

Kelly Belanger

# GENDER AND TEACHING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE: HOW TEACHERS TALK ABOUT FACTS, ARTIFACTS, AND COUNTERFACTS<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** *This article argues that the basic writing course described in Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course* (1986) is a combination of what might be perceived as "masculinist" and "feminist" dimensions. Based upon self-descriptions given by ten teachers using a Facts approach, the teachers are classified into four gender-typed categories: "masculine," "feminine," "androgynous," and "undifferentiated." Interview data suggest that the teachers who perceived themselves in the most masculine terms emphasized the "masculinist" aspects of the course; the teachers who described themselves in primarily feminine or androgynous terms focused on what may be seen as the "feminist" aspects of the course. Finally, the self-described androgynous individuals took it upon themselves creatively to shape and reshape their interpretations of the course. These teachers describe a pedagogy that is difficult to classify as either "accommodationist" or "expressivist," "masculinist" or "feminist."*

David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course* (1986) has a unique status in the field of composition studies. The book outlines a basic reading and writing course taught at the University of Pittsburgh, but it is also, as

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the authors say, "an extended presentation of the metaphors we have chosen to represent our subject" (4). The text is divided into three sections, the first of which outlines the philosophical and theoretical basis for this course which aims "to reclaim reading and writing from those (including our students) who would choose to limit these activities to the retrieval and transmission of information" (*Facts* 4). The second section, "Teaching Reading and Writing," describes the course in practical terms, presenting a semester-long sequence of reading and writing assignments designed as "a general introduction to the language and methods of the university" (48). The book concludes with research-based case studies and other scholarly perspectives on the course written by experienced teachers of "Basic Reading and Writing" at Pittsburgh.

My decision to undertake a study of gender and teaching and to focus on this particular course grew out of the exigencies of a rather specific rhetorical situation. In the Fall of 1990, I was tutoring in a basic writing program in which experienced teachers were working within the theoretical frame of the *Facts* course, although they were free to experiment and to adapt it to suit their own teaching styles and pedagogical goals. Since I was impressed by the curriculum and the degree to which students seemed engaged in their writing, I was startled when a colleague visiting from another university described the course as "paternalistic." Her statement prompted me to reflect upon the implications that recent research and theories about gender and writing might have for understanding more fully the impetus behind much of the criticism that I had heard and was continuing to hear being leveled against the *Facts* curriculum. For example, some critics argue that in advocating that we initiate students—especially marginalized basic writers—into "the language and methods of the academy" (*Facts*) through an intensive read-to-write course, Bartholomae and Petrosky are promoting a "masculinist" writing course. In other words, in teaching students to compose informal responses within the conventions of academic discourse which have evolved out of the long, patriarchal history of the academy, the course can be seen as being as "masculinist" as it is conservative. This argument, although it has not to my knowledge been made explicitly in print, is most frequently set forth in discussions among teachers in which educators inclined toward what Berlin calls "expressivist" pedagogies take exception to a course which concerns itself, finally, with achieving an academic stance and

voice rather than a more purely personal one. The issue also surfaces frequently in forums such as CCCC's sessions on basic writing.<sup>2</sup>

The Bartholomae-Petrosky theory and pedagogy also have a more unconventional side, however, and it is this side that allows Susan Wall and Nicholas Coles to point out that *Facts* is not an "unambiguously accommodationist Basic Writing pedagogy, a return to a new set of 'basics,' conventions of academic discourse 'written out,' 'demystified,' and taught in our classrooms" (231). Rather, they claim, the course encourages students to "'test and experiment' not only with their own language but with the language of the academy, and to draw conclusions about its power and limitations" (234). In fact, in asking students to explore significant experiences in their adolescence, the course often elicits intensely personal writing and values a process of discovery as students are expected to make meaning rather than find meaning in texts. These aspects of the course seem quiet compatible with feminist pedagogies that make a point of valuing writing that is "exploratory, autobiographical, and an organic exploration of a topic in an intimate, subjective voice" (Caywood and Overing xiv).<sup>3</sup> Specifically, I see the early assignments in the course encouraging students to learn what Peter Elbow calls the "intellectual practices" of the academy<sup>4</sup> without concerning themselves (yet) with those stylistic conventions that—as Elbow notes—"tend toward the sound of reasonable, disinterested, perhaps even objective (dare I say it?) men." Thus, because the *Facts* course can be seen as advocating that we teach students to gain access to conventional (and arguably masculinist)<sup>5</sup> academic discourse through somewhat unconventional (and perhaps feminist) means, it lends itself especially well to a study of gender and teaching.

## The Interviews

To gain insight into how the *Facts* course—with its combination of what might be perceived of as "masculinist" and "feminist" dimensions—is interpreted by teachers who are putting it into practice, I interviewed ten teachers who were working with this curriculum in the basic writing program where I was tutoring. I talked with five women and five men, among whom I could expect to find a range of orientations toward gender roles. These ten teachers' responses to a series of open-ended questions were tape-recorded and transcribed, and with the transcriptions in hand, I color-coded teachers' responses

according to question. However, because of the open-ended nature of the questions, the transcriptions make extraordinarily rich reading, and since looking at only isolated responses to questions would mean ignoring much of that richness, I did what Mary Belenky and her collaborators in the book *Women's Ways of Knowing* call a "contextual analysis," which involves developing a feel for each person's experience of themselves and their teaching through reading and rereading the transcripts. After many readings, and after a discussion with another reader who had studied the data independently,<sup>6</sup> some patterns in the ways teachers defined the course's goals for themselves and adapted the curriculum for their own classes began to emerge.

One significant pattern is most readily recognizable when the data are considered with Elbow's distinction between two parts of academic discourse—intellectual practices and stylistic conventions—in mind. When I considered the degree to which the teachers' interpretations of the *Facts* curriculum emphasize one or the other, I found that, in general, teachers' descriptions of the course's purpose fall into three broad categories. In the first group, teachers emphasize the stylistic conventions of academic discourse;<sup>7</sup> in the second, teachers help students make a transition from personal writing with little concern for stylistic conventions toward more distanced discourse which combines the intellectual practices of academic writing with its traditional stylistic conventions; and in the third, teachers focus on intellectual practices with little concern for traditional stylistic conventions.

Given these three perspectives, I sought to discover any significant connection between teachers, gender orientations, and their various readings of the *Facts* curriculum. If, as reader-response theories suggest, our interpretations of literary texts can be influenced by gender, why not our reading of texts that focus on composition theory and practice? With this question in mind, I looked at the transcripts with attention to how the teachers tended to talk about themselves and tried to categorize each of them into one of four possible orientations toward gender roles identified by the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI): masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated. Although I recognize that the act of categorizing people into only four groups is necessarily reductive, I chose Bem's framework because it goes beyond the still common practice of treating gender and sex as analogous terms. In fact, Bem offers a relatively complex view of gender which allows both males and females to fall into any one of four categories.



The BSRI lists twenty terms which masculine gender-typed people tend to use in describing themselves, including words or phrases such as self-reliant, forceful, dominant, assertive, independent, and acts as a leader. Feminine gender-typed individuals, on the other hand, tend to use terms such as yielding, cheerful, shy, affectionate, compassionate, and eager to soothe hurt feelings. For my process of categorization, I supplemented Bem's list of terms with an attention to the kind of concerns and orientations that Carol Gilligan's study *In a Different Voice* and Belenky et al.'s work describe as gender-specific. Based upon Belenky et al., and Gilligan, I considered an orientation toward the first items on the following list of dialectical pairs as "feminine" and a focus on the second items as "masculine": relationships vs. rules, rational vs. intuitive, means vs. ends, collaborative vs. solitary, personal vs. impersonal, listening vs. speaking, support vs. challenge, process-oriented vs. goal-oriented, and equity vs. hierarchy.

Throughout the analysis, however, I constantly restrained any impulses to characterize people simply as either "masculine" or "feminine," and I keep in mind Bem's other two categories. According to the BSRI, an "androgynous individual is someone who is *both* independent and tender, *both* aggressive and gentle, *both* assertive and yielding, *both* masculine and feminine, depending on the situational appropriateness of these various behaviors" (Bem 83). Undifferentiated individuals, on the other hand, tend to describe themselves in terms of relatively gender-neutral characteristics—neutral, that is, in the sense that Bem found that they were not consistently rated by both women and men to be "significantly more desirable in American society for one sex than for the other" (e.g., happy, conceited, truthful) (84).

Based on my interpretation and analysis of the interviews, I have located the ten teachers along a continuum ranging from the most masculine gender-typed individuals, who tended to privilege stylistic conventions over intellectual practices, to the most androgynous teachers, some of whom focus almost exclusively on intellectual practices. In general, I found—not surprisingly—that the teachers who perceived themselves in the most masculine terms seem to emphasize what I have defined as the "masculinist" aspects of the course; the teachers who described themselves in primarily feminine or androgynous terms focused on what may be seen as the "feminist" aspects of the course. As the interview data that follow reveal, however,

the self-described androgynous individuals took it upon themselves creatively to shape and reshape their interpretations of the course. As a result, these teachers describe a pedagogy that is difficult to classify as either "accommodationist" or "expressivist," "masculinist" or "feminist."

### **Voices of the Academy**

Two of the men I interviewed, Brian and Mark,<sup>8</sup> reacted similarly to their one quarter of experience in teaching a syllabus modeled after the *Facts* course. As masculine gender-typed individuals, who treated the course as what Wall and Coles call an "accommodationist pedagogy," they represent one extreme on the continuum of positions where I have situated the teachers.

A graduate student with 13 years of experience teaching basic writing, Brian had a positive initial reaction to the *Facts* course: he especially liked the idea of teaching a course around a theme, and he identified the course's goal as "trying to bring students closer to academic discourse," which he defined exclusively in terms of stylistic conventions, describing it as a kind of writing that has a certain formality of language, tone, and style commonly found in scholarly discourse. For him, this discourse "places a premium on the abstract, the third person. It's distanced," he told me, "and uses the jargon of the field." He felt at ease with the goal of teaching students academic writing and said that "ideally [his] basic writers would be able to do this by the end of the course, but it couldn't happen in ten weeks, or even a year." Similarly, for Mark—an Instructor with over five years of teaching experience—producing academic writing means reevaluating assumptions about what an academic audience expects, and thinking about how students' register and persona will be received; therefore, he tries to help students move away from writing "discursive" and "talky" papers. He was attracted to what I have termed the masculinist aspect of the method—teaching traditional stylistic conventions—but was uncomfortable with what I have called its feminist emphasis on students writing personal experience essays, especially since, as he said, "There are certain risks I am unwilling to take in opening myself up and talking about experiences." Basically, he wondered whether asking students to write personal experience essays is the most expedient way to teach academic writing.

I characterize Mark and Brian as masculine gender-typed in

part because they each described their relationships with students as being distant and hierarchical. As Brian commented, "I'm the teacher, they're the students. I ask them to call me by my first name but they don't call me anything." And according to Mark, the syllabus actually calls for a feminine teaching style, which he says causes him to be more "nurturing and supportive than he would be in another course," although he still sees himself as being less nurturing than most of his colleagues. He says that "because of the way the class is set up, you don't go in and pound your shoe on the table and come off as really authoritarian and dictatorial when you've got all these touchy-feely-caring-sharing discussions about papers going on." At the same time, though, he does see himself maintaining some distance, emphasizing the fact that "if students ask for help, I help. If not, I figure, 'I'm not your mother. You decide whether you need help or not.'" This example supports his description of himself as less nurturing than other basic writing teachers, a characterization that applies—to a lesser extent—to Brian as well.

### **A Self-Reflexive Voice of the Academy**

Like Mark and Brian, a third teacher, Ben, taught the *Facts* course for one quarter and seemed to be a predominantly masculine gender-typed individual. However, when he talked about the course it became clear that he was more than simply a "voice of the academy." While he saw the *Facts* course as emphasizing students' accommodation to what he called "academic discourse" and he focused on both stylistic conventions and intellectual practice that he associated with academic writing, he did not accept that goal unquestioningly.

A teacher with four years of experience working with basic writing students, Ben described his relationship with his students much as Mark and Brian did, that is, in terms of separation rather than connection, referring to that relationship as "congenial" and "rewarding to the extent that he gets to know them, which is pretty limited." He told me he saw students as being purposefully distant, too willing to capitalize on the college setting where you can keep distance from your instructors. He also viewed his authority as a real issue in the classroom and in conferences, where he often sensed that students were not at ease.

Interestingly, although he didn't consider himself to be uncomfortable with personal topics as Brian and Mark did, one

change Ben did make in the *Facts* course was to substitute a theme he calls "Aims of Education" for that of "Growth and Change in Adolescence," the more intensely personal topic of inquiry described in *Facts*. This change still allowed students to participate in what he saw as the most valuable part of the course—the chance for students to be part of an extended academic inquiry. However, he wondered what the implications of that approach might be because of the problems he sees in academic discourse and in the academic community. He noted that he is concerned about the "inevitable trade off—students will have to give up something to get the academy's ways of writing and knowing in return." He saw Bartholomae and Petrosky as more willing than he is to accept such a trade-off and told me that he saw a possible solution to this problem in making discourse itself part of academic inquiry, a step which would allow students to do more than blindly emulate academic discourse. Students would be asked to use language to reflect upon and question itself, just as he himself does so relentlessly.

### **Accepting the Academy's Voice of Authority**

Next to Ben's continual questioning and problematizing, a fourth teacher—Nancy, who had taught the course for a year—stood out for her willingness to accept the authority of the Bartholomae-Petrosky text unquestioningly. She just didn't seem as concerned with considered issues related to the course in a theoretical sense; she struck me as someone simply trying to do her best to teach the syllabus she has been given. When I asked her about her initial reaction to reading *Facts* it seemed difficult for her—at least in the context of this interview—to talk about the course in specific and unambiguous terms. For instance, she said, "I think some good things happened here besides the things we are trying to make happen. I mean those things we are trying to make happen too, but those aren't the things that I would know how to make happen . . . but the students make that happen by experiencing the reading, the writing, the discussing, the sharing of ideas. And then, something happens within their own cognitive process." This response, full of unspecified "things," is typical of numerous times when she seemed unable or afraid to make a point—her point. (Notice how often she talks in terms of "we" instead of "I"). Although she refers to her students taking on the authority to make meaning from what they read, she seems, like the

“received knowers” that Mary Belenky and her coauthors describe in *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, reluctant to speak out of her own authority and perhaps even unable to see herself as having any authority.

When I asked Nancy specifically about her definition of academic discourse, her responses were still quite general, making it difficult to situate her in terms of Elbow’s distinctions between intellectual practices and stylistic conventions. She mentioned students “starting to enter into the university mentality” and alluded to Bartholomae’s article “Inventing the University,” ultimately defining an ideal student paper in her class quite generically—as one with a clear thesis that is supported coherently by the rest of the paper. But when I asked her if she thinks these things characterize academic discourse for the university or for David Bartholomae, she seemed to retreat and answered laughingly, “I have no idea. I mean I don’t know. When Bartholomae came, you know, I heard him talk last spring. I thought I was thinking along the same lines as he was, but to speak for the whole university and what people want academic discourse to be, I don’t know.”

While her emphasis on the “things” students learn through reading, writing, and discussing suggests a tendency to focus more on intellectual practices than on stylistic conventions, her pedagogy seems ultimately to be driven not so much by any awareness of a particular kind of discourse she seeks to teach her students, but rather by a desire to nurture her students’ growth as people. In fact, when she responded to the more personal questions on my list, she herself became visibly more at ease, her voice taking on the clarity and authority it had lacked earlier. As she spoke, she described herself and her background as being in many ways stereotypically feminine.<sup>9</sup> With over ten years of teaching experience ranging from college to junior high to nursery school, she described her relationships with her students and her style as a teacher in terms almost opposite of those used by Mark, Brian, and Ben. Describing herself as maternal and caring, she talked about how she simply cannot teach without really connecting with students. Although she was careful to point out that she always sends students to a professional counselor when they need it, she was very comfortable with the personal nature of the course assignments and saw writing those kinds of assignments as being a potentially therapeutic way for her students to resolve personal

problems. She is always ready to accept student's feelings because, as she reminded me, "It's mom you go to when it hurts." Perhaps more clearly than with the other teachers, Nancy's feminine gender orientation seemed to be powerfully and obviously connected with the ways she teaches some version of academic discourse in her classroom.

### Dissenting Voices

Whereas Nancy had taught basic writing for five years and the Bartholomae-Petrosky course several times, when I interviewed two graduate students, Joan and Charles, it was the first time they had taught basic writing or the *Facts* course (although both had taught a "modes" approach to first-year composition for several years). Both of them reacted negatively to the course, and—interestingly—Joan objected to it because she wanted it to go further in "demystifying" academic discourse for students before asking them actually to produce it.

Joan's initial reaction to seeing the standard syllabus was that she didn't like it, primarily because she considered it "monotonous to deal with the same general topic for ten weeks." Like Ben, she wanted to make the aim of the course more explicit to the students; she even labeled the *Facts* course "covert" as she asked me this question:

[How can students value an assignment as academic writing] if the teacher doesn't come out and tell them the purpose behind it, which some people say destroys the whole thing? It's built into the theory. Bartholomae and Petrosky would say "no" don't tell them. Let's let them become aware of it themselves, but when you get through week ten and they're still not aware of it, what do you do, tell them the last day of class? I'd be angry if I were a student.

In fact, Joan did go ahead and make what she saw as the goal of the course explicit to her students. For her, the goal is a "task-oriented" one: students need to write something abstract and give concrete details to support that point. They must "show us that they can go back and forth between two things. Some people would say it grooms a way of thinking—of abstract thought." In her view, this goal is just one part of academic discourse, and if students were just simply told what it is, "we could deal with it and devote more time to other issues that are important in their writing and in academic writing—their voice,

for one." All in all, though, Joan did seem to accept the necessity of "indoctrinating" students into the intellectual practices and the stylistic conventions of academic discourse as long as students know what is happening to them. She recognized that in academic writing "your individuality is often censored, but, you know, there's reality and there's what would be nice."

In terms of gender orientation, Joan was difficult to classify, but she falls most readily into the "undifferentiated" category. She described herself in terms that Crawford and Chaffin call "neutral with respect to gender roles" (14). For instance, she called herself "not superficial" and "honest," as opposed to using gender-typed terms such as Nancy's "maternal" and "emotional" or Ben's "heavy-handed" and "egomaniacal." Furthermore, she pointed out that she could not separate her perspective as a feminist from her womanhood, believing that her feminist consciousness affected her way of looking at the course more than any other factor.

Just as it did for Joan, the *Facts* pedagogy posed some serious problems for Charles, but he reacted to it much differently than she did. Instead of working to modify the course, Charles chose instead to give up on it completely. He described his problem as follows:

As the course went along, I felt like I was lost, out of my element. In the first place, I don't normally do the kind of reading and discussion that people need to do to get this thing to work. I admit I have a hard time with discussions as a teacher.

A reason for his problems in leading discussions may, in fact, be related to a revealing comment Charles made about himself as a person:

I like getting things done, often at the expense of being nice about it. I've had to learn to be a lot more willing to let things be not necessarily right, but not hurt other people along the way. Not that I was walking around trashing other people, but to be more sensitive to other people's feelings.

This comment is one of several which suggest that he is a masculine gender-typed male, typically more concerned with rules (i.e., with getting things done right) than with relationships (i.e., people's feelings). Although he considered himself to be in the process of changing, Charles' self-described tendency to be concerned with "getting things right" may have



created a conflict for him when faced with a curriculum such as *Facts* that calls for collaborative group discussions in which the teacher is ideally silent. In any case, when he became frustrated, he replaced the discussions with conferences, which he said he favored because they are one-on-one. One way of interpreting this move is that it gave him increased control; as Carol Stanger argues, "using the one-to-one tutorial, the instructor judges the paper against an ideal text, a composite of the male canon, and bestows authority on the essay as well as controlling its interpretation" (36).

Along with the conferences, another strategy Charles used to try to regain control of his course was, he said, to "junk the last paper and let [students] write anything they want as long as they base it on what they're doing in their journals." This sort of assignment is compatible with his goal for any beginning writing course: to give students a good attitude about writing. He saw the *Facts* approach, on the other hand, as being aimed at making students "cognitively enhanced," and therefore serving best those students who "need help on certain cognitive skills" and who are "unfamiliar with academic conventions and how to read a textbook." In all likelihood, the fact that Charles, like Joan, was teaching the course for the first time accounts for some of the difficulties he had with feeling free to interpret the course's aims in ways that might be compatible with his own evolving teaching style and ideas about teaching basic writing.

### **Redefining Academic Discourse**

A final group of teachers, like Joan and Charles, had problems with what they perceived to be the central doctrines of the Bartholomae-Petrosky method. Unlike Joan and Charles, though, they found ways to make it work by innovating within its framework. Most significantly, they composed for themselves and their students definitions of academic discourse that differed significantly from the fairly traditional ones offered by Bartholomae and Petrosky and the teachers discussed so far. The first of these teachers, Douglas, was a graduate student teaching the course for the second time. He said that his students were experiencing something that would help them as writers, but it was not explicitly writing for the academy. Specifically, he saw the goal of the *Facts* course being to raise the confidence level of writers—to find a voice and realize they have something to say and then to say it in Standard Edited



American English. Interestingly, he consistently emphasized what I have called the feminist aspects of the course, explaining, for example, that writing as a process, getting students to write about their own experience, and encouraging students to find their own voices are central to the course.

In accounting for his success in teaching the course, Douglas made a point of contrasting himself with Charles: "Think of Charles Spencer who doesn't like this syllabus, okay. I think the differences between him and me have nothing to do with gender characteristics. I think it has something to do with creativity and ingenuity. He was constantly asking me what I was doing in my syllabus, and I could see he was kind of baffled; he wasn't sure what he would do." Significantly, though, whereas Charles was masculine gender-typed, Douglas characterized himself as more androgynous, if not feminine. Like Nancy, he saw a teacher's role as parental, and he thought that most teachers would see themselves as caregivers in relation to their students. He simply considered it a natural part of the teacher-student relationship. Clearly, though, it was Douglas himself who was a natural caregiver. And he turned out to be remarkably well-informed and articulate when it came to discussing his own gender:

I read Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, and after I looked at the first chapter, where boys are concerned about rules, whereas girls are concerned with relationships, I saw that as a kind of gender characteristic. It was then that I decided gender characteristics could transcend sexual separation. I noticed in myself I had more feminine characteristics than masculine, or I had very many feminine characteristics. I would value relationships over rules. That really hit me hard because I realized I was not a typical male. At the same time, it wasn't threatening my masculinity. Somehow it supports a self image of myself that I don't mind having. I mean I don't feel trapped into this role as some women do.

Along with Douglas, three women fall into this final group. Like Douglas, they all described themselves as being relatively androgynous, feeling ambivalent about academic discourse, and as having found ways of adapting the *Facts* course to make it their own. The first of these women, Patty, was both a writing teacher and the assistant director of the basic writing program. Having taught in the program's pilot project, Patty was one of the most experienced teachers of the *Facts* approach, and she

taught a ten-credit-hour version of the course using the "Growth and Change in Adolescence" theme. She told me:

The goal of the course is to get [students] to find validity in their own opinions, to see that they can make research. They don't just have to copy down ideas. Those are specific goals. Bartholomae and Petrosky talk about that . . . conventions of academic discourse, yet I am . . . I don't like that language. Those terms send up red flags to me. [My colleague] and I have a running joke that whenever I don't agree with him I say he doesn't really mean that—because I don't like to think that I'm indoctrinating them. For lack of a better term, I guess it does make them feel a little more comfortable with the conventions of the academy. I think I'm teaching them the conventions according to how I want the academy to be. I'm indoctrinating them in that sense.

In particular, I was struck here by what I see as Patty's willingness to give David Bartholomae as much credit as possible—even, perhaps, to the extent of giving him credit for saying what she thinks. When I responded by asking her why the words "academic discourse" send up flags for her and not for him, she continued:

I don't know, Kelly, because I think he's just great, and I don't know why he uses those words. I guess they must not have the same kind of red flags for him as they do for me. I think that on some level he must feel that that's a good thing to do but I don't think for a minute that he wants them to be little research robots. But I think when he uses those words his focus is on something else, on general theories of the course, and maybe that's an easy way to approach it. Maybe he is just more concerned with that than I am. I think that's true in some sense.

Perhaps Patty's reluctance to call what she's doing something other than teaching Bartholomae's method is connected with the tendency she sees in herself to be self-deprecating, but in any case, she was certainly innovating within the framework of the approach to teach her own version of academic discourse. Significantly, like Douglas, she described herself as androgynous, observing that she "tends to have close male friends." She told me, "If there is such a thing as a male point of view and a female one, then I probably am as much or more of a mixture than other people might be."

Deborah, too, characterized herself as an androgynous (or in some cases, undifferentiated) person who tended to redefine academic discourse for her class, but unlike Patty, she was less concerned with giving Bartholomae credit for what she had done. Deborah was an instructor teaching the course for the first time, and when I asked about her teaching style she talked—in marked contrast to Charles, for instance—about her tendency to hang back and listen, an ability she attributed to being a woman: “I think [being female] makes me sit back more. Some people might call it passivity. I think of it as me letting the class be in charge of what’s going on.” Deborah, though, did not talk about herself in the stereotypical terms that Nancy did; instead, she used mostly gender neutral terms such as “stubborn and shy and well-meaning.” Like Joan, she claimed that her feminist consciousness affected how she taught more than simply being a woman did: “I find myself and I find the class talking more about—not only growth and change in adolescence—but what happens when you are an adolescent that makes you realize social injustices and how they are connected with how you fit or don’t fit in with certain groups.” She told me that she wasn’t sure how she would define academic discourse because it is all wrapped up in what she thinks it should be, and not how other people think it is. For her it should be a creative, intelligent discussion of whatever subject you are talking about, not as formal as some people see it. Overall much less ambivalent and more defiant than Patty, she told me bluntly, “I don’t think [students] are really writing academic discourse in my class, and I don’t think I really want them to!” In this comment, I heard the same kind of relief and freedom that Jane Tompkins expresses in her article “Me and My Shadow” when she takes off the straitjacket in which she must write academic articles and says “to hell with it” (178).<sup>10</sup>

The final teacher, Brenda, was an Instructor with over two years of experience in teaching the *Facts* course, and she shared this enthusiastic rejection of traditional academic discourse with its emphasis on stylistic conventions. However, she also shared Patty’s tendency to locate the basis for what she is doing in the Bartholomae-Petrosky text. The academic discourse that she wanted students to strive for, she said, is personal and creative, yet clear and controlled; her notion of the ideal academic discourse is writing with a clear sense of purpose, writing which answers questions that we as readers might have along the way (except where the writer wants us to remain

open-minded). Also, "the writer would demonstrate control in that paper through all kinds of tools, asking questions, using dialogue," whatever the content of that paper dictates. In reading it, the reader should discover something, and the writer should also have "a sense of discovery and a really powerful sense of self. We would know that somebody is there talking to us and sharing . . . something new." She noted that there are "many ways of engaging readers at the college level. You don't do the same thing for your biochemistry class that you do for freshman English. I don't think that biochemistry paper has to be dull and lifeless, without meaning, no sense of discovery. I think it can be just as engaging." Yet at times, she said, her students' discourse does become distant, lacking a sense of voice or audience. At those times, Brenda is disappointed, but she realized that it would probably be okay for "the kind of writing they are going to do in college."

Between Brenda's search in her students' writing for a "voice that doesn't just copy ideas into a notebook and turn it in" and Bartholomae's sense that "leading students to believe they are responsible for something new or original, unless they understand what those words mean with regard to writing, is a dangerous and counterproductive task" (142), there is—I think Brenda would say—some tension. Yet, despite any differences between Brenda's philosophy and Bartholomae's, she still insisted on emphasizing their basic commonalities. She concluded the interview by saying: "I realize today that there is a lot of individual interpretation with this course, and I realize that that's part of the course. I don't think that [David Bartholomae] would argue with the way I teach the class, and I think that's one of the greatest gifts of his course, his book."

## Conclusion

Brenda's words suggest that the *Facts* course has the sort of richness we usually ascribe to literary texts, a richness that invites or allows interpretation. Yet fewer than half the teachers interviewed saw an invitation to creative interpretation in the Bartholomae-Petrosky text. Most of them, rather, talked confidently about what the goals of the course were—as though the course's goals and Bartholomae and Petrosky's authorial intentions were transparently clear to them. This study suggests that when some teachers—in this case, especially the masculine gender-typed individuals—read *Facts* they tend to focus on the authors' comments about teaching students "our language and

about helping them compose a reading within the conventions of the highly conventional language of the university classroom" (*Facts* 5). They take such phrases as advocations for teaching a distant, analytical, objective-sounding, and relatively voiceless prose; they bring these ideas to their classrooms, and they never look back.

Other teachers—mostly those people in this study who described themselves in androgynous terms—look beyond such phrases to make other meanings. Most of these teachers referred explicitly to meaning-making processes as interpretation, as reading that might even go against what others see as the "grain" of the text. These teachers reminded me in some ways of the women readers whom Susan Schibanoff describes in her article, "Taking the Gold out of Egypt: The Fine Art of Reading as a Woman." There, Schibanoff tells of Chaucer's Wife of Bath, a woman who sometimes censors and destroys but often just *misreads* texts that do not serve her needs, that do not seem relevant to her values or experiences. Like the Wife, teachers such as Patty, Deborah, and Brenda were resisting readers, and they offered interpretations of the *Facts* course that pushed—sometimes defiantly—against those readings most readily available to other teachers in this study.

I want to contend, however, that not only the instructors who fell into the androgynous group but all the teachers were taking their "gold" out of the *Facts* text, for, to varying degrees and in different ways, each one of them appropriated the parts of the Bartholomae-Petrosky theory that spoke to their experiences and values and reread the parts of it that did not. And these experiences and values have, of course, been shaped by numerous factors, not the least of which being the fact that they are gendered individuals. As for my own "reading" of the course, it may at some point have been influenced by what the BSRI identifies as my feminine gender-type, but at this point, I think it has been formed even more significantly by the powerful voices of the teachers in this study. I originally tended to envision the course as a linear process, moving from personal writing permeated with what Bartholomae calls the "idiosyncrasies" of students' own language to more academic writing characterized by traditional stylistic conventions. The comments made by the group of androgynous gender-typed teachers in particular have complicated that vision for me, and I have come to see the course as more recursive, more fraught with tension between the language practices students bring to the college

classroom and those practices by which academic writers seek to establish an authoritative rhetorical stance.

Their comments also raise the interesting question of what, more specifically, "androgynous teaching" of writing might involve. If forced to choose between the extremes of a purely accommodationist pedagogy (a relatively "masculinist" approach) and a pedagogy which nurtures students' voices (a more "feminist" approach), I would probably choose the latter. The choice, however, would involve a weighing of risks—the risk of stifling students' potential for creative self-expression versus the risk of nurturing students into a position of relative powerlessness in the academy. Yet I can imagine another option which, at least in the context of this study, might most aptly be called an androgynous writing pedagogy. Just as I categorized several teachers as androgynous gender-typed because they described themselves in terms that were sometimes stereotypically masculine, sometimes feminine, I envision androgynous teaching as a kind of instruction which encourages students to stretch their current notions of good writing to include features of discourse that might be seen as typically masculine and those that might be constructed as feminine. Of course, such features are not easily identified and the act of labeling can lead toward what I see as the problematic essentialism at the base of essays such as Thomas Farrell's "The Female and Male Modes of Rhetoric."<sup>11</sup> Still, I believe instructors should challenge both male and female students trained to produce the traditional, analytical, voiceless academic discourse to experiment with alternative styles. Similarly, students who tend to write in a more personal, informal, or anecdotal mode should be encouraged to "try on" more traditional features of discourse, to make them part of their repertoire of choices. Such an "androgynous" approach would, at least, train students to become flexible writers who can adapt their writing as they see fit for various rhetorical situations. At most, it would give them the ability to challenge knowingly traditional notions of what kind of writing is appropriate and persuasive in a particular context. I see such a pedagogy as far more empowering than either a purely accommodationist or a purely expressivist approach.

Having taken such a position, however, I want to qualify my stance to the extent that it reflects any kind of judgment upon the teachers I interviewed, their readings of the *Facts* course, or their teaching styles. These teachers, after all, either are or have

been my colleagues. Having come to know most of them much better in the period of time since conducting these interviews, I am constantly reminded that each one of them is much more than the gendered subject positions into which they have, necessarily, been objectified in this project. Each one of them, for example, holds views of the *Facts* course and their teaching which are far more complicated than they could express in one interview. Certainly by virtue of the fact that they teach in basic writing programs, they all understand in a concrete and personal way what it means for themselves and for their students to be on the margins of the academy, issues of gender aside.

Much of what this project has taught me, finally, is not directly related to the specific individuals I interviewed or the terms in which they talked about the *Facts* course. It has been the experience itself of talking with these teachers about issues of gender and teaching that has affected me most strongly. Although many of the people I interviewed spoke thoughtfully and articulately in response to my questions, it was clear that none of them had previously given much thought to the implications of relationships between their own gender and the way they interpret and teach a particular curriculum. But because their thoughts on the topic were nevertheless so rich and provocative, I am convinced that all teachers of writing would benefit greatly from the unfamiliar process of looking as closely and carefully at ourselves as gendered teachers as we do at the pedagogies of our choice. If we are truly committed to examining critically our composition theories and pedagogies, acknowledging and exploring our identities as gendered individuals is an important step toward understanding fully the factors that most powerfully shape us as readers, learners, and educators.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Andrea Lunsford and the members of her "Gender and Writing" seminar for encouraging this project and the teachers I interviewed for making it possible. I also appreciate the responses that Mindy Wright, Patricia Sullivan, and Linda Strom gave to drafts of this essay.

<sup>2</sup>In a 1990 session on "Gender-Related Problems in Academic Discourse—and Solutions," for example, Derek Owens argued that the *Facts* course is masculinist.

<sup>3</sup>In the introduction to their book, Caywood and Overing mention the following characteristics of feminist pedagogies: (1) treating writing as a process; (2) valuing writing that is



exploratory, autobiographical, and an organic exploration of a topic in an intimate, subjective voice; (3) validation and expression of a private and individual voice; and (4) "recognizing the equal value of the public and private, of personalized experience and detached abstraction" (xiv). Of course, many definitions of what constitutes a feminist pedagogy differ from the one offered by Caywood and Overing, and simply giving students writing about personal experience does not necessarily make a pedagogy feminist. Nevertheless, in this context, where such writing is juxtaposed with traditional academic discourse, it can be seen, *at least*, as relatively feminist.

<sup>4</sup>In *Facts*, Bartholomae and Petrosky point out what they see as the positive aspects of academic discourse—its concern with "counterfactuality," "individuation," "potentiality," and "freedom." These characteristics seem analogous to what Elbow calls the "intellectual practices" of the academy's discourse. In these practices, Elbow too sees positive qualities that he values highly: learning, intelligence, and sophistication. However, I see Bartholomae and Petrosky as being more comfortable than Elbow with the stylistic conventions of the discourse, although all of them claim these conventions should at some point be taught. I have made a point of describing my reading of Bartholomae and Petrosky's viewpoint on this issue since I use it as a touchstone for taxonomizing the teachers I interviewed for this project.

<sup>5</sup>I am somewhat uncomfortable with using the terms "masculinist" and "feminist" since they may suggest essentialist assumptions that I do not hold. I use these terms for lack of better alternatives and trust that my later insistence on distinguishing between gender and sex is convincing evidence that I do not intend to suggest that traditional academic discourse (which I have labeled "masculinist") necessarily comes any more naturally to males than to females or that "feminist" aspects of the *Facts* course are somehow inherently feminine.

<sup>6</sup>Michele Selig, a colleague from psychology, was especially helpful in coding people's responses in terms of gender types.

<sup>7</sup>In "Inventing the University," Bartholomae talks about stylistic conventions in terms of helping students use "common places, set phrases, ritual and gestures, and obligatory conclusions" and teaching them to "take on a persona of authority" (146).

<sup>8</sup>The names of all the teachers are pseudonyms.

<sup>9</sup>According to Belenky et al., for women in our society, being



a "received knower" usually means adherence to sex role stereotypes (134).

<sup>10</sup>Deborah's version of the *Facts* course resembles the women's writing groups that Celia Lury describes in her essay "The Difference of Women's Writing: Essays on the Use of Personal Experience," *Studies in Sexual Politics* 15 (1987): 1-68. Like Deborah's students, women's writing groups often use autobiographical writing, and "what unifies these groups is their relations to texts, which are no longer seen as things on their own, but as a link in a chain of communication, learning, and political and personal development" (20).

<sup>11</sup>Farrell's essay appears in *College English* 40 (1979): 906. For a critique of its method and findings, see Isaiah Smithson, "Introduction: Investigating Gender, Power, and Pedagogy" in *Gender in the Classroom*, ed. Susan L. Gabriel and Isaiah Smithson (Urbana: Illinois UP, 1990) 1-27.

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