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Who owns knowledge? Is knowledge a commodity for the privileged, or can women and members of marginalized classes claim knowledge as their own? Women and members of marginalized classes struggle in the classroom to assert themselves as credible, rational beings. Women have been oppressed for centuries, while members of economically disadvantaged classes have struggled to attain access to higher education. Even for women, higher education poses particular challenges as they seek degrees and employment opportunities within academia. Members of marginal classes may find that their claims to knowledge in academia are silenced in favor of the privileged voice.

What can composition instructors accomplish in the classroom to address these oppressions? Since English composition classes are rich in reading, language, dialogue, and writing, they offer the perfect venue in which to provide women and members of disadvantaged classes the opportunity to have their voices acknowledged—perhaps for the first time. We can disrupt the binaries that perpetuate gender and class hegemony by offering our students a diverse canon that includes not only minority and women writers, but also working-class texts. Expanding the traditional canon will allow all of our students a chance to identify with the texts that they study.

This thesis is intended to inspire composition instructors to assist each of their students in claiming knowledge. Ownership of knowledge is possible for everyone; it is not only the domain of the privileged. Our responsibility as composition instructors is to bring change to the classroom, so that women and members of marginalized classes can claim knowledge.

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Claiming Knowledge: Challenges of Gender and Class in the Composition Classroom

CHAPTER I

Epistemological Connections

Who owns the knowledge factory?[1] Would it be a group of women, some educated, some not—or perhaps a band of economically disadvantaged individuals seeking equality for all classes? This, of course, is not the case, especially for women and definitely for disadvantaged classes. Feminists of all theoretical persuasions seek to address epistemology, and sociologists seek to promote awareness of class disparities, yet women continue to be objectified within educational institutions, while the marginal classes struggle to achieve any access to higher education. Furthermore, dominant views of knowledge, such as those that may come from white, upper-class men, appear to "undermine women's collective identities, claims to knowledge, and power" (Luttrell 34) while perpetuating a hegemony that the lower classes and women of all classes follow.

Simone de Beauvoir examines the plight of women and the lower classes through the lens of historical materialism in *The Second Sex.* Although Friedrich Engels favorably compares woman's condition to that of the proletariat, Beauvoir contends that this view is untenable:

> It is true that the division of labor according to sex and the consequent oppression bring to mind in some ways the division of society by classes, but it is impossible to

[1] The term "knowledge factory" comes from Tokarczyk and Fay, eds., *Working-Class Women in the Academy, Laborers in the Knowledge Factory* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1993). I use this term here to locate knowledge as a construct that is "manufactured" by elitist interests. In this sense, knowledge is not something that is commonly "owned" by women and the working class, but rather "owned" by a patriarchal hegemony that seeks to oppress these groups.

> confuse the two. For one thing, there is no biological basis for the separation of classes…no desire for revolution dwells within [woman], nor any thought of her own disappearance as a sex—all she asks is that certain sequels of sexual differentiation be abolished. (58)

Beauvoir makes a salient point, especially in her assertion that gender-oriented divisions of labor mirror class-based divisions. I contend, however, that woman does have a revolutionary mind—she seeks to overturn the *status quo* of sexual differentiation that exists everywhere in Western culture. To eliminate the differentiation, the effects of patriarchy must be mitigated. This is no small task, given the historical significance of the oppression of women. As Engels maintains:

> The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male. (739)

Engels's statement reveals the connection between the conditions of the lower classes and the status of women. It also reveals the revolutionary potential of women and suggests that they will rise up against their oppression as a class to realize an equal status with men. Beauvoir disputes the connection of class-based oppression and women's oppression on the grounds of biology, but women continue to be subjugated as the lower classes are subjugated, despite the fact that class has no biological basis. This shared oppression of women and the lower classes occurs everywhere in Western culture, but

especially in academic settings, where the voices of women students and lower-class students are often silenced in favor of the voices of the privileged.

Beauvoir also raises a more central concern—that of woman as Object. This objectification occurs because women are subjugated by men, of course, but also because in woman man seeks himself. While Engels shows how women are used as a productive force in service to the state, especially in the rearing of children, Beauvoir contends that woman "is for man a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object—an Other through whom he seeks himself" (59). Unlike Engels, Beauvoir does not draw an analogy between members of economically disadvantaged classes and woman. She states "that the body, the sexual life and the resources of technology exist concretely for man only in so far as he grasps them in the total perspective of his existence. The value…of the phallus…can be defined only in a world of values" (60). Woman is valued as an object, a thing to be glorified, admired, and set aside as Other. Because she is set aside, man gains advantages at the expense of the Other. This action is the "cellular form of civilized society," Engels contends, "in which we can already study the nature of the antagonisms and contradictions which develop fully in the latter" (739). Engels acknowledges women as a subjugated class when he states that women "are ostracized and cast out in order to proclaim once again the absolute domination of the male over the female sex as the fundamental law of society" (740).

Beauvoir and Engels both recognize that woman is consistently objectified. Beauvoir examines this plight from the earliest "nomads" to history after the French Revolution. Engels examines the status of woman from the earliest pre-history to the period of modern monogamous marriage, with objectification emerging through the

"overthrow of mother right [being] the *world-historic defeat of the female sex*" (736). Both Beauvoir and Engels contend that woman has been, and remains, subjugated by man in all aspects of her life, from her earliest years through maturity. Only in the earliest of clan forms, according to Beauvoir and Engels, did woman have rights over man. With the emergence of the institution of monogamous marriage in ancient Greece, according to Engels, came the "subjection of one sex by the other," this being the "first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male" (739). No longer does woman have "tribal rights" over her mate, but now commonly takes her husband's name as she relinquishes her own. In some societal situations, especially "high society," the woman is still known formally only as Mrs. John Doe. Her entire identity and credibility are subsumed under her husband's "good name."

In this type of relationship women are challenged to assert themselves as rational beings, to claim knowledge and intellectual autonomy as their own, and to proclaim what they know to those who would oppress them. As Susan Heckman contends, the Enlightenment epistemology of liberalism posits women as irrational objects forever removed "from the sphere of rationality and politics" (48). Even John Locke, a founder of liberalism, argues that women "cannot know and therefore must believe" (49), prompting many feminist attempts to amend his objectionable assessment of women's intellectual capacity. This rational/irrational dichotomy is matched by another dualism—the "Cartesian dichotomy between subject and object" (62). As long as men are associated with the rational and women with the irrational, women's knowledge will not have credibility. For Descartes, "the subject is the self-conscious guarantor of all knowledge" (62). Enlightenment thought and its successor, humanism, have realized a subject/object

dualism that places men in possession of all rational thought while women remain on the sidelines as objects. Beauvoir preserves the Enlightenment ideal of the subject/object dichotomy, according to Heckman, because she relies on "what the Enlightenment has defined as 'masculine' values" (77). One masculine value is the ability to transcend obstacles "through escape toward some objective, through enterprise" (Beauvoir 140). Women, denied transcendence because of their passivity and their status as "other," appear rather to incarnate the value of immanence. Women are immanently "other," objects through which men substantiate their own subjectivity. As Beauvoir attests in *The Second Sex,* women can become subjects and attain transcendence; they can attain this to the fullest extent. For this reason, according to Monique Wittig, gender must be abolished in order for women to speak fully as subjects; gender removes from women "the most precious thing for a human being—subjectivity" (66).

For the disadvantaged classes to speak fully as subjects, it would seem that class, too, would have to be abolished. Barring this utopian development, it is important for those of us in the academy to recognize that educational institutions can help to mitigate the effects of gender- and class-based objectification and disempowerment in a world in which gender and class are unlikely to be abolished anytime soon. If we accept Engels's claim that women constituted the first disadvantaged class, we should recognize that women have been oppressed, along with the lower classes, for millennia. We would do well, then, to embrace to pedagogical practices that take into account the needs of both "classes." Women, and members of underprivileged classes who manage to enter the academic sphere, are often overlooked in the classroom, their claims to knowledge ignored in favor of the privileged (male, upper-class) voice. As a result, voices that

should be heard are silenced. The "other" becomes the unknowing object, prevented from owning knowledge and denied the credibility to share it effectively with others.

Can women and members of marginalized classes ever hope to claim knowledge through their participation in the educational system, or is this goal an impossible one? What can instructors accomplish in the composition classroom to address the frustrated needs and ambitions of women and members of disadvantaged students? What, indeed, can we as a society do to address the needs of these marginalized groups? The first-year writing classroom is a locus for empowerment for women and members of the marginal classes as they seek to claim knowledge. The composition classroom is rich in language, discussion, and reading—three activities that can support women's claims to knowledge and that can help to redress gender- and class-based inequalities. My goal in this study is to initiate dialogue about the ways in which women and members of marginalized classes strive—and sometimes fail—to share in the ownership of knowledge.

Theoretical Background and Contexts

Composition and feminist theorists have examined the ways in which gender and class affect the learning experience and they have consistently asserted that women and the members of marginal classes are undervalued in the classroom. Several theoretical and epistemological texts address the role that gender plays in the acquisition of knowledge in our society (Belenky *et al.,* Bordo, Cixous, Code, Engels, Foucault, Heckman) while a few acknowledge the common experiences of women and the underprivileged in the composition classroom and in academia at large (Belenky *et al.,* Brodkey, Luttrell, Ritchie and Boardman, Tokarczyk and Fay). Beauvoir, Cixous, and

Code engage in feminist inquiry into the epistemological aspects of women's knowledge while others (Flax, Hawkesworth) examine postmodern and other feminisms, analyzing the truth claims of various epistemologies.

My interest in women's claims to knowledge began with Cixous and Clement's essay "A Woman Mistress" (1986), in which the authors ask whether or not a woman can own knowledge. Their answer is "yes," women can own knowledge, but they must acknowledge the need for a certain mastery of knowledge. "I don't necessarily think one can transmit certain knowledges…except through mastery," Clement contends (1538). This claim prompted me to examine whether other marginalized classes, in addition to women, can claim knowledge as their own.

A few researchers in the fields of composition (Brodkey) and feminist (Luttrell, Tokarczyk and Fay) scholarship examine the challenges that working-class teachers and working-class students face compared to their privileged counterparts. This body of literature focuses not only on the social class hierarchy, but on the particular hierarchies that exist in academia. The hierarchies that separate full-time faculty from adjuncts, teachers from students, and students from one another are based on a number of factors, including race, gender, and class. In her study of teachers and students attempting to bridge the class gap through "literacy letters," Brodkey concludes that the teachers in her study, regardless of socioeconomic status, are guilty of a "professional class narcissism that sees itself everywhere it looks" (684) and that makes impossible a meaningful correspondence that could bridge class distinctions among faculty and students. Luttrell explores class distinctions among students in her study of working-class and upper-class students. In her work, Luttrell interrogates the "teacher's pet" ideal and concludes that it

is the privileged student who inevitably wins this title. Working-class students, who often come to school in less-than-fashionable clothes and whose parents are not socially prominent, are largely ignored and sit at the back of the class. In another study, Luttrell examines class allegiance and common-sense knowledge as ways of knowing within a group of working-class women. Women who use common sense to navigate the world, Luttrell claims, are empowered because this method "is accessible [and] requires no special training or credentials" (37). Class allegiance locates women within a community of knowers whose knowledge is based on shared notions of working-class common sense.

Women's and working-class women's experiences in academia to some extent reflect those of other learners within the larger class-based society, according to Tokarczyk and Fay, who explain that although women are being hired by academic departments at record levels—and often to the distress of men—they are being hired more often for part-time and adjunct work while men receive the majority of tenured appointments. The reason for this, Tokarczyk and Fay argue, may be related to sexual stereotyping. Values often associated with women, including nurture, collaboration, and communal ways of thinking, "are antithetical to the old network, but if widely practiced among academics they could help heal the rifts between class, gender, and power" (8). Universities profess to seek women faculty, but women's values clash with the social and professional norms of academia. Another area in which gender is a liability for women is publishing. Women who value collaboration and communal work may find that their collaborative publishing efforts receive less recognition than single-authored publications. In a "publish-or-perish" workplace, these values are detrimental (9).

Another body of literature compares women's ways of knowing to conventional, male dominated ways of knowing and explores the pedagogical implications of these epistemologies. Flynn explores male and female writing styles and concludes that effective teaching requires the instructor to acknowledge that men and women have different approaches to writing. She emphasizes the value of asking women to write from lived experiences, and she demonstrates that these experiences are "related to the politics of gender" (583). Flynn explains that women's experiences are not necessarily alternative instances of a male reality, but possess a reality of their own, one worthy of expression in writing. Encouraging women students to write from this perspective will empower them to transcend male dominated prescriptions about writing.

Belenky *et al.* demonstrate that woman has been subject to the male experience, which has been presented as the definitive model for intellectual processes. They conclude, as does Flynn, that it is essential to understand the different ways in which men and women develop intellectually, if we hope to create a classroom in which women can transcend the patriarchal processes of learning. Belenky *et al.* recognize that the "abstract and impersonal" have largely been the domain of men while the personal and emotional have been the domain of women. These differences reveal themselves in student writing, as Flynn illustrates in her discussion of the first-year writing classroom. When she asked her students to write papers about narrative learning experiences, Flynn found that male students tended to describe experiences of success or frustration, whereas women described moments of connection or interaction (576). This reflects Belenky *et al.*'s assertion that men's and women's ways of knowing are indeed quite different. In order to direct our attention to these differences Trimbur proposes a collaborative effort in our

pedagogies. Like Belenky *et al*., Trimbur contends that learning requires us to alter our ideas of relations to others in order to "enter new relationships" (465). This type of learning is connected to what Belenky *et al.* describe as "procedural knowledge," in which the "knower" eventually discovers how to relate to others' claims to knowledge.

Epistemological and feminist texts frame a large part of my work on class and gender in the classroom. Heckman locates her study of gender and knowledge in a postmodern feminism and argues that the challenges facing women today arise from dualisms pervasive in our patriarchal society. Heckman evaluates Rational/Irrational, Subject/Object, and Nature/Culture dichotomies as the defining dualisms in women's lives. Woman is defined as irrational, object, and nature which inhibits her ability to claim knowledge for her own. Postmodern feminism, Heckman argues, reveals that these dualisms require one term to prevail over the other, with woman consistently coming out on the bottom of the hierarchy. Cixous also addresses these dichotomies and concludes that all binarisms eventually lead back to the man/woman opposition, perpetuating the phallocentric hegemony that exists "everywhere." Feminist theory (Bordo, Flax, Hawkesworth) support part of my work as I seek to identify the ways in which gender underwrites epistemology. Bordo, in "Cartesian Masculinization of Thought," like Ehrenreich and English and Heckman, traces the "masculinization of thought" from the cultural and philosophical transitions of the late seventeenth century (440). During the Enlightenment, Bordo argues, a de-feminization occurred, defining woman as "other," and mysterious—indeed, as an uncontrollable object of nature.

Flax evaluates claims to knowledge through a postmodern lens, while attempting to "deconstruct further the meanings we attach to biology/sex/gender/nature" (635).

Although most feminists interrogate the sex/gender dichotomy, Flax emphasizes that many still equate biological sex with gender, which complicates any deconstruction of these terms. Flax argues that by equating sex with gender, we are guilty of essentialism—the very problem, she maintains, with what Cixous defends as the embodiedness of being female. Men have bodies, too, Flax argues. We should not reduce embodiment to "a subset of relations of [re]production" (638). Hawkesworth, as well, argues against the French feminists' claim that women have a unique way of knowing—one related to the body—that supercedes any other means of knowing. Hawkesworth questions the notion that, "Where men have gotten it wrong, women will get things right" (544), arguing that such a position is "highly implausible" because it "fails to grasp the manifold ways in which all human experiences…are mediated by theoretical presuppositions embedded in language and culture" (544).

To understand the unequal allocation of resources to support the learning process I turn to Code and to Ehrenreich and English for a feminist inquiry into the epistemological forces that shape women's production of knowledge. Code explores the power structures that support "the construction of expertise and authority" while criticizing "what science has proved about women's natural inferiority to men" (208-09). Science has "proved" that women need advice from experts, including teachers and doctors, for everything from learning to health care. Code emphasizes that "too much trust in experts—too little trust in themselves and their collective strength—renders women acquiescent and passive" (219). Code urges women to "refuse epistemic oppression" while devising "strategies for claiming their cognitive competence and authority, their knowledgeability, and their right to know" (218). Ehrenreich and English

describe the historical rise of the "experts" and their collective control over women's choices as they examine the "traditional patriarchal constructions" between women and men (206). Although Ehrenreich and English do not address the epistemological implications for women in academia, as Tokarczyk and Fay do, they do show that women are susceptible to a scientific rhetoric that promotes the idea that they are unable to think for themselves. Instead, women have "signed over responsibility for their well-being to the experts" (207) who claim to own knowledge. Thus, knowledge remains the domain of the privileged.

In Foucault's work I found a genealogy of the idea of woman as a passionate, unreasonable being. Knowledge is not the domain of those afflicted with madness, as Foucault contends—for madness is unreason, and unreason is the result of passion. Women have consistently been described as passionate, emotional, and unreasonable beings. Foucault maintains that the natural passions of men and women are fraught with madness (*Madness & Civilization*). For women, especially, this leads to the "histerization" of their being, which entails "a thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex" (*History of Sexuality* 146). Heckman, as well, argues that women have always been on the negative side of the rational/irrational dichotomy, making them inferior to the masculine. In a postmodern move, Heckman contends that a displacement of this binary must take place in order for woman to claim her own knowledge.

Although Cixous is often accused of essentialism, her work is quite useful in understanding women's ways of knowing and of writing. In a postmodern manner, Cixous seeks to dismantle the binaries that place woman in a subordinate position. By deconstructing binaries, and along with them, gender distinctions, the phallocentric

hegemony ceases to exist, permitting women to move to a position once available only to men. The charge of essentialism arises when the feminine is viewed as a biological instead of a social construct, according to Irigaray, who explains that feminine writing need not necessarily "appeal to a definition of essentially feminine qualities" (Heckman 43).

Beauvoir describes "feminine qualities" in *The Second Sex.* The eternal question—"what is a woman?"—constitutes the basis for her work. Man would not write a book asking what a man is, Beauvoir asserts, so why does woman? She does so because she is a mystery, an object, and imprisoned in her own subjectivity. She is circumscribed "within the limits of her own nature" (xxi). In Beauvoir's work, one grasps the construction of woman as nature in opposition to man's culture and begins to understand the omnipresent representation of woman as "other." Beauvoir asks why man always emerges as the victor, while woman remains the "other." To answer this question, Beauvoir eloquently traces woman's objectification from the beginnings of patriarchal religion to modern marriage. This pattern of subjugation has found its way into academia, where woman has also consistently been objectified as an object of study and regulation. The patriarchal hegemony, Beauvoir contends, is perpetuated by the male attitude with "disarming ingenuousness" (xxxi).

Engels likewise historicizes his account of women as "other," tracing this objectification back to the onset of monogamous marriage, or rather "marriage of convenience" (739). In Engels's account, marriage is strictly an economic arrangement. Engels describes marriage as an institution in which the man corresponds to the bourgeois, and the wife corresponds to the proletariat (744). The first class struggle

occurs, Engels explains, when the husband takes a wife as his property. Engels's *Origin of the Family* helped me first to understand the implications of woman as a *class*.

Discussions of gender and class are abundant in composition theory and practice (Annas, Bizzell 1994, Brodkey, Flynn, Kirsch and Ritchie, Ritchie and Boardman), which offer the instructor various ways to construct a classroom in which all voices are appreciated. Bizzell evaluates the current "familiar" structure of English studies and calls for a change of venue. For example, the old, "impenetrable traditional boundaries" (480) need to be redrawn and rethought, and we must ask, "how can I reconceive my study of literature and composition now that I regard [historically marginalized texts and authors] as important?" (480). This question is important for our students, especially working-class students who may not identify with texts included in the traditional canon, but who may be interested in working-class literature. Annas teaches a "Working-Class Literature" class and describes the working-class in America as "pluralistic." For this reason, she asserts, we should include as diverse as possible a group of working-class texts on our syllabi. Annas's article helped me to recognize the importance of certain pedagogical tools—especially journal writing—that give students a sense of ownership of the material that they are reading.

Kirsch and Ritchie defend a "politics of location" while exploring the possibilities of dismantling the class and gender hierarchies that pervade academia. They argue that essentialism is dangerous because it forces one to think of gender as a biological rather than as a social and cultural artifact produced by a "varied set of social relationships" (527). Kirsch and Ritchie explore pedagogical strategies that create awareness about the ways men and women write (*cf.* Flynn), while teaching us to "resist the drive to

generalize about men and women" (527). One of these strategies is to encourage students to produce work in a variety of discursive modes, which will create an awareness of the various genres of literature available and the multiple ways of writing about literature.

Ritchie and Boardman offer a historical insight into feminism's influence in the composition classroom as they trace feminist pedagogy from the small triumphs in composition studies in the 1970s through "the explosion of feminist theory and well-documented feminist practice of the last decade" (587). Ritchie and Boardman contend that feminist perspectives have done much to raise awareness within the field of composition of such issues as the working conditions of female instructors, gender politics in the classroom, "the feminization of English teaching" (588), and opportunities for feminist scholarship. Two important feminist practices, inclusion and disruption, focus attention on gender awareness as the authors seek to "theorize the discourses that keep women and minorities marginalized" (591). Inclusion of women in composition upstaged the "gender-blind" theories of the 1970s and 1980s. Instructors and theorists began to ask questions such as, "what are women's experiences in classrooms, in institutions? How do women use language? How are women writers different from male writers?" (593). These questions piqued my interest as a first-year composition instructor, and I began to realize that knowledge is not universal, but owned by a select few.

Ritchie and Boardman describe feminist disruption as a rejection of compliance and silence and an embracing of a new-found outspokenness and self-recognition (599). Belenky *et al.* describe this disruption as subjective knowledge through which women realize their voices are valid. Cixous identifies disruption as a displacement of the "old-boy" network and the phallocentric hegemony by a voice that breaks down the

male/female binary. Nevertheless, disruption, according to Ritchie and Boardman, can eventually become problematic if no one listens. Rhetorical skill is essential to the task of disruption, because the discussion must be sustained in order for it do be effective (604).

CHAPTER II

Questions for Composition Studies

What are the implications of a feminist located pedagogy for women, as well as for members of marginalized communities, in the composition classroom? Has the field of composition become feminized, given that the majority of composition instructors are women? Many instructors in the field wish to "seek alternative writing practices" to validate the experiences and respond to the needs of women (Ritchie and Boardman 586). Perhaps a change as simple as including women authors on the reading list for a course can begin to transform a gender-biased classroom by allowing teachers and students to view society through a feminist lens. Many feminist traditions, including contemporary, French, socialist, Marxist, and ecological feminisms can contribute to this project. In recent years the traditional literary canon has been expanded to include a number of female authors, but a legacy of women's oppression and exclusion still looms over us as we attempt to historicize the female experience. Adrienne Rich asks,

> How does a woman gain a sense of her *self* in a system…
> which devalues work done by women, denies the
> importance of female experience, and is physically violent
> toward women?...How do we, as women, teach women
> students a canon of literature which has consistently
> excluded or depreciated female experience? (239)

Rich addresses a salient issue. How do women teach other women that their history has been illegitimatized? Although as teachers we have paid our dues and overcome certain oppressions along the way, we must meet our women students eye-to-eye and address the canon's still inadequate incorporation of women authors. We must also be careful not to

inflict on our male students the same kind of dominating voice that has haunted women for centuries. Our goal is not dominance but inclusion.

Is an expansion of the literary canon an adequate response to women's consistent objectification and marginalization in the academy? What of working-class literature—can the inclusion of texts from marginalized classes change the ways in which disadvantaged students embrace and respond to literature?[2] While an expanded canon may include women authors, it is unlikely to end the oppression of women in the academy or elsewhere. As is the case when teaching working-class literature, the instructor must seek outside sources to enrich the classroom. As Annas maintains, the instructor cannot teach only the working-class literature of the "male urban factory worker of proletarian novel fame" (173), but must include all aspects of women's working-class experience, from immigration to explorations of sexual orientation:

> Some of these women are Italian, or Vietnamese or Native American, some are African American, some are Anglo and some are lesbians. There are also people from poor and working class backgrounds who are old. There are rural as well as urban varieties of the working class. There are class divisions in the black community and in ethnic communities. And the ways in which class is experienced have changed throughout the twentieth century. (173)

[2] For an important examination of how working class texts can bring about change in the English composition classroom, see Pam Annas,. "Pass the Cake: The Politics of Gender, Class, and Text in the Academic Workplace," in Tokarczyk and Fay, 165-178. Annas contends that "this [inclusion] is especially important in literary studies because culture and the canon have been the property and the province of the privileged classes" in this genre (173).

Annas makes an important point when she notes that the "vast majority of the population" is made up of marginalized groups. By sensitizing people "to other forms of oppression" through the teaching of diversity and "non-privilege" (173), we may perhaps be able to undermine the dichotomies of rich/poor, man/woman, white/black, and the many other binaries that create oppression. Annas, whose work addresses class conflicts between men and women, is particularly concerned to address the institutional patriarchal structures that oppress women in the academy. Even as she describes the inadequacies of the canon and our responsibilities as instructors to diversify the curriculum, she insists that we address the man/woman binary on which, according to Cixous, all such conflicts depend.

An examination of Cixous's approach of deconstruction and its implications for hierarchal binaries suggests several actions that we must take in order to dismantle the patriarchal structures that have subordinated women inside and outside of the classroom. Cixous does not seek to overthrow male knowledge and replace it with an all-encompassing female intelligence. Instead, she believes that binaries should be abolished, and she argues that the only way to do this is to subvert and upend the male/female binary. Cixous claims that a binary can exist only if one of its constituent terms is in a dominant position. Should female knowledge rise up to equal that of the male, the equality would dismantle the binary. Cixous's, account of female knowledge responds to Lacan's theory of the Symbolic which places men closer to the phallus—the omnipotent signifier—and places women farther from that centered truth. Women's knowledge, far from being based in the phallus, is closer to the Imaginary, while men's knowledge is an absolute fixed meaning based in the Symbolic. Women's language, which for Lacan is

the basis of all knowledge, is fluid and not as stable as male language. Cixous seeks to abolish the male/female binary by allowing this fluid female language to rise up and engage the stable language of men.

I shall discuss Cixous's theory more thoroughly in my third chapter, but I mention it here as a way to situate my argument in a dialogue about the subversion of binaries. When we enter our classrooms we encounter men as well as women. The binary is set, and we must disrupt it in order for women to have a chance at inclusion. We must employ diverse perspectives to enable our students to locate themselves in the world we describe. By including racial, ethnic, social, and sexual minority writers in our readings, we make possible a dialogue that will empower students in their own writing. Students will be empowered because they will be able to see themselves in the readings and will have models of writing with which they will be able to identify. Of course, revising reading selections is not sufficient to empower the women in our classes. In our composition classrooms, we should seek to disrupt the subject/object binary in order to ensure that women are not objectified in their opinions or in their writing. Objectification takes several forms, one of which is the instructor's apathy towards female students' opinions, as the students express those opinions in discussion and in essay assignments. We need to eschew the temptation to act as the omnipotent, omniscient giver of knowledge. Because race, class, and gender are inextricable elements of—and seemingly intractable problems in—American society, they are also a part of the classroom (*cf.* Brodkey 695). To become empathetic to the daily lives of our students, many of whom may be single parents, married with family, newly divorced, or working two jobs to make it through

school, is integral to our duties as instructors. Our empathy can bring women out of objectification and "otherness" to a place where they can excel.

Change in the Classroom

Although an expanded canon and empathy for the "othered" student can help to break down patterns of objectification and alienation, we also need to read our students' writing through a lens of social construction. Composition theorist John Trimbur contends that collaborative learning exemplifies the socially constructed classroom and allows students a wider voice through collective decision-making. As Trimbur notes, the collaborative classroom initiates an expanding conversation. This conversation begins in small groups, "next among the groups in class, then between the class and the teacher, and finally among the class, the teacher, and the wider community of knowledge" (461). The knowledge students claim gains greater significance because of the wider social context encompassed by the discourse. Learning becomes a social, not just a cognitive action, blurring the line between subject and object. Collaboration means "joining new communities and taking part in new conversations" (465), and this, especially for women, can validate the roles the learners play in society. Subject and object cease to be sharply distinguished when collaboration takes place in a community of learners. As Belenky *et al.* illustrate, collaboration and consensus give students ownership of knowledge. Knowledge, in this sense, is not the "private property of the teacher" but a "critical reflection of both teacher and students" (219). In this way we can imagine knowledge reflecting back and forth among the students and also between students and the teacher, creating a dialogue that will foster the critical thinking that is necessary for students to

succeed in higher education. Belenky *et al.* refer to this mode of class structure as "connected teaching [where] no one apologizes for uncertainty" (221). Connected teaching builds truth without conflict. It locates truth in consensus and, as Belenky *et al.* propose, breaks the barriers of ego between students and teacher (223).

Collaborative learning can also bring into focus for male students the particular struggles that women have in reclaiming their voices and identities in the college classroom. Often arranging the classroom in a large circle so students can discuss face to face can facilitate multiple levels of dialogue. The instructor is, of course, a part of the circle, which mitigates the "omnipotent professor" persona. During the first week of class the instructor can initiate an introductory ice-breaker game in which each student names three things about her or himself, one of which is false. Stereotypes are interrupted when students guess which claim is false. Although this game appears elementary, it becomes interesting when adults are involved. Women, especially, take great pride in naming attributes about themselves that are true when other students think they are false. One of my female students claimed to have five children and no one in the classroom believed her because she was quite young. When the class discovered that she did indeed have five children, her challenges in gaining an education became clear. The patriarchal *status quo* can also be lightened when male students discover that their female classmates have just as many challenges as they do in attending university.

To understand further how we as composition instructors can mitigate patriarchal bias in our classrooms, we need to address the different ways in which men and women write. Flynn suggests that gender-based differences in social and psychological development may affect these differences (574). This suggestion opens the door for an

examination of the ways in which a feminist perspective in the classroom can transform the way women learn and write.

Luttrell contends that the current feminist analysis of women's knowledge identifies only a "single or universal mode of knowing for women" (*Working Class* 33). In her study, she argues that class, race, and gender simultaneously influence the effects of knowing on women's collective social relations, while defying the prevailing knowledge claims of the existing epistemology. Dominant ideologies of women's knowledge "undermine women's collective identities, claims to knowledge and power, and the consequences for the adult education of working-class women" (34). Some of these "dominant ideologies" of women's knowledge may be perpetuated by the very instructors who wish to eliminate such ideologies in their classrooms. Woman as object, woman as unknowing "other," woman as irrational, and woman as nature are expressions of such ideologies. Cixous's claim that all hierarchies come back to the male/female binary should inspire instructors of composition to "reject phallocentric unitary language for a plurality of languages that does not strive for the creation of a new orthodoxy, a unitary truth" (Heckman 47). The composition classroom is a valuable site in which to practice this plural language, as language is at the heart of reading and writing. We should seek to displace any dualisms that are present in the classroom and to create ways of writing that encourage women, especially, to subvert masculine writing. Cixous contends that to subvert masculine writing is to write the feminine, and this can be accomplished by men or women to upend the status-quo. Heckman writes that "Cixous sees linguistic revolution as social revolution; displacement equals resistance to oppression" (45). We can effect change in our composition classrooms by displacing

male hegemony with a plural language that seeks to level the playing field in the classroom. We should remember that our writing classes are rich in dialogue and language, the very forces that can bring about change for women who are challenged to claim knowledge for their own.

CHAPTER III

"Mother Nature"

This chapter examines the historical context of the nature/culture dichotomy by which women are associated with nature and men with culture. This dualism challenges women to prove that they are capable of claiming knowledge. How can we, as teachers of composition, direct our attention to this binary in order to assist women in claiming ownership of knowledge? In order to do so, we must explore and comprehend the historical and social contexts in which this dualism arose, and we must locate our own position within and our relationship to those contexts. In this way we can present a socially constructed view of the classroom to our students, one that is decentered and focuses on the means by which students express themselves.

Women's alleged closeness to nature, according to Code, "causes their 'animal' (=passionate) natures consistently to overrule their rationality" (212). Because passionate beings are perceived as irrational they appear unable to join the ranks of "knowers" who depend on a rational mind to guide them. Foucault examines the unfortunate lot of the irrational being, who is often represented as or assumed to be female. He addresses "the savage danger of madness" and its relation to "the danger of the passions and their fatal concatenation" (*Madness & Civilization* 85). The passionate woman cannot compete with reason, nor can knowers who are represented as perfectly rational cope with unreason (Code 213). Woman's connection with nature and its mysteries allow her no place in the rational sphere. As Beauvoir illustrates in *The Second Sex,* woman has failed to achieve transcendence as man has done. Her failure to become a subject and her alliance "with

nature through reproduction are closely tied" (Heckman 105), and they perpetuate the gendered nature/culture binary. As Heckman demonstrates, the rise of modern science led to the conceptualization of nature as a force with which (male) humans must contend. This fostered "the relationship between the man of culture and the natural world he sought to dominate" (106). So, too, in Western patriarchal structure, man seeks to dominate woman, who is associated with dominated nature. Woman's association with nature, however, may not be the liability that it appears to be. Nietzsche contends that woman's alliance with nature gives her an advantage over men because her achievements lack the contrived quality of the achievements of man (190). The ambiguity of the nature/culture dichotomy must be carefully examined, according to Heckman, even though woman has been "praised for exhibiting a kind of naturalness through which the artificiality of civilization can be transcended" (112). While woman's association with nature "has more positive connotations than her associations with irrationality and an object status," Heckman asserts, "it is nevertheless erroneous to conclude that this association has been…an advantageous one for women" (112). Heckman argues that because Nietzsche disagreed with the *status quo* of his day, he sought to represent women and nature in a positive light. Other feminist critics of the *status quo*, the eco-feminists, maintain that the female/nature association is a positive one (112).

Woman is associated with nature for several reasons, the main one being her connection with reproduction. The regular lunar cycle emanating from the womb is a taboo subject among men, who would prefer to consider it in scientific terms. Pregnancy is the "great mystery" in which men play only a part. Childbirth is woman's domain, and the childrearing that follows commonly falls to the woman. Women are objects of nature,

unable to achieve the status of subject that men enjoy. Culture, in turn, is represented as superior to nature and seeks to subdue it. Although children are more often than not raised in a maternal environment, they are quickly and inevitably introduced to an academic environment in which patriarchal culture seeks to constrain their intellectual autonomy. Culture will attempt to override the female child's sense of herself and her world, plunging her into the realm of male-dominated educational and social conventions. Bordo elaborates on the nature/culture dichotomy and its implications:

> "She" is "other"; and "otherness" itself becomes dreadful—particularly the otherness of the female, whose powers have always been mysterious to men and evocative of the mystery of existence itself. Like the infinite universe, which threatens to swallow the individual "like a speck," the female, with her strange rhythms, long acknowledged to have their chief affinities with the rhythms of the natural (now alien) world, becomes a reminder of how much lies outside the grasp of man. (454)

While woman's natural affinities may be beyond man's conceptual grasp, man still seeks to dominate woman in several ways. The classroom is one place where women are frequently objectified and silenced—especially in their writing. Cixous explores the nature/body dynamic in her theory of woman's writing while identifying a woman's writing as specific to her connection to her body—to "write the body," for example, is to engage in *l'écriture féminine,* or "feminine writing." According to Cixous, *l'écriture féminine* can erase phallocentric hegemony through a purely feminine stance. As Heckman observes, French feminists, including Irigaray and Kristeva, hold that

"woman's oppression is rooted in language" (42). Women have two unacceptable choices—to write as women, or to write as men. In order to "deconstruct and destabilize" the masculine hierarchy, a new woman's language emerges, making language an instrument of transformation. Irigary, especially, does not seek to create a new truth opposed to masculine truth. Instead, she insists,

> woman's language, like women's sexuality, is plural, not unitary. The search for a unitary truth is a masculine effort; her effort is to espouse a plural, fluid, diffuse woman's language that does not so much oppose masculine language as subvert it. (Heckman 43)

An oppositional approach would only appropriate the "masculine effort" and would hinder women's efforts to claim knowledge as their own. Knowledge and autonomy emerge through the pluralistic language that Irigaray espouses. This pluralistic, fluid, and tactile language, which manifests itself in women's writing, seeks to displace "the old oppositions, particularly that of the masculine/feminine. It will thus have a formlessness that is antithetical to dualistic thought" (45). For Irigaray and Cixous, dualisms are the enemy of feminine self-expression and autonomy.

The French feminists also focus on the phallocentric nature of the subject/object binary. Irigaray maintains that any epistemology centered on the subject is phallocentric while Cixous contends that women should do what women know best—celebrate the body/nature construct in order to overturn phallocentric hegemony. Derrida, a contemporary of the French feminists, maintains that all binaries are hierarchal. Thus, in the subject/object binary, the subject's view is dominant while the object's is secondary.

Cixous seeks to deconstruct these hierarchies so that neither role will be subordinated to the other; indeed, this is the central focus of Cixous's work. She contends that dualisms are the structural base of western thought, a fact that has important implications. These dualisms, according to Cixous, "are never neutral…and stem from the opposition to woman, the man/woman opposition" (Heckman 43). As Cixous argues, all hierarchies can be reduced, in the end, to the man/woman binary:

> In fact, every theory of culture [and] of society, the whole conglomeration of symbolic systems…is all ordered around hierarchical oppositions that come back to the man/woman opposition. ("Castration or Decapitation" 44)

This patriarchal hierarchy includes speech, discourse, language—indeed, "everything that acts on us" (44)—and it extends to the very knowledge that woman attempts to claim. Even the woman/nature connection leads back to the man/woman binary, for we are immediately drawn to the claim that woman is nature while man is culture.

Ecofeminism—Addressing Woman and/as Nature

Ecofeminist inquiry maintains that the exploitation of nature is analogous to the exploitation of women. The woman/nature construct is at the heart of ecofeminism, which celebrates this binarism even as it condemns "masculine domination, exploitation, and oppression both of women and of nature" (Code 270). A major tenet of ecofeminism is the interconnectedness of ecology with human lives "and the life of the biosphere, together with the value of healthy, balanced ecosystems to the maintenance of diversity"

(271). According to ecofeminist theory, forms of oppression, exploitation and male domination of women and nature are connected (271). Code contends that,

> An analysis of the interrelated dominations of nature—psyche and sexuality, human oppression, and non-human nature—and the historic position of women in relation to those forms of domination is the starting point of ecofeminist theory. (272)

However, like Cixous, who celebrates woman, body, and nature, ecofeminists risk being accused of biological determinism, for their theory often relies on the "earth mother" archetype as a representation of woman's "natural role" (272).[3] Code finds this role "disempowering" and is troubled that ecofeminists persist in locating feminine values in "the sensuous, unruly chaos of nature" where she is identified "with nurturant values" (272). This alignment of women with nature, according to Code, only perpetuates the patriarchal *status quo*.

Ecological feminist scholar Ynestra King acknowledges feminists' wariness of any theory that aligns women with nature. While ecologists promote awareness of "the perilous situation of life on earth brought about by human attempts to master nature," some feminists "assert that the feminist project should be freeing nature from men, rather than freeing women from nature" (118). King asserts that "the same positions appear again and again in extending the natural into the social [cultural feminism] or in severing the social from the natural [socialist feminism]" (130). Each of these directions is wrong,

[3] According to Heckman, Cixous, like Irigaray and Kristeva, is often charged with essentialism for her discussions of the "feminine" and "the body." Cixous replies to this accusation by defining her "feminine" writing as an activity in which both men and women can engage, thus eliminating any essentialist aspect. Furthermore, Cixous maintains that "the body" is a purely social construct, not a biological event. Unlike ecofeminists, Cixous sees feminine writing [*l'écriture féminine*] as not a "return to our 'true nature,' but an effort to transform masculine language by subverting it from within" (Heckman, *Gender and Knowledge* 46).

according to ecofeminist theory, because they "form two sides of the same dualism, [choosing] between culture and nature" (131). King suggests that we should think about feminism dialectically, finding in our affiliation with nature new meanings that lead to a fundamental "social ecological feminism" (131). King elaborates:

> Socialist feminism has given us a powerful critical perspective with which to understand and transform history. Separately, they perpetuate the dualism of "mind" and "nature." Together they make possible a new ecological relationship between nature and culture, in which mind and nature, heart and reason, join forces to transform the internal and external systems of domination that threaten the existence of life on earth. (132)

Ecofeminism, as King defines it, seeks to bridge nature and culture, to transcend the traditional dualisms "between spirit and matter, art and politics, reason and intuition. This is the project of ecofeminism" (134).

CHAPTER IV

Women in Poverty and the Working Class

Women who live in poverty and women who belong to the working class know all too well the consequences of being underprivileged, which include limited access to higher education (see Appendix). Code acknowledges that poor women slip through the cracks of the epistemic terrain, a situation that artificially depoliticizes the examination of knowledge. She maintains that a "remapping" of epistemology is in order, because there is currently one epistemology for the privileged and one for the masses, and this is, as Anne Seller contends, "embarrassing" (267). To address this embarrassment, Code argues, we should engage in a political as well as a practical-theoretical analysis of knowledge. An examination of this sort must take in to account the knowledge of all classes, not just those who have had the privilege of a class-specific education. If we fail to accomplish this task, political oppression will continue for the poor, especially underprivileged women, whose voice is critical in mapping epistemology.

The critical challenge for women, according to Code, is epistemic and political. This challenge includes "strategies for claiming their cognitive competence and authority, their knowledgeability, and their right to know" (218). Put in to practice, this means that women need to reject the oppressions that the dominant epistemology imposes. Code emphasizes that this strategy is dependent upon a "collective social critique" that includes realizing how "knowledge itself confers and is conferred by power, perpetuating these complex social structures" (218). Code illustrates how collective social empowerment has been successful in the past:

> Women's successes in forming health collectives and in seeking access to feminist therapy and legal advice show that such power can become accessible also to the oppressed, who need no longer occupy the position of victim and suppliant, in thrall to expert mystification. Although victory is by no means total, women's achievements in refusing to occupy oppressed positions are noteworthy. (218)

Class and knowledge become central considerations for lower-class women as they become caught up in male-dominated social constructs. Participants in Luttrell's study assert that "men's claims to knowledge are superior to women's and [they affirm] the idea that men are more powerful by virtue of their knowledge, not the privilege they have as men" (*Working Class* 39). Furthermore, these women associate their work at home and in adult education classes with intuitive feelings, while associating men's work with thoughts and knowledge (*cf.* Flynn). As Luttrell discusses, this false dichotomy serves to constrain "societal expectations of women's intellectual capabilities" (40). As in Hekman's study of the binarisms that divide men and women into different knowledge camps, Luttrell finds that class is a part of the dichotomy that impedes women's claims to knowledge. Indeed, class plays a central role in determining whether or not some students in our classrooms can own knowledge. Privileged students can and often do stand out in the crowd, becoming favorites of the instructor. In *The Teachers All Had Their Pets,* Luttrell documents what it takes to become a "pet." A student must come from a "good family," have fashionable clothes, and be attractive. Poor or working class girls do not

meet the first two criteria, and this places them at the back of the class where they are forgotten or ignored. Luttrell contends that when teachers validate and acknowledge "some students over others," the "others" will eventually feel that school is a "no win situation where they risk feeling unconnected and unknown" (540).

What can we accomplish in the composition classroom to meet the needs of underprivileged women so that they do not slip through the system? Luttrell believes that

> comparative ethnographic research holds the most promise toward this end. The task for feminist educators…is to become ethnographers…actively and systematically observing what students are doing, listening to what they are saying, and probing what they are feeling despite school practices that conspire to distort, mute, or silence what they know and have to say about themselves and the world around them. (*Teacher's Pet* 539)

It is no secret to feminist scholars that women's voices have been muted everywhere in our culture and especially in the classroom. It is even more disturbing to realize that the system in fact "conspires" to silence students on the basis of race, class, and gender, which "necessarily structure the individual's understanding of reality and hence inform all knowledge claims" (Hawkesworth 536).[4] Luttrell affirms that she was able to understand by listening to her subjects' accounts of "teacher's pet," how the educational

[4] For an illustrative article that examines diverse feminist epistemologies and theories on how race, class, and gender affect ways of knowing, see Mary Hawkesworth, "Knowers, Knowing, Known: Feminist Theory and Claims of Truth" *Signs* 14.3 (1989): 533-557. Hawkesworth criticizes the postmodern feminist "escapist tendency in the shift to intertexuality, in the move from fact to fiction", while claiming that "the world is more than a text" (555-556). Instead, Hawkesworth proposes that a feminist standpoint theory, a "successor science" can substitute for masculine science a "more sophisticated conception of social and political life" (536).

system "shortchanges girls." She suggests two ways of improving working class women's education. First, we must go beyond the teaching of political and economic standards of development that privileges the bourgeois classes and instead teach values that have gone virtually unacknowledged, including "empathy, nurturance, and sensitivity—[virtues] that support personal growth and development" (539). The educational system, according to Luttrell, neglects values connected to family and community. By articulating strict boundaries between "productive and reproductive" skills, schools devalue the lives of poor and working-class women who may contribute significantly to their family's survival, and thus deprives them of "visibility or a voice" (540).

We must remember that the success of a school can also be understood in terms of ethical relationships. If, according to Luttrell, we as teachers value some students over others, what does this reveal about the school's potential to serve as an agent for social change? Are our syllabi replete with privileged male texts or do we acknowledge the diversity of the classroom by including working class texts? Annas finds that her course on "Working-Class Literature" allows each of her non-privileged female students a voice of her own.[5] As Annas notes, working class women come from all ethnicities, ages, and sexual orientations; there are also class divisions in the Black community and other ethnic communities. How can we adjust our pedagogy in order to address these different subject positions among our students? Traditional ways of teaching will not go far in meeting the diverse needs of underprivileged students. Annas argues that the school

[5] Annas explores the multiple ways in which pedagogy can address the needs of the working-class woman. She notes that her views are not always popular in academia. Her attempts to teach working-class students ways of writing that meets their goals often elicits accusations of "rocking the boat" or of being too "soft" or "trivial" (175) Academic prose, Annas maintains, will not always reach the underprivileged student.

should "serve as a bridge for working-class students between their lived experience and the academic world" (172). To construct this "bridge," Annas replaces traditional essay assignments with journal writing that explores the political, ethical, and intellectual aspects of the texts that students read. Students are encouraged to engage in discussion about the ways in which these texts affect their lives, to critique the texts and others' ideas, and to discuss any other readings in which they are interested, creating a connection between their own experiences and those of the characters in the readings (173).

CHAPTER V

Women and Credibility

Can woman, who has been defined as emotional and irrational, be taken seriously? What of her knowledge—is it credible? Can women own knowledge? Code makes an important observation: before a woman can own knowledge, she must free herself from the "stereotyped conceptions of her 'underclass' epistemic status, her cognitive incapacity, and her ever-threatening irrationality" (215). As she confronts these derisive labels, a woman must struggle not only with the consciousness of the scrutiny of others, but also with her own self-scrutiny. She may come to believe that she is not as capable as men. As recent as the first half of the twentieth century, women, whose intuitions on such matters as housework and child-rearing were not trusted, were subjected to an arsenal of scientific, male-authored directives on everything from detergent to burping. Having relinquished their own claims to knowledge in favor of an imposed knowledge that was seen as more "distinguished" or credible, women were seen by men as hysterical and pathological on account of their strange, preternatural connection to nature. Women had to be directed, by men, to adopt sane cultural practices. These directives "established [themselves] in a series of curious epistemological moves" beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, according to Code (206). Men of science became the "experts" and determined what was appropriate for women (206). Thus, women's skills were no longer their own, but were shaped and constrained by the dictates of male authorities. "Knowledge itself," Code explains, "increasingly, became a commodity of privilege" (207). Woman was taught to rely on the scientific experts in

order to be "good enough" in her domestic work. Reliance on male scientific imperatives erased woman's claims to a knowledge of her own. Beneath these "prescriptions" for female knowledge lay the idea of "women as unbalanced and fundamentally out of control, and of motherhood and femaleness as pathology" (208). The connection of pathology with femaleness is at the heart of male control over woman—a connection that correlates to the culture/nature binary in man who is associated with culture, and attempts to control woman, who is associated with nature (208).

As Code suggests, woman's intellectual self-consciousness is "shaped…by stereotype-informed assumptions that neither her experiences nor her deliberative capacities are trustworthy sources of knowledge" (215). This may cause a woman to remain silent in the classroom, afraid to speak out because her ideas do not conform to the prevailing opinion. Belenky *et al*. examine women's silence in the presence of authority—a situation in which women see "authorities as being all powerful, if not overpowering" (27). The authors reflect on the submissive behavior of women who blindly follow authority regardless of any "inner voice" that may tell them to turn away. This passivity may have implications for women students who fear speaking out in the classroom and view the instructor as the ultimate authority. Belenky *et al*. argue that if women have "no confidence in themselves as knowers," they must cling to other knowers for guidance (28). This can be problematic in the classroom, especially in the de-centered classroom where discussion is a primary pedagogical activity. To facilitate discussion with women, who may use silence as a defense because they lack confidence, instructors should first understand that silent women often locate their knowledge in others, not in themselves. A syllabus that includes opportunities for journal writing often inspires the

reticent student to discuss viewpoints centered on the self instead of on others. Journal writing locates the writer as subject, not as object or unknowing other. As subjects, women enter the realm of knower and can thus claim their knowledge as their own instead of receiving it from a central authority. Belenky *et al.* argue that women lay claim to subjective knowledge when they stop accepting the voices of others as truth and begin to "assert their own authority and autonomy" (77). This subjective knowledge can emerge at any time in a woman's life—sometimes as late as midlife—and often comes at a time when a woman most needs it. Unfortunately, those around her may not always understand this new knowledge and may attempt to undermine or devalue it. The educational system, especially, may misinterpret this new development in a woman's intellectual life as stubbornness, failing to recognize the change as a positive one that leads to ownership of knowledge.

Women's recognition of their own subjective knowledge coincides with a newfound ability "to hear themselves think, while gathering observations through watching and listening" (85). This skill is the precursor to the "reflective and critical thought" that is procedural knowledge, or as Belenky *et al.* describe, "the voice of reason" (85). This voice of reason tells women that they must engage in "careful observation and analysis" (94) while realizing that others also have a right to their opinions. As she attains procedural knowledge, a woman enters into dialogue with the opinions of others in order to assess the truth, which may be "hidden beneath the surface" waiting to be "ferreted out" (94). Often, opportunities for collaboration and for building consensus in the classroom will foster the critical thinking skills necessary for procedural knowledge to emerge. This is where we, as instructors, should heed the call of many in

our field to de-center our classrooms. We need not structure our classes panoptically, but may instead create an intellectual field on which all can participate equally.

Paolo Freire envisions a classroom of this sort when he argues that the "banking" concept of education is inefficient. This "banking" concept, in which the instructor methodically "deposits" information in the minds of students who receive and memorize it, is especially demoralizing to women, some of whom already see the teacher as omniscient and omnipotent. A constant dialogue between students and teacher is necessary to the critical development of self and to the students' ownership of knowledge. The class should be a partnership between the students and the instructor, who views her class as an ongoing dialogue, a give-and-take in which the woman's voice is acknowledged and valued. Engaging the students in dialogue creates an atmosphere in which meaning is made. Until this occurs, no knowledge can be claimed and students' credibility is limited (*cf.* Berthoff 330).

Although many composition instructors find Freire's work uplifting and liberating, just as many find it too ideological, and believe that his proposals would be unmanageable in practice. Originally developed for the illiterate and underprivileged people of Brazil, Freire's pedagogy may not fit neatly into our ideas of the composition classroom. I mention it here, however, because it suggests a way to locate women, as the oppressed, in a pedagogy that liberates them from the omnipotent and omniscient professor, who would limit their credibility and their ownership of knowledge. Many instructors find that an atmosphere of inquiry, where teacher and students foster critical thinking by asking questions to be a liberating experience. The instructor's burden of being the "expert" is lifted and students can begin the process of acquiring subjective

knowledge, a knowledge that comes from within rather than from outside sources. Belenky *et al.* explain that this type of knowledge is particularly emancipatory for women, who for various reasons, have previously had their ideas devalued by authority figures.

CHAPTER VI

Unique Challenges for the Marginalized

If we assume that only the privileged take advantage of opportunities for extended education, we must ask why a greater number of underprivileged individuals do not take advantage of federal aid to attend university. Are they caught in a vicious circle of stereotyped expectations, similar to those that women of all classes confront as they struggle against the dominant expectations of their culture? As one participant in Luttrell's study asserts, "People's mobility is very limited…The system keeps people in their place, in their class. You need intelligence to get out of your place" (*Working Class* 38). Often apathy sets in among the underprivileged, as one young man, "Brady" laments, "I don't want to fill out any paperwork and I don't want any debt from going to school."[6] Finances are such a significant concern that the prospect of incurring debt, even for an education, seems anathema.

In addition to apathy, class allegiance may hinder members of marginalized classes who would otherwise pursue higher education. Class allegiance, however, helps others to excel, as the following stories indicate. Before becoming a successful writer, Valerie Miner wondered whether her accomplishments were a betrayal of her working-class family, whose members struggled to forge a life for themselves.[7] Miner describes her dilemma:

> Every day I wonder whether writing is a form of lunacy
> or betrayal. One of my parents didn't go past grade eight

[6] Personal conversation; the student's name has been changed to preserve anonymity.
[7] Miner is the author of "Writing and Teaching with Class," in Tokarczyk and Fay.

> and the other didn't finish high school. My mother works in an all-night coffee shop and her goal for me has always been "to get a good job at the telephone company." There were few books in our house, no symphonies on the Victrola, no high drama except at the Sunday dinner table. One of my brothers grew up to be a carpenter. The other works for a maritime union. So I've always carried that Miner suspicion that laboring with words is not real work. I ask myself…shouldn't I be doing something useful? (73-74)

"Laboring with words" is an activity in which bell hooks chose not to engage several years ago during an academic presentation at Northwestern University.[8] Instead of adopting the terms and conventions academic discourse generally used in such presentations, hooks "chose to speak in a very basic way, thinking especially about the few community folks who came to hear [her]" (104). Later hooks was criticized "primarily by privileged white female academics" for betraying her knowledge of theory and for appearing "anti-intellectual" (104). This contradiction surprised hooks; as she asserts, the academy is supposedly a place where one can "be truly radical or subversive" (104). Her academic colleagues accepted the false proposition that intellectuals can speak only to one another, with no hope of speaking to the masses (104). hooks argues that if she cannot reach her students by speaking in a voice that can be understood, then dialogue can not occur. She believes that class allegiance is important for "intellectuals"

[8] bell hooks, "Keeping Close to Home: Class and Education," in Tokarczyk and Fay, 99-111.

as well, for when we move "outside our class of origin," then we "enter hierarchical institutions that daily reinforce domination by race, sex, and class," and we run the risk of eventually becoming like those who oppress and dominate (105). As the title of her essay, "Keeping Close to Home: Class and Education," indicates, "keeping close to home" is important if one wishes to reach a diverse audience in the classroom. Students from every background can benefit if we approach our teaching by being true to ourselves, even if this includes a non-standard or non-elite speech pattern or "accent." hooks explains:

> To deny ourselves daily use of speech patterns that are common and familiar, that embody the unique and distinctive aspect of our self, is one of the ways we become estranged and alienated from our past. It is important for us to have as many languages on hand as we can know or learn. It is important for those of us who are black, who speak in a particular patois as well as standard English, to express ourselves in both ways. (107)

hooks maintains that we need not forget where we came from in order to make a difference to our students and to our colleagues. We do not need to put on a mask when we enter the halls of academia. By reaching back to our roots we will be able to reach those students who would be intimidated by a privileged voice. hooks allows that even though society, including the academy, is shaped by white, capitalist patriarchy, instructors do not need to assimilate to its conventions. Instead, even in the face of such "structures of domination" we can remain true to our roots and decide for ourselves

where we do and do not want to compromise (108). We can also teach our students this skill, as hooks suggests:

> Unless we share radical strategies, ways of rethinking and revisioning with students, with kin and community, with a larger audience, we risk perpetuating the stereotype that we succeed because we are the exception, different from the rest of our people. (109)

Neither working-class students nor working-class teachers want to be patronized for being "different." Instead, they want to participate fully in the challenges of academia and to be true to their lived experiences.

Conclusion—an Opportunity for Change

What is in store for women of all classes as we assist them in claiming knowledge? hooks's suggestion that we "keep close to home" opens up possibilities of learning for marginalized women, as they struggle to hold their own in dialogue with privileged voices in academia. Collaboration and consensus, as Trimbur and Belenky *et al.* illustrate, can also bring out voices that might otherwise be silenced by traditional pedagogy. The de-centered classroom, as well, can mitigate the image of the professor as omnipotent and omniscient, as we attempt to create a partnership with our students to facilitate an on-going dialogue. Understanding the nature/culture dichotomy—the dichotomy that eventually leads back to the male/female binary—can help us to overcome our tendency to privilege male voices in our classrooms, even as we explore women's affinity with nature and the advantages of a plural, fluent language. As Cixous

maintains, this language will overcome, or subvert, the male hegemony that exists in academia and elsewhere.

While the canon has been expanded to include several women's and minority texts, we still have a responsibility as composition instructors to search for additional texts of all kinds and backgrounds, including working-class texts, to place on our syllabi. This is particularly important in English and composition studies since the canon and the culture it purports to represent have been "the property and the province of the privileged classes" (Annas 173). Ownership of knowledge is possible for everyone, but it will take perseverance on our part, as instructors, to develop pedagogies that will create diverse dialogues of knowledge in which everyone can participate. The composition classroom is rich in reading, language, dialogue, and writing—activities that can facilitate participation by those who might otherwise be left behind in favor of the male, privileged voice.

Appendix

Practical Concerns

Intelligence alone is not sufficient to escape the system; community programs are also necessary to provide transportation to universities and community colleges. While some universities are accessible by public transit, they may not serve the neighborhoods that most need access to higher education. Since mobility for the underprivileged is an issue, the task at hand becomes political, as tax dollars are needed to fund public transportation, especially in marginalized neighborhoods where access to vehicles is limited at best. Federal aid applications are an issue as well, as many in poverty lack access to a home computer or access to transportation to get to a computer. The cycle is completed as the poor sit at home with no way to access the education that would otherwise be available to them.

I envision community centers that can assist those in need of computers in order to complete necessary forms for financial aid, and volunteers from local community and state colleges to assist prospective students with class selection and enrollment. In the best of circumstances, university-funded transportation would be available to transport students to and from classes.

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