The Book and the Writer: The Convergence of Composition Studies, Social Constructionism, and Feminist Criticism

Any fool can generalize.
—Florida Scott-Maxwell,
The Measure of My Days

Think of writing as a social practice and its
study becomes an inquiry into the circum-
stances under which people read and write.
—Linda Brodkey,
Academic Writing as Social Practice

The image of a seed bursting its container also suggests the dynamic and recursive tension between structure and limitation on the one hand and change or growth accompanied by the breaking of form on the other hand. Much of the current theoretical work on reading and writing—and in the humanities in general—is undergoing just such a transformation; questioning, discussing, debating the very nature of knowledge, language, and the notion of the self, that is, the relationships between life, language, and text. And, while I want to keep Florida Scott-Maxwell's maxim on the generalizing capacities of fools clearly in mind, I feel that it would be useful to review and comment on some of the debates and discussions which helped shape the writing of this book.

In fact, one of the critical reasons why this type of book on the gendering of journals or diaries, both as literary forms and as sets of literacy practices which occur both in academic and nonacademic settings, can be written right now has to do with the serendipitous breaking or opening of the disciplinary containers which we usually call Composition Studies, Literary Studies, and Language Studies.

Indeed, many scholars have begun to shift their focus from the study of the products of writing and reading in order to consider jointly the dynamic and interactive processes of reading and writing, and the social and historical contexts of all acts of discourse, including literacy practices which are often classified as outside the domain of "literature" and/or which are generated outside academic cultures. In so doing, they have challenged traditional notions about authors, texts, reading, writing, canonicity, and above all, language (Berlin 1988; Bizzell 1982; Bizzell 1986; Brodkey 1987; Bruffee 1986; Cooper 1986; Faigley 1986; and LeFevre 1987). Drawing on the methods and metaphors of such diverse enterprises as philosophy (Rorty 1979), sociolinguistics (Heath 1983), psycholinguistics (Vygotsky 1962), anthropology (Geertz 1973; Geertz 1983), Marxism (Bahktin 1981), and from poststructuralism/deconstruction/French feminisms (Cixous 1986; Derrida 1972; Foucault 1980; Irigaray 1985; Kristeva 1981; Lacan 1977; and Marks and Courtrivon 1981), these widely ranging and exuberantly disarrayed theoretical conversations frequently align themselves both with what are coming to be known as social-constructionist views and with much feminist work.

This current set of ideas argues, among other things, that no act of writing or reading is completely personal or private, and that the "self" itself is partly or wholly a social construction. Since journals and diaries have often been associated with descriptions such as *private writing*—writing that has no audience—and *personal writing*—the book of the self—these views radically challenge our traditional ideas about the very nature of the journal. At the same time, these new ideas about the self and discourse can be seen as offering us interesting possibilities for reconceiving, or reinventing, the idea of the journal.

Composition, Social Constructionism, and Feminism

Both feminist and social-constructionist views have recently entered the composition conversation, and both refer to a wide variety of perspectives on language and writing. If I may play Florida Scott-Maxwell's "fool" momentarily, I want to try to summarize some of the

claims which I see as common to many social constructionists' and feminists' views and consider the convergence or consonance between those overlapping perspectives because it is that intersection of theoretical frames which informs the perspectives I am trying to bring to this discussion of the journal.

In the article "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal," Lester Faigley offers one perspective on social views of writing by describing three "competing" perspectives on the writing process, which he calls expressivist, cognitive, and social. The social view, he observes:

> is less codified and less constituted at present than the expressive and cognitive because it arises from several disciplinary traditions. . . . Statements that propose a social view of writing range from those urging mere attention to the immediate circumstances of how a text is produced to those denying the existence of an individual author. (Faigley 1986, 534)

Indeed, Karen Burke LeFevre, in her *Invention as a Social Act*, identifies and discusses several possible overlapping perspectives or levels of perspective on writing as a social activity.

> Invention may first of all be seen as social in that the self that invents is, according to many modern theorists, not merely socially influenced but even socially constituted. Furthermore, one invents largely by means of language and other symbol systems, which are socially created and shared. . . . Invention often occurs through the socially learned process of an internal dialogue with an imagined other, and the invention process is enabled by the internal social construct of audience, which supplies premises and structures of belief that guide the writer. . . . Invention becomes explicitly social when writers involve other people as collaborators, or as reviewers whose comments aid invention, or as "resonators" who nourish the development of ideas. . . . Finally, invention is powerfully influenced by social collectives, such as institutions, bureaucracies, and governments which transmit expectations, and prohibitions, encouraging certain ideas and discouraging others. (LeFevre 1987, 2)

A central claim which most social constructionists and feminists share is that language and discursive practice is constitutive. Thus, a critical theme common to these enterprises is that language not only

conveys social reality, but is also one of the prime elements in its construction and maintenance.

> First, language should be viewed as an active force in the way we constitute—not simply copy—reality; language thus plays an active role in how we perceive and think and invent. Second, language should be viewed in its development and its use as a dialectic between individuals and social realms. Invention that occurs with language has often been understood as a principally intrapsychic event that goes on privately in the individual. Yet language is inevitably social as well. It is what we inherit from previous generations, what we learn from others, what we share with others. Language is itself the result of ongoing social process. (LeFevre 1987, 2)

Viewed this way, language is both the seed and the container, and therefore it can be used to contain or burst open our various perceptions of reality. As Linda Brodkey writes: "Whoever uses language creates a world and a world view in words. To say that language is a material resource is to argue that we fabricate culture as a matter of course in narratives, which can be seen then both as cultural practices and cultural artifacts" (Brodkey 1987, *Academic Writing*, 105). No longer seen as the transparent reflection of an objective reality, nor the passive vehicle for the conveyance of ideas, language and discourse are now clearly seen to have the power to marginalize or empower, mute or magnify, hurt or heal. In short, language, the social codes it embodies, and the discursive forms that it employs all write us into the social and cultural positions that we, as we write, experience as intrinsically ours.

Indeed, probably the most interesting and provocative set of debates percolating for those interested in social-constructionist and feminist views of language has to do with specifying the relation between "self" and "language," has to do with asking questions like: How much of the self is socially or linguistically constructed? or Does saying that the self is multiple and socially constructed mean there is no "self"?

John Clifford, in a recent review of works on the theory and politics of composition studies in *College English*, describes the debate as follows:

> In its present incarnation, the debate rages around the decentered subject and the traditional individual. In Lacanian psychology and structural Marxism, for example, the subject is conceived of as either a fragmented and structured illusion or the site of powerful

sociohistorical forces beyond anyone's control. In the thinking of the traditional humanist, however, the individual possesses a coherent consciousness that fulfills its intentions and acts purposefully in the world. (Clifford 1989, 527-28)

Many thinkers have moved away from the traditional humanist notion of the "self" as an autonomous, coherent, and completely individual entity and toward the view that the self is partially socially constructed through language and other forms of social organization, a "self formed through social negotiation, through a dialectic between a temporary self-in-process and society" (Clifford 1989, 528). However, some, whose views are grounded most fully in poststructural perspectives, tend to view the self as completely socially constituted. Such a position would, indeed, deny the "existence of the individual writer."

Thus, some would grant language far more power, and far more control, espousing a view that we are not agents in the generation of meaning, but rather, "the prisoners of language." We are thus simply recipients of language and social codes. Freed and Broadhead, for example, link poststructuralism with the following view of the author: "No longer an author, the writer is, instead, authored by language. Not a manipulator of signs, the writer is manipulated by them, subjugated by 'the prison house of language'" (Freed and Broadhead 1987, 156).

Bruffee also summarizes the strong variant of the social-constructionist perspective as claiming not only that texts and knowledge are socially and linguistically constructed but that the writers themselves also are:

> A social constructionist position in any discipline assumes that entities we normally call reality, knowledge, facts, texts, selves, and so on are community-generated and community-maintained linguistic entities—or more broadly speaking, symbolic entities—that define, or "constitute" the communities that generate them. (Bruffee 1986, 774)

Faigley, too, sees a social view of writing as moving beyond both the expressivist and cognitive views of writing in terms of its focus on the social construction of the writing self. According to him, expressivist views of composing see the individual as using language as a means for self-discovery, while cognitivists would claim that individuals use language to configure and construct reality. However, "in a social view, any effort to write about the self always comes in relation to previous texts" (Faigley 1986, 536).

But many social constructionists—and most feminists, I sus-
pect—hold a view related to that of Linda Brodkey, who draws on both
social-constructionist and feminist ideas in her work. She focuses on the
social situation of writing and reading and sees the relations between
writers and texts as reciprocal and dynamic. Thus, while she describes
her view as one in which writing is seen as a "socially constituted act
whose meaning and value to writers and readers depends on contingent
social arrangements," she notes that "the practices of writers and read-
ers are seen as social and thereby material enactments of their collective
as well as individual understanding of what can and cannot be done in
writing" (Brodkey 1987, vii. Emphasis added). Even more to the point,
she writes:

> There is always a context, for writing as speaking, consisting at the
> very least of a writer, a reader, a text, and a situation. In order to
> understand variation in writing, one would need to explore how
> textuality, the meaning and value of a text, is created in the recip-
> rocal social relations that writers and readers construct in their lan-
> guage. (Brodkey 1987, *Academic Writing*, 96)

Similarly, Marilyn Cooper employs the phrase "the ecology of
writing" to discuss her notion of a dialectic process whereby discourse
communities, and individual speakers and writers, act on each other to
change or maintain discursive practice and the linguistically-con-
structed reality that underlies it (Cooper 1986). Karen Burke LeFevre
sums it up nicely when she writes that the terms *individual* and *social* are
not mutually exclusive categories. Rather they are "dialectically con-
nected, always co-defining and interdependent" (LeFevre 1987, 37).

While I spent much of the summer, spent much of my writing
time thinking, indeed, worrying, about the issues of language and the
social construction of self, I know these issues are not fully resolvable.
What follows is an excerpt from my journal that catches what I was
thinking about that subject on 20 July at about ten o'clock in the morn-
ing.

*[Thinking thinking thinking about what to say—what I know—what I
can discover by writing. My brain wants to pull so many many—too many??
strands together. I was never any good at French braiding. Worried about
voice—subjectivity—who is the I that writes—how do I connect the postmod-
ern, deconstructive nonself inscribed only by other voices, with me, a multiple,
changing, person in process, but an I nevertheless. The I who has dirt under her
fingernails from weeding the garden and a cat sleeping next to her, who worries*

about showing the house to prospective buyers and whether or not she can afford to buy a Cross pen to write. A permeable I—inside and outside, but unified over time, which she knows by many things—like by keeping and reading her journals.

I guess I'll just have to be comfortable with the fact that the discussion of these issues will take place throughout the text I write. Certainly, however, some form of dialectic and reciprocal view of the relation between self and language is the one that I find most compatible at present (whoever I am), and this certainly informs my perspectives on gender, journals and diaries.]

Also, some composition scholars, like Lester Faigley and James Berlin, see social-constructionist views as incompatible with a process view of writing because of the latter's acceptance of and pedagogical emphasis on the idea of a genuine voice or a personal voice which they claim assumes the traditional notion of the self as authentic and individual. But Linda Brodkey suggests that social views of writing are generally compatible with, and indeed build on, current models of writing as a set of processes.

> Any notion of writing process presumes implicitly or explicitly, that writing is best understood as a set of observable human practices. Thus, any attempt to study writing, even writing as literature, would necessarily entail situating writers and writing practices with a social, psychological, historical and political context. (Brodkey 1987, *Academic Writing*, 80. See also Knoblauch 1988)

A second critical constructionist claim is that reading and writing take place in the context of—although not necessarily in the presence of—historical and current communities of other readers and writers who share essential, although often invisible, literacy habits, conventions, and discursive models. Thus, the concept of community, borrowed from linguistic notions of speech community, has become an increasingly important idea in social-constructionist views of literacy. "However unseen they may be, the norms define the writer's community, a context that conditions, governs and constrains, not just the message, but the writer producing it" (Freed and Broadhead 1987, 162-63). Or, as Brodkey writes: "All writers use the language of a community, and all must write in ways deemed appropriate to and by a community" (Brodkey 1987, *Academic Writing*, 12).

Even though the idea of a discourse community sounds relatively simple and positive, much recent work has shown that language communities are structurally and ideologically complex. Joseph Harris, in

his recent essay on the notion of plurality within and between discourse communities, "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing," comments:

> We write not as isolated individuals, but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns, and practices both instigate and constrain at least in part the things we can say. Our aims and intentions are thus not merely personal, idiosyncratic, but reflective of the communities to which we belong." (Harris 1989, 12)

Close examination of the workings of these multiple communities and networks, according to Harris and others, however, reveals not only plurality, but along with it, issues of power, dominance, privilege, and marginalization.

Consider the critical and frequently invoked term, the *academic discourse community*. The term was first employed in composition in a rather global, presumably neutral, and definitely benign way to capture the significant distinctions between the language habits and conventions of entering or marginal students and those of the university community to which students were to be "initiated" (Bruffee 1986, 783). However, it has become apparent that a simple dichotomous set of "communities"—the academic and the nonacademic—do not sufficiently represent the complexity of discursive practices and discursive politics within and between disciplines or within the academy as a whole. Thus, a central task of social-constructionist work is to explore the convergences, coalitions, and tensions between and among varieties of discursive networks (some deriving from disciplines, others from particular methodologies, such as deconstruction, or from interdisciplinary enterprises, such as feminism) which collectively compose the academic discourse "community," and to explore the critical connections between academic literacy communities and the host of other discursive communities to which people belong or which condition people's uses of language (Bizzell 1982, "Cognition, Convention"; Bizzell 1986, "Composing Processes" and "What Happens?"; Bartholomae 1986; Brodkey 1987 *Academic Writing* and "Modernism"; Bruffee 1986; Chiseri-Strater 1991; Freed and Broadhead 1987; Harris 1989; Heath 1983; Myers 1985; Odell and Goswami 1985; and Neilsen 1989).

For example, Shirley Brice Heath, in her landmark ethnographic and sociolinguistic study, *Ways with Words*, probes the connections and discontinuities among home, community, and school literacies in the communities of "Roadville" and "Trackton" (Heath 1983). She finds that nonacademic, often oral discourse traditions which vary according to

region, race, gender, and class, are primary influences in the developing literacies of children, even though they are often ignored in school .

More recently, Joseph Harris has provided another illustrative example of the multiple and shifting relations between speech and writing communities which are stratified by class through an examination of his own discursive position in the academy. He reports that after he reached college, he realized that his coming from a working-class background, from a radically different discourse community, had had profound consequences for him in the university. "This sense of difference, of overlap, of tense plurality, of being at once a member of several communities and yet never wholly a member of one, has accompanied nearly all the work and study I have done at the university" (Harris 1989, 11).

Issues of plurality and power in academic discourse are also thoughtfully considered in Lu Min-zhan's autobiographical essay, "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle," in which she explores the difficult negotiations she had to make as she moved among English, French, and Chinese and their respective ideologies at home, in the classroom, and in the world (Min-zhan 1987). Yet, shuttling to and fro among languages or language communities is not the same as moving from one clearly marked linguistic territory to another. As Harris observes astutely, "the borders of most discourses are hazily marked and often traveled and . . . the communities they define are thus often indistinct and overlapping" (Harris 1989, 17).

In sum, although methods of inquiry range widely in the investigation of the reciprocal and complex relations among language, epistemology, individual speakers and writers, and the contexts and communities in which they speak and write, James Slevin identifies some of the common origins and concerns of social constructionists as follows:

> The social origins and contexts of writing are a common interest of many scholars and teachers influenced by current theories of discourse and ethnographic studies of actual textual production. These influences lead to a concern with how writing is produced and, more specifically, with conditions that enable it *or* (especially in some feminist and pedagogical studies) those conditions that *dis*able it. . . . Scholars and teachers with these different interests share in common such questions as the range of discursive forms available to a writer, the ideological dimensions of these forms, the nature of authorship, and even the availability of a readership. (Slevin 1986, 549)

Like social-constructionist perspectives, feminist theory and practice have also been "bustin' out all over," proliferating and permutating at an amazing rate, and producing a rich ecosystem of both ordinary and exotic theoretical varieties of description and explanation of gender, sexuality, and sexual difference, and other sources of social and textual difference. It is impossible to review adequately the development or the current state of feminist theory and practice here, but detailed treatment is available in several new book-length collections.[1]

First—and at the very least—scholars, researchers, and teachers with this perspective tend to recognize that discourses and the people who generate them are always socially and historically situated, and thus have both historical and social contexts, constraints, and consequences, and that gender has historically played a critical role in situating all writers and readers. For example, in response to the traditional, modernist view of the writer as a solitary genius who works alone in what is invariably *his* garret producing original *master*pieces unaffected by material, social, or historical contexts or conditions, Brodkey and many others have pointed out that historical, material, and quotidian conditions have always differently affected the type, quality, and quantity of the writing and reading that women have done. She suggests that the scenes of writing for women are often rooms that are leased, not purchased, and sparsely furnished. Both the literal and figurative houses women write in are filled with many rooms and many people and multiple obligations (Brodkey 1987, "Modernism"). Naturally, therefore, feminists are interested in such material and historical conditions as access to literacy, schooling, and publishing, since for centuries, many women were explicitly denied access, solely on the basis of their gender, to literacy generally or to specific types of literacy, which were usually the most public and powerful forms.

In "Composing as a Woman," an important new article which signals the increasing interest in feminist perspectives in composition research, Elizabeth Flynn agrees that such issues are critical to a feminist understanding of composition. "A feminist approach to composition would focus on questions of difference and dominance in written language" (Flynn 1988, 425). She suggests that teachers "ought not to assume that males and females use language in identical ways or represent the world in a similar fashion" (Flynn 1988, 431).

Indeed, for many feminists, understanding the complex historical and social relationships among gender, language, and discursive practice is critical to their practice as feminist scholars and teachers. One important strand of feminist thought has concerned itself with the ways in which women as a group have historically been muted, silenced, and

marginalized by language and language use. I will explore this claim throughout this work, as I try to document and understand the profound social and epistemological consequences of discursive marginalization.

As a corollary, many feminists are concerned with notions of discourse community, having always been in or around multiple discourse communities, and they have recognized that those communities that have far more public power than others have tended historically to be male-constructed or male-affiliated. They recognize that some discourse communities are voluntary or elective while others are not. Like Joseph Harris, they feel their own "tense plurality," their own multiple, marginal, and often restricted memberships in most public and dominant discourse communities.

Similarly, feminists are also interested in exposing the processes of literary and curricular canonization, the mechanisms whereby certain powerful discourse communities determine which types of literacy practices or instances of writing will accrue literary, academic, or pedagogical value. Feminists have also identified the generic and aesthetic categories which sustain the canon as historically the products of male manufacture and therefore not representative of all human experience, but rather representative primarily of the perspectives of white, elite, heterosexual, Western males.

Finally, most feminists recognize the enormous power of language which, as a social construction, continues to reflect and reproduce a world in which asymmetrical subject positions are ascribed according to gender, inflecting all our perceptions of the world and of our places in it. Language affects not only our perceptions of each other as gendered beings, but also our perceptions of ourselves, and of gender itself.

Certainly, it is important to acknowledge the critical insight that women are not all alike—there is no "transhistorical changeless, feminine essence" (Clifford 1989, 531)—and that race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion are also important determinants in the social construction of the self. Nevertheless, gender as a social construct powerfully writes itself onto all of our lives and we must try to decipher its inscriptions and revise them, rewriting them as we see fit.

Of course, a woman remembered only as Aunt Jane of Kentucky had this notion of the social construction of the self all figured out a long time ago when she wrote this passage in her journal:

> How much piecin' a quilt's like a life. . . . The Lord sends us the pieces but we can cut 'em out and put 'em together pretty much to suit ourselves, and there's a heap more in the cuttin' and the sewin' than there is in the caliker. (Bank 1979, 76)

The Situation of a (Feminist Academic) Writer in 1991

It is impossible to do anything without telling a
story.
> —Marilyn French, "Text as Context"

The Academy has a limited tolerance for lived
experience, which it easily dismisses as "sto-
ries."
> —Linda Brodkey,
> *Academic Writing as Social Practice*

The theoretical claims in the previous section are important, but they do not, by themselves, provide the entire context for this text. Indeed, since, as both a social constructionist and a feminist, I have just spent the last several pages discussing the importance of placing writers and writing into social and historical context, it is only fitting for me to locate some of the critical contexts and communities which inform my own writing generally, and this writing specifically, as a preliminary and prefigurative illustration of the central claims and methods of this book.

Several factors influence the personal and social situation from which I write. I am 39, a baby boomer, and an assistant professor of Composition/English at a small branch of a larger state university. As a white, middle-class child growing up in Ohio in the 1950s, I lived in relative comfort and emotional security. My parents were college-educated—my father worked in public relations, my mother was a social worker—and so I learned to value literacy and schooling in general. That envelope of protection and security was torn open when I was sixteen and my father, quite suddenly, died. I tried to staple it shut by marrying a disabled Vietnam veteran at the age of eighteen, one week after receiving my high school diploma and one week before I graduated from Girl Scouts. I began working on my Master's degree only because my first husband went to England to do a pottery apprenticeship and told me to find something else to do. My interest in graduate school was considered selfish by many friends and relatives and it dealt a final blow to my first marriage. We separated during the first semester of my Ph.D. work.

I was married for the second time in 1981, after my second year of doctoral study. My husband and I are raising two children, one from each of my marriages, who are fourteen and seven years old. We feel lucky to have survived the Ph.D. process, which took eight years. During that time, I started one dissertation and abandoned it after three chapters; I was morning sick—all day—from September to April (when

my daughter Molly was born) the year I had my dissertation fellowship. Naturally, I always worked full time, or nearly full time, in addition to my academic and domestic responsibilities. Later, when I was writing the second dissertation, we were faced with a protracted custody battle over the older child, Benjamin.

Not surprisingly, my "professional life" has been filled with gaps: work unwritten, or unfinished, or unpublished. All those years, I subscribed to the "fluke theory" of success. When I did well, it was an accident; when I did poorly, it was my fault. I clearly wanted both a family and a career, but often felt as though I was succeeding at neither of the two. I believed that if I were only smarter, better organized, more supportive, or more productive, I would be able to successfully integrate both sets of roles.

What I am finally beginning to understand, however, is that my personal situation as an academic woman is not unique, but rather common, and is directly related to the issues of marginalization, muteness and empowerment which are among the central themes of this book. In *Women of Academe: Outsiders in the Sacred Grove*, Nadya Aisenberg and Mona Harrington interviewed thirty-seven "deflected" academic women (women who had been deflected from a regular professional academic career) and twenty-five tenured academic women, who represented a variety of institutions, regions, and disciplines (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988). Collecting more than fifteen hundred pages of transcription, they found several critical recurring patterns of response. Surprisingly, the deflected and tenured women's stories were far more similar than distinct in that both groups had, indeed, been marginalized professionally and economically.

> As women rise in the professions, they are stymied at a certain level by the remaining force of old social norms that, in the past, barred women from public life generally. The old norms buttressed the division of responsibility—public roles for men, private for women—with a variety of assumptions about male and female natures, drawing natural connections between given proclivities and given roles. Women's identity was located in the body and in the emotions, men's in the mind. Women gave birth, suckled infants, nursed the sick, cleaned homes, cooked meals, provided sympathy, enchantment, and inspiration. Men learned, calculated, bought, sold, fought, wrote, painted, philosophized. (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988, 4)

Aisenberg and Harrington suggest that these inequalities are in

large part sustained by the force of what they call "the marriage plot"—which applies to all women, whether married or not—the central tenet of which is that "women's proper goal is marriage, or, more generally, her primary sphere is private and domestic. Her proper role is to provide support for the male at the head of the household [or, one might add, the male-run institution] of which she forms a part" (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988, 6).

Most of the women in the study reported, in varying permutations, enormous difficulties in trying to negotiate both the supportive roles of "the marriage plot" and the "adventure plot" of their own professional development. They told of handling a disproportionate amount of domestic work and child care; of having less financial support for their educations than their male counterparts; of having to subordinate their professional interests and development to those of others. While the women, as a group, often felt both exhilarated and transformed by learning and teaching, and they often felt simultaneously excluded from full participation in academic culture. As I read, I kept hearing voices again and again that could have been mine:

Graduate Student in Humanities
    I felt that some day they were going to find me out. You know the feeling that it's not quite true, that my I.Q. was really 60. (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988, 67)

Graduate Student
    I was teaching two freshman sections while I was taking courses for the master's. And then I fell ill, I was quite seriously ill not long after I was married, and had to drop a whole semester really. . . . It may have been pure exhaustion. (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988, 44)

Language Scholar writing dissertation
    The baby was due in January, came in February. . . . And I was serving on three or four faculty committees, and teaching and advising thirteen students. So I just got tired all the time. (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988, 45)

Classicist
    They're not going to like it. I'm not doing good enough work. They think I'm not really serious because I have a family and I have other obligations. My career pattern isn't like theirs. I'm too old. (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988, 68)

Issues of Voice and Discourse Community

Many of the issues these women raised centered precisely around problems of voice, of knowing, of language, and of discourse community. Indeed, Harrington and Aisenberg had to add a whole new category they called "voice" after they started analyzing their interview data because it was such a recurrent theme in women's stories about academic life and about the tensions they felt in their relationships to academic discourse communities. Continuing the metaphor of the "adventure" and the "quest" plot, the authors explain that speaking, particularly, speaking with public and academic authority, is associated with the quest plot, while silence is better suited to the marriage plot.

> A strong clear voice is necessary to the practice of the profession, both literally in the classroom and figuratively in written research. But our stories demonstrate that women trained or training in specific disciplines—that is, following the quest plot—still report feeling "inadequate," "uncomfortable," "an imposter," "mute." To state views boldly in public debate, to challenge the intellectual views of others, still pose problems for professional women.
>
> Why should this be so? Why do women find persistent difficulty with forms of public assertion? Why do they refer to silence, apology, diffidence, hesitancy, as characteristic of their discourse? One powerful reason is that a voice of authority is exactly the voice the old norms proscribe. . . . To be loveable, the goal of the marriage plot, a woman must be silent. To express professional knowledge and wisdom, a woman must speak and speak with authority. To presume that, as women enter the professions in ever greater numbers, the injunctions of the marriage plot will simply fall away, is to indulge in wishful thinking. (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988, 64-66)

Even before my specialized graduate training in applied linguistics and composition theory and pedagogy I knew how important, how central, language is to the shaping of our everyday experience, how critical it is to every social interaction or educational enterprise. I knew somehow that words were powerful; they could help or hurt. I must have known something about the power of naming, as I remember naming my two dolls with wonderful sounding words I had heard on the radio: Diarrhea and Polio. I got in trouble in school more than once for making up words, and was scolded by a teacher who asked the scathing rhetorical question: "Who do you think you are? A dictionary?"

I know I loved writing. I wrote reams of poetry. I even wrote my classmates' compositions—often in homeroom—just for the fun of it. Most importantly for my purposes here, I was an intense, albeit sporadic, diary keeper from junior high school on.

Yet in college and graduate school, I found I often had difficulty both with the topics I chose and with finding an appropriate voice or style in which to write about them—another common problem for women writers and academics, according to Aisenberg and Harrington. For example, although I did well in school, I had certain so-called *problems* with my writing, particularly in graduate school. I was told more than once to stop apologizing. I was told that my claims weren't strong enough; or that my criticisms were too qualified. When I spoke in class, I found that while I would try to hold my ideas in, they would build up pressure to the point that they would erupt in a great gush of words. One professor called me "hyperfluent"—ambivalent praise at best.

When it came time to write my dissertation, I started the wrong one. It was an important topic and an ambitious one, but not compelling enough to force me to write it in addition to all my other responsibilities. All along I wanted to write about the relationships between gender and language but felt I had already used up my feminist option by writing about gender, language, and brain laterality for my master's thesis (Gannett 1976). I can clearly remember people asking me if I was *still* working with that gender stuff.

But the critical problem in writing that work, as in writing this one, was the problem of finding a voice or voices with which I could express myself as a woman, as a feminist, and as an academic.

> Writing, as it has been traditionally required in college, can be understood to be a "male" establishment form, in as much as the aims and modes of scientific, informative, exploratory and persuasive discourse, even until recently, literary discourse, have been defined and developed by men heading intellectual institutions and by the predominantly male writers whose ideas the professors have valued. College writing trained and still does train students to use their minds in time-hallowed ways. For female students, this still, I suspect, means straining to attain a style, voice, and role that is hard to integrate with sexual and domestic success. (Goulston 1987, 21-22)

Given the difficulties that academic women, myself included, often have with academic writing, deciding how to write this book was not easy. As Mary Jacobus explains:

Utterance, though, brings the problem home for women writers (as for feminist critics). The options polarise along familiar lines: appropriation or separatism. Can women adapt traditionally male dominated modes of writing and analysis to the articulation of female oppression and desire? Or should we rather reject tools that may simply re-inscribe our marginality, and deny the specificity of our experience, instead forging others on our own—reverting perhaps to the traditionally feminine in order to revalidate its forms (formlessness?) and preoccupations—rediscovering subjectivity; the language of feeling; ourselves. (Jacobus 1979, 14)

I have tried to resolve this dilemma by inscribing the issue of academic women's multiple voices stylistically throughout the text, as the reader will have already noticed. That is, since the focus of the book is precisely the set of tensions among traditional academic and literary discourse communities, women as marginalized users of discourse within those communities, and the marginal discourses of journals and diaries, I have decided to open up this particular academic discourse to those other voices and discourses to explicate some of these points of connection and disconnection. To converse with the traditional academic voices of objectivity, authority, abstraction, and/or agonism, I have invited some individual voices, some openly subjective, even passionate voices; some hesitant, wondering-aloud voices. I have also welcomed the myriad voices of journal keepers, female and male, student and professional, famous and anonymous, to this colloquium.

Thus, the diaristic, the anecdotal, the quotidian, the material conditions of writing, the immediate and seemingly random evidence from popular culture—both my own lived experience and that of those around me—all accompany and inform my work here. I do not intend a simple equation of masculine and feminine voice here, but rather a colloquy of public and private voices, academic and not-so-academic voices, which have often been linked to the masculine and feminine worlds of discourse.

These issues of canon and curriculum, marginalized and multiple memberships in various discourses, self and voice, are not only central to my writing, they also prefigure the central issues my students face in their journal writing and those that men and women have faced in their attempts at public and private forms of writing throughout the centuries. Their voices are the heart of this piece, the life of this text.

As for me, I feel somewhat like Wendy Goulston, who writes in her resonant essay on women writing in and for the academy:

Whenever I pursue ideas about women in depth, I wonder to what degree and for whom they are true. While skepticism can sharpen understanding, the self-doubt lurking behind my skepticism often blocks my thinking. Theories that suggest that women's socialization produces internalized oppression explain this dilemma: women are often not sure of their own ideas, especially when asked to express them in rhetorical forms that have traditionally been used exclusively by men. This is my thesis and my situation. (Goulston 1987, 19)

But as I plunge ahead into the wilderness of this text, I also feel just like Mollie Dorsey Sanford, who left Indianapolis in March of 1857 for the Nebraska Territory and who kept a journal of her westward travels and pioneer experience. Mollie understood the intellectually transforming power of writing when she penned this entry in her diary on 10 September 1860. "I know I shall never pose as an author or writer. But I do often wish I might be something more than a mere machine" (Sanford 1976, 98).