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ABSTRACT
        A study critically reviewed current literature on
gender and literacy learning as a foundation for the development of
theory and further research on gender issues in adult literacy
learning. One of the most surprising findings was the real lack of
serious attention to gender issues in recent scholarship on early
literacy and reading education. The gender and writing research was
categorized into three general approaches that paralleled the scheme
developed by Solsken (1993). Much of the research on gender and
writing was concerned with delineating differences in the writing of
women and men. Such research was largely descriptive, and
explanations for such differences were adopted rather uncritically
from the psychological or sociolinguistic literature, suggesting
universal gender-linked developmental patterns. Considerable
attention had been given to how the contexts of literacy learning
might contribute to differences in the literacy development of males
and females. The ways in which gender differences in reading and
writing are socially determined, in contexts such as school, family,
or community, had received surprisingly little attention. Some
limited attention was given to issues of power and identity in
studies of gender and writing. The studies on gendered conflicts in
writing focused on how individuals both accommodate and resist
socially determined gender roles. (Contains 46 references.) (YLB)

GENDER AND LITERACY LEARNING:
IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH IN ADULT LITERACY EDUCATION
(PAPER DRAFT FOR ROUNDTABLE SESSION)

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OBJECTIVES

The overall purpose of this study was to critically review current literature on gender and literacy learning, as a foundation for the development of theory and further research on gender issues in adult literacy learning. Specific objectives were:

1. to identify key conceptual perspectives and research findings on the significance of gender in literacy learning, from childhood to adulthood
2. to assess the strengths and limitations of this scholarship, with an emphasis on its potential relevance to adult literacy education
3. to draw implications for future research and theory-building on gender and adult literacy learning

PERSPECTIVES

Several perspectives provided the context and rationale for this study. First, the belief that gender can play a significant role in shaping women and men's learning needs, preferences, and experiences is common in the educational literature. While the greatest attention has been given to disadvantages experienced by girls and women in formal education (for example, the 1992 AAUW Report, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*), there are also arguments that male students are negatively affected by gender-related biases and stereotypes (Klein, 1985). While many questions exist concerning the role of gender in learning and education, it remains a significant and important focus for further research and scholarship.

Second, in adult literacy education in particular, a number of authors have called for educational programs and instructional methods designed to meet gender-specific needs of women (e.g., Camarack, 1992; Kazemek, 1988; Van Dijk, 1991). However, such recommendations are typically based on undocumented assertions or very limited empirical evidence about gender-related characteristics. In an earlier investigation, we found only a handful of empirical studies on adult women's literacy learning or gender differences in literacy learning among adults (Hayes & Hopkins, 1995). While these studies were suggestive of potentially distinctive aspects of women's literacy learning, as a whole the body of literature was far too insubstantial to support any conclusions. Nor was there any coherent focus among the identified studies or any apparent effort to clarify the conceptual frameworks that might guide research on gender and literacy learning.

Finally, while the purpose of the present study was to assess theory and research on gender differences in literacy learning across the lifespan, the intent was <u>not</u> to simply apply findings about children to adult literacy learning. Adult learning theory supports the premise that differences in children and adults' cognitive abilities, psychosocial development, life situations, and the contexts of adult literacy learning would make generalizations of research findings inappropriate. However, such research and related theoretical perspectives might suggest issues, questions, and guiding concepts that could be fruitfully explored in studies of gender and

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adult literacy.

METHOD

Our goal in this review was to do a broad assessment of different theoretical perspectives and research findings on gender and literacy learning, rather than a detailed and comprehensive analysis of a particular body of scholarship. For the purpose of this study, we restricted our definition of literacy learning to the development of basic reading and writing abilities. The acquisition of numeracy skills, computer literacy, and other dimensions or types of literacy were not included in our review. We used the following process to locate key source material. As a first step, we reviewed major handbooks (i.e., *Handbook of Reading Research, Encyclopedia of Educational Research, World Yearbook of Education,* etc.) and recent books for overviews of major themes and research findings related to gender and literacy learning. Using information from these sources and searches of education-related data bases, we located and reviewed key research studies and other pertinent sources in journals and documents. We developed a scheme for categorizing the research according to major emphasis or focus of the investigation. The search also yielded a few efforts to distinguish conceptual frameworks for the study of gender and literacy or education. We used these frameworks to ensure that we located and included research that represented major conceptual perspectives. Findings about gender and literacy learning were summarized, and comparisons made among findings associated with similar and different conceptual orientations. Strengths and limitations of this scholarship were assessed, in particular related to methodological issues, unexamined or sparsely studied topics, consistency of findings across sources, and potential implications for adult literacy learning.

DATA SOURCE

Initially, we focused our review on research in the areas of beginning literacy, reading, and reading education. The findings from this literature suggested that gender had received attention in research on writing, so we added English education and composition studies to our investigation. Research on gender and learning disabilities also emerged as a related area of scholarship, and was included in our review. We gave the most attention to publications within last ten years, but also included earlier work that was influential or representative of key perspectives.

FINDINGS

One of the most surprising results of our review was the discovery of a real lack of serious attention to gender issues in recent scholarship on early literacy and reading education. Notably, gender is not mentioned at all in the entries on Reading or Written Composition in the 1994 *Encyclopedia of Educational Research.* This omisson reflects the marginalization of research on gender rather than a total lack of scholarship. Sex differences in reading began to receive considerable attention two decades ago, but more current research studies are limited and sporadic.Gender issues seem to have received a greater amount of recent attention in the areas of writing. Feminist perspectives on gender and literacy learning tend to be marginalized, and rarely integrated into mainstream publications. Much of the feminist work tends to be conceptual or addresses practice rather than reports research. A notable example is Caywood and Overing's(1987) edited volume that examines the intersections between feminism and writing theory in terms of implications for gender equity in teaching writing.

Conceptual frameworks

It is difficult to categorize this research neatly into different conceptual approaches to the study of gender and education, such as those identified by Goetz and Grant (1988). However, a framework is useful for distinguishing some general orientations, keeping in mind that some research reflects varied assumptions. The three approaches delinated by Goetz and Grant are

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sociological in orientation, and include sex differences, structural conditions, and symbolic processes. Solsken (1993) uses a framework of three perspectives on literacy learning (drawing primarily from reading research) to distinguish among research specifically on gender and literacy. These perspectives include emergent literacy, social construction of literacy, and literacy as status and identity. Solsken claims that there is considerable similarity between her perspectives and the scheme described by Goetz and Grant; however, there are also some significant differences. Flynn (1995) analyzes publications on feminist composition in relationship to four feminist perspectives: liberal feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, and postmodern feminism Here we will categorize the gender and writing research into three general approaches that parallel to a great extent the scheme developed by Solsken, with some differences as noted below.

Sex Differences in Literacy Skills

Research included in this category attempts to delineate differences between the sexes in literacy-related skills or abilities. We have included research on sex differences and verbal abilities, learning disabilities, biolological origins of differences, and communication styles and attributes of writing.

Verbal abilities. Documenting gender differences in verbal abilities have occupied researchers for decades. Girls and women have long been credited with stronger verbal abilities than boys and men. Indeed, the results of early studies indicating poorer verbal performance of boys led to considerable attention to ways of enhancing the literacy learning environment for boys in schools (e.g., Staunchfield, 1974). The landmark study in this area was Macoby and Jacob's (1974) review of the literature which concluded that males outperform females on tests of mathematical and spatial ability, while females outperform males on verbal tests. More recently, researchers have used meta-analyses to see how such differences hold up over time and across different populations. Hyde (1981), for example, did a meta-analysis of the studies cited in the Macoby and Jacob review, and found that gender differences accounted for only 1% to 5% of the population variance. In a later meta-analysis that compared the Macoby and Jacob findings on verbal ability to more recent research, Hyde and Linn (1988) found even smaller sex differences in the later studies. They asserted that such differences in verbal abilities - at least as measured by current standardized tests - were negligible from an educational perspective. Based on a longitudinal study of gender differences on the DAT and PSAT/SAT, Feingold (1988) concluded that cognitive differences are disappearing. Feingold (1992) also examined gender differences in variability of intellectual abilities using national norms of several standardized test batteries. Overall, his findings supported Macoby and Jacob's (1974) earlier report that males are more variable than females in quantitative and spatial abilities but not in verbal ability.

The results of such research have been affected by a variety of factors.. In response to Feingold (1988), Halpern (1989) argues that the apparent decline in gender differences in verbal scores could be attributed to differential school attrition rates for girls and boys. In recent years, the proportion of female dropouts has decreased relative to that of boys, which may result in a lower proportion of low-ability boys who are tested. In addition, she suggests that the LD population which includes a considerably higher proportion of males is not represented by such standardized test scores. Scott et al. (1985) point out that age of subjects, ability level, and instruments used to assess ability may have a significant impact on the extent of identified differences. Other meta-analyses indicate that gender differences are larger for tests with more selective samples, such as the SAT, than for tests that are administered to entire classes, such as standard achievement tests (Han & Hoover, 1994). Han and Hoover (1994) attempted to take some of these factors into account in a longitudinal analysis of gender differences in performance on three national achievement tests. In regard to verbal abilities, they found that females outperformed males on reading and language skills, with larger differences at higher

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grade levels. Their results also indicated that these differences were greater among students at lower and average achievement levels. These findings led the researchers to conclude that that an emphasis of future research should be "the language deficits of low-achieving boys" (p. 10) - a conclusion that seems remarkably similar to the perspective dominant two decades earlier!

Many questions continue to be raised about the conclusions and value of such gender difference research. Noddings (1992) suggests that historically research "proving" the lower variability in women's intellectual abilities was used as evidence of their inferiority (more undifferentiated) and she questions the practical significance of such work. Based on their research review, Scott et al (1985) conclude that group sex differences are too small to be of use in predicting verbal skills or in group educational policy decisions. Noddings (1992) also points out that standardized tests may not capture all significant verbal or intellectual abilities.

Learning disability research. Learning disabilities (LD) is one area in which sex differences continue to be a particular area of concern. Considerably more males than females are identified as learning disabled; the prevalence of reading disabilities in particular among boys compared to girls is commonly reported as 2:1 to 5:1 (Shaywitz et al., 1990). In a review of the literature, Vogel (1990) concludes that males have been the subjects of most research, with the result that little is known about females with LD or about gender differences.

The findings of some studies have raised questions about these presumed gender differences in LD. Shaywitz et al. (1990) found almost equal prevalence of reading disabilities among girls and boys using a researcher-defined criterion. In comparison, twice as many boys as girls were identified as LD by school personnel. The researchers conclude that a referral bias among school personnel has created the apparent gender difference in ' D, when in fact there is not such a difference. Shaywitz et al. suggest that behavioral differences are the reason for this referral bias. Boys more frequently exhibit behavioral problems and attentional deficits that are associated with LD (but are not defined as learning disabilities per se). Other research has shown that girls tend to have more severe disabilities before they are referred for LD services (Vogel, 1990).

Biological influences on literacy skills. The observed sex differences in verbal abilities, despite their controversial nature, have led to numerous attempts to delineate and investigate their origins. In general, explanations tend to be dichotomized into those that emphasize biological versus sociocultural factors (Downing et al, 1982). One difficulty is that observed differences can be explained by either, or may be a result of interactions between the two. Maturational differences are commonly suggested as a factor explaining girls' early reading achievement advantage in relation to boys. Girls mature physically earlier than boys, corresponding to their earlier literacy development, which then equalizes by adolescence. However, this explanation does not hold up when comparing male and female school achievement in other areas, or cross-culturally (Scott et al, 1985). Nash (1993) summarizes four potential biological explanations for the presumed higher incidence of LD among boys, including higher pre-perinatal complications among boys, hormonal effects on cognition, different maturational rates, and genetic factors. The research she reviewed did not offer conclusive support for any of these possible explanations. Gender differences in brain functioning have also been proposed as an explanation for differences in reading abilities (Lanbercome & Shapiro, 1986). Research in the 1970s and 1980s indicated that males have greater assymmetry of brain function, with less functional overlap between verbal left and spatial right hemisphere. Females have more efficient dominant left hemispheres, males have more efficient nondominant hemispheres. Lanbercome and Shapiro argue that these differences, giving females an advantage in the initial development of verbal skills, may interact with sociocultural infuences to create greater problems for boys in reading development. However, there does not seem to be research that supports a relationship between brain laterality and reading comprehension. In one study using a sample of 110 high school students, Wesson and Holman (1994) found that females showed a greater preference for left laterality, but there was no significant difference in

male and female reading comprehension scores.

Communication styles and attributes of writing. Much of the literature on sex differences and literacy draws on sociolinguistic theories about how women and men use language. Generally, these theories indicate that women and men use language in gender-specific ways. For example, Tannen (1990) proposed that women tend to use "rapport talk" - a conversational style that emphasizes inclusiveness and relationship-building - while men tend to use "report talk" - emphasizing competition for recognition and individual assertiveness. These perspectives have been used to suggest that women and men may use written language in different ways.

Research on differences in women and men's writing styles typically has involved counting the use of certain kinds of words, phrases, or examining the organization of ideas. Hiatt's (1977) study is representative of such work. She analyzed 100 books, 50 written by women and 50 by men, looking at attributes such as sentence length, logical development of ideas, use of adverbs and adjectives. Her findings indicated that women and men do write differently, but these differences did not support prevailing stereotypes (such as women's writing as more emotional, indecisive or indirect than men's writing). In an educational context, Peterson (cited by Hunter & Pearce, 1988), based on an analysis of freshman compositions, found that women used "I" over 50% more often than did men, and used "you" over 100% more than did men. Lynch and Strauss-Noll (1987) examined attributes such as length of response, vocabulary, and tone (aggressiveness) in samples of freshman writing and found gender differences only in vocabulary choice. Using a sample of women in a basic writing class, Hunter and Pearce (1988) studied linguistic patterns including use of first and second person pronouns, and sentence transitivity in the women's responses to reflexive (those that ask the writer to be personal and informal) and extensive topics (requiring the writer to be public and formal).

Arguments for the significance of such studies primarily seem to lie in the implication that if women and men use written language in different ways, they might differ in their ability to conform to certain academic conventions for writing. Hunter and Pearce (1988), for example, state that their findings indicate that women basic writers are more adept at reflexive than extensive writing, and argue that more reflexive writing should be used in basic writing courses for women. In another study of college student writing, Sanborn (1992) documents the struggles that women experienced with writing academic essays that required the linear development of ideas, "objective" and detached argumentation, a form that did not seem to fit their preferred mode of understanding and expressing ideas. The extent that such concerns are gender-specific remains unclear. Sanborn (1992), in fact, suggests that male students can experience similar problems, making the issue more one of accomodating diverse cognitive styles that may be associated with multiple factors including gender.

Conclusion: Difference studies. According to Goetz and Grant, an early body of research focused on biological-genetic explanations for sex differences; this is reflected in some early reading research on biological origins of cognitive differences associated with gender (Solsken, 1993). Such a focus on biological explanations is not apparent in the writing literature, possibly because our review concentrated on more recent studies. However, much of the research on gender and writing is concerned with delineating differences in the writing of women and men. Such research is largely descriptive, and explanations for such differences are adopted rather uncritically from the psychological or sociolinguistic literature, suggesting universal gender-linked developmental patterns. Crawford (1995) discusses several important weaknesses in sex difference research. These include the difficulty of deciding "what difference makes a difference"?, the problem of separating sex from other confounding variables, and the treatment of women and men as global and opposing categories while minimizing overlap in characteristics or diversity among women or men. Perhaps most importantly, she criticizes the essentialist assumptions inherent in sex difference research, which locates gender differences within the individual and divorced from their social contexts. While essentialist assumptions are

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also apparent in research on gender and the contexts of literacy learning, these studies provide more potential insight into how gender is socially constructed.

Gender and contexts of literacy learning

Considerable attention has been given to how the contexts of literacy learning might contribute to differences in the literacy development of males and females. Up to the early 1970s, the emphasis was on identifying ways in which school environments and socialization might put boys at a disadvantage in developing literacy skills, primarily reading skills. In the 1970s, there was a significant shift of concern to disadvantages experienced by females. Sadker, Sadker, and Klein (1991) attribute this shift to a changed perception of school "failure" - away from more overt academic performance (ie as measured by poor grades and discipline problems) to more subtle biases. The docility and apparent conformity of girls were reinterpreted as problematic, and the attention-seeking behaviors of boys were perceived a giving them unfair advantages. Researchers have looked for biases in many dimensions of the school environment, including instructional materials, teacher behavior, group interactions, and instructional methods. Mostly there has been only speculation about the impact of sex role socialization on literacy learning and minimal attention to gender biases in literacy learning in contexts outside of school. Much of this body of work is not specific to literacy learning. Here we will note some key ideas and provide more details on a few literacy-specific studies.

Instructional materials. One early explanation for boys' slower reading development was that "female-oriented" texts dominated early reading instruction. There is still a common belief that boys will not read about girls, but that girls would be willing to read books about boys. Sadker, Sadker, & Klein (1991) found some support for this belief in their research review, but they suggest that this preference might be due to sex stereotyping in texts and more active plots in stories featuring boys. In the 1970s, attention shifted to male biases in texts such as basal readers, examining factors such number of male versus female main characters and sex stereotyping (in occupations, traits like assertiveness, problem-solving, bravery versus passivity, dependence, incompetence). Later studies investigated the impact of sex-equity guidelines for instructional materials, with findings indicating some gains in equity but also lingering biases. Sadker et al. observe that such research dropped off in the 1980s and in 1991, there was not good data on sex equity in current instructional materials. In terms of effects on readers, concern seems to be more with how instructional materials might reinforce sex role stereotypes, or attitudes toward men and women rather than reading performance per se. There is not much evidence of how potential biases really affect boys' or girls' reading comprehension or achievement.

Teacher behavior. Explanations for differences in literacy development have frequently focused on teacher behaviors. Early researchers characterized the school environment as feminine, and claimed that boys were penalized for active, assertive behavior, while girls were rewarded for being passive and compliant. There is a general body of more recent research that indicates teachers interact more with male than female students, at all levels of education. One explantion for this differential treatment is that that males attract more attention due to their behaviors, like volunteering answers, etc. But some research shows that a few students typically receive the most teacher attention in a class (i.e., not every boy), though these are more likely to be male students (both high achieving males and those with problem behavior). The impact - good or bad - of such interactions, particularly on literacy learning, remains unclear. It seems to be assumed by many writers that more interaction is generally more positive for students.

In research more specific to literacy learning, some studies have examined biases in teachers' evaluations of student writing. Authors have suggested that teachers will likely be more critical of "female" modes of expression since these are typically devalued in education. In addition, even if differences in women and men's writing do not exist, teachers' stereotypes may

lead them to respond differently to women and men's writing (Barnes, 1990). Research evidence in support of these assumptions is rather inconclusive. Variations in research methods, the type of student writing examined, and the academic context make it difficult to make generalizations. Several studies can serve as examples. Roen (1992) found that composition teachers readily offered stereotypical beliefs about differences in women and men's writing. However, in a study of high school teachers' actual evaluations of student writing, he found an interaction between gender of teacher and actual gender of student author, even when the real gender was reversed for the purpose of the study. Teachers responded more favorably to writing by students of their own gender. Barnes (1990) also found that gender of teacher had an impact on their responses to college student essays. She did not find that teachers consistently favored writing that reflected stereotypical male or female attributes, irregardless of designated gender of author. However, male teachers were generally more intolerant of emotional writing, and female teachers were more concerned with language, mechanics, and conforming to male rhetorical style. There were also some interactions between gender of teacher and (fictional) student writer.   **Student interactions**. There is a considerable body of research on the significance of gender in group interactions, and specifically, in classroom discussion. In general, the assumptions are that males tend to dominate discussion, are more confrontational and assertive, while females use conversational strategies that invite interaction, build on the comments of others, and maintain rapport with others. Such assumptions are frequently cited in the literature on gender and writing as evidence that girls and women may be at a disadvantage in the literacy classroom in general. Student writing groups are a context specific to writing instruction in which such gender differences might be explored (Appleby, 1992). However, there seems to be little available research on gender and writing groups in particular.

Computers. The increasing use of computers for writing and in writing instruction has been a focus for some research on gender differences. Males typically are assumed to be more comfortable and motivated to use computers, reflecting the stereotypically masculine computer culture in our society. Authors in English education have drawn on other scholarship to support claims that women and men tend to respond to computers with different learning styles. Nye (1991) uses Turkle's (1984) work in describing "hard" learners, typically male, who treat computers as tools and use them for task mastery versus "soft" learners, typically female, who use computers interactively and conversationally. Beer (1994), using college student autobiographies of computer experiences, found that women were more likely to express negative feelings such as frustration, resistance, and incompetence. Beer suggests that men are more likely to perceive computers as a source of power in writing (to improve form and acccuracy, as well as to gain access to information through electronic networking). She offers examples indicating that women are likely to resist the use of computers because they are believed to be impersonal and socially isolating. She also indicates that poor self-esteem affects women's willingness to use computers; this is attributed partly to lack of female role models and stereotypes of women as technologically incompetent. Many of these ideas seem to be general issues related to gender and computers, rather than distinctive issues in the use of computers for writing

Conclusion: Social contexts of literacy learning. The ways in which gender differences in reading and writing are socially determined, in contexts such as school, family, or community, have received surprisingly little attention (Solsken, 1993). While authors have drawn attention to how texts and writing assignments reflect masculinist modes of discourse, and biases in teachers' behavior or group interactions, it is difficult to find studies that have actually investigated the impact of such factors on girls' and womens' reading and writing. Oddly enough, while much attention has been given to females' difficulties with school-oriented writing, few authors have noted that females up to grade 11 have outscored males on national writing proficiency assessments since 1984 (US Department of Education, 1994). There also has been little investigation of how women and men's experiences in social contexts outside of school

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shape their use of reading and writing.

Gendered Nature of Literacy

Most recently, researchers using feminist and poststructuralist perspectives theories have drawn attention to somewhat different issues and perspectives on gender and literacy. Such scholars have focused on the conflicts and tensions experienced by girls and women in learning to read and write, and attempted to document how male and female writers both resist and conform to gender-related stereotypes.

Gender and genre. Some scholars have examined how women and men respond to different genres of reading and writing. The use of journals has received particular attention, partly because journals are now popular in English education, and because journals - or diaries - are commonly perceived to be a "female" type of writing. Gannett's (1991) research in *Gender and the Journal* is widely cited to support gender differences in journal use. Grounding her work in the sociolinguistic theory of women as a "muted group," she suggests that historically, journals have served both societal needs as well as personal needs of women. In an analysis of the historical literature on journal use, she suggests that on the one hand, women's journals reflect women's domestic responsiblities, serving as records of family events and household duties. On the other hand, journals also gave women the opportunity for "the creation, confirmation, or reconstruction of a sense of a positive and knowing self, with its own voice or voices" (p. 127). Among present-day college students, Gannett found gender-related differences in attitudes toward and use of journals. In a survey of 76 students, 28 of 41 women had kept personal journals, compared to only 4 of 35 men. Based on an analysis of six class-related student journals, she reported differences in the length and nature of women and men's journals. Women wrote more extended, descriptive, reflective journal entries than did men; men were more likely to have difficulty with journal-writing and to question its value. Similarly, Moonilai-Masur, Cincik & Mitchell (199?) found that high school students identified journal-writing as an activity for girls rather than boys. Drawing on sociolinguistic perspectives, these authors suggest that attributes of women's language use make them more comfortable with the expressive nature of journalling.

Other researchers have examined how girls' and boys' writing might reproduce dominant, gender-typed genres of fiction. Moss (1989) describes the apparent tendency of girls and boys to imitate, respectively, the conventions of the romance and the adventure, as well as to perpetuate gender-role stereotypes, in their own stories. She argues that children use genres like romance to explore "gender identities." Gilbert and Taylor (1991) review a variety of studies indicating differences in what girls and boys choose to write about, reflecting stereotypical female and male roles and identities. From a practical perspective, these authors question whether there is any value in encourging women to write in genres such as journals or other self-expressive forms that are not "masculinist" but that have no current status in the world of work or other social arenas. They argue for a move beyond the use of simple expressive writing in literacy instruction to "writing against the grain" (p. 121). Such writing, they propose, would include a critical examination of dominant discursive frameworks and moving beyond them to "play" in writing as means of rejecting and reversing conventions. As examples, they describe feminist fairy tales read and written by children.

Gender and voice. As part of the constructivist approach to writing instruction, students are typically encouraged to develop their own "voice" in their writing. While as the above discussion suggests, women are typically assumed to be more comfortable with expressive modes of writing, some authors argue that this does not translate into the ability or opportunity for women to express their perspectives through writing. From a sociolinguistic perspective, if women's ways of expressing themselves are generally devalued, women will enter educational situations with a background of language experiences that can inhibit development of their own "voice" in their writing (McCracken, 1992). Studies such as those of Sanborn (1992) have

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examined how traditional academic writing tasks place constraints on women's ability to express their own voices. There has been less attention to describing the nature of women's voices as expressed through their writing in learning situations. (However, there is a considerable body of literature on women as professional writers that might yield relevant insights. This literature was beyond the scope of the present analysis).

One pertinent study is notable for its focus on adult working class women's writing. Hollis (1995) examined the nature of women's voices in autobiographical narratives written by participants in the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, held during the 1920s and 1930s. Drawing on poststructuralist theory and Belenky et al.'s concept of constructed knowing, she argues that individual women were able to use different discourses in their autobiographies. In her analysis, she focuses in particular on how the women use "I" and "we" in different forms. "We," for example, appeared as an androcentric voice for workers, as a voice of the family, and as a collective voice for women. Hollis acknowledges critiques of autobiography as potentially reinforcing the status quo if people recreate their lives in terms of prevailing conventions or are negatively affected by an apparent disparity between their lives and normative life patterns. She indicates that while autobiographical assignments can promote women's identification with stories of powerlesness or silence, various aspects of the Bryn Mawr assignment encouraged these women to create stories of strength.

Gendered conflicts in writing. Some feminist researchers (Gilbert, 1989; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Moss, 1989) have examined the ways in which students' gender identities and the gendered nature of classroom literacy practices create conflicts for girls in learning to write. Such research has tended to focus on children's literacy learning and to address issues in both reading and writing (perhaps because these are less likely to be treated as separate subjects in elementary school than in upper grades or college). Assumptions inherent in such studies tend to be that male-oriented texts and literacy practices have greater status and rewards, and female concerns tend to be marginalized in the classroom. Students' "gendered subjectivities" are believed to have a significant impact on literacy learning: "language can be seen as a learned social discursive practice of a gendered subject, not as a natural and personal response of self" (Gilbert, 1989, p. 262). These assumptions have informed critiques of whole language and other approaches to literacy learning that emphasize individual self-expression and meaning-making while ignoring the impact of social structures that shape individual thought, particularly in terms of gender (Gilbert, 1989; Kelly, 1995).

From this perspective, whole language pedagogies create conflicts for girls in conforming to the espoused ideal of being "active" learners, because females are more covertly rewarded for for being quiet and compliant (Kelly, 1995; Walkerdine, 1985). In reading and writing specifically, girls can experience tensions related to denying their identity as females to identify with high status male-oriented texts, or affirming their identity as females by identifying with low-status female-oriented texts - but thus accepting subordinate status (Gilbert, 1989). Such conflicts can be expressed in girls' writing. For example, Gilbert (1989) describes stories written by two ten year old girls which reflected difficulties with placing women in positions of independence and adventure. Researchers from this perspective tend to emphasize that, while children's stories typically appear to reproduce gender-related concerns and positions, their writing reflects both accomodation and resistance to gendered norms. Moss (1989), for example, argues that children actively explore gender identity through their writing, and their imperfect reproduction of dominant genre like the romance reflects a struggle with adopting gendered discourse. However, there is a general sense that girls will be likely to adopt positions of subordination unless teachers explicitly encourage and support challenges to dominant female images.

A study by Cayton (1990) is suggestive of conflicts experienced by women in writing at the college level. Cayton identified differences in men and women's self-reports of writing blocks while completing research reports. Men identified cognitive issues more frequently (i.e., how to

organize a topic), while women emphasized concerns related to self and affect. She groups the problems experienced by women into four categories: difficulties with audience, difficulties with ethical responsibilities to subjects of the project, difficulties with using research from secondary sources, and difficulties with voice. As an example of conflict, in regard to voice, women reported conflicts in choosing to use traditional academic prose that did not reflect their own voice, yet they also had doubts that their writing would be taken seriously if they used a more personal mode of expression. In general, Cayton argues that women's writing blocks do not simply represent cognitive or affective issues, but reflect struggles with the subordinate, outsider status of women in relation to academic discourse.

Aronson and Swanson (1991) describe similar tensions experienced by graduate women in their dissertation research and writing. They also describe conflicts between the identities of the women as adults versus the norms for graduate student behavior. The authors describe writing groups formed by women graduate students as a means of support during their dissertation research. The study illustrates the tensions experienced by the women in entering the academic community and adopting the academic discourse. According to the authors, the groups helped the women subvert the competitive, individualistic mode of academe and put their writing into the collective context of women's personal lives.

Conclusion: The gendered nature of literacy. There has been some limited attention to issues of power and identity in studies of gender and writing. The studies on gendered conflicts in writing are examples of work from this approach. Such studies focus on how individuals both accomodate and resist socially determined gender roles. Solsken (1993) suggests that in such work the concern with gender is not reflected in "identifying consistent patterns of difference between groups of males and females, but rather upon tracing the patterns in individual's learning biographies back to sources in the system of gender relations" (p. 123). Existing studies have tended to examine gender-related conflicts expressed in girls' writing, rather than conflicts they experience in the acts of reading and writing themselves (Solsken, 1993). Hollis's (1995) study of Bryn Mawr women's writing also falls within this perspective, though it differs in its more explicit poststructuralist framework and concern with identity issues that include class as well as gender.

IMPLICATIONS

Taken as a whole, what are the implications of scholarship on gender and literacy for research in adult literacy education? Based on the results of our review to date, we can offer some preliminary suggestions and research questions:

1. Many concerns have been raised about the value of "sex difference" research (Crawford, 1995; Goetz & Grant, 1988). Such research with children indicates the difficulties of attributing observed group differences to a single variable such as gender. This research also does not reflect more current perspectives on the social construction of gender. It would be more fruitful to develop lines of research that explore issues of gender and the social contexts of literacy learning, and the gendered nature of literacy learning.

2. There have been few studies of how adult literacy instructional materials reproduce or challenge systems of gender relationships. In one recent study, Quigley and Holsinger (1993) found that much curricula reinforce the notion that women should occupy positions of lower intellectual, occupational and social status. Quigley and Holsinger recommend research on teacher resistance to such curricula. Researchers might also investigate students' responses to gender biases in literacy curricula. Do students accept or reject the images conveyed by such materials? How do these "hidden" messages affect students' attitudes towards and progress in literacy learning?

3. How are teacher or tutor interactions with students affected by gender? What impact does the gendered nature of these relationships have on the literacy learning process?

4. Is gender a factor in adult students' preference for and success with computer-based literacy

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instruction?

5. Small group learning is increasingly advocated as a desirable instructional approach in adult literacy learning. Some authors suggest that it is a particularly desirable instructional format for women, yet we have little information on the dynamics of adult literacy instructional groups. How is the process of group literacy learning affected by gender?

6. There is little research on how social contexts outside of formal education shape women and men's literacy practices. Heath (1983), for example, briefly notes differences in the literacy practices expected of women and men in working-class communities. How are these practices linked to systems of gender relations in different communities?

7. What tensions related to gender are experienced in learning to read and write as an adult? Rockhill (1989) described the conflicts that adult women may experience in their personal relationships as they pursue literacy education. Are there internal conflicts that women - or men - also experience, between their gender identities and expectations for learners, or for readers and writers in their families and communities? How do learners respond to these conflicts?

8. How are gender identities and conflicts expressed in adult literacy students' writing? How can student narratives serve as means for analysis and transformation of limiting gender roles and self-perceptions?

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