



# Gender in Conversation: A Case Study of Faculty Talk about Teaching Writing

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# Why study gender in WAC/WID contexts?

- Gender matters (Tannen, 1990; Wodak, 1997; Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006; Coates, 2013)
- Disciplinary gender regimes complicate cross-disciplinary interactions (Becher & Trowler, 2001)
- WAC scholarship explores identity but not often gender
  - racial identity (Young & Condon, 2013)
  - cultural and linguistic identity (Cox & Zawacki, 2011; Leki, 2003)
  - professional and disciplinary identity (Poe et al., 2010)
- Gender focus limited to feminist critiques of the WAC enterprise (LeCourt, 1996; Malinowtiz, 1997)

# Case Study: Question & Methodology

*How do writing specialists and disciplinary content experts negotiate and perform gender in conversations about teaching writing?*

## **Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis**

“A feminist approach to analyzing the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in their world according to the ways in which they are located by competing yet interwoven discourses.”

(Baxter, 2003)

# Case Study: Participants and Data Sources

## Bill: Writing Specialist

Straight, White, Male

English Ed.; Comp/Rhet

4 yrs at Institution,  
Prep for T&P

Seminar Facilitator and  
Teaching Fellow

*Recorded  
Conversations  
2 hrs, 61 pgs*

*Interviews  
7hrs, 180 pgs*

## Lena: Political Science Professor

Straight, White, Female

Political Science

6 yrs at Institution,  
Tenured

Seminar Attendee

# Analysis: Discourse of Egalitarianism

## Interviews

Bill: "I'm just trying to be really respectful of positioning what I want them to do or what I think they can do within their existing framework, goals, projects, whatever it is...and not just marching in and saying, "You should just do X, Y, and Z." Although, I guess I did that at the end."

Lena: "[Bill]'s good at showing me instead of telling me."

"He made me feel more comfortable, like I'm not the only person who goes through that, who doesn't just have it down. Just having someone to talk to about writing, and bounce ideas off of, has made me more excited about writing."

## Transcript

Bill positions himself as fellow question poser, worrier, self-doubter (ll. 8-9, 10, 13-4, 24-29)

Bill tempers his advice (ll. 31-35, 38)

# Analysis: Discourse of Gender Differentiation

## Interviews

Bill: "Maybe my interactions with Lena were stereotypically male-female in the sense that I perceived her as needing some help and some confidence-boosting and I'm not sure I've had that same dynamic with any male faculty members."

"Lena made it easy because the gender piece wasn't that significant, the status piece was not existent at all, and she was open and willing to participate, so, she made it easy."

Lena: "[I]t's always been more of a gender thing going on. I feel like a lot of men that I've talked to...aren't sometimes as good of listeners. [Bill] just seems to be more...he was looking at my stuff and showing me what he had done. But I felt that there was that give and take."

"Bill, he's not gendered, and that sounds really weird to me, but he's like...A guy, he's not this kind of masculine presence in the way I think of masculinity."

## Transcript

Bill made moves characteristic of men's talk (Tannen, 1990; Coates, 2013): held the floor, determined the next topic

Male storytelling as "parallel conversation" (Palmer, 2007), show self-awareness (Holmes, 1997), achievement (Coates, 2013)

Lena seeking affirmation; minimal response as a form of "shitwork" (Fishman, 1978)

# Insights and Implications

- Discourse of egalitarianism might have obscured the operation of stereotypically gendered conversation roles
- Discourse of gender differentiation may have thwarted the egalitarian spirit
- Gender-focused analysis can help WAC/WID folks:
  - Be more aware of the discourses that govern our interactions with faculty
  - Acknowledge how intersecting discourses can limit subject positions
  - Revisit values at the heart of our work



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