3. WHY CALL SUCCESSFUL CO-AUTHORING "FEMININE"?

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3 WHY CALL SUCCESSFUL CO-AUTHORING “FEMININE”?

A feminine emphasis might lead to communal texts—dialogic, not monologic scores. Assemblages of documents, voices, tapes, and quotations from various sources. A range of chromatics, all circulating in the same netting; multiple voices to reflect multiple backgrounds, cultures; an impatience with the myth of a “solitary” authorial voice responsible for propagating and codifying all information.

Derek Owens

As we met with the co-authoring teams, they talked with us and each other about their individual and collaborative writing processes, their products, their strengths and weaknesses, professional issues of tenure and single authorship, pedagogy, their views on collaborative dissertations, issues of choice and time and proximity, first author concerns, and what they saw as benefits of their co-authoring; but what struck us as we listened to them and then read the transcripts was their attention to, and sometimes almost reverence for, their relationships—both professional and personal. In their collaborative dissertation study, Toni Knott and Lynne Valek (1999) found that the workplace collaborators they studied (mixed gender pairs) began their collaboration, without exception, in order to accomplish a task; not only that, they thought of the task as more important than the relationship. However, most of the teams in our study came to work together only after a relationship, often a close friendship, had developed. Most of them seem to value the relationship over the task, seeing their publications as happy by-products of their personal and professional associations.

Furthermore, we were not just interviewing academics who work together: we were interviewing academics who write together, and the creation of common text and voice, a necessarily shared vision, and the expansion of understanding to encompass two or more consciousnesses seemed to deepen the relationship they brought initially to the task. In searching for a way to talk about these relationships, we came upon a model developed by Cynthia Sullivan Dickens and Mary Ann D. Sagaria in their 1997 study of collaboration among women scholars. They interviewed (individually, not as teams) twenty-six women who had co-authored with other women, and they found that four collaborative profiles emerged: (1) “pedagogical collaboration: nurturance” promoted growth and learning through a common intellectual project and
often involved a more experienced woman who nurtured a less experienced one; (2) “instrumental collaboration: pragmatism” centered around a need for expertise, a specific task, or a desire to work with a particular person; (3) “professional partnership collaboration: shared agendas” was characterized by common research interests, several projects together, and an extended professional relationship; and (4) “intimate collaboration: intellectual and emotional closeness” involved “an emotional and intellectual closeness, shared understandings, and an ease of communication” (87).

We were especially interested in the “intimate” category because of our study’s interviewees’ emphasis on the affective and ineffable qualities of their own relationships. Dickens and Sagaria point out that their study “differs from antecedent scholarship on academic teams . . . by identifying intimate collaboration as a fourth relationship pattern, one which has heretofore been invisible and or undocumented in published work” (95). They go on to say that “affective qualities enmeshed in academic research relationships have not been captured by traditional quantitative research methods” (95). Sociologists Dee G. Appley and Alvin E. Winder agree: “Most social scientists are patently unaware of the expression of caring which underlies collaboration. It is therefore necessary to form some awareness that some significant and vital conceptions of human behavior have been omitted” (1977, 283). In addition, most studies of collaboration in academia up to this point have focused on men with “no mention of intimacy as a quality of those relationships” (Dickens and Sagaria, 95). For instance, Smart and Bayer consolidate scholarly collaborations into “master-apprentice,” “supplementary,” and “complementary” collaborations (Austin and Baldwin 1991, 20), corresponding roughly to Dickens and Sagaria’s “pedagogical,” “instrumental,” and “professional partnership” categories. But Dickens and Sagaria call for more focus on intimate collaborative relationships and for research involving interviews with pairs or teams and “other collaborations that display power and status differences, such as those involving women and men, junior and senior faculty, and African American and white faculty” (97). Our study addresses several of these areas with sometimes surprising results: the ease with which most of the teams, even the male-male teams, fall on some level into the category of intimate collaboration is compatible with one of our key findings, one that has to do with gender and a feminine approach.

A FEMININE APPROACH: DEFINITION OF TERMS

As we said earlier, a central finding of our study is that all of the co-authors approach writing together from a standpoint which involves care, connection, and nurturance, a standpoint which we choose to call feminine,
so explaining our conception of that standpoint is important before we con-
tinue.¹ We would like to make it clear at this point that we know the terms feminine and masculine are somewhat controversial, and that some readers will resist them.

In a conversation with Chuck Schuster, who has written about Bakhtin’s chain of utterances in relation to collaboration, Michele explained our theory that the co-authors in our study approach co-authoring from a feminine standpoint. He listened, was quiet for a minute, and said, “Isn’t it a shame we have to call it a feminine approach because then the only other approach is masculine.” Michele agreed with him but defended our choice of terms by saying we knew no better and more succinct way to describe what we were finding, and he concurred that, at present, feminine is the best and most familiar term for a nurturing approach.

Several voices have echoed Schuster’s, encouraging us to use the terms; in their imperfection, their incompleteness, they may still contain enough life yet to invigorate themselves, to make themselves useful. We feel that our many exchanges about these terms—between us, and between us and other read-
ers—have dialogically sharpened our views and ensured that the terms remained productive. If a feminine approach involves caring and its cultural work in relationships, ethics, and social discourses, then it deserves to be explored rather than dismissed as baggage.

Part of the resistance to these terms stems from the fact that many people, scholars or not, see the terms masculine and feminine as naming biological and sometimes essential characteristics, and they also often see those terms as dichotomous and as carrying negative connotations. In deference to those crit-
ics, it is possible to use other terminology to describe competitive, individual-
istic standpoints and nurturing, interdependent standpoints; in their 1977 article, Appley and Winder develop such terminology. They call for a paradigm shift from “a cycle where competition and hierarchy can serve as a value base for survival” to “collaboration as a value system” (280). They

define collaboration as a relational system in which: 1) Individuals in a group share mutual aspirations and a common conceptual framework; 2) the interactions among individuals are characterized by “justice as fairness”; and 3) these aspirations and conceptualizations are characterized by each individual’s consciousness of his/her motives toward the other; by caring or concern for the other and by commitment to work with the other over time provided that this commitment is a matter of choice. (281)
According to Eric Trist, this paradigm shift is necessary because “evidence is mounting that the individual by himself, or indeed the organization and even the polity by itself, cannot meet the demands of these more complex environments. A greater pooling of resources is required; more sharing and more trust” (qtd. in Appley and Winder, 280–81). Neither Trist nor Appley and Winder explicitly associate the collaborative value system with a feminine value system, but in their work, Dickens and Sagaria find that Appley and Winder’s and Trist’s theories “evoke themes of caring, commitment, and consciousness (or reflexivity) that tend to be characteristic of feminist inquiry” (82). And Appley and Winder’s paradigm intertwines with other feminine concepts and theories.

Certainly Nel Noddings’s ethic of care (1984), which she calls feminine, supports the paradigm Appley and Winder call for. In addition, the feminine valuing of intimacy, and the intimate nature of some of our interviewees’ relationships, coincides with Appley and Winder’s belief that individuals must be “able to experience psychic intimacy in the work setting . . . which requires the caring and commitment [that is] part of the value base in a collaborative system” (287). Furthermore, this psychic intimacy should “allow the investment of self . . . without the compulsion of necessity,” echoing Iris Marion Young’s belief that in asymmetrical reciprocity, gifts of understanding must be given with no expectation of receiving a gift in return. According to Appley and Winder, these free gifts of oneself, one’s time, and one’s talents, can only be given if “work is not related to survival”; they must be given by choice, which “requires a participative mode that we have little experience with. It means investing in the people we work with as much as in the product produced. It means . . . we confirm each other day by day as we move from making a living to making a life” (288).

In 1977, Appley and Winder called for a shift from a competitive and hierarchical paradigm, which they go so far as to characterize as dysfunctional, to a collaborative one, which they see as necessary for human survival. They could have called for a shift from a masculine paradigm to a feminine one, but the terms do not matter; the concept is the same. The world in general, or at least western culture, and certainly academia, is still—over twenty years after Appley and Winder published their research—in need of more nurturing, caring, and interconnectedness, and we believe the co-authors in our study represent a small microcosm of people whose work seems pointed in this direction. We choose to call their approach feminine partly because feminism—in all its manifestations and definitions—is well established in contemporary western scholarship, and partly because we find it interesting that the men in our study approach co-authoring from a
feminine standpoint (as we define it) and acknowledge the problems with
the masculine approach.

As we worked on this chapter, we began to wonder if we were both
equally compelled to continue to call the stance of the co-authors we
studied feminine.

*Michele:* On my worst days I say “feminine shmenine.”
*Kami:* [irritated] So you’re saying we should just abandon the femi-
nine thing and go with “collaborative value system”? You know Pat
(Hartwell) even said we should stick with feminine in spite of the
reservations he had.

*Michele:* Well, some people cringe at feminine . . . you know? . . . and
others embrace it. Even though I see strong similarities with the col-
laborative value system and a feminine approach, no, I’m not saying
we should abandon the term *feminine.* Here are my reasons. Despite
its being considered loaded, *feminine* is a far more accessible term.
Collaborative value system doesn’t go as far or include as much as
*feminine* in terms of possibilities. *Feminine* is more far-reaching in
terms of ethics and attention to difference than it seems on the sur-
face. Collaborative value system comes out of business and sociologi-
cal models, and even thirty years after Appley and Winder, you don’t
read about it. It hasn’t caught on as a worldview, but *feminine* has.
Sociologists recognize caring as central to a collaborative value sys-
tem, but it has yet to be interrogated in that system.

*Kami:* Why do you say “on the surface”?
*Michele:* Because *feminine* suffers from essentializing and stereotyp-
ing—cartoons of behavior.

*Kami:* Do you think that the fact that we’re lesbians has anything to do
with our choice of the term *feminine*?

*Michele:* I think it’s ironic that we choose that term. I think it’s somewhat
unexpected of lesbians who would certainly privilege female-identified
ethics and actions but reject the social constructs of *feminine.* So
sometimes it feels like we’re going backwards.

*Kami:* Are we?

*Michele:* I think we’re trying to revive this term—it’s a much richer
term than it appears. That doesn’t mean it isn’t loaded, that it doesn’t
have critiques and problems. I think it’s too bad it’s been locked up
with women—been limited to women.

*Kami:* I think it’s too bad that because postmodern feminism is so
focused on difference—so self-conscious about admitting its ties to
white, western, straight, privileged women and problematizing those
ties—that the gains made early by second wave feminists in terms of
recognizing the strengths of traditionally feminine traits like care, nurturance, and responsibility are now mentioned almost with embarrassment—and sometimes regarded with hostility—by feminists. As we talk, I’ve realized one reason I might want so much to hang onto the term feminine. When I first became aware of feminism in the late ‘60s, I was threatened by it. It seemed to me all about breaking down the traditional role of women, a role I was convinced at the time was inevitable and necessary for me. I married a man and gave birth to five children and lived out that role, not resentfully but, I admit, somewhat unconsciously. When I started grad school in 1989, after staying home with my children for seventeen years, I started to wake up, but I never felt as if the work I had done in caring for my children and others had been wasted or was less important than some of my friends’ “professional” labor (certainly few people thought I had a career) outside their homes, or the work men do. I still feel it’s the most challenging and most important work I ever did. When, in the early ‘90s (yes, I was late), I became aware of Gilligan and Chodorow and others, I felt validated. Here were respected researchers saying the work I had done, the characteristics that defined me, were something to be studied seriously, valued, even emulated. I guess it seems to me that in worrying so much about essentializing, feminists are losing a great deal of what offered—and still offers—so much hope to both men and women.

*Michele:* Right. Because caring is not easy, or for the faint of heart, and it’s not a behavior of passive, dependent sheep. It involves real consciousness and choice.

We would like to make it clear at this point that we know gender is constructed (as well as performed, provisional, and possibly chosen), although not determined. We know that, likewise, the feminine characteristics discussed by theorists such as Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan are, to a significant degree, the result of social construction. We also understand “gender as relation” and the dangers of “too closely focuss[ing] on the details of masculinity and femininity” (Chodorow 1989, 18), and consequently we resist essential and dichotomous descriptions of human behavior. With Barrie Thorne (1999), we believe that

the contrastive framework has outlived its usefulness. . . . The view of gender as difference and binary opposition has been used to buttress male domination. . . . A sense of the whole, and of the texture and dynamism of interaction, become lost when collapsed into dualisms like . . . hierarchical versus intimate, agency versus communion, and competitive versus cooperative. . . . We need, instead, to develop concepts that will help us grasp the diversity, overlap, contradictions, and ambiguities. (108)
However, evidence of gender differences found and explored by western psychologists, philosophers, scientists, sociologists, feminists, and linguists such as Chodorow, Bakan, Guttman, Gilligan, Young, Harding, Lakoff, Coates, Penelope, Romaine, Thorne, and many others cannot be dismissed—even the earliest research which necessarily focused on the differences in biology and the sociocultural result of those differences, or gender. This rich mix of disciplines has contributed to an “interstanding” (Ballif, Davis, and Mountford 2000, 589), a more comprehensive, productive term for how conceptions of gendered knowledge and action intersect, interact, and can also result in dissonance and discomfort.

These scholars would agree the masculine and feminine stances lie along a continuum, and that certainly a feminine stance is not displayed only by women (any more than a masculine one is displayed only by men). In discussing the gender continuum, Chodorow points out:

Some women are far more nurturant than others . . . some men are more nurturant than some women. I agree that all claims about gender differences gloss over important differences within gender and similarities between gender. . . . Still, I believe that the intergender differences are socially and politically most significant . . . it is crucial to take full account of structural and statistical truths about male-female differences. What is important is not to confuse these truths with prescription. (1978, 215)

Yes, “intergender differences are socially and politically most significant,” but, as Benhabib notes, gender is infinite in its varieties and yet tedious in its similarities (1992, 229). More recently, Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Janet Emig (1995) remind us that it’s possible for both men and women to “embody or enact culturally feminine values”; Phelps and Emig speak of “feminine attributes” as “principled choices: not so much claimed about women as chosen by women [and, as our study shows, also chosen by men], proposed for women and perhaps men, offered as a basis for constructing new models for writing, learning, teaching, and rhetoric” (409). We understand Phelps and Emig as foregrounding the ethical choices inherent in a feminine approach, and the authors of Feminist Consequences (Bronfen and Kavka 2001) identify “the issue of ethical relations for feminism as a way of making contact with one another without assuming each other all to be the same” (xxiii).

In choosing the terms masculine and feminine, we are not looking for easy, discrete, unreflective ways of conveniently characterizing co-authors, the kind of essentializing that was brought to our attention by Bette London (1999) in her critique of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s well-known description of their work together. London wonders at their inability to articulate not only
the deeper reasons for but also actual processes of their co-authoring. She goes so far as to say they reproduce tropes employed by their turn-of-the-century predecessors. Indeed Gilbert and Gubar seem at pains to domesticate—even trivialize—their undertaking, relegating it to the conventionally feminized sphere of the “psychologically useful”: a support service, a form of nurturing, a kind of cheerleading, an act of comforting. (80)

Our greatest detractors might criticize our claim that care and nurturance are primary to a successful co-authoring relationship. Yet, we are confident that we can meet London’s critique head on because we go well beyond simple “domesticating” and feminizing to problematizing and challenging the conditions under which co-authors must write. London claims that Gilbert and Gubar “do not seem to recognize collaboration as a category of writing. For when they do not insistently and narrowly personalize their collaboration, they come close to universalizing it out of existence” (81). Our call for reflection, for making co-authoring processes more visible, seems to us to be a clear alternative to what London accuses Gilbert and Gubar of doing.

We find Lyotard’s interpretation of feminine and masculine stances particularly useful in helping us see femininity as an alternate space, a place other than the masculine but not necessarily having to do with the sexual differences of men and women. In an interview with Gary Olson, Lyotard insists that “the enormous, extreme, huge importance of the question of gender is precisely that this question has no answer, and that’s the only way we can continue to think about it” (qtd. in Olson 1995, 186). He characterizes “real femininity” as the “refusal of the temptation to grasp, to master” (170), which is compatible with Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson’s explanation of feminist critical theory as “contradiction, interchange, debate . . . constantly and innovatively in flux—challenging and subverting and expanding not only other (male) theories but its own positions and agenda” (1993, 205). Lyotard posits that “another sexual space could be substituted” in which “differences traverse individual bodies rather than opposing a ‘woman’s’ body to a ‘man’s.’” For him, what is important is not the differences between men and women but the fact that “a biological or social male” can also be female (qtd. in Olson, 187). Lyotard says that “what is needed is to move away from a discourse of mastery and abstract cognition toward a way of being that recognizes affect, the body, and openness,” a posture he defines as “feminine” (170). Specifically about writing, Rebecca Moore Howard (2000) reminds us that collaboration’s suspect state hinges partly on the “gendering of authorship”: “Collaboration involves one writer being influenced by another, whereas in the male-dominated authorship of the modern
West, authors are supposed to be autonomous. If they must collaborate, they must do so hierarchically not dialogically” (477).

So, when we use the terms *female*, *feminine*, and *feminist*, we are thinking (usually) not of female biology or essential preferences and characteristics, but of processes which tend to undermine the authority of “male” discourse. Whatever encourages and initiates a free play of meanings and prevents “closure” is regarded as “female” . . . if there is a female principle, it is simply to remain outside the male definition of female. (Selden and Widdowson 1993, 212)

However, it is important to note that our conceptions of feminine and masculine are specific to mainstream American culture and that postmodern feminists resist the notion that all women share the same position (Caughie 1998, 119). Brady (1998) critiques Chodorow’s, Gilligan’s, and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule’s use of the narratives of a few western women to represent all women, and Susan Jarratt reminds us that feminism has as much to do with addressing “the specificity and materiality of difference” (1998, 9) as it does with political activism and valuing a nurturing and connected stance.

The characteristics we call *feminine* and *masculine* are historically and culturally derived from observations and experiences of white western men and women, and until recently, differences among women have not been part of the feminist critique. Certainly we, as white western middle-class women, cannot speak for African American or Asian or Hispanic women, nor can they speak for us. As Sandra Harding explains, “people coming from marginalized groups and testifying to their experience is crucial. . . . [I]t creates the kind of subject that can go on to make history and knowledge [while not being] . . . defined by the way the dominant group defines who you are.” However, she goes on to say that women’s individual stories must be told and valued, but this telling is part of a ‘collective process.’ It’s done in front of other people. It’s done together.” These narratives report “individual participation in a collective experience. . . . a collective subject of knowledge, not the kind of individualist subject who becomes a genius alone, and not the kind who joins a community and never has a thought outside the community either” (qtd. in Hirsh and Olson 1995, 41–42).

The narratives of individual women have created a kind of meta-narrative from which all people can learn. Recognizing the danger of creating such a meta-narrative, a strategy which has the potential to elide difference, Nancy C. M. Hartsock nevertheless proposes “to lay aside the important difference among women across race and class boundaries and instead search for central commonalities” (1987, 163–64). In their article “Negotiating the Differend: A Feminist Trilogue,” Michelle Ballif, D. Diane Davis, and Roxanne Mountford
(2000) explore the differences among feminists. In an attempt to illuminate the tension between valuing difference and finding solidarity, they turn to Lynn Worsham, who believes feminisms can “form an alliance that recognizes that our histories and experiences are not only diverse in all the ways we have learned to name them, they are also intertwined in complex and mutually determining ways. The lesson to be remembered . . . is that there is no need to eradicate difference to find solidarity” (584).

Several contributors to the collection Feminist Consequences (Bronfen and Kavka 2001) predict a movement toward “reclaiming universalism” (xx), a universalism which “does not erase otherness. . . . and which will include but extend beyond subjects who happen to be women” (xxii). The meta-narrative we discovered in our study is connective tissue which has the strength to span differences and provide “fundamental supplements to more abstract structural information and analysis as well as sources of theoretical concepts” (Phelps and Emig 1995, 410). In a listserv discussion about the “trilogue,” Mountford (2000) closed her posts with a quote by Muso Soseki: “Do not say that your wisdom and my ignorance belong to opposing worlds. Look: China and Japan, but there are not two skies.”

Acknowledgment of the risks of choosing the terms feminine and masculine does not preclude us from using these terms to describe the behaviors of any person from any culture if those persons display feminine or masculine characteristics as we—along with Gilligan, Chodorow, Lyotard, Noddings, and others—have defined them. In choosing these terms, we recognize with Worsham that “there can be no safety in words chosen, no refuge . . . in abstract, dematerialized categories of difference” (1998, 336), but we also believe with Worsham that “a choice of words always remains for each of us to make individually, a choice that will place us alongside one another in a side-by-side relation of association and alliance” (330). Although the terms masculine and feminine can be problematic, they seem to us to convey best what we want to say about the co-authors we studied; these terms evince the nature of these successful co-authoring relationships. Our choice is supported by Worsham. For her, concepts like “the one most troubling to feminists, ‘woman,’” are only inadequate if we expect them “to provide the precise summing up, the final word. An alternative view and a more modest expectation is to see that a given concept places in our hands particular possibilities and thereby suggests a direction for thought and action” (332).

For us, the concepts or terms masculine and feminine provide a way to talk about our findings and “suggest a direction for thought and action,” both in analyzing our findings and in articulating the implications of our study. We choose to name successful co-authoring as feminine because “naming, like...
rhetoric, is neither good nor evil; rather, it is the condition we are thrown into by language” (Ballif, Davis, and Mountford 2000, 597).

We believe we can say that the co-authors we interviewed are feminine in that their nurturing, heterarchical, noncompetitive, caring, connected, contextual, affective approach—not to mention the possible risks of challenging and subverting academia’s sacred cow of single authorship—most often locates them in a space that is not limited to competition, autonomy, hierarchy, and rationality. Of course, we are not saying that these co-authors are never competitive or self-promoting (or that autonomy and competition are never appropriate). For example, many of the co-authors in our study saw the value of autonomy in some circumstances; indeed, several of the interviewees maintained that autonomy is a prerequisite for successful collaboration. However, for the most part, we heard little evidence of that more masculine standpoint as the co-authors discussed their collaborative work, and no one seemed to feel the necessity to establish autonomy as a member of a writing team. As a result of listening to and analyzing what the co-authors said, we believe much of their success is a product of the choices they make—in approaches, epistemologies, and methods—and the actions they take from a nonmasculine standpoint.

From our standpoint, too, we recognize that not all the interviewees consciously choose a feminine approach. The word feminist involves conscious choice and connotes political action involving women’s struggles in a patriarchal system, and the word feminine, as we said before, connotes a space “outside” or other than masculine, a space where caring, cooperation, and context are the standard. According to Stephen Heath in “Male Feminism,” “Feminism is a social-political awareness of the oppression of women and a movement to end it” (1987, 27), and while we suspect the interviewees sympathize with that movement, we cannot say all the co-authors, either male or female, identify themselves as feminists. When we asked the teams about what seemed to us to be a feminist stance, most said they had not previously thought of what they did in that way. Three teams connected feminism with their co-authoring—Elizabeth Kent and Matthew Oldman, Gilbert Adams and Julie Knight, and Lisa Ede and Andrea A. Lunsford—but two of those made the connection as a sort of afterthought. Kent, in analyzing the valuing of collaboration in their department, mused, “I always felt comfortable . . . in fact I think it’s feminist”; and Oldman realized that their assigning of first author to a department member who needed it professionally could be characterized as “female negotiation.” When we asked Adams and Knight if they had ever thought the reason they work well together involves a feminine approach, Adams said they had “never had that feedback,” and Knight looked at him and exclaimed, “Well I’m
glad you finally got some outside feedback on this . . . that’s absolutely the reason we get along.” So, in most cases, the perception of their feminine stance is our perception, although most of the teams saw the validity of that perception when we questioned them about it, and we think the data supports that perception as well.

Only two of the co-authors, Ede and Lunsford, identified their approach as consciously feminist; their connection with feminism is more explicit, intentional, and political. According to Ede,

Our commitment to feminism is an important part of our collaboration and lends a kind of multiple significance to the work we do collaboratively. When a lot of people work collaboratively, they have personal reasons for wanting to collaborate, and they find that to be a positive, productive process so they keep doing it . . . but I think there is a kind of overt termination of significance. It feels like it’s a feminine statement to work collaboratively . . . so that in addition to whether we think “Representing Audience” is a better article because we’ve done it together, there is sort of always already some kind of “and we’ve done it collaboratively” that adds to it.

We found her phrase “overt termination of significance” a provocative way to describe the value of co-authoring beyond the creation of better products. She and Lunsford consciously choose co-authoring as a feminist practice, while the other co-authors in our study exhibit a feminine approach but have not consciously chosen a feminist stance or have not explicitly named their approach as feminist.

Since a number of the co-authors in our study mentioned the terms ego and egolessness, distinguishing between the feminine and masculine ego is necessary here. Feminist theorists have not overlooked the feminine tendency to focus more on the “other” rather than the self (but not always at the expense of the self), and Chodorow (1989) turns to psychologists David Bakan and David Gutmann in her 1989 discussion of ego. As we established earlier, Chodorow sees “gender as relation” (18) but finds analyses of traditional female and male characteristics useful in illuminating the terms feminine and masculine. Bakan focuses on the distinction between male and female egos; for him the male ego “manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion; . . . the urge to master” while the female ego “manifests itself in the sense of being one with other organisms . . . [and] in noncontractual cooperation.” Gutmann supports Bakan; he characterizes female personalities (and for him this characterization applies to all sexes) as “part of a larger social organization and system of social bonds” and the male personality as making “himself or herself . . . the focus of events and ties.” Consequently, female egos are likely to be more flexible, or less “insistent on self-other distinctions,” more oriented to the pre-
sent, and more subjective (qtd. in Chodorow, 56). We would characterize the egos of the interviewees as feminine in their cooperative, contextual, flexible approach.

Just as we’ve asked that definitions of authorship be expanded, we are asking that definitions of feminine be revisited and revived in light of our findings. We’re not just calling for a “different space” or a “space outside” or for walls to come down inside the house to open up the rooms, or even for an addition built on to accommodate us. We want, if not a tearing down of the old structure and new plans drawn, at least a full, thoughtful renovation that reflects new and old understandings of how people may be writing together and why. Whatever their preconception of feminine may be, we hope readers will with us see “feminine in the deep classical sense—rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness” (Noddings 1984, 2).

NOTES

1. Our use of standpoint is not to be confused with standpoint theory. Laura Brady (1998) critiques Sarah Ruddick’s appropriation of “standpoint theory” as one “based on the idea that women, as an oppressed group, must know their oppressor—men—in a way that the oppressor does not need to know the oppressed.” Like Brady, we are mindful of taking any path that can “imply the moral superiority of women [and] and easily become essentialist” (38). Our intention is to use standpoint in a more prosaic, traditional way.

2. We understand that the word difference can imply a foundational concept, like a “‘proper’ feminist against which to judge difference.” Ballif, Davis, and Mountford find Derrida’s term differance more appropriate and useful in that it “embrace[s] an unending play of differences and attend[s] to the exclusions that are created in the name of feminist solidarity” (2000, 585).

3. It was serendipitous that as we were searching for support for our choice of terms, we subscribed to a PRE/Text listserv discussion around Ballif, Davis, and Mountford’s article (2000). From the article and the stimulating listserv discussion, we gained a better understanding of what others in the field of composition and rhetoric are thinking about in terms of contemporary feminism, especially the struggle to turn toward difference without abandoning the possibilities of common ground. Our work attempts to suspend naming in some ways and invigorate it in other ways. Like these writers, our biggest challenge, and simultaneously our greatest pleasure, has been playing with this language.