Bringing CWILA into the Classroom
A Resource for Critical Pedagogy

This short teaching module was developed by Magnolia Pauker and Laura Moss at the University of British Columbia with the support of the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice-CWILA Research Network in order to provide university and college students and teachers with an overview of Canadian Women in the Literary Arts (CWILA) as a resource for critical pedagogy in feminist, gender, literary studies, and beyond. Some of the text for the slides has been adapted from CWILA’s website (cwila.com).

Recent critique has emphasized the problematic relation between the institutionalization of Women's Studies programs and what is perceived, indeed experienced, as a "loss of an earlier connection to practical politics" where "institutionalization is equated with depoliticization" [1]. The challenge is to bridge the connection between theory and lived experience.

As a university instructor of feminist and cultural studies, I find that the challenge to inspire political engagement and critical consciousness is further complicated as students come to realize that while feminism remains, in Juliette Mitchell’s analysis, "the longest revolution," the problems with which we are confronted today often seem insurmountable and may inspire a sense of hopelessness. The question of what to do with the knowledge gained through studying feminist theory and history comes up again and again.

The measurable impact produced by CWILA’s activities both in terms of generating conversations in the Canadian Literary community and beyond and in effecting significant change with regards to review culture in Canadian publishing presents a model for action for students and teachers who are committed to practical feminist politics and to the potential for cultural change.

— Magnolia Pauker, July 2014

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Student Preparation

1. Write a short response for each of the following questions **BEFORE** looking at the CWILA website and doing the assigned readings:

   a) Think back to your last English literature class. How many books did you read that were written by female authors? How many by male authors?

   b) Is there a gender gap in your own reading practice? What about in the distribution of books from around the world? Do you read books by writers from a variety of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds? Do you think that your reading practice is representative of the public in general? Why or why not?

   c) What methods could be used for measuring gender and ethnicity? Whose work is left out when reviews of books by male and female writers are counted? How might the category of ‘genderqueer’ address this issue? And how not? What are some of the issues that come along with categorization, in general, and ‘genderqueer,’ in particular?

   d) How do you think that the publication statistics for gender measure up in Canadian literature? Estimate the percentage of books identified as written by women that were published in Canada in 2011.

   e) How do you think review statistics will measure up? Estimate the percentage of reviews of books identified as written by women in the Canadian press in 2011.

2. **Familiarize yourself with the CWILA website.** Take note of the resources and programs offered.

3. **Read:**
   - Laura Moss, "Guy-Guys, CWILA, and Going Down the Hall to the Archives." *Canadian Literature* 217 (Summer 2013): 6-16.
CWILA: Background & Context

A non-profit organization run by volunteers, **CWILA strives to promote and foster equity and equality of representation** in the Canadian literary community by:

1) tracking statistics on gender representation in reviewing;
2) bringing relevant issues of gender, race, and sexuality into the national literary conversation;
3) and creating a network supportive of the active careers of female writers, critics, and their literary communities.

CWILA was founded in 2012 by poet, essayist, and UBC instructor **Gillian Jerome** in response to a conversation on gender representation in Canadian literary reviews that was started by poet, novelist, blogger and critic **Sina Queryas** on her blog **Lemon Hound** and continued by poet, blogger and metalhead **Natalie Zina Walschots** (a.k.a. Natalie Zed) on her blog **www.nataliezed.ca**. The conversation expanded to include a wide range of women active in various literary communities across the country calling for a **discursive space to address the politics of representation, the critical reception of women’s writing in the literary press and the ways in which to foster stronger critical communities of women of all ages including genderqueer writers, Indigenous writers, as well as other women and/or genderqueer writers of colour.**
The Count: Genealogy

The 2011 Count: In May 2012, 50 volunteers joined Jerome to count reviews in newspapers, journals, and magazines to document the rates at which books by male and female writers were reviewed in 2011 and to note the gender of reviewers. Over 2,500 book reviews from 14 publications were counted, analyzed, and documented. The initial count found that 39% of review space went to works by female writers. The results of the count were so profound that members of the group decided to form an organization dedicated to combating gender inequities. CWILA was born.

The 2012 Count: In July 2013, the 2012 count was launched with reviews of 3,092 books in 26 publications. As CWILA’s executive director, Sheila Giffen, explains, “we added the category of ‘genderqueer,’ as an imperfect way to acknowledge people who do not identify as either male or female.” CWILA also began to track statistics on Canadian content and the support of Canadian publishers. As CWILA board member, Laura Moss says, “Basically, we set out to measure the C in CWILA.”

The 2013 Count: The count continues for 2013 with 5,613 books from 31 publications including 4 French language publications. Up until this point only English language reviews had been counted. This year the results from 1259 French reviews were also taken into account.

An important statistic that we’ve not been able to gather is the distribution of reviews based on the racial or ethnic backgrounds of authors.

— Sheila Giffen

The full breakdown of results from the yearly counts along with analytical and explanatory literature can be viewed and downloaded at CWILA.com.
Reading Gender: Class Discussion

Working in small groups, discuss the following questions based on the results of the initial 2011 Count:

1. How do you interpret the gender gap in reviews of books authored by females and males in Canadian publications? How do CWILA’s findings compare with your predictions? Were you surprised by the results? If so, what surprised you most? If not, why not?

2. Thinking back to your last English literature class, how many books did you read that were written by female authors? How many by male authors? How many by writers from a range of ethnic backgrounds? How many depict a range of sexualities? And how many reinforce heteronormativity? Compare your findings with other members of the group.

3. Is there a gender gap in your own reading practice and experience? Why and how might this information matter?

Learn about writer & illustrator, Joanna Walsh’s campaign: #readwomen2014
The 2011 CWILA Count: The Numbers

The original 2011 CWILA Count... found that although women published half the books in the country, they only got an average of 39 per cent of the book review space. The Count found that men wrote more reviews than women, men tended to review books by men (still a persistent trend), and books by male writers received more attention than books written by women authors. **CWILA proved a gender bias in literary culture in Canada.**

What does the gender gap in reviews of Canadian and non-Canadian authors signify?

The results of this year’s count show that editors, writers and critics—to varying extents—have responded to our call. In one year, we can see many publications with significant changes in the number of published reviews of books written by women between 2011 and 2012:

- **The Walrus** — 23% to 56%
- **Canadian Notes and Queries** — 25% to 46%
- **Fiddlehead** — 29% to 58%
- **Geist** — 38% to 49%
- **National Post** — 33% to 42%

"We are having more frequent, regular discussions about how to broaden and diversify the pool of writers who we work with in all sections of the magazine."

— Rachel Giese, Senior Editor at The Walrus
A. Working in small groups, discuss the apparent impact of the CWILA count on gender equity in review culture in Canada. What do these numbers tell you and why do they matter?

B. Identify three other areas in the public sphere where equity of representation and space remains unequal. Brainstorm together.

For more on impact, read CWILA’s interview with editors Rachel Giese, Jared Bland, and Mark Medley who discuss the pivotal role that CWILA’s work has had in increasing gender parity in review culture in Canada.
The Count: Comparative Analysis 2011 & 2012

The publication and publicizing of CWILA's count has been instructive. The solution does not lie in the count itself.

Why are women still being reviewed less? Why are women still writing fewer reviews? Why are women in virtually every public domain still less inclined to speak up?


What does the gender gap in reviews written by women compared with reviews written by men of female-authored books suggest?

How would you analyze and contextualize this information? What feminist and cultural studies ideas or theories might you turn to?

What does this information tell you about the need for gender equity in all levels of cultural production? How would you enable such change?

Will the improvement continue? Look at the 2013 numbers and decide for yourself.
CWILA Resources & Programs

Be sure to spend time on CWILA’s website where you will find program information, essays and interviews with Canadian authors and editors, ongoing events and conversations in the Canadian literary community, resources for writers, more information on the Count, and other resources for writers.

 Interviews with:
Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, John Barton, Tamara Faith Berger, Jared Bland, Christian Bök, Stephanie Bolster, Catherine Bush, Ivan Coyote, Cherie Dimaline, Bronwyn Drainie, Carole Gerson, Rachel Giese, Helen Guri, Gillian Jerome, Sheila Heti, El Jones, Scaachi Koul, Lydia Kwa, Larissa Lai, Ross Leckie, Alex Leslie, Martin Levin, Katherine Leyton, Michael Lista, Donato Mancini, Daphne Marlatt, Mark Medley, Laura Moss, Jane Munro, Cecily Nicholson, Donna Bailey Nurse, Meredith Quartermain, Sina Queyras, Shane Rhodes, Lisa Robertson, Mary Schendlinger, Anakana Schofield, Tracy Sherlock, Sue Sinclair, Jillian and Mariko Tamaki, Tara Lee Morin, Trish Salah and Casey Plett, Ayelet Tsabari, Shannon Webb-Campbell and Sue Sinclair, Alana Wilcox, Jessica Duffin Wolfe, Rita Wong, and more coming online all the time!

Counting is one way of comparing one set of incidents against another. Counting can be seen as another way of telling a story.
— Madeleine Thien, “Seventeen thoughts on the question of numbers”

Essays (selected list):
Helen Guri, “Processing Negatives: A Big Picture of Poetry Reviewing.”
Laura Moss, “Measuring Support on the “Literary Assembly Line.”
Erin Moure, “Circles of Intimacy: Translation, Corporeality, Responsibility: Mi Versión.”
Sue Sinclair, “A Philosophy of Criticism.”
Erin Wunker, “Reflections On Risk and “Running with the Pack.”
Jan Zwicky, “The Ethics of the Negative Review.”

The numbers and charts… tell a compelling story about the Canadian literary climate for women. Underneath those numbers, however, are social patterns and practices whose influences weave a complicated net.
— Lorri Neilsen Glenn, “Context for the CWILA Numbers”

Read the interview at CWILA.com: "From our Critics-in-Residence: A Conversation Between Shannon Webb-Campbell and Sue Sinclair"
Looking Toward the Future: Counting for Race?

We are not numbers. But we are using numbers to understand a system that we have created. The numbers help us see the ways in which our system is a meritocracy, a celebration of great literature, and the ways in which it is not.
— Madeleine Thien, “Seventeen thoughts on the question of numbers”

Working in small groups, read aloud Larissa Lai's response to Gillian Jerome's question about the nature of power in the literary field and then read Madeleine Thien's "Seventeen thoughts on the question of numbers," originally presented as part of the panel: "CWILA and the Challenge of Counting for Race."

Discuss the following questions:

1. What are some of the concerns that Lai expresses with regards to the CWILA Count and what she terms “fast information”? What do you think might be conceived as ‘slow information’? How do Thien's "Seventeen thoughts" function in this regards? Are these texts "fast" or "slow"? Explain.

2. How do Lai and Thien discuss issues of systemic discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality? Where do their analyses converge and how do they diverge?

3. How do Lai and Thien each answer the question of whether CWILA should count for race? What are their concerns? Consider the rhetorical forms in which the speakers are communicating. How is the context of responding in interview distinct from that of the individual address? What is made possible by each distinct form?

4. Should CWILA count for ethnicity, race or, perhaps, racism? And are there other counts that could profitably be done?

Well, I think the methodology of counting is fraught. And then the methodology of racial categorization in fraught. As in the methodology of gender categorization. So you’re already in a swamp! — Larissa Lai
Feminist Social Justice Advocacy In the Arts and Beyond

Consider becoming a member of CWILA and volunteering for next year’s Count!

Social Justice@UBC Networks:
- Canadian Women in the Literary Arts: A Social Justice @UBC Research Network
- Ecologies of Social Difference
- Indigenous Pedagogies: Decolonizing Educative Praxis and the Complex Work of Social Justice
- Rethinking Responses and Responsibilities in River Regions: Exploring Love, Loss and Lament from Critical Creative Empathy Perspectives and Arts-Based Political Practices in Global-Local Contexts

Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum?

Less than 4% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 76% of the nudes are female.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS
CWILA calls for essays, on any topic relating to literary arts, by female Canadian writers, including poets, novelists, playwrights, storytellers, scholars.

LEARN MORE
Why are women still being reviewed less? Why are women still writing fewer reviews? Why are women in virtually every public domain still less inclined to speak up?” What do David Gilmour’s comments and the response generated in the media tell you about discrimination in the university and beyond? How are misogyny, heteronormativity, homophobia, and racism evidenced in these conversations? And how do feminist, queer, critical race, and Indigenous studies form part of the response?

You may also choose to discuss the larger cultural context in which CWILA’s work takes place. How and why is CWILA’s work relevant to contemporary culture in the university and beyond? What other forms and modes of activism could be helpful in addressing discrimination based on gender, race, and sexuality? What other critical social justice issues need to be addressed?

Be sure to refer to Handout 3: Assignment Outline and take note of the required texts to be addressed in your essay.

Your response will involve researching the media response to Gilmour's comments with specific attention to CWILA. You may also find it useful to refer to some of the links listed on CWILA's webpage under "Media Coverage".

Canadian novelist and University of Toronto instructor, David Gilmour, Shelf Esteem interview, September 26, 2013:

“I’m not interested in teaching books by women. Virginia Woolf is the only writer that interests me as a woman writer, so I do teach one of her short stories. But once again, when I was given this job I said I would only teach the people that I truly, truly love. Unfortunately, none of those happen to be Chinese, or women. Except for Virginia Woolf. And when I tried to teach Virginia Woolf, she’s too sophisticated, even for a third-year class. Usually at the beginning of the semester a hand shoots up and someone asks why there aren’t any women writers in the course. I say I don’t love women writers enough to teach them, if you want women writers go down the hall. What I teach is guys. Serious heterosexual guys. F. Scott Fitzgerald, Chekhov, Tolstoy. Real guy-guys. Henry Miller. Philip Roth.”
Works Cited:


