
Middle School Students as Social Theorists: Using a Short-Term Unit to Engage Students in Thinking Critically about Gender

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Because middle school is a time of identity development, it may also be an appropriate time to focus on students' conceptions of social roles. This article examines a unit focused on gender roles taught to a group of seventh grade language arts students at a private, urban school. The students deconstructed and reconstructed their gender schemas, gained awareness of gender as a lens, and began to question the adequacy of the male/female binary model. The findings suggest that ideas typically found in college-level courses may have appropriate applications in classrooms of much younger students.

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Introduction

Early adolescence is a time of identity development (Bandura, 1991; Erikson, 1963). Because of the developmental needs of early adolescents, middle schools may be appropriate venues to explore questions of identity development. While gender is often looked at as a variable in predicting students' performance or other outcomes (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006; Hyde, Fennema & Lamon, 1990; Hyde & Linn, 1988), few researchers have studied how the middle school curriculum can help students question ideas about gender roles. Curricula that challenge societal norms around gender are becoming increasingly present in college classrooms (Crocco, 1997; hooks, 2000; Scott, 1999) and are even beginning to appear in high school classrooms (Martin, 2005). However, middle school students do not often engage in thinking around these topics.

Middle school may be an especially appropriate setting to look at gender. Researchers suggest that gender stereotypes are present in children as young as 24 months of age (Levy, 1999, in Hyde & Lindberg, 2007) and continue through elementary school (Teig & Susskind, 2008). Awareness of the inequity involved in gender relations increases as children enter and move through adolescence (Neff, Cooper, & Woodruff, 2007). Therefore, students in middle schools are aware of gender expectations and are becoming aware of the impact of gender in society. Further, Hill and Lynch (1983) argue that adolescents are likely to exhibit stricter adherence to gender norms. Finally, because adolescence is a time of questioning (Erikson, 1963), it may be especially appropriate to engage middle school students in questioning a concept with which they already have some familiarity. Such questioning can take place as a result of individual conversations and relationships, but it can also take place as a result of a systematic curriculum. A multifaceted curriculum can provide what Chapman (1997) called “mirrors and windows” (p. 56) that allow students to broaden their perceptions of what is considered normal, what is acceptable, and what is possible.

The purpose of this article is to report on a curriculum unit delivered to a seventh-grade language arts class that was designed to challenge students’ assumptions about gender and gender roles. I wondered whether changes would be evident in students’ thinking about gender and gender roles over the course of the instructional unit and through the remainder of the academic year. If so, it might support further study on the appropriateness of middle school as a venue for teaching explicitly about gender and gender roles. Further, if perceptions were altered in my middle school class, it might indicate that such teaching inclusive of gender equity discussions should be taking place in a more systematic manner.

Underlying Theories

Schema theory holds that humans tend to classify individuals into groups based on previous experiences (Axelrod, 1973). Individuals try to fit new information into their existing schemas rather than creating new schemas (Axelrod). Thus, once an individual has created a schema, it is likely that he or she will add information to that schema, reinforcing his or her existing idea about how the world works. One of the first classifications that an individual learns to use is gender (Levy & Haaf, 1994). Gender schemas function to preserve traditional gender roles because individuals continually add new information to their existing gender schema, thus validating the gender roles (Hyde & Lindberg, 2007).

Gender schemas are culturally transmitted (Hyde & Lindberg, 2007). Children absorb information about gender from their parents, the media, and the world around them. By the age of 3, children express disapproval toward peers who play with gender-inappropriate toys (Bussey & Bandura, 1992, in Hyde & Lindberg), demonstrating that even at this young age children have developed

cohesive gender schemas. In expressing disapproval, children not only demonstrate their existing gender schema, but they also show the tendency to fit new information into that schema rather than reforming it.

In modern U.S. society, a gender schema allows a person to assess information easily in terms of a binary relationship allowing only two choices: male and female (Hawkesworth, 1997). This binary model assumes that all things are able to be categorized as *either* male *or* female and that nothing could be categorized as *both* male *and* female *or* *neither* male *nor* female. Because individuals tend to remember information that supports their existing gender schema and by the age of 3 children have already begun to construct a binary gender schema, it follows that by middle school students will have fairly strict binary gender schemas in place. This theory is supported by Hill and Lynch (1983), whose gender intensification hypothesis holds that adolescents behave inflexibly in terms of gender as they begin to behave more as adults around them.

It is important to note that gender is socially constructed. Something that is constructed can also be deconstructed and reconstructed. Rather than deciding on a binary gender framework, multiple genders can be incorporated; in addition, rather than linking sex and gender, the two can be separated. In implementing the unit that is the focus of this article, I hoped to engage my students in thinking and reading that would cause them to question the adequacy of their existing gender schemas. In this article, I report on the changes that were evident in students' thinking about gender and gender roles over the course of the instructional unit.

Contextualizing the Unit

This research was conducted at the private, pre-kindergarten through eighth grade private urban school where I taught fifth through eighth grades. This school is tuition-based rather than government-supported. Murphy School (pseudonym) was founded on progressive ideals and is located in a Midwestern urban center in the United States. The facility itself was built over forty years ago and has had few updates, but the school provides an excellent framework in human rights education and non-violent conflict resolution to all its students. Further, curriculum units are integrated across subjects, and a sense of community pervades the school. Overall, Murphy School attracts families who are looking for a distinctive educational experience.

Murphy School serves approximately 160 students. The students all commute to the school; some are driven a full hour each way to attend Murphy School, indicating the strength of the school's reputation. The student population at Murphy School is very diverse. The students are majority African American and Caucasian (including many biracial children who identify as both African American and Caucasian), with approximately 10% of the student body

comprised of Latino/a and Asian students. The school serves roughly equal numbers of boys and girls. While a majority of the students identify as Christians, there are a few identified Jews, Muslims, Wiccans, Atheists, and Hindus also in attendance. The school's tuition is much lower than most private schools in the area and a majority of the student body receives some form of financial assistance, including full scholarships.

Most of the 25 faculty at Murphy School are certified teachers, and many of the uncertified teachers are pursuing teacher licensure. Members of the faculty identify as Black, White, and biracial and as Christians, Jews, Muslims, and atheists. The faculty at this school is comprised of about twice as many females as males.

Kindergarten through fifth grade teachers tend to teach a single group of students each year, similar to many early elementary school teachers in public schools. On the other hand, many middle-grades teachers have a homeroom class but are also responsible for instruction in multiple classes. Thus, many middle-school teachers encounter a group of students one year and teach that same group of students during the following year or even years.

This was the case in this research: I was teaching seventh grade language arts to a group of students I had taught during their fifth grade year. Our relationship was in its third year when this unit was implemented. This repeated exposure built a trusting relationship, which I believe affected the level of openness in the classroom. In addition, Murphy School's administrators are explicit in allowing faculty the freedom to incorporate human rights themes into the teaching of subject matter as much as possible.

The seventh grade class that participated in this curriculum unit was composed of 14 students. All 14 students took part in all of the unit's activities. However, one parent did not want his or her child's artifacts to be considered for this article. Therefore, for the remainder of this article, *the class* will refer to those 13 students who were granted parent consent and provided their own student assent to allow their artifacts to be considered for the research project. Seven students self-identified as Black, five as White, and one as biracial. The class was composed of eight female students and five male students. Students identified as Christian, Catholic, Jewish, and atheist. The students' parents' occupations included retail clerk, social worker, automotive assembler, and lawyer. This demographic information is provided as descriptive rather than as the basis for analysis; because the participant group was so small, no cross-cultural comparisons will be made.

I was also a participant in the research, occupying the role of both teacher and researcher. I was in my third year of teaching in the school, and my fifth overall. I am a White female who was raised in a suburban setting, but chose to teach in an urban area. It was because of my belief in the progressive ideals of Murphy School that I first came to work there. My teaching style, thoughts, and personality are all embedded in the way the unit unfolded. My role as teacher, participant, and researcher presents possible challenges to the validity of the

findings. In addition, I began with the assumption that my students would be able to reconceptualize gender. This assumption was based in my prior interactions with this particular group of students.

In order to minimize such challenges, I used a case study methodology that included member-checking and analysis of the data by an outside educator (Cresswell, 2005). As I prepared for the week of teaching, I obtained informed consent from all participating students and their parents. As the week unfolded, I wrote down insightful comments that were made during discussions and kept notes to myself about the mood of the classroom and other contextual factors. I also transcribed lists that were made on the board. Each of the individual student's writing pieces was photocopied. After the week ended, I shared discussion notes, student writing, and transcriptions with another educator. We analyzed the data in conjunction with one another.

Implementing the Unit

Lois Gould's *The Story of X* (1972), a short allegory about a child raised without gender, was used as the core text for the unit. I chose to use this text for several reasons, including its emphasis on childhood, which I thought would be salient to seventh graders, and its length, which made it appropriate for a short-term unit. This reading was supplemented with daily journaling, sharing, and discussion. A short overview of the five days of the unit is provided below.

Monday

Students began examining the social construction of gender in society. The students made individual lists of what they considered to be *boy* and *girl* characteristics. After the students created their individual lists, the students added items to either the *boy* column or the *girl* column of a class list. Once the students finished adding items to the board, they looked at the view they had constructed of girls and boys, which closely reconstructed stereotypical views of girls and boys (Pipher, 1994; Pollack, 1998). Many students commented on how shocked they were at what appeared in the class's list. Perhaps in response to the cohesive role specified for girls, Georgia made an addition to her list. Under the *girl* category, Georgia wrote her own name and next to her name, wrote *strong*. To close out the class period, the students began reading *The Story of X*.

Tuesday

Students began the day by thinking of men and women through history. In small groups, the students created lists of famous men and women outside of the

sports or entertainment field. This activity was defined specifically to focus on individuals who are remembered for their actions, rather than for athletic performance or beauty. Again, students then added an item to either the *famous men* or the *famous women* column of a class list. Students were able to list 17 male but only 8 female figures from history, as well as 9 male but only 7 female modern political figures. The students' list paralleled the findings of Sadker and Sadker (1995). The students discussed their hypotheses about why they could recall more men's names than women's. Kendall and Katherine commented on how they wished they had been able to make evenly-matched lists.

The students then finished reading *The Story of X* out loud. A constant stream of comments and questions peppered the reading, and the class period evolved into a discussion. For example, Ebony raised the issue of gender-specific clothes, asking, "It's not like little kids need different pajamas, so why do they make boys' and girls' [pajamas] different?" Another line of questioning came around children's toys. Katherine asked, "Why aren't action figures called dolls?" causing several boys to laugh. When asked about their laughter, Adam explained that, "dolls are only meant to be pretty and not do anything, but action figures are meant to be tough." A barrage of questions came from many of the students, including, "Well, why can't a girl doll be tough?" and "What about Ken? He's meant to be handsome, not strong!" A discussion ensued and the boys came to the conclusion that dolls and action soldiers *were* different, but that either boys or girls could play with either type of toy.

Noah asked the next question: "Why are girls supposed to be so emotional and boys can't be? I get upset sometimes, too, but I can't tell anyone..." After a pause, various students began offering their opinions on the matter. The class's consensus was that because men fought in wars they had to learn how to control their emotions and they trained their sons to do the same.

As the students left the classroom, they were abuzz with conversation. A particularly exciting aspect of this day was the reports from other teachers that the students had spent the rest of the day discussing issues surrounding gender in later classes.

Wednesday

Students examined their own personal social construction of gender. Each student wrote down his or her own sex and gender characteristics. From there, each student wrote about whether or not the two constructs matched. Students were invited to share their perspectives. Robert believed that his sex and gender were well matched. Nicole believed that her sex and gender were poorly matched. The remainder of the students expressed an opinion somewhere between the two analyses.

The students then began discussing their questions. Katherine had done some research the night before and was curious about the terms *hermaphrodite*

and *transgender*. Sarah asked whether or not being transgender was the same as being gay. Several students shared stories of family members or family friends who were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Overall, the students discussed a variety of topics that normally would not be discussed in a middle-school classroom. The subjects were introduced simply and calmly, and the students responded to the subjects in a mature manner.

One final question brought many replies and answers from the students. Georgia asked why she was called a tomboy just because she liked sports. She then said, "And if I have to be a *tomboy*, then why doesn't Ryan have to be called a *tomgirl*?" There was quite a bit of laughter, and Ryan was visibly embarrassed. I asked Ryan if he liked being laughed at, and he quietly replied, "No." When his classmates heard this, most of them stopped laughing and became serious. I asked Ryan what he thought Georgia meant when she called him a tomgirl. He said, "I guess that she was saying that since I don't really like to play rough and I like to look nice, I'm more like a girl's gender than a boy's." I asked Georgia if that was what she had intended. She nodded and apologized. Ryan forgave her, and the class entered a discussion about why tomboy is part of the lexicon, but tomgirl is not. The following exchange ensued:

Sarah: It's funny, because back in the day, women had to wear dresses and skirts and stuff. Now, women can wear pants if they want, and it's good, because women are freer. The weird thing is, men aren't any freer. They still can only wear pants, just like they could only wear pants before.

Adam: Yeah, but that's because pants are easier to move around in, so why would anyone want to wear a skirt if they had a choice?

Several students nod in agreement

Nicole: No, it's about more than comfort and convenience. Wearing a skirt is... something that makes someone a girl. And wearing pants is like a guy thing to do. Women can wear pants or a skirt because it's ok to make yourself tougher and more like a guy. Guys can't wear a skirt, though, because no one would want to be more girly.

Margaret: It's not about being tough or girly. It's about having power. Men have power already, so why would they want to be like a woman and have less power?

The students appeared to be swayed by Margaret's argument, and most agreed with her. As the class period ended, Margaret asked if she could bring in an article the next day to share.

Thursday

Students examined the social construction of gender in literature. Individually, the students read two picture books in the classroom and evaluated the representation of gender in those books. When there were 15 minutes left in the class period, Margaret shared her article. The article, from a popular magazine for teenage girls, reported on female genital mutilation in Africa. She introduced the article by saying that scary things happened to women, too. She went on to list date rape and sexual abuse as some of the scary things that affected women and then read a one-page account of a young woman who was forcibly mutilated. After she finished the article, there was a long silence in the classroom. Eventually, the students began to discuss how lucky Americans are, as well as the unfairness of this practice. At the time, I did not address the ethnocentric perspective that this conversation could have perpetuated, though the students' social studies teacher and I spoke about it and she implemented instruction regarding North African women later in the year. Aiesha and Nicole both spoke of women's lives in other countries. The students left the classroom quietly on Thursday.

Friday

Students began the class by evaluating their own thoughts on gender and gender roles. Students responded to the journal topic, "Has your thinking about gender changed this week? If so, how? If not, why not?" After allowing time to free-write, I asked each student to come up to the board and put a checkmark in the column that best represented how they felt: either "Yes, my thoughts about gender have changed this week," or "No, my thoughts about gender have not changed this week." Of the 13 students, eight indicated that their thinking had changed, while five indicated that their thinking had not changed. Of the girls participating in the research, 37.5% reported a change in their thinking. All of the boys reported a change in their thinking.

Students then shared some of the ways that they felt their thinking had changed. Kendall shared, "Before this week, I never really thought of the fact that girls can be boyish, but boys can't be girlish." Adam said:

Now I know that sex and gender are two different things. I used to think that they were the same thing. I now know that gender is how you act. I also now know that people are afraid of kids acting like another gender. Also that it is socially acceptable to be a 'tomboy' but not to be a 'tomgirl,'... because boys already hold more power, so why would you want to go down on the power scale?

As the class period ended, I thanked the students for their seriousness and attention during the week, and asked if they had any thoughts they wanted to share before the weekend came. Robert said that he was going to ask his mom,

“Mom, who do you think has more power in our house: you, or dad?” He laughed and said, “I can tell you what: my mom knows all about women holding power!” This light-hearted comment left us all feeling positive in wrapping up the week’s activities.

Further Analysis

After the conclusion of the unit, another teacher and I analyzed the documents collected over the course of the unit. We read and reread the documents individually, making notes about themes. We then compared our themes and found evidence for five themes of change in students’ thinking. These themes are explained in the sections below. In the interest of space, not all of the evidence appears. We chose the strongest pieces of evidence for each category, while simultaneously making sure that each student’s voice was heard at least once in this article.

Recognizing Previous Assumptions

A very prevalent theme in students’ reflections was students realizing the assumptions about gender made by society. Six students, one boy and five girls, expressed this theme in writing and in speech. Noah revealed, “I realized all the assumptions that were made about gender. We all have a lot of the opposite gender’s characteristics.” In their comments, Margaret and Aeisha both used the word “mean” in describing how society defines gender. Finally, Ebony commented, “I never really thought about how much gender roles are cemented into our minds and our society. Overall, the six student comments that fell into this category indicated a level of surprise about the cohesiveness of gender stereotypes and about the infiltration of those stereotypes into individuals’ minds.

Rejection of Society’s Right to Define Gender

In the previous category of comments, the students began to realize how congruent their thoughts were with society’s assumptions about gender roles. As the students continued thinking about gender schema, they began to resist society’s gender stereotyping. Two boys and six girls expressed ideas that fell into this category. Four of those students, two males and two females, made comments similar to Sarah’s. In discussing the match between her sex and her gender on Wednesday, Sarah said “... and nor do I care about society and what they think a female should and should not be.” In responding to the discussion of transgender individuals that took place on Wednesday, Katherine said, “It’s cruel to make people pretend to be something that they are not and do not want to be.”

Katherine's comment indicates that she was no longer willing to accept society's strict gender guidelines. Overall, the students whose comments fell into this category explained that now that they had become aware of the expectations society has about gender they were willing to challenge them.

Acceptance of Those with "Other-Gendered" Traits

In the first category of comments, students realized how congruent their thoughts were with society's assumptions about gender roles, while in the second category of comments, they began to resist society's gender stereotyping. This third category represents another change in students' thinking: acceptance of individuals whose behaviors crossed gender lines. Six students, four girls and two boys, expressed acceptance of other-gendered traits in others. Robert commented, "People should be what they want to be, not who others choose for them to be." In this comment, he rejects society's right to set up a strict binary gender system.

Just as there were six students who expressed comfort with others exhibiting characteristics associated with the other gender, there were also six students, split evenly between boys and girls, who expressed comfort with their own behavior crossing gender boundaries. The three boys were less wordy than their female counterparts, as typified by Robert: "I do have some girl qualities. I'm sensitive, I have long hair, and I cry easily." The girls' comments were similar in content to the boys', though they typically were more verbose in their explanations. Georgia expressed a rejection of the view that only boys are strong, writing, "I'm strong and it doesn't mean I'm not girly." Overall, the girls and boys represented in this category demonstrated an increased level of acceptance of personality and personal characteristics in themselves that blurred traditional gender boundaries.

Expanded Perspective About Gender

A theme present in three responses was surprise at the importance of gender in other societies, as well as the strength of gender stereotyping through American history. Two girls commented on the lack of change in thinking since the mid-century. Ebony wrote, "I didn't know that gender roles had remained the same since like back in the 50s. I thought it would change as the years go by because people change." One male student responded to the article shared about female genital mutilation, writing, "I thought that the guys have it bad in the U.S., but compared to the other parts of the world where women are treated horribly...." Here, Marcus was able to move past his previous view, that of women having the upper hand in our society, to a view that some women are struggling with basic human rights.

Increased Awareness of Gender in Daily Life

This final theme was expressed repeatedly through student comments. Three boys and six girls expressed this theme. Two boys commented on how often they noticed gender around them. Marcus wrote, "I kind of think about gender roles, because when I look around today I see how many young men are put in jail for hitting young women. When a woman hits a man, the woman doesn't go to jail." Marcus's comments show that a gender has become a lens through which he can view events around him and try to make sense of the world. Six female students expressed a new awareness of gender. Kendall said, "I now don't say things I would have earlier and try to be sensitive to not contributing to other two-side stereotypes." Finally, Georgia wrote of the need to translate her new way of thinking into action, writing, "Thinking about gender roles this week makes me want to go on a protest or write a letter but I don't know who I would write it to." After sharing her comment with the class, the students brainstormed possible protests that they could undertake and reached a consensus that their form of a protest would be to point out gender stereotyping wherever they saw it.

The Remainder of the School Year

While the curriculum unit lasted only a week, the students continued to discuss gender throughout the five months remaining in the school year. During the class's discussions about Laurie Halse Anderson's *Fever 1793* (2000), several students brought up the feasibility of Mattie's mother actually running a coffee house. They were skeptical that a woman could have held such a public profile in colonial Philadelphia. A second discussion occurred during the class's reading of Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962). The students commented on being glad that a young woman who excelled in math and science was being shown. In addition, they commented on the rarity of a character like Meg's mother, who was both smart and beautiful. Finally, the students raised the issue of gender again in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. They believed that Juliet represented early feminist thought. They were especially surprised at her reply to her father that marriage is *an honor that I dream not of*. The students expressed pleasure at the fact that she was acting like an obedient daughter while really finding a way to assert her own thoughts. These continued conversations suggest that the unit affected the way that these students saw the world.

Conclusion

The goal of this unit was to engage students in evaluating their existing ideas about gender. Overall, it is clear that this goal was reached. All of the male students reported a major change in their thinking, while 37.5% of the female students did so. It is interesting to compare the percentages of boys and girls who felt their thinking had been changed. These results contradict the findings of Katz and Ksansnak (1994) who found that girls were consistently more flexible in their view of gender than were boys, particularly heading into adolescence. These results also seem to contradict Bartini (2006) who found that neither girls nor boys were likely to exhibit gender-role intensification.

In this context, the low percentage of girls could indicate that the materials were ineffective in reaching the female students. It could also indicate that many of the female students were already aware of gender roles. In a debriefing conversation with the students, the second explanation seems to be supported. Sarah remarked, "I was already aware of the limitations society places on me merely for being female. I am consciously seeking ways to make sure I get what I need even though I am a female." Margaret, Nicole, and Kendall expressed agreement. This exchange helped to convince me that at least some of the female students in the class had previously thought about gender schema and had already begun to reject societal divisions about gender and behavior.

It is also clear from analyzing the students' comments and writings that they began to reconstruct gender schema along alternative lines. While most students remained entrenched in thinking of gender in a binary model, they became much less strict about the boundaries between males and females. For example, many of the students commented that they now accepted those who behaved in ways traditionally associated with people of the opposite gender. Many students were also able to see traits of the opposite gender in themselves. On the whole, students expressed concern about the inadequacy of traditional gender schema and constructed their own gender schemas that were more flexible. Moving into the future, these students may be more accepting of those whose behavior does not conform to traditional gender expectations. While the participants themselves were a diverse group, because there were so few in the group, it seems inappropriate to engage in cross-cultural comparisons. However, future research should certainly examine the role played by differences such as race and class on students' understanding of gender.

My research provides an example of the appropriateness and effectiveness of teaching explicitly about gender and gender schemas in middle school settings. My students dealt with a host of issues some would deem inappropriate for students their age. However, some of these seventh-grade students began to incorporate gender as a lens, while others strengthened their gender lens. Students who had never before questioned gender assumptions began to do so; some began to question the adequacy of the male/female binary model. It appears that these students began to approach what Katz (1996) refers

to as gender-flexibility or the ability to understand and look beyond cultural norms regarding gender.

It is important to note the centrality of context in this unit. Again, as teacher, I had a three-year relationship with a small group of students at a school whose mission included social justice. I was freed of the restraints of standardized curriculum and the type of testing associated with No Child Left Behind and other mandates. Thus, teachers should attend to three issues before embarking on a similar curriculum. First, teachers must ensure that there is a high level of trust between the teacher and all students and among all students. Without the freedom to speak controversial thoughts aloud, this unit would have been less successful. Second, teachers should establish ground rules within their classrooms to allow for open discussions. These ground rules can certainly be created by the students, but teachers should ensure that students have multiple opportunities to practice these rules in low-impact conversations before beginning a unit like this. Finally, teachers must explicitly teach the students how to deal with the conflict that will inevitably rise during honest, questioning conversations. Similar to the interaction between Georgia and Ryan, honest questions can lead to hurt feelings. Teachers must ensure that their students are able to learn and question together while still ensuring safety for all. These materials certainly need to be implemented by a thoughtful teacher in a respectful environment, but within this classroom context evidence points to the ability of middle school students to deal maturely with sensitive material. Further, my findings imply that it is appropriate to build on adolescents' natural tendency to question social norms.

It is important to note that there are certainly limitations to this research. First, this article reports specifically on students' self-reporting of their own attitudes, feelings, and beliefs. It is possible that students presented some aspects of their thinking while keeping other aspects private. In addition, the students' changes in thinking as the unit ended were discussed; follow-up research would help to contextualize the effectiveness of this unit in helping students question assumptions surrounding gender. Finally, my own positionality as researcher, teacher, and participant may limit the findings of this research.

My research demonstrates that early adolescents can be engaged in developing a critical viewpoint about gender. Social constructs such as race and class could be similarly deconstructed. Honest, open conversations, and lessons around gender and gender schema are one place to begin the ongoing discussions that may help students think more critically about the world around them.

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