

Tasting the Flouride: The Potential of Feature Film to Enhance the Instruction of the Women's Movement

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This paper addresses our desire to learn more about effective practices with film and our aspiration to promote a more inclusive curriculum. Specifically, we consider how the film Iron Jawed Angels impacted students' understanding of the American women's movement, particularly the fight for suffrage by the National Women's Party, and examines the questions: (a) How can feature films be used to incorporate a close examination of the women's movement into the curriculum? (b) How do students make sense of the women's movement when it appears in a feature film during classroom activities? For most students, the film appeared to call important attention to women's history. The results suggest that feature films with females as main characters or with a narrative based primarily on female perspectives can be used to promote engagement with women's issues and to promote the inclusion of female perspectives in the secondary curriculum. However, we also found important differences between how female and male students responded to the film.

Introduction

In 2000, Third-Wave feminist authors Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards wrote, "For our generation, feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it; it's simply in the water" (p.17). In some ways, this observation may be seen as proof of the remarkable success of the American Women's Movement. Most young Americans today cannot imagine a world in which women could not vote, could not apply for their own credit cards, and could not wear pants to school. Young American females, in particular, have been reared to believe they are equal to their male peers and have rarely had reason to question or doubt this belief; however, the fact remains that equality between women and men has not been achieved. Thus, the words of Baumgardner and Richards must also be seen as cautionary, since existing inequalities cannot be combated if they are not recognized.

In order to strengthen the successes of the Women's Movement and continue the struggle, students must be given an opportunity to

study the progression of the modern American Women's Movement within the greater context of United States history. This type of explicit attention to the history of the Women's Movement is necessary both to develop students' historical understanding and to raise their critical consciousness. Unfortunately, insufficient attention is paid to the Women's Movement in the majority of United States history classrooms (Hickey & Kolterman, 2006; Loewen, 1995; Schafer, 2007). This topic may often be neglected due to inadequate attention in curricular resources, its secondary status within the traditional canon, and teachers' decisions to emphasize other topics. We believe these obstacles may be overcome if non-traditional resources, including feature film, are used to engage students in the topic of the American Women's Movement and women's history more generally.

This study explores the possibilities of using feature film to broach this important topic. The data that support our contentions emerged from a larger study which reflected on how students make sense of the past through feature

film. Our primary assertion is that including activities which explicitly address the Women's Movement are essential in social studies classes, and feature films can support this inclusion. The advantages for using feature films are as follows: (a) Films are powerful audiovisual stimuli, (b) Films can include multiple perspectives, and (c) Films are viewed copiously by students in their everyday lives (Marcus & Levine, 2007). At the same time, the emotional component to feature films offers the unique potential to increase students' historical empathy and to relate events of the past to their own lives in the present. It is through film that modern-day inequalities between women and men may be deconstructed. Therefore, this paper addresses our desire to learn more about effective practices with film in our aspirations to promote a more inclusive curriculum. Specifically, we consider how the film *Iron Jawed Angels* (2004) might be used to incorporate/strengthen the Women's Movement in the social studies classroom, particularly the fight for suffrage by the National Women's Party and examines these questions: (1) How can feature films be used to incorporate a close examination of the Women's Movement into the curriculum? and (2) How do students make sense of the Women's Movement when it appears in a feature film during classroom activities?

The Importance of the Women's Movement in the Curriculum

There is no doubt that major victories have emerged from the American Women's Movement, particularly for white, middle-class women; however, the gap between women and men has not been closed. In schools, gender biases persist, although they may have become subtler (Lundeberg, 1997). The social studies, for example, continue to exhibit gender disparities in curricular representation, student achievement, and instructional strategies (Hahn, Bernard-Powers, Crocco, & Woyshner, 2007). Often these biases are so entrenched

that few teachers and students even recognize them. This is largely because in the social studies, as in society, the male experience is still seen as the standard experience (Noddings, 1991/1992).

The traditional canon of United States history supports a masculine perspective. State and national standards emphasize political, economic, and military history, all institutions of which most women (and some men) have traditionally been under-represented, while they are mostly "silent" about women's history (Hahn et al., 2007). According to Noddings (1992), removing gender bias from the social studies curriculum would necessarily require "... starting with a tradition that is largely unwritten" (p. 233).

Traditional curricular materials also reflect a male standard. Under-representation in social studies textbooks continues to be a problem (Clark et al, 2005; Levstik, 1997/1998; Noddings in Ross, 1997; Wineburg, 2001; Woyshner, 2006), while researchers have also noted that efforts to include women in social studies texts are often awkward and hollow (Wineburg, 2001). Women's History is not interwoven throughout the text; rather, women are simply inserted into the traditional canon, usually in the form of representative sidebars and supplemental material. Textbooks do not become gender neutral simply because women appear more frequently than in the past (Wineburg, 2001). This failure to meaningfully integrate Women's History does nothing to encourage students to value the topic. In fact, just the opposite may occur. As Noddings (1992) observes, "Mentioning females for achievements that would go unrecognized if the subjects were males is demeaning to women and trivializes the history under examination" (pp. 230-231). Finally, even when curricular materials focusing on women's issues are available, teachers often neglect to use them (Levstik, 1997-1998).

Attempts to integrate women into the traditional narrative are insufficient in meeting the goal of a more inclusive curriculum. Women's

History must be clearly and directly discussed in the classroom. The explicit and comprehensive inclusion of Women's History into the social studies curriculum expands the opportunities for students to deepen their historical understanding. According to Wineburg (2001), historical understanding requires that a student be able to navigate "the tension between the familiar and the strange, between feelings of proximity and feelings of distance in relation to the people we seek to understand" (p. 5). Central to this task is students' abilities to determine historical significance and the development of their historical empathy.

Students need opportunities to explore the significance of women in the historical narratives they study. In order to do this well, historical events must be connected to other events and to themselves (Seixas, 1996). Thus, Women's History can be increasingly meaningful to students if they understand how Women's History is an integral part of the overall historical narrative and how Women's History is important to their lives today.

The multiple perspectives introduced through study of the Women's Movement can scaffold development of students' historical empathy through increasing what Barton and Levstik (2004) refer to as perspective recognition — one important component of historical empathy. O. L. Davis (2001) suggests that "frequently, empathy springs from considerations of more than one, even several different, points of view or perspectives" (p. 3). These multiple perspectives better support students' analyzing and interpreting historical evidence and in understanding people's actions and beliefs. There must be both a conscious effort by teachers to include these perspectives as well as the curricular materials to support these efforts to successfully include women's history in the classroom.

The Rationale for Using Film to Teach about the Women's Movement

Innovative resources, such as feature films, hold the potential to motivate students, to offer varying perspectives and points of view, and to emotionally and intellectually engage students. While some feminist scholars (Bulman, 2005) contend that feature films "tend to privilege the view of men" (p. 166), similar to textbooks, and others lament that Hollywood has been dominated by male actors, directors, writers, and producers (Gournier, 2007), there are numerous films which represent the viewpoints of women, focus their narrative and plot on female characters, and/or have female writers, producers, and directors (e.g. *Iron Jawed Angels*, *Mona Lisa Smile*, *Norma Rae*), thus providing a potentially missing or under-represented component to the social studies curriculum. And although these films may represent a small percentage of all Hollywood films, they provide an important resource.

The vast volume of students' film viewing outside of the classroom also provides a strong justification for film's inclusion in the history curriculum (Marcus & Levine, 2007).¹ Teachers cannot ignore the potential influence of students' film viewing both at home and in the theater as an influence on their understanding of the past. Many of the films students watch are based on historical events or have historical themes, and these films are a common source of historical knowledge (Davis, 2000). Although written accounts of the past are the primary medium for exploring history with adult historians, the same may not be the case for K–12 students. Students are likely to experience history embedded in visual mediums such as pictures, films, and other sources (Davis, 2000; Levstik & Barton, 1994). Teachers can equip students with the knowledge and skills to critically view history-based feature films in and out of the classroom.

Movies can function in a storytelling role which helps students recognize and analyze different narratives about the past (including

women) and examine how historical interpretations are constructed — a central exercise of effective historical thinking. Teachers accomplished in film-based instruction can show films as historical *documents* to teach about a particular time period or event as well as to teach the skills and dispositions which empower students to look at movies set in the past critically as historical documents, not just entertainment, what Marcus (2005) calls historical film literacy.

The proposal to incorporate film into the pedagogical practices of history classrooms is not new, yet the potential for feature films to influence students' historical understanding has not been fully contemplated. While there are abundant articles in social studies and history journals which review the historical accuracy of films and offer innovative pedagogical suggestions (e.g., Feinberg & Totten, 1995; Goldstein, 1995; Johnson & Vargas, 1994; Metzger, 2005) and a reputable collection of writings that discuss films as historical representations (e.g., Carnes, 1996; Davis, 2000; Rollins, 2004; Toplin, 1996), only a handful of studies provides empirical explorations of how to best use film in the classroom (Marcus, 2005, 2007; Marcus, Paxton, & Meyerson, 2006; Metzger, 2008; Meyerson & Paxton, 2007; Paxton & Meyerson, 2002; Seixas, 1994, 2007; Stoddard, 2005, 2007).

Building on this previous work, the analysis in this paper includes an examination of aspects of historical thinking that may be directly linked to a more overt inclusion of the Women's Movement in lessons, particularly when film is a pedagogical tool.

Methods²

Background

Data were collected during the 2004-2005 academic year in two high school U.S. History classrooms in southern New England. The first class was taught by Mr. Thackeray at Garfield High School, which is located in an urban dis-

trict. The second class was taught by Mr. Guthrie at Torre High School, which is located in a suburban district on the outskirts of the same urban center. Mr. Thackeray's class was a heterogeneous tenth grade class studying civics the first half of the year and U.S. History from 1830-1910 for the second half of the year. Data were collected in his class during the U.S. History portion of the course. Mr. Guthrie's class was an eleventh grade honors class covering the period 1870 to the present. Data were collected for the entire school year.³

Following Shulman's (1986) model of learning from exemplars, these teachers were chosen primarily for their expertise in utilizing film in their classrooms compared to typical teachers; they were also chosen for their significant teaching experience and dissimilar teaching contexts. Both teachers were interviewed prior to being chosen to participate to establish that they fit the participant criteria.

Both Mr. Thackeray and Mr. Guthrie had extensive teaching experience. Mr. Thackeray was in his third year as a high school teacher, yet he had spent over thirty years as a member of the Political Science faculty at a nearby university including teaching a class on *Politics and Cinema*. Mr. Guthrie was in his 25th year as a high school teacher and his 13th year as the chair of the social studies department, all at the same school. He has taught a long-running course referred to as *Film, Music, and History* and regularly conducts workshops on using film to teach history at local and national conferences.

Forty-six students participated in the study, with a total of 18 from Mr. Thackeray's class at Garfield High School⁴ and 28 from Mr. Guthrie's class at Torre High School. The students self-reported their characteristics as 48% female and 49% non-white. The participating class at Garfield High had no self-identified Caucasian students, while the class at Torre High was predominately (82%) white. English was not the native language for almost 20% of the students at Garfield High.

A total of 10 different films were shown during the school year, five by Mr. Thackeray and seven by Mr. Guthrie, with two of these films being the same.⁵ For each film, there was a pre-film, during-film, and post-film activity. The activities and film viewing lasted between three and five days for each film. *Iron Jawed Angels* was a film shown by both teachers and was used as part of a unit on the Women's Suffrage Movement taught during the spring in both classes. The film depicts the work of Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and others advocating for Women's Suffrage from the time period just prior to President Woodrow Wilson's first inauguration up until the passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920. The film mixes recreations of real events with fictional elements and stars Hillary Swank and Patrick Dempsey, among others.⁶

At Torre High, the film was shown in conjunction with a unit on progressivism and the suffragettes. Prior to viewing the film, the students completed a series of readings on the suffragettes and researched the life of one suffragette (student choice). Mr. Guthrie previewed the film through an extensive introduction, and he stopped the film several times to provide "historical context" via lecture and discussion. The summative assignment for students was to write an editorial about whether the suffragettes should protest in front of the White House during war time (WWI) — a scene powerfully portrayed in the film. These lessons and the film viewing lasted for five class periods.

Similar to Mr. Guthrie, Mr. Thackeray at Garfield High School asked students to complete research prior to watching the film. He took students to the library to conduct Internet research on Alice Paul. Like their peers at Torre High, the resources provided to the students presented a similar narrative to the film.

Finally, Mr. Thackeray seized upon a significant scene in the film, a 1913 protest march in Washington D.C. supporting a woman's right to vote, and created a class activity on that scene. After viewing this scene, but prior

to finishing the film, students were asked to make protest signs they could use to march in the parade of 1913 as shown in the film. Mr. Thackeray then gathered the students and their signs and paraded them to other teachers' rooms and to the faculty lunch room. The activities and film viewing lasted for four class periods.

Data Collection

The analysis for this paper is derived from the data compiled from three instruments: surveys, interviews, and in-class film assessments. A team of experts including history professors, education professors, pre-service teachers, and participant teachers from the study reviewed and modified all data collection instruments. The instruments were then piloted and revised again.

The pre- and post-surveys and interviews primarily provided background demographic data. The central data for the analysis were obtained from in-class film assessments which collected quantitative and qualitative data to explore how students made sense of the past through film. At the completion of the unit during which each film was shown, students completed the film assessment tool and responded to eleven prompts which instructed students (a) to choose a point on a scale ranging from 1 (completely not true) to 5 (completely true) and (b) to explain their choice in the form of a written response. The prompts included statements such as "I learned about history from this film," "This film confirms information I already knew," and, "In my opinion, this film is historically accurate and trustworthy."

Quantitative data from the film assessments were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were generated for all film assessment prompts, and the data were also analyzed to check for statistically significant differences — specifically for this analysis, differences based on gender (see Appendix A for the complete film assessment tool).

Qualitative data from these three prompts were then coded using a constant comparative method (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The students' responses were first coded deductively (Miles & Huberman, 1994) by placing responses into broad categories within the research framework. For example, for the prompt "This film contains information I already knew," responses were coded as "Yes, the film contained information I knew," and "No, the film did not contain information I knew." Within these broader categories, the responses were then coded inductively (Miles & Huberman, 1994) allowing the responses to dictate categories and patterns. For example, the yes and no responses about already knowing information in the film were broken down into general statements ("I didn't know anything."), statements that specified the information learned in the film ("I didn't know that these women had done so much for this to happen."), statements that specified prior knowledge that was also in the film ("I had previous background knowledge on the hunger strike/imprisonment of Alice Paul."), and statements that contend their prior knowledge was enhanced, clarified, or strengthened by the film ("I know that it was hard for women to get the vote, but I didn't know it was that difficult until I actually saw it"). A similar coding procedure was used for each prompt.

Results

In the initial analysis of the data, student responses to *Iron Jawed Angels* immediately stood out from the other films. *Iron Jawed Angels* was rated as the most trustworthy and accurate feature film seen during the school year by students in both classrooms; it was chosen as the film "closest to the way it actually happened"; it was cited as the source of their greatest knowledge about the subject during the unit, and it was revealed by the teachers as the film students reacted to in the most positive manner.

As we will show below, for most students the film appeared to call important attention to Women's History. The results are encouraging and suggest that feature films with females as main characters or with a narrative based primarily on female perspectives can be used to promote engagement with women's issues and to promote the inclusion of female perspectives in the secondary curriculum.

Students at both Torre High and Garfield High reported that *Iron Jawed Angels* was the most historically accurate and trustworthy film among all films shown in class. On the film assessment, the mean for *Iron Jawed Angels* across both schools was a 4.28/5 responding to the statement, "In my opinion, this film is historically accurate and trustworthy" using 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. At the end of the school year, students were asked to consider all films used during the year and choose the one they believed was the "closest to the way it actually happened." *Iron Jawed Angels* was selected by more students at both schools than any other film. Students cited several reasons for choosing this film as accurate and trustworthy, including statements about the film reinforcing or supporting their previous knowledge and other sources of information during the unit and that the film was based on "real" events and "actual" people. The teachers and students reported additional dimensions of the film such as the film containing known actors, well-liked music, and a modern style of filmmaking as also contributing to its trustworthiness among students. The perceived trustworthiness of *Iron Jawed Angels* by students (however flawed the reasoning may be), combined with the film's focus on women and women's rights, led us to hypothesize about the potential of the film to enhance their awareness of Women's History.

What emerged from the findings as significant were the ways in which students believed they "learned" from the film and thus considered the film as evidence of the past and the ways in which the film promoted the development of historical empathy. We draw from

Barton and Levstik’s (2004) notion of empathy, which includes the facets of perspective recognition and caring as crucial elements. Perspective recognition involves explaining the actions of people in the past by understanding their perspectives and placing their actions in historical context. This is coupled with the notion of caring, an emotional connection to the past. Barton and Levstik (2004) report:

For most students, ... motivation to learn about the past centered on exploration of the “border areas” of human experience — times when people were forced to respond to fear, discrimination, or tragedy, or when they displayed extraordinary bravery or outrageous humanity. A key element of students’ interest was the emotional relevance of these topics to their own lives. (p. 231)

The Women’s Movement, in general, as well as the events depicted in *Iron Jawed Angels*, specifically, is particularly qualified as such an area.

We analyzed the results of the film assessment prompts as a whole as well as by school, racial identification, and gender. While the differences between student responses at the two schools and between racial groups did not reveal statistically significant results, comparing the results by gender among student responses to three prompts from the *Iron Jawed Angels* assessment tool garnered our attention. Females were more likely to suggest that the topic and perspectives of Women’s Suffrage and Women’s Rights were familiar to them and that they personally related to the film. Table 1 shows the results for the three questions by gender.

Table 1

Difference by Gender for Responses to Iron Jawed Angels from Both Classes

1 = strongly disagree – 5 = strongly agree

	Male n = 22 ⁷		Female n = 21	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
This film confirms information I already knew.	2.73	1.20	3.67*	1.28
I am able to personally relate to this film.	1.86	1.13	2.81*	2.81
The film presented a view/perspective of certain historical events and/or time periods that were new to me.	3.81	1.17	2.95*	1.50

* p < .05

To confirm that these responses were unique to *Iron Jawed Angels*, we conducted the same analyses for all films used during the year. There were no other statistically significant results by gender for any of the film assessment's eleven questions on any of the other films.

Learning about Women's Suffrage from the Film

The first prompt with a statistically significant difference between males and females asked whether the film contained information they already knew. Females reported knowing more information in the film than males. Of the male responses, 68% reported little or no prior knowledge of information in the film. Among the males reporting little or no prior knowledge, some responses included very general statements such as follows:

- I didn't know much information in the first place.
- I knew very little coming into the film.

Others in this majority cited some of the specific information they learned including:

- [I learned] the way some women went on hunger strikes for the right to vote.
- I didn't know that these women had done so much for this to happen.

The male responses indicate they were not familiar with (or did not remember) the Women's Suffrage Movement or the significant historical figures in the movement.

For the female students, only 19% said they had little or no prior knowledge of the events and issues depicted in the film. For example, one reported: "I had little [to] no knowledge of this before the movie."

Meanwhile, 33% of female students said they had prior knowledge of the events and/or people in the film such as those who said:

- I had previous background knowledge on the hunger strike/imprisonment of Alice Paul.
- I already knew about the organizations and how often women's cries for rights were ignored

Finally, 38% of the female students said they had prior knowledge that was enhanced, clarified, or strengthened by the film. For example, students reported:

- I knew of some of the women who fought for Women's Rights and what they did to get their message to others, but I did not know many of the women in the film and how endangering their actions were to themselves.
- I know that it was hard for women to get the vote, but I didn't know it was that difficult until I actually saw it.
- From what I learned from the history books, this movie just put the icing on the cake to what I knew.

We did not test students' content knowledge prior to watching the film, so we cannot confirm the actual pre- post-differences in knowledge about the Women's Suffrage Movement between the female and male students. However, our data show females reported knowing more than their male counterparts, and while both had their knowledge enhanced and the film built on prior knowledge, women had more prior knowledge on which to build. The degree to which both female and male students "trusted" the film, combined with the males' lack of prior knowledge and the females' varied prior knowledge, influenced the way

students learned from the film and used the film as evidence of the past.

The results support Wineburg's (2001) conclusions that males are not familiar with women's place in the past and that females are only slightly more aware, though we did discern an important difference between the males and females. In another study, Levstik (1997-1998) reported that middle school students had limited knowledge, particularly about violence associated with the suffrage movement — precisely what both males and females in our study reported learning about from *Iron Jawed Angels*.

Personally Relating to the Film

The second prompt indicates differences between how females and males personally related to the film. Interestingly, neither females nor males established strong personal connections with the film with females essentially neutral (2.81/5.0) and males not personally relating to the film (1.86/5.0). Thus, while students and teachers reported that both females and males enjoyed watching the film and believed the history portrayed in the film to be accurate, they failed to develop strong personal connections to the film as a whole.

The majority of the males' responses were embedded in their personal experiences, or lack of experiences, with several of them specifically citing their gender identity — they did not identify with the film because they were not female. Of the male responses to this question, 82% said they did not identify with the film or only partially identified with the film. Most of these responses indicated a lack of identification because the male students have not had experiences like those experienced by the characters in the film. For example, two male students said:

- I am not able to personally relate to this film because I never had any experience similar to the film.

- I [have] never been through things like that.

Several of the males who did not identify with the film specifically cited gender as the reason they could not relate to the film or only slightly related to the film with responses such as follows:

- I can see where the women in the film are coming from, but being male obviously separates me from them.
- I can feel towards fighting for a cause, but women's suffrage doesn't quite directly relate to me being a man.

Another student, who did report relating to the film, did so because "I have had to push for my rights to do things through my parents." This student did not claim to "relate" to being a woman, but could relate to some of their struggles and actions as depicted in *Iron Jawed Angels*. While at first, it seems disappointing that many males say they cannot strongly relate to a film highlighting women's issues, it is encouraging that they at least began to think about issues of gender. It would be unrealistic to expect the experience of one film to alter their frame of reference and years of prior experiences, but films may serve as an important catalyst for future learning and growth as they present new perspectives and engage viewers.

Like their male peers, many of the female responses were rooted in their personal experiences. Twenty-nine percent of the female students discussed not strongly relating to the film because the fight for women's rights is something in the past, not as relevant to them today. For example, they reported the following:

- I have rights I don't have to fight for. I don't go through what they did.

- Women do not have to fight like that for what they want and are treated like equals in today's society.
- I have never been refused something or treated unfairly because I am female or for any other absurd reason, so I have never had to fight for justice.

If, as Hahn (1996) reports, gender is a fundamental component of our experience and filters our view on the world, these students' perceived experiences were as equal partners with men. Meanwhile, 57% of female students related to the film. Several of these students reported relating to the film because they recognized continuing issues with women's rights today. Some discussed women's rights in general terms; for example, they said things like the following:

- Women have rights now, but we are still not as equal to men as we should be.
- Women to this day are still not heard like they should be. They are not treated as they were back then; however, they are still not being heard in some cases like they should be.

Others embedded their responses in specific experiences related to their gender identity:

- Sometimes at work I find my manager to favor the male employees.
- I remember I had to fight for me to play football when I was little because I'd been the only girl.

Still, other female students related to the film for reasons not explicitly related to gender. These students reported reactions such as follows:

- I can relate to someone struggling hard to achieve a dream.

- I am able to relate because there has been something I really want, but it was really hard to get.

Finally, two students expressed understanding the experiences of women in the film by stating:

- I can completely understand what women went through during the period.
- I understand why they wouldn't give up what they believed in, but at the same time I didn't live in that time so I can only imagine.

The second student offers a more sophisticated response indicating her location in the present is a limiting factor in fully understanding the past, yet perhaps she is unaware of additional resources she can use to make sense of the past.

Overall, when asked whether they related to the film, both quantitatively and qualitatively the female students related better than the male students with many of both sexes specifically citing factors of gender.

Perspectives in the Film

The final question, with a significant gender difference among participants' responses, asked students whether *Iron Jawed Angels* presented a view/perspective of certain historical events and/or time periods new to them. Female students were much more likely to report they already were aware of the perspectives presented while males reported being mostly "unaware" of these perspectives.

Eighty-two percent of the male students said the perspectives offered in the film were new or mostly new to them. Similar to the response for the question about learning new information, several of the responses were not specific, while others cited the specific "new" perspectives they encountered. Among those males who were less specific, responses included the following statements:

- Yes, I never knew none [sic] of what happened at that time.
- I had never studied this period in depth, so this was pretty much my first exposure to the topic.

Other male responses included the added dimension of identifying the perspective learned. For example, responses included the following:

- I had no idea people were so hostile and violent towards women.
- About Alice Paul doing everything in her power to get her and every other women independence.

As with the question about whether the film contained new information, the majority of female students (62%) explained they were aware or somewhat aware of the perspectives presented in the film. Those students who discussed being mostly aware of the perspectives included these comments:

- It shows from the point of view of Alice Paul and the women that fought beside her and how they were truly treated.
- I knew what was going on — the point of view of the people.

Several of the female students who expressed familiarity with the perspectives also pointed to specific things new to them which included the following:

- Most of them are familiar to me, but seeing men throwing things at the woman suffragists was pretty embarrassing. I didn't know that men hated women gaining right so badly like that.

- I knew about women's suffrage, but I did not know that it was that bad and how extremely bad the women were treated.

Twenty-four percent of female responses indicated the perspectives shown were new to them. These female students provided the following comments:

- The time period was not new to me, but the perspective was. I didn't realize how dangerous it was to be a women's rights activist.
- I had never really studied the women's suffrage in great detail before, especially from a woman's perspective.
- I never saw/learned about a women's rights activist's personal life and how she wanted to almost give up.

The female students reported being more aware of perspectives presented in the film, while the males were encountering "new" perspectives.

Discussion and Implications

What contributed to the female-male differences in response to *Iron Jawed Angels*? There are several factors that may have influenced these results, though our evidence does not provide any definite answers. Perhaps, for some of the female students, they pay better attention to women's issues in school and in their daily lives. The students in this study were not grouped into single-sex classes. Are females somehow exposed to ideas in history that males are not getting, or do they pay more attention to these issues? Do their experiences as females in everyday life enhance their awareness of women's issues? Barton and Levstik's (2004) concept of caring as a part of empathy entails a relationship between learners and the subjects they study that includes emotional commitment or personal impor-

tance. Female students may have deeper personal connections to content focused on women because they form an emotional commitment and see personal relevance between themselves and the content. And “When students care about the topic of study, they are motivated to attend to instruction, to seek out information on their own, and to reflect on what they’re learning” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 230) — which perhaps separating the females from the males when it comes to awareness of women’s issues in the curriculum.

Although there were statistically significant gender differences, both females and males said that they learned new information from *Iron Jawed Angels* and were exposed to new perspectives. Despite the fact that if they study women, students are especially likely to study the women’s suffrage movement (Hahn et al., 2007), our data supports previous claims that, at least in this limited instance, women’s perspectives may not be a central or memorable element of the K-12 curriculum. The results also corroborate Wineburg’s (2001) assertion: “In girls’ minds, women in history are blurry figures; in boys’ minds, they are virtually invisible” (p.133). Therefore, while the male students reported they learned more and were exposed to new perspectives in statistically significant higher numbers than female students, both genders have a deficit in recognizing the importance of gender and women’s issues in understanding the past. Levstik (1997-1998) came to a similar finding about the recognition of perspectives. The middle school students in her study displayed limited knowledge about women in history, none reported knowing that not all women supported the suffrage movement, and few mentioned that some men did support the movement — thus leaving out important historical perspectives.

The specific content of the film itself may also play an important role in how students reacted — allowing both females and males to learn from the film and to see new perspectives.

The film exposed students to powerful images of men being openly hostile to women, women being denied the rights men possessed, multiple-perspectives being expressed within women’s groups, and female suffragettes being force fed in jail. These potent scenes were memorable for the students and provided perspectives not common in the school curriculum. These scenes presented a stark contrast to the gender roles traditionally portrayed in film, and perhaps for many students, it served as a contrast to their experiences in everyday life of which gender issues are no more noticeable than the fluoride in the water.

Finally, a feature of *Iron Jawed Angels* that potentially intensified student reactions to the film was a specific attribute of its narrative. *Iron Jawed Angels* chronicles a story with female characters as the central figures and heroines; it does so from a female perspective. As Mr. Thackeray, the teacher at Garfield High School recounts, “They [students] often don’t see women as protagonists ... [or women] who can change their lives and their situations collectively or individually.” Mr. Thackeray also distinguishes what students may gain from *Iron Jawed Angels* that they do not from other films:

[In] many ways, all five of these films [of the films shown in history class this year] have that theme of characters trying to or actually getting some empowerment. But what is interesting is that if you actually look at the end result in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, in *Spartacus*, even in *Glory* with the end, and in *Gangs of New York* in some ways, many of the characters seeking empowerment don’t actually achieve it or maybe they do for a period of time, but in the end, they don’t have it versus, let’s say, *Iron Jawed Angels*, so it’s an interesting contrast to the other films.

The contrast in *Iron Jawed Angels*, with its female-centered plot and characters and in the achievements of these characters, may have contributed to increased awareness of alternative perspectives.

Feature films may be important curricular instruments in the quest to increase students' historical understanding of women in history due to the storylines presented and the powerful nature of the audio-visual medium. Film, in this case *Iron Jawed Angels*, provided not only an opportunity to make women's issues an explicit feature in the historical narrative but also through powerful and meaningful ways. Women are not secondary to the film's narrative because the story is told from their perspectives. Multiple female perspectives are represented such as characters' differences in philosophy about how to achieve suffrage and about what role African-American suffragists should play. Unlike textbooks and many readily available primary sources, films highlighting women's stories and female characters are unique classroom resources. Appendix B presents a small sample of films which could be used to teach about women and their roles in history. Some of the films deal directly with women's issues in various time periods, while others present women as core characters and highlight women's narratives.

Challenges often arise when using film because the storylines do not solve the breadth/depth dilemma that Libresco and Wolfe (2003) cite as often keeping a comprehensive examination of women out of the curriculum. In fact, it may exacerbate the issue due to the time it takes to show feature-length films and to use them well with pre- and post-film activities. This challenge is a matter of priority, philosophy, and politics. As Hahn (1996) discovered, access to appropriate curricular materials does not necessarily translate into increased coverage. However, there is a more significant pedagogical challenge related to the way students respond to feature films as a source of knowledge about the past.

The capability of *Iron Jawed Angels* to offer new information and perspectives to students is encouraging. Unfortunately, students were so impressed by the film they appeared to view it with little critical analysis, ingesting the new knowledge and perspectives as objective facts. This is consistent with the findings from the larger study of which this data is drawn (Marcus, 2007) as well as with the work of others exploring the issue of student interpretation and analysis of film (Marcus, Paxton, & Meyerson, 2006; Meyerson & Paxton, 2007; Paxton & Meyerson, 2002; Seixas, 1994, 2007).

Without significant scaffolding from their teachers, many students will view films as trustworthy historical documents and use them unabated in the construction of their understanding of the past. Therefore, activities for teaching about women with films require thoughtful preparation in order to present challenges to many students' beliefs about the nature of "history" feature films. For example, *Iron Jawed Angels* exposes many students to new perspectives about the suffrage movement, accurately captures much of the emotion of the period, and includes various correct historical details, but it also contains numerous flaws ranging from the fictional romantic interest of Alice Paul and a more witty on-screen than in real-life Alice Paul to the imposition of "a post-feminist sensibility on the dissidents they honor" (Stanley, 2004).

Iron Jawed Angels exposed both female and male students to new knowledge and perspectives about the Women's Suffrage Movement — particularly males. Despite these encouraging findings, watching one film is not likely to significantly alter understanding of women's perspectives and roles in history. However, viewing a series of powerful films in conjunction with well-planned activities, which include other primary and secondary sources, could have a notable effect on students. These films can bring women's history to the forefront and if used well and repeatedly, permanently alter students' knowledge,

perspectives, and appreciation for women. Films can help students notice women's history in ways other sources might not and in ways, as Levstik (1997-1998) argues, "more than benevolently inclusive" (p. 24).⁸

Notes

1. For more information about student viewing of film outside the classroom see Marcus, 2007.
2. This study was partially funded by a grant from the Teachers for a New Era Project at the University of Connecticut and by a University of Connecticut Faculty Grant.
3. All names are changed for confidentiality.
4. There were a total of 53 students in the two classes, but seven did not complete enough of the work to be included in the study (two from Torre H.S. and five from Garfield H.S.).
5. The other films shown during the year included the following: Torre High — *The 60's, Gangs of New York, Wild Boys of the Road, Do the Right Thing, Dick*, a student selected film about Vietnam, and *Forrest Gump*; Garfield High — *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Glory, Gangs of New York, Spartacus*.
6. *Iron Jawed Angels* was critically acclaimed and nominated for five Emmy Awards; Hilary Swank won a Golden Globe award for best supporting actress. The film first aired on HBO.
7. Three students did not provide responses to these prompts for this film.
8. The authors wish to thank Margaret Smith Crocco, Thomas Levine, Jeremy Stoddard, Douglas Kaufman, and Rochelle Marcus for their feedback on drafts of this paper.

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Appendix A

Film Assessment Tool

NAME:

Film viewed:

Please check the appropriate box for the statements below and explain your answer:

	Completely not true	Mostly not true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true
I learned about history from this film.					
↓					
Please explain your answer:					
I learned more from this film than from other sources of information during this unit.					
↓					
Please explain your answer (If no, which sources were better and why, if yes, what about the film helped you learn more than other sources?):					
This film confirms information I already knew.					
↓					
Please explain your answer:					
	Completely not true	Mostly not true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true
In my opinion, this film is historically accurate and trustworthy.					
↓					
Please explain your answer:					
I am able to personally relate to this film.					
↓					
Please explain your answer:					
I identify with specific characters in the film.					

<p align="center">↓</p>					
Please explain your answer:					
	Completely not true	Mostly not true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true
In my opinion, this film does not have any biases.					
<p align="center">↓</p> Please explain your answer:					
In my opinion, the themes and events in the film are connected to events in today's world.					
<p align="center">↓</p> Please explain your answer:					
The film presented a view/perspective of certain historical events and/or time periods that was new to me.					
<p align="center">↓</p> Please explain your answer:					
	Completely not true	Mostly not true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Completely true
In my opinion, the film creators' perspective/ideas are evident in the film.					
<p align="center">↓</p> Please explain your answer:					
I learned specific new information from this film.					
<p align="center">↓</p> Please explain your answer:					
* If you could ask a character in the film a question, which character would you ask and what would you ask him/her?					
* Please list any other reactions you had to this film or anything else you want to tell us about the film.					

Appendix B

A sample of films with females as the main characters or with narratives primarily based in the story of women or from a female perspective

- *Beloved* (1998)
- *Boys Don't Cry* (1999)
- *Elizabeth* (1998)
- *Emma* (1996)
- *Erin Brockovich* (2000)
- *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991)
- *Iron Jawed Angels* (2004)
- *The Joy Luck Club* (1993)
- *Legally Blonde* (2001)
- *Little Women* (1994)
- *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* (1999)
- *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003)
- *Norma Rae* (1979)
- *North Country* (2005)
- *Pleasantville* (1998)
- *Pocahontas* (1995)
- *Pride and Prejudice* (2005)
- *Sophie's Choice* (1982)
- *Steel Magnolias* (1989)
- *Swing Shift* (1984)
- *Thelma and Louise* (1991)
- *Working Girl* (1988)

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