'Don't believe in pressuring the children. When the time is right, they'll choose the appropriate gender.'

SAGING THE TEXT

23 charges that most languages present gender as "binary and permanent" (para. 3). Has this been your own view? How does Devor challenge this — that is, what's the alternative to gender being binary and permanent — and how persuasive do you find his evidence?

According to Devor, do children "acquire" gender roles? What are the functions of the "generalized other" and the "significant other" in this process?

What is the distinction Devor makes between the "I" and the "me" (paras. 13-15)? Write a journal entry describing some of the differences between "I" and "me".

24 examples from Devor and from other reading or observation, list the "activities and modes of expression" (para. 13) that society considers stereotypically female and characteristically male. Which are acceptable gender behaviors, and which are not? Search for a "rule" that defines types of crossgender behaviors as tolerated or not.

Some aspects of the traditional gender roles described by Devor seem changing? If so, which ones, and how?

EXPLORING CONTEXT

6. Review Becca Moore Campbell's "Easy" (p. 118); what evidence of gender role socialisation do you find in the story? To what extent do Moore's childhood experiences complicate Devor's presentation of gender role acquisition?

7. To what extent do Alexis de Tocqueville's views of women and men (p. 417) reflect the "patriarchal gender schema" as Devor defines it?

8. Drawing on Devor's discussion of gender role formation, analyze the difference between the "I" and the "me" of the girl in Jamaica Kincaid's story (p. 421).

9. How would Devor explain the humor of the cartoon on page 432? How do the details of the cartoon — the setting, the women's appearance, the three pictures on the coffee table — contribute to its effect?

EXTENDING THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

10. As a class, identify at least half a dozen men living today who are widely admired in American culture. To what extent do they embody the "four main attitudes of masculinity" outlined by Devor (para. 19)?

11. Write an essay or journal entry analyzing your own gender role socialisation. To what extent have you been pressured to conform to conventional roles? To what extent have you resisted them? What roles have "generalized others" and "significant others" played in shaping your identity?

The Story of My Body

JUDITH ORTIZ COFER

Accepting the idea that gender roles are socially constructed might not be too difficult, but it may come as a shock to realize that even the way we see our bodies is filtered through the lens of social values and beliefs. In this personal essay, Judith Ortiz Cofer reflects on the different roles her own body has assumed in different contexts and cultures — the ways that different societies have "read" the meanings of her physical appearance. The story of her body becomes, to some extent, the story of her life, and woven into the tale are intriguing comments on gender and on cross-cultural perception. A native of Puerto Rico, Ortiz Cofer (b. 1952) is the Franklin Professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Georgia. Her publications include The Line of the Sun (1989), a novel; Silent Dancing (1980), a collection of poetry and prose; An Island Like You: Stories of the Barrio (1996);

Migration is the story of my body.
— VICTOR HERNANDEZ CHIRIZ

Skin

I was born a white girl in Puerto Rico but became a brown girl when I came to live in the United States. My Puerto Rican relatives called me tall at the American school, some of my rougher classmates called me Skin Bones, and the Shrimp because I was the smallest member of my classes all through grammar school until high school, when the middle Glasys was given the honorary past of front row center for class pictures and scorekeeper, bench warmer, in P.E. I reached my full stature of five feet in sixth grade.

I started out life as a pretty baby and learned to be a pretty girl from a pretty mother. Then at ten years of age I suffered one of the worst cases of chicken pox I have ever heard or. My entire body, including the inside of my ears and in between my toes, was covered with pustules which in a fit of panic at my appearance looked as if a illiac cat had plunged its claws deeply into my skin. I grew my hair long and hid behind it for the first years of my adolescence. This was when I learned to be invisible.

Color

In the animal world it indicates danger: the most colorful creatures are often the most poisonous. Color is also a way to attract and seduce a suitor. As a Puerto Rican girl born of "white" parents, I spent the first years of my life hearing people refer to me as "colored." It was a first (experiences of color prejudice occurred in a supermarket in Paterson, New Jersey. It was Christmas-time, and I was eight or nine years old. There was a display of toys in the store where I went two or three times a day to buy things for my mother, who never made lists but sent for milk, cigarettes, a can of this or that, as she remembered from hour to hour. I enjoyed being trusted with money and walking half a city block to the new, modern grocery store. It was owned by three good-looking Italian brothers. I liked the younger one with the crew-cut blond hair. The two older ones watched me and the other Puerto Rican kids as if they thought we were going to steal something. The oldest one would sometimes even try to hurry me with my purchases, although part of my pleasure in these expeditions came from looking at everything in the well-stocked aisles. I was also teaching myself to read English by sounding out the labels on packages: L&M cigarettes, Borden's homogenized milk, Red Devil potted ham, Nestle's chocolate milk, Quaker oats, Bustelo coffee, Wonder bread, Colgate toothpaste, Ivory soap, and Goya (makers of products used in Puerto Rican dishes) everything—these are some of the brands names that taught me nouns. Several times this man had come up to me, wearing his blood-stained butcher's apron, and towering over me had asked in a harsh voice whether there was something he could help me find. On the way out I would glance at the supermarket shelves, and my parents had already told my brother and, my mother yet darker than my fair-skinned father. It was eight or nine years old.

The mean brother who first referred to me as "colored." It was a few days before Christmas, and my parents were already very timid about entering the fancy store, we did not approach the huge man in the red suit. I was not interested in sitting on a stranger's lap anyway. But I did covet Susie, the talking schoolteacher doll that was displayed in the center aisle of the Italian brothers' supermarket.

It was the mean brother who first referred to me as "colored." It was a few days before Christmas, and my parents had already told my brother and me that since we were in Los Estados now, we would get our presents on December 25 instead of Los Reyes, Three Kings Day, when gifts are exchanged in Puerto Rico. We were to give them a wish list that they would take to Santa Claus, who apparently lived in the Macy's store downtown— at least that's where we had caught a glimpse of him when we went shopping. Since my parents were tired about entering the fancy store, we did not approach the huge man in the red suit. I was not interested in sitting on a stranger's lap anyway. But I did covet Susie, the talking schoolteacher doll that was displayed in the center aisle of the Italian brothers' supermarket.

In the human world color triggers many more complex and often deadly reactions. As a Puerto Rican girl born of "white" parents, I spent the first years of my life hearing people refer to me as blanca, white. My mother insisted that I protect myself from the intense island sun because I was more prone to sunburn than some of my darker, trigüisí playsmates. People were always commenting within my hearing about how my black hair contrasted so nicely with my "pale" skin. I did not think of the color of my skin consciously except when I heard the adults talking about complexion. It seems to me that the subject is much more common in the conversation of mixed-race peoples than in mainstream United States society, where it is a touchy and sometimes even embarrassing topic to discuss, except in a political context. In Puerto Rico I heard many conversations about skin color. A pregnant woman could say, "I hope my baby doesn't turn out prieto" (slang for "dark" or "black") like my husband's grandmother, although she was a good-looking negra in her time. I am a combination of both, being olive-skinned—lighter than my mother yet darker than my fair-skinned father. In America, I am a person of color, obviously a Latina. On the Island I have been called everything from a paloma blanca, after the song (by a black singer), to la gringa. 1

My first experience of color prejudice occurred in a supermarket in Paterson, New Jersey. It was Christmas-time, and I was eight or nine years old. There was a display of toys in the store where I went two or three times a day to buy things for my mother, who never made lists but sent for milk, cigarettes, a can of this or that, as she remembered from hour to hour. I enjoyed being trusted with money and walking half a city block to the new, modern grocery store. It was owned by three good-looking Italian brothers. I liked the younger one with the crew-cut blond hair. The two older ones watched me and the other Puerto Rican kids as if they thought we were going to steal something. The oldest one would sometimes even try to hurry me with my purchases, although part of my pleasure in these expeditions came from looking at everything in the well-stocked aisles. I was also teaching myself to read English by sounding out the labels on packages: L&M cigarettes, Borden's homogenized milk, Red Devil potted ham, Nestle's chocolate milk, Quaker oats, Bustelo coffee, Wonder bread, Colgate toothpaste, Ivory soap, and Goya (makers of products used in Puerto Rican dishes) everything—these are some of the brands names that taught me nouns. Several times this man had come up to me, wearing his blood-stained butcher's apron, and towering over me had asked in a harsh voice whether there was something he could help me find. On the way out I would glance at the supermarket shelves, and my parents had already told my brother and, my mother yet darker than my fair-skinned father. It was eight or nine years old.

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1trigüise: Brown-skinned.

2Fugitive: White man.
3palestina: White woman.
4la gris: A white, non-Latina woman.
5Los Estados: "The States"—that is, the United States.
She talked when you pulled a string on her back. Susie had a limited repertoire of three sentences: I think she could say “Hello, I’m Susie Schoolteacher,” “Two plus two is four,” and one other thing I cannot remember. The day her older brother chased me away, I was reaching to touch Susie’s blood curls. I had been told many times, in most disinterested, not to touch anything in the store that I was not buying. But I had been looking at Susie for weeks. In my mind, she was my doll. After all, I had put her on my Christmas wish list. The moment is frozen in my mind as if there were a photograph of it on file. It was not a turning point, a disaster, or an earth-shaking revelation. It was simply the first time I considered— if naïvely—the meaning of skin color in human relations.

I reached to touch Susie’s hair. It seemed to me that I had to get on tip-toe, since the toys were stacked on a table and she sat like a princess on top of the fancy box she came in. Then I heard the booming, “Hey, kid, what do you think you’re doing?” spoken very loudly from the meat counter. I looked at the man, but standing there, feeling humiliated because I knew everyone in the store must have heard him yell at me. I felt him approach, and when I knew he was behind me, I turned around to face the blood that started to run out of the place, but even as I reached the door I heard him shout after me: “Don’t come in here unless you gonna buy something, You dirty brown is your natural color.” I heard him laugh and someone else too.

I took a bath every night. I thought the mall was dirtier than I was in his dungarees, and a knitted wool cap of my father’s. I was not pink like my sisters, but I could see, since it was better color and I was wearing my quilted play coat, downcoats, and a knitted navy cap of my father’s. I was not pink like my friend Charlene and her sister Kathy, who had blue eyes and light brown hair. My skin is the color of the coffee my grandmother made, which was half milk, leche con café rather than café con leche. My mother is the opposite mix. She has a lot of café in her color. I could not understand how my skin looked like dirt to the supermarket man. I went in and washed my hands thoroughly with soap and hot water, and borrowing my mother’s nail file, I cleaned the created watercolors from underneath my nails. I was pleased with the results. My skin was the same color as before, but I knew I was clean. Clean enough to run my fingers through Susie’s fine gold hair when she came home to me.

*Boca con café... café con leche: Milk with coffee (light brown)... coffee with milk (dark brown)*

My mother is barely four feet eleven inches in height, which is average for women in her family. When I grew to five feet by age twelve, she was amazed and began to use the word tall to describe me, as in “Since you are tall, this dress will look good on you.” As with the color of my skin, I didn’t consciously think about my height or size until other people made an issue of it. It is around the preadolescent years that in America the games children play for fun become fierce competitions where everyone is out to “prove” they are better than others. It was in the playground and sports fields that my size-related problems began. No matter how familiar the story is, every child who is the last chosen for a team knows the torment of waiting to be called up. At the Paterson, New Jersey, public schools that I attended, the volleyball or softball game was the metaphor for the battlefield to life to the inner city kids—the black kids versus the Puerto Rican kids, the whites versus the blacks versus the Puerto Rican kids and I was 4F, skinny, short, bespectacled, and apparently impervious to the blood that drove many of my classmates to play ball as if their lives depended on it. Perhaps they did. I would rather be reading a book than sweating, grunting, and running the risk of pain and injury. I simply did not see the point in competitive sports. My main form of exercise then was walking to the library, many city blocks away from my barrio.

Still, I wanted to be wanted. I wanted to be chosen for the team. Physical education was compulsory, a class where you were actually given a grade. On my mainly all A report card, the C for compassion I always received from the P.E. teachers shamed me the same as a bad grade in a real class. Invariably, my father would say: “How can you make a low grade for playing games?” He did not understand. Even if I had managed to make a lot (never happened) or get the ball over that ridiculously high net, I already had a reputation as a “shirmp,” a hopeless nonathlete. It was an area where the kids who didn’t like me for one reason or another—mainly because I did better than they on academic subjects—could lord it over me; the playing field was the place where even the smallest girl could make me feel powerless and inferior. I instinctively understood the politics even then; how the not choosing me until the teacher forced one of the team captains to call my name was a coup of sorts—there, you little show-off, tomorrow you can beat us in spelling and geography, but this afternoon you are the loser. Or perhaps those were only my own bitter thoughts as I sat or stood in the sidelines while the big girls were grabbed like fish and I, the little brown tadpole, was ignored until Teacher looked over in my general direction and shouted, “Call Ortiz,” or, worse, “Somebody’s got to take her.”

*4F: Draft-board classification meaning “ unfit for military service;” honor, not physically fit*
No wonder I read Wonder Woman comic and had Legends of Super Heroes daydreams. Although, I thought I was an "intellectual," my body was demanding that I notice it. I saw the little swelling around my once-flat nipples, the fine hairs growing in secret places but my knees were still bigger than my thighs, and I always wore long, or half-sleeve blouses to hide my lousy upper arms. I wanted flesh on my bones—a thick layer of fat. I saw a new product advertised on TV, Wrinkle-Off. They showed skinny men and women before and after taking the stuff, and it was a transformation like the ninety-seven-pound-weakening-turned-into-Carles-Athlete ads that I saw on the back covers of my comic books. The Water-Off was very expensive. I tried to explain my need for it in Spanish to my mother, but it didn't translate very well, even to my ears—and she said with a tone of finality, eat more of my good food.

Wonder Woman was stacked. She had a cleavage framed by the spread wings of a golden eagle and a muscular body that has become fashionable with women only recently. But since I wanted a body that would serve me in P.E., hers was my ideal. The breasts were an indulgence I allowed myself. Perhaps the daydream of bigger girls was more glamorous. since our ambitions are filtered through our needs, but I wanted a powerful body. I daydreamed of leaping up above the gray landscape of the city to where the sky was clear and blue, and in anger and self-pity, I fantasized about scooping my enemies up by their hair from the playing fields and dumping them on a barren asteroid. I would put the P.E. teachers each on their own rock in space too, where they would be the loneliest people in the universe. since I knew they had no inner resources, no imagination, and in outer space, there would be no air for them to fill their dilated milleny.

I was saved from more years of P.E. torment by the fact that in my early career as a shrimp, I was a healthy, pretty baby. Recently, I read that people are drawn to big-eyed round-faced creatures, like puppies, kittens, and certain other mammals and marsupials, koalas, for example, and, of course, infants. I was all eyes, since my head and body, even as I grew older, remained thin and small-boned. As a young child I got a lot of attention from my relatives and many other people we met in our barrio. My mother's beauty may have had something to do with how much attention we got from strangers in stores and on the street. I can imagine it. In the pictures I have seen of us together, she is a stunning young woman by Latino standards: long, curly black hair, and round curves in a compact frame. From her I learned how to smile, suave, and talk like an attractive woman. I remember going into a bodega for our groceries and being given candy by the proprietor as a reward for being bonita, pretty.

I can see in the photographs, and I also remember, that I was dressed in the pretty clothes, the stiff, frilly dresses, with layers of crinolines underneath, the glossy patent leather shoes, and, on special occasions, the shawl-lugging little hats and the white gloves that were popular in the late fifties and early sixties. My mother was proud of my looks, although I was a bit too thin. She could dress me up like a doll and take me by the hand to visit relatives, or go to the Spanish mass at the Catholic church and show me off. How was I to know that she and the others who called me "pretty" were representatives of an aesthetic that would not apply when I went out into the mainstream world of school?

In my Paterson, New Jersey, public schools there were still quite a few white children, although the demographics of the city were changing rapidly. The original waves of Italian and Irish immigrants, silk-mill workers, and laborers in the cloth industries had been "assimilated." Their children were now the middle-class parents of my peers. Many of them moved their children to the Catholic schools that proliferated enough to have leagues of basketball teams. The names I recall hearing still ring in my ears: Don Bosco High versus St. Mary's High, St. John's versus St. Joseph's. Later I too would be transferred to the safer environment of a Catholic school. But I started school at Public School Number Eleven. I came there from Puerto Rico, thinking myself a pretty girl, and found that the hierarchy for popularity was as follows: pretty white girl, pretty Jewish girl, pretty Puerto Rican girl, pretty black girl. Drop the last two categories; teachers were too busy to have more than one favorite per class, and it was simply understood that if there was a big part in the school play, or any competition where the main qualification was "presentability" (such as escorting a school visitor to or from the principal's office), the classroom's public address speaker would be requesting the pretty and/or nice-looking white boy or girl. By the time I was in the sixth grade, I was sometimes called by the principal to represent my class because I dressed neatly (I knew this from a progress report sent to

Bodega Market.
my mother, which I translated for her and because all the 'presentable' white girls had moved to a school I later came to hate. But I was still not one of the popular girls with the boys. I remember one incident where I stepped out into the playground in my baggy gym shorts and one Puerto Rican boy said to the other: "What do you think?" The other one answered: "Her face is OK, but look at the toothpick legs." The next best thing to a compliment I got was when my favorite male teacher, while handing out the class pictures, commented that with my long neck and delicate features I resembled the movie star Audrey Hepburn. But the Puerto Rican boys had learned to respond to a father figure: long necks and a perfect little nose were not enough. That is when I decided I was a "brain." I did not settle into the role easily. I was learning to be a brain. There we became part of a little community of relatives and friends. School was another matter. I was one answered: "Her teeth resemble the movie star Audrey Hepburn. But the Puerto Rican mother, which I translated for her and because all the 'presumably' white girls wore a white blouse underneath, all the boys stared at her and. "I'll tell you everything," her mother told me. "There was something wrong?" Ted blurted out.

The problems at the public school got to the point where even nonconfrontational little me got beaten up several times, my parents enrolled me at St. Joseph's High School. I was then a minority of one among the Italian and Irish kids. But I found several good friends: three girls who took their studies seriously. We did our homework together and talked about the Jackie's. The Jackie's were two popular girls, one blonde and the other red-haired, who had women's bodies. Their curves showed even in the blue jumper uniforms with straps that we all wore. The blonde Jackie would often let one of the straps fall off her shoulder, and although she, like all of us, wore a white blouse underneath, all the boys stared at her arm. My friends and I talked about this and practiced letting our straps fall off our shoulders. But it wasn't the same without breasts or hips.

My final two and a half years of high school were spent in Augusta, Georgia, where my parents moved our family in search of a more peaceful environment. There we became part of a little community of our army-connected relatives and friends. School was yet another matter. I was enrolled in a large school of nearly two thousand students that had just that year been forced to integrate. There were two black girls and there was me. I did extremely well academically. As to my social life, it was, for the most part, uneventful—yet it is in my memory blighted by one incident. In my junior year, I became wildly infatuated with a pretty white boy. I'll call him Ted. Oh, he was pretty—yellow hair that fell over his forehead, a smile to die for—and he was a great dancer. I watched him at Teen Town, the youth center at the base where all the military brats gathered on Saturday nights. My father had retired from the navy, and we had all our base privileges—our father reason we were. When Ted's father had shaken his head.

But I was Ted's sweetheart, his whole beautiful self, that concerned me in those days. I knew my father would say no to our date, but I planned to run away from home if necessary. I told my mother how important this date was. I caressed her.

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But I was Ted's sweetheart, his whole beautiful self, that concerned me in those days. I knew my father would say no to our date, but I planned to run away from home if necessary. I told my mother how important this date was. I caressed her.
breathing rate. I don't remember what I said before hanging up. I do recall the darkness of my room that sleepless night and the heaviness of my blanket in which I wrapped myself like a shroud. And I remember my parents' respect for my pain and their gentleness toward me that weekend. My mother did not say "I loved you," and I was grateful for her understanding silence.

In college, I suddenly became an "exotic" woman to the men who had survived the popularity wars in high school, who were not practicing to be worldly: they had to act liberal in their politics, in their lifestyles, and in the world they went out with. I dated heavily for a while, then married young. I had discovered that I needed stability more than social life. I had learned for sure and some talent in writing. These facts were a constant in my life. My skin color, my size, and my appearance were variables—things that were judged according to my current self-image, the aesthetic values of the time, the places I was in, and the people I met. My studies, later on writing, the respect of people who saw me as an individual person were the criteria for my sense of self-worth that I would concentrate on in my adult life.

ENGAGING THE TEXT

1. Ortiz Cofer writes a good deal about how people perceived her and about how their perceptions changed according to time and place. Trace the stages Ortiz Cofer lived through, citing examples from the text, and discuss in each instance how her self-image was affected by people around her. What main point(s) do you think Ortiz Cofer may be trying to make with the narrative?

2. Which of the difficulties Ortiz Cofer faces are related specifically to gender (or made more serious by gender)? Do boys face comparable problems?

3. In your opinion, did Ortiz Cofer make the right decisions throughout her story? Is there anything she or her parents could have done to avoid or resist the various mistreatments she describes?

4. What role do media images play in Ortiz Cofer's story?

5. Does everyone have a story similar to Ortiz Cofer's, or not? Other people may be overweight, wear braces, mature very early or very late, have large noses or unusual voices, and so on. What, if anything, sets Ortiz Cofer's experience apart from the usual "trauma" of childhood?

EXPLORING CONNECTIONS

6. Review Aaron D. Devor's " Becoming Members of Society" (p. 424). How do Ortiz Cofer's experiences support and/or complicate Devor's explanation of gender role socialization?

7. Compare the childhood experiences of Ortiz Cofer and Gary Soto (p. 20). To what extent do their relationships, concerns, and behavior appear to be influenced by gender? What other social forces shape their lives?

EXTENDING THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

9. In her self-analysis, Ortiz Cofer discusses the "variables" in her physical appearance—the socially determined values that influence her perception of her body. She also reflects on personal "facts" or "constants"—more durable features, like her writing and her need for stability—that contribute to her identity. Write a series of journal entries that tell the story of your own body. What "variables" have influenced your perception of your appearance? What "facts" about yourself have become "constants"?

Where I Come From Is Like This

PAULA GUNN ALLEN

Paula Gunn Allen was born in 1939 in Cubero, New Mexico, a Spanish-Mexican land grant colony, where she comes from is life as a Laguna Pueblo-Sioux-Lebanese woman. In this essay she discusses some of the ways traditional images of women in American Indian cultures differ from images in mainstream American culture. Allen is widely recognized for her books of poetry and her novel The Woman Who Owned the Shadows (1983). Other works, including Grandmothers of the Light (1981) and Women in American Indian Mythology (1994), have focused on the female spiritual traditions of Native America. Her most recent work is a biography entitled Pocahontas: Medicine Woman, Spy, Entrepreneur, Diplomat (2003). This essay appeared in her essay collection, The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions (1988).