

"I've Got a Blind Prof": The Place of Blindness in the Academy

Rod Michalko

"Look! Look!"

"A dog, a dog!"

"It's a seeing eye dog!"

"He's blind!"

Then silence, a very loud silence. "Forward, Smokie, right, find the chair." My guide dog Smokie competently guides me to the chair situated at the large desk located at the front of N17—a large lecture hall in the university where I teach sociology.

An earlier version of this chapter appeared as "Blindness Enters the Classroom" in *Disability and Society* 15:3 (2001): 349–59. On June 4, 2001, Smokie died of liver cancer. I dedicate this chapter to him.

"Good boy, Smoke," I say as I remove his harness, place it carefully on the chair, and give him a well-deserved treat. I wait the few seconds that it takes Smokie to settle himself comfortably under the large desk, and then I turn my body and face toward the still silent mass of more than eighty students. The class list I received two days earlier showed an enrollment of eighty-three students for this new term in Introductory Sociology. As I stand there facing the class, I sense the mass that fills the room, and I hear the students as well—not their voices, they aren't speaking clearly now—but movement in the seats, bags being put on the floor, papers shuffling, throats clearing. This lecture hall holds seventy-five people, and as I cast my gaze over the rows of seats inclining from where I stand toward the back, I wonder where the extra eight students are sitting or if they are even present.

I run my hands through my hair and smile at the class. There is no need to call for silence, and so I begin my first lecture of the new term. "This is Introductory Sociology 100.12," I tell the mass, "so if you want biology, chemistry, or psych, or something, you're in the wrong room." There are a few murmurs of laughter, but I don't sense anyone leaving. I continue: "For those of you who didn't notice, there's a dog under this desk." More murmurs of laughter. "His name is Smokie and he's my guide dog," I say. "Guide dogs guide blind people," I continue. "So," I draw this word out, "I guess that means I'm . . ." The laughter now goes well beyond the murmur.

"My name is Rod Michalko," I tell them, "and it's my privilege to be your professor for the year." I then turn and walk to the chalk board. I run my hand along its ledge and locate a piece of chalk. Raising it to the chalk board, I say that I'm going to write my name on the board. As I am about to write my name, I stop and face the class. "Anything written on here?" I ask. A few "no's" come from the mass. "Come on, you guys, louder, let me know, I don't want to write on someone else's junk." Loud laughter now and a resounding "No!" springs from the mass. I print my name on the chalk board and turn to face the class. "Can you read that?" I raise my hands as I ask this question, beckoning another loud response. I hear a resounding "Ycs!"

"Not bad for a blind guy, huh?" I say. The laughter is now bouncing around the room, and the mass begins to speak loudly. The students have now come to life. As I hold my hand up and speak over the din, the class settles. I now begin Introductory Sociology 100.12.

But I begin something else as well—something much weightier than introducing more than eighty first-year university students to the discipline of sociology. I'm beginning to introduce them to blindness. For most, if not for all of the students, blindness has entered *their* classroom for the first time. Blindness has come into their classroom *with* me and *in* me (Michalko, *Mystery* 23–34; Michalko, *Two in One* 174–83). There is much with and about me that is not so unusual for them—I am, after all, a white, male professor, a social identity with whom students are more than familiar. But these inter-

prective categories are shoved aside as blindness radically makes its way to the foreground of the students' interpretive processes. They sit there in surprise; some are confused, and others sit at their desks in disbelief. "I couldn't believe it when you walked in with Smokie at the beginning of the class," one student told me about halfway through the term. "I phoned my mom right after class." He continued, "I told her, 'I got a blind prof!' I just couldn't believe it."

Yet, this disbelief goes much farther than merely the expression of surprise. For example, a former student dropped in to visit me about a year after he had graduated. During our visit he, Stuart, was reminiscing about the first class he took from me. He said that about a month into the class, Brian (the student who sat next to him) became suspicious of my blindness. Stuart said that Brian pointed out that "He looks right at me," as he put it, and asked Stuart whether he thought I was really blind. We both laughed. "It's true," said Stuart, "Brian really thought you could see, and he thought the class was, you know, one of those experiments. He even had me looking for one-way mirrors on the wall."

Many students have told me similar stories over the years. What can (should?) we make of such stories? There is, of course, the obvious quantitative explanation: Students rarely, if ever, experience a blind professor, and, when they do, they are surprised and "can't believe it." As Tom Shakespeare says, "Because of the widespread segregation of disabled people, many non-disabled people may not have come into contact with disabled people" (49). As explanations go, this one is certainly plausible. But to leave it at that is to ignore the particular social context in which blindness makes an appearance and within which surprise and disbelief are framed. It ignores the *scene* in which blindness is a frame. To understand people's surprise and disbelief when blindness unexpectedly "shows up in a picture," let's conduct a "scenography," to borrow from Butler (28), and thus interrogate the ways in which a scene is put together, staged, and socially constructed (Shildrick and Price) in such a way that blindness becomes a surprising and even unbelievable feature.

To conduct such a scenography I first examine the social organization of a university classroom into which blindness enters. What makes the entry of blindness here so surprising and unbelievable? Has blindness been in the classroom before—before the blind professor entered? Is disability just one more contingency, just one more human feature? Or does a disabled body harbor a particular and valuable pedagogy? Are professors merely "talking heads," or do our bodies speak as well, and, if so, what do they say in the classroom, and how are they heard?

THE PROF'S BLIND, HE CAN'T SEE!

I'm in N17 facing my Intro class for the first time. It's a new academic year and I'm quite excited. I'm very familiar with this classroom because I've taught

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here before. More than this, I've been in classrooms most of my life, and this one is really no different from any other.

The students' desks are only a few feet from where I stand and are arranged in theater fashion, rising on an incline to the back of the room. My desk is, of course, at the front of the room and is very large—a big table really. It has the usual stuff on it—a lectern and a slide projector, both of which I place on the floor next to Smokie. There is a smaller, podium-like table next to the large desk. It, too, has its usual stuff; it houses a VCR as well as a computer with PowerPoint. I notice, despite my blindness, the overhead fluorescent lighting, which floods the classroom with an almost unbearable brightness. And, of course, lurking behind me is that ever-present and proud symbol of university life—the chalk board.

I am just as equipped as my classroom. In my shoulder bag are about eighty copies of the course outline, printed up very nicely. I also have copies of the two books we will be reading in Introductory Sociology this year. A paper clip is attached to one end of the cover of each book so I will know which way is up when I hold the books up for the students to see.

Everything is set; the students embody a quiet anticipation; I sense more than eighty pairs of eyes now on me, now on Smokie. Smiling, I return the look. I focus my gaze first toward the rows of students nearest me, then I raise my gaze, moving slowly left to right, across the middle and to the back of the room. I then reach down, give Smokie one more quick rub behind his ears (an act designed more to reassure me than him), straighten up, and walk around to the front of the large table. Introductory Sociology 100.12 is about to begin.

My course, along with every other course in this and every other university, is about to begin in the midst of the ubiquitous, taken-for-granted sense of sight. Like the air we breathe, sight is everywhere in my classroom, and, like the air, it is not noticed and not even seen. The classroom—its equipment and social organization—bears the mark of sight; students see and assume this of one another, and they assume that they all see the same things and in the same way. There is no blindness visible anywhere in the classroom . . . till now.

Until Smokie and I entered the classroom, blindness was on no one's mind, and, just as important, neither was sight. But now what? This is a university classroom, after all. There are textbooks for the students to read, overhead slides to see, words to copy from the chalk board, exams and term papers for me to write and grade, students to watch for signs of cheating—this site is full of sight. Now what that blindness has entered this site of sights? Now what that the professor is blind? I have a lot of explaining to do.

I begin the course by doing just that. There are lessons in my explanations—lessons regarding the assumptions and practices of our society. For example, I ask the students how they get the prof's attention during a class and how they communicate their desire to speak. The students now have an

opportunity to notice for the first time in a critical way the universal classroom symbol of the raising of the hand. This is our first sociological lesson of the year—the interpretive transformation of a visual event (the raising of a hand) into a communication event bathed in meaning—"I want to say something." This leads to our second sociological lesson—the construction of new symbols from the building blocks of culture. Students always suggest the interactional practice of interrupting as a way to symbolize their desire to speak, now that they have a blind professor. "Excuse me" or "Rod" are now established as the oral events that are transformed into the communication event of "I want to say something."

The next sociological lesson has to do with the phenomenon of reading. Reading, and doing so *with the eyes*, is an assumption as universal to the classroom as is the raising of the hand. I ask for a volunteer and a student comes to the front of the class. I ask her to close her eyes; then I hand her a copy of the course outline, and ask her to figure out how to read it without opening her eyes. The class comes alive, laughing and talking. Within a few seconds, the class begins shouting suggestions to the student standing beside me tentatively holding the outline. Sooner or later, either from the student herself or shouted from the class, comes the suggestion "Get someone else to read it to you." "Good," I say as I take the outline from the student's hands. "That's what I'll do when it comes to grading your term papers." Sociological lesson number two: Print is a cultural phenomenon and not something that stands by itself outside of the context of contemporary society. There are many ways to read, and even though visually is the dominant way, it is not the only way. Another sociological lesson: The implicit connection between vision and print is an ideology that dominates in our society, leading to the hegemonic privileging of sight (Barton 56).

There are other such sociological lessons during this first class, but I mention only one more, namely, recognizing one another. Sight is also privileged in this regard. We see one another, and we recognize one another. Does this mean that those of us who don't see, don't recognize anyone? How will the prof who can't see come to recognize his students? How will he know who's asking a question? What of those students who skip class—will he know? Does he even know that there are students in the classroom? Are there other sociological lessons (Barnes) to be gleaned regarding the phenomenon of recognizing one another when addressing it within the particularity of having a blind prof? This time I leave such addressing and gleaning to the imagination of the reader of this chapter. Surely there is a lesson in this, too. However, let me provide a clue to these other lessons. Do nondisabled university teachers bring their bodies into their classrooms as well? Or is this bringing restricted to those of us whose bodies are noticeable? Is there anything to notice about the nondisabled body? What does the body say when the nondisabled teacher enters the classroom?

So far I have addressed some of the ways in which sight is implicitly embedded in our classrooms. Sight is not merely a physiological function. Instead, it represents a symbolic order and is used to privilege that order as both the dominant ideological and the normal way of being-in-the-world (Corker, *Deaf and Disabled*; Oliver, *Understanding Disability*). I used the occasion of blindness in the classroom as a way to critically interrogate this order as it manifests itself here.

I SEE, THEREFORE I KNOW

As for every sociologist, the fundamental topic of my research and my teaching is society, and, like every sociologist, I try to get my students to look at their society. But, unlike every sociologist, I problematize this looking as well as the understanding that society is seeable. Looking at society is somewhat paradoxical especially when considered from the point of view that students have been living in society from their birth. Still, if we (sociologists) are asking our students to look at their society, where would they look? Where is society, after all? What sort of sight can see society?

My students can see many things, and I ask them to point to some of them—to their desks, to my desk, to me, to each other, to themselves—and they have no difficulty whatsoever doing so. I then ask them to point to society, and this is where the trouble starts. When I ask the students to point to my desk, not only do they know where to point, *they also know where to look*. The latter presupposes the former. But when it comes to pointing to society, knowing where to look loses its presuppositional and taken-for-granted character. Students are never sure of where to look, let alone where to point. This is not the case when I ask students to point at my desk—they know where to look and thus where to point, and this knowledge is steeped in an implicit understanding of the sense of sight as a necessary condition for knowing—"I see, therefore I know" (Michalko, *Mystery* 78).

But, like the rest of us, students also know that they live in a society; they know that society exists. Yet, their sense of sight with its subsequent ability to look fails them when I ask them to point at their society. Their bewilderment at this inability may be understood as a temporary and pseudoblindness. The students cannot point at society; they cannot even look at it; they have gone blind!

The sense of sight that the students so implicitly and so naturally relied upon as the conjoining of seeing and knowing has failed them. This temporary and pseudoblindness, however, penetrates our classroom *as a teacher*. The students and I begin to re-view what they know without seeing—we discuss knowing ideas, thoughts, and emotions, and we ask what it means to know a friend, a family, each other, and ourselves. We begin to interrogate

the role of sight in this knowledge. The discussion then moves from the role of sight to sight as a role.

Somehow the students know that not only do they see, but that others also do. The question now becomes, how? How do we know (see) that, like us, others see and, like us, others see that we see? From this form of questioning flows the first and most important of all class assignments: "When you leave here today, I want you to spend the rest of the day, this evening and tomorrow looking and thinking about how you know that people around you can see and how you know that they can tell that you can also see. You have to do this without asking anyone whether they can see and without telling anyone that you can see."

Students come to the next class with all sorts of responses to this assignment. Here are some examples: "He waved to me and I waved back, right across the parking lot." "I smiled at her and she smiled back." "I got all ready, I looked at myself in the mirror and made sure I looked okay before I left my room." "You know what she said? I heard this before about a million times, but I couldn't believe it when I heard it this time. She said, 'I just gave him a dirty look and kept walking.'" "My psych prof just put up a slide, a slide of the brain." "See you later, I just said 'see you later.'"

Students were beginning to experience what Berger calls the "first wisdom" of sociology—"things are not what they seem" (23). Although not in these terms (yet?), students experience the first trope in understanding the social character of their world. They do so by problematizing the common-sense understanding of sight as a strictly physical fact. Like everything else, sight needs to be achieved, and this can be done only through social action, interaction, and language (Corker, *Deaf Studies*). Seeing and knowing this requires something more than the sense of sight. These students learned that in order to see and know their society, they must refocus their gaze by positioning themselves within a standpoint that offers them a view of society. They also learned what philosophers from Plato to Heidegger have learned over the centuries, namely, that sight cannot see itself. They learned this when blindness (the teacher) entered the classroom; they learned this from both my blindness and theirs. Despite the blind teacher and blindness as teacher entering the classroom, the story doesn't end there; in fact it doesn't even begin there. Blindness entered the classroom long before Smokie guided me into N17 that day.

THE ECHO OF BLINDNESS

Contemporary conversations about knowledge and the institution often focus on the way that academic discourse legitimates itself by disavowing the historical, cultural, and corporeal specificity of its speaking. By exposing the

way that objective and neutral methodologies repress the precise locations from which the speaker comes, academic discourses have begun to interrogate themselves from within, calling scholars to account, so to speak, for their own inescapable epistemic contingencies. (Roof and Wiegman ix)

Disavowal as a form of self-legitimization engaged in by academic discourses has traditionally been a preferred method for resolving the problem of subjectivity in the academy. This problem as well as its solution is an articulation of modernity, and we owe this legacy primarily to the Age of Enlightenment. The precise location from which the speaker comes has been traditionally understood and positioned as a barrier to objective knowledge, and this positioning has generated the solution of objective and neutral methodologies. Method—framed within a positivistic understanding of the world—is modernity's way of removing (repressing) the particular situation of the speaker/inquirer. This methodological repositioning of the speaker/inquirer relies upon an imagined location possessed of the power (Foucault, *Order of Things*, *Archaeology of Knowledge*) to neutralize the influence of subjectivity. The problem of subjectivity is taken care of by dehistoricizing, deculturizing, and debodilying the subject with the subsequent production of knowledge.

The Western tradition has continuously made use of visual metaphor with its concomitant spatial metaphor to express the problem of subjectivity and its solution (Jay). Thus, particular locations blind us to a clear and objective view of reality. We (particular subjects) must get out of the way in order for reality to come into view. Particularity blinds us to the objective view of reality, and any knowledge production from particular locations is knowledge blinded by subjectivity. Even though Roof and Wiegman point out that academic speakers are beginning to interrogate themselves from within and are called to account for their own inescapable epistemic contingencies, the problem of subjectivity conceived of as blinding knowledge production remains a dominant ideology within the academy to this day (Smith, *Writing* 73–95).

It is this version of blindness that precedes Smokie and me as we enter the classroom. The students sitting in front of us have had more than a decade of formal education; they have had several years of seeing the point, of not being blind to the facts, of looking at things objectively, and of trying to see what the teacher is getting at. They have had many years of educational practice of seeing that seeing is enlightenment and blindness is ignorance. They have had years of encouragement to step out of the darkness and into the light. (See what I mean?)

And now the very contingency that the students have been taught to avoid—the contingency that represents the quintessential barrier to knowledge—walks into their classroom and positions himself as their professor.

Blindness as the contingent representation of ignorance begins to resonate and echo around the classroom. The sounds of blindness reverberate in the exclamations: "He's got a seeing eye dog! He's blind!" And in the questions: "How will he mark my exams? How will he know who I am?" These remarks are expressions and representations of the more fundamental question "How can he know, if he doesn't see?"

My blindness is, to borrow from Roof and Wiegman once again, my "inescapable epistemic contingency." Exposed as I am in front of more than eighty students, flexing my fingers gently around Smokie's harness, I find at least some means of escape. Recall that I tell students how I will mark their exams and papers and I demonstrate how I read. By showing students that I do the ordinary things that other ordinary professors do, I escape, albeit to a small degree, the extraordinariness of my contingency. I make use of the common-sense version of blindness (which not so coincidentally includes the medical sense) as a condition (contingency) in order to demonstrate that I can minimize the "negative effects" of blindness on my teaching (Zola; Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement* 46–53). But this also serves to emphasize the version of blindness that greets me as I enter the classroom. My blindness echoes the sound that is already resonating there.

I need to do more than account for my inescapable epistemic contingency. I need to escape the conception of my blindness as *contingency* in the first place. If not, my presence as *professor* is, as Roof and Wiegman say, deculturated and, more fundamentally, disembodied. After all, the students, unlike me, are without contingency in relation to sight—they don't see their eyesight as such. They are simply people, not people with eyesight. They don't happen to see, they simply see. I, on the other hand, am not simply a person, I am a person with blindness, with a disability. My blindness is a contingency, a condition I happen to have, I am a person who happens to be blind, at least in their eyes. My students do not see their sight as a contingency that they must escape. They see and thus potentially know. I can't see and thus can't know. I will be teaching ideas that must be looked at (examined) and ultimately seen (understood). I will be teaching "seeing people" to see sociologically. In the words of DiBernard, I would be involved in "teaching what you're not in the presence of those who are" (132).

I enter a university classroom in which blindness is already present, a presence couched within the understanding of it as the binary opposite of sight. Because our culture metaphorically (and often concretely) connects seeing with knowing, my presence in the classroom represents an initial echo of blindness as an obstacle to knowing. Seeing blindness as merely an inescapable epistemic contingency doesn't necessarily position it in a location of knowing. After all, inescapable contingency resonates with the sense that if blindness *could* be escaped, it should be. Blindness is not typically treated as a location of epistemic advantage or standpoint (Harding 146–60; Smith, *The Everyday*

181–207) in the way that “woman,” for example, is. Womanhood, as a site of inquiry and as an epistemological standpoint, does not formulate woman as contingency. Instead, there is something essential to be experienced and learned from the standpoint of womanhood. Yet, blindness and other disabilities are usually framed within the non-disability ideology of conditionality and contingency (Titchkosky, *Disability, Self, and Society* 121).

Such an ideology is exemplified in DiBernard’s work. A nondisabled university professor, she introduced a course in disabled women’s poetry. Whatever complacency she harbored with respect to her new course being merely another university course was, in her words, “quickly shattered the first night when a woman in a wheelchair wheeled into the room.” “I knew then,” DiBernard continues, “that I have a lot of work to do in coming to terms with my own relationship with and feelings about disability and my identity as an able-bodied person” (132).

In the face of disability, DiBernard not only faces the epistemic challenge of coming to terms with disability, she also recognizes herself (her identity) as located within able-bodiedness. “I feel my identity now not as a woman who ‘happens to be’ able-bodied, but as a woman whose able-bodiedness is a location for which I need to take responsibility.” DiBernard says that she needs to acknowledge her able-bodiedness “as the place from which I experience the world and from which I do my work.” DiBernard’s experience and work flow from her able-bodiedness, and, as a teacher, she has retrieved her embodiment. Her body is no longer “happenstance” or contingency; it is now the place (location) from which she experiences the world, from which she works, and from which she teaches (132).

But DiBernard’s able-bodiedness did not come to her from her experience or her work until she taught a course on disabled women’s poetry and, more significantly, until the woman wheeled into her classroom that night. Disability gave her her able-bodiedness. DiBernard’s able-bodiedness now comes to her as identity and not merely as contingency.

But does DiBernard’s able-bodiedness return the favor to disability? Does she see the disabled body in the same way she sees her own body? Does the disabled body now occupy the space of epistemic location, or does it remain mere contingency? Like those with abled bodies, do we (those of us with disabled bodies) also experience the world and do our work from the location of our bodies? DiBernard hopes that her students (the able-bodied ones) will come to understand their bodies in this way, but, as she writes, “it’s a long journey to make in fifteen weeks if people with disabilities have not even been visible before” (132).

We can glimpse an answer to these questions from DiBernard’s hope. Despite her new found epistemic location, DiBernard still refers to disabled people as “people with disabilities.” She still understands the “problem of disability” as the “problem of essentializing,” of seeing only the disability when

looking at someone who is disabled. DiBernard has not yet grasped disability as essential to the experience and work of a disabled person and thus as essential to the weaving of a social identity. Although her own (able) body is now commingled with identity, the disabled body remains contingent and conditional. We are not so much disabled people as we are people with disabilities. DiBernard’s newfound epistemic location permits her to see herself not as someone who happens to be able-bodied but as someone who is able-bodied. Yet, the location of able-bodiedness does not permit the same for the disabled body.

In a similar fashion, my students learn a great deal about their able-bodiedness (eyesight) when Smokie and I (blindness) enter the classroom. They learn, for example, about cultural practices such as making eye contact, giving dirty looks, looking wide awake in class, and so on. They learn that eye contact and looks are not merely a natural function of eyesight but are instead cultural productions. Some of the students begin to turn their gaze toward their own eyesight, and some of them even begin to take responsibility for their seeing. It is at this intersection between the body (eyesight) and identity that I must take responsibility for my blindness and join my students. This responsibility marks the beginning of the development of a social positioning so necessary for the inclusion of identity into the practices of teaching and learning. Identity is not merely a subjectivity that must be removed in order to know, as the Age of Enlightenment would have it. The task of the speaker/inquirer is to engage in the risky business of maneuvering identity, including the body, into the social position of speaker/inquirer. This maneuvering risks and therefore must resist the understanding that identity and the body represent knowledge itself; instead, identity and the body represent the “critical space for critical inquiry” (Titchkosky 2003). Speakers/inquirers must maneuver in the space of their identities and bodies and not obliterate this space as a remedy to modernity’s problem of knowing.

This conjoining of the body and identity in the classroom with my students is a daunting task indeed. Like DiBernard, I, too, am tempted to let my blindness (my body) reveal the connection between able-bodiedness and identity. I am tempted to reveal the epistemic location of able-bodiedness, and I join DiBernard in the hope that my students will see both their identity and epistemological standpoint in their bodies (eyes). This hope, however, will remain just that, a hope, unless I (blindness in the classroom) continue the attempt to depict my blindness as mine—as my identity—and as a location from which I experience the world, from which I work, from which I teach, from which a reality (one as legitimate as those of my students) comes to me, and especially as a location *in which I live*. This is to depict blindness and all disability as a social identity—an identity that embodies living and learning and not one that is contingent and from which we must escape.

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Walking on Thin Ice: The Il/legitimacy of Race and Racial Issues in the Classroom

Simone A. James Alexander

"Why are there so many women's texts on this syllabus?" questioned "Tom," a student of my "Third World Novel" course. This was my first attempt at addressing the contradiction that Margaret Andersen addresses. She writes, "At the same time that educators say this is a multicultural world, they teach a deep sense of otherness and ask students to think as if we were all alike. Thus, while we acknowledge that there are different groups in society and different cultures in the world, at the same time, we deny it by maintaining a reference point on human culture and society that is centered on the experiences of a few" (6). In my teaching I therefore aim to de-center the center, an "all-white, womanless curriculum." I informed Tom that I was attempting to promote curriculum continuum and to connect unconnected spaces by illustrating connections

among my students, their learning, society, and me. My goal is to heighten awareness of and tolerance for difference and to promote inclusion rather than exclusion. Tom's questioning of my rationale for choosing more texts by women than by men resulted from his literary training and background. He had been trained to read and accept (white) men's texts unconditionally; to witness this "drastic transformation" of the curriculum was unusual and unexpected. I had inundated the curriculum with works not only by women but also by women of color, third-world, immigrant women, who are branded by otherness and deemed peripheral by mainstream discourses.

Alternatively, my privileging texts by women of color could have been too personal for Tom; he viewed this act as my pushing my own agenda. I am a black, Caribbean-born, and female professor who teaches predominantly white, middle-class American students. By choosing texts that speak to and about myself, I made Tom feel as though the woman of color was forced on him in both body and text. Arguably, Tom foregrounded my gender, my body, and color and was reacting to what he felt was overkill, that is, a black woman teacher talking about black women. Tom's questions and others like them provide an entrée to this discussion.

The Third World Novels course is one of three rotating electives I teach. It meets once a week for two hours. In addition to the electives, I teach two sections of Freshman English, which are required of all faculty. Each section meets twice a week for one hour and fifteen minutes and consists of sixteen students, all freshmen. One section of the course had one black female student; the rest of the students were white. The elective was a little more diverse. In a class of thirteen students, three were Asians (all male), four African Americans (three females, one male), and six Caucasians (four females, two males). In another elective, Survey of African American Cultures, there were five African American students (three females, two males), eleven Asian students (all female), and four Caucasian students (two males, two females).

By probing the effectiveness or noneffectiveness of debating race and racial issues in the classroom, in this chapter I examine how race, gender, and class to some extent determine classroom dynamics. I address the expectations and responsibility that both students and the institution expect the teacher to shoulder and how these expectations change when the teacher is of color. I argue that though the classroom is seen as a liberatory forum where issues of race are openly addressed, it also functions as a repressed space. Though the head of her class, the teacher, ironically, not only suffers from bodily restriction in the enclosed classroom but also tailors her discourse to suit the needs of her students and the institution. Similarly discomfited are the students, as they, too, are repressed by classroom restrictions and governed by race- and gender-restricted discourses. Although the teacher's racial identity can affect her students' responses to race and racial discussions, it also affects her authoritative presence in the classroom. The subject of classroom debates can

become the object of her students' gaze. This gaze takes on mythic proportions when the teacher is othered, an exotic, alien being. Apart from being a black, Caribbean-born (Guyanese), middle-class woman, I have traveled extensively and lived on four continents. Although I have not recently lived in the Caribbean I have maintained a distinct Caribbean accent.¹ But my discernible difference is not simply a matter of skin color and linguistic difference. I also speak and have taught the Russian language.² I am not merely a black Caribbean-born professor but a black Caribbean-born professor who speaks Russian fluently.

To my students and some colleagues, my privileged status as a multilingual professor is itself an anomaly, one that was underscored in a recent job interview when the chair of the English department and the hiring committee questioned what I intended to do with my unusual background and qualifications. I countered that I viewed my unusualness as an asset and my backgrounds not limiting but complementary. I should add that he had quickly corrected himself, replacing the word "unusual" with "exceptional." Although I was told that my educational background would be an asset to the department and the institution, I did not get the job.³ Although the chair did not voice this openly, I can safely assume that the unusualness in my qualifications lies not in the fact that I speak Russian but that I am a black woman who speaks Russian. I can't but think the university was not yet prepared to deal with such an oddity.

The teacher of color occupies an ambiguous position, powerful and powerless, both subject and object. As an agent of knowledge, she also becomes the object of her students' gaze and occasionally their derision. Not only is the teacher's discourse tailored to meet the needs of both her students and the academic institution to which she has obligatory ties, but her body is constrained as well. I feel as if I am walking on thin ice. Yet there are still many uncharted and unbroken silences on race that, despite dangers, should be brought to classroom discussions. As a generous contributor to the unspoken silences in the classroom (I, too, have added to the silence by remaining silent), I try here to confront (albeit in writing) the source/force of my discomfort. Thus, I reclaim myself, my body. In this self-legitimizing process, I would like actively to engage colleagues and especially my students and offer possible solutions that we all can use in classroom discussions as means of countering racism.

ENGLISH 101

I received my initiation in identity and body politics in my second year in a tenure-track position at a private liberal arts college in New York, where I taught English 101 to incoming freshmen. Despite its location in a largely

multicultural community, the college was and is a predominantly white institution. After coming to grips with my students' initial expressions of shock and surprise upon realizing that I am othered, triply so, black, female, and Caribbean, I began to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, which purportedly provided me with the acceptance and acknowledgement that I sought at the institutional level. This sense of home, however, was short-lived, shattered by "Ryan." In response to an assignment on cultural differences, Ryan blatantly exhibited his intolerance to my race. The assignment, based on Doris Lessing's short story "The Mother of the Child in Question," asked students to illuminate and comment on societal and individual prejudices and cultural differences. In this story an immigrant mother is repeatedly questioned and coerced by the district's social workers to send her youngest child to a school for the "mentally disabled." The mother remains steadfast, refusing to surrender her child to the local authorities and insisting that her daughter attend the same school her four siblings attended. I posed questions: Why was the story titled as it was when the overriding issue appeared to be the child's condition and devising ways and means to help her? Was the title an allusion (insinuation) that the mother's decision not to send her child to this mandated school was itself questionable? Ryan responded that the mother did "a wrong thing and her decision, not to comply with the authorities, was foolish because as an immigrant she would not have been entitled to such 'luxuries' [as a special school] in her homeland." He also observed that the mother didn't speak and/or understand English well and was ignorant of American culture. After questioning further the mother's decision not to send her child to a school for the "intellectually challenged," Ryan concluded, oddly, that "Whites are afraid to take blood from Blacks because they suffer from sickle cell anemia." Ryan's (written) outburst was not only an attack on my race but also an attack on my body as he read it. African American scholar Carla Peterson correctly points out that the "body is never simply matter, for it is never divorced from perception and interpretation . . . and it is subject to examination and speculation" (x). Indeed it is true that the (black) body "is subject to examination and speculation." At the same time, however, it is also perceived (at least in Ryan's view) as "simply matter," sometimes, as here, "discarded" matter. My body is always already a "highly contested site of meaning" (xv), evidenced by Ryan's mis/reading of it. He attempted to make the black body invisible and/or ridden with dis-ease. My "diseased" body equates with having no body at all. Thus, the body becomes, to echo Peterson, both "invisible and hypervisible" (xi). In spite of my attempts to keep it out of sight and "out of speech," in part by my dressing it professionally in suits, it was exposed to the white male gaze and derided. Vanessa Dickerson argues, "all too often when the black female body is looked upon or made the object of the gaze, the body is still perceived as unworthy, if not worthless" (197). Ryan unveiled and announced the worthlessness of the body. Moreover, viewed as a collective

(black) representative, I was held accountable for the dis-ease that plagues the entire black race.

Ryan's attack on my racial identity on one level effaced my gender as well as desexualized my body. Because my body was seen as collective, my gender was also erased. In Ryan's eyes, the black body is homogeneous, yet in another way my body is gendered, visibly female. However, although I was quite aware that Ryan's comment was racially motivated, prejudiced, inappropriate, insulting, and ignorant, unquestionably provoked by my race, I remained silent. My silence temporarily stifled my own dis-ease with his unsolicited response. Later I quietly "voiced" my dis-ease by humbly writing at the bottom of his paper: "What is the relevance of this statement? And how does it enhance your essay?"

Obviously, by making my body the object of the gaze, Ryan overlooked my intellectual abilities and reduced me to racialized, sexualized body. Henceforth, Ryan viewed my teaching, an activity usually deemed intellectual, as an act of impersonation, an out-of-body experience. My apparent physical defect, in his eyes, is closely linked to an intellectual defect. Ryan's prejudice was reinforced by the stereotypes that have circulated about black bodies. Tragically, these stereotypes are still in circulation. This was confirmed by a former professor, who, upon hearing that I had landed a tenure-track job just out of graduate school, commented that this was "affirmative action at its best." My qualifications and the fact that I had completed a master's and a Ph.D. with no financial support from my department were totally overlooked and thereafter dismissed. Instead, my professor preferred the myth that black women (African Americans) are the primary beneficiaries of affirmative action. His comments speak directly to Carla Peterson's sardonic observation that "African Americans need affirmative action because, as pure bodies, they are incapable of intellectual thought and cannot compete fairly as workers in the marketplace" (xvi). My intellectual abilities were discredited and affirmative action indicted, with my hiring seen as simply a matter of race and, ironically, privilege. My professor's uninformed critique and false presumptions of minority hiring engaged what Carrie Tirado Bramen calls "inferential racism" (118).

In the instance just mentioned, my racial identity was attacked; in other instances, my ethnicity is subjected to ridicule. One such incident occurred in a class in which I introduced various novels by Caribbean authors. As I entered the classroom one morning, one of my male students, "Robert," started to chant "Kinky Reggae," the song made popular by Jamaican-born Bob Marley. Taking a break from his melodious pastime, Robert asked whether I was a Rastafarian and practiced "Rastafarianism." I learned later that he wanted to know whether I was familiar with reggae. Though the Rastafarians (in the Caribbean) are noted for their dreadlocks (along with their symbiotic relationship with nature, among other things), Robert thought he

noticed a striking resemblance between us. At that time, I wore, and still do, my hair straight. Had Robert taken the time to look at me he would have noticed that I did not fit the physical stereotype he intended with the word "Rastafarian." But by focusing on my ethnicity, he negated my body, which functioned conveniently as a site for manipulation. His queries were rebutted with silence.

FROM BODY POLITICS TO CLASSROOM POLITICS

In my ongoing effort to separate the body from brains/intellect, I attempt to keep the body out of sight and out of classroom debates by employing a strategy of "decorporealization." Peterson claims that "one sentimental strategy" that black women employed "in coming to voice . . . was that of decorporealizing the eccentric black body, rendering it invisible and privileging the soul or mind instead" (xii). My attempt to decorporealize the black female body means not that I subscribe to the popular mainstream discourse that views the black body as unseen/obscene but that I wish to lessen the presumption of incompetence that plagues it. I hope to give agency to the teacher's intellect by deflecting the gaze from her body. Though race is pivotal in determining this presumed incompetence, Pamela J. Smith argues that often gender damaging takes precedence over race as she wisely determines that "even being of the 'right' race does not diminish . . . this presumption of incompetence" visibly linked with women (31). I embodied this linkage.

The dynamics of the elective I taught last spring, "Survey of African American Cultures," were noticeably different from others. First, the class mainly consisted of students of color. Second, the African American students dominated the classroom discussions, and third, the Asian students were mostly silent. In this classroom of color, I consciously worked to undermine my own authority to be noticeably impartial, allowing students to express themselves freely as they saw fit. The black students took full advantage of this transferral of power by "stepping up to the podium" and openly speaking about racial encounters, paralleling the injustices that various characters in specific texts experienced with those they themselves had experienced. Some of the issues raised included police brutality in the black community, racial profiling, and the presumption of guilt based on race. James Baldwin's "If Beale Street Could Talk" provided a perfect stimulus for discussion. Arguably, my presence boosted the black students' assertiveness, for here stood one of their own. In this instance the classroom provided a forum, an outlet for students who otherwise may not have had or seized an opportunity to speak and be heard. During these discussions the white students were also noticeably silent. I wondered whether they didn't understand the texts or were dissatisfied with the discussions.⁴ The situation was soon elucidated by one of the two white female

students. "Amanda" E-mailed me to detail her dissatisfaction with the class, her discomfort in openly discussing the issues at hand, and her fear of being disregarded by the others. She added that another reason for her not participating much was that she did not find the class challenging and structured enough. This structural imbalance, she said, was a result of my allowing personal experiences in "nonpersonal" discussions. Amanda suggested I employ the Socratic method for our discussions because, in her experience, this method had been most effective for establishing the needed structure and authority.⁵ Undoubtedly Amanda is one of those students, who, in Sheila Minn Hwang's words, "assume[s] that authority comes in specific packages and that a particular kind of authority is necessary for effective teaching" (159). I employ Pamela Smith's proposal for a possible solution—I "swallow the rage that results from experiencing discrimination." Smith writes: "[S]ince black women are presumed to be unintelligent and not sufficiently credentialed," we should "write scholarship about race and gender that is both experiential and analytical" to assess the effects of discrimination and racial prejudice (32). Thus, I combine analysis and lived, bodily experiences—despite Amanda's objection—in the classroom—and here.

Amanda's fear of speaking candidly about race and racial issues may have been justifiable. She was ill at ease in a "colored" classroom, on the one hand, and on the other, her privileged life sheltered her from the injustices and discrimination that inner-city students face daily and that appeared in our texts.⁶ Cheryl Johnson writes, "one manifestation of students' dis-ease with the black female professor is their hesitancy, sometimes downright fear, of engaging in dialogue with her about African American literature and culture" (132). Amanda's refusal ultimately served to undermine my power and authority in the classroom, an authority, which in Indira Karamcheti's words, "has already been problematized by the fact of visible difference" (138). Amanda viewed the undermining of my authority as self-inflicted and irresponsible, an indication of incompetence. Her disapproval of the intermeshing of the personal (autobiographical) with the fictional/analytical is key because it suppresses the "relation [between] pedagogy and the personal."⁷ The suppression of this relation is viewed by Roger Simon as "the result of a strategic embrace of notions of objectivity borrowed from traditional disciplinary studies and seen as necessary for achieving academic legitimacy" (91–92). By suggesting that I adopt a Socratic approach in my teaching, Amanda both embraced and posited traditional canonical discourses as the standard for all other discourses. Traditional discourses unconditionally embrace objectivity, which results in depersonalization. To Amanda, not only did the content of my African American course fall short of achieving academic legitimacy, but I did, too.

Amanda was totally against the conflation of the teaching body and my self. In her view the two should be distinct. But how does one study/teach African American literature/culture separate from the black self, the black

body? Amanda's request to treat as distinct and separate the black body and the black discourse on slavery, for instance, was in my mind an impracticable demand, especially given the needs and desires of my other students to relate their lived, bodily experiences with the textual ones about which we read and wrote. Black literature has been one of recovery, recovering what was lost or deliberately excluded and rendered insignificant by mainstream (popular) discourse. The emerging literature, which focuses on self-representation, attempts to recover not only the self but specifically the black body. Saturating contemporary works, this self-recovery process is evident and unavoidable. It is almost impossible to remain disembodied in the process of teaching works by African American authors about African American peoples. As a woman of color I find that these textual issues of race, racial prejudices, and body politics speak to me directly. My teaching is inevitably a "situated, embodied act," to reemphasize Simon. Simon concludes: "to teach as a Jew [his] Jewish body will have to be seen more clearly, more concretely," meaning, "refusing to leave [his] difference at the door" (100). Like Simon, I refuse to leave my difference at the door. I therefore personalize the readings as an act of legitimizing them. As a further counter to alienation, I incorporate and integrate issues on diversity and alterity not only in my electives but also in both sections of my English 101 class. I visibly assert myself as black and female through text choices. One such text is Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, though it may seem ironic that I would choose to teach a book that chronicles a man's invisibility to assert my presence and my visibility. Unlike the invisible man who claims that when people "approach [him] they see only [his] surroundings, themselves, or a figment of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me" (3), I feel my visibility/invisibility is accentuated by my race and my gender, which are critical to my teaching (body). In a sense, my identity is betrayed, given away by my body. Indira Karamcheti illuminates this exposure/intrusion in concluding that "indeed, the minority teacher is already known, in *personal terms*: ethnicity, race, is, among other things, an already familiar genre of personality" (Karamcheti's italics, 138). Karamcheti correctly notes that our notable ethnic and racial differences make us "walking exemplars of ethnicity and of race" (138). But again within this visibility we also embody our invisibility. Offering a case study of students in a women's studies course, Lisa Bowleg writes that the invisibility of race does not apply to the woman of color but to white people, who have the privilege of seeing "themselves as generics (that is, as 'just people')" (116). Although I lack this privilege, I enjoy the privilege of incorporating texts in my syllabi that embrace and celebrate difference and otherness. Engaged in the act of transgressing the supposed divide between the personal and the pedagogical, I am "engage[d] in the practice of self-inclusion, the politics of the personal" (Karamcheti 138). The pedagogical and the personal should not be seen as opposite. They are complementary. By including specific texts and asserting my self in discussions I transform the curriculum.

Speaking about the limitations that women of color face, Sheila Minn Hwang corroborates my experience that "students tend to make assumptions about correlations between one's ethnic background and one's area of expertise" (159). Though Hwang is Asian and teaches British Literature and I am black and teach African American literature and literatures of the Diaspora, we share a similar fate. Like Hwang, who, "because of [her] Asian face, must constantly defend [her] right to talk knowledgeably about British literature" (159), I, too, in spite of my black face, am forced to defend my position as an African Americanist/Afro-Caribbeanist. My blackness and the fact that I teach African American and "minority" literatures do not spare me the label of incompetence, as Amanda's questions and suggestions of my academic legitimacy evidence along with departmental questioning of my teaching approach and techniques.⁷ I am living proof that one's visible, embodied ethnicity does not always permit one to lay claim to the literature that speaks to and of that ethnic group.

Although in the preceding example my ethnicity is a detraction and disclaimer, in other cases, it provides a visible link with textual references for my students. Establishing a link between the text and myself seemingly provides some identifiable comfort, a therapeutic remedy as practiced by "Martha." Too bashful to address openly issues of race and discrimination in the classroom, Martha did so without inhibition in a written assignment on James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son." In class Martha, normally enthusiastic about our debates, was unusually silent. However, she informed me subsequently by E-mail how much she enjoyed the discussion and was appalled by the discrimination that Baldwin experienced in spite of his education. She writes that she was "simply shocked that someone with Baldwin's education was subjected to so much hate and discrimination. It is even more appalling when you considered that he attended an Ivy League university." Martha was troubled by the injustices Baldwin faced and the mistrust of white people that he later developed as a result of these injustices. Evidently she thought that his education would shield him from the injustices that she linked exclusively to the experiences of uneducated (poor) blacks. Martha saw a link between Baldwin and me and realized, maybe for the first time, how insignificant one's education could become amidst racism and racist perceptions. On one hand, the personal narrative in which she acknowledged the injustices was probably her way of ensuring that the rage of racism that embodied Baldwin did not infect me, and on the other hand, it may have been her attempt to build my trust in her. Martha cautiously did not voice her opinion in the classroom with her fellow students, who interpreted Baldwin's essay simply as a personal (autobiographical) narrative that had nothing to do with reality. Yet her refusal to address such issues except in a paper intended for my eyes put me on the defensive, tempting me to see the written response as an "act of pleasing." In this situation the classroom functioned as an inhibiting, suffocating space. And it

reveals that Martha, though white, was subjected to what I had experienced as a black woman: She was trapped, physically and linguistically, in this predominantly white classroom.

EVALUATIONS: A MARKER OF COMPETENCE?

Whereas students use written evaluations (a privilege) as a forum to voice their disapproval and discomfort with both the class and the teacher, the teacher has no such institutional forum, no real outlet. Because evaluations represent a subjective practice, I ask whether it is fair to place a preponderance of weight on students' evaluations when judging a teacher's competence—or incompetence. Addressing the danger of relying heavily on students' evaluations and the occasional self-imposed blindness or lack of vision of colleagues, Smith cites the Association of American Law Schools: "Non-minority colleagues often do not recognize the hostility and questioning of ability that colleagues and students can direct at a minority professor. The failure to acknowledge these factors can cause some faculty members and administrators to give undue weight to [student] complaints and to respond inappropriately" (31).⁸ The dominance and frequency of in-classroom questionings have distracted attention from the sometimes more profound out-of-classroom questionings by the institution. Because of the atmosphere of fear and prejudice, the teacher often does not feel safe discussing the possible racist motivations for bad evaluations with other faculty members. I experienced my own bouts of skepticism at the end of a fall semester. After giving my students a written assignment to construct a counternarrative to Judy Syfers's essay "I Want a Wife," I was dumbfounded by "Sara's" response. In her essay she wrote a sister-narrative titled "I Want a Girlfriend." Sara graphically, with sadomasochistic detail, described the kind of girlfriend she (as male speaker) desired and the violent, abusive, sexual relationship that should define this relationship. Assuming a male identity, Sara wrote that she wanted to be complimented on the size and satisfaction that would be derived from her male anatomy. In an after-classroom session with Sara, I voiced my concerns about and discontent with the content of her sexually wired essay. She did not see eye-to-eye with me and saw nothing abnormal or unusual about her written response. She apparently thought that by her assuming a male identity it was acceptable to stereotype the male body since it was an "out of body" experience.

A few days after I was debased and labeled by Sara along with her classroom supporters as closed-minded because I objected to her sexual descriptions and innuendoes, my dean asked whether I thought that the term-end bad evaluations were racially motivated.⁹ Although I knew that her questioning in *this case* was well intentioned, I refrained from offering a verdict for I fear being

accused of masking my "incompetence" or "playing the race card," playing for sympathy. And although at this point my fears of talking openly about the evaluations with the dean were unfounded, they were later confirmed.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: CLASSROOM VERSUS INSTITUTION

One possible solution to student and administrative challenges to teacherly authority and teacherly selfhood, as well as to the multiethnic syllabus, is to acknowledge that race and gender matter and directly address them, exposing prejudices. However, one should note that the classroom is a place where students are groping for identity and power and where the teacher, at the same time, is attempting to assert hers, the reason difference is made to matter so greatly. Even though the classroom provides a forum for dialogue among the races, this forum is effective only if it is defined by sustained dialogues. At the same time, classroom debates should not be posited as the cure-all of prejudices and dis-eases.

The institution also plays a pivotal role in bridging the divide between teacher and students, between in- and out-of-classroom debates. Although one possible way to transform the curriculum is to add diversity to it, the institution also has an obligation to diversify the faculty to reflect the changing needs. The need for more diversity in the mainstream curricula, evidenced in my English classes in which race discussions spill over, should be addressed and implemented. Even though diversity should be a component of mainstream courses, electives should not be regarded as adjuncts to mainstream curricula but as part of the whole. To foster collegiality and to create a productive environment, institutions need to undergo changes; rather than adopt the notion that the "student is always right," they should instead take into consideration that a student's questioning of a teacher may be the result of personal differences and prejudices. Evaluations should not be the sole marker of competence, and the teacher should not be graded on this single assignment; her overall performance should be taken into account. Institutions should also cater to the needs of the changing profession(al) or individual. They should be aware of new scholarship on and by women of color, familiarizing themselves, either in planned faculty forums or personal discussions, to better understand the professor and to better assess students' complaints. This interaction would help the administration and students to become more accepting and tolerant of difference and individuality, permitting personal growth, which eventually leads to institutional growth. Administrators should be willing to listen to suggestions that may not support theirs but yet are not necessarily outlandish. The challenge, moreover, is not solely to pursue the course of integration and diversity in the curricula but to extend it beyond classroom debates and remain committed not only to students but also to

women professors of color. To this end it would be helpful if minority faculty are given a forum to voice their discomfort and experiences, whether good or bad. Whether the views of the woman of color are in agreement or to the contrary, she should not be penalized or marginalized for expressing them. When the woman of color becomes legitimized, bodily and/or textually, thin ice will not beckon and threaten.

NOTES

1. Although Guyana is geographically located on the South American continent and is the only English-speaking country in the region, it is considered part of the Caribbean community because of the cultural and linguistic similarities and governing policies it shares with other Caribbean nations. It is also a member of the Caribbean Commonwealth Community. Similar to other English-speaking Caribbean countries, Guyana was colonized by the British, hence its former name, British Guiana.
2. I lived in Moscow for six years, where I obtained a first and a second degree in Russian language and literature. While completing my dissertation, I taught Russian language to undergraduates at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. More than half of my students were first-generation Russian immigrants.
3. I found out later that another West Indian friend was offered the job, which she turned down because of unsuitable conditions.
4. While I noted the white students' discomfort, mine was tempered. I responded to comments as portrayed herein, sometimes refraining from offering an opinion so as not to be accused of being prejudiced one way or the other or of inciting racism. Though being uncomfortable with addressing race and related issues should not be a source of contention in seminars that have race incorporated in the titles, one can never take things for granted. I have had students who were sincerely stunned that race and racism and the vestiges of slavery were so prevalent in a class that spoke to and of the black experience. Students complained that they were expecting to be introduced to the cultural aspects of the black experience and not be engaged in empty rhetoric, trespassing on the racial aspect of the black experience and unnecessarily digging up the past.
5. I feel that authoritative distancing on the professor's part is necessary to foster students' expressing themselves freely in an atmosphere that promotes the exchange of ideas and various interpretations. It is rather ironic that Amanda called for my authoritative presence in the classroom and, in the same breath, accused me of being too opinionated and too visibly present.
6. In conversation with Amanda, I learned that she was a transfer student and had lived in Boston all her life. Both her parents are medical doctors.
7. In a meeting with Amanda, I proposed arriving at a less rigid pace of learning so her concerns could be duly addressed and represented and all her needs could, I hoped, be met. In spite of our meeting and unknown to me, Amanda took the matter to the dean, who later, in a brief conversation, requested that we meet to discuss in detail strategies for countering issues such as students' expectations and teachers' obligations.

ations. Though this meeting did not take place, a few days after Amanda filed her grievance, I was contacted and informed by a senior faculty member that she had been asked to conduct a classroom observation, specifically in this literature class, on my teaching praxis and practices. I assume that the reason this meeting did not take place was that the classroom observation took place without event and I was given a flattering and laudatory report. Apparently there was no need for further investigation.

8. Pamela Smith herself is an assistant professor of law at Boston College Law School and has faced discrimination by both students and the institution.

9. Evaluations are normally given to students at "New College" about three weeks before the end of the semester. Customarily, we professors are instructed to give them to students to fill out, at the end of the session, in our absence. I followed this instruction, but before I was able to leave the classroom a few of Sara's friends stood in front of the class, using the blackboard as a cushion for the evaluation sheets, and drew straight lines through the number one on all ten questions. One is the lowest score, ranging on a scale from one to five.

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Dancing Revolution: A Meditation on Teaching and Aging

Brenda Daly

Write yourself. The body must be heard.

—Hélène Cixous

"What did you think of the presentation?" I asked the eighteen students in English 339, "Literary Theory and Criticism," following their attendance at a talk by Jane Tompkins and Gerald Graff in the spring of 2000. I was expecting these students, all of them undergraduate English majors, to debate the pedagogical question Tompkins and Graff raised in their title, "Sage on the Stage or Guide on the Side?" Instead one student blurted out, "They're so old!" As others nodded in agreement, I countered foolishly, "But they're my

age!" Since I was too surprised to turn this exchange into a teachable moment, I have been haunted ever since by this classroom scene: the moment I became aware of my aging teacher's body. How, I began to wonder, am I to act in this newly "old" body? I recalled with embarrassment having danced a little jig in that same classroom to wake a drowsy student. We all enjoyed the moment—including the sleepy student—but afterward I wondered: Am I too old to dance and too old to teach? If Parker Palmer is right, such fears of aging are widely shared by teachers. As he says in *The Courage to Teach*, "Day after day, year after year, we walk into classrooms and look into younger faces that seem to signal, in crude ways and subtle, 'You're history. Whatever you value, we don't'" (48).

Fall semester 2000 has ended; nevertheless, according to my "Ladies of Rylstone Calendar," whose pages I have not turned since the academic year began, it is still August 2000. Above the caption, "Beautifully preserved," is the photograph of a nude: a middle-aged white woman, her breasts discreetly hidden behind a large cooking pot, stands in her kitchen, ladling preserves into jam jars. August, now long past, was the month I learned, as I was preparing to return to the classroom after a summer of writing, that I had a potentially precancerous condition. When the doctor phoned, explaining the need for a biopsy, which she called "minor surgery," I was typing the syllabus for English 339, "Literary Theory and Criticism." Calmly, with only mild annoyance at the inconvenience, I called to schedule the surgery for late September and then quickly returned to my work. A few days later, as I handed out my syllabus, a student called my attention to at least three typos on the first page! I was embarrassed but intrigued; with my mind elsewhere, my body had been writing itself, recording disturbances. Throughout the month of September, I worried—unnecessarily, as it turned out—that the demise of my body had begun.

Wednesday, December 22, 2000, 11:05 A.M. *A Lutheran Brotherhood saleswoman arrives, earlier than scheduled, to explain my options for long-term care insurance. I am annoyed, mostly because I have allowed him to schedule this appointment at a time that interferes with my writing but also because I don't want to think about aging. I know, however, that long-term care insurance will cost less if I buy it before I turn 59. Nevertheless, I ask, "What if I wait until I'm 65?" With fingers on the keyboard of his laptop, he answers, "I'll turn you into a 65-year-old in just a second here, and we'll figure the cost." He smiles at his joke, but I don't. "What if I limit my coverage to five years?" I ask next, explaining, "I'd rather be dead than linger on if I am unable to take care of myself." He zooms me back to age 59, explaining that for a higher monthly payment, my long-term care coverage can be adjusted for inflation. "The problem with that plan," I reply after he shows me the cost, "is that I'm an English professor who may not be able to afford such a large monthly payment, especially after retirement."*

Having had almost no time to write during fall semester, I hoard my morning hours over the holiday break. These hours belong to me, not to students who view me, understandably, primarily in terms of their own needs. And these hours certainly do not belong to an insurance man who sees me as one more sale in the year 2000.

In the year 2000.

In the year 2000 I acknowledge that, despite my ability to exercise an hour a day with Jane Fonda and the eternally young women on her videotapes, I must make changes in my teaching schedule. I no longer have the stamina to teach two eighty-minute classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays so that, ideally, I can write on alternate days of the week. Preparing to make this change, I rationalize: Committee work has already "stolen" most of my writing days; what difference will it make? It's true. Despite a Tuesday-Thursday teaching schedule, my writing time—as is probably true for most faculty members—is usually "stolen" by required service to the university: preparing for classes, answering an increasing number of E-mails, reading and evaluating applications for grants and leaves for a college committee that I currently chair, grading papers, and writing letters of recommendation for students. More and more I find that I am able to write only during the summers. Given these realities, I arrange to switch from a two-day to a five-day teaching schedule for spring semester 2001. After making this change, one of my inner voices says, "It will be good to have a gentler rhythm, a more even tempo, for each work day." Another voice protests, "Does growing old mean slowing down until, finally, I will be forced to give up the things I love the most—writing? teaching? dancing? Death is not the problem (or so I tell myself); what I can't seem to accept is the time between now and then."

I would prefer not to think about aging. The primary reason for my resistance is that, as Elizabeth Spelman reminds me, our culture fears the body, a fear that intensifies as the body ages. "What might be called 'somatophobia' (fear of and disdain for the body) is part of a centuries-long tradition in Western culture" (126), Spelman explains. Men have claimed "transcendence," actively creating culture, according to Simone de Beauvoir, whereas women have been regarded as "immanence," as wombs. According to Spelman, that is why feminists such as de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Shulamith Firestone have argued that "the source of our liberation lies in sundering that connection" (126). Yet Spelman cautions feminists against disassociating ourselves from the body. Instead, she argues, feminists must challenge this attitude toward the body because somatophobia "contributes to white solipsism in feminist thought": (1) It ignores an important element in racist thinking that holds that certain races are more "body-like," that is, "more animal-like and less god-like" (127); (2) it leads to the notion that superior groups—of a certain gender, race, or class—have better things to do than caring for the body, thus predicating one group's liberation on the oppression of the other group;

and (3) it leads, by divorcing the concept of woman from the concept of a woman's body, to "the idea of a woman who is no particular historical woman—she has no color, no accent, no particular characteristics that require having a body" (128).

Such a disembodied feminist—without color, accent, or body—becomes an oppressor of others. Thus I must acknowledge not only that I have a body but also that I inhabit an aging white middle-class (or is it working class?) body. When I enter the classroom, I cannot leave this body behind, although my culture would have me do so. I was reminded of this cultural code in 1963 when, at the age of twenty-two, I was about to begin my first teaching job. Instead, I had to inform the principal at Hopkins High School in suburban Minneapolis that I was married and pregnant. The principal, disapproval in his eyes, immediately released me from the contract. Embarrassed and without questioning his assumption, I knew the unwritten rule: He couldn't have a pregnant woman in the classroom. I felt trapped in my pregnant body, afraid of being eternally condemned to the realm of immanence as my mother had been. Because my mother had had no money of her own, her responsibility for the care of seven children made her completely dependent upon my unpredictable and abusive father. It also left her no time for a life of the mind. Hoping to escape her fate, despite my pregnancy, I enrolled that fall in a graduate program at the University of Minnesota. Oddly, the more my body swelled, the more invisible I felt on campus. Following the birth of my son on a Saturday evening, one week before winter quarter ended, I attended my last Wednesday-evening seminar. When a male student commanded me to stand up. I stood. For the first time, and only after it was over, my pregnancy had been acknowledged.

I understood that I had violated a taboo simply by appearing in a university—a place of the mind—in a pregnant body. Over the next fifteen years, as a mother and a high school teacher, I became a feminist. Although I did not return to a doctoral program until 1978, one of my first postdegree publications focused on mothering. In *Narrating Mothers*, which I coedited with a younger colleague who was (and is) also a mother, we consciously and persistently resisted the binary opposition, immanence/transcendence, as we examined the maternal perspective in twentieth-century women's narratives. My essay, "Teaching Alice Walker's *Meridian*: Civil Rights according to Mothers," explains how, as a teacher, I came to understand that mothering is not the same for all women. Judith Fetterley had alerted me to the fact that gender makes a difference in how we read, and in 1985, while I was teaching an extension course in a racially mixed neighborhood in northern Minneapolis, my students taught me that African American women and white males interpreted *Meridian* differently from the way I did. Yet, African American women readers did agree with me on one point: that mothering is central in *Meridian*. By contrast, young white men did not even notice moth-

ering in the novel! After this teaching experience, because I had read Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* in 1976, I recognized that I could no longer read—or teach—as a (white) man. Along with many other feminists, I acknowledged that consciousness is embodied.

Now, as I confront the "flesh loathing" that I sometimes feel toward my own aging, white, heterosexual, middle-class teacher's body (with its working-class past), I understand that I must learn to differentiate between cultural attitudes toward aging and my own experience of it just as, earlier, I had learned to differentiate, as Rich recommended, between the institution of motherhood and my actual experience of it. I am not at all certain, however, that such differentiation is possible when it comes to aging. Since the birth of my son thirty-six years ago, I have known—known viscerally—that I cannot escape death. Yet, since my mother's death in 1997, I have also resolved to resist at least some aspects of aging. This resistance, I believe, makes me hungry for dancing. As a girl, I loved to dance, and when I dance now the experience reminds me of the girl I once was. In the fifties and into sixties, that lively girl could rock and roll, jitterbug, and twist and bop with abandon. That may be why, in 1999, as I was leaving my own fifties behind, my partner and I signed up for dance lessons. What a joy to dance again!

At the same time I found myself drawn to the rhythms and images of dance in fiction, and in a wild experiment in "Twentieth-Century Fiction," I invited thirty, mostly white, male and female nonmajors in their late teens and early twenties to dance their responses to fiction. We began by discussing images of dance in David Leavitt's "Family Dancing" and Lorrie Moore's "Dance in America." During the next class period we assembled in a gym where the dance instructor, Linda Sabo, explained that dance is "culture inscribed on the body." Under her guidance, students learned a few basic movements before choosing a character from one of the two short stories to portray in dance. After improvising movements for their character, Sabo asked them to dance with another character. In retrospect I view this experiment as a kind of acting out, a way of avoiding the task of facing my anxieties about aging. Yet, as a result of this experiment, I began to ask new questions. If dance itself is a language—a symbol of the act of creation itself, a pantomime of metamorphosis (Cirlot 72–73)—how, I wondered, does the language of dance differ from the language of literature? How does the body speak? What exactly is the language of dance?

Defining dance for inexperienced students, Lorrie Moore's teacher-narrator says: "I tell them dance begins when a moment of hurt combines with a moment of boredom. I tell them it's the body reaching, bringing air to itself. I tell them that it's the heart's triumph, the victory speech of the feet, the refinement of animal lunge and flight, the purest metaphor of tribe and self. It's life flipping death the bird" (47). I agree; that's it exactly: Dance is the purest metaphor of tribe and self. In this sense the body is the text, and the

text the body. Critic Arlene Elder also suggests such an intimate relationship when she uses the phrase "dancing the page" to describe the native dance rhythms in M. Scott Momaday's novel, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. As Elder's phrase implies, dance is a phenomenon shaped by cultural codes and beliefs, a metaphor of tribe and self. If dance is defined as "a pantomime of metamorphosis," its rhythmic movements "speak" of the inevitable transformation of body and culture, self and tribe. According to this formulation, body and mind and individual and culture cannot be separated. Aging, like other transformations of self, occurs to an individual but always within a tribe, a culture. In short, cultural beliefs are shaping my experience of aging.

Physician Christiane Northrup makes this point—that beliefs about aging influence the actual physiological process—in *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* by summarizing the results of an experiment on the T'ara Humara Indians in Mexico: As reported by Dr. Deepak Chopra, endocrinologist and internationally recognized authority on how consciousness affects our bodies, certain members of the T'ara Humara tribe ran the equivalent of a marathon or more every day and had regular races between groups. The most intriguing aspect of their culture, Northrup emphasizes, was that they believed that the best runners were those in their sixties. Indeed, according to researchers, the best lung capacity, cardiovascular fitness, and endurance were found in the runners in their sixties! Yet, as Chopra emphasizes, "for this belief to translate into physical reality, the entire tribe has to believe it" (Northrup 435). Certainly, this belief—that the body improves with age—is not shared by the American "tribe," of which I am a member. Moreover, as I learned when presenting an earlier version of this chapter, men and women experience aging differently. For example, one man who has been supportive of my feminist scholarship in the past declared bluntly that the topic of aging is "narcissistic"; by contrast, upon hearing my topic, women have commented almost uniformly that men gain status as they age, but women lose it. These gendered responses helped me to identify the primary source of my fear of aging in the classroom: the possible loss of respect from students.

I first encountered my fear of this loss of respect almost thirty years ago while reading Joyce Carol Oates's *Do with Me What You Will*. As Marvin Howe, an aging lawyer, tries to explain to Elena, his much younger wife, why he needs her so desperately, he recounts an experience at a stag party: "The master of ceremonies had been building up to this. He made us all believe that something truly amazing was going to come on stage. . . . And then . . . two bicyclists pedaled out, and they were women, naked, but then it became obvious that there was something wrong with them: they were very old women" (Oates's ellipses 554). Although I was only thirty-two years old when I first read this passage, I identified with the aging women who are figures of ridicule: "They were very skinny, they were riding these bicycles, like circus bicycles, decorated with balloons and paper flowers" (554). At first, Howe

says, the audience was surprised, but then they laughed. But when one old woman fell, Howe explains, he was reminded of his aging mother, and at that moment "the bottom had fallen out of the universe" (554). That is why, Howe says, his life depends upon the youthful Elena's staying. He needs her to function as a mirror in which he can see himself as youthful, regardless of his age. By contrast, if an aging woman chooses a younger partner, she is likely to be ridiculed. The reason is obvious: An aging woman *is* her body, is immanence, whereas an aging man is not.

Despite this encounter with the sexism of ageism in the early 1970s, I have been very slow to recognize my own internalized ageist attitudes. For example, although I began studying images of women in the early seventies and although I tried to be inclusive, I had completely ignored grandmothers! Only after becoming a "nana"—which is what my Mexican American grandson calls me—have I found myself reading more and more often from the perspective of an aging woman. Yet I say very little about aging women in the classroom. Little by little, I am attempting to change this behavior. For example, when I inform students that, according to reader-response theorists, we read from different subject positions, I now include age along with the more familiar categories of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class. Last fall (2000), to illustrate this reader-response concept to students, I used my personal experience as a grandmother to describe how I read the chapter called "Three Sisters" in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*. Since becoming a grandparent to two beautiful Mexican American children, as I told students in "Twentieth-Century Fiction," I have become attentive to "three old ladies who smelled like cinnamon" (105). These three sisters are not ordinary women, I explained, but personifications of what Jean Wyatt calls "Mexican social myths of gender [that] crystallize with special force in three icons: 'Guadalupe, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada* (*Malinche*), the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children" (244). What intrigues me, I told my young students, is that Cisneros has transformed these icons into mentors who bless Esperanza, rather than discouraging or delimiting her feminist desires. Students were polite as I expounded on Cisneros's feminist transformations of the mythical identities of these three women, but they were obviously not as engaged as I.

What attracts me is Cisneros's notion of aging women who bless, rather than any notion that discourages or delimits them. This notion of a "mentor who blesses"—similar to what Erik Erikson calls "generativity"—is not always easy to achieve. Generativity, according to Erikson, is the "instinctual power" behind many kinds of caring; more specifically, it refers to "man's *love for his works and ideas as well as for his children*" (131). Erikson explains that it may first arise during parenthood but can be generalized to include many workers and thinkers who need to teach, not only for their own sake but also for that

of others. In 1964, when Erikson's words were first published, women's ideas were rarely valued; their work was limited to the care of children. Yet the concept of generativity may be expanded to include a woman's need to generate feminist ideas—that is, the need to continue her own creativity—as well as her need to nurture the young in her care, both inside and outside the classroom. My feminist ideal, then, is to become a creative older woman who blesses the young, rather than fearing, envying, or delimiting them. To learn how to achieve this goal—which can be challenging in a competitive academic culture—I have begun seeking grandmother-mentors. My search has only just begun, but thus far, such generative feminist mentors are not easy to find either in life or in literature.

One reason for the absence of generative aging women is that they are not honored in Euro-American culture. Alan Cheuse makes this point in a short story called "O Body Swayed," which depicts an aging woman who is abused by school children. As Cheuse's title suggests, his story is a fictional updating of Yeats's "Among School Children," with specific reference to the lines "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance" (lines 63–64). The aging woman in the story, Jane Harrison, is a former dancer, now confined to a wheel chair, who has recently returned to the United States for hip-replacement surgery. The story opens as Jane, recalling with embarrassment her "little dance" with a flight attendant in the lavatory somewhere over the Atlantic, asks the same attendant for help in leaving the plane. It is fear of this kind of dependency that prompts me and others in my age bracket to pay money for long-term care insurance. In our society aging parents cannot count on help from their adult children; in fact, even if the children are willing to help, parents may prefer the help of someone they pay, as is the case with Jane in "O Body Swayed." Jane is not at all gracious about accepting help from her son; in fact, in an effort to escape him and his wife, she finally agrees, though reluctantly, to be interviewed by a young reporter. "Just come the hell over," she tells Amy Kunstler, "I'm in a bloody wheel chair, and you can push me to the park" (25).

As they talk, joggers, skateboarders, and bikers go whizzing by, and Harrison repeatedly asks Kunstler to slow down. The issue of generativity surfaces when the reporter asks, "So you're not making anything new?" Harrison lies: "I am, actually. . . . A very new piece. Quite embryonic right now, though. But definitely in the works" (28–29). Following this exchange Harrison becomes even more cantankerous, undoubtedly because she feels defensive about lying and angry that she is not in fact working on a new piece. She cautions Kunstler not to get her hopes up about doing a story about her: "I'm a bit more difficult in person than my pieces might make me out to be." Kunstler responds, "I don't write psychological criticisms of movement, Miss Harrison. Unless I'm trying to find some connection between a piece and the American psyche" (29). Harrison objects to the notion of an American psyche, calling it

"silly bullshit" (29). However, this supposedly silly bullshit provides a key to the meaning of this story, instructing me in how to understand—in cultural terms—the story's unpredictable close.

What happens is this: While Amy Kunstler is distracted by a man, probably her ex-husband, who is stalking her in the park, Harrison is suddenly on her own. Watching as the couple swing at each other, Harrison thinks, "A dance," and takes off in her wheelchair. Feeling "free," she suddenly realizes that she hadn't lied: "She was rushing toward something new. The piece flashed into her mind. On stage, moving chairs, and women with strong arms—stronger than hers—spun themselves about, the large wheels making great circles in the eyes of the audience. It all came to her in great circles itself, as she kept moving along the path" (32). But when she has to pee, she calls out to two young boys, mistakenly assuming they will help her find a lavatory. Instead, the boys kidnap her, calling her "Wheelchair Granny" and "Granny Wheelie!" During a battle between two gangs, her purse is stolen by one gang and her chair by the other. At the close of the story, she lies in a hospital bed, sobbing without sound in the presence of her son and his wife. Closing her eyes, she sees "wheels and skates and boards and bikes, bandanas, wheels and wheels and wheels" (36). Yes, it is a cultural dance, but not precisely what she had envisioned.

My initial response to this ending was angry resistance. I attacked the author, whom I imagined (incorrectly) to be a young man because he seemed to imply that an aging woman should not be seen or heard in public. During a calmer, more reflective rereading, I recognized that my response to the story mirrors Harrison's response to aging. I became cranky toward someone younger, an irritability more intense toward someone upon whom I feel dependent. In this case I felt dependent, as a reader, on how a (male) author had envisioned me. Forced to acknowledge Harrison's dependency, her vulnerability, I wonder: Are such feelings inevitable? It is this very question, I conclude, that Cheuse is asking readers to contemplate when he has Kunstler say, "I'm trying to find some connection between a [dance] piece and the American psyche" (29). What is this connection? Harrison finds herself in a brutal dance over which she has no creative control: Wheels and wheels rush by as she herself on wheels is caught in the battles of the young people around her. It is a brutal choreography, one without gentleness toward the elderly, a cultural choreography that allows Harrison no space for dignity or creativity. I comfort myself: Since I am a writer like Amy rather than a dancer like Jane, I need not fear such a loss of creativity as I age. I don't use my body to write; hence, unlike a dancer, I can work until I drop dead. Almost immediately I recognize this thought as a flight from the body. As a writer I may be able to escape (some of) the limitations of aging and embodiment; as a teacher I cannot.

A teacher's choice of metaphors has a powerful effect on pedagogy, according to a young colleague, Deb Marquart. Perhaps the fact that embodiment is

inescapable in the classroom helps to explain why I, along with others, think of teaching as dancing. For example, working-class academic Julie Olsen Edwards uses the dance metaphor to describe her teaching of mostly working-class students. She says, "I have the privilege of orchestrating our dance together. I tap into their hope and offer them mine. Your families and mine," I tell them, "do the work of the world" (357). Edwards reminds me that, when I define myself primarily as a writer and not as a teacher, I am guilty of trying to leave this labor—this dance of teaching—to embodied others while I as a writer assume the superior life of the mind. Yet it is difficult to resist the widely shared assumption that research is more important than teaching, at least at a university such as Iowa State. Moreover, although parental roles should not be thoughtlessly mapped onto teaching—I do not play the part of mother to my students—the two are dialectically related. Being a parent has influenced my teaching, just as teaching has influenced my parenting. For example, as both a mother and a teacher, I understand that it is important to be available to the young while, at the same time, it is important to set boundaries not only for the benefit of the child, who needs the experience of dancing alone, but also for my own benefit: If I fail to care for myself and if I do not remain generative (creative), I cannot care for the next generation. Recalling Jane Harrison, I ponder a recurring nightmare: a fear of falling in the classroom.

To examine my fears of aging—an examination that must precede more effective methods of teaching about aging—I decide to focus on English 384, "Twentieth-Century Fiction," a course in which "family" is a recurring topic. Having resolved to stop denying my own aging, I analyze the portrayal of grandparents, however marginal, in the stories I frequently assign. As stated earlier, the course enrolls up to thirty-five students, mostly nonmajors in their late teens and early twenties, most of them white. In the fall of 2000, I begin the course with Willa Cather's well-known story, "Paul's Case" (1902), closing with a story published in the late-twentieth century, David Leavitt's "Family Dancing" (1984). As Leavitt's story dramatizes, it is now possible—as it was not at the time Cather wrote "Paul's Case"—to be explicit about a character's sexual orientation; however, this change does not suggest that the family—a historically heterosexist institution—is any healthier in the late-twentieth century than it was earlier in the century. Since a grandmother appears—in fact, opens the dancing—in Leavitt's story, I begin to explore the question: How will an aging woman respond to a gay man or, more specifically, how is their interaction represented by an openly gay author? This question was prompted, in part, by an invitation from a young gay colleague, just out of the closet in the fall of 2000, to join his proposed session, "Writing the Body," at the Conference on College Composition and Communication the following April (2001). Sadly, the grandmother knows nothing about her grandson Seth's sexual orientation; only Seth's sister, Lynnette, knows that John, a man who happens to be her best friend, is her brother's lover.

But before turning my attention to Leavitt's grandmother, here is a brief synopsis of the story. "Family Dancing" opens as Seth's mother, Suzanne, who is newly remarried, prepares to host a party at which she will encounter her former husband, a man she continues to love, despite the fact that he has rejected her. Ironically, despite the fact that the story's central event is a party arranged to celebrate the son's graduation from prep school, Seth remains a marginal figure in the story and in his family. One obvious explanation for Seth's marginality is that the story is told primarily from the mother's perspective; however, it soon becomes apparent that Seth has also been marginalized by his troubled, heterosexual parents. The question of who is whose partner grows more complex, psychologically and literally, when the party ends with a family dance. John, Seth's secret lover, begins by inviting Seth's grandmother to dance. With my new attentiveness to grandmothers, I note that Pearl "dances with amazing energy" (139) to the applause of sisters, cousins, and grandchildren. Some family members—including the angry Lynnette—try to stay out of the dance, but these onlookers are eventually pulled onto the floor. For example, Suzanne asks her ex-husband, Herb, to dance despite the fact that during their marriage he had shown his aversion to Suzanne by frequently telling his daughter, Lynnette, that she is his favorite partner. Next, as Pearl calls to her granddaughter Lynnette, "Don't be a spoilsport" (141), John pulls her onto the floor. Given the father's past seductive behavior toward his daughter and her resulting hatred of her mother this experience is frightening for Lynnette.

Initially, following Leavitt's shifting narrative perspective, I analyzed this scene from the point of view of the mother and daughter, sympathizing with each in turn. Lynnette has contained her feelings of abandonment by overeating, displacing the anger she feels toward her father onto her mother. Yet as Lynnette observes, Suzanne has also been rejected and abandoned: "It is not her fault, she tells herself, if Suzanne is still in love with Herb. . . . Perhaps there is something wrong with her taking such pleasure in her mother's sad predicament" (135). As a daughter, I understand Lynnette's anger toward her narcissistic father, and, as a mother, I share Suzanne's sad bewilderment at her daughter's behavior. But as I began to analyze this story from the perspective of a minor character, the grandmother, I experienced this scene differently. Initially I regarded Pearl's dancing as undignified, but eventually I recognized my attitude as a symptom of flight from my body as well as from my changing role in the family. What makes it possible, I wonder, for Pearl to enjoy herself when she may well have accumulated more painful memories than her daughter or granddaughter? Is something positive—perhaps a greater capacity for joy—possible for me as I enter old age?

While rereading Leavitt's story from Pearl's perspective—as I prepared to present a portion of this chapter with my colleague—I reflected on the possibility that Pearl may be the only family member capable of blessing Seth in

his new life—in his partnership with John and his planned career in fashion design. As the story makes obvious, Seth's father and mother are too preoccupied with their own lives to nurture their son. For example, both parents are surprised at Seth's request for a sewing machine as a graduation gift. Nor is Seth's sister Lynnette a likely supporter. Unlike her parents, she knows that Seth is gay and accepts him; however, she has been so severely damaged by the family romance—in particular, by a seductive father who has made her, not his wife, his primary emotional partner—that she has little to give Seth. Pearl is, for this reason, Seth's last best hope. Unfortunately, however, despite Pearl's affection toward her grandson, she has not been told that he is gay, and this suggests a lack of intimacy between them. Moreover, because Pearl is described as viewing her daughter's marriage as a move "up" on the social ladder, she begins to sound materialistic. Sadly, although this dancing grandmother seems to enjoy herself, I find little evidence that she has the capacity to bless Seth in his life choices.

Sunday, December 24, 2000. *Would I rather be like Pearl, dancing with the family at times of ritual celebration—at graduations, weddings, birthdays, even funerals—than at home writing, as I am today? Like Jane Harrison, part of me wants to escape family, part of me wants to be an independent, creative woman, not somebody's teacher or mother or grandmother. When my son calls on Christmas eve, we close with "I love you." This year my partner and I give each other "events"—spots of time—rather than gifts. We enjoy the quiet and, because we are both writers, we value the time and the freedom to write.*

Although my search for dancing grandmothers—for generative aging women—yields a greater number than I had anticipated, I find myself resisting some of them. For example, I resist joining the dance of working-class grandmothers that Northrup invokes as an antidote to our culturally inscribed fears of the aging female body. Quoting from "The Dancing Grandmas" by Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Northrup describes "four old women refugees who wore black, had red hands and ruddy cheeks, and whose entire history was in their forearms"—as follows:

At a family wedding, these four danced beautifully and powerfully, "lifting their skirts to display piano ankles wrapped in Ace bandages." As was their tradition, they danced to exhaustion, all the young men, including the groom, as a way to test their stamina. At the end of the evening "Everyone had been inoculated with the power of age. No one could ever become sick from age, or made ill by the idea that aging was a pathetic time. Everyone knew a good and decent, deep life awaited them in later years." We've been too long without those powerful, honest, wise women of old—too long without images of their beauty, power, and strength. Welcome them back, They are inside each of us. (479)

I appreciate the strength and camaraderie of these women, but I don't want their bandaged ankles. It may be snobbishness—I have been programmed to prefer looking like Jane Fonda—but a deeper source of my resistance is that these aging women remind me of my paternal grandmother. As a Norwegian immigrant, she gave her life to support her five children; as a result she had almost no time for creative self-expression. She was a strong dancer for years, but her legs finally gave out. Like Jane Harrison, she had hip-replacement surgery and, during her final years, could not walk.

I admire working-class women like my grandmother, but I don't want to romanticize their suffering bodies. What might my grandmother have become, I wonder, if she had had a chance for a life of the mind? I also wonder why Northrup, a professional woman, chose working-class rather than middle-class women to function as an image of embodiment in *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*? Is she attempting to dissociate from her own white, professional, middle-class body? Yet Northrup understands that her professional education has alienated her, not only from her body, but also from her feelings. She discloses that, although her father had advised, "Feelings are facts. Pay attention to them," her scientific training quickly taught her "that feelings, intuition, spirituality, and all experiences of life that cannot be explained by the logical, rational parts of our minds or measured by our five senses are ignored or discounted" (12). She describes the practice of medicine as an "addictive system" that "fears emotional responses and highly values the control of emotions because it is so out of touch with them" (12). In an effort to resist such gendered cultural imperatives, Northrup, like Spelman, points out that "female bodies, long associated with cycles and subject to the ebb and flow of natural rhythms, are seen as especially emotional and in need of management" (13). Along with our entire society, the medical model of aging perpetuates this view of the body. As Northrup says, "The experience of aging as we know it is largely determined by beliefs that need updating. Though many people do decline with age in this culture, this decline is not a natural consequence of aging—it is a natural consequence of our collective beliefs about aging" (434).

I have already experienced the painful reality of these collective beliefs. For example, I was once verbally attacked by a young man simply because I was an older woman who happened to be in a place dominated by the young. I was in my early fifties when I arrived, alone, to hear my son who was playing a gig in a bar near the University of Minnesota, the same university where I had earned my Ph.D. some years earlier. Now, a tenured professor, I was returning to campus town to hear my son, the lead soloist and guitarist in a band that played mostly for college students. While I was making my way through the bar to the dance hall in an adjacent room, a young man invited me to dance. I turned him down courteously, but he responded, in a voice filled with contempt, "You're old." "Yes," I answered, "I am. Old." I wasn't yet

a grandmother, but I had been pronounced "old." As I listened to my son's music, I imagined cruel retorts I might have made—"I'd rather be old than young and stupid, like you" or "I don't dance with babies"—but I wondered: Am I too old to dance now? Have I already begun the decline into old age?

This encounter may have prompted my preoccupation with images of dancing grandmothers, but it also heightened my anxieties about meeting the cruel gaze of some young people. But I remind myself that the gaze of most young people is not cruel. Quite the contrary. For example, when I told Elyse Lord, the first graduate student I mentored at Iowa State in 1987, about my preoccupation with dancing and aging, she told me the following story via E-mail. She was purchasing tickets for a performance by Anna Halprin, an eighty-year-old modern dancer, she said, when the ticket agent warned her that there would be some nudity in the retrospective, which was described as "a meditation on life and death." Feeling the need to forewarn her uncle, whom she had invited, Elyse received in return his comment that "he didn't think he'd like seeing an eighty-year-old woman naked unless he was himself eighty years old." "I wasn't sure what he meant," Elyse remarked, "other than the stereotypical—that naked women exist for the pleasure of men and eighty-year-old naked women aren't as pleasurable to look at to men (who aren't themselves eighty?)" This man's response is similar to that of Marvin Howe in Oates's novel, *Do with Me What You Will*: He does not want to be reminded of his own mortality. As an antidote to this sexist attitude—that the aging female body is repulsive—I remind myself that the aging women in the photographs on the "Ladies of Rylstone" calendar are not repulsive; they are lovely.

December 27, 2000. In her holiday letter, Elyse writes, "I got to see dancer Anna Halprin's 80th year retrospective performance. She is one of the most brilliant and inspired people I've ever encountered, so watching her dance her 'good-bye' performance was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, as was participating in the Circle the Earth Dance on Easter." Although I am not sure what the Circle of Earth Dance is, I want to learn more about it.

I do not wish to deny that I am aging, nor do I want to pretend that I can overcome death. However, as Northrup and others emphasize, patriarchal culture promotes the view that death can be overcome. David Morris reiterates Northrup's argument in *The Culture of Pain*, when he writes: "Tragedy tells us that the body must go down to death. Medicine cannot endure this thought" (264). Yet I remain uncertain, as I confront the eventual demise of my own body, that I will be able to maintain my spirit—my spirited body, my dancing body. Must I differentiate body and spirit? Religion has taught me to do so, making the promise that (spiritual) life can be "everlasting." As a Lutheran I also learned the price of this comforting belief when I asked my minister,

"What is your view of dancing?" His answer, "It's like having intercourse standing up!" was a blunt summation of the attitude of some Lutherans toward the supposedly "lower" pleasures of the body. His answer also implied that in order to have life everlasting, I should engage in sex without pleasure and only for reproductive purposes. Such a view of the body would make me, inevitably, an adversary of dance. As Ann Wagner states in her title, *Adversaries of Dance: From the Puritans to the Present*, Protestants have positioned themselves as "adversaries of dance." However, like many in my generation, the late fifties and early sixties, I refused to obey this command. Hearing the music of Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly, Chuck Berry and Little Richard, I wanted to dance, and I did.

At that time I did not know that I owed the joy of such dancing—the jitterbug, the swing, and the boogie—to African American culture. However, I have since learned that "whites have steadily borrowed from African American dance—largely without acknowledgment or appreciation of the source" (Hazard-Gordon xi). Katrina Hazzard-Gordon also explains that dance was sacred in African culture although, over time, sacred, ceremonial dance and secular dancing were differentiated. "The split began in the middle passage," she explains, "and by the time the first generation of slaves was born on these shores the process was well underway" (15–16). Now, through Toni Morrison's inspired ability to "dance the page," I participate in the sacredness of the dance that Baby Suggs, holy, initiates in *Beloved*. Calling her people to a clearing in the woods, Baby Suggs, holy, begins by calling to the grown men, "Let your wives and your children see you dance" (87). Because Baby Suggs understands, "Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it," she invites her people to love and celebrate their bodies. She invites them to dance: "You got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance" (88). My culture has not taught me to love my flesh, particularly my aging flesh. As Morrison demonstrates through the figure of Schoolteacher, fear of death in patriarchal culture leads Anglo-Europeans to project the burden of embodiment onto an "other" whom it then loathes and enslaves.

January 1, 2001. *The New Millennium has arrived. During the past week I have received two requests from students for letters for reference, one due January 16th, the other January 31st. Although I am happy to write these letters (on average I write two such letters a week), they take time. The semester begins on January 8th, but I find it difficult to stop writing. Yesterday, on the television show, "Sunday Morning," Mickey Hart, Curator of American Folk Music, explained that drumming wakes up patients suffering from a range of illnesses, including Alzheimers. Doctors now prescribe rhythm for such patients.*

As I proofread the syllabus for English 345, a topics course in women and literature that my coreacher and I have titled "Changing Our Stories," I reflect

on how each author portrays aging women. The course begins with Susan Glaspell's drama of an aging woman who is presumed to have killed her husband. Next on the syllabus is Mary McCarthy's *Memoirs of a Catholic Girlhood*, which presents two narcissistic grandmothers. Fortunately, strong, aging women are portrayed in narratives by Leslie Marmon Silko, Sandra Cisneros, and Kim Chernin. For example, in *Storyteller*, Silko credits her aging Aunt Susie with teaching her how to tell Laguna stories, stories told not only for pleasure but also for survival. (Fortunately, having thought about aging and ageism before teaching *Storyteller*, I was prepared when a student remarked, "What is this, a geriatrics ward?" In response to this young white woman's comment, I contrasted Laguna Pueblo views of aging women with Euro-American views, explaining that Aunt Susie is portrayed as part of a culture in which women are respected rather than demeaned or dominated.) Like Silko, Paula Gunn Allen explains that she learned the lessons of her culture from an older woman: "When I was small, my mother often told me that animals, insects, and plants are to be treated with the kind of respect one customarily accords to high-status adults. 'Life is a circle, and everything has its place in it,' she would say. That's how I met the sacred hoop, which has been an integral part of my life" (1). Having grown up inside patriarchal stories, stories in which animals, insects, and plants are usually regarded as mere background for human dramas, I find this notion of a circle, a circle in which all are spiritually kin, a powerful alternative.

Because I am not part of a gynocentric culture, a culture that respects aging women, I continue to seek stories that provide images of cultural transformation—a metamorphosis of self and tribe. That is why I am desperately seeking stories of dancing grandmothers. As I reread Kim Chernin's *In My Mother's House*, I am saddened that Rose Chernin, the courageous Marxist revolutionary, refuses to dance. Even after lawyers had successfully prevented Senator Joseph McCarthy's committee from forcing her to testify, Rose refuses to dance, according to her daughter Kim Chernin. Kim writes: "I grabbed her around the waist and danced with her. It was like moving a ton of bricks. 'Come on, Mama, dance,' I kept insisting. She pushed me on the shoulder, took a few little steps, looked over, shaking her head at my father, and finally broke away and sat down on the couch" (246–47). Because Rose had been forced to be a fighter for most of her life, she had perhaps armored her body, making it impossible for her to dance. This was a great loss, in my view, of the body electric. To reclaim this lost poetry, a gift Kim shared with her maternal grandmother, she began to turn away from political life in the 1950s, finally deciding to become a poet, not a revolutionary. Mother and daughter are eventually reconciled, as are poetry and politics, but Rose herself refused to dance.

In contrast to Rose Chernin, Emma Goldman did not consider dancing and revolutionary activities incompatible. According to Alix Kates Shulman, "When her comrades disapproved of her love of dancing as a frivolity unwor-

thy of a true revolutionary, she grew incensed, retorting that a revolution without dancing, without 'beautiful radiant things,' was not worth fighting for" (15). For what is life, as Emma asks, without "beautiful radiant things"? What is life if we cannot see that Anna Halprin, dancing at age eighty, is beautiful? What is life if we cannot see ourselves, at any age, as part of the earth rather than isolated from her or in dominion over her? If we truly engage students in critical thinking, we must ask these questions, creating classroom occasions in which to explore them in depth. My coteacher and I raise such questions each time we teach "Changing Our Stories." Through the study of a range of genres—letters, memoirs, poetry, autobiography, myth, fiction, criticism, and theory—we show that the boundaries between poetry and criticism are not great, despite the fact that, in our class-conscious academy, theory is privileged over poetry, writing over teaching, and mind over body. These hierarchies create jealousy, according to Valerie Miner, who says: "Some scholars are jealous of writers—and irritated they spend so much of their lives writing about writers. Witness the new vogue in literary criticism as veiled autobiography" (83). Miner may be right, but I prefer to think that autobiographical criticism has emerged, instead, out of a desire to transgress and transform hierarchies of genre and class. I yearn to think in terms of an inclusive circle-dance rather than in terms of the familiar choreography of competition.

April 2001. *Shortly after we complete our study of Audre Lorde's Zami: A New Spelling of My Name, including a report on The Cancer Journals, my team-teacher learns that she has had a recurrence of breast cancer. On a Tuesday, she tells me about her biopsy; the next day she informs me that the tumor is malignant; that Friday she has a lumpectomy. The following Monday I give students the good news; tests results show that all the cancer has been removed. As my colleague begins chemotherapy, she is optimistic.*

The changes that have taken place in our department during this academic year are challenging my ability to evolve into a generative mentor of young faculty. For example, because we have many new, research-active faculty in our department and because we do not have a budget that provides for more course releases for research, tenured faculty must teach an extra course every other year, regardless of their productivity as scholars. This increase in my teaching load will provide untenured faculty with an automatic one-course release during their first five years. Under our old competitive system, I always won a one-course research release, which meant that I taught only two courses each semester. To be blunt: If I am to remain a generative faculty member, I must also have support for my creative work and, in my view, the university should support both young and aging faculty. Sadly, I can do nothing about this problem—except to resist displacing my frustration and anger onto younger members of the department.

An even more severe challenge to my goal of becoming a generative feminist professor has been created by the recent shortfall in the state budget. For our department, the effects of the budget cuts are severe: (1) the number of students in English 339, "Literary Theory and Criticism," has been increased from twenty to twenty-five; (2) one section of "Twentieth-Century Fiction" will be cut, which means, quite possibly, that I will teach first-year writing instead; and (3) all tenure-line professors are now expected to "volunteer" to tutor for two hours a week in the Writing Center. There is also talk of a furlough for all faculty, which means that in December we may not receive pay for one week's work. In a recent meeting on the topic of mentoring, the provost began with a summary of the budget crisis—whose results, since the state legislature remains in session, are still unknown—but he did not address the problems of mentoring that would be created by the budget cuts. "Mentors will have to work harder," he answered when I asked, "What would you recommend that mentors do to address the morale problem that is already beginning to affect retention?" This suggestion is not particularly helpful to mentors who, like me, are already facing the exodus of young, untenured faculty. Moreover, the provost's reply does not acknowledge that departments that do not have strong records of obtaining grants, such as ours, will suffer the most severe cuts. How, under these conditions, do we continue the generativity dance?

Confronted with increasing competition between young and old as resources dwindle, I wonder: Can the dance metaphor be sustained? As the competitive choreography intensifies, I am skeptical as I read Parker Palmer's dance metaphor: "Mentors and apprentices are partners in an ancient human dance, and one of teaching's great rewards is the daily chance it gives us to get back on the dance floor. It is the dance of the spiraling generations, in which the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn" (25). I how, I wonder, is this dance of mutual empowerment to take place under such dire budgetary conditions? Yet it is precisely this kind of crisis—as, for example, when the rains do not come, and the crops are threatened—that prompts the Laguna Pueblo to call on all their members, young and old, to participate in ceremonial dances. Such ceremonial dances, or rituals, are also central to the structure of Laguna Pueblo stories, as Paula Gunn Allen explains, whereas conflict is central to the structure of Euro-American stories. Perhaps, if I can resist viewing myself as competing with younger faculty, if instead I imagine women as mutually empowering dancers, new possibilities might emerge. In this receptive mood, I reflect on the revolutionary dance of feminists, young and old.

My first dance lesson comes from a former graduate student who, as a new temporary instructor, has just learned that she has lost her job as a result of the budget cuts at Iowa State. Despite this crisis and despite my more priv-

ileged and secure position, she has expressed no resentment toward me. Although I am powerless to save her job, her remarkable generosity prompts me to take some action on behalf of her and the many women like her. A second lesson comes from a young, idealistic feminist whom I first met during her three-year appointment as an adjunct assistant professor (without tenure) at Iowa State. Although she did find a tenure-line job elsewhere and has since become an assistant dean, she is so frustrated at her lack of administrative power that she is planning to leave the academy. She too inspires me with her generosity when, after hearing of my work on aging and teaching, she sends me a handout on "Teaching across the Generations," prepared for the Fifth Annual Faculty Development Conference (January 8, 2001). In this handout, Illene C. Noppe, whose title is "I Age but the Students Don't: Musings of a Professor at Midlife," points out that the challenge for aging academics who wish to be generative, as Erikson recommends, is to achieve integrity as opposed to despair. I have felt despair as a result of the budget cuts, but thus far—with a little help from my friends—I am resisting its pull.

Another dancing lesson comes from Elyse Lord, who, although she has yet to find a tenure-line position, continues to collaborate with me. Recently, after reading an early draft of this chapter, Elyse suggested that both teachers and dancers experience the tension between "the novel/the new/the unexpected" and "the routine/inevitable/expected." This tension, she says, "mirrors the 'life art' tension of growing old (certain milestones seem inevitable, like thinking about cancer), yet of staying 'new/young, by dancing.'" Most important, despite the backlash against feminism—ever more apparent in the classroom—the revolutionary dance continues. The new president of our faculty senate, feminist historian Christie Pope, created a new committee on women and minorities, which has been active this past year. This committee has, for example, proposed a family-leave policy that is long overdue. Word has it that our new president is receptive to the plan. At the same time, the university will no longer encourage early retirement. Remarkably, despite the budget crisis, women continue to work, teach, and dance together, taking collective action on behalf of all women and their families.

March 21, 2002. One of my two best friends from high school has died of cancer. I grieve for her. Fortunately, my colleague in English has successfully completed chemotherapy with this "bonus": Her hair is now growing in very curly. Once again, we are team-teaching "Changing Our Stories," and we have added a novel, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, in which the major character is a powerful, aging woman. Miraculously, I am more energetic now than in 2000!

The good news—of generative possibilities—keeps coming: I have been awarded a full year's sabbatical for 2002–2003 to begin a project on photography and women's narratives. Best of all, I am still family dancing, most recently at Cancun during spring break. I used to say: "In my next life, I plan to be a dancer." Now

I see that my wish is being fulfilled in this life. While orchestrating my daily activities, crying, laughing, working, playing, striving for a harmonious tempo of teaching and writing, family and friends, I dance the pages of my life.

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Enforcing Diversity and Living with Disability: Learning from My First Teaching Year

Ray Pence

I enter my eighth year as a graduate teaching assistant carrying two bundles of experiences associated with my first classrooms and students. What I have learned from teaching introductory composition and literature courses at two Midwestern universities, living with chronic illness, and immersion in disability studies grounds this exploration of those experiences. There may be no relationships between the experiences other than chronological ones. Though I am unsure of the presence and significance of connections, I believe that searching for them will be productive for my audience and for me even if it does not result in a seamless statement. Because they have shown me that bodies are as important as minds in pedagogical and scholarly activities, the experiences I address here have made the largest contributions to my identity.

Reflecting on these contributions takes me into territory that should be familiar for many readers (teaching situations complicated by race issues) and to less well known places (daily life with a rare condition that is more felt by the afflicted than seen by the well).

One experiential bundle consists of efforts to enforce diversity that accompanied my interactions with the few African American students in courses I taught during the 1994–1995 academic year, my introduction to teaching and to graduate school. I was pursuing an M.A. in English literature at a public but selective (one could say exclusive) university in a rural corner of the Midwestern United States that lacked the diversity celebrated in my department's common syllabus for composition and literature classes. At that time I saw diversity solely in ethnic and racial terms and believed the syllabus reinforced my perception. When those who I expected to embody diversity in my classes—black male students—showed what I thought was insufficient interest, I panicked. Without them, the inclusiveness and critical bite represented in the syllabus by bell hooks, Cornel West, and similar “Others” would go unappreciated, as would my commitment to an agenda I saw in the syllabus. Though I was uncertain about how much authority I had and uncomfortable using it, I could not curb my desires to reach these students of color and ensure their presence. Predictably, the more I sought to make them part of my project, the more they eluded and resisted me. Under pressure from me, the black male students of my first teaching year—all three of them—finally withdrew from the courses. Their reactions showed more relief than resentment; I was left with no teaching energy but a surplus of frustration.

By displacing race onto “minorities,” I made a mistake that Nancy J. Peterson suggests is common among white teachers (39). I wish I had been ready for her argument that whites ought to make racial categories personal and political by recognizing we are people of race even if we are not people of color and by interrogating our privileges. My first students and I would have been productively challenged if the syllabus and situation had fostered critical inquiry into the whiteness most of us represented. Peterson's perspective is compelling because she and I share privileges and problems. Both of us are white, heterosexual, middle-class instructors who ask students on Midwestern (mostly white and conservative) campuses to read multicultural texts. Peterson's recollection in “Redefining America: Literature, Multiculturalism, Pedagogy” of how her pregnancy (with its reassuring heterosexual subtext) may have made Adrienne Rich safe for students is resonant (33). I often think my race allows white students to cope with texts by poets such as Amiri Baraka and Sonia Sanchez, whose anger and agency apparently do not frighten their teacher. If I can withstand the assaults of such work and live to analyze it, perhaps they can, too.

Where Peterson helps me know myself as a teacher, Michelle Fine has changed the way I think about my writing identity and practice. In her essay “Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative

Research,” Fine presents a case that resembles Peterson's in its debt to bell hooks. Many white narrators with college educations and middle class locations—including Fine herself, as she reminds the reader more than once—are committed to “Othering” but not to analyzing their own identities and interests. It is easier to write about or for those whose gender, race, and class identities are associated with subjugation, “banishing them to the margins of the culture.” But as its title suggests, Fine's essay looks for ways out of the Othering trap: “When we construct texts collaboratively, self-consciously examining our relations with/for/despite those who have been contained as Others, we move against, we enable resistance to, Othering” (139).

Though I have participated in “the construction and distancing of Others” by writing this version of what happened during my first teaching year (Fine 131), I also have sought the critical self-reflection Fine advocates. Skin privilege and a measure of institutional prestige give me relative freedom to write what I please and the chance to reach an audience. In spite of its focus on my subject position as narrator, observer, and participant, this story reproduces and reinforces unequal power relations between me and student Others in my past. But as Fine insists, stories like this are also occasions for “working the hyphen” that both links and separates the researcher and the subject, the teacher and the taught, and the writer and the written about (135). Eliminating “structures of domination” in this narrative may be impossible (153); searching for their sources in society and in myself is imperative.

Reviewing my campaign to enforce diversity made me return to a question I have avoided for a long time and that may be on readers' minds as well. Were black males the only “problem students” I had that first year? Of course not. Several white students also disregarded my course policies and showed little or no interest in my approach. But as I saw things then, shaped by a pedagogical climate that prioritized diversity, my narrow definition of the concept, and a lack of classroom management skills, I had to intervene to save my African American students from an education without my course.

As I have indicated, the concept and consciousness of whiteness were not part of my thinking. Now that such awareness is central to my teaching, I wonder what difference it might have made during my first year. I am asking better questions that require students to reflect on assumptions they may have about the race of authors and of characters in texts and on their own raced reading responses. Do they conclude that third-person omniscient narrators have no race or create no racially exclusive audiences? Do they see fictional authority figures like doctors, lawyers, and teachers as white men until they learn otherwise? Is it a coincidence that many texts they call “boring”—which usually means that they find the subject insignificant and point of view frustrating—are by or about people of color and women? Without knowledge of whiteness as a default category that dominates but rarely asserts itself, I would not be posing such questions.

Ability is another category that is shaped by a society's structures. Living with disability, the second bundle of experiences I reflect on here, has showed me that ability and whiteness resemble one another in their composition and deployment. Just as people who are defined as white benefit from whiteness consciously and unconsciously, those who meet standards for sound bodies and minds enjoy the privileges of culture and society that practice ableism.

I started learning about ability and disability during my second teaching semester, a time when I pressured myself not to colonize black bodies to serve my notion of diversity. Avoiding that abuse of power while being confident in my ability to teach the fiction and poetry that were part of my spring 1995 syllabus was the key to improvement. However, it soon became clear that I would handle situations involving black male students even less effectively than I had in the fall. This time, my emphasis on African American literature justified paternalistic interventions. Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Toni Morrison were on my reading list for English 112: Composition and Literature. Why weren't my black students coming to class and turning in their work? I tried to answer the question by calling the students, seeking help from their academic advisors, dropping them from the course, and then asking the director of the composition program to "force add" them back into the class after I could no longer live with my decision. Once again, anxieties about the absence and presence of black bodies determined my decisions and priorities.

It took grave conflict with my own body to keep the second semester from turning into a repeat performance of the first. Psoriatic arthritis (PA), a condition I had never heard of until I had no choice but to listen, did not free me from dealing with real or imagined student problems. But the farther I went into territory from which there is no escape—chronic illness—the more I realized the need for new strategies to face difficulties that would, like students themselves, come and go. The first part of this chapter was about what went wrong with my teaching while I was preoccupied with the bodies of certain students; the rest addresses what happened when PA arrived to bring my body into my teaching. To tell the story I must take on the role of a patient who needs to define his illness experiences not for doctors but for himself.²

The first symptoms showed up on my scalp. What I assumed was stubborn dandruff turned out to be psoriasis—more of an annoyance than a concern, I thought then.³ Later, the red and scaly spots spread to my arms, buttocks, legs, and lower back. Psoriasis changed the nails on my fingers and toes, which developed pits, thickened, and crumbled. Before that, I detected other symptoms beneath my skin. Their randomness made them especially disturbing. Though I was feeling progressively worse, there was nothing linear about learning I was sick. Stomach pains that woke me up before sunrise were the first alarming symptoms. After I got out of bed and moved about, with difficulty but determination—I had to meet my class on time and with a sense of

purpose—the pains would subside. This would have been reassuring were it not for the persistent soreness and stiffness in my right foot and ankle, and eventually in my lower back, that made getting dressed, walking, and using stairs into struggles. Fortunately I had health insurance for the first time in my life, so I made full use of the campus clinic.⁴ Initially doctors were confident I had tendonitis, which did not scare me, and then ankylosing spondylitis, which did. I had never heard of this condition with its name like a poisonous insect, nor did I know of Reiter's syndrome, which is known today as reactive arthritis, until a doctor used it to label my symptoms. The search for a name for what I was feeling marked the beginning of a process of redefining myself in an unequal collaborative relationship with physicians.

Confused and upset as I was, calling these assessments misdiagnoses would not have been fair to those who made them. Like PA, the three conditions I turned out not to have are systemic rheumatic illnesses covered by the umbrella term *spondyloarthropathies* (Shiel 1). When people ask what my disability is (a common occurrence because it is obvious to others only during flare-ups), I usually tell them I have arthritis. This does not mean much because it can mean *too* much: There are more than one hundred kinds of rheumatic disease (Theodosis et al. 2007). Saying that I have PA is more accurate and specific but still insufficient. PA takes five different forms: asymmetric polyarthritis, symmetric polyarthritis, arthritis mutilans, distal interphalangeal joints (DIP), and ankylosing spondyloarthropathy (Birks 1–2). Because my symptoms correspond to four of these five variants, I still am unsure of the PA category I belong to. Though I have help from medical authorities and loved ones, learning the truth about PA is a solitary process because it is a rare condition that affects fewer than three million people in the United States (American College of Rheumatology 1; Birks 1). My health condition is marginalized even if I am not. There are no best-selling books offering cures or prevention of PA; I have never met a fellow "sufferer" (though I have found friendship with people who have other forms of arthritis, all of them women).

I would not begin learning all of this information until I received a definite PA diagnosis in the summer of 1998, more than three years after initial symptoms. To find out what the symptoms meant I made several disorienting visits to a local hospital whose specialists took over when the campus clinic could do no more. A gastrointestinal doctor looked for explanations of my stomach problems and anemia with upper and lower GIs and X rays.⁵ Many of the procedures took place during the midmorning hours, just after I had finished teaching. In spite of the pain of my symptoms and the fear that went with the tests, I missed just one day of teaching and one seminar meeting and was proud that I had upheld the Protestant work ethic my father embodied.⁶ The gastrointestinal specialist was also working hard but could find nothing wrong for all of his effort. Though my perception was clouded by sedatives

that helped me through the lower GI, I can recall with clarity his frustrated tone when he told me I must go to a rheumatologist.

This was a turning point. My stomach pains had faded away, but my joints were worse than ever, and more of them were falling prey to the unknown assailant. While teaching sometime in April 1995, I tried to turn my head to face the students who sat to either side of me in our discussion circle but could not do so without agonizing effort. Other movements I had taken for granted brought unwelcome surprises. I learned to dread dropping things because I had to squat slowly and stiffly to retrieve them; bending from the waist became a faint memory. Plugging in an overhead projector or VCR triggered pain that shot from my elbow to my shoulder. Rising from a chair after just a few minutes created "locking" sensations in my lower back and ankles, which often did not feel as if they were there to support my decreasing weight.

Talking about these symptoms with my peers was an activity I usually avoided, in contrast to my compulsive discussions of problems with enforcing diversity (especially when the topic was "our" African American students). As for revealing to my students what I saw as physical and emotional weaknesses, this was out of the question. Our classroom environment, tense from the beginning because of the demeanor I adopted in reaction to the fall semester, had no camaraderie or trust. As the end of the semester neared, my symptoms intensified, and I struggled to be a minimally effective pedagogical presence. Students were less enthusiastic with each assignment and more willing to challenge me rudely. In bitter moments I told myself—and believed—that some of them would be happy to know I was ill.

Another side to being sick and scared helped me through the semester and revealed a new direction for the future. Jane Tompkins has written of times when teachers must let go and stop wanting too much from themselves and their students (659). Such a time arrived for me in the late spring of 1995. Chronic illness pushed me toward the goal Tompkins describes with remarkable simplicity and awareness of what keeps teachers from caring for themselves. My perfectionist expectations were dominating my teaching and living until PA altered my reference frame. Illness imposed limits on me in some ways; in others it freed me to identify and address pedagogical difficulties that immobilized me even more than my most painful symptoms did. With PA, there were more important things to worry about than whether students adhered to my course policies. Hard as it was, I had to allow students to be responsible for problems they created for themselves. The stress of taking on the burdens of students was a luxury I could no longer afford.

Readers may wonder whether this stress, along with the anger, fear, and despair brought on by enforcing diversity during my first and second semesters, had anything to do with the onset of my PA. I have thought and worried about possible links and still do, though no clinical evidence suggests that stress triggers or increases the chances of getting PA. Now that I have lived

and taught with PA for more than six years, I know from experience that emotional turmoil intensifies whatever symptoms I have, especially when that turmoil is associated with or generated inside the classroom.

But what interests me more than probable or certain connections between my reactions to teaching situations and my PA is the way my illness experiences are situated, culturally and socially. The postmodern theoretical context Arthur W. Frank uses in his study of the emerging genre of life writing about illness in *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* was also a setting for my initiation into the world of PA. Though I knew almost nothing about critical inquiries into whiteness and disability that were starting to attract widespread attention at around the same time I was getting ill, I was aware of the postmodern thought that influenced those inquiries. My first year of graduate school was an immersion in antifoundational philosophy that showed me the importance of Michel Foucault's analyses of institutional power and medical and clinical discourses. At the time I resisted much of what I read because it challenged my investment in humanism and Marxism. Later I realized that this difficult, disorienting thought had prepared me to interrogate the medical model of disability, which locates defects in individual bodies and their remedies in modern scientific practices. Chronic illness helped me find something useful in postmodern philosophy; postmodern philosophy made me want to assess my illness and myself as a life writer.

Acknowledging that PA has made me see things in postmodernism I did not notice before becoming ill is hard to do without turning this story into a variation on the theme of disability as a character builder. My main interest as a narrator is relationships between my body and mind, whose cohesion has been made clear to me by feminism, postmodernism, and PA. With its emphasis on postmodern critical theory, my first year of graduate school showed me sites for exercising agency and asserting identity I had not known. Becoming ill that same year was the beginning of moving toward such a site as a person with disability. Discovering disability studies was finding the site itself, a place where I can begin to make sense of how PA contributes to my social position, relationships, and responsibilities. Few concepts are more important to disability studies than the medical epistemology that the field challenges but cannot escape any more than people can be outside capitalism, heterosexism, patriarchy, and racism. Knowing about that model and its critique is one of the many empowering benefits of knowing about disability studies. In sum, disability studies manages my symptoms as much as Naproxen pills and Methotrexate shots do,⁷ and this is a story of converging factors, not of causes and effects.

I have not always been as eager to share my story as I am now and wish I had kept a journal during the onset of PA. Comparing my initial reactions to PA with the perspective I have as a participant in two interdisciplinary fields, one dedicated to bringing disability to the attention of the humanities

and the other committed to explaining change and conflict in the United States, would be useful. With its emphasis on life writing by people with disabilities who also theorize disability as scholars, disability studies is a community and context for stories like this. Fortunately, the flexibility that American studies and disability studies share should make the former field an additional space for disability narratives and help overcome past inattention to disability.

My own required coursework as a Ph.D. student in American studies, which began in 1997, included no courses that addressed disability. What bothered me more than this exclusion at a time when disability studies was emerging was my failure to notice it sooner, especially considering my PA. That American studies would include class, ethnicity, gender, race, and sexuality seemed natural to me. When I thought of disability as a subject of scholarly interest I confined it to applied fields such as occupational therapy and special education. Bound by medical model thinking, I had trouble seeing that American studies was not as inclusive as I had assumed.⁸ But American studies was also where I found peers and teachers who pointed me toward Simi Linton and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, who urge dialogue between disability studies and American studies (Linton 2-3; Garland-Thomson, "Incorporating" 1).⁹ Now I work on making the bulk of my reading and writing contribute to that conversation.

In the months between the end of my first and start of my second year in American studies, another convergence of factors served as catalyst for change. My PA was flaring up after what I had thought was a long remission, making getting up from sitting positions and walking hard. I was sorting through the social constructionist ideas about categories such as ethnicity, gender, and race that were woven throughout my first year of seminars. Then came news of one of 1998's pivotal U.S. Supreme Court decisions. The majority opinion in *Bragdon v. Abbott* held that HIV-positive persons are covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Learning that disability was, more than anything, a definition—in this case, people who were often perceived as living under a death sentence became people with disabilities, finding agency in national policy—made me want to continue thinking about disability in relation to my personal and professional identities.¹⁰ Far from being the well-informed citizen I wanted to be, I knew next to nothing about what being HIV-positive means and was conscious of the ADA for the first time, eight years after its passage. I would learn later that the ADA definition is more in harmony with the minority and social models of disability than with the medical model because it acknowledges both official documentation and interpersonal perception of disability. Knowing about this definition made me want to redefine myself as someone seeking to eliminate his ignorance of disability, its social construction, and its relevance to his own experience.¹¹

I was struck by how the definition fits what I have known with PA, which does indeed substantially limit one or more of my major life activities. But

while the ADA defines me as a person with a disability, I rarely do. Cultural and social emphases on striking visual disability markers are part of the reason. Only by stopping my medicine and making special effort to reveal my psoriasis can I make my PA known in a public way. There are no obvious signs—such as a cane or wheelchair—of authentic, official disability on or associated with my body. However, the absence of these markers has helped me avoid discrimination and prejudice along with making my disability identity ambiguous. I have never attended an academic conference devoted to disability studies and worry about how my claim of disability would be perceived and received. As a white heterosexual man who is far more comfortable than most of the planet's people no matter how much he complains about his wages as a teacher and tutor, perhaps I am not one of James I. Charlton's "us."¹²

Being oppressed and silenced is an experience I have not known and do not expect to know. But it is better to recognize my reservations about my identity and make them part of this narrative than to let them keep me from writing. If I do not, I cannot feel like a member of the support group I have found in disability narrators or add my voice to what Frank calls "testimony" (137). Though I never anticipated that analyses and stories from scholars of disability in Canada and Britain would be useful or even acceptable within American studies, their influence is something I value. For example, debates over social model theory within disability studies in Britain address questions about impairment's definition and value as a critical concept. Because I often think of PA more as an impairment than a disability for reasons explained earlier, this debate helps me interrogate my own definitions and rationale for separating disability and impairment and taking the former more seriously than the latter.¹³ Another compelling element of dialogues on impairment within British disability studies is how they appear to be split along gender lines. Liz Crow, for instance, advocates a resurgence of interest in impairment, which she connects with a feminist emphasis on the personal as political. This is an alternative to the exclusive concern with materialist critiques of social structures and how they disable impaired people that Crow finds in Michael Oliver's work.¹⁴

Susan Wendell is another feminist scholar interested in challenging materialist emphasis on social structure over personal experience. Her book *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability* also challenges feminism by proposing "transcendence of the body" (165). Wendell, who writes candidly about her chronic illness, is not always clear and consistent in defining and arguing for transcendence. But her exploration of the paradoxes of pain and its consequences is original. "Experiences of the body," Wendell observes, "can teach consciousness a certain freedom from the suffering and limitations of the body" (172). The critical stance we take toward our bodies cannot be separated from our bodies, but this does not mean we cannot perceive them with the objectivity materialists bring to their critiques

of disabling social structures. Acknowledging the social contexts within which pain is intelligible, Wendell refuses to concede that pain requires a context. She suggests that some bodily conditions are difficult no matter what the context, and her point reached me because few people ever see the pain in my joints or, to be accurate, its consequences.

Reading Wendell and others with a feminist location in disability studies helps me know the gendered character of my PA experience, just as reflective writing reveals that my teaching body is as raced as the Others in whom I saw little but race. Years of the privilege not to think about how my own body was situated within constructions such as able, male, and white shaped my perceptions of and reactions to my problems as a new teacher. This freedom from something was perhaps the greatest of the benefits that accompanied my subject position. Dealing with race was easy for me as an undergraduate English major who could feel as good about his absence of prejudice toward black people as he could about his abilities to analyze their literature. I did not have to think about the realities of who and who is not empowered until I had, and had to use, institutional power. Nor did I have to think about PA—or other forms of arthritis, or chronic illness in general—because I did not fit the cultural profile of people who are affected by such conditions. The only arthritis narrative I had before becoming ill was made up of images and messages from television advertisements. Commercials featuring little old ladies who complained of not being able to knit and who eventually were rescued (to the relief of their families) by various pills with reassuring brand names represented my knowledge and ignorance of arthritis. It was not my problem, nor would it be.

Giving up the privilege of involuntarily ignoring arthritis has meant gaining valuable new perspectives. I admit that I would rather not be chronically ill, but I also do not want to return to the thinking that was changed through living with PA. Definitions of diversity and identity that I brought to my pedagogy were not quite real to me until I began acting according to them in the classroom. Understanding diversity solely in ethnic and racial terms, and mostly in black and white, was no understanding at all. Now I recognize that diversity embraces as many categories as there are people and that disability is among them. This has been good for me and for my students—instead of enforcing diversity, I am interested in exploring it. The course I currently teach, an introduction to the methods and goals of American studies, lets me do that by offering the life writing of disability narrators Helen Keller and Lewis B. Puller, Jr., along with the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass and Maxine Hong Kingston.¹⁵ Acknowledging disability must be part of any course titled “Understanding America.”

An inclusive syllabus is a simple way to avoid returning to the narrow diversity definition of my past. Being attentive to the presence and absence of students with disabilities is more complicated and crucial. Over the past seven years my courses have been those that degree-seeking students take because they must

and consequently are excellent sites for assessing campus diversity. As the reader knows, students of color are vastly outnumbered in the institutions where I have worked. Students with disabilities are usually not represented at all. Though a small handful of my students have had learning disabilities such as dyslexia, not one blind student or deaf student or wheelchair-using student has come through my door.¹⁶ People with disabilities and topics related to them were as invisible in the classes I taught as they were in seminars I took. In both cases I was too slow to recognize these disturbing realities, which showed me just how much I was a part of ableism.

There will always be one person with a disability in any classroom where I am teaching, but I anticipate retaining control over visibility of my PA, which seems to have stabilized, well into the future. On the few occasions when I have revealed my condition I have done so out of curiosity about how the news will be received and not because I have been all that comfortable doing so. One reason is the limits on how much of myself I will share with students who for the most part would rather be other places than my class. Perhaps things will change when I teach graduate students. Another reason is my reluctance to present myself to anyone as a person with a disability because I do not meet unofficial, informal, but nevertheless powerful public criteria. When I stand before my students I am passing as an able-bodied person, one who knows he should not reinforce social standards for competence and control. This says more about how I perceive my students than about the students themselves, but I feel I must avoid speaking of or showing my disability lest I lose authority. There have, of course, been exceptions to my silence. Sometimes I will give my perspective as a person with arthritis (not PA) when we encounter characters with a form of that condition. Just as it was crucial for me to overcome my ignorance about arthritis and whom it does and does not affect, it is important for students to see that many people who appear to be healthy do not always feel that way. In general, however, I have incorporated disability into my courses not by talking about myself but by making sure it is a category and a subject that deserves attention in its own right and in conjunction with other topics.

Like my understanding of diversity and disability, the way I think of identity has become more complex during my seven years of graduate study, teaching, and chronic illness. Knowing that my social roles are made possible within and on the terms of institutions is the key to that change. As a new teacher I was interested in African American students mostly because I wanted to confine them to a constructed category they apparently fit. An educational institution legitimized my efforts, and institutionalized medicine sanctions my doctor's interest in me as a PA patient. To put it another way, black students were important to me because they were not white and I am important to my doctor because I am not, in his words, normal. There are dramatic differences between situations involving my students and me and

those involving my doctor and me. But his authority and mine occupy a similar space. Neither one of us always knows the people we deal with professionally as whole persons. If we could learn to do that while reflecting critically on our own authority and how disciplines make it—and us—possible, I am sure there would be many benefits for us and those we say we serve. Maybe the only significant difference between my doctor and me is that I have opportunities to make assessments of my professional identity part of that identity—by writing this essay, for example. I am also writing for purely personal, even selfish reasons: to convince myself that even though I was not ready for teaching or chronic illness, what matters more are my reactions to those transforming experiences. I want to know that I am currently doing the right things in the classroom and in my scholarly work. But my uncertainty, like my PA, will remain a chronic condition.

NOTES

1. The syllabus for English 111, College Composition, had five units: reflective narrative, institutional knowledge, argument, discourse analysis, and cultural texts. Two course goals were demonstrating that language is value-positive and actively shapes experience and subjectivity and showing that the human subject is not the humanist subject: autonomous, integrated, and rational. The English 111 syllabus was, to use terms I was learning at the time, a social-constructionist rather than an expressivist syllabus.
2. This self-definition is a key concern of narrators such as Nancy Mairs, Robert Murphy, and Irving Kenneth Zola. Their stories have provided me with invaluable examples of how to explore roles of the teacher and of the scholar with disabilities. I am particularly impressed with how these writers explore disability's intersections with class, ethnicity, gender, race, and sexuality.
3. At that time I did not know that psoriasis precedes arthritis symptoms in most PA cases, sometimes by years.
4. My health insurance plan expired when my time at the university where I earned an M.A. ended. I have been unable to purchase a new plan because of prohibitive costs associated with my preexisting condition and my age (thirty-eight).
5. Upper and lower GIs are procedures in which doctors search for evidence of gastrointestinal disease: polyps and tumors, for example. The procedures involve inserting long, thin apparatuses resembling hoses into patients orally (upper GI) and anally (lower GI).
6. Since that time I have not missed a teaching session because of my illness, though there have been times when doing so would have been better for my students and for me.
7. Naproxen is a type of nonsteroidal antiinflammatory medicine, a more potent form of over-the-counter products such as Aleve. Methotrexate is a toxic drug that was

developed to treat cancer but has been effective against arthritis and psoriasis. I have taken Naproxen since May 1995 but began Methotrexate in 1998. The lack of dramatic results with Methotrexate in my treatment may validate what physicians suspect is true: The medicine is most effective when prescribed during the earliest stages of PA and other forms of arthritis.

8. George Lipsitz's address to the 1994 American Studies Association, titled "No Shining City on a Hill," is an example of this neglect. Lipsitz argues energetically that his field should align itself with various social movements but emphasizes ethnicity and race to the exclusion of people with disabilities and their cultures.

9. I am also intrigued by Linton's and Garland-Thomson's inclusive disability definitions. For Garland-Thomson disability is "the attribution of corporeal deviance—not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do" (*Extraordinary Bodies* 6). Linton avoids Garland-Thomson's stress on physical disability with a broader definition. Disability is "a marker of identity [that] has been used to build a coalition of people with significant impairments" and a category open to those with "behavioral or anatomical characteristics marked as deviant, and people who have or are suspected of having conditions . . . that make them targets of discrimination" (Linton 12).

10. My experience of being tested for HIV antibodies at the order of my first rheumatologist also made me attentive to the *Bragdon v. Abbott* decision. He explained his order by telling me that some of my symptoms, particularly joint soreness and stiffness, were common in relatively young men during the onset of AIDS.

11. The ADA covers people with physical and/or mental impairments that substantially limit one or more life activities, have a history or record of such impairment, or are perceived by others as being impaired (Illingworth and Parmet 3). The minority and social models locate disability in discriminatory cultural and social practice and structure.

12. The reference is to the title of Charlton's book *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment*.

13. I have reservations about Oliver's disability definition, which he borrows from a British organization called the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) but do acknowledge its influence. Quoting from the UPIAS definition, Oliver calls disability "the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization" that acknowledges people with impairments only to exclude them from the mainstream (11). According to this definition, I am exempt from such exclusion because society does not know I have a serious impairment.

14. Crow argues that social model exponents such as Oliver "disable [themselves] by tackling only one side of [their] situation" when they focus on disability at the expense of impairment (211). According to Crow, impairment and disability need to be understood through an examination of their interdependence. The model of disability that is dominant in British social sciences reduces impairment to something that triggers disability and is not a priority for critical analysis, she maintains. Crow calls for a "renewed" social model that goes "beyond grand theory and into real life" by addressing personal experiences of impairment (223).

15. Keller's 1903 autobiography *The Story of My Life* exemplifies the "overcoming disability" narrative. The Pulitzer Prize-winning *Fortunate Son: The Autobiography of Lewis B. Puller, Jr.* may be better known as a Vietnam War memoir than as a disability narrative. Puller, who lost both legs and parts of both hands in combat, also struggled with alcoholism and committed suicide after his book won the Pulitzer Prize.

16. My language in this paragraph reinforces a false binary opposition between "students of color" and "students with disabilities." This is difficult to avoid but raises provocative questions about language's limits. In disability studies we need always to be sure our audience knows that addressing disability involves accounting for class, ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and other imperfect but still indispensable identity categories. It is especially important to remember that in many cases people of color are more likely to be people with disabilities than are whites.

Feminist scholars have taken the lead in raising incisive objections to uncritical acceptance of the categories I have mentioned. Barbara DiBernard draws an analogy between how the terms "person with a disability" and "woman" have been used to "falsely universalize" diverse groups of people (135).

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