

Introduction: Identity Politics in the College Classroom, or Whose Issue Is This, Anyway?

KATHERINE J. MAYBERRY

This collection is poised between a revolution and a counterrevolution. It emerges at a critical moment in American higher education — when the momentum of liberalization that transformed higher education in the second half of this century is decelerating in the face of conservative forces seeking their own brand of transformation by the opening of the next century. The story of the revolution begins fifty years ago, with VJ Day and the return of hundreds of thousands of GIs eager to receive their due and enter the elitist club of American higher education. Their example was followed in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s by veterans of Korea and Vietnam. Throughout this period, the dramatic growth of public institutions helped convert higher education from a privilege available to a few to a right accessible to all. With the victories of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, including affirmative action legislation, the growing student population became increasingly diverse. In 1993, which may turn out to have been the watershed of university diversity, minority enrollment accounted for 26 percent of the total college and university undergraduate enrollment.¹

Woored and welcomed into institutions where they nevertheless re-

mained distinctly marginal, African Americans and other minorities banded into campus communities whose badge of membership was a particular marker of "otherness"—color, accent, physical characteristics, and so forth. During this period, the term "identity" underwent a telling reconceptualization, evolving from its 1960s association with self-absorbed individualism à la Holden Caulfield to a signifier of group affiliation. Identity was no longer a personal, individualizing matter, but a function of those phenomenological characteristics one shared with others. As their numbers grew on campus, minority identity groups began to articulate identity-based interests and submit identity-based demands that were, in many cases, met by administrations often unprepared to negotiate such delicate matters. The speed and effectiveness of the revolution was indeed remarkable: in the space of a generation, minority students saw those same identity markers that had always guaranteed their powerlessness and underrepresentation develop into sources of considerable influence and control. With the formation of the first black studies program in 1969 at San Francisco State University, "identity politics"—the negotiation of and for power derived from minority group affiliation—had become an operating reality within American academia.

The opening of the university to minority groups clearly set the stage for the phenomenon of identity politics. Less clear is the nature of the relationship between the rise of identity politics and the contemporaneous development of poststructuralist thought. Whether connected through causality or mere coincidence, the two movements have a good deal in common: both live, move, and have their being in the "deconstructability" of received truths, including, of course, the canon of white Western knowledge. While there are also crucial theoretical differences between the two, it is worth noting that the iconoclastic operation of identity politics found friendly soil in the irreverence of poststructuralist theory. Certainly, the simultaneous development of both projects contributed to the creation of a university climate in which knowledge, authority, and relationships are rou-

Introduction: Identity Politics in the College Classroom

tinely exploded, politicized, or, to use a popular neologism of the 1990s, problematized.

In a setting where little was safe from interrogation, where ideologies were discovered behind every brick and ivy leaf, it was only a matter of time before white faculty—guardians of the now thoroughly problematized trinity of knowledge, authority, and tradition—were challenged. The most provocative of these challenges revolved around the issue of identity: within the last few years, minority constituencies on campus have begun to scrutinize the relationship between professors' identities (again, as determined by race, sex, ethnicity, etc.) and their claims to professional authority and expertise. This debate over identity-based credibility (teaching what you are versus teaching what you're not) is currently the most visible expression of identity politics in higher education.

Until fairly recently, there were few grounds on which a professor's authority could be impeached. Students might complain about a course's workload or a professor's teaching style, or in egregious cases about his or her professionalism (which more often involves inappropriate behavior than questionable expertise); fellow scholars might question the validity of a professor's scholarship; but for the most part, charges of pedagogical malpractice were unthinkable. The recent demographic changes in student and faculty populations, the radical revisions of canons and curricula, and the politicization of identity, knowledge, and authority have changed all this, introducing an identity-based definition of *credibility* as an entirely new precondition of professional authority.

As understood by the challengers, credibility goes beyond disciplinary expertise to include affiliational and experiential components; one is a credible professor/scholar in a particular minority studies field if one can claim origin and experience within that minority culture. The recent challenges to credibility are voiced by minority students and professors alike, and they identify a variety of pedagogical and scholarly offenses conceivable only within a context of politicized

identity. Those being challenged are for the most part white men and women in the humanities and social sciences who teach and/or write about identity groups that are not only different from their own, but also historically oppressed by their own—for example, men teaching women's studies, whites teaching black studies, heterosexuals teaching queer studies, and so on.

At a time when faculty are being accused of willfully ignoring external challenges to what they do and how they do it, these internal demands for credibility have commanded their full attention. As the essays in this anthology demonstrate, faculty are not dismissing the credibility issue as an outrageous academic fad; on the contrary, they are taking it very seriously, formulating a variety of positions on the issue with fairness, intelligence, and probity. *Teaching What You're Not: Identity, Politics in Higher Education* is a collection of these positions, composed by individuals at all levels of the professoriate: prize-winning researchers, senior scholars, untenured professors, and graduate students. Written from a wide variety of identity perspectives, and in some cases impelled by firsthand experience with credibility challenges, the essays in this collection are a testament to the seriousness with which we take our teaching and the courage with which we examine and learn from critiques of our performance.

The debate over credibility and identity that this volume documents is taking place at a time when those demographic and ideological forces that have transformed American higher education in the last few decades are themselves meeting powerful challenges. With the ink barely dry on new curricula, expanded canons, and minority club charters, an educationally conservative political right is deploying its supplies of Wite-Out wherever possible. The momentum of the multicultural revolution is being counteracted by a conservative counter-revolution with a formidable momentum of its own, in large part driven by conservative lawmakers. To borrow the title of a recent book on the subject, higher education is under fire.²

The challenges aimed at higher education constitute a familiar litany: tuitions are too high; faculty are lazy, arrogant, unaccountable, and averse to undergraduate teaching; knowledge and truth have become the hand-servants of political correctness; identity is replacing expertise as a primary requirement for faculty appointments, and so on. Many of the detractors of higher education have the political, financial, and ideological wherewithal to act on these complaints: the dramatic changes in state and national legislatures resulting from the 1992 elections have placed a fiscal ax in the hands of the detractors. In perhaps the most staggering example, Republican governor George Pataki of New York proposed a \$290 million reduction (31.5 percent) in the budget of the state university system (ultimately reduced by the legislature to \$185.6 million).³ At the federal level, the vote in the House of Representatives to discontinue the national endowments for the arts and humanities is only one of many sobering symptoms of the country's bad mood about higher education. The defeat of affirmative action in California demonstrates the vulnerability of the entire multicultural movement, as does the ease with which educational conservatives were able to parody the principles of multiculturalism in the political correctness debate.

In short, the American university system is on the defensive, and the current debate about identity politics is up for grabs as a weapon in the struggle. On the one hand, university critics are perfectly capable of turning it, like multiculturalism, into a caricature of itself—ludicrous measure of just how removed faculty have become from the job of educating. On the other hand, those faculty involved in the debate—and this includes those on both sides of the issue—could use it as a means of demonstrating just how seriously faculties and their universities take the job of teaching a highly heterogeneous student population. Every contributor to this volume has put the issue of identity politics to good use, in each case using it as a springboard for examining his or her own motives, qualifications, and goals as teachers and as scholars. The image of the professoriate that emerges

from these essays powerfully belies the negative image currently circulated by its critics.

One might expect a certain degree of defensiveness on the part of those faculty whose credibility has been challenged. Surely for many “majority” faculty, the charges electrifying the air of “minority” studies touch a nerve much more sensitive than that of *professional* credibility. For those of us whose liberal political consciousness developed during the same period that incubated multiculturalism and identity politics, it is discomfiting to find ourselves identified as “them” in an “us versus them” scenario. The dissonance between our self-image as committed, card-carrying intellectual liberals and the challengers’ view of us as underqualified cultural colonizers begs for resolution. In part, our responses to these challenges become the processes through which we resolve this clamoring dissonance.

But the essays in this volume are about far more than self-justification and conscience stroking: the issue—in some cases realized in painful personal confrontations—has driven all the contributors, and many more besides, to step back from their podium and ponder the teaching role, to reconsider and in some cases redefine the goals, methods, and informing ideological assumptions of undergraduate teaching. If for no other reason, the current debate over identity politics is momentous because it has elicited this attention to the business of teaching.

While identity politics may seem an unlikely catalyst for pedagogical review, it becomes quickly apparent to anyone interested in entering the debate that all responsible arguments must work from a clear identification of what one hopes to achieve through teaching and what methods are most likely to effect these goals. These do not sound like revolutionary questions, yet too few of us—trained as disciplinary scholars rather than educators—have seriously entertained them. Higher education is fortunate in its rich resource of dedicated professors, yet many of the most dedicated have neglected to subject their teaching to the same interrogations that have so dramatically

altered what they teach and to whom. To reiterate a crucial point: the current challenges to credibility are important to all of us because they contain those interrogations and require us to review our personal missions as educators.

The essays in this anthology are written from a wide variety of identity interfaces: an African American man teaching feminist theory; white men teaching women’s studies; a straight woman teaching lesbian material; white women teaching and writing about African American history; an able-bodied woman teaching literature by women with disabilities. The positions, strategies, and arguments communicated in the essays are equally varied, as well as enormously rich and comprehensive. As the anthology editor, I am grateful for this richness, but it does make the job of organizing the essays a challenging one and any principle of organization inevitably arbitrary. A reasonable model of classification is implied in the grammar of the anthology’s title—*Teaching What You’re Not*. The phrase implies at least four questions: (1) what does *teaching* consist of? (2) *who* is doing the teaching? (3) *what* is being taught? and (4) *who* is being taught? Virtually all the essays address all these questions in some way, but with varying emphases; it is according to the emphases that the essays are grouped.

The essays in the volume’s first part, “Multiculturalist Pedagogies,” report a variety of pedagogical strategies developed by professors teaching a multicultural canon in a multicultural classroom. These essays allow us to observe how and to what end a progressive (or to use bell hooks’s phrase, “transgressive”⁴) pedagogy emerges from classrooms in which identities are mixed in some way. They demonstrate as well how the multicultural classroom and canon have expanded not only the objects of intellectual inquiry but also the skills and methods taught in traditional liberal arts courses. Indeed, for each writer, the subject matter of the course is as much a means as an end—a tool through which certain widely applicable skills and

perspectives can be developed. For Nancy J. Peterson, teaching American literature means more than teaching a particular set of literary texts and a particular critical idiom; it must aim as well to develop in students a multicultural perspective from which they can cooperate across divisive identity lines to effect social justice. Like most of the contributors to this volume, Peterson unblinkingly accepts the inevitable entanglement of teaching and advocacy. She teaches the skills of literary analysis not merely as tools for unpacking some transcendent textual meaning, but as methods of interrogation revealing the ideological foundation of representation—literary and otherwise. As Peterson's experience teaching a Toni Morrison course demonstrates, students are most likely to develop this perspective and these skills within a classroom that is a "learning community," where dialogue replaces monologue.

Working within a very different disciplinary and identity context, Barbara Scott Winkler is also concerned with building classroom community as a means of achieving a "transformation of consciousness" within her students. Winkler reports the strategies and methodologies she uses when teaching classes with a significant lesbian/gay component, both in content and in student population. Importing the feminist activist concepts of "coalition and alliance building" into her teaching practice, Winkler demonstrates a pedagogical resourcefulness that is necessary to any teacher faced with the challenges of identity politics; Winkler's essay is the first of many in this volume to demonstrate how the unprecedented circumstances of the contemporary college classroom are requiring faculty to look to unfamiliar disciplines and practices for suggestions about negotiating its complexities.

This resourcefulness is demonstrated as well by Janet M. Powers, who borrows methodologies far removed from literary study to help her maneuver in multicultural literature classes. Uncertain about her own motives for teaching what she is not, Powers is disturbed by the likelihood that her students will be influenced by her mode of "gaz-

ing at skin, language, habits of conversation, music, ways of relating that are different from my own." By resorting to ethnographic theory and practice in her classes, Powers believes she has at least partially mitigated the polarization of identities inevitable in multicultural classes.

The fourth essay in part 1 is a joint project written by a male professor of political science and three of his students (two women and a man) in a feminist political theory course. Challenged by students and colleagues alike for teaching a feminist theory course, J. Scott Johnson argues that professorial identity is no more or less an issue in feminist courses than in any other course. The purpose of his political theory course was not to enable a particular perspective capable of drawing certain political conclusions, but rather to model a set of skills that would allow his students to make reasoned judgments about the strengths and weaknesses of feminism in general and of specific feminist theories in particular. That Johnson achieved this goal is enviably demonstrated by one student's statement that "by the end of the semester, I understood and could defend exactly what I believed in." Like theater director Tyrone Guthrie, Johnson sees his teaching role as that of an "audience of one" who reflects student input in order to encourage students to evaluate and refine their own thinking. The student contributions to the essay, which describe Johnson's teaching method and reflect the independent thinking it fostered, are a testament to just how thoroughly the cooperative method succeeded—developing not only the skills of critical thinking, but also defusing the initially troubling issue of professorial identity.

The essays grouped within part 2, "The Class Roster," identify a consideration that is crucial to the current debate surrounding identity and teaching: a reasonable, defensible argument for or against teaching what you're not must take into account the question of *who* is being taught. These essays remind us of the numerous differences that exist in student populations—both within a particular class and,

more generally, from institution to institution. These differences are definable not only in terms of color, culture, and gender, but also in terms of aptitude, education, class, values, political sophistication, and so forth. To assume a monolithic student body is to risk a useless, because absolutist resolution to the debate. Put another way, pedagogical strategies that might work perfectly well in one classroom or one institution could be utter failures in a different class or institution.

Christie Farnham relates a hair-raising instance of classroom identity collision set in motion by the strong political and religious views of some of her students. Farnham's teaching of an African American history course at Iowa State University was repeatedly challenged by black students calling for a more Afrocentrist perspective. Convinced that Afrocentric history does not always meet historiographical standards, Farnham was unwilling to represent it as historical fact in her classes, despite aggressive student demands for its inclusion. In a situation that quickly escalated into an example of identity politics at their most extreme, Farnham's teaching was publicly excoriated by her detractors as alternately racist and incompetent. What Farnham's experience demonstrates is that "not all problems arising out of teaching what you are not—in this case, being a white woman teaching black history—can be reduced to pedagogy or personalities." Farnham's insistence on conforming to the standards of her academic discipline when determining what and what not to teach raises some provocative questions about the origins and functions of disciplinary authority. Her position also constitutes an interesting counterpoint to the broader-based pedagogical practices represented in some of the preceding essays.

Barbara DiBernard, an English professor and director of a women's studies program, has had striking evidence of just how variable the most seemingly homogeneous student populations can be. She opens her essay with an account of an epiphanic experience in a women's literature class that can serve as a cautionary tale for all faculty about

the complex identities of every one of our students. Like many essayists in this anthology, her practical classroom experience makes her wary of the essentialist assumptions implicit in identity politics. In her teaching of literature by disabled women, she has become acutely aware of the arbitrariness of most identity markers; yet at the same time she realizes that in order to be a "political ally" of disabled women, she must agree to inhabit the position of "able-bodied" and to think in terms of polarized identities.

Celeste M. Condit's essay reminds us of yet another way a given student population can complicate a professor's teaching practice. In her discussion of teaching communication courses to undergraduates at the University of Georgia, Condit inserts a sobering reality check into the conversation about enabling, student-centered pedagogy. For Condit, whose communication classes consist of significant numbers of white Southern men, the problems of teaching *who* she is not are not mitigated by the application of progressive teaching styles. To cede authority completely by becoming a participant-observer or audience of one would put her hopelessly at the mercy of students who, in her experience, "are not sheep that we decide to teach 'actively' or 'passively.' . . . [but] highly motivated, highly skilled, and enormously self-interested people who . . . intend to minimize the pain we cause them, and sometimes to maximize the pain they inflict on us." Condit's experience of classroom politics may, as she observes, be a function of the differences between a professor's goals in teaching a course and those of her students in taking it. More fundamentally, her unhappy experience at the University of Georgia is an instance of a gender politics in which the woman—even if she is the professor—will always be the loser.

Part 3, "Professorial Identities," reflects a variety of perspectives on the issue of the relationship between a *professor's* identity and the material that he or she teaches.

Accustomed to having her scholarship challenged on the basis of

her racial identity, Jacqueline Jones, noted historian in the area of African American women's history, takes the uncompromising position that the single most important qualification for any professor in any field is expertise: "Whenever anyone expresses doubts about my work as a white woman writing African American history, I reply . . . 'Let's begin the discussion with my footnotes, and go on from there.'" Jones goes on to point out the political risks of assigning or selecting scholarly and teaching specialties on the basis of narrowly defined identity, pointing to the decidedly negative consequences of the tradition in history of "white men of property and privilege . . . writing about . . . white men of property and privilege."

The next two essays pick up Jones's point about the practical and ideological consequences of identity-determined teaching and scholarship from a very different vantage point. Lavina Dhingra Shankar, after persuasively arguing the enormous complexities of personal identity, speaks to the professional straitjacket that many "minority" faculty are forced to wear in a multicultural university. Despite her decidedly Western(ized) education, Shankar's "postcolonial identity" has dictated her curricular affiliation as much as, if not more than, her professional interests and training. As Shankar puts it, "some are born with identities, others have identities thrust on them."

Indira Karamcheti, English professor at Wesleyan University, is also concerned about the commodification of identity in the multicultural university. As a member of a non-American ethnic group teaching primarily white American students, Karamcheti has always been different from the students she teaches. As with many of the white faculty contributing to this volume, the challenges that have been posed to Karamcheti's professional authority are a function of the phenomenological mismatch between her and her students; yet in her case, the grounds for those challenges have more to do with old-fashioned racism than contemporary identity politics. Karamcheti includes a number of passages from student papers that demonstrate the double bind of "non-Caucasian" teachers, who must contend

with, on the one hand, students' low expectations of their ability to teach authoritatively, and on the other, students' equally reflexive tendency to abandon all reasonable standards of judgment once they recognize that these teachers are not "handicapped" by their ethnicity. Both Shankar's and Karamcheti's careers have provided ample evidence of the limitations that the American academy places on the pedagogical strategies and scholarly preferences of the minority teacher.

The final essay in part 3 returns us to the site of a women's studies class taught by a white male professor. Craig W. Heller's essay is concerned with the excess of authority automatically conferred by his positions as white male and professor. "How contradictory is it," Heller asks, "that I may be convincing students of the viability of a feminist message by, at least in some part, fulfilling the patriarchal expectations that many students have of male teachers?" Heller's hope is that the tension between his positionality and his pedagogical goals can be resolved by a pedagogical strategy of silence, absence, and invisibility, but he also recognizes that his "hands-off" approach is capable of sabotaging his goals every bit as much as a more authoritative style.

Part 4, "The Texts and Contexts of Teaching What You're Not," focuses very directly on the "what" of teaching what you're not. Each of these essays presents in considerable detail the use to which a particular text or disciplinary context can be put in classrooms where identity is an issue. In their concentration on specific contexts, some of these essays offer a case study approach to the issue that reflects in each instance significant learning on the part of the professor as well as the students. Robert S. Levine, professor of English at the University of Maryland, opens this part with a career-long overview of his teaching of Herman Melville's novella "Benito Cereno" to shifting student populations. Levine's essay is as good a defense of faculty seriousness about teaching as any of us could wish for; his ac-

count of a twenty-year struggle with “a recalcitrant text (and students)” provides not only a “concrete account of the implications of the curricular, pedagogical, and demographic changes” in the academy, but also a testament to the willingness of faculty to adjust to these sweeping changes.

Gary L. Lemons contextualizes his teaching strategies in a course called *Redefining Womanhood: (Re)writing the Black Female Self* within a short story by Audre Lorde called “Tar Beach.” Lemons’s course is explicitly political in its aim, which is to teach students “how to interrogate and critically oppose the capitalist, racist, sexist exploitation of women.” Since his own intersecting positionalities as black, male, feminist, and professor can complicate or undermine the achievement of this goal, he has developed a pedagogy and a reading list intended to be liberating for both student and professor. By concentrating on Lorde’s erotic story of lesbian union, Lemons seeks to destabilize certain limiting and generalized constructs of race, gender, and sexuality—a destabilization that not only enriches the class’s view of womanhood, but also challenges their suspicions about their black, male professor self-identifying as feminist. In this course, Lemons manages to convert what might begin as the liabilities of his own identities into vehicles for achieving his liberatory aim. His essay and his courses are not about teaching what he is not, but, as he puts it “*teaching what I am*—an advocate of a feminist movement in which women and men . . . struggle to end sexual oppression.”

The third essay in part 4, written by Gerard Aching, a member of a Spanish and Portuguese department, combines a theoretical argument for the substitution of *practice* for identity as the defining component of credibility, with a contextualization of this new definition. Aching agrees that the “identity-based definition of credibility can be misleading and essentialist in a debilitating and counterproductive manner” and proposes that credibility be understood as “an area and range of competitive practices or strategies,” not as a function of race, gender, or ethnicity. The potential productiveness of transgressing

identity lines and disciplinary specializations is demonstrated within his account of student experiences in a study and service abroad program.

Donna J. Watson’s essay offers the perspective, not of teacher, scholar, or student, but of black woman writer whose texts might become the object of “alien” scrutiny in a classroom or professional conference. Watson’s essay is not an argument for or against teaching or criticizing what you’re not; rather, it is a powerful representation of what writing and written texts signify within the black female culture. Her contextualization of black women’s writing within a history of silence, oppression, fear, and paralysis reflects the importance of black women’s texts to black women writers and readers. Watson does not subscribe to the ownership school of literary studies, but she does recommend that any academic writer (or, by implication, teacher) remember and be sensitive to the context within which black women’s writing is created and read.

Mary Elizabeth Lanser’s essay also contextualizes a resolution to the identity/credibility debate—not by citing a discussion of her teaching within a certain text, but rather by inserting the historical and political context of black studies into the discussion. Lanser insists that “it is virtually impossible to comprehend the territoriality that has developed among black scholars in black studies” without understanding “the roots of black studies as both an intellectual pursuit *and a way of life*” (emphasis added). The context Lanser provides is critical to a full understanding of the exclusionary position held by some minority scholars. In Lanser’s case, this context does not weaken her career-long commitment to teaching black studies, but it does put into relief the passions, energies, and principles that drive this commitment.

The text under review in Renée R. Curry’s essay is Julie Dash’s influential film *Daughters of the Dust* (1992). Curry uses her viewing of this film by an African American woman about African American women as a way of demonstrating the disadvantages a white woman

brings to reading or viewing material emerging from a culture not her own. She recognizes that her own deafness to the historical, cultural, and semiotic resonances impoverish her viewing of the film. Yet she does not conclude that for this reason black texts should be the province of black women. Instead, she invites white scholars to use the reading (viewing) of texts by others to "undertake a spiritual as well as an intellectual and emotional transformation," which must involve their naming, witnessing, and accounting for their whiteness in the same way that they account for other politicized identities. Curry concludes that such meetings between white viewer and black text must continue so that all of us can grow "older, wiser, and stronger through our interconnected pasts, presents, and futures."

As members of the higher education community engage in the debate about identity and credibility, it is important that we remember the uneasy context within which this debate is taking place. The university is unquestionably under examination by those who, while perhaps lacking sound judgment, have a plentiful supply of political muscle and public support with which to act on these judgments. Axiomatic to any discussion of the future of higher education is the certainty that whether propelled from within or without, fundamental changes are going to be made to the enterprise of higher education—and sooner rather than later. Clearly, a target for change, if not extinction, is the entire multicultural project, which is threatened by economic exigencies as well as ideological disapproval. On the one hand, increasing tuition rates at private and public institutions and decreasing availability of state and federal aid are threatening to push access to a college education out of the reach of low- and even middle-income students. On the other, by caricaturing the curricular and canonical revisions of multiculturalism, conservative forces both on and off campus are moving the university ever closer to its earlier mission of teaching the dominant class all about itself and its sustaining ideology. Given this context, it is important to foresee any

implications of the identity/credibility debate that could be used as canon fodder by those whom Bob Levine refers to as "the monocultural polemicists." In closing this introduction, I would like to identify three of those possible implications.

The first of these involves the issue of essentialism. A number of essays in this volume address the identity-based challenges to faculty credibility by complicating the concept of identity, demonstrating convincingly that identity consists of uncountable characteristics, not simply phenomenological markers. The point is indisputable, yet we should be wary of the direction in which it might ultimately be taken. If identity is finally vastly more complicated than one's race or sexual preference or gender, then those very markers that have commanded for underrepresented groups the attention and support of the modern university could be deemed irrelevant. The gains that have been achieved through the multiculturalist project depend on a broadly generalized definition of identity, which must at some level be perpetuated if these gains are to continue. We cannot afford to problematize identity out of existence until these gains include a completely equitable society.

A second concern both implied and stated within this volume is the question of professional expertise. Minority studies (which include, for example, women's studies, African American studies, postcolonial studies, lesbian/gay studies, etc.) are comparatively young interdisciplinary fields—indeed, younger than many university faculty. When we add to this that graduate programs in them are few and far between, we begin to understand why so many faculty gravitate toward these fields after their formal training is completed. In order for these departments to be accorded the institutional support necessary to their survival and growth, they must operate with the same intellectual rigor common in more traditional departments. There are many, many reasons why a white scholar should become interested in African American studies, for example, but none of those reasons constitutes a qualification. These fields have developed the reputation

of "anybody-can-play pick-up game[s]," to use Ann duCille's rather chilling phrase,⁵ which will have the effect of undermining the fields themselves as well as *all* the faculty who teach them—both qualified and unqualified. If credibility is the issue here, then we must understand that whatever else it may signify, credibility always assumes doing your homework, however variously that homework may be defined from specialization to specialization.

A final concern is the absence of essays that emphatically defend an identity-based definition of credibility. The "call for papers" soliciting submissions invited essays representing both sides of the debate. Having had my own credibility challenged at a major conference, I was well aware that there are many voices in the academy capable of voicing compelling arguments in support of "teaching what you are." Surprisingly (at least to me), while this volume received a flood of submissions, very few of them advanced such arguments. Those who are particularly defensive about having their credibility impugned might use this fact as an indication that, finally, when the chips are down, there is no reasoned, defensible support of a position that is often expressed spontaneously and emotionally (as in my conference experience), or naively by undergraduates who lack the intellectual sophistication to see its full implications. But I would raise a more troubling possibility, which is that the arguments are there, but those faculty, many of whom are members of minority groups and hold junior, untenured positions, do not feel safe publicly advancing what are unquestionably unpopular views. When, in response to my experience at the women's studies conference, I wrote a piece for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*⁶ that called for greater understanding and sensitivity on the part of white scholars working in African American studies, the responses (which were numerous) were both surprising and disturbing. They were evenly divided between those who disagreed with my conciliatory stance (some quite vigorously) and those who supported my attempt to understand the position of my challengers. Those in the former camp were almost

exclusively white, those in the latter, African American. Most interesting (and troubling), the disagreements took the form of published letters to the *Chronicle*; the agreements (and there were many over a period of six weeks or so) were communicated to me privately by telephone and letter. One hopes that this striking segregation of response is not evidence of how effectively a still hierarchical academic system can silence minority views, of how impotent identity politics finally are.

NOTES

1. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, almanac issue, 1 Sept. 1995, 14. "Minorities" include American Indian, Asian, black, Hispanic, and foreign students.
2. Michael Bérubé and Cary Nelson, eds., *Higher Education under Fire: Politics, Economics, and the Crisis of the Humanities* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
3. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, almanac issue, 1 Sept. 1995, 80.
4. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).
5. Ann duCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19 (spring 1994): 603.
6. Katherine J. Mayberry, "White Feminists Who Study Black Writers," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 12 Oct. 1994, A48.

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No Middle Ground? Men Teaching Feminism

J. SCOTT JOHNSON, JENNIFER KELLEN,

GREG SEIBERT, and CELIA

SHAUGHNESSY

"What does it matter who is teaching feminist political theory? What does it matter who is teaching?" This is how we four responded to the question whether one of us (Johnson) should or should not be teaching a course in which the other three were enrolled. But answering a question with a question is not particularly satisfying, nor were we content with the responses we received from our peers. When we presented a talk to faculty on teaching about gender and the relation of gender to the content of a course on the classics of political theory and a course on feminist theory, we were surprised by hostile skepticism from tenured women faculty in three different departments. The discussion quickly polarized. Some senior women faculty who had fought to get gender issues and feminist concerns into the curriculum were not willing to entertain the possibility that a man could teach feminism, because they felt gender was a blinding filter. Apparently the position they were attacking was one that held that anyone could teach feminist theory because gender doesn't matter. There is no middle ground between these positions as they saw them. However, denying men the opportunity to teach feminist theory is a precaution

that feminist theory does not need to take. All that is required is a recognition that gender does matter in teaching, and that this acknowledgment should not prevent teaching. In fact, appreciating the role that gender plays can often improve a course regardless of the gender of the professor. This essay reflects our experiences surrounding a course on feminist political theory that was taught by a man.

Government 313: Feminist Political Theory was offered for the first time at Saint John's University and the College of Saint Benedict during the fall semester of 1994. Seventeen students, eleven men and six women, enrolled in the class. We began by comparing Susan Estrich's argument in *Real Rape* to the discussion by Katie Roiphe in *The Morning After*. Following that we surveyed some of the claims made in the history of political thought from Plato, through Rousseau, to Freud. Most of the semester required an investigation of the feminist response and positive critique. We used Rosemarie Tong's introductory textbook and read selections from theorists representing liberal, existential, Marxist, radical, and socialist feminisms. We considered the debate over Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" as well as that over Gilligan's theory of *A Different Voice* and an ethic of care. Finally, we considered Naomi Wolf's conception of power feminism and tried to see whether it fit easily into any of our original categories. The course was challenging and the reading load heavy, but most of the students were successfully able to examine critically the ideas presented.

Feminist political theory is often assumed to be more than theory because the point of feminism is to change the world; in other words, feminist theory without action is not really feminist theory. Feminist political theory is a human activity through which women have sought to establish their equality, though different versions of feminist theory have different programs for change. Historically, women also have used feminist theory to argue for greater particularized benefits for themselves as a class or group. Students sometimes have

difficulty separating the analytic portions of a theory from its policy recommendations. They often want the right answer and unreflectively accept whatever is placed before them unless they suspect that it has a partisan bias. Of course, feminist theory is unabashedly partisan in favor of the equality of women and men, so many students seem to think of it as propaganda instead of a proper subject for study. On the other hand, some may feel that men cannot present feminist theory sympathetically because they are not supposed to belong to the group that feminist theory is meant to benefit. We argue that both positions are mistaken. Feminist theory simply cannot be dismissed as political indoctrination, but because of the baggage that the recent backlash has attached to the subject, special care must be used in its teaching.

As a group, we believe that a critical approach to feminist political theory allows all students, male and female, to gain a hold on difficult material, assess its strengths and weaknesses, and decide for themselves whether to adopt the perspective advocated by each variety of feminist thought. We maintain that it is not possible to simultaneously and consistently hold and act on all the varieties of feminist political theory, since the debates and differences among feminists are significant and real. We obviously do not believe that men teaching feminist theory are essentially any better than women at maintaining a critical perspective on the subject matter, but we suspect the tension between teaching feminist theory and engaging in political activity, which is inherent in the subject matter itself, explains some of the questioning each of us experienced during the fall of 1994. In what follows we will describe those experiences.

Shaughnessy's Experience

The first person I told that I was taking feminist theory from Scott Johnson immediately had a question: "Is he qualified?" It struck me as odd that this person could not believe that a male could ever be

qualified to teach feminist theory. Others asked similar questions, such as, "Why would he want to teach that?" and "What interest does he have in women's issues?" No one had ever questioned the qualifications of any of my other professors. Furthermore, when we gave the talk midsemester, Johnson's senior colleagues dismissed my ability as a student to talk about what I had learned in his class, and they often ignored what he had to say. The room was tense. It looked to me as if it had become a power struggle between two young students as new wave feminists and an older generation of women protecting their authority as longtime feminist scholars. Men were excluded. It seemed that they thought gender was only about women and only women could teach or talk about it.

I, on the other hand, thought it was a great idea that a male was teaching feminist theory, because it could bring a fresh perspective to issues I thought demanded a new look. I was surprised that people assumed that because Johnson was male, he was either unqualified or lacking legitimate interest in the subject matter. I felt that questioning the qualifications of my professor in this class but not in others was injecting partisan concerns into the realm of academics. When we gave the talk, Johnson's senior colleagues even seemed to dismiss my experience as a woman because I was learning about gender and feminism from a man. My friends' responses to the class reflected the polarizing public debate over feminism. Women could love or hate feminism, but not choose the middle ground. Men, on the other hand, were expected to oppose feminism and rarely allowed to be sympathetic or supportive. Treating feminism like any other academic subject—a middle position—was not acceptable. So it seemed the idea of a man being an authority on feminist theory was simply not believable.

From the beginning, I was comfortable in the classroom. For the first time, as a woman, I didn't feel nervous about the possibility (and later the reality) of disagreeing with the feminist mainstream. Johnson did a wonderful thing: he never once laid out what he thought

feminist theory was or should be. That was the question that (thankfully) plagued us through the entire semester. His refusal to define it for us was a key reason the class worked for me. In some ways he was more of a very educated sounding board. I could ask any question or bounce my ideas off him and usually get a ton of questions back. He would never insist that there was a single set way of viewing these ideas. We weren't forced to accept or reject a standard definition of feminism.

As a woman and a student, I found this important. I had always felt uncomfortable being called a feminist because I wasn't really sure that I agreed with all the standard popularized definitions. In this class, I was given the room to find and grow into my own definition of feminism. Johnson would constantly question parts of the definitions that each of us came up with, so that by the end of the semester, I understood and could defend exactly what I believed in.

I felt that Johnson was open to many new ideas and new theories, some of which were highly critical of earlier versions of feminist thought. He gave us a wide variety of readings offering many visions of feminism. This gave us, as a new generation, an opportunity to see that along with the liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist feminists there were lesbian, minority, and even conservative feminists. To know the history and development of these different strands of theory is of course important and necessary. But we need to know where feminism is today and where it is going in the future.

In my opinion, the historical struggle to form a cohesive women's movement ironically resulted in a loss for individual women of the opportunity to choose their own personal identities. The individual "I" was subsumed in and lost to the ideological "we," defined as all oppressed women. Older versions of feminism obviously can speak for and about all women, but less and less do they speak for and about individual women. They certainly don't speak to me. I think these older versions of feminism have become authoritarian. They seem like a club with particular rules, like those proscribing the en-

joyment of sex because women's sexuality has been created by the male patriarchal structure for men's enjoyment, or rules insisting that men cannot be part of the solution because they are the problem. I don't think that that kind of feminism, as it has been popularized and satirized in the media, will work for me or my generation of individual women and men working together for greater equality.

Maybe Johnson presented a more humanistic approach to feminism. By more humanistic, I mean more inclusive and maybe more cooperative. I now believe that feminist theory does not have to divide men and women but can lead to a better search for human equality. I learned that feminism should not make me feel as if I had to choose between men and women. This made me realize that both men and women have to take responsibility and action in order to change thoughts and institutions. I did not have to be a male-basher to be a feminist. Nor did I have to feel left out of the fight for equality just because I did not agree with nor accept all the philosophy or theories that women before me had believed in.

With Johnson's knowledge, guidance, and support, I was able to see the males and females in my class, as well as my professor, as all part of the same struggle to recognize the equality of all human beings. I don't know whether Johnson was more open to this because of his identity. Maybe he was trying to make a genuine effort to reflect on how everyone, including himself, is implicated in the problems, concerns, and triumphs of feminism. This attempt at reflection shows us a human view of equality and feminism. It is what made the class work for me.

Seibert's Experience

Every college student knows how important the choice of professor is to the success of a course. If you find the perfect professor, then even the worst class you can think of can be made worthwhile. How-

ever, even the most interesting subject matter can be made deathly dull by the wrong professor.

These thoughts occurred to me as I signed up for a class on feminist theory, a class being taught by, I might add, a man. For some reason it did strike me as odd that a woman was not teaching the course, but I had to take the course anyway so I signed up. Initially, I thought a male professor in this class would have to be either completely effeminate—bordering on gay—or else totally opposed to everything he was teaching. On the other hand, I thought any woman teaching this class could not help but become adamant about one aspect of the movement or another because of her personal experiences. I couldn't see any middle ground between these positions. As I look back, it is clear to me that the gender of the professor affected the view I took of the class.

Feminism has always given me the creeps. In part, this is because I had been confronted with only the most radical, abrasive, and outspoken examples of the feminist movement. These are the ones that make good press and grab the spotlight. None of the history behind feminism is ever presented, and we men are not often allowed to see the real tenets behind the different waves of feminism. It is difficult to discover the entire picture of feminism because of the media's distortions. For men to be sympathetic to feminism, they need to see the origins of the movement and the reasons for its existence.

I will be the first to admit that the fact that Johnson was a male helped me in this class. I knew full well that he was bringing his own prejudices to the classroom and that these prejudices were as much a struggle for him as mine were for me. Because he is a man, I was more open and felt more comfortable asking the questions I thought were important. I did not feel I was being viewed as the enemy. I believed he had probably gone through all the same struggles that I have in trying to figure out who he is in relation to the material he was trying to teach us.

In the past, whenever I tried to discuss with women issues like rape, gender identity, power, and the family unit, they always made me feel as if I had no clue whatsoever about what was happening in their world. I was made to feel as if I were incapable of empathizing with them and their plight. Encounters such as these made me think that I had no way of ever understanding what was happening to them because I was not a woman. Sitting there in class listening to and talking with another man who was obviously well versed in the tenets of feminist theory made me see that I did have the ability to grab hold of the concepts involved. Accusations were not thrown at the class at any point with regard to patriarchal structures or the rape of women. When we examined these topics, we examined hypothetical causes in light of the evidence that was presented by the theorists. Arguments, not accusations, were the central subject of the class. This shifted the focus away from what men had done to women over the years and toward a consideration of the implications of those actions and the question of what we should do now. Thus ideas were always fair game, but the individuals in the class were not.

I found myself becoming a better man for struggling through the course. Johnson knew what he was talking about, and that is what made the class run the way it did. I am glad that he allowed the class to run itself when it would, and could keep it going when the tone of the class required intervention. He had no problem acquainting us with the theoretical frameworks of the wide variety of feminist theories, but at the feeling level he seemed to be learning right along with us. This provided the atmosphere that people need in order to learn. The class became a group endeavor. The process becomes much more effective if the person you are looking up to is trying as hard as you are to really grasp the impact of the issues involved. Johnson let us see what it was like to struggle through the issues. I do not think the gender of my professor hampered the class or in any way diminished the knowledge I gained. If the world wants men to become better men, then more men should teach feminist theory and more men

should take classes in it. The information and theories contained in the movement hold the power for both halves of the population to be liberated.

Johnson's Experience

It might help for you to know that I am a political scientist, broadly trained in public policy and political theory at Carleton College, the University of Chicago, and Stanford University. I have worked closely with Susan Moller Okin, Elisabeth Hansot, and Jennifer Ring, as well as other political theorists here and there. I teach political theory and American politics at Saint John's University, an all-male college offering a coeducational curriculum in conjunction with the all-female College of Saint Benedict located a few miles down the road. About a third of my teaching focuses on gender issues: male, female, straight, and gay. I participated in the construction of a new gender studies and women's studies minor and work on a men's development research group. I designed the course taught last semester based on syllabi from Okin and Ring, and I teach it here because no one else in my department has the training and desire to offer the same kind of course, despite the obvious need for one in our department.

Since I am writing this essay with three of my students as an opportunity for each of us to reflect on who we are in relation to the class, I think it helps to have some idea as to who I am, especially as my students were often asked whether I knew anything about the subject or why I had an interest in teaching feminist theory. I have learned a lot about myself by teaching this course and writing this essay. The sections about my coauthors' experiences suggested to me that they learned more from the class than I could possibly have put into it, and surprisingly, each of them seems to have taken a slightly different class.

Of the many things that unnerved me during the semester I taught

Feminist Political Theory, some of the comments written by my coauthors were the most disturbing. When I first began studying feminist theory, the backlash against the movement had barely moved into full swing. While it seemed that few men were truly interested in the material, no one, male or female, appeared really put off by the work. Everyone in the classes I had taken was there because they wanted to be. Therefore, when I walked into Feminist Political Theory, I was somewhat unprepared for a hostile female audience in a class with almost twice as many men as women enrolled. None of the men were pro-feminist; at best they were indifferent. Some students had signed up for the class simply because they needed a political theory class that semester and had no idea, much less cared, what the topic of the course would be. Even my coauthors report that they initially came into the class with their prejudices firm and their critical capacities somewhat dormant.

I suppose I always had known that by teaching this class I was going to step on toes and tweak a few noses, so I should not have been surprised by the reported assaults on the course's legitimacy based solely, as it seems, on the fact that I am male. Some of the questioners were students, but others were faculty. Earlier we discussed the polarized reception to a public talk we gave on teaching gender in a variety of courses. Some of my students have reported that they were contacted by senior faculty and questioned about the class content and my approach. When faculty privately question another professor's credibility, that can have a serious effect on a class, even if those questions never become public. For all these reasons, I was surprised that the course worked as well as it did. Fortunately, my department has approved the course as a regular offering for as long as I would like to teach it.

I teach my upper-division undergraduate courses by using discussion. As one student has already reported, in class I see my role as being a highly receptive, highly concentrated, highly critical audience

of one who reflects information back to students in order to help them improve their performance. The more I can leave initiative to the students, the better. A teacher must use the energy and experience that the students bring to a class meeting, and the students must be aware of how I see my role as well as theirs.

The philosophy of teaching that I am describing here, the development of the professor into an audience of one, puts an obligation on the student to take responsibility for his or her own learning. A teacher as an audience of one cannot work effectively if the students do not do their work competently. This means that I am often only as good as my students; but it also means that as an attentive audience, I take whatever they bring to the classroom and mold it through careful criticism. I reflect their input, individually and collectively, so they can better see themselves and what they are learning.

When playing the role of an audience of one, I may appear to be doing nothing to the casual outside observer, but by the intensity of my concentration, by the focus of my attention, I will be communicating to the students what they need to know. This self-effacement does not come easily, but I believe it is a necessary characteristic of good teachers. It also hides the amount of preparation that goes into the design of a syllabus, the selection of the readings for each day, the thinking through of the possible as well as the probable course of that day's conversation, and the effort that effective reflection requires to draw out the students' criticisms of the reading.

I developed this approach to teaching from my work in theater. Tyrone Guthrie first argued that a director is primarily an audience of one in the same way that I have suggested a teacher is. Much research on teaching suggests that a student-centered approach helps students go beyond mere knowledge acquisition and begin applying the concepts they have learned. It was only after having settled on this philosophy of teaching that my research on feminist theory uncovered several discussions of feminist pedagogy that recommended

a similar approach. These found that while men tended to be granted authority in the classroom automatically, women were often denied it. The authors of these discussions then tried to design a feminist pedagogy that simultaneously made a virtue out of an unfortunate reality.

In my classes, I attempt to shed the authority normally granted to professors so that my students can see me as a learner, much like them, who simply has been studying feminist political theory for a bit longer than they have. I certainly do not want them to confuse my opinions with the right answers to the many questions I ask in my classes. In fact most of my questions have no single right answers even though some have demonstrably wrong ones. It was ironic that an older generation of feminists did not accept my authority to teach feminist political theory even though my philosophy of teaching was based on shedding some of that authority in the classroom. The attack on my authority by others not in the class actually helped break down the barriers between the students and myself as their professor.

This teaching strategy cannot guarantee successful learning any more than its alternatives. By successful learning I mean that the student has critically engaged opposing arguments and found ways to discover or strengthen his or her own position. A failure occurred when a student could never quite see past his or her own prejudices and his or her critical faculties remained in hibernation. Thus a failure doesn't mean the student declined to become a feminist, only that he or she declined to think. A student who still cannot distinguish between MacKinnon and Okin yet believes in everything each says without noticing or questioning their differences is a flop, yet a student who spends an entire semester engaging in the arguments while still rejecting all feminist theory in favor of traditional patriarchal family values can count the course as a successful learning experience if and only if he or she has thought through the reasons for and against patriarchy and can construct a cogent argument for their tra-

ditional position. The main goal informing my philosophy of teaching is getting students to think for themselves, which ultimately may allow them to change their beliefs but does not require it.

In reflecting on who I am in relation to my teaching style and the particular subjects I teach, I believe the key factor has been comfort. I am comfortable with who I am and how I go about what I do. I can shed authority in the classroom because the loss of rank does not threaten my sense of who I am, and I think students can read that in my approach to them. This allows my students greater freedom to find themselves in relation to the difficult issues raised in the books and articles assigned and discussed. Shedding authority might be easier for men because they are automatically granted it, but the main point I want to emphasize is that a cooperative style of teaching that empowers students to make their own learning choices and then holds them responsible for those choices is an effective teaching strategy regardless of subject matter or the teacher's gender.

I am not female and cannot actually experience for myself much of what some feminists theorize. But I am also not Plato, nor Hobbes, nor Rousseau, and I cannot directly experience much of what they wrote about either. For me the fact that I am neither female nor Plato has some effect on my teaching, but it does not prevent me from challenging my students to reflect on who they are in relation to the material at hand or who the authors were in relation to what they wrote. Being male does affect how I see the world, but I can recognize that bias and must accept it in order to work through it. Being male gives no extra insight into knowledge. Who I am is simply a precondition, a set of changing filters, through which I experience the world. The identities of readers and writers, teachers and students, are clearly germane to many classroom discussions, but only to the extent that such discussion furthers the consideration of ideas. If the discussion of identity degenerates into ad hominem attacks as a way of avoiding ideas and critical thought, then no one is learning.

had a better sense of the relationship between political theory and my politics.

As the course progressed I realized that both women and men had been falsely represented in the political theory canon, as well as in history. Furthermore, approaching the class as something valuable solely for women, or expecting to learn just about women and to “set the story straight” was extremely shortsighted on my part. I had entered the class under the false assumption that the world as we knew it, or as it had been presented to us in the traditional political theory canon, was a true and accurate representation of what is “male.” Eventually I began to understand that not only had women’s experiences been left out of things, but so had many men’s experiences. Traditional, unreflective conceptions of gender roles had been damaging for both genders—hindering all our experiences. Therefore, to experience the vast spectrum of characteristics that our humanity is composed of, we need to begin to recognize and understand that all of us have been limited by the canonical expectations.

To understand the world, we need to understand both sides of the story, and we need to fuse both fragments together to see the big picture. It is fairly accepted that to argue effectively it is advantageous to know your opponent’s argument. I think the same strategy can be applied to understanding “how the world works”—we need to gather all the information and viewpoints and experience that we can from all the fragments that constitute the world, then we need to fuse them together, and hopefully, looking at this big picture, we will gain some insight on how to understand things.

The claim that only women can teach feminist political theory is based on the false assumption that only women can learn, understand, or teach about issues related to women. This is a damaging assumption not only because it limits men, but because it limits women as well. From what I learned in class, and the way I understood it, the women’s movement is working toward equality that will allow women (and men) to experience their full humanity. This

Kellen’s Experience

When I first signed up for this class I thought that I would be very closely related to the subject matter, simply because of my gender. I expected the course to focus primarily on women’s experiences and issues that had been excluded from the political canon (and history in general) and on how this exclusion had affected and, more important, hindered women. I was more or less expecting to hear a one-sided version of the story—the one side of the story that had been lost in history, the one side of the story that had been forced to take a backseat to the male version of the story. I was drawing this conclusion under the assumption that the experiences, issues, and events that had already been published in the political theory canon (and history) were “male.”

I also had several questions about what feminism was, or how it could be defined, and what the role of feminist theory has been and could be. Above all, I wanted to know how I, as a woman, fit into all this (feminism, feminist theory, etc.). As the class progressed, I learned that most feminist theorists, especially the political theorists, have written their texts in response to or as rebuttals of the standard, widely accepted canon composed of works by Locke, Hobbes, Plato, and so on, all of whom have excluded women and women’s experiences from their texts. One of the chief reasons for feminists’ responses is an attempt to redress the imbalance and the imperfect vision of the political theory canon. These attempts at intervention reexamine aspects of human experience that have been ignored because they have been assumed to be just like the male experience. A second reason for the responses is that participation in the canon is in part determined by reflection and redeployment of issues already extant in the canon. Locke responds to Filmer and Hobbes, Wollstonecraft critiques Rousseau and Burke. After participating in the class and learning of the exchange between feminist theorists and traditional theorists, I expanded my view of how the world worked. I

equality suggests an abolition of essentially gender-specific roles of the kind that divide all activities into women's work and men's work. If only women can teach feminist theory because it is about women, then the standard feminist charge against the mainstream (male) canon suggests that women cannot teach political theory because it is only about men. This is both ironic and sexist. Women are capable of teaching, learning, and understanding subjects that they have been historically excluded from, and so are men. Feminism, as I now understand it, expands how we approach, view, and understand the world.

It is important to view feminist theory in an objective way, although the subject matter is often very conducive to a subjective approach. But I think it is dangerous to approach feminist theory in a narrow and fragmented way. As with any subject, approaching feminist theory in a narrow way limits and excludes valuable information. Studying, learning, or understanding feminist theory in narrow and noninclusive fragments seems to be contrary to what feminist theory is actually trying to do—broaden the information in the old canon, expand our understanding and definition of equality, and expand our understanding of female and male.

This course had a tremendous impact on me. We need to understand men and women in order to understand how the world works. If men are included in the quest to learn from, understand, and teach feminist political theory, we all might better be able to gain new insights from the old canon as well as develop new political theories about how the world works and why. More important, this course helped me understand that feminism was just one version of the human quest for equality for all. I have come to believe that it is impossible to achieve equality in a one-sided manner, or by focusing on only one side. True equality would inevitably affect all people; therefore, it cannot be approached as something one side fights for, or something one side "gives" the other side. It needs to be approached

as something that we all work toward together—something that we all need, deserve, and owe to each other, together.

Conclusion: No Middle Ground?

Feminist political theory is an appropriate academic subject for undergraduates to learn and faculty to teach. There is a distinctive core to the subject: it is grounded in the study of the relationship between equality and difference with regard to sex and gender. Part of the rhetoric that was used to justify the inclusion of women's studies as an academic discipline was the claim that all previous work has been the study of men by men. In part this claim was true, but most if not all of that work never considered questions of gender or what being a man really meant. Even today some versions of the new men's studies movement try to borrow the insights of feminist theory and apply them directly to the study of men, thus once again failing to consider critically what differences there might be between men and women. Other versions of men's studies are crude illustrations of the backlash against the gains of feminist political activity, and once again ignore the actual study of men and their differences from women.

Feminist theory focuses on the relationship between gender difference and gender equality. This study can be done by men or women. To prejudice the conclusions of such study based on the gender of the investigator reflects poorly on the holder of that prejudice. This is not to say that all prejudices or assumptions can be ignored. They must be sought out, identified, recognized, and analyzed. What we tried to do in this class was to examine a wide variety of texts and notice how certain assumptions held prior to the research would make the conclusions of the studies congregate within narrow ranges. Radical feminists will find that men as a class dominate women as a class, while liberal feminists will find that changing the rules may allow

the supposed domination to lessen over time. In no case did we find that the gender of the writer was the most important assumption needed to get to the conclusion. We found that regardless of gender, those who chose to work in a radical framework would come to radical conclusions, just as if we chose to use liberalism as our frame we would come to conclusions consistent with its predictions.

Teaching feminist political theory unsympathetically or uncritically calls into question political theory—not just feminism—as well as the merits of the professor. We do not expect any theory to be taught as if it were unquestionable, but we also do not expect theories to be taught as if they have no merit. If the course were designed to prevent students from becoming feminists or political theorists, then the course would be a failure. But teaching feminist theory as an academic subject need not create a classroom of feminists. Nor should teaching feminist theory simply be preaching to the choir. Our argument is plainly that a critical approach to thinking about feminist theory leads to a better understanding of its variety and impact and does not depend on the gender of the professor or the student.

The identity of the professor is germane to a conversation about teaching only to the extent that identity affects or biases ideas. Of course identity serves as a filter, but that filter need not remain unexamined. Like all assumptions, identity too should be examined, or it certainly might bias conclusions. But the contrary assumption we faced in this course—that males are essentially unqualified to teach feminist political theory—suffers from a lack of critical examination. In our experience in this course, identity did matter, it was examined, and it helped us all toward a better understanding of the material. We believe that those who challenged the course failed to consider adequately their own assumptions and grounds for their challenge. While we started with the polarized debate whether men can or cannot teach feminist political theory and found little middle ground in this binary opposition, we ended with a different formulation of the issue. By looking at what we feel must have been the reason behind

the opposition, we think we have found a solution. This is the obvious compromise: identity is an assumption that should be examined by everyone when teaching or learning feminist theory. The claim that suggests that only male identities be examined seems to us just as untenable as the claim that only women have a gender. Each of us, male and female alike, learned about ourselves as we learned about feminism.

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Teaching What I'm Not: An Able-Bodied Woman Teaches Literature by Women with Disabilities

BARBARA DIBERNARD

I had no awareness of disability issues when I saw a sign at a busy intersection of carpeted footpaths at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1985: "Be aware of slow-moving Amazons." This sign made me look at my surroundings in a different way. When I did, I realized that women with many kinds of disabilities were participating fully in the festival, and that I wasn't used to seeing these women in my daily life. Yet I knew instantly that they were there; it was my awareness that had changed. Since inclusiveness was one of my goals as a feminist teacher, I resolved to seek out literature by women with disabilities and teach it. This was the beginning of a journey that had a profound impact on me and on my teaching.

The first writings by women with disabilities that I read were in *With the Power of Each Breath: A Disabled Women's Anthology*. I knew immediately that I would use this book in my teaching. In the fall semester of 1988 I ordered it for a senior graduate-level course, Twentieth-Century Women Writers. I looked forward to the class, a night class that I knew would have a number of nontraditional students, and was quite pleased with my decision to integrate literature by

women with disabilities into the class. However, my complicity was quickly shattered the first night when a woman in a wheelchair wheeled into the room. My first reaction was, "How are we going to talk about disability with *her* here?" I knew then that I had 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. One of the complications of "teaching what you're not" I had not foreseen is "teaching what you're not in the presence of those who are."

Joni, who had had polio as an infant and had therefore lived virtually her entire life as a person with a disability, helped to educate us all. One evening when students were getting very excited and angry in discussing the way the media portray women as sex objects, Joni stopped us cold. "Who are you talking about when you say 'women'?" she asked. "I have never seen a woman who looks like me used as a sex object to sell a car. In fact, I would like someone to look at me as a sex object sometime." It was one of the most profound moments I have ever experienced in a classroom. In an instant, Joni revealed that our use of the word "women" did not include her, a woman sitting in the room with us at that moment. On a broader scale, her comments showed one of the problems with "identity politics"—we are allowed to "be" only one thing at a time; our identities are reduced to one dimension, and differences are erased or overlooked. Joni was visible as a person with a disability, but not as a woman. The rest of us in the room, all of whom would be seen as "able-bodied" by others, had not taken account of our able-bodied locations. Without a doubt, we saw ourselves at the center, Joni at the margin, ourselves as "women," Joni as "disabled."

Through my teaching of literature by women with disabilities, I have tried to do what Adrienne Rich suggests we must do with other privileged locations such as whiteness: "to experience the meaning of [our able-bodiedness] as a point of location for which [we need] to take responsibility" (219). Although I started out at the first stage of

curriculum integration by "adding and stirring" literature by women with disabilities into a course on twentieth-century women writers, reading and teaching the literature have changed my perceptions of myself and the world. 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. I need to acknowledge it overtly as the place from which I experience the world and from which I do my work. I hope the same for my students by the end of the semester, although developmentally it's a long journey to make in fifteen weeks if people with disabilities have not even been visible before.

While Joni was a significant resource and teacher for all of us, while she generously and thoughtfully shared her experiences as a person living with a disability, she also made it clear that it was important to her that an able-bodied person had chosen to teach this literature, that I saw it as important to teach "what I was not." It was also the first time in four years at the University of Nebraska, she said, that this aspect of her experience had been included in a class. First, it was affirming and empowering to her; second, it made the lives of women with disabilities visible to the other students; third, it complicated the category of "woman" in a way that made a unitary identity politics of gender impossible.

In order to take account of my own location, it seems necessary to ask some seemingly elementary questions. What does it mean to be "disabled"? What does it mean to be "able-bodied"? What are the implications of these identities in terms of the title of this book, *Teaching What You're Not*? Is there an identity politics in disability studies that enables me to be "not" disabled? Unlike some (but not all) identities, being "disabled" can be changeable for some people. Some people who have been blind recover their sight; some people with disabling diseases and conditions go into remission. Being "able-bodied" is a changeable condition as well. I could become disabled in a moment, through accident or disease. Joseph Shapiro points out that

"Fewer than 15 percent of disabled Americans were born with their disabilities" (7). Does this make my being an able-bodied person at this time (or "temporarily able-bodied"),¹ teaching literature by women with disabilities, different from my being a white person teaching African American literature? After all, a white person cannot become African American. Of course, other identities also seem changeable; for example, many people who have lived for years as heterosexual later come to identify as lesbian or gay. Are there some identities that are immutable, biological, and some that are not? Underlying these questions is a larger question about identity politics. Are there some identities that "count" in identity politics? "Gender, race, and class" is a trilogy we often hear recited in academic work. However, I think we must ask what this trilogy excludes, and we must complicate our notions of identity beyond it.

Is disability an identity that "counts" in identity politics? A wide range of conditions and experiences is covered in the term "disability." The editors of *With the Power of Each Breath* write in their introduction that they began working on the book "with a strong political commitment to produce an anthology representative of all disabled women. We wanted the impossible: that this collection would be *the* definitive statement by and about disabled women. It is not" (11). As "disability" is used in the United States, it includes people with visual and hearing impairments, people who are quadriplegic, people who are paraplegic, people with other kinds of mobility impairments, people with heart conditions, people with multiple sclerosis, people with epilepsy, people with medical complications due to diabetes, and people with mental disabilities, among other things. It's clear that the experience of disability will be very different depending on what kind of disability a person lives with. What we call "disabled" is a multiple, not unitary, set of conditions and experiences. Can it then be an "identity"?

Michelle Fine has pointed out that other factors also influence a

person's experience of her or his disability, although most researchers have not acknowledged this in their work:

To date, almost all research on disabled men and women seems simply to assume the irrelevance of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or social class. Having a disability presumably eclipses these dimensions of social experience. Even sensitive students of disability . . . have focused on disability as a unitary concept and have taken it to be not merely the "master" status but apparently the exclusive status for disabled people. Paralleling what Hester Eisenstein (1983) has described as the "false universalism" of feminist writing of the 1970s, the disability rights literature has chosen to stress commonalities among all disabled people rather than differences. (141)

Since the term "person with a disability" falsely universalizes as much as 1970s feminist writing did with "woman," it is important to take account of the degree to which the category is socially constructed and the effect this has on a person's identity. Fine states,

It is ironic to note that the very category that integrates this text, "disabled girls and women," exists wholly as a social construct. Why should a limb-deficient girl, a teenager with mental retardation, or a blind girl have anything in common with each other or with a woman with breast cancer or another woman who is recovering from a stroke? What they share is similar treatment by a sexist and disability-phobic society. (144)

Another way of talking about the socially constructed nature of "disabled" as an identity is to distinguish between "disability" and "handicap." Debra Connors writes that a classmate of hers made this distinction: "A disability, she explained, is a physical or mental impairment. A handicap is a set of social conditions which impede our independence" (92). Michelle Fine elaborates:

Likewise in the past twenty years, both the study and the politics of disability have undergone transformation. Activists and scholars have insisted that the *disability* (the biological condition) be conceptually disentangled from the *handicap* (the social ramifications) of the condition. Obstacles to education, community and political participation, in-

dependent living, employment, and personal relationships derived not from the incapacities, for example, of individuals in wheelchairs to walk stairs but in the existence of the stairs themselves. If people with mobility impairments could not enter buildings without ramps or ride inaccessible buses, the fault was in the structures and the transportation system, not in their bodies. If people who wished to work could not because of the medical standards that barred anyone with a history of heart disease, cancer, epilepsy, or obesity or anyone with diabetes or visual or hearing impairments, the problem might be one of arbitrary medical standards, and not of a person's inherent incapacity to perform specific job tasks. If young adults with sensory, motor, or learning disabilities were not attaining a postsecondary education, perhaps the problem lay not in their biology but in the institution's architecture, testing requirements, or admissions standards. (143)

Debra Connors analyzes the social construction of disability in a historical context: "Disability is not a medical problem; nor is able-ism just a set of prejudicial ideas about disabled people. Disability is a social institution which has developed alongside capitalism. Our societal position has been shaped by history and is inextricably woven into the fabric of American culture. There is no reason to assume that medical conditions are disabilities or that they should necessarily be stigmatizing" (93).

People with disabilities report consistently on aspects of a "disabled identity" that are attributed to them by other people. They are considered childlike and often treated like children; they are considered asexual, mentally impaired no matter what their disability, dependent, passive, lazy, and unemployable.

However, it is also true that with the advent of a disability rights movement in the United States, many people feel proud to claim their identity as people with disabilities, acknowledging that both the physical and social elements of disability have shaped their experience and therefore their identities. In the film *Positive Images: Portraits of Women with Disabilities*, one woman states that she is insulted when a person says, "I don't even notice that you are disabled." She says that a close friend would never make that statement, because a friend

would know how much her disability is a part of her. Joseph Shapiro begins his book *No Pity* with a similar example:

Nondisabled Americans do not understand disabled ones.

That was clear at the memorial service for Timothy Cook, when longtime friends got up to pay him heartfelt tribute. "He never seemed disabled to me," said one. "He was the least disabled person I ever met," pronounced another. It was the highest praise these nondisabled friends could think to give a disabled attorney who, at thirty-eight years old, had won landmark disability rights cases, including one to force public transit systems to equip their buses with wheelchair lifts. But more than a few heads in the crowded chapel bowed with an uneasy embarrassment at the supposed compliment. It was as if someone had tried to compliment a black man by saying, "You're the least black person I ever met," as false as telling a Jew, "I never think of you as Jewish," as clumsy as seeking to flatter a woman with, "You don't act like a woman." (3)

Shapiro goes on to explain that while he knows that these speakers felt they were sincerely praising Cook, it is now possible for people with disabilities to have pride in being disabled, or at least seek not to hide it as a shameful thing. "As a result of an ongoing revolution in self-perception, they (often along with their families) no longer see their physical or mental limitations as a source of shame or as something to overcome to inspire others. Today they proclaim that it is okay, even good, to be disabled" (4).

My teaching rests on the assumption that there is a self-conscious identity of "a woman with a disability." The literature I teach is not by women who "happen to be" disabled; it is by women who have consciously thought about their identities as having both a physical and a socially constructed component. They are women who, even if they are first-time writers, responded to an external or internal call to write about their experiences as women with disabilities. Such self-identification obviously has a significant political component; it makes a political movement possible. This is an important time for people with disabilities to identify as such because previous libera-

tion movements in the United States have largely excluded them. During the 1992 election, for example, a writer for the *Disability Rag* pointed out, "It's the year of the woman in politics, heralded in the press, on TV, by the polls, the pollsters, and the pundits. It's also been the year of gay and lesbian issues. . . . But neither party has given as much as lip service to disability rights" (1, 4).

As a feminist, I know that all oppressions are linked; they have a similar dynamic, and we cannot erase one without working against them all. I know that a woman with a disability experiences her identity as complex, with gender, race, sexual orientation, class, physical ability, and other aspects all factors in how she experiences the world. I believe that including women with disabilities challenges many of our theories and generalities, making our descriptions of the world richer and more complicated. Sandra Harding's description of feminist standpoint epistemology is helpful here. This epistemology is based on the notion that knowledge is socially situated and that in a stratified society, "empirically more accurate descriptions and theoretically richer explanations" result from using the resources of a lower-status group to view nature and society (119). Harding uses gender, but I believe that disability standpoint epistemology operates the same way. Like gender, the standpoint of disability presents a "less partial and distorted . . . picture of nature and social relations" (121) than a conventional view, because "in systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse" (Hartsock, quoted in Harding 120).

But Harding cautions that a standpoint is not the same as a point of view:

In a socially stratified society the objectivity of the results of research is increased by political activism by and on behalf of oppressed, exploited, and dominated groups. Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained. The need for struggle emphasizes the fact that a feminist [I would substitute "disability"] standpoint is not something that anyone can

have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement. A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by "opening one's eyes." (127)

As an able-bodied woman, I see myself as a social and political ally by teaching literature by women with disabilities through the lens of disability standpoint epistemology. I am also an activist on disability issues. I have written letters to the editor about ableist language in newspaper articles; I have protested the lack of an adequate and working elevator in a new arts center, including letters to the editor, to university officials, and to a state senator; I have boycotted and urged others to boycott local theaters that are not accessible. For me, feeling I can use disability standpoint epistemology has been the result of reading, talking with people with disabilities, and attending workshops. I have read everything I have come across by and about women with disabilities, disability theory, and disability politics. I subscribe to and read the *Disability Rag* regularly. Women with disabilities have been generous in talking with me and helping me understand the reality of their lives. Workshops by Connie Panzarino and Mary Frances Platt on ableism as a parallel oppression to other oppressions have also been extremely helpful.

Although disability standpoint epistemology requires that we identify a disability perspective, it does not push toward erasing differences or regarding disability as a unified experience. Following standpoint theory, the more multiple our standpoints, the more complete view of the world we will have. Harding specifically explores race and sexuality in writing about feminist standpoint epistemology, for example. This has implications for teaching. As with any other "group" we "teach," we need to be careful to talk about people's experiences as complex and individual, not "*the* woman's experience," or "*the* disabled experience." I try, through a variety of teaching techniques, to make this part of my classes, but it's difficult, especially when it is most students' first effort to consciously focus on the experience of people who are different from them. We are always

balancing disability as a physical and socially constructed identity and human experience as individual.

What has actually gone on in the classroom when this white able-bodied woman has taught literature by women with disabilities? What has happened for the students, and what has happened for me?

A look back at my syllabus shows me that the first time I used *With the Power of Each Breath*, it was one of ten books I asked the students to buy and read. It was the only anthology and the only nonfiction book besides May Sarton's *Journal of a Solitude*. I asked the students to read approximately 90 of the 350 pages, and I surmise from the fact that we spent only one class session on the book that I didn't quite know what to do with it. My discomfort, I believe, stemmed from the fact that the authors were not "professional" writers and their autobiographical stories were not amenable to the usual types of literary criticism. The students were not bothered, however; they found the book very powerful and urged me to use it again.

Through my feminist reading and teaching I have come to see that the standards of "good" literature have often excluded the work of women and other marginalized groups. Reading and teaching Tillie Olsen's *Silences*, Joanna Russ's *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, and Virginia Woolf's *Room of One's Own* in conjunction with Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" have radically broadened my notions of "art" and "literature." In her book *Silences*, Tillie Olsen, incorporating the words and ideas of Virginia Woolf, speaks eloquently of what we need in and from writing:

Read the compass of women writers in our infinite variety. . . .

Teach women's lives through the lives of the women who wrote the books, as well as through the books themselves; and through autobiography, biography, journals, letters. Because most literature concerns itself with the lives of the few, know and teach the few books closer to the lives of the many. . . .

Help create writers, perhaps among yourselves. There is so much unwritten that needs to be written. . . . It does not matter if in its begin-

ning what emerges is not great, or even (as ordinarily defined) "good" writing.

Whether that is literature, or whether that is not literature, I will not presume to say, wrote Virginia Woolf in her preface to *Life As We Have Known It*, *Memoirs of the Working Women's Guild*, but that it explains much and tells much, that is certain.

The greatness of literature is not only in the great writers, the good writers; it is also in that which explains much and tells much (the soil, too, of great literature). (43-44)

As I enacted Olsen's, Woolf's, and others' ideas about literature and art into my teaching, I became more comfortable teaching literature by women with disabilities and more thoughtful about how and why I'm using this literature in my classes. In the past several years, I have integrated writing by women with disabilities thematically into my courses, and have enlarged my sources beyond *With the Power of Each Breath*. For example, in the same class where I once taught ninety pages of *With the Power* in one isolated class period, I now use a packet that includes writings from *With the Power*, *With Wings: An Anthology of Literature by and about Women with Disabilities*, and *Voices from the Shadows: Women with Disabilities Speak Out*. I have included readings from these books in the sections of the course dealing with growing up, education, creativity, sexuality and relationships, mothers and children, and women bonding and strength. I have also regularly shown the film *Positive Images: Portraits of Women with Disabilities*, which interviews women with three different disabilities about their childhoods and education, and shows them going shopping, at work, dealing with sexual and other relationships, and generally going on with living their lives. What I'm trying to do in my thematic approach and the groupings of the readings is to keep us from unthinkingly theorizing "woman" as white, middle-class, heterosexual, and able-bodied, to avoid any unitary essential concept of "woman." In other words, it's a pedagogical strategy that complicates identity politics. When we did the section on mothers and children, for example, we

read about the experience of a black slave woman (Brent, excerpts from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*), an impoverished white woman during the Depression (LeSueur, "Annunciation"), a black lesbian (Lorde, "Now That I Am Forever with Child"), a white middle-class woman (Kumin, "Making the Jam without You"), a black woman in the rural South of the United States (Walker, "Everyday Use"), an unmarried Chinese woman whose story is told by her Chinese-American niece (Kingston, "No Name Woman"), a woman with MS who was not physically strong enough to hold her baby and who could not make eye contact with her because of vision loss (LeMaistre), a woman paralyzed from the waist down who had a tubal ligation after three miscarriages (Matthews), and a woman with polio whose daughters were twenty months and three weeks when she became disabled (Matthews). I have also taught Anne Finger's *Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth* and invited Finger to speak at our campus, and have taught Connie Panzarino's autobiography *The Me in the Mirror*.

One technique I use sparingly, but at least twice a semester, is a round robin in which every student receives a number and speaks in turn. The main rule is that no one can be interrupted; everyone can have the floor for as long or short a time as she or he wants. I encourage students to take notes when others are speaking on things they want to go back to and discuss in more depth later. I have used this format a number of times when dealing with literature by women with disabilities, for several reasons. It allows us to get a large number of responses out onto the floor; it ensures a range of responses, from very personal and emotional ones to more distanced and literary ones; and it allows students to speak in what they feel is a nonthreatening atmosphere. When I first used this technique, my goal was to get everyone to speak, so that students would realize that each of them had important things to say. It was a student who pointed out to me an additional, powerful effect of the round-robins. She told me that she liked round-robins better than usual class discussions because the

person who spoke directly after her would be concentrating on her or his own ideas, not attacking her (which was what she expected, and experienced, unfortunately, in many other class discussions). This was an important insight for me. When I used a round-robin for *The Me in the Mirror* this past semester, students' comments ranged from feeling that Connie was overly demanding of her aides to worries about knowing how to react to people with disabilities to admiring Connie for her courage. I think it's important that students perceive the round-robin as a nonthreatening context in which they can voice things they have previously felt silenced about.

My students also write in their journals before we discuss each reading in class. Often in their journals students will express that this is the first time they have ever read about people with disabilities. Some will write about friends or relatives who have disabilities, including older relatives with whom bringing up the topic is forbidden, or friends their age paralyzed in accidents. Other students write about jobs or internships that involve working with children with disabilities. Many students write about their confusion and fear toward people with disabilities they meet on campus. What are they supposed to do? Should they say hello to a person in a wheelchair, even if they don't know the person? Is looking away from that person a form of prejudice? Should they offer to help open a door, to push someone up a steep ramp, to aid someone stuck in snow? Their questions are real, and most say they haven't had any place to ask them safely. They are often very concerned with the "politically correct" language to use in talking about or to a person with a disability and say that their avoidance of people sometimes has to do with their uncertainty about terminology and their fear of being deemed "politically incorrect." I respond to the questions they've raised in their journals privately, sometimes letting them know about experiences I've had, sometimes referring them to other readings, sometimes quoting people with disabilities who are my friends. In this way, students have another "safe space" in which to voice their concerns and fears.

When these questions come up in class, I usually try to get students to talk with each other about them instead of looking to me for an "answer," although I am ready to share my own ideas and responses. What I want them to realize, both in journal responses and class discussions, is that there are no clear-cut rules. Situations and people differ; what is appropriate for one time and place will not be appropriate for another. I teach "what I'm not" as someone who has educated myself in the area, having done a lot of reading, having talked to people with disabilities, having attended anti-ableism workshops, and having engaged in activism on the issue. I don't have the "answers," but I feel I can help guide students toward a useful discussion.

Another technique I use in class is to ask students to temporarily take on the perspective of someone who is disabled. One exercise that I use regularly with different pieces of literature by women with disabilities is to ask students to imagine themselves as the woman with a disability that we have read about. In a timed anonymous free writing I ask them to describe, in detail, their day up until they came into this classroom. I ask them to be very specific. As a prompt, I ask them to think about how they would wake up, get out of bed, brush their teeth, get dressed, eat breakfast, and so forth. When we are done writing, I ask a student to collect all the writings and then redistribute them, so presumably no one has her or his own. Then I ask volunteers to read their writings aloud, and have several read before opening up a discussion of what it was like to do the exercise and what we learned. Some students seem simply unable to do the exercise; they cannot imagine what it would be like to be paralyzed or blind; they cannot imagine, even after reading the literature, what adaptations they could make to function. Others do extraordinarily well in putting themselves into someone else's experience. Regularly, some students realize that they don't know whether the building we are in has an elevator or where the accessible entrance is; they don't know whether there is public transportation that accommodates wheelchairs; they don't know whether the doors of our classroom are wide enough for

a wheelchair. In this exercise, I want them to realize the practical implications of having this disability in our town, attending our university. I want them to realize that a woman who uses a wheelchair might be necessarily more concerned about whether or not she can physically get to a certain class than the fact that some women are often treated as sex objects in advertising. I want for them what I want for myself, to have a more complete view of the world. I believe disability perspectives and disability standpoint epistemology can help.

In other exercises I design for class, I try to help students go beyond their "politically correct" anxieties about which language to use when talking with or about a person with a disability or what to do on meeting a person with a disability on campus. Sometimes, instead of asking them to take on the persona of a woman with a disability, I ask them to take on the persona of an able-bodied person dealing with a person with a disability, a situation closer to most of their own standpoints. In the section on creativity, for example, we read Deborah Kendrick's poem "For Tess Gallagher," in which an aspiring poet wishes to talk with the famous poet after her reading. The narrator hopes to talk to Tess Gallagher "Of line and phrases and meter . . . and laugh like conspirators, over children,/ Pets, and lovers we have known." But the poem ends:

All we talk about instead
Is the only
Other
Blind person you have known.
(84)

I have asked the students to do the following assignment in small groups: "You are Tess Gallagher. Write your own version of the evening Deborah Kendrick writes about in her poem 'For Tess Gallagher.' This can be a poem or prose." In response, students have been able to voice the complexities of a "famous" person meeting someone

she does not know who admires her, as well as of a sighted person meeting someone who is blind who wants to strike up a conversation. I have found that, in general, small groups work well for these kinds of assignments. Collectively, the students talk out complications within the still practical framework of getting an assignment done, and getting it done on time. It's good practice for community activism, I think.

In another small group exercise I have used with "For Tess Gallagher," I ask students to "Prepare a performance/reading of 'For Tess Gallagher' to present to the rest of the class." Obviously students must work closely with a poem and understand its complexity in order to respond adequately to this assignment. Most do well, and some absolutely astonish me with the creativity and risk taking they demonstrate in the limited amount of time they have to do the work.

In the section on creativity we also read Nancy Mairs's story "Shape," about a woman sculptor who has MS who is shaping a clay head (she has already had to give up working with wood after cutting herself several times). Because her energy is limited, she tells her daughter she can't take her and a friend to the movies that night. Her daughter responds, "No wonder Father left you. . . . Harriet's right—you're nothing but a damned cripple" (96). One or more groups have this assignment: "You are Abby, Pamela's daughter in 'Shape.' Write/tell your own version of the events your mother tells in 'Shape.'" I should emphasize here that for me such class activities work well in a class in which students know they will be asked to interact with the material in a direct way in class, and in which we have developed some trust and experience in working together and hearing many voices.

My exercises are sometimes more pointedly activist. I have asked students to read a handout on language use called "Unhandicapping Our Language." In one group assignment I tell them, "You are responsible for introducing 'Unhandicapping Our Language' to the office where you work. How will you introduce the handout, what will you

do to let people know it's important? What will you do to help people begin to make the language changes it suggests?" Another group has this task: "Based on what we have read and seen so far by women with disabilities, what actions do you recommend that people can take to be allies to these women in eliminating barriers and discrimination?"

I added another dimension to my teaching of literature by women with disabilities in the fall of 1993, when I invited Anne Finger to campus. My sophomore-level women's literature class read her autobiographical book *Past Due* and was required to go to either a reading or a talk on disability that she gave. In their journals on *Past Due*, before they had met Finger, students wrote about a variety of things. One student wrote movingly about her profoundly disabled brother and the toll caring for him takes on her family, especially her mother. Another wrote about her own rheumatoid arthritis, and the uncertainty and scariness of not knowing how it would develop. Another wrote about her aunt who had had polio. Several students noted that they had never read a description of childbirth as graphic as Finger's. Some were uncomfortable with this; others thought about their mothers and the physical pain that their births might have caused them. A couple of students initiated conversations with their mothers about their births. The three mothers in the class wrote about their own childbirth experiences. Many students liked the fact that the book made them think about difficult issues. Specifically, a number of students thought about what they would do if they were pregnant and found out their fetus was likely to be disabled.

On the first day of class discussion, we did a round robin. Students spoke of many of the issues they had written about in their journals, although not some of the most personal. Most people commented in their next journals that they found the round-robin worthwhile and that they had learned a lot from their classmates' responses. The next class period I asked students to write down a passage that moved them emotionally, angered them, or made them think, with a few

notes as to why it affected them so. Then I asked them to share this with one other person. After that, I opened up class discussion by asking dyads to share what they had talked about. The discussion again was complex, serious, wide-ranging.

But some interesting and unexpected things happened when the students got to hear Anne Finger. For her evening speech, I had asked Finger to do what I called "Disability 101"—that is, to assume that most of the audience was quite new to disability issues. She did, I thought, an excellent job, using lots of personal examples from her own life and other people's to show the kinds of institutionalized and unquestioned assumptions made about people with disabilities, and the handicaps in the form of barriers that able-bodied people put in their way. I felt that Finger's tone was direct but mild and was effective for getting her points across. I was somewhat startled to hear that several of the students found her tone very negative and were uncomfortable with what they perceived as Finger's anger toward them as able-bodied people. These students felt more negative after hearing her than after reading the book. One example that came up over and over again in their written reports on her talk was her remark that when she uses a wheelchair, many more people open doors for her than when she uses a cane, even if she is balancing a load of books on one arm and leaning on her cane with the other. Some students responded very defensively. They "heard" Finger saying that she was not grateful when people opened doors for her, and they expressed anger at her, saying they "were just trying to help," and "she should appreciate people helping her." They felt she was accusing all able-bodied people of being insensitive.

Another example was Finger's analysis of the Jerry Lewis telethon. She talked about the way the telethon presents people with disabilities as eternal children; even fifty-five-year-old men are "Jerry's kids." She talked about the telethon's "false promise of a cure," implying that it was terrible to be disabled and that only a cure was worth our contributions, not technology to make living with a disability easier.

She talked about the threatening implications of the pitches to send money—"You don't want this to happen to you." She talked about the broader issue of why people with disabilities have to beg on television for donations. But what some students "heard" was that she was being unfair to Jerry Lewis, that after all, he was just "trying to help."

There is a consistent thread here. The students who were most uncomfortable and angry at Finger wanted to remain subjects and central, while Finger and other people with disabilities remained "other" and marginal. They did not want to take responsibility for their able-bodiedness, their privilege; they did not want to see it as the location from which they experience the world. They wanted to be in the position of choosing when to "help" unfortunate disabled others, and to receive gratitude for doing so. Finger had said, "If you are disabled and conscious, you go around in a state of rage." They did not want to hear of her rage. To one of these students, I wrote this journal response:

maybe you can understand why Finger chose to tell us about some of the negative things about being disabled. Where else are we going to hear them? As she said, when we hear anything, it's usually "The ——— Story," of how someone triumphed over all difficulties, overcame all obstacles. Yet, what about the disabled women who are sexually abused, why is the unemployment rate among disabled people who want to work 66 percent, why did a person assume Finger was looking for the Communications Disorders Clinic when she said she wanted to return a key to the Communications Dept.? She lives with this every day, and I guess I don't mind if she tries to tell me, as an able-bodied person, what it's like.

Still, I don't think that students who had this response are going to come out of my class informed disability activists. They are perhaps conceptually not ready for the kinds of complexities Finger was talking about. They are fearful, I think. They do not want the world as they know it to be challenged or changed. They cannot see privileged locations as locations. They do not see knowledge as socially situated.

I don't think that in a fifteen-week semester I can completely transform these students' view of the world. What I can do is offer some reading, some experiential exercises in class, some challenging journal responses, and hope that someday they will have enough other experiences and have lost enough of their fear to look past their own supposed centralities.

This opens up the larger question in "teaching what I am not"—am I accomplishing my goals of being an ally of people with disabilities, creating allies in some of my students, and helping give students a sense of the individuality and complexity of the lives of the women we read about? I notice as I type this that there is a seeming contradiction between the first two goals and the third. In order to be a political ally, I must see myself as "able-bodied" and a group of other people as "disabled"; this kind of identity politics is hard to reconcile with the aim of seeing the complexity of anyone's individual experience, where disability will be just one factor among many. This is the dilemma I have been struggling with through my teaching and through the course of writing this essay. Like all dilemmas, it is too neat and false when it implies I must do one or the other. I believe that at this historical time and place, it is important for me to teach as if identity politics has a reality and unity I do not believe it has while actively teaching against it. It's important to me to be part of the disability rights movement as an ally, as an able-bodied person who also has many other aspects to her identity. It's also important to me to teach the complexity, individuality, and social constructedness of all our identities.

It seems appropriate to end with the words of some of my students. I ask them to write final journals in which they identify five aspects of the course that they felt had the most impact on them. Some of them pick the writings by women with disabilities. In the way they write about their perceptions and understandings, I worry sometimes that I may be encouraging stereotypes rather than breaking them down. The

most notable stereotypes are those of the pitiable "cripple" and the "Super-Crip," material for a made-for-TV movie. I also read in their journals, however, a struggle with the complexity of identity and how to deal with "what I am not" that seems to me real, admirable, and a place from which much more can grow. Each of these students has given me permission to use her words in this essay, hoping they will be useful to other students and teachers.

Connie Panzarino's book *The Me in the Mirror* was also a personal favorite. Issues that face individuals with disabilities have always been an interest of mine. Connie is an inspiring woman who has done so many things for Handicapped rights. I loved reading about her personal struggles and triumphs. (Michelle Karmazin)

Reading Connie Panzarino's book was an incredible revelation for me. . . . Her story, her life, totally opened my eyes. I began to see everyone differently, people with disabilities and people without disabilities. My favorite class period when we were reading this book was the one that you had us write as if we were Connie. We had to write in detail everything we did from the time we woke up to when we went to bed from Connie's perspective. It was definitely an eye-opening experience. It literally forced me to think about life and what it would be like in a completely different way. It also made me extremely appreciative and more aware of my own ableness and how quickly it could all be taken away from me. I think that sometimes we look at people with disabilities the same way we do the homeless and serious criminals—if we keep them on the fringes of society they can't touch us, they can't affect us. If we keep a wall between "us" and "them" then what happened to "them" won't happen to "us." (Kim Hansen)

Reading *The Me in the Mirror* by Connie Panzarino was a definite learning experience for me. I had never before considered many of the struggles that a person with a handicap faces in their life. And, I had never stopped to think of what a day in the life would be like. This book was very eye-opening for me. The book offered a look at the personal and political struggles that Connie faced throughout her life. The experience of reading this book was immeasurable as to the increased awareness I gained. I began to question the construction of handicapped entrances in the backs and sides of buildings. And, some-

times I've looked for entrances and they haven't been there at all. The other day I met this woman named Michelle. It was cold and rainy and I was really happy that she asked for my help on our walk to class. She held my umbrella for us while I pushed. Her destination was Avery and we started talking about the total inconvenience of the entrance being so far out of her way. She also expressed concern about the low bushes that line the entrance. It scares her when she is out at night. I believe that if I had not been exposed to the book and the discussions that accompanied, I may not have felt comfortable talking to Michelle about her disability. (Sunshine Black)

I am so glad that you brought the issue of disabilities into our class. You know, you can learn about types and causes of disabilities, but nothing can educate a person more than to talk to a person with a disability. Connie Panzarino educates her readers in this way. She gives people with disabilities a voice by sharing her experience. I think that for so long non-disabled people tended to think that people with disabilities weren't real people—like they didn't have real emotions, ideas, and thoughts. I am so thankful that this is changing, it is literature like this that can change people's attitudes and lives. (Kelly Schreiner)

[The poet Chrystos] makes us feel like we are all connected and are standing in one huge, earth-sized circle, holding hands and supporting one another. When I read her poem "Ceremony for Completing a Poetry Reading" I can vividly picture thousands of women in the circle, with Chrystos standing among us with a basket of gifts, talking and passing beads and feathers and other things around the circle. . . . A few months ago, Connie Panzarino was not a woman I would have pictured in the circle of women I envision above. All the women would have been standing, able to pass the gifts around just as I would. Most would have been white, heterosexual, American—just like me. Now my circle includes women of different abilities and colors and personalities. This is not to say that I don't have any more to learn or I have completely conquered my prejudices and fears about other people. But the more I read and the more I learn, the bigger and more diverse my circle gets. (Christy Johnson)

NOTE

1. This term "originated among disabled people and has recently been used by some U.S. feminists to refer to people who used to be called 'able-

bodied." Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler, *A Feminist Dictionary* (Boston: Pandora Press, 1985), 444-45.

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Teaching What the Truth Compels You to Teach: A Historian's View

JACQUELINE JONES

A few years ago I delivered a lecture on Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* to an audience of college students in New York City. After the talk, two undergraduates approached me and initiated a conversation. They had recently read my book on the history of black working women, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, and, they confessed, they were surprised to see that I was white. They had assumed I was an African American, but instead. . . . The young women were too polite to say so, but I realized they had hoped to meet a tall, proud sister rather than a short white girl. One of the students asked how I came to write the book, and so I launched into an autobiographical tale that began with my childhood in a racially segregated small town in Delaware, and continued through my college years as a tutor of inner-city children. I was wending my rhetorical way up to my experiences at Wellesley College, where my mostly upper-middle-class students lacked any understanding of African American history, when I noticed that my listeners were becoming increasingly impatient with my little walk down memory lane. Exasperated, one of them interrupted, "May I ask you a personal question?" I nodded, and she asked, "*Are you married to a black man?*" In response, I could only smile and shrug and say no, and the conversation ended on a rather unsatisfying note for all three of us. The students had been looking

for some personal—even intimate—connection between me and the story I told in the book, and when they could not find it, they felt disappointed.

My reaction to this encounter was mixed. On the one hand, as a graduate student (at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison in the early 1970s) I had come to believe that “all history is autobiographical.” My friends and I were studying history because we had a compelling interest in American society, and we sought insight through the lens of our own families and communities—hence the self-proclaimed “swamp Yankee” from a New England working-class family writing a history of an early-twentieth-century strike among textile workers; the granddaughter of Irish immigrants researching the structure of nineteenth-century Irish immigrant families; the native Californian exploring the history of agricultural migrant labor in that state. Within this small circle of graduate students I fit right in; the subject of my dissertation, the Northern teachers who went south after the Civil War to teach the freedpeople of Georgia, evoked my early elementary school years in a Jim Crow school system. By the time I wrote *Labor of Love* I had a daughter (Sarah, born in 1981; Anna would come along in 1985), and (I told myself) perhaps motherhood was the “intimate connection” between the book I wrote and the person I was. In a sense, then, my student-questioners were on the right track, though I never got far enough in the (admittedly long-winded) story I was telling them to make that point.

On the other hand, I must confess that I was a bit irritated by the two students’ queries about my decision to write a book about black working women. After all, I wondered, how many historians are routinely called to account for the subjects they choose to explore? After a lecture on nineteenth-century financial institutions, is my econometrician colleague asked, “*Are you married to a banker?*” Does my colleague in seventeenth-century Puritan studies face routine challenges, “*Is your father a preacher?*” Too, I asked myself why I had never heard of instances where any number of white male scholars of black his-

tory were questioned about the “personal” reasons behind the topics they chose to study—slavery, free blacks in the antebellum period, the freedpeople during Reconstruction, for example. Finally, I suspected that the “motherhood connection” between my subjects and me amounted to a desperate attempt on my part to rationalize, or justify, my topic. In fact, I realized that I began my research on *Labor of Love* in the late 1970s, before I even contemplated having children, and that the real motivation behind it was my desire for something on the topic to assign to my Wellesley students. More significantly, I had an intrinsic interest in the history of black working women and their families, and I realized that very little had been written on these topics. What more did I need to launch a major research project?

To understand why I have chosen to write about certain topics over the last twenty years, one would need to consider the sequence of my four major research projects. In the process of writing my dissertation on the Northern teachers of the Georgia freedpeople from 1865 to 1873, I realized that I would have to learn much more than I already did about the history of African American life and culture. That interest led me directly to *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*. While researching the history of Southern sharecroppers for that book, I was struck by the similarities in the material condition of the black and white families that lived under that system, and I was struck by the efforts of those families to seek out work and better wage and educational opportunities, within a highly circumscribed plantation economy. Those concerns resulted in a study of black and white poverty after the Civil War, *The Dispossessed* (1992). At that point I became intrigued with the highly contingent dynamics of the structure of the American labor force—how certain groups of people came to embrace, or be assigned, certain kinds of jobs throughout history. I am currently at work on a history of the social organization of labor, and especially the ways that the job histories of white women and children have at times converged with, or diverged from, the histories of African American men, women, and children. Over the generations,

within a variety of regional economies, black people and white women and children (not to mention a whole host of other groups identified by their marital status, age, and religion, among other personal characteristics) have predominated in certain kinds of jobs, waged and nonwaged, as a result of not only racial and gender ideologies (which have shifted over time in any case), but also military considerations and the availability of large numbers of (certain kinds of) laborers in a particular time and place. Shut out of the paid labor force for whatever reason, or limited to ill-paid seasonal or casual labor, blacks and poor white female household heads have been stigmatized as lazy and lacking in ambition. Indeed, white elites (men and women) have tended to conflate criminality and poverty; hence the currently fashionable view that holds poor women of both races responsible for all the ills that afflict American society today. For example, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, authors of *The Bell Curve*, argue that poor women are the agents of dysgenesis, the process by which "dumb" women reproduce (what the authors might call) the Cognitive Mudsill, children who will supposedly inevitably grow up to be violent and irresponsible members of society.

Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow, then, represents one stage in the evolution of my professional interests. It should go without saying that none of my books represents some distilled essence of "who I am"; rather, each book is a "text" of my interests at a particular time in my career.

More to the point perhaps is my lack of comprehension about what it means to study or teach "what you are" or "what you are not." Obviously, all of us are composed of multiple, overlapping spheres of identity. Would those who insist that I teach only "what I am" find it acceptable for me to teach white women's history, but not black women's history? Or the history of all middle-class women (black and white) but not the history of poor women? Or the history of women in small towns but not those in big cities or rural areas? Or perhaps I should confine myself to the history of white women

academics, preferably those who have married and have had children? Obviously, the whole notion of matching any single personal demographic characteristic to one's teaching and scholarship is absurd on the face of it. This is not to deny the value of collaborative scholarship or the importance of intellectual exchange among people from different backgrounds (at conferences or within the pages of journals); the study of history (or any field, for that matter) thrives on debate, give and take, and the more people involved the better. But it would be difficult to sustain the argument that one particular kind of person will inevitably possess insights into the past based on his or her background or life experiences. The study of history depends on people's research and analytical skills, and the passion they bring to their work, not their psychic powers.

Historical scholarship is a highly politicized enterprise today, and that that politicization is manifested in a variety of ways, in and outside the classroom, within the publishing business, and within the profession itself. Yet I stand by one fundamental principle: scholars must remain free to write about and teach any subject they wish. Debate should focus not on what a person has chosen to research, but rather on how well he or she has done it. Whenever anyone expresses doubts about my work as a white woman writing African American history, I reply (if given the opportunity), "Let's begin the discussion with my footnotes, and go on from there." The vitality of historical—and indeed, all scholarly—inquiry depends on a generosity of intellectual spirit, an openness to the exploration of any number of issues in any number of ways. The field of history is enriched, and enriches life outside the academic community, only to the extent that scholars are free to pursue the study of the past in all its dazzling complexity.

Far too timid about any criticism they might face for writing on topics related to the history of race or ethnicity, some younger white scholars have decided to focus on whites exclusively, on the theory that, for example, African American history is best left to blacks,

Asian-American history to persons of Asian descent, and so forth. Implicit in this attitude is the narrow-minded and misguided conviction that minority historians should study one thing, and one thing only—the history of their own ethnic or racial (or gender) groups. This view is objectionable both on practical grounds and on principle. In practical terms we might note that the number of black men and women going to graduate school in history today is very low, for a variety of reasons—the sagging academic job market; the need for many college graduates (from all backgrounds) to find a job and begin paying off their student loans as soon as they receive their diplomas; the lack of encouragement gifted students of color receive throughout their educational careers, encouragement that is necessary to get anyone into graduate school and keep her or him there.

A larger issue of principle is at stake here—the potential fragmentation of scholarship altogether. Some American historians are preoccupied with sorting out a wide range of personal demographic characteristics—gender, race, ethnicity, regional identification, and class—and parceling out topics to scholars accordingly. Thus we hear serious discussions about whether or not men should write women's history, whether non-Southerners can actually understand "the Southern way of life," and so on and on. Obviously, if we wait for descendants of English indentured servants to step forward and write the history of that group, or if we reserve the study of Florida phosphate miners to people of their own kind, we will be out of luck. In fact, the view that the histories of certain groups of people must be written only by members of their own group shows a veiled contempt for those groups; the idea would seem to be that if no representative scholar steps forward to write that history, who cares? Better we learn nothing about that group than learn it from the "wrong" person. I believe that the bottom line is that no particular piece of the past should be ceded to a particular group; why should our willingness to explore every avenue of history be limited by the economics of the job market and the demographics of the profession?

Over the past few years, the field of American history has been enlivened by attention to groups that received short shrift—if any attention at all—from traditional scholars who focused their sights on "great men" and the wars they waged and the politics they practiced. History was narrowly defined precisely because one group of people—white men of property and privilege—was writing about people in the past much like themselves—white men of property and privilege in the past. While one might argue that the elite should write about the elite—that these men "understand" the culture and values of their forbears, it is clear that as a consequence many generations of American students gained only the most shallow view of the past.

A scholar's choice of topics for research has a clear connection to what he or she teaches in the classroom. To the extent that our departments are inclined to indulge us, we teach about the things that intrigue and inspire us; it is up to us somehow to communicate the love of history to our students, and the best way to do that is to present the most inclusive and expansive view of our subjects. Consider how silly it would be for me, or any other white person, to announce to my classes at the beginning of the semester that I feel uncomfortable talking about black history, because I am not black myself, and so if my students who are interested in the history of the family or labor history want to learn about black families and workers, they should take a course offered through the African and Afro-American studies department—if one is offered that year, or if not, too bad. Stated another way, I would be offended to know that my male colleagues down the hall teaching American survey courses were taking care to omit any mention of the vast scholarship in the field of women's history because they were men and felt it inappropriate for them to do so. Clearly, such a parochial approach would set us back several decades to the time when women, black people, and workers of all kinds were omitted from standard history courses and textbooks.

My course syllabi include a wide range of voices from the American past, and it is ludicrous that I should apologize for it, just because I grew up in a white middle-class family in the mid-Atlantic region (how "white bread" can you get!). In my survey of American women's history, I have assigned a number of Federal Writers Project slave narratives, as well as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. For a course on Southern women's history I have used Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Mamie Garvin Fields with Karen Fields's *Lennon Swamp and Other Places*, and Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*. I have taught a survey of American history with a special focus on autobiography, and included Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* and Frederick Douglass's autobiography. The reading list for my modern social history course includes Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*, in addition to Federal Writers Project interviews with a variety of black workers, from Pullman porters to Southern midwives, and a collection of interviews of automobile assembly line workers (including black and white men and women) from the 1970s and 1980s.

At this point I should mention the obvious: as a historian, I do not hesitate to teach novels and autobiographies written by African Americans (or by Native Americans or Asian-Americans or Italian-Americans, for that matter). My students must learn to read these works the way they would any other historical texts—there is nothing particularly mystical about the stories these writers tell, or the way they tell them; how irresponsible it would be to suggest that appreciation for these works depends exclusively on one's chromosomes, phenotype, or family rituals practiced back home.

Over the past twenty years or so, I have taught hundreds of students at Wellesley, Brown, and Brandeis, and I know for a fact that a good many of them (Native American, Asian, black, and white men and women, undergraduates and graduate students, from a variety of backgrounds) have gained a deeper appreciation for the study of

American history as a result of reading these works. I cannot conceive of constructing a syllabus around the notion that I must teach only "what I am"—whatever that is: mother, white person, resident of New England, academic? Similarly, the suggestion that I should refrain from teaching what I am not—whatever that is: sharecropper, coal miner, working-class, black?—insults the intelligence of my students, and indeed, the ideals of learning and scholarship altogether. After all, the goal of higher education is (or should be) to introduce students to worlds outside their own, to engage them with complex questions about the human condition, and to encourage them to study the work of serious thinkers.

I reject the whole notion of an "authentic voice" and its corollary—that only persons with certain demographic characteristics may unlock the secrets of that voice. The autobiographies, oral interviews, and firsthand accounts listed above are not "pure" in the sense of being raw or unmediated accounts. For instance, the Federal Writers Project slave narratives were transcribed by interviewers who varied in their views of their subjects. It is important for students to understand the social context in which those interviews were conducted—the Depression-era South, when Jim Crow patterns of racial etiquette pertained—and the point of view of the interviewers themselves. This particular kind of historical source offers a good lesson in the pros and cons of oral histories and interviews.

In a similar vein, Booker T. Washington wrote his autobiography with prospective benefactors and other white patrons in mind. We need to consider his "secret" life as a sponsor of test cases challenging Jim Crow segregation in order to begin to understand *Up from Slavery*; the book itself of course hardly tells us the whole story of his life. To cite another example: perceptive students of any class or color can surely recognize the dramatic forms utilized by Angelou—her selective choice of childhood memories; her license in reconstructing dialogue from many years ago; the series of vignette in which she, or members of her family or community, encounter specific incidents of

racism and then, just as surely, seek to regroup and triumph over mean-spiritedness in its various guises. Every text must be read critically; any good teacher can help a student understand how to do that, and any good student can learn how.

My own experiences have taught me that, if the notion of an "authentic voice" is less than helpful in understanding primary texts, it is downright dangerous as an approach to secondary works like historical monographs. Over the last few years I have accumulated a number of anecdotes—some funny, and some not so funny—about people who believed they were reading the "authentic voice" of an African American woman in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*. There was the African American graduate student who prefaced her comments about my book in her women's history seminar with the observation that it was a relief to move beyond the history written by white women and finally grapple with the more sensitive work of a black woman historian. There was the debate about my race in an undergraduate class, where one student assured her classmates that I was indeed black (despite the suggestion to the contrary offered by my photo on the book jacket); it was just that I was "very light skinned." Or the time I was asked by a magazine book editor to review a new biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. (I had recently reviewed a book by Angela Davis for the same magazine). In the course of the conversation the subject of my race came up, and when I mentioned that I was white the editor responded in dismay, "But I was *assured* you were black," and then promptly retracted the invitation (she felt bad, though, and gave me a book on the history of housework to review instead). I have waited at airports for long periods of time because the person sent to fetch me was looking for a black woman to get off the plane; I have arrived at speaking engagements only to have my hosts profess their disappointment with my appearance, because they had intended that I should serve as a "role model" for their black students. Together, these stories add up to a cautionary tale—the

hazards of extrapolating much at all about a person on the basis of the kind of history he or she writes.

A variation on this theme is the criticism my work has received because I am white. I have had my share of uncomfortable encounters at scholarly conferences when I was urged to sit down and refrain from speaking because my presence on a panel devoted to black women's history simply replicated historic patterns of class and racial oppression. (I know for a fact that witnessing one or more of these encounters has been enough to dissuade certain younger white women and men scholars from ever focusing on the history of black women in their own work.) One reviewer of *The Dispossessed* charged that, first, I was guilty of "sentimental racism" because I had an unrealistic and condescending view toward black family life, and second, that I should examine the cultural degradation of my own middle-class white existence before deigning to make any hypocritical comments, scholarly or otherwise, about any aspect of African American life or culture. These public and personal criticisms are of course hurtful, but I would not want to spend much time whining about them. Most scholars who have ever written a book or article or delivered a paper at a conference have endured strongly felt criticism of some type, and indeed, contempt and ridicule are tried and true means of intellectual discourse in a whole host of settings. It's hard to be on the receiving end of such invective, but it is certainly not limited to historians, or to white girls who write about black history. And ironically, personal attacks are easier to deal with than attacks that focus on aspects of my work over which I have some control; in the end (I have to remind myself), I would rather be denounced for the color of my skin than for the weakness of my argument. In the next book I can work on sharpening my argument, but there is not much I can do about my whiteness.

While teaching a new course at Brandeis University in the fall of 1994, I was reminded that my high-minded ideals about the nobility

of the scholarly enterprise will continue to collide with some of my students' expectations—personal, political, and otherwise; but as far as I could tell, my race was not a major factor in this particular setting. The course was part of a new "University Seminar" (Usem) program offered at Brandeis; its aim was to group all first-year students in seminars, introduce them to the critical analysis of texts, and help them improve their writing skills.

In preparing the catalogue copy (this was the first time the course was offered), I made the mistake of giving the course a broad, and probably misleading, title: *History of American Race Relations*. The short course description sent to all incoming students noted that the main theme of the course was the history of blacks and whites in the workforce, from colonial times to the present; but it was not until students arrived in class on the first day and saw the syllabus that they had an idea of what we would be doing:

This course focuses on the relations between black and white workers, from the country's earliest colonial settlements through the late twentieth century. We shall pay particular attention to place (regional variations in patterns of work and family), change over time (the development of the economy from rural to agricultural to urban and industrial), and varieties of work culture (the ways in which workers resist the demands imposed upon them, and the ways in which they create communities among themselves). Several questions inform our study: What are the shifting meanings of "race" throughout American history? How do the factors of class and gender affect patterns of "race relations" over time? What is the impact of larger economic transformations on the relations among various groups of men and women workers? And how do workers who live in racially segregated communities perceive each other within a racially integrated workplace?

By the time my Usem students saw this fuller description of the course, the damage had been done. Most had expected to spend the semester talking about Rodney King and O. J. Simpson (with the history of the Los Angeles Police Department providing the "context," I suppose). They were in for a rude shock. Over the next few weeks I

found that at least some of the students resisted examining their own ideas about race, and some were (in all probability) wondering how they had gotten themselves into such a course. It did not take long for them to realize that their own histories as family and community members, as high school students, and as enthusiastic consumers of late-twentieth-century youth culture were not necessarily going to provide them with any direct connection to the past.

In the course, we examined a variety of full-length texts, as well as a hundred-page packet of short primary documents that I had collected as part of my research over the last few years. These documents included court cases from the seventeenth century Chesapeake; excerpts from the laws of Virginia 1661–62 and 1691; a list of tithables in Northampton County, Virginia, 1666; an early-eighteenth-century New York indentured servant's contract; Samuel Sewall's antislavery and antiblack tract "The Selling of Joseph" (1700); notices for fugitive slaves, servants, and white wives published in New Jersey papers in the eighteenth century; a Virginia planter's misgivings about slavery (1736); slaves' petitions for their freedom during the Revolutionary era; the Ohio black codes of 1804; James Henry Hammond's defense of slavery (1845); newspaper articles written by Frederick Law Olmsted, based on his travels in the South in the 1850s; documents related to the deployment of black and white labor during the Civil War, the violence inflicted on blacks by white workers in Northern cities around the time of the war, the struggles of freedpeople to own their own land and control their own families in the Reconstruction South, the history of trade unionism in the late nineteenth century, and federal policies related to black labor during the two world wars.

I could be wrong, but in terms of shaping the classroom learning that semester, the demographic makeup of the classroom was secondary compared to other factors. Among the eighteen students, half were women, three were African American, and most were probably middle-class or upper-middle-class. The students gave no indication that they considered my race significant one way or the other; they

saw me first and foremost as a professor—one of the very first they had encountered in college—and I think they were simultaneously open to my teaching style and wary of the demands I placed on them.

As for the students themselves, I cannot categorize them by race or gender on the basis of how often they talked in class, what insights they brought to bear on the material, or how well they wrote their papers. In other words, no particular *kind* of student was either adept or handicapped at reflecting on the historical significance of the readings. Most had only a tenuous grasp on the chronology of American history, and when it came to examining documents from the seventeenth century, they all started at about the same point in terms of their prior knowledge of the period. They were, essentially, still high school students, and I intended that their first college-level history course should introduce them to a wide range of methodological and historiographical issues. We talked about the problems of using legal statutes, court cases, personal reminiscences, social workers' reports, and newspaper editorials as historical evidence. We used one account written by Olmsted as an exercise in inference; from his description of slaves and poor whites, we speculated about his views on slavery and on poor people of both races. We drew connections among workplaces in antebellum Baltimore, Boston, and Cincinnati, based on the sometimes violent confrontations between black and white workers at certain workites, in certain jobs, in those cities.

I was intrigued that, toward the end of the semester, almost all the students listed *Maggie's American Dream* (the autobiography of Maggie Comer, edited by her son James P. Comer) as their favorite book for the semester. I think most college students, and first-years in particular, are pretty egocentric, and so for understandable reasons my students found particularly appealing this story of a young woman determined to get a good education and see her children succeed in life. Too, Maggie Comer seemed to live in a world that was not so distant in either time or sensibility from their own twentieth-century urban, industrial society. On the other hand, at times they seemed unable to

make the leap of imagination that a study of (for example) the seventeenth-century Southern colonies called for. If an when I offer the course again, I will consider using autobiographies exclusively; most students seem most easily and effectively drawn into the study of history through stories about specific people.

Throughout the semester we considered a wide variety of workplaces, the tobacco fields of seventeenth-century Maryland, the docks and taverns of the early-eighteenth-century seaport city, artisans' shops during the Revolutionary era, antebellum Piedmont cotton fields, Civil War army camps, postbellum plantations of tenant farmers and sharecroppers, steel mills, the parlors and kitchens of middle-class white women, World War II defense industries, and finally, high-tech and corporate offices. We tried to keep in mind a truly bewildering number of factors as we examined each workplace—the ethnic, gender, and racial composition of the workers; the political economy that shaped their work choices (or lack thereof); the physical and emotional demands of the job; and the conditions that shaped their everyday experiences. We talked about the historical processes by which certain groups of workers come to think of themselves as part of a community, variously defined, and about the many forces that have divided American workers over the years. At the midpoint of the semester I asked the class to review what we had learned thus far and was rewarded when one student suggested, "Sometimes race matters—and sometimes it doesn't." This observation was, of course, one of the major themes of the course. I allowed myself some tentative feelings of satisfaction.

The course ended on an ambiguous note. Moving into the more recent period and reading Cornel West's *Race Matters*, the students finally felt free of the historical straitjacket I had imposed on them all semester, and began to talk about racial issues as revealed in contemporary popular culture, the news media, their neighborhoods at home, their circle of high school friends. But these discussions seemed curiously circumscribed and muted, considering the fact that

I thought they would amount to the culmination—or rather, refutation—of a semester-long attempt to censor “easy talk” in favor of close textual analysis. The hard fact of the matter was that glib generalizations did not come so easily anymore. A description of white boys emulating the black “hip hop” style at one student’s high school brought the inevitable questions—where is the high school located, and what is the class makeup of the student body? It mattered whether the school was in Manhattan, or Cambridge, or Atlanta—some of the places represented by the students in the class. Stories of family-based prejudices had to be placed in the context of a particular place, ethnic or racial group, and the ages and occupations of its members. Other questions included, What is the significance of skin color today, and doesn’t it matter which particular shade you are referring to, and in what setting? And on and on. We had run out of steam; there were so many factors to consider about any one situation.

Still, in broad outlines we could draw some conclusions about changes in the meaning of race and in the nature of biracial workplaces through the centuries. We began the course by examining a 1658 Maryland tobacco plantation worked by white male and female English indentured servants, male African and Native American slaves, and the white landowner and his wife and children. Most laborers during this period were bound (in this case, only the landowner himself was “independent,” or “free” in any meaningful sense of the word), and teenaged white servants and black and Indian workers of all kinds were often lumped indiscriminately into a category of rowdy, promiscuous, profane, intractable workers. The contrast between that work setting and the white-collar office place of postindustrial America was striking, to say the least, though if we consider gender, class, and racial configurations in both time periods we might detect some threads of continuity linking the Maryland of 1658 to the America of 1996.

Obviously, I faced a number of pedagogical challenges in teaching this course, but my inadequacy as a white person teaching African

American history was not high on my list. I had to figure out the most effective ways to teach first-year students how to read historical texts, analyze their significance, and see the connections among them; and how to write a well-organized paper and document it appropriately. I had to encourage shy students to overcome their reluctance and speak out in class. Obviously high school preparation affected individuals’ literary, analytical, and verbal skills, but a whole host of other factors influenced their engagement with the material. I was paired with thirteen of the students in this class as their faculty first-year adviser, so I made a special effort to get to know everyone outside class; as a result I came to understand better some of the developmental problems first-year students must deal with. One student was homesick; he missed his high school friends. Another student decided very early on that she wanted to try to transfer to the West Coast; her parents were separated, and her mother lived nearby, but she wanted to live near her father. A couple of soon-to-be math and science majors were not happy about taking history seriously; they saw my course as the least of twenty-two other evils they had been forced to choose among. One student spent at least part of the semester comparing me to her beloved high school social studies teacher, and found me lacking. When I think of all the problems my students faced that semester—getting adjusted to a new place to live and to new friends, to a new set of academic demands and a whole new weekly work rhythm—my race quickly receded in significance as an issue of major concern in the classroom.

Offering a variation on my student’s succinct observation, I would venture to suggest that in the historical profession today, sometimes race should matter, and sometimes it should not. As historians, we have come to believe that a full and honest rendering of the past necessarily mandates attention to groups long believed unworthy of scholarly study; and we have discovered that throughout American history, whether we are exploring the ratification of the Constitution or the Cult of True Womanhood, the history of the trades union

movement or the development of American foreign policy, certain notions about "race" have mattered, and have mattered a great deal. At the same time, when we debate, teach, and otherwise draw on current historical scholarship, the race of a particular scholar should matter much less than the shape of his or her argument, the content of his or her footnotes. In the classroom and at scholarly conferences, in department meetings and the pages of scholarly journals, the advancement of history relies on a diversity of viewpoints. As a means of furthering scholarly inquiry within the historical profession, self-censorship has little to recommend it; and in fact, assigning certain kinds of people to certain historical topics, while ostracizing those who stray from these narrow-minded guidelines, poses a distinct danger to our continually evolving understanding of groups and issues that have received far too little attention from scholars in previous generations.

Over the past few years we have made great progress in opening up the study of history—in breaking down artificial boundaries between men's and women's history, between social and political history, between economic and labor history (for example). The last thing we need to do now is to slip back into a Balkanized view of the world, a view based on dualities between black and white, rich and poor, male and female. Should we as scholars retreat defensively into our respective "camps," or subfields, the whole study of history will be diminished, and accordingly rendered suspect as a scholarly enterprise.

A Paradox of Silence: Reflections of a Man Who Teaches Women's Studies

CRAIG W. HELLER

People often ask about my students' reactions to me, both as a teacher and as a feminist. I have discovered that this is usually a polite, if thinly veiled, way to ask me the question that is really on their minds, which is, "What the hell are you, a white, middle-class, straight male, doing teaching Introduction to Women's Studies?" The conversation usually goes off in various directions regarding feminism or pedagogy or the politics of exclusion. In truth, the classes I have taught, regardless of how they were listed in the catalog, have always centered around issues central to feminism, and my teaching style, were you to observe me, is feminist pedagogy at its most stereotypic. It was not, however, until I had my first opportunity to teach Introduction to Women's Studies (while completing my dissertation on feminist pedagogy) that I began to examine my own pedagogy in light of my sex.

Research on feminist pedagogy usually sees gender as a unit of analysis both for students and for the construction of knowledge, but rarely has the gender of the instructor been addressed as an issue. Typically, the literature either assumes that feminist teachers are women (which, although smacking of essentialism, makes for a moot point) or, worse, supposes that feminist teachers, whether female or

male, need only follow certain pedagogical principles in order to fit the label. One of the purposes of this essay is to point out that the gender of the instructor *is* an important element of one's feminist pedagogy and that "one size does not fit all." In other words, a feminist teacher who is a man and a feminist teacher who is a woman face different issues, and both need to understand the different roles and expectations they fill, both willingly and unwillingly, for their students.

I explore three matters in this essay: first, how my subject positions¹ of "male" and "teacher" have been previously constructed by students long before they enter the college classroom; second, the role of silence in a women's studies classroom when that silence originates from a male teacher; and third, the inherent paradox in a man teaching women's studies—a situation where I use the power afforded me by my white male status to encourage students to challenge traditional patriarchal assumptions and expectations. This strategy, in itself, is merely subversive, but given that my venue is a women's studies classroom and that I am a teacher in a women's studies program, utilizing this strategy evokes a troubling question: How contradictory is it that I may be convincing students of the viability of a feminist message by, at least in some part, fulfilling the patriarchal expectations that many students have of male teachers?

Gender plays a role in all our daily interactions; this is a basic tenet of feminism. Our society's assumptions about gender carry over into the classroom in student/teacher relationships as much as in any other interaction. By the time they reach college, students have had at least twelve years of indoctrination and "practice" at catering differently to male and female authority figures. Research has shown us that students have different expectations for male teachers, believing them to be more competent, more experienced, and "tougher" than female teachers.² A recent study found that students see young women teachers as less capable than young men teachers, but that

older women are believed to be the best teachers even though they are seen to be on a par with older men teachers as far as the depth of their knowledge is concerned.³

Regardless of their gender-dependent perceptions, students are highly experienced at ceding authority to teachers while they themselves adopt a passive stance. In this relationship, students passively consume facts provided by a recognized authority figure, assuming that the information is "truth." This typically results in the type of "banking education" that Paulo Freire has long criticized.⁴ Freire describes this situation, which is the norm in Western schooling, as teachers making deposits of facts in students who act as little more than bank accounts for the storing of information rather than the analysis or critique of information. By the time most young men and women reach college age, they subconsciously expect little change in these long-established patterns. A women's studies class is often their first exposure to the idea of and means for challenging these patterns.

Susan Heald has argued that we all hold "a taken-for-granted set of assumptions about the identity of individuals in various categories," which are rigidly defined by the dominant discourses of our society.⁵ These categories, or "subject positions," include everything from piano player to lesbian, woman to doctor, teacher to student. Heald cites her own example of having her teenage sense of identity defined and limited through others' expectations of the subject positions of "pianist" and "talented" that were applied to her. We also hold similar assumptions about ourselves, contributing to the creation of a sense of subjectivity, as we occupy various categories. This creation of dominant identities or "subjects" contributes to the stereotypes that reinforce the systems perpetuating sexism, racism, and other social ills. Just as it was long held that Africans were not intelligent enough to care for themselves and thus "needed" the institution of slavery to protect them, there are many beliefs and definitions, based on similar, if less overtly reprehensible, interpretations of subjectivity that bind our own sense of identity as teachers.

Heald goes on to argue, and I would agree, that a part of feminist pedagogy should be to question these established assumptions so that we can upset some of these long-held perceptions about teachers' as well as students' roles.

Teachers and students are "gendered" subjects, as they are "raced" and "classed" and identified according to sexual orientation, age, and physical ability. In addition, we/they are also what I call *educational* subjects: We have claimed an identity within the range of those laid out by educational institutions. We need to keep trying to uncover just how it is that our subjectivities are formed within these institutions. . . . Feminist pedagogy needs to be grounded in the understanding that education is an apparatus of social regulation and as such participates in the formation of the dominant subject positions of "teacher" and "student."⁶

What are the beliefs, assumptions, and definitions students hold about the identity of the subject position "male teacher"? How do they limit, or perhaps, as John Schilb has suggested, enhance, my ability to teach in women's studies?⁷

For both students and professors, these beliefs, assumptions, and definitions center around the use of power. All students have been taught in the classroom that the teacher holds power and they do not. We are all taught by our society and our culture that men hold power, and women, with few exceptions, do not.

Power and authority have always been recognized as problematic components of feminist pedagogy. The stereotypical image of the feminist teacher as "female nurturer" rather than "male disciplinarian" is all well and good, but we cannot dismiss, as bell hooks points out, that teachers have power over students, and as long as we evaluate students' performance we cannot pretend to give up all our authority as teachers.⁸ Some, such as hooks, Nancy Buffington,⁹ or Magda Cere Lewis, suggest that this power can be used to good advantage. Lewis asserts that

the use of institutional power, I believe, should not always be viewed as counterproductive to our politics. Feminism is a politics that is both

historical and contingent on existing social relations. I [have] no problem justifying the use of my institutional power to create the possibility for privilege to face itself and own its violation publicly. Using power to subjugate is quite different from using power to liberate.¹⁰

While I agree that a teacher cannot and should not abrogate all power and authority in the classroom, I question the use of power as a pedagogical tool for myself or for any male feminist teacher. Under certain circumstances, it can be useful and beneficial for a female teacher to use those strategies that have typically been the reserve of male authority figures, especially if their use can challenge oppressive stereotypes. But as a white male teacher, I obviously have no need to appropriate "the master's tools" of authoritative power. It is my responsibility as a feminist teacher to promote a discursive space that not only promotes new interpretations of women's subject positions but also allows students to challenge the dominant images of men and men who are teachers.

My students expect me, as a male teacher, to overtly control the discourse and the classroom environment. To them, a teacher is a source of information and an "attitude cop," with the grade book as the nightstick. While being a source of information is a primary responsibility of any teacher, it should be tempered with an understanding of how students see this second role, especially if one is committed to a feminist pedagogy.

The students in my Introduction to Women's Studies classes (I have taught this class seven times now) work in small groups of five or six for most of the class periods during the semester. The groups have directed activities, such as role plays and small group projects as well as broadly outlined discussion agendas to work from, and the students are responsible for maintaining a fruitful discussion within their own group. I rarely intervene. Within a very few weeks, the students, partly as a reflection of the subject matter of the course and partly as an aspect of human nature, form a sense of community with their group members and, by extension, with the class as a whole. To a

large extent, this sense of community replaces any need on my part to exercise control overtly.

By remaining largely silent, I abrogate my traditional subject position as authority figure, and the students, by virtue of the communities they form within the classroom, have no need of one. When they see that I, the traditional teacher/power figure, am willing not to exercise my privilege to control their discourse, their thinking, or *their learning*, then they are free to learn from the materials, from each other, and from me in whatever way each of them can best profit from. The students, because they feel an obligation and responsibility to their classroom community and to themselves, make the investments of thought, time, and effort that are necessary for a successful learning experience.

I am very active in creating a relationship with my students characterized by a horizontal rather than vertical power dynamic. I expect my students to use my first name and I rarely answer questions directly as if I held secrets for others to discover. I often leave the classroom (after establishing some guidelines) to allow them autonomy in their learning, and I practice a variety of other behaviors designed to shift the focus from me at the center to the academic information and their analysis of it.

After several weeks of a semester, the majority of my students do exhibit a good deal of autonomy and community in the classroom. It takes only two to three weeks for them to stop looking to me for reassurance or reward and to begin relying on themselves and their classmates for interaction. This is not to say that I sit among my students observing a raging chaos. I do have to set boundaries, establish a classroom environment, assign grades, and act as a knowledgeable resource. But by redefining my subject positions, I can do all these things *with* my students, not *for* them.

Regardless of how well or much I "redefine" myself in the classroom, I still, in large part, represent the "norm," and students have been taught that when the "norm" speaks, they should sit up and take

note. Even after weeks of nearly silent participation, I need only raise my voice or adopt a stern demeanor and my little communities of learners start to wither, their budding sense of empowerment seeming to collapse on itself. Clearly, in one fifteen-week semester, I cannot completely overcome my subject position. Even by the end of the semester, the majority rarely challenge me directly or export their autonomous behavior to other classes. The few instances in which this has occurred I count among my greatest successes.

It has been my perception that students question but do not challenge my unique (in their experience) subject position of male women's studies teacher; they want to know why, as a man, I am interested in feminism and women's studies, but they have never challenged that interest or my professional expertise. My women colleagues, on the other hand, who teach similar courses in the women's studies department, do not, in general, go unchallenged by many of their students, at least the male ones. Their pedagogies tend more toward the overt use of authority in the classroom, which I agree can be an important strategy for women. In the same way that students need to learn that I can be silent, they need to learn that women can represent authority. But regardless of pedagogical style, these colleagues, particularly the younger ones, regularly experience resistance, not necessarily to the material, but to their sex and their role as teacher.

This is the source of what I see as a paradox. If students are not questioning my positions and are responding to me primarily as a man/teacher (rather than a man/feminist or any other subject position), what then are the consequences for my pedagogy? Obviously, I am in a somewhat unique position. Should I use my patriarchal subject position to further my feminist agenda? If I continue to work toward less authority-based relationships with my students, will I reach a point where they stop taking me seriously? This, I feel, is the major issue facing men in women's studies. On the one hand, we represent excellent role models for students as men who respect and support feminist agendas, but, on the other, we represent the patriar-

chy and everything our students expect of it. Where is the balance between male silence and male authority?

Maintaining this balance is a key responsibility of a male women's studies teacher. I wonder, even when I remain verbally silent, what other messages I am sending with my body language, my mannerisms, my very presence—messages that my students are long practiced at recognizing and responding to. As Kampf and Ohmann point out, a man teaching in women's studies "will have to be sensitive about dominating class. He will have to be open to criticism. . . . He'll have to learn when to be quiet and when to disappear. These are all lessons worth learning."¹¹

Do I succeed if one of my students comes to believe that patriarchy must be challenged because I say it should? Obviously not. Do I succeed if I make myself so innocuous in the classroom that my students have no respect for me at all? Again, obviously not. I can maintain a balance between these extremes only by subverting my position as male authority figure through the use of feminist pedagogy while asserting my position as teacher, again using feminist pedagogical strategies. I cannot (and should not) shed the evaluative and mentoring authority granted me by my role as a teacher. However, by deflecting the flow of power in the classroom away from me and back to my students so that it flows among all of us in a more or less egalitarian manner, I am able to present myself as a teacher who respects my students' abilities, knowledge, and experiences as well as their lack thereof. This more horizontal power dynamic supports the creation of a community of learners in the classroom who view me as a more knowledgeable member who can be looked to for guidance and leadership rather than as the authority figure from whom the setting and interpretation of rules are expected.

To create such a community, a teacher needs to understand that students are active agents in their own learning processes and to promote an environment that supports this perception among all members. This requires that the teacher agree not to exercise all of

her/his power and to allow the students to explore and experiment with their own senses of identity—their own subject positions. There will always be a certain degree of indoctrination that occurs in a classroom, especially a women's studies classroom, but if we allow students to contribute to the process, then we can involve them in their own learning.

NOTES

1. Susan Heald, "Pianos to Pedagogy: Pursuing the Educational Subject," in *Unsettling Relations: The University as a Site of Feminist Struggles*, ed. H. Bannerji et al. (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 129–49.
2. B. L. Goebel and V. M. Cashen, "Age, Sex, and Attractiveness as Factors in Student Ratings of Teachers: A Developmental Study," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 71 (1979): 646–53.
3. K. J. Martin and L. R. Smith, "Effect of Teacher Age and Gender on Student Perceptions," ERIC Document 347162.
4. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Knopf, 1970).
5. Heald, 134–35.
6. Heald, 147.
7. John Schillb, "Men's Studies and Women's Studies," *Change*, April 1982, 38–41.
8. bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).
9. Nancy Buffington, "When Teachers Aren't Nice: bell hooks and Feminist Pedagogy" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, San Diego, March 31–April 3, 1993).
10. Magda Gere Lewis, *Without a Word: Teaching beyond Women's Silence* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
11. Louis Kampf and Dick Ohmann, "Men in Women's Studies," in *Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States, 1776–1990*, ed. M. Kimmler and T. Mosmiller (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 389–93.

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