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WHAT'S IDENTITY GOT TO DO WITH IT? MOBILIZING IDENTITIES IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

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Research done over several decades in a variety of disciplines across the social sciences and humanities has shown that students and teachers alike bring their identities and experiences with them into the classroom. Identities are highly salient for students' experiences in school; they make the classroom a different place for different students. This is because students with different identities in the same classroom will face different sets of what Claude Steele calls "identity contingencies." Steele uses the term to refer to the specific set of responses that a person with a given identity has to cope with in specific settings. Indeed, *who* a student is perceived to be will affect such variables as her placement in an educational tracking system, the friends she will have to choose among, and the academic and social expectations that her teachers will have of her.[1] While these identity contingencies might seem relatively insignificant, they can have major consequences for the opportunities a person will have over the course of her life.

To the extent that we are genuinely interested in educating for a just and democratic society, then, we will recognize the salience of identities in the classroom. We will work to alter the negative identity contingencies that minority students commonly face, even as we find strategies for maximizing opportunities for all our students. But I will go even further than this. I argue that a truly multi-perspectival, multicultural education will work to *mobilize identities* in the classroom rather than seeking to minimize all effects of identities as part of the process of minimizing stereotypes. Only by treating identities as epistemic resources and mobilizing them, I contend, can we draw out their knowledge-generating potential and allow them to contribute positively to the production and transmission of knowledge.

IDENTITIES

What are identities? In my book, *Learning From Experience*, I define *identities* as the nonessential and evolving products that emerge from the dialectic between how subjects of consciousness identify themselves and how they are identified by others. Elsewhere in the book, I define them as "socially significant and context-specific ideological constructs that nevertheless refer in non-arbitrary (if partial) ways to verifiable aspects of the social world." I argue that identities are "indexical"—that is, they refer outward to social structures and embody social relations.[2] Insofar as identities reference our understanding of ourselves in relation to others, they provide their bearers with particular perspectives on a shared social world. They are, in the words of Satya Mohanty, "ways of making sense of our experiences."[3]

In this essay, for analytical purposes, I take the dialectical concept of identity I worked with in *Learning From Experience* and separate it into two components: ascriptive and subjective identities. I make this analytical distinction not to suggest that the two components can be, in fact, separated from one another. Indeed, identity is inescapably relational. Rather, I make the distinction because it allows me to more clearly delineate what is at stake in taking a realist—rather than an essentialist or an idealist—approach to identity. I argue that taking a realist approach to identity is critical to the project of working toward a more egalitarian and free society. Only a realist approach effectively registers the dialectical (as well as historically- and culturally-specific) nature of identity construction—an adequate understanding of which is essential to our ability to work toward the transformation of socially significant identities. To the extent that we are interested in transforming *this* world into a better one—insofar as we cannot get *there* except from *here*—the transformation of the identities that are central to the arrangement and functioning of society will be a necessary part of our epistemic and political project.

Ascriptive identities are what some researchers call "imposed identities," and what I sometimes call "social categories." They are inescapably historical and collective, and generally operate through the logic of visibility. Examples include racial categories such as "Black" and "Asian" as well as gender categories such as "woman" and "man." Ascriptive identities come to us from outside the self, from society, and are highly implicated in the way we are treated by others. More importantly, ascriptive identities are highly correlated with the selective distribution of societal goods and resources. This is because, as a result of variable and historically specific economic and social arrangements such as slavery, employment discrimination laws, and restrictive housing covenants that unfairly advantaged some groups of people at the expense of others, different social categories have accrued different meanings and associations. These meanings and associations—many of which linger long after the economic or social arrangements that gave rise to them have been dismantled or even outlawed—are often invoked and mobilized by those in positions of relative power to justify day-to-day processes of social and economic inclusion and exclusion. These processes can range from the personally painful, as when a young Black girl is refused admission to a schoolyard game by a group of white girls, to the economically debilitating, as when a Latina fails to gain a much-deserved promotion because her white male boss has trouble imagining her in a position of authority.[4]

The other aspect of the dialectical concept of identity is what we call sub-jective identity, or simply "subjectivity." Subjectivity refers to our individual sense of self, our interior existence, our lived experience of being a more-or-less coherent self across time. The term also implies our various acts of self-identification, and thus necessarily incorporates our understanding of ourselves in relation to others. Thus, subjective identities can refer to aspects of some-one's personality, such as when we describe ourselves as being a "non-conformist," or a "joker." They can also advertise our values, such as when we identify ourselves as a "Christian," or an "ecofeminist." Finally, they can refer-ence available social categories, such as when we self-identify as "gay" or "dis-abled." Although subjective identities sometimes feel as if they are completely internal, and thus under our individual control, thinkers since Hegel have agreed that subjective identities are inescapably shaped by the experience of social recognition. As Linda Martín Alcoff has argued, "the 'internal' is con-ditioned by, even constituted within, the 'external,' which is itself mediated by subjective negotiation." "Subjectivity" she explains, "is itself located. Thus the metaphysics implied by 'internal/external' is, strictly speaking, false."[5]

REALIST VS. ESSENTIALIST AND IDEALIST CONCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY

I draw the distinction between ascriptive and subjective identities because how we understand the relationship between them will determine whether and when we are essentialist, idealist, or realist about identity. Essentialists about identity suppose that the relationship between the ascriptive and the subjective is one of absolute identity. They imagine, for example, that if a per-son can be assigned to a racial or gender category on the basis of some invari-able characteristic like skin color or genitalia, then everything else of significance, including how he or she self-identifies, his or her propensity for violence, personal characteristics, and even innate mental capacity follows from being a member of that particular group. These days, there are very few scholars who claim to be essentialist about identity. Notable exceptions would be Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, the authors of *The Bell Curve*, and some of the researchers who are searching the human genome for evidence that would provide a genetic basis for the sociohistorical concept of race.[6]

Idealists about identity, by contrast, claim that there is no stable or discoverable relationship between the ascriptive and subjective aspects of identity. Idealists imagine that how others regard a person should be of little consequence to the strong-minded individual who makes her own way in the world. The neoconservative minority with the "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps" mentality is one kind of person who takes an idealist approach to identity. Shelby Steele in *The Content of Our Character* and Richard Rodriguez in *Hunger of Memory* provide good examples of a neoconserva-tive idealist approach to identity.[7] Another example of an idealist approach to identity would be that of the postmodernist who argues that we can disrupt historically sedimented and socially constructed identity categories

through individual acts of parody or refusal. I am thinking here of Judith Butler's argument in her influential work *Gender Trouble*.[8] If essentialists impute too much significance to the social categories through which we receive societal recognition, idealists attribute too little. They underestimate the referential and social nature of identity. Identities, after all, refer to rela-tively stable and often economically entrenched social arrangements. Such social arrangements can change, and when they do, available identities will change along with them.[9] But individuals, qua individuals, have much less power over their identities than idealists imagine.

Realists about identity, by contrast, understand ascriptive and subjective identities as always in dynamic relationship with each other. We understand that people are neither wholly determined by the social categories through which we are recognized, nor can we ever be free of them. Indeed, the inti-mate connection between the organization of a society and the available social categories that we must contend with in that society accounts for why no transformation of identity can take place without a corresponding trans-formation of society—and vice versa. This is true for everybody—Black, White, male, female, gay, straight, able-bodied, disabled—but the stakes for those of us who are members of stigmatized identity groups are especially high. Because the identity contingencies we are likely to face have potentially debilitating effects on our life-chances, we ignore the dynamics of identity at our peril. To the extent that we are interested in transforming our society into one that is more socially and economically just, we need to know how identities work in order to effectively work with them.

Before I proceed, I need to make a point about the relational and con-textual nature of all identities. As social constructs that draw upon available social categories, identities are indexed to a historical time, place, and situa-tion. A consequence of this is that the same identity evokes very different associations in different places. On most mainstream news programs, a Chicana/o identity evokes associations of illegality, poverty, criminality, and delinquency. In Casa Zapata, the Mexican-American theme dorm at Stanford University, a Chicana/o identity is associated with pride, family, hard work, achievement, and solidarity. As the meanings associated with any given identity changes with the context in which that identity is invoked, the identity contingencies associated with that identity correspondingly change. There are a number of implications that follow from the contextual nature of identity, including the fact that a person can experience her identity very differently at different times, depending on the historical context and locale in which it is invoked. Claude Steele has done important work on the phe-nomenon of "stereotype threat," which is a particular kind of identity con-tingency that results from the fact that some identities are stigmatized in socially significant ways. He defines "stereotype threat" this way: "When a negative stereotype about a group that one is part of becomes personally relevant, usually as an interpretation of one's behavior or an experience one is having, stereotype threat is the resulting sense that one can then be judged or treated in terms of the stereotype or that one might do something that

would inadvertently confirm it."[10] Stereotype threat is thus not only anxiety producing, but, crucially, it can measurably affect a person's performance in a realm that might alter the course of his or her future. Steele's work demonstrates empirically what most of us have known at the level of experience all along—that an identity that feels very safe in one situation can feel very threatened in another. Moreover, it helps explain why individuals who are members of certain groups might make the decisions they do—why, for example, Latina/o and African American students, who may have achieved well in elementary school, begin to disidentify with education as adolescents and either under-perform or drop out altogether. They are responding to the myriad messages about who they are and what they are capable of that they get from the larger society. They are removing themselves emotionally, if not literally, from a very unpleasant and uncomfortable situation. Given the stereotypes about these two groups, African American and Latina/o students who care about doing well in school are almost always going to be subject to stereotype threat in the classroom—unless their teachers and fellow students work actively to alter the identity contingencies these students have to face in the classroom setting.

The relational and contextual nature of all identities reveals that the problem is not identity, *per se*, but the way in which particular identities are invoked in particular social contexts. Understanding the dialectical nature of identities helps us to avoid falling into the trap of thinking either that nothing can be done to change typical educational outcomes (women just *are* bad at math; Latinos just *are* the type of people who drop out of school), or that individuals should be able to escape, willfully and through sheer force of character, the identity contingencies to which they are subjected. Educators who take a realist approach to identity understand the importance of changing the classroom dynamics in which people with different identities interact. By changing classroom dynamics, we transform the local social contexts in which particular identities are invoked. And because identities are dialectical, a transformation of the social context will necessarily alter the contingencies attached to particular social identities. The first step toward addressing negative educational outcomes that are identity-based, then, is understanding the dialectical nature of identity and recognizing the fact that identities are always already invoked in the classroom—usually in pernicious ways. The next step involves figuring out a way to mobilize identities in a way that recognizes *all* identities, but especially minority identities, as important epistemic resources.

IDENTITIES AS EPISTEMIC RESOURCES

The idea that we should mobilize identities in the classroom is a somewhat unconventional idea. Identities are often thought by right-, classic liberal, and even left wing thinkers to be pernicious, or at least not conducive to rational deliberation and the public good. Some critics of identity are afraid of the difference that identities imply, afraid that an acknowledgment of

cultural or perspectival difference will lead inevitably to a situation of irresolvable conflict. For others, the risk of stereotype threat and prejudice is so great as to suggest that, rather than mobilizing (and recognizing) identities, we should try to eliminate the salience of identities in the classroom completely. Such critics advocate an "identity neutral" or "color blind" approach that denies the continuing salience of certain kinds of identity for everyday interactions and experiences.

The work that those of us involved in the Future of Minority Studies project have been doing, however, suggests that seeing identities as things we would be better off without is not the most productive or accurate way to understand them. Linda Alcoff, for example, devotes a chapter of *Visible Identities* to dismantling the political critique of identities, demonstrating that such critiques are predicated on erroneous assumptions and a metaphysically inaccurate understanding of what identities are.[11] Providing careful readings of such political theorists as Todd Gitlin and Nancy Fraser, Alcoff demonstrates that their arguments against identity politics depend upon three basic assumptions about the nature and the effects of identities: (1) people with strongly-felt identities are necessarily exclusivist, (2) whatever is imposed from outside us—as an attribution of the self—is a pernicious constraint on individual freedom; and (3) identities bring with them an unvarying set of interests, values, beliefs, and practices that prevent their bearers from being able to participate in objective, rational deliberation about the common good. Such assumptions, Alcoff notes, are "hardwired into western Anglo traditions of thought"; as such, they are rarely ever made explicit and defended (31). As a way of questioning these assumptions, Alcoff examines the practices and claims of a wide range of political groups who attend to the salience of identity—from the Puerto Rican Political Action Committee (PRPAC) to the Service Employee International Union (SEIU)—to see if the picture of identity supported by these assumptions corresponds to the lived experience of identity or its politically mobilized forms. Importantly, the correspondence is not there. Alcoff argues that when we look at how identities operate in the world, we see that people with strongly felt identities are not necessarily exclusivist and that they can be capable of seeing past their own immediate interests for the common good. Moreover, we see that identity ascription is an inescapable—but not necessarily pernicious—fact of human life; it can enable, as well as constrain, individual freedom. The work Alcoff has done suggests that any dismissal of identity is, at minimum, required to begin with a metaphysically adequate understanding of it. Otherwise, dismissing identity is about as effective as dismissing gravity: you can do it, but unless you radically change the conditions that give rise to it (such as by traveling to space to achieve a condition of zero-gravity), you are not going to make much of a difference in how it works.12

Similarly, I have argued elsewhere that identities should be considered important epistemic resources that are better attended to than dismissed or "subverted."13 The argument I have been making begins with the presumption that all knowledge is situated knowledge; there is no transcendent

subject with a "God's eye" view on the world who can ascertain universal truths independent of a historically and culturally specific situation. Having recognized that all knowledge is situated, I see the importance of considering both from where a given knowledge-claim is derived, as well as whose interests it will serve, in any evaluation of its historically and culturally specific significance and truth-value. Moreover, I understand that even good, verifiable *empirical* knowledge must be evaluated in relation to a particular historical, cultural, or material context. Significantly, my view that all knowledge is situated does not lead me down the primrose path of epistemological relativism any more than my view that identities are constructed leads inexorably to the idea that they are arbitrary or infinitely malleable. I am a realist, and as such, I hold that there is a "reality" to the world that exceeds humans' mental or discursive constructions of it. While our collective understandings may provide our only access to "reality," and may imbue it with whatever meaning it can be said to have, our mental or discursive constructions of the world do not constitute the totality of what can be considered "real." The "real" both shapes and places limits on the range of our imaginings and behaviors, and therefore provides an important reference point in any sort of interpretive debate about the meaning of a text, a picture, or a social identity. The part of the "real" that exceeds humans' mental and discursive constructions of "reality" is also what occasions some "truths" to carry over across specific historical and cultural contexts.

The link between knowledge and identity stems from the fact that our identities provide us with particular perspectives on shared social worlds. And while identity and knowledge are not coextensive, nevertheless, what we "know" is intimately tied up with how we conceptualize that world and who we understand ourselves to be in it. Our conceptual frameworks are thus inseparable from how we comprehend ourselves in terms of our gender, culture, race, sexuality, ability, religion, age, and profession—even when we are not consciously aware of how these aspects of ourselves affect our points of view. Our identities thus shape our interpretive perspectives and bear on how we understand both our everyday experiences and the more specialized and expert knowledge we encounter and produce through our research and teaching. They influence the research questions we deem to be interesting, the projects we judge to be important, and the metaphors we use to describe the phenomena we observe.[14] This is as true for those who have "dominant" identities as for those of us who have "minority" identities. As fundamentally social beings, we humans can no more escape the effects of our identities on our interpretive perspectives than we can escape the process of identification itself. Identities are fundamental to the process of *all* knowledge-production.

The link between knowledge and identity provides a compelling rationale for why a diverse work force, professoriate, or research team maximizes objectivity and innovation in knowledge production. People with different identities are likely (although not certain) to ask different questions, take various approaches, and hold distinctive assumptions. Insofar as diverse members of a research team conceptualize their shared social world in

dissimilar ways, they may view a shared problem in discrete ways. In situations where mutual respect and intellectual cooperation are practiced, the existence of such divergent perspectives can lead to the sparking of a productive dialectic that might lead to a creative solution or advancement in knowledge. Complacency and too-easy agreement, by contrast, can lead to intellectual stultification. The presence of people who hold different perspectives but who are able to respect each other's intellect and creativity increases the possibility that a research team will come up with an innovative solution to a shared problem that looked, from one point of view alone, unsolvable.[15]

Solving a problem held in common is certainly not the only, and perhaps not even the best, explanation for why a diverse professoriate can lead to advancements and innovations in knowledge-production. In a disciplinary field like history or literary studies that takes as its object of study human society or culture, for example, the existence of researchers with diverse identities increases the possibility that someone might ask previously ignored research questions that open up entirely new areas of inquiry. This is essentially what has happened with such subfields as women's history and African-American literature. Importantly, when the object of study is human culture or society, paying special attention to the struggles for social justice of people with subjugated identities is especially crucial to the process of investigating the functioning of a hierarchical social order such as our own. This is because subjugated identities and perspectives are often marginalized and hidden from view. Unlike the perspectives of those who have the economic means and social influence to publish and broadcast their views, the views of people who are economically and socially marginalized do not form part of the "common-sense" of the "mainstream," or dominant, culture. As I have argued elsewhere, the alternative perspectives and accounts generated through oppositional struggle provide new ways of looking at a society that complicate and challenge dominant conceptions of what is "right," "true," and "beautiful." Such alternative perspectives call to account the distorted representations of peoples, ideas, and practices whose subjugation is fundamental to the maintenance of an unjust hierarchical social order.[16] Consequently, if researchers and teachers are interested in having an adequate—that is, more comprehensive and objective, as opposed to narrowly biased in favor of the status quo—understanding of a given social issue, they will listen harder and pay more attention to those who bring marginalized views to bear on it. They will do so in order to counterbalance the overweening "truth" of the views of those people in positions of dominance whose perspectives are generally accepted as "mainstream" or "common-sense."

It is for these reasons, and one more, that I argue that teachers in multicultural classrooms would do well to recognize identities as epistemic resources and work to mobilize them in the classroom. As Michael Hames-García argues in an essay about the teaching of American literature, an important part of educating for a democratic society involves helping students understand what is at stake in the outcome of various debates.[17] If students are to grow up to be participatory citizens in a functioning

democracy, they need to see themselves as contributors to an ongoing conversation about the best way to live in the world. This will necessarily involve introducing all students—majority and minority alike—to alternative conceptions of what that "best way" might be. Whether the class is interpreting a novel or debating the merits of welfare reform, the discussion as a whole will benefit from the introduction of alternative (non-dominant) perspectives. Importantly, involving minority students in classroom discussions as privileged members—participants whose identities bring crucial (and otherwise missing) information to the discussion at hand—has the effect of changing the classroom dynamics and, by extension, the identity contingencies in that classroom. And where the teacher and students are successful at linking the perspectives expressed (in the novel, the textbook, or by the students themselves) to historically specific material interests and consequences, the stakes for students' life choices will be that much more evident. Research has shown that when education is presented as being 'relevant to students' lives, they will be more invested in both the discussion at hand and their education as a whole.[18] Finding ways to mobilize identities in the classroom thus serves the dual purpose of empowering students as knowledge-producers capable of evaluating and transforming their society even as it has the potential to contribute to the production of more objective, and less biased, accounts of the topics under discussion.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The recognition that identities are epistemic resources has implications for a wide range of policies that are external to the classroom, but that bear on what happens within it. At the most basic level, it provides a strong justification for integrated schools and classrooms. If a teacher is working in a classroom that is extremely homogeneous—along lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and ability—she will have fewer perspectival differences to exploit in her efforts to encourage her students to think critically about their own assumptions and values. Insofar as preparing students to be good citizens of a functioning democracy is an important goal of education, it must provide students with opportunities to exercise their critical capacities by reflecting on the convictions that guide their judgments about the best way to structure our common society. Students who are not encouraged to think about why they believe what they do will have difficulty understanding why other people believe differently. They will, moreover, be deprived of important occasions to consider changing their beliefs and transforming their identities. By contrast, a teacher whose classroom is diverse along lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and ability will have a rich variety of perspectives to draw on. She will have a greater probability of success in her efforts to encourage the sort of productive dialogue that is fundamental to the goal of educating for a multicultural democracy. Through giving her students the chance to examine their own identities, she will be training them to more adequately negotiate disagreements arising as a result of cultural, racial,

economic, and class differences. Furthermore, by allowing her students to consider their own implication and agency in the structure and functioning of our society, she will be developing their critical capacities to imagine that society could be organized differently. The epistemic and pedagogical importance of perspectival difference, then, suggests that teachers and educational policy makers should resist, in whatever ways possible, the re-segregation along the lines of race and class of schools and classrooms that is currently taking place throughout this country.

A further implication of the importance of having diverse perspectives in the classroom is the need to re-examine current ability-based tracking practices. The work of educational researchers Jeannie Oakes, Amy Stuart Wells, and Irene Serna suggest that tracking, as it is currently implemented, works more to segregate along the lines of race and class than to discriminate along the lines of educational preparedness or ability. In several studies examining the decision-making processes of the people responsible for deciding how students will be tracked, these researchers demonstrate that ascriptive identities like ethnicity and gender are as instrumental in determining where a student ends up as are the student's test scores. Wells and Serna have further shown that the resistance to de-tracking is extremely strong among elite parents who perceive their children to be beneficiaries of the tracking system.[19] Such parents assume, mistakenly, that ability-based tracking is unbiased and that it ensures a more educationally challenging environment for their child. They thus fail to acknowledge the salience of identity categories for affecting educational outcomes—for their own children as well as for noncite children. Moreover, they lack an appreciation for the potential epistemic benefits of a diverse classroom. So, while educators committed to transformative multicultural education cannot expect to easily end current tracking practices, we need to continue our efforts to develop more compelling discourses about the economic and social salience of identity and the epistemic significance of perspectival diversity. Such discourses will be crucial to our success in affecting educational policies regarding the population diversity of our nation's classrooms.

Finally, the need for diverse perspectives and the importance of fostering dialogue in the classroom calls for a re-examination of current policies affecting the funding and oversight of our nation's public school system. As teachers know very well, it takes both time and space for us to get to know our students well, and for our students to get to know and respect each other. Moreover, it takes money to buy an adequate supply of that time and space. Without sufficient funding to hire well-qualified teachers, purchase up-to-date teaching materials, build and maintain safe and functional physical facilities, and retain the necessary administrative support staff, public schools will not be able to provide the small classrooms and interactive learning environments that are necessary for mining diverse perspectives and fostering productive dialogues.

Indeed, the steady defunding of public schools—and the consequent rush of panicked parents toward private schools, home schooling, and school vouchers—poses a grave danger to our democratic system inasmuch as it

effectively eviscerates public education's function as a shaper of civic identities. As Rob Reich discusses in his *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education*, parents who pull their children out of the public school system are more likely to place them in learning environments that reinforce their beliefs rather than in environments that challenge them. This can have the effect, Reich argues, of stunting children's sense of civic responsibility and diminishing their capacity to develop what he terms a *minimalist autonomy*. Minimalist autonomy, according to Reich, "refers to a person's ability to reflect independently and critically upon basic commitments, desires, and beliefs, be they chosen or unchosen, and to enjoy a range of meaningful life options from which to choose, upon which to act, and around which to orient and pursue one's life projects." Its development, moreover, *requires engagement* with diverse perspectives and is crucial to an individual's ability to act purposefully with others in the service of creating and maintaining a democratic society.[20] Under this view, unless we find our public schools sufficiently to provide good, safe, educational environments that are attractive to a wide diversity of parents, we will fail to provide *all* our students with the opportunities they need to fully develop their sense of civic responsibility. Without a diversity of perspectives in the classroom, and without engaging in dialogues that challenge their sense of what is good, right, true, and beautiful, our children are highly unlikely to spend time reflecting on the best way to structure our diverse society.

Without diminishing the importance of working for large-scale school reform, I understand that teachers cannot wait for reform before they step into the classroom. Consequently, I turn my attention now to how teachers can work to mobilize identities in the classrooms they currently occupy. I begin by addressing a common mistake that teachers and students both make, that is, attributing to another student an "alternative" or "marginal" perspective that he or she does not have. I then discuss more specifically how to mobilize identities in a way that does not burden students, or stereotype them, or prevent them from growing and changing.

IDENTITY AND THE REALM OF THE VISUAL

An important part of mobilizing identities in the classroom in the way that I am proposing involves acknowledging—and then disentangling—the relationship between identity and the realm of the visual. As I indicated above, some identities appear to be visibly marked on the body. That is, they exist as social categories or ascriptive identities in part because they reference what are visual bodily characteristics (such as skin color, hair texture, limb shape, etc.) and assign to those characteristics an excess of social meaning. It is important to note that these visual bodily characteristics have no intrinsic meaning. Rather, they become imbued with meaning through the conflictive process involved in producing a social consensus about the way our society should be organized. Members of a society for whom a particular identity is especially meaningful will be socialized to select out and "see" the visual

bodily characteristics commonly associated with that identity. Such socialization is necessary because such bodily characteristics are not visually obvious to everyone—especially to those people who have not been brought up to see them.

Racial identities are one example of the kinds of identities that appear to be marked on the body. Others include gender and some kinds of disabilities (such as blindness, paralysis or limb loss). By comparison, other kinds of identities are commonly thought to be "invisible." Examples include sexuality, class, and other kinds of disabilities (such as dyslexia or chronic fatigue syndrome). Even with these "invisible" identities—though, we often behave as if we can reliably "see" identity. This is because we, as members of a society in which such identities are seen as significant, are socialized to pick up visual cues (bodily comportment, clothing, accessories) as a way of "seeing," and thus "knowing," them.

Sara Hackenberg has recently identified a process and coined a term—*visual fetishism*—that has been useful to me in thinking through our societal tendency to privilege the act of "seeing" the Other as a proxy for "knowing" the Other.[21] Even as we realize that some black people can "pass" for white, that Latina/os come in a wide range of colors and physiognomies, that some men dress and live as women and vice versa, that we cannot reliably read sexuality or class status on the body, and that many disabilities are invisible to the eye, we consistently operate in the world *as if* identities are always visible. We imagine that we can "see" difference, and that we always "know" to what racial, gender, class, or sexual orientation group someone belongs. We fetishize what is visible to us as if it contains the "truth" of the person—revealing their inner thoughts, capacities, and attitudes—even though we understand, at some level, that we may well be mistaken. We imagine not only that we can "see" race, gender, ability, and sexuality, but also that we can "know" in a reliably determinative way what those aspects of a person's identity will imply for the kind of individual that person will turn out to be.

It is important to remember that the act of "seeing" and thus "knowing" the people we come into contact with is experienced by most of us as being indispensable to our ability to act in the world. At a very basic level, visual fetishism helps orient us in the world as we act in accordance with the narratives we have internalized about who we are in relation to others. Visual fetishism can thus be a source of comfort to us as inhabitants of a rapidly changing society. But at a more problematic level, visual fetishism provides some people with an unfounded sense of superiority. This is particularly the case when such people are confronted by those racial, sexual, cultural, or bodily "others" who confound them, whose practices and values, because they are different, challenge their own. Because of the Othering it involves, visual fetishism can give some nondisabled persons a false sense of confidence about their own enduring able-bodiedness, even as it provides a measure of solace to the nativists who seek to shield themselves from the instability of values, practices, and hierarchies that racial and cultural "otherness" seems to threaten them with. In this way, visual fetishism can foster profound

ignorance by preventing those who are most anxious about the existence of "others" in their midst from learning more about the "others" they know so little about, even as it can exacerbate oppression by keeping such people from interrogating their own false sense of superiority.

Even as we exercise caution with respect to judging people on the basis of how we see them, we must yet recognize that how we see them *does* matter for their experience. After all, the extent to which identities are referenced through the realm of the visual is also the extent to which they activate the pernicious aspects of visual fetishism, and thus matter to a person's day-to-day experience of oppression. In a society like ours that fears both strong women and women whose sexuality exceeds the bounds of normative heterosexuality, a lesbian who "looks" like a dyke is at greater risk of being gay-bashed than is a lesbian who is more gender conforming. Similarly, in a society like ours that has long associated skin color with status, a dark-skinned black man is at more risk of being pulled over and interrogated while driving an expensive vehicle in a predominantly white area than is a light-skinned black man. And finally, in a society like ours that, as Tobin Siebers has pointed out, has no common experience of disability, a person who has difficulty speaking is more likely to be judged by others as mentally incompetent than someone who speaks clearly—when in fact there may be no correlation between that person's ability to speak and his or her mental capacity.[22]

MOBILIZING IDENTITY IN THE CLASSROOM

How can we, as teachers, mobilize identities in the classroom in a productive way? How do we avoid stereotyping students on the basis of visual fetishism even as we give due weight to the perspectives they have developed as the result of the identities they have? How do we bring our students' experiences into the classroom without either pigeonholing them as "native informants" or allowing them to be unquestioned authorities on an identity group as a whole? How, in other words, do we recognize our students as complex human beings not reducible to their ascriptive identities even as we take full advantage of the knowledge they have gained as a result of being socially situated beings?

Mobilizing identities, as I am defining the practice, involves mining our students' identity-based perspectives to see what insights into an issue they might have to offer, as well as subjecting our students' identities to evaluation and possible transformation. As educators, we want to attend to the various perspectives our students bring into the classroom, even as we give them an opportunity to change and grow. After all, if we wanted our students, upon leaving our classrooms, to be the same people they were when they entered it, we would not have accomplished very much. Moreover, because socialization as a fundamental aspect of all forms of education cannot be avoided, we need to think carefully about the values our pedagogical practices support, and Education should give students the tools they need to evaluate the beliefs,

conditions, and truth claims they will be exposed to throughout their lives; it should not be about merely inculcating status quo values. The purpose of a transformative multicultural education, moreover, should be to educate for democracy and social justice; it should be to help our students develop a better understanding of the structure of society and an increased sense of efficacy with respect to their own ability to influence positive social change. With these purposes in mind, I propose several principles for successfully mobilizing identities in the classroom.

Remember that every student is a complex individual with the capacity to contribute positively to the learning environment. Unless we treat our students—and, in particular, our minority students—as complex human beings with the capacity to contribute positively to the educational goals of the classroom, we risk reinforcing negative identity contingencies and creating classroom conditions that trigger stereotype threat. Since stereotype threat is activated when students fear they will be evaluated in terms of a prevailing negative stereotype about a group with which they are associated, students need to feel that their teachers, and peers, are capable of seeing them as complex individuals with the capacity to grow and change rather than as embodiments of a reductive stereotype. Although, theoretically, any student can be subject to stereotype threat, the risk for our minority students is much greater simply because they are the ones most subject to reductive and negative stereotypes in our society at large.

Work to get to know each student as a particular individual who is shaped and reshaped as a social being in and through collective identity categories and larger social structures. We can use several strategies to get to know our students as individual and complex human beings. I will suggest here a few that have worked well for me: First, ask your students to write something about themselves for you at the beginning of the class. Make the question open-ended so that you can get a sense of what aspects of their identity are most salient for each of them as individuals. Second, hold individual student conferences. This is a lot of work, but really worth it if you can make the time; there is simply no better way to get to know someone. Third, set aside a sufficient amount of discussion time, and introduce topics designed to get students talking. Think about ways to clear space for students who are too shy to talk, without forcing them to talk if they are very uncomfortable. If a student is particularly quiet during class discussions, I will ask her privately if she would like for me to call on her. Usually, she will say yes—the trouble she has in entering the discussion often has more to do with a reluctance to interrupt than with a lack of something to say. Occasionally, he will say no, and explain that he is either nervous about his language skills (this is frequently the case for ESL students), or simply shy. In such cases, I offer alternative ways for my students to contribute to the discussion. I never want my students to be plagued by performance anxiety and I do not believe that everyone has to participate in a conversation to the same degree. The important issue for me is that everyone should have the opportunity to share his or her views in one forum or another. A number of university professors

I know, myself included, have taken advantage of our universities' move toward web-based discussion forums. I find that students who are uncomfortable talking aloud in class can be quite eloquent in online forums. Web-based discussions have not replaced my in-class discussions in my courses, but they have enhanced my classroom discussions in crucial ways. Most importantly, learn to listen carefully as you allow your most die-hard assumptions to be challenged. Do not assume that an Asian student's parent pushes him too hard. Do not assume that your women students are not going to do well in math. Rather, listen to what your students say about their growing-up, their partners, their abilities and disabilities, their intellectual and social commitments. Do not expect consistency and allow for contradictions. Treat each student as an individual who is shaped and reshaped by his or her changing social and economic situation.

Help your students to understand their connectedness to others by developing strategies to denaturalize your students' identities. In a society like ours that idealizes the unconstrained abstract individual, those of us who wish to mobilize identities in the classroom must help our students develop an analysis of society that allows them to understand their connectedness to others and, in particular, to those who seem most different. This involves denaturalizing our students' customary (narrowly individualist) ways of being in the world. It means demonstrating to our students that *all* identities (including their own) are linked to historically-, geographically-, and culturally located ways of being a person in the world. Making the connection explicit will not only denaturalize the process of identity formation, but will introduce students to the complicated and far from obvious—but significant—relationship between social location, experience, and knowledge. In general, unless people's customary ways of being in the world are disturbed, their identities (and thus their interpretive perspectives) will remain untheorized and profoundly parochial. And while even untheorized and "inaccurate" identities can be epistemically useful to an observer for investigating the workings of ideology, they will not contribute to their bearers' ability to effect positive social change until they have been denaturalized and brought into the realm of examination and evaluation.[23]

Find strategies for denaturalizing your students' identities that are appropriate to your classroom and to your students. Denaturalizing identities in a lecture class will be a different project than in a discussion class. For example, in a lecture class I co-taught with Hazel Markus in Spring 2004. I watched as she accomplished, in an effective way, the task of demonstrating that all identities are linked to historically-, geographically-, and culturally located ways of being a person in the world. One day, Markus began the class by having our students fill out a short psychological survey describing themselves, their ethnic identities, and their attitudes about upward mobility and prejudice. In the lecture that followed, she introduced them to the large body of social science research in the United States and in Japan that describes what she has termed "self-ways."[24] In a subsequent class, Markus

brought the results of the survey to share. In presenting the results, Markus demonstrated how—with some variation along gender and race lines—our students conformed to an identifiably "American" way of being a person in the world. Markus's research and pedagogical strategy effectively allowed our students to see themselves as racially- and culturally located beings who have been shaped, but not wholly determined, by the values and mores of their racially- and gender-stratified society. This not only disturbed our students' customary sense of themselves as self-created and wholly autonomous individuals, but it also pushed them to understand themselves as analogous to the Japanese young people who have been similarly shaped, but not wholly determined, by the values and mores of *their* particular society. Denaturalizing the process of identity formation has the advantage of helping our students understand that *everyone's* identity is complex and multiple and formed in relation to his or her situation. It helps them to avoid the pitfalls of assuming, too quickly, that they know the attitudes and assumptions of the "others" they are interacting with, even as it frees them to explore different aspects of their own identities. When students are given the tools to understand how and why they believe and value what they do, they are empowered to question their own received notions, occasionally rethink them, and, in the process, transform their identities.

Mobilizing identities in a discussion class, as opposed to a lecture, will necessarily involve the students in a more active way. Susan Sánchez-Casal has experimented with mobilizing identities in her Latina/o Studies classroom by identifying existing communities of meaning and sorting her students into small working groups based on those communities.[25] She then asks the students in each group to work together to develop arguments on issues that will be discussed in class. The beauty of Sánchez-Casal's approach is that it allows students to develop their ideas in concert with like-minded peers; it thus works against the false notion of the individual knower even as it provides students who have minority perspectives a sense of affirmation for their ideas during the crucial period of development and clarification of those ideas. I know from talking with my minority advisees that if they get no support for their ideas from the professor or even one other student in a class, they begin to withdraw from that realm of interaction by disidentifying with it. Students need to feel that their ideas are good (i.e., valued) before they can effectively put those ideas to the test through dialogue or debate in a classroom setting. Keeping our students engaged is a prerequisite for providing them an opportunity to reorient their perspectives. Identifying preexisting communities of meaning, as Sánchez-Casal did, is thus an important strategy in the effort to mobilize identities in the classroom.

One way to identify existing communities of meaning is by noting how students sort themselves when they enter our classroom. Which students consistently sit together? Do they share a racial or ethnic background? Are they of the same gender? Do they hail from the same geographical community? Are they affiliated with a particular university club or religious group? Are they the source of their identification with each other? Paying attention What is the source of their identification with each other? Paying attention

to where and with whom our students sit will tell us a lot about how they understand themselves relative to the other students in our classrooms. Knowing this will help us figure out how best to engage our students in the learning process. Of course, in setting up communities of meaning in the classroom, we should keep in mind the importance of avoiding polarization along one set of identity lines. While we want to give due weight to the communities of meaning into which students initially sort themselves, we also want to help students realize that they might be able to form communities of meaning that are drawn along other lines. We can do this by emphasizing the complexity of students' identities and by not letting race, or gender, or ability stand alone as the determining factor for the formation of working groups for the entire duration of the class. One possible way to address this concern is to switch topics of discussion to allow students to see how the different aspects of their identities become salient in different situations. As we change the issue—from affirmative action to abortion, from handicapped access to online file sharing—the possible communities of meaning should alter somewhat. Changing the focus of discussion and re-forming working groups in your classroom to create new communities of meaning can reinforce the lesson that *all* people, themselves as well as others, are complex and multiple beings not reducible to their most visible ascriptive identities.

Actively cultivate an atmosphere of intellectual cooperation and mutual respect by being prepared to compensate for differences in power relations and adjudicate conflicts in values that enter the discussion. Given the hierarchical nature of our society, we are likely to be called upon to compensate or adjust for disparities in power that seep into the classroom from the larger society. Part of creating a context in which disagreements can be aired safely may thus involve interceding on behalf of a marginalized viewpoint or community. One way teachers can preempt the necessity of such intercession is to strategize ways to give marginalized perspectives and minority identities priority in the discussion. We can, for example, give students who are advocating a position that is not easily understood (or held) by the majority of students extra time to present background information necessary for understanding the issue. We can require the class as a whole to read articles, watch videos, or do research projects that excavate a minority or erased historical event or perspective. Additionally, we can point to the interests historically served or denied by the social and economic structures that have privileged some identities and perspectives at the expense of others. And we can explain to our students that such apparent "imbalance" is necessary for opening up the issues under discussion and for maximizing objectivity by bringing a multitude of perspectives to bear on the issue.

Adjudicating conflicts in values can be equally difficult but just as necessary to the project of creating an atmosphere of intellectual cooperation and mutual respect. Of course, we need to be careful to adjudicate conflicts in a way that does not close down discussion. To that end, students will need to know from us, through consistency of word and action, that we will not penalize them for taking the wrong position. Moreover, teachers should

avoid having too strong a voice or position at the beginning of any debate or dialogue. In general, disagreements and strong rebukes are best voiced by fellow students, who have less real power over their peers in our classrooms than we do. This is not to say that we should stay out of the discussion entirely, or that we should tolerate any form of rudeness or disrespect. The first reason we cannot exempt ourselves from the discussion is that doing so will cause our students to mistrust us; they know we have a perspective and will feel cheated if we pretend we do not. Besides, our students expect to learn something from us (we are the teachers, after all!) and may feel that we are acting in bad faith if we expect them to lay their cards on the table while we refuse to do the same. Another crucial reason we may need to intervene in a discussion is that true dialogue can occur only in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Where real disagreements arise, we will be called upon to make sure that students show respect for each other's views. Our efforts in this vein should be directed toward fostering an atmosphere of intellectual cooperation and mutual respect while allowing for an exploration of conflict and contradiction. Our goal should not be to reach consensus (although consensus is not bad in itself); our goal should be a respectful airing of differences and a meeting of intellectual and emotional challenges.

Remember that you are teaching the practice of critical thinking rather than a particular ideological stance. At base, remembering that we are encouraging a practice rather than delivering a product means that not every issue needs to be discussed in every classroom. Indeed, in order to effectively identify and mobilize communities of meaning in the classroom, we must be sensitive to the sorts of issues we introduce for discussion in the context of our particular set of students; it is not always safe for students to voice or champion minority perspectives. After all, if a teacher has only one gay student (or if he himself is gay) in a classroom full of anti-gay religious fundamentalists, it might not be the wisest idea to bring up the subject of gay marriage. The teacher might end up creating a situation in which his one gay student is silenced, alienated, or shamed, while his fundamentalist students are reinforced in their homophobia. Accordingly, we must bear in mind that it is neither possible nor necessary to discuss every issue in every classroom context. Just as I do not have to give my children every different kind of fish to get across the general idea that fish are in the class of things that are good to eat, so teachers do not have to discuss every hot button social issue with their students to convey the general idea that social issues are in the class of things that are good to discuss and evaluate. Once we introduce students to the dialectic of identity and the principle of socially situated knowledge, they should be able to extend those lessons into other arenas of debate later on throughout their lives.

The key to mobilizing identities effectively in the classroom is your own identity. If we, as teachers, hold and neglect to examine and change stereotypical or prejudicial attitudes toward members of socially stigmatized groups, we are going to take those views into the classroom and mobilize them—whether we intend to or not. Because of the power dynamic inherent

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every classroom situation, our identities will have a tremendous influence on classroom dynamics. As much as possible, then, we need to be aware of and understand those dynamics so that we can work with them. Whatever your identity, it is going to matter for how you interact with the students in your classroom. And because identities are relational and contextual, your identity will matter differently according to *who* and *what* you are teaching. If, for example, a teacher is an Asian man who is teaching math to a group of white students, he is probably going to be accorded a good deal of credibility. He may be terrible at math; he may have received a 480 on his math SAT, and be a substitute teacher who normally teaches art. But because of the positive stereotype our society holds about Asians and math, the presumption he will face is that he knows what he is doing. But if she is a Black woman who is teaching math to a group of white students, she is probably going to have a hard time at first. This is not to say that she should not do it. It is to say, though, that part of her work in that math classroom is going to involve challenging stereotypes as much as teaching differential equations.

Finally, find ways to link the issues you discuss in the classroom to your students' daily lives. The recognition that *all* identities matter in the classroom—yours as well as your students'—affirms yet again the importance of linking learning to life. Because it is not possible to check our identities at the door of the classroom, we must work to avoid the "not in my backyard," or NIMBY phenomenon that some teachers fall into when they are talking, for example, about race. Pretending that identities do not matter in the classroom does not make them insignificant to educational outcomes. It just makes it harder to confront their very powerful effects. So, without ever accusing any of our students of being racist, or sexist, or ableist, (because making such an accusation will never alleviate the problem, but will contribute to a situation of defensiveness and polarization), a teacher who is working to transform her classroom into one that meets the needs of *all* her students must find a way to acknowledge that the social dynamics we discuss and study are social dynamics that we are all a part of both inside and outside of the classroom. Even as we work to avoid the pitfalls of blaming and accusing—as well as their corollaries, guilt, and defensiveness—we have to acknowledge that *we* are implicated in the production and reproduction of racist, sexist, heterosexist, and ableist ways of knowing and unknowing.

As teachers and students, we are not responsible for what our society and parents teach us, any more than we are responsible for being born into a particular situation or having an identity ascribed to us. Identities, initially, are given to us. What counts is what we do with them—whether we embrace them without question or whether we work to transform them by critically examining the dogmas of our society, thus undermining the ideologies and associations that unfairly disadvantage some people at the expense of others. Certainly, mobilizing identities productively in the multicultural classroom will never be an easy, or even a completely safe, thing to do. But doing so is both possible and necessary if we are to ever be successful at creating a more just and democratic society for everyone.

NOTES

1. Claude Steele, "Not Just a Test," *The Nation* 278.17 (2004): 38–40; Claude M. Steele, Steven J. Spencer, and Joshua Aronson, "Contending with Group Image: The Psychology of Stereotype and Social Identity Threat," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 34 (2002): 379–440.

2. References are to my *Learning from Experience: Minority Identities, Multicultural Struggles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 86 n. 2, 13, 133. It should be clear from my definitions that I understand identities to be both *constructed* and *real*. Identities are *constructed* because they are based on interpreted experience and *real* because they refer outward to causally significant features of the world. Moreover, because identities refer (sometimes in partial and inaccurate ways) to the changing but relatively stable contexts from which they emerge, they are neither self-evident and immutable nor causally unstable and arbitrary. Identities, in sum, are causally significant ideological constructs that become intelligible within specific historical and material contexts.

3. Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 216.

4. For concrete examples of how racial ascription works in three elementary schools, see Amanda Lewis, "Everyday Race-Making: Navigating Racial Boundaries in Schools," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47.3 (2003): 283–305.

5. Linda Martín Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 337.

6. Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Vincent Sarich and Frank Miele, *Race: The Reality of Human Differences* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004). For critiques of Herrnstein and Murray, see Bernie Devlin et al., *Intelligence, Genes, and Success: Scientists Respond to The Bell Curve* (New York: Springer, 1997); Steven Fraser, ed., *The Bell Curve Wars: Race, Intelligence, and the Future of America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

7. Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983). For a critique of such neoconservative idealist approaches to identity, see my *Learning from Experience*, esp. chap. 4.

8. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

9. A good example of an identity that is emergent is that of "mixed-race." For more on mixed-race identity, see Ronald Sundstrom, "Being and Being Mixed Race," *Social Theory and Practice* 27.2 (2001): 285–307; Michele Elam, "Pedagogy, Politics and the Practice of 'Mixed Race,'" *Navigating the Frontline of Academia*, eds. Deirdre Raynor and Johnnella Butler (Seattle: University of Washington Press, forthcoming).

10. Claude M. Steele, Steven J. Spencer, and Joshua Aronson, "Contending with Group Image," p. 389.

11. See Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. chap. 2.

12. See also Hazel Rose Markus, Claude M. Steele, and Dorothy M. Steele, "Colorblindness as a Barrier to Inclusion: Assimilation and Nonimmigrant

Minorities," *Daedalus* 129.4 (2000): 233–59. Working with a social-psychological model of identity, Markus, Steele, and Steele argue that creating what they call "identity-safe" classrooms involves understanding the precise ways that historical identities are *already* mobilized in the classroom, generally in negative and pernicious ways. Because of this, they are opposed to "color-blind" approaches to identity.

13. See my *Learning from Experience*. See also Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García, *Reclaiming Identity*; Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory*; Michael R. Hames-García, *Fugitive Thought: Prison Movements, Race, and the Meaning of Justice* (Minneapolis: Minnesota, 2004); Alcoff, *Visible Identities*.

14. See Natalie Angier, *Woman: An Intimate Geography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), esp. chap. 3. See also Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Men and Women* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

15. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). See also the discussion of standpoint epistemology in her contribution to this volume.

16. Paula M. L. Moya, *Learning from Experience*, p. 44. See also Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory*, pp. 213–14.

17. Michael Hames-García, "Which America Is Ours?: Martí's 'Truth' and the Foundations of American Literature," *Modern Fiction Studies* 49.1 (2003): 19–53. See also Patricia Gurin, Biren (Ratnesh) A. Nagda, and Gretchen E. Lopez, "The Benefits of Diversity in Education for Democratic Citizenship," *Journal of Social Issues* 60.1 (2004): 17–34.

18. Nadga, Kim, and Truelove, in their study of a multicultural educational initiative at the University of Washington, argue that disconnecting learning from life has the negative effect of decreasing students' sense of agency with respect to interacting with diverse peers. They show that when intergroup dialogue is combined with content-based learning, students' levels of confidence regarding their ability to make changes in the existing social structure was measurably increased. Biren (Ratnesh) A. Nagda, Chan-woo Kim, Yaffa Truelove, "Learning About Difference, Learning with Others, Learning to Transgress," *Journal of Social Issues* 60.1 (2004): 195–214.

19. Jeannie Oakes, "Two Cities Tracking and Within-School Segregation," *Teachers College Record* 96.4 (1996): 681–90; Amy Stuart Wells and Irene Serna, "The Politics of Culture: Understanding Local Political Resistance to Detracking in Racially Mixed Schools," *Harvard Educational Review* 66.1 (1996): 93–118.

20. Reich, Rob. *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 117.

21. Sara Hackenberg, "Reading the Seen: Mystery and Visual Fetishism in Nineteenth-Century Popular Narrative" (Ph.D. Diss, Stanford University, 2004).

22. Tobin Siebers, "Passing," Gary L. Albrecht, ed. *Encyclopedia of Disability*, 5 volumes. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005). See also Rod Michalko, *The Mystery of the Eye and the Shadow of Blindness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Tobin Siebers, "Disability as Masquerade," *Literature and Medicine* 23.1 (2004): 1–22; Tobin Siebers, "What Can Disability Studies Learn from the Cultural Wars," *Cultural Critique* 55 (2003): 182–216; Tobin Siebers, "Disability Studies and the Future of Identity Politics," in this volume.

23. Because identities are indexical—because they refer outward to social structures and embody social relations—even previously untheorized identities that are

brought into contact and dialogue with other interpretive perspectives have the potential to provide us with differential, and potentially valuable, access to a shared and very complicated social world.

24. Hazel Rose Markus, Patricia R. Mullaly, and Shinobu Kitayama, "Selfways: Diversity in Models of Cultural Participation," *The Conceptual Self in Context: Culture, Experience, Self-Understanding*, eds. Ulric Neisser and David S. Jopling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 13–61.

25. In their essay, "Identity, Realist Pedagogy, and Racial Democracy in Higher Education" (presented at *The Civil Rights Project* conference at Harvard University, 2003), Susan Sánchez-Casal and Amie A. Macdonald introduce the concept of *communities of meaning*, which they define as interpretive perspectives on the world that are common to people who come from similar social locations. The concept is useful for reminding us of the social nature of identity and of knowledge, and of the way in which "common sense" changes according to the social context. See also Lynn Hankinson Nelson, "Epistemological Communities," *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds. Linda [Martín] Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York: Routledge, 1993) 121–59; Susan Babbitt, "Feminism and Objective Interests: The Role of Transformation Experiences in Rational Deliberation," *Feminist Epistemologies*, 245–64.