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Work in Progress

Feeling Like a Fraud: Part Two

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Wellesley Centers for Women
Wellesley College
Wellesley, MA 02481

No. 37
1989

Work in Progress

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Feeling Like a Fraud: Part Two

Peggy McIntosh, Ph.D.

About the Author

Peggy McIntosh, Ph.D., is Associate Director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. Her projects focus on bringing materials on women and perspectives from feminist thought into the liberal arts disciplines and into the basic curriculum of United States schools and colleges. Her programs have been funded by the Andrew W. Mellon, Ford, Dodge, and Valentine Foundations, The Kentucky Foundation for Women and the Anna Wilder Phelps Fund. This talk was first presented in the Stone Center Colloquium Series in December, 1987.

Abstract

*This talk, a sequel to *Feeling Like a Fraud* (Stone Center Work in Progress No. 18, 1985), posits a baseline sense of authenticity which gives one the ability to have feelings of fraudulence. The sense of authenticity creates the awareness of a lack of fit between what one feels and what is said about one's virtue or competence, or expected in public behavior. Vignettes of situations inducing feelings of fraudulence are contrasted with vignettes of experiments in teaching or public speaking which involve newly-invented forms and which have brought feelings of authenticity in public performance. The talk is cast in the metaphor of a house tour, and features both a greenhouse and a Madwoman in the Attic. The analysis is placed in context of a theoretical model of a double and conflicting structure within the psyche and the society, in which over-rewarded, vertically-oriented elements are contrasted with laterally-oriented, affiliative, informal elements of a "home-sense." Invention of less fraudulent forms for public performance may be made possible by taking a complex and pluralistic home-sense seriously. Such home-work is seen as societally desirable personal work for the creation of more broadly useful theory and public policy.*

I first gave a talk on this subject in April, 1984, as part of an earlier Stone Center series. I proposed a dual view of feelings of fraudulence, using a Moebius strip as metaphor and as visual aid. This strip, when twisted once and fastened at the ends, becomes a loop on which both of two apparently opposed statements turn out to be, so to speak, "on the same side." I suggested both that "We must not let them make us feel like frauds," and that "We should continue to spot fraudulence in the public roles we are asked to play." I praised the observer in us which may feel uncomfortable when rising in hierarchies which purport to be meritocracies, if we know they are not that. I applauded the part of the self which hesitates to claim isolating titles and rewards, and said that there are pretenses in official language and behavior which may imply that we are more than we feel we really are in terms of merit and singularity, and less than we feel we are as human beings embedded in matrices of circumstances and relationships.

I suggested that we trust some feelings of fraudulence or apology and analyze them more closely. I think that many of our feelings of fraudulence come from deep and wise sources. The trick is to trust the very feelings of discomfort that are giving us the most trouble, and try to follow them where they may lead. Recently they have been leading me to look for what I imagine must be some feelings of *authenticity* which give us the ability to recognize our feelings of fraudulence. Some baseline sense of authenticity in us must be responsible for our registering a lack of fit between our own sense of ourselves and what is said about or around us.

This talk builds on, italicizes and extends the previous discussion. But this time I am shifting the emphasis from what's wrong with "them" to what's right with "us." I want to focus not on the pretenses of "official" worlds which may make us feel like impostors but on some authentic elements of life in us which I think prize-giving systems usually miss, and which seem to me fundamental and central grounds of

our being.

Because of my excitement in making this shift from the subject of fraudulence to the subject of authenticity, I had been eagerly looking forward to this talk for months. I knew that the first talk on feeling like a fraud had triggered a flash of recognition in many people, and I was happy at the opportunity which the Stone Center gave me to go into that subject once again, in the company of many people whose work I value. The atmosphere could not have been more welcoming. I wrote page after page of new ideas. But I couldn't organize those pages. The day of the lecture approached and still I couldn't outline the talk. And so, naturally, I began feeling like...

As I have said, the trick in this matter of fraudulence is to try to hold onto the very feelings that are giving you the most trouble, and trust them to lead you to some new ground, some new way of seeing or being. Given months' accumulation of animated notes, why could I not outline the talk? It dawned on me, then, that the outline itself makes me feel fraudulent. In my 1984 talk, I described the student who finds the formal expository style fraudulent, given her sense that language is an invention and that life doesn't come in sentences, paragraphs or arguments. For me, the outline now joined the argumentative paper as a problematical form, requiring pretenses such as subordinating all ideas to one "main" or governing idea. I realized that for me the outline is, and always has been, a fraudulent form. My genre, I realized, is the *list*.

What is the difference? What makes the outline give me such discomfort, the list such relief? On a list, everything matters; you need not rank, subordinate and exclude; you can add or subtract, elaborate or delete. The sequence doesn't much matter; sequence doesn't claim to provide a governing logic for a list. With an outline, one must (pretend to) justify the sequence, and to know and deal appropriately with the relative significance of each item or idea. One cannot be generous in an outline. One must decide that some things matter a lot and others hardly at all. Vertical and hierarchical outlines force one to (pretend to) link ideas, to rank, to judge and to eliminate. They force what are for me unacceptable simplifications.

The list allows me to keep everything, to expand, to add at any time. There is no pretense that everything in a list has been sorted out. The outline pretends to have a place for everything and everything in its place; it implies that what's left out didn't fit, and that what got in all fits together.

I knew that I wanted to talk here about several different encounters with feelings of fraudulence and

five or six attempts to track and act on feelings of authenticity. I also knew that no single idea seemed to be more important than the others, and that starting with any one of them as *the* most important distorted my sense of the whole matter.

At that perception, the topic turned metaphorically from an argument into a house. The talk turned into a house tour of places where I go when I am thinking about feeling like a fraud, and trying to get better grounded. I will show you some of the rooms; we can start or finish anywhere. Within the house metaphor, I do not feel like a fraud. I do not have to demonstrate to you that the living room in any sense *follows from* the kitchen, or the attic from the bedrooms. The only danger is that I will talk too much on this tour, since now I feel *at home*.

Though we could start the house tour anywhere, I will first take you to the shelves where I have accumulated some key readings since my last talk. But to tell the truth, papers and books lie in heaps everywhere around the house. For this is a house, not an outline. One thinks with the help of others in all rooms of life. But here are some key readings which have fetched up on the shelves of one particular paper-laden room. Blythe Clinchy and Claire Zimmerman, in "Growing Up Intellectually: Issues for College Women," described "connected" and "separated" knowing, and drew on Peter Elbow's contrast between playing "the doubting game" and playing "the believing game," as described in Elbow's book, *Writing Without Teachers*. This paper has been important to me in identifying as "the believing game" a learning mode I find congenial, non-fraudulent. Further work along the same lines is in Belenky, Clinchy, et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*. Next comes Jane Martin's recent book, *Reclaiming a Conversation: The Ideal of the Educated Woman*, and several of her articles advocating that we educate for the 3 C's: care, concern and connection, as well as the 3 R's. Here is Alfie Kohn's book, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*, which I consider to be, along with Mark Gerzon's *A Choice of Heroes*, among the most important books by men on the damage done to the whole society when socialization forces men into postures of dominance. Here is P. R. Clance's 1985 book, *The Impostor Syndrome*, which focuses, like her earlier work with Imes, on the pathology of feelings of fraudulence. Next comes Carol Cohn's paper, "Sex and Death in the World of Defense Intellectuals," and the paper by Carol Gilligan and Jane Attanucci called "Two Moral Orientations: Gender Differences and Similarities." Here is an unpublished paper on "double helix management style" by Helen Regan of Connecticut

College, Jean Baker Miller's preface to the second edition of *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, and a *New York Times* article on the "impostor syndrome" in winners of Nobel and Pulitzer prizes. Then comes Stephen Berglas's very unreflective book on a related topic, *The Success Syndrome*, and last but not least, an article in the American Psychological Association *Monitor* of July, 1987 on the "impostor syndrome" in therapists.

I was particularly delighted with this last article. It reported on a study of 62 doctoral-level therapists who responded to a questionnaire about whether they ever felt like impostors in their roles as therapists. In this study, 79% of the therapists reported that they felt like impostors "occasionally," and the remainder reported that they felt like impostors "frequently." This affirmative response made me feel *very* good about these therapists; they apparently did not embrace the image of themselves as experts, though their credentials might allow them to do so. The author of the article implied that therapists' impostor feelings are problematical, but as you know from my Moebius strip analogy, I think that feelings of fraudulence within our present systems can be very wise, instructive and constructive, and we need these feelings especially in "experts."

I want to take you now to the living room, where we play a lot of music, and there are a lot of instruments, records and tapes. I'm going to put on a tape of the 1984 "Feeling Like a Fraud" talk and play fragments which anticipated my present emphasis on that *authenticity* in us which evaluation systems may miss. Fast forward...

I listed some ways in which one may feel fraudulent: "One feels illegitimate in doing something, or appearing as something; one feels apologetic, undeserving, anxious, tenuous, out-of-place, misread, phony, uncomfortable, incompetent, dishonest, guilty." The two words I want to focus on now are *misread* and *uncomfortable*.

I described people repudiating praise which makes them feel misread and uncomfortable:

If an executive says, "She has set her goals high and has met them in a truly professional way," the employee may feel, "This is no picture of me. I just hold the office together. I just talk to people, for goodness sake..." A graduate student, told that she has written "the definitive work" and will very likely have a brilliant dissertation defense, is likely to think that it is all a

colossal mistake, and that she couldn't defend a guppy.

I also noted that in my experience, feelings of fraudulence are not so common in domestic or everyday life.

I pat our cat and the cat purrs. I don't feel like a fraud. It's not the same as getting an "A" on a paper. When I bring home chocolate chip mint ice cream, the kids' appreciation doesn't throw me into a panic about who I am. I think that being praised for a good spaghetti sauce or for finding a bargain is not so unnerving as being praised for giving a speech.

I noted that feelings of fraudulence may be felt when people who were socialized to think they do not belong high in hierarchies rise up into public view in any way, but I also noted a related feeling of not trusting hierarchical reward systems to read us rightly. In those hierarchies which force us to adopt isolating roles, titles or modes of discourse, we may feel misrepresented. "They call me a pathbreaker. But I don't break paths. I think and write." The metaphor of pathbreaking implies that one is isolated, brave and aggressive, while one may in fact usually feel tied in, connected and interconnected. Thinking of ourselves not as solo pioneers, but as threads in a complex web of circumstance and interaction, some of us may be reluctant to accept special praise and the "loner" status it falsely implies.

I said that I hoped we could move students and ourselves from feeling "My voice should not be heard at all" to "I don't like the official tone I am forced to take in these situations; it misrepresents me" through "What *other* voice can I find to convey not an autonomous self-confident me (which doesn't exist), but the self-in-relation, not coercive and not deceptive, but social?" In answer, I suggested the voice of conversation, which as a form has little of fraud in it; it demands neither solo authoritativeness nor the soloist's accountability. I said that some of women's apparent apologies may be antirhetorical strategies for avoiding dominance, and for staying connected to listeners through a tone of conversation and dialogue. I said that for some of us who look unsure of ourselves in public speaking, the problem may be not that we can't stand at the podium, but that we can't stand the podium.

I described an either/or, win/lose pyramidal

structure of psyche and society which rests on a wide, lateral base of collaborative potential. The vertical part of our psyches and our institutions pushes us to ascend toward power and individual visibility at the tops of institutional pyramids, while the more hidden lateral functions of society and self tell us to keep working for the decent survival of all, for in this lies our own best chance for survival. I suggested that feelings of fraudulence may amount to a critique by wise, well-grounded, laterally-oriented parts of the psyche of the too-strong emphasis on, and reward for, the vertical in present-day U.S. psyche and society.

This is why it is quite possible to feel both that we are not good enough to be taken seriously, and that there is something wrong about the systems which have excluded us from serious consideration. We may sometimes get the message that we do not do the important work of the world, and at other times feel that the realest part of us, which produces the results honored by the world, is never recognized even by those who praise us. I know that the part of me that is at home sitting here in a dimly lit living room musing about this paradox without any single-minded focus is not the part which gets public kudos. And I am thinking of an alumna of a New England school who didn't attend her fiftieth reunion because she felt that according to the alumnae notes version of things, she would be seen as having done nothing of importance with her life. Yet she knew that that perception of her life was deeply wrong. She was up against a version of reality which says that those who chiefly make families and communities and private worlds are not really in the picture. Sometimes what I do is, at heart, domestic thinking made public. And usually the press, the praise and the prizes are not given for what I feel I most deeply am. They are given for a set of other traits. For many of us, the filter systems within which we are screened, rewarded or praised may have missed out from the very beginning on what we consider *the most genuine ground of our being*. In these cases, I think we need to insist on its genuineness and its centrality to our work in the world.

As I feel this shift from an analysis of "what's wrong with them and their fraudulent forms" to "what feels important to me," I feel the positive emotion of what in faculty development groups I call the shift from Phase III study of excluded people's *issues* to Phase IV study of "ordinary" people's *experience*, seen on their own terms. One shifts from anger at low status and victimization to the conviction that we are all valid, and that we in non-dominant groups may have a lot to teach, if only we can take our

home-selves seriously enough to word, to name, what we observe and feel about our lives. I think that what I call the home-self here may correspond to my sense of baseline authenticity which allows me to feel uncomfortable with certain kinds of performance expected of, or rewarded in, public or hierarchical situations. So, from this *living* room, I am trying to center on that home-self for *what it can offer as alternative forms* to forms that feel fraudulent. For I believe that public embarrassment has virtue at its core, and that if we follow it to its sources, it will help show us our potential wholeness.

Anyone's particular search is specific in many ways, so mine may speak best to white, Anglo-American women of middle age who have economic security and who share some of my academic and personal circumstances. We need testimony and research on many diverse people's experiences of feeling like a fraud, but since I am talking here about tracking a sense of authenticity, I must, in this case, stay very close to home.

Now I want to take you to the study upstairs, and pull out some old photo albums which will show me in positions of feeling like a fraud. Each situation involves what I now see as a denial or misrepresentation of some element of my authentic identity, in the context of award or credentialing ceremonies. Here's a commencement photo from June, 1967. I am in a voluminous crimson gown signifying a Ph.D. from Harvard, and also serving as a spectacular maternity dress, for I am eight months pregnant. As Harvard's President, that pinnacle-sitter among pinnacle-sitters, has awarded our degrees, he has said, "I welcome you into the company of educated men." As women getting Ph.D.'s, a great many of us have been suddenly defined right out of the picture, or rather the instant camera has produced a picture with blanks in the places where we are standing. Here's another photo of six short, smiling, mostly straight-haired rather innocent-looking, fresh-faced women, most of them my friends, at a Phi Beta Kappa initiation ten years earlier. The dean doing the honors has said kindly to all of us at once, "You don't look like Phi Beta Kappas," defining us right out of the identity we have just earned. We are politely speechless, and perhaps a little flattered, pleased not to look like Agnes Bluestocking. But we sorely needed then, as now, for our mental health, Gloria Steinem's exemplary behavior in rejecting pictures of her which, in the guise of compliments, leave her out. She knows how to haul others' definitions of her right back to where she herself is. Told by a reporter, "You do not

look 40," she said, "This is what 40 looks like." "You do not think like a woman..." "This is what a woman thinks like."

Here is a photo, going back another four years, of my first college roommate. It is November, 1952, and our Greek professor, quoting Polonius' "Neither a borrower nor a lender be," has asked us to come to his office. It seems that my roommate and I have been making the same mistakes on our Greek exercises, which are otherwise very good. Yes, we do the daily homework exercises together. The aim is to learn Greek, no? No — Professor Finley, renowned scholar of epics, explains that we must be judged alone. We can be rewarded only for solo feats on the battlefield of learning. We will be rewarded for competition against each other (which we do not do well) but not for collaboration (which we do well). We feel like criminals. We work separately, and each get "C+" for the course, perhaps through refusal to create a loser or to be a winner in a win/lose system, or perhaps through simple inability to face irregular Greek verbs alone. The reward system does not acknowledge *as* learning the kind of learning that works for us and that we do well. Unless we have a stance over and against others, we are not genuine students.

Here is a plaque on the wall and a commencement photo from June, 1979, at the University of Denver. The plaque reads, "Outstanding Academic Advisor." But six faculty members had done intensive advising together. We were not competing, and we consulted students as well as each other on how to do this intricate relational work. The presentation of an award created one winner and five losers, and created a pinnacle where we had tried to create a plateau. The *valued relations* between us, and between us and our students, were undermined by the establishment of a prize. I was grateful for the thought of those who wished to honor me just before I left the university, but being rewarded as an individual was destructive of what I valued most in that situation and in myself. The reward system and its attendant naming system not only misrepresented, but also harmed the basic nature of the work.

The sense of fraudulence in these cases came from having my actual ways of being ignored, and a condition created in which if I disowned part of my identity. Leaving it *out*, I could paradoxically feel like one of the *in*-group. My sense of *authenticity* had consisted in my good feelings at having a rather unorthodox, complex identity; being female, reflective, somewhat solipsistic and also effective in public or institutionally accredited ways; working with friends;

collaborating in learning and in advising; and being tied in and supported. The prize-and-grade-givers at every turn were giving the prizes for versions of "excellence" alien to or actively excluding me, even when this entailed defining away what was standing right in front of them.

The next photo is from a private New England girls' school in June, 1982. I am sitting on the platform feeling like a fraud because my publications have been given the most prominent place in the introduction of me as commencement speaker. Publication is hard for me and usually makes me feel somewhat fraudulent, for reasons I will go into later. Conversation with other people is at the center of my work. I feel like a fraud, sitting there and hearing about the publication which sets me at a distance from this audience of parents and students, rather than about the conversations which tie me in. I want to say to the audience, "I'm not separated from you; we are all in this together." I especially want to say this to the sixty seniors sitting there in the sun in their white dresses. They hate writing, don't they? Most of the research indicates so; the rhetorical style of expository writing they have been drilled in has worked against their trusting themselves as writers, and underrated many of the kinds of thinking they do more easily.

So I go up to the podium with a stricken feeling of a great chasm to cross, much damage and misunderstanding to be undone, before we can get to the unnamed territory of my sense of the best that we can do together. To try to tell the seniors of my respect for their experience, I say something heartfelt. I say, "We need you, *just as you are*, in the White House." The seniors look at me in disbelief, as do their fathers, who hold corporate America together. Just then, three U.S. Army helicopters, flying in close formation, swoop low over the commencement ceremony and hover in place, drowning us all out. So while they churn overhead, circling twice over the ceremony with their motors chattering, I'll tell you why most publication makes me feel like a fraud.

First, as you know, I trust lists, not outlines. Second, I like conversations, in time and space, in situations and with bodies. Publication locks words into place and launches them into the void. One can't converse with or respond to a faceless audience. So the traditional academic tone is guarded, depersonalized, lacking in conversational voice. Since the author can neither imagine nor adjust to various readers' needs and reactions during the act of reading, the author must accept isolation, and must risk being *misunderstood*. For those of us who fear being

misunderstood, and who like to keep the social fabric as whole as possible through conversation, presenting ourselves in black print on white pages can be daunting.

And then there is the matter of footnotes. Footnotes are a courtesy to the reader, says my colleague Elizabeth Minnich. Footnotes are for information, says Jean Baker Miller's editor. These are valid observations. But since conventions of academic footnoting have always intimidated me, I now look to see whether there is an element of fraud in them. Footnotes create the illusion that there's a systematic edifice of knowledge that one is adding to: that one knows the past work on a matter, has read it, knows what one is adding to it, and moreover, knows what the ancestors of one's ideas are — the ancestors or the influences upon one's ideas. The writer of footnotes purports to be adding a clear piece to an accumulating body of knowledge in a conscious, systematic way. But where an idea came from is often unclear, especially in the interdependent worlds of feminist thought in which I now spend so much time. For example, this talk bears influences of at least 50 writers and artists, and maybe 300 conversations. Footnoting is frequently used, I think, to perpetuate the illusion that knowledge-making is systematic and rational, sequential and cumulative. At least this is true in most of formal study as I have experienced it.

And so, there I sit, the visiting speaker, praised most for what I do least well, praised not at all for what I feel is authentic in me, the reactive, responsive, impulsive, synthesis-making, conversational self-in-relation. I do not like the public image of myself as published authority. So my talk must repair that misfit between what I actually do and trust, and the image of me conveyed by the words of the well-meaning person doing the introductions.

Now those U.S. Army helicopters have headed back to their base, and I resume telling the seniors in their white dresses that I trust them in their authentic seventeen-year-old selves, more than I trust our present leaders in high places, too few of whom have ever felt like frauds. But they are young, and perhaps feel too vulnerable to believe in their own authenticity; they may have to settle, for now, for being trapped in and subtly undermined by single-minded views of what excellence is.

Now I want to take you into the bedroom of one of our daughters, Janet, and let you see a student closer to home trapped in this kind of situation. She is writing a college paper on a Schubert sonata, and has invited me in to read her final draft. I have been cynical about the assignment which sets a Schubert

sonata movement beside four statements made by literary critics about the Romantic Era. The instructor has told the students to describe the ways in which the Schubert sonata bears out the critics' analyses of the Romantic Period. Since the students must state in detail *how* the music confirms the descriptions, not *whether* it does, the topic forces them into perhaps-fraudulent agreement with the instructor's premises.

Janet practices the piano intensively and cares about 19th century music. She has played the Schubert movement over and over but is continually derailed from the paper topic, which seems quite unreal to her. Reading through her draft, though, I find it nonetheless impressive. I tell her that it is amazing what she has done with the topic; she has even made it interesting. I tell her that when I was a teaching "fellow" at a university, this is the kind of paper I would have given an "A" to. She bursts out, "It's a bullshit paper." I tell her bitterly, "I know it's a bullshit paper; you were set up to write one. And you were set up to feel like a fraud, no matter *what* you wrote." I tell her that when I was an instructor, we would have mistaken a first-year student's ability to write such a paper as an indication that there was nothing wrong with our assignment. That is, only a few students would do well on such an assignment, but wasn't it true that only a few could ever do well in these highly sophisticated subjects? Her singular success in leaping over the hurdles we had set would have confirmed us in our sense that nothing was wrong with our hurdle system of teaching. But now I ask why it is that most of what we ask students to do in school has little meaning for them, and not much for us, either. Why are we always telling students what to do? Our habits as teachers, I tell Janet, now don't seem to me as rational as they used to. For example, we often ask students to be clear on subjects which we ourselves find confusing. No wonder they feel like frauds.

Janet will call later to say she "got the 'A'." I will say I knew she would. She will say again, "But it is a bullshit paper." At least she is getting at home the doubled vision, of being both part of and alien to the dominant systems, learning to see the way her grade here will be earned by complicity, as she agrees to pretend there's nothing wrong with the assignment, and that this relentless analytical drill in jumping through hoops and over hurdles set up by others makes sense to her as education.

For her, later, and for those of us who are now not so trapped, it is possible to consult our authentic, dissenting selves to arrive at some *alternative* ways of doing things. The trick here is to ask the authentic

dissenting self, "What would make you feel better? What would allow you not to write the bullshit paper?" I will give you some examples, and for this we should move into my bedroom, for it is in the early morning hours and in bed that I get my best alternative ideas on how to act.

I was about to visit Pasadena Polytechnic High School in California. Having never spoken to California teachers before, I wondered what I could tell them, but felt a problem in the idea of "telling" them anything. So I decided to put the discussion period first. At the school, I listened for an hour to what faculty had to say about the topic at hand, and then identified seventeen subthemes. While we took a coffee break, I constructed the talk from those themes. The talk synthesized a conversational event. I felt wonderful about it.

Once, on being asked to give a keynote address at a conference on Women and Education, I said that I was tired of the pinnacle system of having a keynote speaker. Couldn't we have a kind of conversational plateau on which two or more people talked to each other in public? As a result, Ted Sizer and I, who met for the first time the night before, held a public conversation for an hour and a half, sitting in two armchairs on a stage before an audience of educators at the Bryn Mawr School in Maryland. We talked back and forth. It was risky to participate in this simultaneously private-and-public exchange, but it made good on the usually fraudulent claim that we in education have dialogues with each other. On balance, I felt very pleased with the event, though it revealed among other things that I had read Sizer's work carefully and that he had not done so with mine. At least this was out in the open for all to see.

The elements of authenticity which I enjoyed in these situations came from having more than one voice heard, from making a public social occasion for the consideration of ideas, from sharing responsibility and from creating an atmosphere for exchange rather than an argument. These were work-in-progress sessions.

In connection with the American Bicentennial, when asked to give a talk at the University of Denver on "Rugged Individualism," I was filled with ambivalence about the topic. On the one hand, we may need qualities of rugged individualism to resist much of what we are told and taught, and to tap into our authenticity. On the other hand, the idea of rugged individualism has rested on a myth, a *macho* illusion, even an infantile delusion in the United States, that the self is the main unit of society, and that selves do not have strong past and present

connections. Enacted in white men's lives and reflected in public policy, this myth now does more harm than good, I think. I felt fraudulent, not being able to come to a clear sense of one important "main" opinion or argument on Rugged Individualism. So I devised a pluralistic form of lecture, in which the medium could be the message. I arranged twenty chairs in a semi-circle and labeled each with a different facet of myself. I gave the talk jumping from chair to chair and giving a wide variety of perspectives on the subject, e.g., as from "Daughter of Presbyterian Grandmother" and "Mother of Two Young Girls" and "Pediatrician's Wife" and "Reader of *Field and Stream* in the Dentist's Office." At the center of the horseshoe was an armchair labelled, "Central Self." The students asked afterward, "What is the central self?" I said I didn't know; I simply assumed that there must be one, to act as a kind of moderator, though not necessarily as the central authority. It keeps the personality from flying apart from centrifugal force. It moderates between various voices in the self, which are also the voices of others inhabiting the imagination. The central self does not, however, come up with "the answer," dominating or overriding some voices. All stay there, in plural variety, corresponding to what goes on in my head.

Jamaica Kincaid wrote about the many voices in her head on the subject of how to be a girl, in a tiny piece, in a genre all its own, which is found at the start of her book, *At the Bottom of the River*. As soon as I read her piece called, "Girl," I went upstairs, got into bed, and wrote my own version of it, echoing the voices in my head from my childhood about how to be a girl. This piece of writing seemed so authentic that I decided it could provide a good opening exercise for faculty development seminars. Our traditional format, "My name is, I teach at and I am here because...," separated people, not necessarily because of their names, but because of accents, differences in their institutions and regions, differences in perceived status and because of the semi-official accounts some people gave of themselves. Within a few minutes of beginning such introductions, a few in the room were usually feeling like frauds; whereas when I asked everybody to write a piece paralleling Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl," and used those as our sole introduction to one another, we heard the voices of our experiences *as girls* coming through, with no distinctions being made between us except out of the testimony of our own memory and experience. This way of beginning has transformed each seminar series. It also makes me part of the group; I simply read my own piece, as we all begin with what we have in

common: being raised as girls. We are all in it together, in a lateral relation, each the authority on her own experience, which none of the rest of us can know better than she.

Now I want to take you to my desk in the living room where much correspondence from my colleagues in curriculum change has piled up. We who are in this work really do keep in touch with each other, and these are reports of real situations. A colleague at University of Michigan writes about how a group of instructors replaced a fraudulence-inducing assignment with a better one. The first assignment, in a Greek and Roman Art History course, which is also a sophomore writing course, had been a complete failure, from the six teaching assistants' point of view. After several weeks of instruction in Art History, the instructors in this course had devised this assignment: Go to the Museum of Classical Art in Ann Arbor, choose a Roman sculpture and write an analytical essay on it. The papers were wooden, stilted, poorly organized, boring, and filled with the language of art criticism badly used or misused.

The faculty cancelled the assignment altogether and redesigned it. The second assignment went this way: Go to the Museum of Classical Art, choose a work of Roman art, make a copy of it in any medium you choose and then write an essay on your experience of copying it. These papers asked students to be *authorities on their own experience*. Whereas the first papers had been written under the shadow of students' knowledge that all of the teaching assistants were getting Ph.D.'s in Art History, and "knew more" and cared more than the students did about the works under discussion, the second assignment put the students and the instructors in a more lateral relationship to the works of art. There was no way that the instructor could "know more" than the student did about his or her own experience in making the copy. Students stopped asking the usual question, "What do you want?" and did not need to wonder, "How can I appear to know what I'm talking about when I really don't?" The papers were interesting, vivid, unusual, clearly-organized narratives about what it was like for a student to have a particular learning experience. In terms of Belenky and Clinchy's description of the modes of "procedural knowing," the students had been allowed to move from "separated" to "connected" knowing.

The next piece of correspondence comes from teachers on both coasts of the country. At schools in California and Maryland, American History teachers tried to compensate for the fact that the texts that they

were using omitted women's history altogether. One experiment was a valiant attempt at a corrective which did not work. The teachers invited the students to create a supplement to the American History text, focusing on the lives of women. The students could not do it. How were they to know about women's lives if the many editors of their thick textbook didn't? And in any case, how could they possibly imitate textbook style, which sounds as if nobody in particular wrote the book? The students were very uncomfortable with this assignment, partly, I would say, because it put them in a position of claiming more authority than they felt. But the teachers were trying in good faith to put students in positions of authority, to compensate for the history text which had left them out.

At a girls' school, a history teacher in a similar effort asked each student to imagine that she was a female person in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1638, three years after the colony was founded. She said, "You are a female person in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Here is a ten-page questionnaire I would like you to fill out to tell about your life. We don't know a great deal about women and girls in your situation. Here are twenty American history books from which you can pick up a little information and insight on women and girls. Do consult these books; don't just make up everything. But once you've schooled yourself a little, using these as a resource, make some educated guesses and invent your personality and your life." The students loved this assignment, whether or not they were known as "good" students. One said, as she handed in her paper, "I don't care what I got on this; it's the best thing I ever did in school." Some students said that for the very first time ever, they had found a real person in history. Many got a sense of identity from the project, which they cannot get from routine assignments merely asking for their reasoned *opinions*. The only doubt they had about the assignment was that it made them *make up* so much of what they said. This raised the question, "What do you think historians do?" And that question had the effect of making them see themselves as historians, not readers of others' history, but into *makers* of the stories which "History" is. Historians triangulate off available evidence, using their common sense.

In the Shipley School, an English teacher grew exasperated at giving 8th grade students repeated assignments in writing about short stories' plots, characters, settings and themes. She felt the whole course was pointless. She transformed the course into

one which turned the students into writers. Every assignment for a 13-week period was the same: for Monday and Wednesday the students read two short stories, and for Friday they wrote a fraction of one themselves. They could write a very short passage, a scrap of dialogue, a bit of description, a different ending, but she asked that whatever they wrote be in some way triggered in their imaginations by what they had read. This assignment had a transforming effect; students became for the first time *interested in the craft of writing*. They would come into class and say, "I just don't see how Hemingway did that!" or, "She's meant to sound sort of disconnected, like a Tillie Olsen character." The teacher did not ask the students to look up the ladders of talent to admire other authors, but rather to see other authors as colleagues similarly engaged in the writing process. Tillie Olsen, Shakespeare and Hemingway became related to the students in that all were writers.

I think the authenticity of these assignments for students came into being when teachers at least temporarily put aside the mantle of authority and let students become the authorities on their own experience and on their own sources of creativity. It is very important to this discussion that in all of these cases the teachers reported feeling *comfortable* with the revised assignments as well as impressed with the work they inspired. The teachers felt well-grounded, as they do not in the familiar situation of scrambling to "stay on top of the material."

Finally, here is a love letter from a past student, forwarded by a colleague in American Studies at the University of Denver. We faculty members from that program get such letters still, years after a profound experiment in curricular re-vision. Four of us who were teaching American Studies realized that we were teaching courses on "American Culture" in such a way that all ancestors of people like ourselves were left out. Our group consisted of a black woman who had traveled around the country a great deal, had been married to a military man and was now, as a widow, raising two children as she taught English at the University; a white man who had been raised as a fundamentalist Baptist in rural South Carolina and who taught Black Religion in America; a Jewish historian who had grown up as the son of a haberdasher in the garment district of New Haven; and I, an English teacher, a "good girl from New Jersey," though now I would say a "good" (middle-class WASP) girl from New Jersey. We decided to end the omission of people like ourselves by teaching our American culture courses twice through. First we ran

through the presidents and the most famous writers of a given period, all of whom were white and male, and generally from the eastern United States. Then we went back and asked the students to help fill in whatever had been left out in the first part of the course. In general, the students denied that anything had been left out, both because they didn't want to hurt our feelings and because they honestly thought that we had included everything that counts. Their impression was, "You went too fast, but basically you hit the high points." We pressed them for a description of what had happened in America except these "high points" during the decades in question, and why history should be defined as "high points."

At last, when the floodgates broke, they spent many days listing phenomena of American culture which had been left out, and blaming us for the gross, unconscionable exclusivity of the curriculum! Students spent the rest of the semester in their own research on many aspects of life: children, dolls, tools, toys, recipes, church services, etiquette books, artifacts, students, elders, invalids, brides, bridges, bankers, butter churns, broadaxes, songs, dances, courtship, drink, food, punishment, death, disease, dying, hymns, quilts, patches, shrubs, conservatories or gold-headed canes.

In the final exam in such courses, we asked students to compare the versions of American culture conveyed by the first few weeks of the course with the versions of American culture conveyed by the latter part of the course. The letter on my desk is from one of the many students who have written thanking us for this kind of teaching; we gave him the ability to see what he was learning as versions, rather than as truths. We helped him to see systemically (i.e., to see social systems at work) and to understand epistemology and to take an interest in the *politics of ways of seeing*. In learning all this, our students also felt authentic, for they were able to find themselves in the second part of the course in a way that they had never experienced in college before.

The same was, of course, true for us as teachers. For us, the authenticity came in putting ourselves — the unseen Others — into the curriculum, no longer obviously purveying versions that left us out, but now discussing with students, as part of course content, the politics carried by various versions. Authenticity here involved taking the power to speak as ourselves, and to see ourselves and all students as part of American culture. Most teachers in most places are passing on versions which exclude themselves — as teachers — and exclude students' experiences,

reinforcing systems of power that do not serve most of us well. But as the mail on this desk accumulates, I read of the changes taking place as consciousness of this problem grows.

After all this wordiness, I want to take you over into a room in this house which I love because it is so completely nonverbal: a quirky old greenhouse. I open the door and smell! It's the smell of earth and of growing things. Here, it is all growth and development. These plants don't feel they're on trial. Here they are all bodies in the body of the world. The foliage is diverse and green, and has its seasons. The greenhouse helps to explain to me what I so dislike about grading in education. My aim as caretaker here is not to put plants in competition with each other. Quite the reverse; in gardening, to help each plant fulfill the potential which its seed contained, you *reduce* competition. This is what I try to do in education. In the greenhouse I feel authentic, helping differing plants to thrive as themselves and trying to create conditions for that.

Now I must confess to you about another room in the house. If you are a reader of Charlotte Brontë or Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, or if you love Lily Tomlin and Jane Wagner, you will not be surprised to hear that there is a Madwoman in the Attic. You go up there and her room is absolutely draped with Moebius strips. She scrawls on them, in red ink, and covers the walls with angry graffiti. She is alternately *off the wall* with anger at those who have made *her* feel like a fraud, and *off the floor* with a visionary sense of her own elemental connection to the universe. You can never anticipate her mood. She loves MacDonald's french fries, and when I go up there to clean up the greasy red buckets, she blurts out, "Don't you snoop in my papers!" But now and then she throws some poems, scrunched up in spitballs, down the stairs from the attic, and if I simply throw one away, she shouts: "I'll kill you if you don't read my poems!" She harangues me if I give her any attention and harangues me if I don't. Here's a Moebius strip on which she has written: "I MAY NOT KNOW WHO I AM BUT YOU SURE AS HELL DON'T, YOU GODDOM PHONIES, SO DON'T YOU TELL ME WHO I AM." The other day she looked at me and said, "You need me. I'll be here for you." Now, I spend a lot of time taking care of her, and when I do it is very hard on my family. And here she is, telling me I need her. Thanks a lot.

Today she threw down a poem which I will read to you. I have told her, by the way, that I was going to start telling audiences about her. She said, "Don't be that crazy. You're not dead yet." Yet I think she was

also moved.

I think that in this poem she is dealing with one of the things I have been saying: that prize-giving systems may completely miss out on what we feel is most authentically *us*. She has written:

The prize fish flops, and dies.
I pass through the nets.
I escape the hooks.
I am the growing medium — water.

The prize roses wilt and die,
Brushed free of soil.
I am the growing medium — earth.

The princess swoons over the perfect
three-star omelette.
I am the steady stove.

The jet assumes its power. —
It levers against me — the air,
The necessary body for its rise and its
descent.

Water, Earth, Fire, Air,
I am the growing medium, the
genuine element.
Trust me.

I will end by taking you down to the kitchen and then back to the bookshelves again. Here on the kitchen table, as it happens, this very day, is an encouraging article on the front page of the newspaper. By contrast with the usual horrible disjunction between what a kitchen is for and the conflict and violence brought to us in the pages of newspapers, we find a picture of two powerful heads of state who have signed a treaty agreeing to destroy certain nuclear stockpiles.

The journalists have characteristically misread this meeting. They are trying to decide who *won* the event, and even which statesman's wife won the contest to be seen as the perfect wife of a head of state. They cannot see peacemaking except as another species of warfare. Moreover, the journalists have got it wrong in that they see the precedents for this historic occasion as coming only from men, not from women. The journalists have not mentioned Eleanor Roosevelt, who had the idea for the United Nations; nor Randall Forsberg, who had the idea for the nuclear freeze nor Helen Caldicott, who gave Physicians for Social Responsibility its recent power. The editorials instead cite Marshall McLuhan on the subject of the

global village, and Jonathan Schell on nuclear danger, and a male astronaut on the subject of seeing that the world is One, and Robert McNamara, who has recently taken a position against nuclear proliferation.

But despite the silencing and censoring of women's voices, and the denial that women are, in the words of Mary Beard, *a force in history*, this article reports events which come from the work of many men and women who have been thinking and acting laterally. And here, at least, is a picture of two men in power, sitting at a table in 1987, signing an agreement to reduce nuclear weapons. Our work in critiquing militaristic values is sometimes momentarily recognized as having an authentic or sensible base, though it is also exploited cynically by many to serve other purposes as well.

I want to go back to the shelves now and pick up one of the articles there which has made most sense to me in illuminating work towards authenticity. It is a paper that suggests that unless we study what we *haven't* noticed, we will never understand what we think we have noticed. According to the Gilligan and Attanucci paper, human moral development was seen by earlier researchers as simply a neutral and universal kind of development in which approximately two thirds of the (male) sample were seen to mature fairly well and one third seemed to be anomalous, immature. The (male) subjects who did not develop along normative lines were simply seen as failing to achieve moral maturity. When, through research on women, Gilligan identified the "ethic of care," the previous model of "moral development" began to look like a specific model for tracing development of the ethic of justice. Now "anomalous" men could be seen as people in whom the ethic of care and the ethic of justice were combined. They now matched a sample of similar women. All were recognizable *only because a further sample of women who specialized even more in the ethic of care had been identified*. Until the voices of women had truly been listened to and the previously unlooked-for "ethic of care" identified, the ethic of care was not in the spectrum of moral concern; therefore men who did not fit the first norm could not be placed at all. Now they seemed understandable, having in their moral sense both an ethic of care and an ethic of justice.

Most of the research on this subject of feeling like a fraud, or impostor, has been done on college students or on white, middle-class, employed American women in early middle age. I suggest that until we study the sense of fraudulence or authenticity in other people more fully, and in many cultures, we will not understand them in any one. It seems that

until we study people of many groups, we will not understand people of *any* group well, for we will have only naming from the most-heard-from groups. We need studies which identify the sense of authenticity in many different groups in different cultures, which are likely to put in a whole new light the things I have said here.

Though I cannot generalize from my own explorations, I will summarize. I have focused here on feelings of fraudulence which I experience in hierarchical systems rewarding individuals for being physically male and for habits of competition, separation, isolation, "rigor," impersonality, formality, single-mindedness, official speech and the controlled language of "rational argument." My feelings of authenticity came with feeling physically female and being in situations of connection, uncertainty, conversation, solitude, informality, sociability, collaboration, domesticity, repetitive life, spontaneity, expressiveness and what the world calls madness. I have often felt authentic when doing what Jean Baker Miller calls "finding one's development through the development of others," or when entertaining many contradictions and differing people, emotions and ideas.

For most men I know, feelings of fraudulence may well be triggered by the very qualities of life which seem authentic to me. Some men I know feel fraudulent if they don't sound official and somewhat opaque; if they respond spontaneously or make informal-sounding statements, they feel a little soft in the head. They may be raised to fear the intricate, contingent connectedness which feels right to me, or find that if they have what I am calling a baseline sense of authenticity, it draws on different aspects of the personality or experience. At the same time, some employed white women I know say they feel somewhat fraudulent even in the home sphere, today, when confronted with superwoman images, and feel they fall short of domestic ideals projected onto them there, as I do in the public sphere into which I feel not at all invited on my terms. Some people seem never to feel like frauds at all. Factors of age and class, race and region, as well as personal circumstance play into all of this. Our diverse senses of authenticity should be mined further.

For me, the shift from rhetorical argument to house tour was the breakthrough allowing me to go from feelings of fraudulence caused by separation from myself to an authentic sense of self-in-domestic-connection. The shift from that abstract Moebius strip to an imagined house allowed me to feel more comfortable, being simultaneously *at home* and *with*

you in public, bringing the public life to the home ground and home-work to the world.

Going public with our sense of, or search for, authenticity seems to me an important step for people who do not thrive in the public worlds of confrontation and challenge. Once I felt only silence and misery on the subject of fraudulent feelings, and then entered what Belenky, et al. call a position of “received knowing,” agreeing in this case to the commonly held opinion that women simply lacked confidence. Then followed an important switch to a kind of street-wise, angry, “subjective knowing,” which may remind you of the Madwoman: “There’s a lot of phonies out there, and I don’t like them.” These 1984 and 1987 talks on “Feeling Like a Fraud” illustrate, I think, the two kinds of “procedural knowing” described by Belenky, et al. The Moebius strip analysis was an example of “separated knowing,” in which I tried to get some distance on the whole complex subject, and this talk, connecting with deeper elements of myself, fits with what I think of as an essential part of the “connected knowing” pattern, though Belenky, et al. did not describe it as such, which is playing the believing game with one’s *own* deepest sense of authenticity.

Academic training encourages me to value the abstract, “separated-knowing” analysis of the Moebius strip talk more than these homelier vignettes. But the gardening self, the half-awake person in bed, the woman who broods over old photos and the Madwoman make essential and original observations. In fact, the Madwoman says she gave me the Moebius strip idea to begin with, and resents the fact that its contradictions are seen as madness in her and intellectual complexity in me. Connecting with these *many* parts of the self is a way of doing what Belenky, et al. refer to as “constructed knowing,” choosing one’s versions from a wide variety of understandings, sources, voices and guesses.

I don’t think that we will be able to do what I call the meta-doubting, the necessary meta-criticism of the main invisible structures of psyche and society, until we try to get in touch with our personal senses of authenticity and talk about how things really are for us on a daily basis. Though my imagery for authenticity is personal, and therefore feels somewhat “unintellectual” and even embarrassing, I think that we need to mine this kind of layer to reach better theoretical understanding of what our various situations are. It can help us to understand what seems wrong to us in many areas of life, including media representations of human nature, or public pronouncements and policies.

Many individuals daily bring what I have been

describing as the home or friendship sense into their routine lives and into institutional worlds. A larger task is to create whole value systems, policies and institutions which place at the center this concern for growth, development and survival without violence and with dignity for all. Listening to voices of personal authenticity, however tentative they are, may help us to develop theories of human nature and systems which fit experiences and serve basic human needs better than most present theories and systems do. The mostly-submerged baseline sense of authenticity in those who unaccountably feel like frauds may help to reveal the places in which present theory or policy do not fit with what people are, or want or do most constructively.

Discussion Summary

After each colloquium lecture, a discussion is held. Selected portions are summarized here. Drs. Jean Baker Miller and Janet Surrey joined in the discussion.

Comment: I’m not sure how to put this without sounding a little challenging. Sitting here at Wellesley College, it is easy to say, “I don’t need this way of behaving...” Once you have gotten to the top, you can say it. If you don’t have these economic and social conditions, it’s harder. You can’t say it.

McIntosh: One thing many of us here have is power. Once you’ve “made it” in these systems, you do have some power to do the critique while those who’ve been most disenfranchised within these systems may not. To those who don’t have enough money to put food on the table, it may sound like cultural arrogance for anyone to suggest questioning the world’s definitions of success. But I think those who have “made it,” and are highly privileged and paid, can call the meritocracy on some of its claims, if they are willing to do so. They have the power to point to fraudulence in high places, and shouldn’t necessarily expect that work to come just from those who are struggling most to survive, and feeling they can’t do anything but try to keep their heads above water.

Comment: The most important issue for women is first to get power.

McIntosh: In 1984, the first questioner made a related point. But I said that I favored a double vision in which we teach both survival according to the “rules” and give an alternative view of those rules and of the reasons they make so many of us uncomfortable or angry; they give power to so few people or functions of personality. I agree with you that those with the most privilege and power may be able to see or say that most easily, and perhaps getting vertical

power for some must be the top priority. But the question is, "What will be most empowering?" It may be different things for different groups and individuals. There may be a taxonomy of different degrees of empowering cynicism.

Miller: May I complicate that issue a bit? I think that people who are "the outsiders," not the privileged ones in society, know a lot about the fraudulence of people who are claiming privilege and value and truth and so on. So I don't know that you can't talk about that to us outsiders. We know it already. It's very validating to hear it said in ways that are truthful. That doesn't mean disempowering people, necessarily. I think people have to be related to reality; you choose your way. There are certain things you don't have to be in the world, certain positions you don't have to aspire to. It's complicated. But I'm not so sure that you have to avoid being critical when working with us "outsider people."

McIntosh: You pointed to yourself when you said "outsider people."

Miller: Well, I think in some general way, all women are. And then people who have not come from privileged backgrounds - which I didn't - are "outsider people."

Comment: I think we shouldn't forget that you can get power in cooperation and affiliation, not just in individual public behavior.

Miller and McIntosh: Yes.

Comment: I love your examples of your teaching. I'm struck, as a faculty member, that when I try to teach what I feel, I have to walk a very fine line between being myself and being what the kids want, not only for the dean or the school, but for the students. I had a student once come to me and say, "I get so confused coming from this other woman's class to yours. She is so tough, has all this data, and she's so smart. I think, 'That's what I want to be.'" And then the student comes to my class, and I'm really making contact with her. I'm talking about really thinking, and I reach her in a different way.

McIntosh: This is a set-up for teaching about both/and thinking as against either/or thinking. Your student has — we all have — affiliative talents and soloistic talents. She doesn't have to choose. The dominant systems in our culture value the soloistic more, and talk as though the self is the main unit of society. Therefore, that view is in the political ascendancy, and the other is considered extracurricular, unrigorous and connected with, say, just being a "nice person." But you can teach that student she is both part of and alien to the dominant value system. Being in both classes, she can be part of

your plants-in-the-greenhouse world and learn also how to work in the more officially recognized world of "hard data." She can decide how to develop herself, knowing that the politics work against the development of affiliative talents, especially against bringing them into public life or public view as though they were important.

Surrey: I'm thinking also about the value to women who have, for example, written a Ph.D. thesis. There is a lot of value to living in two worlds. I live in both a feminist world and a patriarchal world, and feel my authenticity constantly challenged in each. I feel that the movement between worlds results in growth. There is a growth which comes from movement around different ways of looking and being. It is a movement rather than a grounding. Women can learn other ways of seeing beyond themselves and learn how to create their values in the world. We need to allow students, as you say, to use the tools of the main society so long as they don't get overwhelmed by them, and that is a challenge in both therapy and in teaching.

Comment: What would you have the teacher say to her student?

McIntosh: I'd say that it is great that she appreciates both ways of being, and she definitely contains both or she could not appreciate them. She can develop what feels right to her as a mix of her own. The first teacher's style may be admirable, but make the student herself feel fraudulent when she tries only to imitate it. Whatever she works out, I think we should encourage her not ever to let the world talk her out of her feelings. Her own preferred styles may carry little press, praise or prizes, but they may have authority of a deep kind. Every so often they may even be seen as making a public difference. After all, here are these two statesmen at the table signing a weapons agreement, with a lot of fanfare, and just for a minute, from the things they are saying, you might think they have been reading feminist theory.

Comment: Would you read "Girl"?

McIntosh: Yes: I'm glad you asked. I think it is a most wonderful work, and when people write their own versions, this releases deeply authentic and usually long-forgotten voices in themselves. I met Jamaica Kincaid at M.I.T. a couple of weeks ago. I told her that I wanted to thank her especially for "Girl." Her answer relates to the theme of authenticity, for she told me this was the first piece that she ever wrote. I said that it was in a new genre, all its own, unlike anything else ever written. She said that she thought that was so. She wrote it on a rainy

Sunday afternoon in March, sitting in her living room on a sofa. She said, "I wrote and wrote, and said to myself, 'I don't know if anyone else will like this, but I like it...'"

McIntosh read Kincaid's "Girl" and her own version of it.

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