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Work in Progress

Feeling Like a Fraud, Part III: Finding Authentic Ways of Coming into Conflict

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Work in Progress

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About the Author

Peggy McIntosh, Ph.D., is Associate Director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women and Founder and Co-Director of the National S.E.E.D. Project on Inclusive Curriculum (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity). She consults widely in the United States and internationally with elementary, secondary, and higher education faculty who are creating gender-fair and multicultural curricula. A graduate of Radcliffe College and Harvard University, with degrees in English, Dr. McIntosh has been awarded honorary doctorates in Humane Letters by Augustana College and the College of Saint Catherine and has taught at the Brearley School, Harvard University, Trinity College (Washington, D.C.), the University of Denver, the University of Durham (England), and Wellesley College. Her many studies on systems of unearned privilege have been influential in a range of fields.

Abstract

This talk, a sequel to *Feeling Like a Fraud, Parts One and Two* (Stone Center Work in Progress, No. 18, 1985, and No. 37, 1989), tracks the author's search for ways of coming into conflict which do not bring up feelings of fraudulence. It analyzes her exploration of what feel like more authentic methods of approaching contentious interactions. One key discovery is that she feels most authentic fighting the idea that life is conflict, i.e., life is war. Another is that intense class, gender, and race strife go on in her psyche, which serves as a micro-battlefield for macro-systems in the society. The analysis is placed in context of a theoretical model of double and conflicting structures 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 coming into traditional conflict is made easier by taking the complex and pluralistic home-sense seriously. If the self is plural, then conflict may nearly always be a simplification of it.

Thank you to the Stone Center for inviting me to do yet another rumination on "Feeling Like a Fraud." This is the third in a series which I began with talks on the same subject in 1984 and 1989. I respect the work of the Stone Center and have been delighted to be included in this Colloquium series over the years.

I want to tell you how I came to this subject of *Feeling Like a Fraud*. I heard seventeen women in a row apologize as they came to the mike during a general session of a conference. Courtesy of the Johnson Foundation, we had been flown in at great expense to the Wingspread Center near Racine, Wisconsin to talk about the subject of *Women in Educational Leadership*. Supposedly we were all educational leaders, and indeed many in the group were college presidents and deans, or were leaders of projects which were considered to be substantial. Yet seventeen women in a row started their remarks with words like "You may not agree with this, but," or "I don't know, but," or "This is just a brief comment that I want to make," or "I only want to say one thing. . ." At first I was very upset and impatient with these disclaimers, and also bewildered. If we were such leaders, where was our confidence? And I felt, "Women, we will never make it in the boardrooms of the United States if we can't stand at the podium and deliver the goods." And then, because I was working at a Center for Research on Women, where we try to put women's lives and experiences at the core of what we look at, I wondered, "What are these seventeen women really saying with these disclaimers?"

I thought it might be a way of trying to create a relationship with the next person, as if to say, "You are real; I am real; you may not agree with this, but my aim is not to lord it over you with my superior position here at the podium with the amplified voice. And we can talk later." It occurred to me that the traditional aim of much public speaking, deriving from Greek rhetorical arts, is that I, the speaker, try to

persuade you, the listener, of my point of view, no matter what your point of view may be. So I thought that in this sense, which Sally Gearheart has named as potentially coercive, rhetoric can tear the fabric. Perhaps what these women were trying to do with their disclaimers was to strengthen the fabric before it could be torn by rhetoric.

And I came back from that conference and thought that maybe each of these women, standing alone up there, isolated, at the microphone, felt like a fraud. I knew that feeling. Perhaps we didn't want that isolation, and that sense of being above others. So I wrote a little yellow memo to Jean Baker Miller on a "Wellesley College internal memo" sheet. "To: Jean Baker Miller; From: Peggy McIntosh; Jean, Do you ever feel like a fraud?" I got back a little yellow sheet, another "Wellesley College internal memo." I still have it in my file. "To: Peggy McIntosh; From: Jean Baker Miller; I feel like a fraud all the time." And I thought, OK, if this woman who has mounted the major challenge to Freud in our time, and is loved all over the country already, and feels like a fraud all the time, I think there's a topic here. So I told Jean I thought there was a topic, and she invited me to give a talk in 1984 on what I was thinking about feelings of fraudulence.

For the first talk, I made a Moebius strip. I was trying to say two things. It's deplorable if some of us feel fraudulent more often than others. I wrote a kind of fight song on one side of the strip. "WE MUST NOT LET THEM MAKE US FEEL LIKE FRAUDS!" That can apply to any "them," or any "us," in cases where some are made to feel less entitled than others to a voice, to recognition, to power. But then, because I felt it might be deeply wise to feel like a fraud when you are surrounded by fraudulent forms, I presented a different point of view. Maybe it's not that we can't stand at the podium, maybe it's that we can't stand the podium. And in that other mood, on the back of the strip I wrote, "LET US CONTINUE TO SPOT FRAUDULENCE IN THE PUBLIC ROLES WE ARE ASKED TO PLAY," by which I meant the roles of expert, leader, superior, or even competent person. I wanted to show that, for me, both of the exhortations are part of the same analysis. So I configured them as a Moebius strip, following the Austrian mathematician Moebius, who discovered this marvel: If you pull together the two ends of a strip so that they meet, and then twist one and fasten the ends together, you've created a one-sided strip, in which you can pass your thumb over "both sides," yet it won't change sides. I wanted to see both of these messages as part of the same analysis. (As I pull the strip along, my thumb is

going over each side in turn, without changing sides.) The rest of that first talk elaborated on the proposition that feelings of fraudulence can be seen plausibly as both deplorable and applaudable, in different contexts.

For the second talk five years later, I explored the question, "How come you know you're feeling like a fraud?" I wondered what inner mechanism lets a person know they're feeling fake, or uncomfortable. What is this baseline knowledge? I posited and tried to identify in myself what I called a "home-self" that is made uncomfortable by being called out of itself into arbitrarily created systems of awards and acclaim or expectations about its worth. And at the end of that paper, I described the "home-self" I had identified as providing my own "baseline" sense of authenticity.

During that exploration, I had traveled through the house of my psyche, looking at various rooms in which I feel like a fraud sometimes, in different ways, and I had decided to contrast the parts of the house in which I feel most fraudulent with those in which I feel most like my home-self. My conclusion to that paper read this way:

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 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.

That was the second paper. One of my favorite parts in visiting the house of my psyche was dipping into a small greenhouse within our house, in which I breathed in the smell of growing things and realized that to help plants thrive, you reduce competition among them, and that the point of the conservatory is not competition but growth and development of plants.

My other favorite part was in going upstairs, where there is a "Madwoman in the Attic." She has Moebius strips all over her room. They're covered in angry red writing. One of them, for example, says, "I MAY NOT KNOW WHO I AM BUT YOU SURE AS

HELL DON'T, YOU GODDAMN PHONIES, SO DON'T YOU TELL ME WHO I AM." And when I go up to her room to clean up the red french fries containers lying about, she says things like, "I'm here for you." And I'm thinking, "Thanks a lot. It's very hard on me and my whole family when I have to take care of you." Her room is a terrible mess. Every now and then, she throws down a little poem, wrapped up as a spitball, from the third floor to the second. And if, in my imagination, I pick up this wet thing and drop it into the wastebasket, she shouts, "I'll kill you if you don't read my poems!" But if I pry it open and try to have a look at what it says, she says, "Don't you mess with my things!" She harangues me when I give her attention, and when I don't. And the morning of that second "Fraud" talk, she had thrown down a spitball poem. Now actually I wrote it on the steering wheel of my car, stuck in traffic on the Southeast Expressway that afternoon, but it does have to do with the "home-self" as I had defined it, and it came through my pencil like automatic writing. The Madwoman wrote about a world beyond the fraudulence in competition:

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.

Ten years after I wrote the second paper, it came to me more and more, as a flood subject, that it was difficult to bring what I felt was my home-self into the world of conflict. This is not entirely true. My work in the SEED Project, which I founded 14 years ago and have co-directed with Emily Style ever since, challenges the world of education—the world of

formal schooling. However, it does so obliquely, by enabling educators to start their own faculty development discussions led by themselves in their schools. Some probing questions like how well the curriculum is including all students, and what sets of values are being conveyed by the curriculum, are directly provocative, and I experience the SEED Project as a deeply radical undertaking. But it is not simply conflictual, coming from an attack position. It involves groups of people doing much inner searching based on the premise that we are all part of what we are trying to change. It seems to me to fit with my home-self in being a program that empowers others to do work on their terms, and on their turf. The SEED Project is very speculative, conversational, ruminative, imaginative, and often transformative, in the way it is felt, the way it is constructed, and in its results. It hosts healing conflict without self-righteousness or simplicity.

I also have little difficulty in coming into conflict in context of the many public talks I give and the consulting work I do. When I am in a room with the actual bodies of other people, I feel less vulnerable to being misunderstood myself or dismissed or taken for a fool. I can recognize or add or play with the nuances which keep conflict complicated in a way that feels authentic to me.

But when I am acting on my own and feeling a need to come into conflict, then I have a very hard time doing so, so I suggested to Jean that I do yet another talk on "Feeling Like a Fraud," but that she let me think about it for a year. During that year, I have been watching my own processes and testing ways of coming into conflict to see which feel comparatively more authentic to me. My talk tonight will end with some of the difficulties of coming into conflict when my home-self feels multivariate and complex, whereas conflict is usually staged in a reduced world of this versus that, me versus you, them versus us, taut, dire, and frightening. And as I will also sketch out, my non-home self as defined by the rest of the world fears to lose power and its sense of security and good reputation by coming into conflict.

In order to illustrate some of my findings, I will first map here the interior landscape that I learned from my earliest schooling, which forms the backdrop of most of what I have realized and put into written form in the last twenty years. What I am going to draw is five frames of mind, superimposed on a two-part psychological and sociological structure which helps to shed light on my fears of coming into conflict as an individual. My fears include these thoughts: my home-self is hopeless at fighting; I was taught others

should do this; I can't do it; I'm bad at it; I'm not a warrior, I'm a woman; I'm a loser; I'm not courageous; I'm afraid to take sides; I hate to do anything bad to people; I hate it when they do anything bad to me. I don't want people to think I am a bad person. And conflict is too simple for the life I am trying to lead; life is more complicated. Conflict is damaging; I want to avoid it. I was told to avoid playground bullies. Why take them on? They just want to smash us up. And look at the conflict in the world already. Why should I add to it? The conflict in movies, in the news, on TV; the violence in ads, rap songs, textbooks, academic language: everything as a contest. Why should I join the fighting?

While I was writing that, I noticed that the brand name on the very pencil I was using was "Invader." This increased my feelings of fraudulence: I'm hopeless at this contentious world; I'm going to stay out of conflict; it is not for me, it is not about me. And of course all of you who are psychoanalysts here, or psychologists, know that such thoughts come from somebody who is filled with conflict! I didn't quite register on that as essential self-description, but I think that my feelings of fraudulence show the truth of it.

All of that train of avoidance and fear derives from what I think was put into my mind in early childhood. It is a picture of the world which I carry with me still, and every one of its five frames of mind, which I have called Interactive Phases, contains different versions of the role and nature of conflict.

In grade school, these are the functions of personality which I was taught were important: being right, being in control, being very exact in our answers, doing our work alone, without help from or to any other child, and turning into a specialist some day. This was presaged in school by being, say, class clown, or "most artistic," having some little specialty which set us apart from others. These are the functions of personality which schooling rewarded in us, and these are the psychological properties which I felt were most important. We were told we must try to move toward "the top" of our propensities, lest we fall toward "the bottom." What was at the bottom was not spelled out very well. What was clear was that we should move toward "the top." Stasis was not all right. I'm talking about my schooling in suburban New Jersey public schools in the 1930s and 40s. We were given the slogan "Better and better every day, in every way." So being yourself was not okay. The assumption was that you were not going to grow and develop as a matter of course. You had to improve all the time or you would be a loser. This made life scary.

In math, you got it right, or you got it wrong. And

in those days, you wouldn't bother to show your work because your train of thought was not what was being graded. In spelling, you got it right, or you got it wrong. Right/wrong; yes/no; success/failure; quick learner/slow learner; either/or. Either you climbed toward the top, or you fell toward the bottom. Your sense of life was polarized, and put into vertical terms. "Win lest you lose," was the hidden ethos. The territory of the losers was much larger than that of the winners, so there had to be competition for the limited space at the "top." There was a nagging sense in lots of us children, male and female, that we were not doing quite well enough, ever, to be "top," and that other people would be "top."

Having drawn that psychological picture of vertical functions of personality a couple of decades ago, I then turned it into a sociological picture of the institutions of the culture, because I realized that my pinnacled psychological structure felt as though it were mapped onto the pinnacles of the public institutions. Wherever there's an institutional form that has a lot of decision-making ability, power, money, and few people at the top, that's a pinnacle, whether of government, or school, or business, or the military, or law, or medicine, or the institutional forms of the church, or whatever. I felt these pinnacles had ladder-like structures going up them, and the rungs on the ladders were the markers by which you can answer the question, "How am I doing?" The rungs are pay, promotion, press, praise, prizes, prestige, and all together, power. Then I knew why I had been so anxious in school though, like many of you, I had "done very well in school." It was so hard to reach the pinnacles, and most people would be shouldered off the ladders and be losers, and the space at the top was so narrow, no wonder the competition was so nerve-racking.

And those who were at the so-called top could look down and know how isolated they were, how far away from most, and also how surely they would be toppled themselves by those coming up. Reconstructing those impressions, I could understand how I was made nervous by the pyramids of the school and the culture, and the sense that I should head for the so-called top, or support those who were pinnacled. And yet we were in World War II when I was a child, and it seemed at that time, and it was true, that Hitler made the war against him seem morally defensible. So "kill or be killed" did seem like one law of life to me. Yet it seemed to me too terrible to be the only law of life. The war was too simple for my view of things, and I remember feeling sorry for German and Japanese people. I felt frightened on my own

behalf, not wanting to kill, or to be killed.

I think what I was divining then was that I was connected within my psyche and in the society to what I was being taught to hate and fear. Traditional conflict implies I am not connected with what I am conflicting with. But I am connected with it. Armies need to train soldiers to break the feeling of connection with those they kill. Soldiers have to be rigorously taught to disconnect with whole groups of people. One lesson I learned by participating in the work of the A.K. Rice Institute is that when someone in an unguided discussion said something, I was likely to relate to some part of what they had said. It seemed to speak for a little part of me, even if it was in opposition to something that had been said before. That fellow-feeling makes conflict of the either/or kind seem too simple, and I know now better than I did as a child why war terrified me so much, not just for the deaths it brought but for the torn fabrics in every part of the psyche.

When I was a child, the role of killer was not being asked/required of girls directly. We were merely meant to support the boys as heroes. I realized my exemption from their masculine war-training most acutely one day in fourth grade when I got home from school and felt enormous relief that I could go indoors, while my brother had to stay out of doors and to play "Guns," in the neighborhood. If he went indoors he would be considered a sissy. The game of Guns was something the boys had to play. The only script was "Bang, bang, you're dead!" There were three groups, the Germans, the Japs, and the Yanks. And everybody wanted to be a Yank. The boys "played guns" from behind garages and barns and houses.

I remember feeling so grateful that I could go indoors and play with my stuffed animals. What I did with my stuffed animals was ritual and obsessive, and I see it now as highly symbolic: I married my stuffed animals to each other every afternoon. Moreover, I married different animals to different other animals every afternoon. I see that as diversity! I think that as a girl, and indoors, I was trying to make the civilization that was the opposite of the wars outside, in the neighborhood and the world. I would gather my mother's flowers if any were in bloom, and put them on the piano: beauty. I would play the piano: harmony. And then I would conduct the ceremonies on the altar of the piano: union. I didn't think of it as sexual union. I imagine Freud would say, "Yes, my dear, you did." In any case, the boys were suffering out of doors in their "win lest you lose/kill-or-be-killed" mode of training for what was (and still is) seen as masculinity. It was through no fault of their

own that they obsessively played Guns. It was projected onto them. Making domestic peace was projected onto girls.

I don't use the word "projection" quite as psychologists do. I see a projection as a visiting on to people of an image of what they must be, whether or not they're actually emitting any data that would support that image. The projection onto Caucasian men that they will thrive in this world of "win lest you lose/kill or be killed" has made them suffer horribly. And I believe that the projection is quite false. I believe we all have in us the capacity to make and live in pecking orders. It shouldn't have been projected racially, ethnically, class-wise, or sex-wise.

Below the fault line in my diagram is the world that is projected on to the rest of us. I see it in very humdrum terms, below the world of win/lose: either/or. Above the fault line, the grain of the rock is vertical; below the fault line, horizontal. It's hard to describe the life below the fault line because it is not about winning, and most description I have been schooled to do in my life involves working at an apex—developing my best talent or putting forward my key point, making my strongest argument, recovering my most precious memories, or defending my most original idea; in other words, prioritizing.

Below the fault line there is little prioritizing. It is the area of daily upkeep and maintenance and the making and mending of the world. It is very humdrum, it holds the world together, it is healing, and it is beyond winning and losing. My most personal metaphor for it is dishwashing. You wash the dishes, you wash the dishes, and you wash the dishes, and you don't win. And you're really crazy if you think you can win. And just as I begin to say, "Hey, the liberal arts curriculum never taught us we would need to wash"—it's time to wash the dishes. And I can't even start to write the theoretical essay on this before it's time to wash the dishes. Here's another example from my white suburban life in the late twentieth century. You wait for the repair person, you wait for the repair person, you wait for the repair person. The repair person comes, and doesn't bring the right part, and you are already late for work, but you do not use your top-down, pinnacled rhetorical skill to tell him where you feel he belongs on the ladders of competence because you need your plumbing back and he needs his money. And liberal arts education has in no way taught you how to deal with this moment. Not even psychology courses, though in psychology courses which have been influenced by Stone Center work, you might find some sense of how to engage relationally with the

repair person in this situation.

Or agriculturally, you plant the seed, you water it, perhaps fertilize it, perhaps pray over it, perhaps weed it, and if you're lucky, you harvest, or others do. And if you're lucky, you bring food to your table, or buy food. But you will never have the "mega-meal" and be done with eating. The agricultural cycle must be repeated again and again, or life will not go on. So here is the making and mending of the personal fabric, the agricultural fabric, the kitchen fabric. In the pedagogical fabric: you talk to a student; you talk to the same student the next day about the same thing; you talk to the same student the next day about the same thing. The aim is not to win, but to stay in decent relationship until, say, the end of the semester, or the end of the year, or until graduation, or until death do you part. If you're lucky, the students keep coming back, and you see that the achievement wasn't that you got the better of them, or they got the better of you, for here they are again, sitting on a step saying, "Remember when you said such and such, and I said such and such," and you are still in relation.

And family life at its best is like this. You don't set the children up in a row in the morning and ask which will be the winner and which the loser. You try to work it out so that the growth and development of the whole family is provided for as well as possible. For parents, it has to do once again with what Jean Baker Miller named as finding one's development through the development of others. And the development is more through survival than through what the world calls "achievement." The ethos isn't "win lest you lose," but rather, "you work for the decent survival of all, for therein lies your own best chance for survival." When I first began to speak in this way in 1981 and '82, some listeners concluded that I had been tainted by California New Age thought, or was sentimental or Communist. But with the disappearance of the ozone layer, and of so much clean water and clean air, this has stopped seeming like such a "pie in the sky" ethos, and people in many places are working for language beyond "either/or" to express an ideal of sustainable balance in the mind and soul and social and biological fabrics.

I believe that beyond the making and the mending of the domestic fabric and the educational fabric are further worlds of necessary relationality. The world of sex doesn't go well when the aim is to win, the world of love doesn't exist when the aim is to win, and the world of friendship is sorely strained when the aim is to win. We see this when too great an adrenaline rush and a will toward winning breaks up friendships in individual sports. To me, in addition to containing the

worlds of sex, love, and friendship, this world below the fault line includes the enormous globe of the complex, multifaceted soul in each of us, which has in it all the experiences which have moved us and become a part of ourselves. And anybody who is even half-way awake in the late twentieth century, and has had the kinds of experiences we have had, has a complex, multifaceted, and I would say multicultural soul, comprised of connections and understandings that have had deep, deep positive meanings for us. And these rays which I sketch, emanating from the globe of the multifaceted soul, are the connections to everything in the universe which we cannot see, but which gives meaning to us. And we would be crazy to try to master our divinities.

I see this soul, beyond the world of winning and losing, as a site which can enable a blessed solitude, by contrast with the loneliness of the climb up the ladders. Some people listening to me have told me that the climbs up the ladders are not as lonely as I think they are. They say that in teamwork, the whole team strives together. I see this, but I also keep noticing that you are fired from the team alone. It may be called teamwork, but in the long run, does it feel durably supportive? I feel the evidence is mixed.

In any case, I am quite convinced of the complexity of the "solitary" soul and its possibility for myriad connections, and I have felt and seen many instances of loneliness and pain on the ladders, especially the pain of getting your fingers smashed by the person whose rung you are trying to climb up on, or smashing others' if you feel they threaten your ascent.

This business of climbing the ladders was projected on to white males. And the business of life below the fault line was projected on whatever males were considered to be "lower caste," together with all women designated to do the work behind the scenes, making and mending the fabrics and doing what Jean has called the emotional housekeeping of the world, as well as the physical housekeeping. I believe that the sectors above and below the fault line are in all of us by nature. We all have it in us biologically to make and live in pecking orders, and we all have it in us biologically to live in symbiotic relationships within biodiverse habitats. If we were to go out into the grounds of this institution, in any two square yards we would find the land teeming with organisms whose main aim is not to wipe each other out. And except within the human world, there's not a biological effort to create a master power, a superpower, a dominator organism for the planet. And in fact, this is not the main human preoccupation. We engage in the

symbiotic relational life below the fault line all the time within the mechanisms we've designed for our survival. For example, by stopping at a traffic light so as not to crash into someone else. We live symbiotically most of the time. Just noticing what is happening and fitting in so that one doesn't make new dangers for oneself or others is a symbiotic way of living. I don't have very well developed words for life below the fault line. It is the life in which we make our way day by day without doing damage, insofar as we can, making and mending the fabrics, not necessarily getting ahead but getting through. I believe it is also, spiritually, what the theologian Paul Tillich called "the ground of our being."

It was my own world below the fault line which fueled my interest in asking about conflict. Couldn't I reclaim this part of myself as an adjunct, an actual aid in undertaking conflict and fearing it less, maybe even feeling I could do it well? And couldn't it help me to understand climbing the ladders better, and to resist feelings of being *reduced* by competition? I wanted to be able to come into conflict using my home-self. Usually, when you come into conflict, only one aspect of you is likely to be marshaled against one aspect of what you are opposing. But I feel like one of those balls on the old electric typewriter which had all the letters on it. I feel multifaceted. There's more to me that could come in contact with the paper than the one letter at a time which in the old technology actually hit the paper. And there is more paper than gets marked by the print of that one letter. And I felt many more resources in me which might be useful in conflict than I had been taught I could use, especially as a female of my class and place and race who was not meant to be in conflict to begin with. So—what would it require for me to see what was oversimplified in what I had been taught to develop in myself? And oversimplified in what and how and with what parts of myself I had been schooled to come into conflict, where that had been allowed at all?

To reflect on these questions required some self-rescue, some coming into conflict with acculturated self-annihilation. I saw that the pinnacles of authority in what I call the Phase One part of my personality were womanless and all white. I had neither studied women nor noticed that I hadn't, and this phase of oblivion is still in me and is a happy handmaiden of, or adornment for, wealthy white male authorities. My Phase Two personality had studied and noticed exceptional Others, who were presented as unlike their kind and therefore worthy of study, and so I had admitted to my awareness "exceptional" men of color, or women of any color, who were allowed to occupy

minor pinnacles in the scale of importance. This worked to awaken an "ambitious" part of me, and did not really change the oblivion to patterns of subservience in the Phase One personality. In Phase Three, I experienced life at the "bottom." This was about the Issues. In this frame of mind, I recognized sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, colonialism, and other grievances and kinds of oppression. The lines were drawn and the sense of conflict was a stark one: winners vs. losers, victimized vs. victimizers, oppressors vs. the oppressed. Here I could take sides, as a woman, though the internal and external monitors from Phases One and Two reacted harshly to my coming into conflict at all over issues of any kind.

In Phase One, my mind had assumed that conflict is necessary to keep down the "lower orders"; in Phase Two, my mind licensed competition against the "lower orders" so as get into an assimilated, or accepted state with the "authorities." In Phase Three, my mind took on a feistiness of going to war for my and others' dignity, self-respect, rights, money, property. This was important growth, but it often made me feel like a fraud, too. For Phase Three casts all of life as war, and oversimplifies in this way. The oppositional sense made my mind and heart defensive, angry, righteous or self-righteous, more socially and politically useful than before, but feeling always oversimplified, and cowardly at fighting, feeling that I did it badly, and wanting to capitulate early on.

Below the fault line, in Phase Four, life looks much more complicated than in the realms in which the vertical political axis underlies thought and feeling. In the lateral realm, I feel we are, to use a phrase of Leroy Moore, bodies in the body of the world. We all have our stories, and they are all complex. There are no single issues and no single identities. In defining this realm, I go from issues to experience. Sometimes when people ask, "What do you do?" and I say I do multicultural women's studies, they say something like "Oh I'm sympathetic to all of your issues." And I feel impatient because issues do not constitute my life, experience does. I'm interested in experience in all its complexities. Below the fault line, we are all in it together: here is my Virginia Grandmother, and here is her Black cook, and here am I, and my children and grandchild, and here is Thomas Jefferson, and here are my mother and sister and I visiting the gardens at Monticello, and here are the plants and diseases of the gardens, and we all have our complex interwoven stories.

Below the fault line, when I am criticized or critiqued, I partly credit the critique, not simply

because of internalized oppression or self-hatred, as in Phase Three, but because a little of the complex multivariate “me” has an imaginative and empathetic affiliation with the integrity of the opposer. Simply “answering back” is not representative of me. I am reminded of a dean in a Boston area university who said to a frustrated young faculty member, “Your role is to give me your ideas about what you want to change. My role is to give you my ideas about the contexts for change. Don’t let my role interfere with your role.” One of my roles is to see how I am seen and not to try to do all the defining; another role is to ignore how I am seen and try to do the defining. I hold both roles and use both.

I am looking for a better balance between the vertically positioned capacities of Phase One, Two, and Three which are natural to us all, and the lateral capacities of Phase Four which are also natural to us all. And I see Phase Five as getting beyond the projections, and furthering a more balanced development in all people of both our potential for making and living in pecking orders, and our potential for living in symbiotic relationships within biodiverse habitats which seem to me to be both in us and around us.

So how does each of these five internal frames of mind bear on my history of coming into conflict? In Phase One, I was a cheerleader for the football team of my high school. In Phase One I tucked myself up under the aegis of the powerful; I cheered for the football players who were the high school heroes. I had two problems, however, as a cheerleader. First, I never really learned the rules of football, and second, I didn’t really care who won. Or rather, I felt sorry for the losers. So I never quite got into the spirit of either/or: them vs. us. In Phase One, life is war. Men are the fighters. They fight to keep what they have already won, and women, together with men of color, can apparently be sheltered by the powers that have accrued to the heroes, but only on their terms. We can taste some of that power perhaps through patronage or marriage or cultural assimilation. We can partake of the so-called “top.” As women, we can do sexual favors, we can make ourselves useful, we can do the work which sometimes results in praise: “We could not have done it without you.” But we must not fight, and we don’t come into conflict with those we serve if we want to keep their semblance of support. While we “cheerlead” for the apparent protector, we do not register on the statistics that show men are actually not such great protectors of women, or which indicate that, for example, marriage serves men better than women, economically, psychologically, and in terms of

physical health.

In Phase Two, exceptional “Others” make their way toward the top. The spotlight is shifted a little lower on the mountain, and here is Elizabeth Cady Stanton, scrambling up the rocks. She’s admired. What an effort she is making! What a fighter! In this phase, or frame of mind, I work to win power that women have previously been denied. I work hard for the grades or the grants, and tried to keep what I feel I have earned, and also feel pressure to keep hold of my rung, to see that other contenders for the same rung are kept lower. In this frame of mind, I also feel the inclination to distance myself from noisier or more publicly active feminists: those who are “down below,” and who talk in a more outspoken way, or shout, about “their issues.” As a Phase Two achiever, I was trained to identify against them, and to wish they would shut up, for they endanger my climb to the top. In this scenario, I come up against the glass ceiling but also do not want to lose favor with those who put it there. In the Phase Two frame of mind, I wish to be patronized by, but not opposed to, authority, so the people whom the authorities point out to me as lower, and undesirable, become a component of my perceived enemy. This is misplaced enmity. It is self-damaging enmity which results from being caught in the oppositional simplicities of Phases One, Two, and Three. But in the Phase Two frame of mind, I don’t realize that, so I keep my distance from those below me on the ladder, and convince myself that I may “get ahead” because I am as good as the best of those who are “above” me, and better than the worst of them. And I feel competitive with those who are further “down,” racially, in terms of social class, or in any other way.

In this frame of mind, I am vulnerable to forgetting that I am seen as a woman, which is a big mistake. I think it is a very ignorant set of teachings and advice which tell women, “Go for it. You’re just a person, you’re entitled to fame and fortune and respect.” If we make the mistake of not knowing that we will be seen as women, and that that carries consequences, then we go into our futures alone, and at the first set-back, or each successive set-back, we must take it personally and internalize it as our own failure. I think it’s very debilitating to give young girls the message, “You can be anything you want to be.” I tell them, “No, you can’t be Pope, for starters.” I try to give them a double message from Phases Four and Three realities: You are Wonderful, and you will not be seen that way. I think this is good preparation for living confidently while seeing systemically also.

If you climb toward the glass ceiling, presenting

yourself as a loner, apolitical, outside of the systems of power, you will probably not realize that those at the so-called top do not have your interests at heart. And you will make common cause with the authorities, against those who are more like yourself but seen as lower down. You will present yourself as a new kind of winner. I know that feeling and can play that role. In my project work, it feels like constant competition and conflict in order to make the case with donors, getting the grant we need and keeping the grant, always somewhat uncomfortable relative to issues of power, feeling fortunate to be funded, but uncomfortable with the need always to justify the work as more “outstanding” than others’. The hype can make me feel like a fraud, even though at the same time I feel we do very important and effective work.

In the Phase Three issues-oriented frame of mind, life feels like war, for sure. And I know it not from the top, but because now I’m on the bottom. I see and feel it as conflict, among the abused and victimized losers making war against the winners; the have-nots against the haves. War for what? For survival, resources, voice, influence, protection, respect, opportunity, influence. For justice, for dignity, and freedom. For a decent life for everyone. I feel it as a battle and take part through lobbying, demonstrations, petitions, donations, workshops, meetings and projects. I feel in Phase Three that I am coming into conflict with huge systems of injustice and also with what feel like two kinds of embodied enemies: Phase One power-holders, oblivious or not, and Phase Two go-getters. In Phase Three, I tend to see men unfairly as a single group making war on women. And I may see men unfairly as a uniform group projecting onto women, especially feminists, that we make war on men, and that we make war on the natural state of things. This kind of picture is too simple, when the real problem is overarching power systems, such as patriarchy. Phase Three issues-oriented work is simpler than my feelings and observations, simpler than actual lives, though brave and truly intelligent in recognizing broad power-related patterns. It is the phase in which I get angry, bitter, frustrated, and sometimes eloquent. It fuels a lot of hard work.

Much of what I do in the area of Phase Three issues is complexified by the fact that I benefit from power in several systems of privilege: white privilege, heterosexual privilege, class privilege. In those respects I get power from the existence of Phase One and Phase Two assumptions and frameworks for social and economic life. I can’t take the moral high ground in these areas, except by coming into conflict

with individualistic, capitalist, and white cultural accounts of deservedness, which I have done in my papers on privilege systems. I know that in doing my work, I have benefited from money and class and power that I inherited from others. And getting the balance right between knowing what I earned and knowing what I didn’t earn is difficult, not just for me, but for thousands of others who are also trying to think more systemically as we assess our past assumptions, behaviors, and gains or losses.

I feel that my life took on new energy when I got into the issues of Phase Three, but I notice that sometimes the discussion takes on too much of a Phase Three flavor after one of my public talks, and then I try to steer it into more nuanced territory in which the blame is not put on Them about whom some speaker in the audience feels morally outraged. This relates to my own discomfort at coming into simple conflict, when I know myself as being situated in many locations, all of which are part of me. I try to reflect to the speaker something beyond blame, but afterward I may feel like a fraud whether I added fuel to the fire or tried to damp it down. For any speaker’s rage usually speaks to a part of me.

In Phase Four, my sense of the world begins to cohere. Phase Four awareness is based in experience. I’m much less ambivalent. I feel I am involved in the making and mending of the fabric of society and of thought. My aim is beyond winning and losing; I am *exerting* myself working for the decent survival for all, for there lies my own best chance for survival. And here I can use and develop the both/and thinking projected onto lower caste people, which I believe is endemically, biologically in all of us. I shelter and foster and admire and enjoy growing things, and there is a more organic and even relaxed feel to my conflicts. The main aim of biological organisms is not to eliminate each other. They do give pain to other organisms, but there’s no superpower thinking, no effort to get into a position mastering the world. I feel much more relish in the day-to-day activities of Phase Four. Conflict recedes and exertion takes on. I play my roles and others play theirs, and it is not necessary to declare a winner. My main projects and consulting jobs have this feel. I will lead the discussion for an hour before I give the talk. I co-create dozens of kinds of interactive exercises. I also work with two or three co-leaders or with 14 planning staff, or with 40 people at a conference which is chiefly interactive. This kind of event gives me joy, because the conflicts we experience are owned as part of our psyches, as we do inner work on the myriad ways we were schooled to

not take ourselves or each other seriously. And when we do take ourselves and each other seriously across inner and outer lines we were taught not to cross, this feels like a good dream.

Since I believe that the capacity to be conflict-oriented exists in all of us, and the capacity to be laterally-oriented at the same time exists in all of us, I envision Phase Five, in which it is possible to experience a balance between the vertical and the horizontal propensities in each of us, though for U.S. society it may take 100, 200—who knows how many years?—to create wide awareness of and marked commitment to this possibility. Already, however, I glimpse or experience the balance now and then, especially among people not immersed in the media, in formal schooling, or in making a lot of money, but using their imaginations to create better balances as they use life's resources.

The media strongly sell us win/lose thinking, and given something violent to write about, or to show on TV, or to make movies about, moguls will chose it, and sell things that way, and also I think aggrandize their sense of being male in that way. Right now there are seas of white male conflict corresponding to dominant white male psychological structure in society as a whole. And no wonder our so-called leaders, and no wonder the so-called "misfits" in school, act violently. And without our recognizing it, the jocks in the schools are licensed by adults to act the same way, and cause some of the violence they can later self-righteously distance themselves from, as in the case of Columbine High School. In my Phase Four self, what I come into conflict with is precisely this state of things, and the way I do it is to co-invent alternatives which leave me and others moved. They increase our ability to share testimony, our ability to be respected, our ability to relate to ourselves and others plurally, and our ability to make intellectual and social change. I help to make safe spaces in schools for teachers to talk about how their own teaching comes from the basic messages that they received about life-as-war, and how they might change their teaching to bring into the fabric the students' and their own intellectual, emotional, social, and political lives, so that education includes all of us and makes us know that we and our knowledge belong. This is a Phase Four use of transformed conflictual energy, in the service of plural survival.

As I watched myself coming into conflict over the last year, within all of these frames of mind in my psyche, I came to this conclusion: the conflict in which I feel most authentic is the conflict in which I oppose the idea that conflict is all there is to life. I come into

conflict most authentically with the idea that life is only war, and that conflict is the law of life, and that our main relationships are conflictual. And in correspondence with that outer feeling, I come into conflict with the idea that my identity is single, simple, and unitary, and must make war on the not-me inside or outside. I learned that I come into conflict authentically with the idea that my "self" has only one identity. I also conflict with the sense that the outer world is about conflict and the inner world is about peace. No, the world I feel as "inner" is partly about conflict. And the world I experience as "outer" has conflict in it, but is only partly about conflict. I have found I can insist on this. In fact, I get angry about this, and harangue people about it. Whenever I "lose control" in the presence of audiences, I find in retrospect it was likely to have been on this theme. And I feel I can get angry about it without feeling I'm necessarily going to shatter, humiliate myself, or endanger my future. I feel authority, as well as authenticity, in saying conflict is not all there is. And I have learned I can say this even to some who were capital-letter Authorities for me in the past.

So paradoxically, I use the warring part of me to say that war is not all there is, that there is something larger around it. War is in me, but not the only thing in me or anyone else. This recognition tied many things together for me. This is why I had felt sorry for the other football team, and for the Germans and Japanese, and for the men who are so damaged by the teaching they receive that they are warriors, and then sentimentalized by being told that they are nice guys when they know they have been trained and rewarded for being competent killers and haters of parts of themselves. They and we bear the burden, the hypocrisy, and the consequences of this.

The world of conflict or war is partially present in all of us, I believe. And why? It is an element of survival, to live in and make pecking orders. But I believe Darwin was misrepresented badly when he was taken to be writing *only* about pecking orders. In his famous passage on "the tangled bank," biodiversity abounds. Social Darwinists who want to use Darwin, and do use him, to justify capitalism have sketched him as a scientist recording only the ways in which organisms compete for themselves. He is misrepresented as the discoverer of "Nature red in tooth and claw." Darwin was not about that only. In his home, he kept earthworms, studying them for decades. He was not studying their conflicts, he was studying their lives, observing their behavior. He's misrepresented when he is heard to conclude that competition is the law of life. Growth and

development are also laws of life.

I believe that residing too much in Phase Four stories of experience can be sentimental if it ignores the power systems which have influenced our experiences. And I believe that staying just with the Phase Three issues has a different and equally important drawback, which is that it produces the same story again and again: the bad guys fight the good guys. This feels too simple for most actual lives; it is so bipolar. I think the complexly informed soul with all its stories, understanding itself as having been shaped by many intricacies of society, is a soul gathering knowledge and wisdom. I feel most authentic myself between Phases Three and Four, going back and forth across the fault line, trying to recognize both abstract issues and lived experiences.

I also know that the vertical schemes that I grew up with are still in me and will never go away; they make me afraid of conflict, of getting out of line, afraid of not being seen as the good female, or “feminine,” yet unwilling to just accept the authority of winners, either. When I was a child, competitive games scared me. “Checkmate” in chess terrified me, and even in checkers, the sound of that victorious “clack, clack, clack” of the checkers piling up seemed to me to carry a gloating sound. In tennis, I liked rallying. Once we began to keep score, in the win/lose system, I didn’t want to be a loser. But in the lateral, affiliative way, I didn’t want to create a loser. Sukie Magraw, an instructor here at Wellesley, had a fascinating observation related to this. She found that students who had just played squash against a visiting team didn’t want to be in the company of the person they had just played, whether they had won or lost. I read this in terms of my Phase Theory; they did not want to be a loser, but did not want to *create* a loser. I read it relationally, and thought that it tied in with their being women, schooled to the rules of taking care of others’ feelings, yet now also breaking into the win/lose athletic world in which they would not be “nice” and give away games. This made them uncomfortable all around.

Walking in the mountains with my family as a child, I liked the first sensation of being together on the trail. But a certain winning streak in certain family members meant that they got ahead on the trail, and had a tendency to make something of it, emotionally. It made me feel bad. I identified with the role of our Shetland sheep dog who tried to round us up by running back and forth on the trail from the first person to the last. My parents tell me, and I remember, that I simply adored the large campgrounds where we would occasionally stay. I liked being all together,

with everybody equally needing food, clothing, and shelter, and living as my class-conscious parents said, “cheek by jowl.” Everybody needing to put up their tent, or cook supper; everybody getting rained on. The community feeling was wonderful, by contrast with the competitiveness of the trail. I loved the peacefulness of it. And I remember that when I encountered Jean Baker Miller’s book, and read that conflict was essential if we were to move toward our own development, I thought, “I can’t bear this.” I remember shutting this book, when I found it, at the age of 45. I trusted this author, and suspected she was right about most things, and I couldn’t bear that she was advising us that we need to come into conflict. What I now think is that that book alerts us to consequences for us of systems of power that are not good for any of us. She was not asking me to interfere with my sense that the campground was wonderful. She was pointing out how rare the campground is, and telling readers that to have the campground at all we would need to come into conflict with systems that were bad for the growth and recognition of our relationality.

Seen in a Phase One light, my resistance to her words on conflict came because I was so firmly trying to stay in the role of good girl, good white girl, good upper-class girl contained within the systems of authority. I thought then, I can’t do this thing that she asks. Now, as it happens, I have on my refrigerator a magnet with an Eleanor Roosevelt quote which reads, “You must do the thing which you think you cannot do.” But then, at the age of 45, I still hoped to get through life by being nice personally within the authority systems, and hoped that I could just find the communal and communitarian campgrounds again and again.

As I observed my feelings of fraudulence on coming into conflict this past year, I saw that one aspect is my dislike of trying to “make a case for” my ideas in writing. This correlates with my comparatively slim body of published work and with the fact that I like to keep to the Work-in-Progress feeling in what I do publish. I feel like a fraud in the conflicts which surround academic and media life in general, the tendency to shoot others down and get shot down. Kill or be killed. I do not want to get shot down, and I have found that my work circulates in underground fashion among those who are interested in my complex, conversational, and autobiographical methods of getting into the creation of new theory. I do not really fear bringing my ideas into words when I am doing public speaking, public dialogues, or the highly charged work of the SEED Project with

teachers. What makes me feel like a fraud is writing for faceless audiences. I found I had a variant of this fear in that I feel fraudulent in sending letters to people I do not know, in situations in which committing myself on paper may cost me something and make others see me as angry or stupid.

Through pondering this, I saw I was invested more than I knew in being seen as an intelligent, self-controlled, high class, undefeated woman, a kind of combination of Phases One and Two. I realized that in the presence of an audience I give some of this impression, and I believe it gives a special protection to my talks, which are unexpectedly issues-oriented, provocative, and original, like Phases Three and Four together, and yet usually applauded. In print, I am much more vulnerable to the thrashings which authors with even the faintest political awareness may get from anyone who wants to do them in. Yet whenever I do have the courage to go into print before faceless audiences, I reach thousands of readers. I decided to go ahead in the future and try to put more of my feelings into print even if this put me in the vulnerable "angry, stupid, low-class female/feminist" category, open to attack, and even if by writing more I will not write much lasting work of strong importance to readers. In addition to co-writing a new book chapter with Emily Style (I find co-writing feels like a comfort in that the blame as well as the praise can be shared), I wrote more letters of protest and support than usual this year, and practiced putting some of my home-self into them rather than being abstractly argumentative.

Here are just a few examples. To Christopher Lydon, host of "The Connection," on National Public Radio, I wrote, one day,

Dear Christopher, I am very discouraged to hear you say, quoting Ezra Pound, that "*The Iliad* is all we need. It has enough drama for a planet." I am discouraged because it appears from time to time when you interview women that you do "get it" about our being left out of the liberal arts curriculum, and out of the main ways of seeing "life" which you and I were raised with. Yet in declaring that "*The Iliad* is all we need," it is as though you have forgotten all that the feminist women scholars and writers have been saying about most men's and women's daily lives. I'm discouraged that you mistake a war epic and its adorer, Ezra Pound, for a universal and adequate story to cover the experience of us all. Who is this "we," in "It's all we need"?

Sincerely, Peggy McIntosh.

This time, instead of agonizing over what tone and words might be more effective than others, I just went

ahead and sent the letter. You will have seen that it declares conflict is not all there is, and that I came into conflict with Lydon over that. In preparation for this talk, I pulled it out of the file and saw this theme in retrospect. This was a letter in which I did not feel that my emotions oversimplified my own multifaceted self, and I let my anger and discouragement show, instead of censoring them.

Here's a second example, to a *Boston Globe* editor and columnist:

Dear David Nyhan, Thank you very much for your column of today. I hope you will now pursue further the matter of the right-wing activity of about ten huge foundations and 100 major operatives who have indeed infiltrated the institutions of the United States with a view to taking power for the right, as against earning it. Meanwhile, I appreciate your analysis of the media's role of creating "news" as well as doing what it purports, which is reporting news. The right-wing is brilliant at getting the media to strengthen its hand. Thank you for your awareness of this.

In the first example, my letter to Christopher Lydon, I was coming up against a powerful figure knowing that this would probably preclude my ever being asked to appear on *The Connection*. In the second letter, I was only offering support to a journalist who usually sits on the fence, and encouraging or goading his more liberal side. Looking at my letters over the year, I realized I was much more comfortable in the second, ally and supporter role, than in the one in which I challenge a well known person. I take the second role more often, and I think it can be seen as more traditionally female, allying with someone else's brave work. I aspire to get to a point at which I can do with equal poise, both the lateral work supporting someone else to come into conflict and the riskier solo vertical work. The risk with Lydon, incidentally, was calculated; I thought that he would probably never have me on the show even if I wrote a book, and meanwhile, if I dared to write, I might lessen his unconsciously arrogant use of "we" to refer to everyone, which would be an accomplishment for any of us..

Just a year ago, after agreeing to do this talk, I came into conflict in a way that burned some of my bridges in another way. I sent a letter of resignation to the president and board of trustees of Radcliffe College. My protest meant that I renounced the power I had in that institution with which I had many connections over 47 years. At the time, I was Second Vice-president of the Alumnae Association, and I was angry that through a series of secret talks the Radcliffe

president and board of trustees were arranging to sever their ties to Radcliffe College undergraduates and to abdicate their mandated responsibility to advocate for the interests of undergraduate women at Harvard. Yesterday's paper showed that my action and the protests of others who agreed with me merely delayed the outcome by a year. Radcliffe has now voted not to be a college any longer. I am glad that I took that stand then. It got a lot of publicity in the media, and I felt brave. But I find that the final defeat of what we stood for has made me withdraw into myself somewhat. Yesterday I was called by a writer at the *Washington Post* who said that I was referred by a writer at the *Harvard Crimson*, and I found that I did not answer the call immediately. Maybe I didn't want to say, "We called it correctly. And they went ahead and did it. They won." I did not want to say I was humiliated; I was a loser.

As I have said, taking that stand means that I have burned my bridges with Radcliffe, which is now just a series of highly visible graduate institutes doing work in some ways akin to my own. So what did I salvage? Self-respect, a sense of being a Cassandra, a sense of protecting young women's interests. And also I salvaged this story to tell, which becomes part of the story of my life. Was it worth it? I will never know. But the protest made me feel integrated. I think I was expressing my connection to the institution which Radcliffe was in the 1950s, protecting and also furthering the development of women like me within the patriarchy of Harvard, like a rare mother allowing one to develop "home-self" in the midst of the male-centered ethos of the family or in this case, the university. And now I am furious that the mother abandoned the daughters to the "care" of the abusive father in return for being given a little Phase Two desk of her own in a branch office elsewhere.

I also wrote a letter to Brett Lott, a journalist, thanking him for quoting something he had read elsewhere about writers' needs for support at certain times: "This deadening of one's gift by learning not to believe in it is the most dangerous time in the life of an artist." I thought he was also alluding to how hard it is to come into conflict with external evaluators who do not believe in one's gift. I wrote to him a letter to say that I saw a parallel in children's learning not to believe in their own gifts, and I told him that I think it is a key moment in a child's life when she or he comes into conflict with authority by saying, "I don't think the grownups are telling me the truth."

This was an easier letter to write, serving as another ally piece, and also a mini-conversation, coming off another's thought. I feel that such a letter

can encourage a writer to follow a train of thought which I want to see more of in the world. It feels relational and I did not feel I was a fraud in writing it, but it was slightly scary at the same time, like all of these letters written to those I cannot see. Will I be misunderstood? I am now trying to write these letters sounding more and more like a complex, situated human being and less like someone trying to claim abstract authority on a single point or two. But my fear remains that I will be construed as a harridan, an obsessed woman who has nothing better to do than to write crank letters. If I learn that I am seen this way, and feel I haven't been effective, I am likely to forget the long histories of women who have made a difference, and to punish myself as a woman who should have kept her ideas bottled up. Such self-recrimination efficiently continues patriarchy's work.

After working on many home-self efforts toward more authentic and courageous writing, I thought, Peggy, this is pretty timid. Why don't you take on one of the big guys, instead of keeping to these local correspondences? So I wrote to Rush Limbaugh, whose attacks on me have been a burden I have suffered with in silence for years. I took the draft of my daring letter to Limbaugh on a trip to California last weekend. It was all finished and just about ready to go. When I got back here, I found I had left it in California. So I can tell I am ambivalent about this letter, which does take on one of the most powerful media figures in TV and radio. But I feel it as a victory for me, stimulated by the prospect of this talk, that I found a way to address him on my terms, as a scholar, and not simply as his victim.

Dear Mr. Limbaugh, It has come to my attention over the years that you continue to refer to me and some other women as feminazis. I have decided that I would like to discuss this with you. I would like to discuss your knowledge of feminism and Nazism and learn also how you came to associate these two phenomena with each other, and both with me.

I suggest that we meet in a place which is neither your work place nor mine. I will plan to bring a lawyer, one other person, and a tape recorder, so that there need be no question about what was said between us. I suggest that you bring the same. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely, Peggy McIntosh.

Though Limbaugh still terrifies me, I chuckled as I wrote this. My daughter said, "It sounds as if you're inviting him to a duel." Yes, but it feels like a duel with a difference. I decided to take him on where I am, that is, as a scholar, as well as a person whom he has hurt. I am not encountering him only as the sick

playground bully, whom I was taught to avoid, and who wishes to injure me further, but also as an ignorant blusterer. But I have been unable to find his address. Can anybody tell me how to reach Rush Limbaugh? (Various audience members give suggestions and ask more about who Rush Limbaugh is). He is a thoroughly irresponsible right-wing commentator who says anything he wishes. In fact, there is a whole book called *Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot* about the fact that he doesn't have even a single fact-checker, but says outrageous things off the top of his head to his following of millions who proudly call themselves Dittoheads. He says the country belongs to those who have worked hard and sweated and that the founding fathers are sacred and that "America" is going down the tubes because of its enemies: immigrants and feminazis and black criminals and liberals and abortionists.

Writing the letter to him takes me back to a time at the Bronx Zoo in New York when I was a small child, perhaps five years old, and got up on a railing and said to a lion with a huge mane, on the other side of the fence, "Hi." My brother said, horrified, "Peggy, don't talk to him." I asked, "Why?" He said, "He might answer." That is the way I had gotten to feel about these most powerful men. That they might answer. But my courage is strengthened by the knowledge that there are some fences which can protect me from their worst replies. And in the case of Rush Limbaugh, I felt that my authentic home-self authored that letter, and was proposing a connection of sorts, literally a guarded conversation.

I will end with two matters, one of which is somebody else's diagram, which has been useful to me in complexifying conflict. And the other is the experience of starting a journal recently called "Gender and Conflict" for a conference I was invited to attend at George Mason University on that subject. The journal-writing experience surprised me.

As you know, I think that our hearts are filled with different voices, and the problem with the war-like either/or is that it over-simplifies the complications of the soul. I am not saying the complications of the issues, but the complications of the heart's many affinities. The men I admire most are those like the writer Donald Murray, who brings tenderly traced mixtures of emotion to his account of his experiences. I have said that I come into conflict most authentically with the idea that conflict is all there is. I have also said that the contests and contentions take place in me too. I am not Gandhi or Martin Luther King, or William James, whose writing on the moral equivalent of war moves me very much.

I am interested in moral leadership which discusses in a still more narrative and textured way how the power relations around us get trained into psyches, and can also be seen and resisted there, and I think this is one thing Jean Baker Miller's work is telling us. But I got a new angle on some dimensions of this when I started the assigned one-week journal on Gender and Conflict to take to the conference in Virginia.

The previous Saturday morning, I was at home and decided that while I was thinking about what to write in my gender diary, I would clean up some piles of papers in the kitchen. The first paper I took up had on it a date of 1997, two years earlier. I was embarrassed, and then mortified to find that the papers under it dated from 1996. I was giving myself such grief over my messy habits that finally I couldn't think about Gender and Conflict at all. Inside me was a noisier conflict, with voices calling me by my name and shouting, "Peggy, you are such a mess! Why are you such a mess? How could you do this?" So I asked these voices, "What's wrong with being a mess?" And they said, "We don't do that." And I said, "Who is we?" And suddenly I had a vision of one of the streets in the town in New Jersey where I spent most of my first twelve years. There was a row of houses which seemed to me unbelievable, like a bad mistake. Poor people lived in them, poor people with strange faces. And my voices said, "We're not like that." It flashed into my mind that these voices were saying I must be neat so as not to identify against my class and race and ethnicity. I was not being policed for being a messy woman. I was being policed as a person from a well-off, "professional," white family, threatening our family's reputation by crossing over into behaviors which I was taught to project onto poor people, working class people, and people of color. As a white female, I was being used as a counter and a battleground, being shouted at to keep my identification with whiteness, maleness, and wealth. And I think also to keep my identification with "law and order," meaning "a place for everything and everything in its place," referring to things and also to people.

In this fight the oppressor had become internalized. I experienced dominance of just some aspects of my identity set against the rest. A part of me was viciously attacking another part of me, telling me that I must not cross the line into "their" mess. My psyche was being used as a site for class/race battles in the larger society, against people who lived in houses "like that." And as the image of poor people's houses flashed on my mind, I stumbled on the construct of me being divided against myself

dishonestly to save “our” face, projecting problems of mess and everything else onto “them.” So it was a complicated interior picture of a conflict staged in me, in which I am not the righteous person writing to the liar Rush Limbaugh. Here I am the host of a well-setup internal police state, supervised by the white and wealthy female voices, making me disown, and to project onto others, parts of my psyche and part of my self-knowledge, which is that I am in fact messy, to keep the wars going outside. I was the battleground and the perpetrator, and something that women of color have often pointed out became clearer than usual to me. The female shriekers were trying to get me back into place with the men of my race and class, and away from identification of women in those other houses. I saw the truth of this working in my vision of Other People’s houses. And seeing and knowing and coming into conflict with that internal police state became one of the most empowering sensations of this year-long observation. I am apprised of it and now I can infiltrate this police state in the and try to see more about how it works.

Meanwhile, I have not cleaned up most of my papers. I am an accumulator of papers. If I do not take my history seriously, who will? I feel on better terms with my papers, now. In fact, the reason I keep them is that they are so interesting; they mean so much to me. Why should I let my history be disappeared? Now the voices shouting about unseemly mess have receded to the background, regrouping for their next attack.

I think they will attack as I work on my own next conscious effort, which is to find ways of coming into conflict with people “like me” face to face in a way that does not leave me feeling destructive, fraudulent, or reduced. I can practically hear them shouting about this kind of conflict, “We’re not like that.” Once again the race and class punishments will loom and the voices will try to keep me in the white lady prison. I feel readier for them this time. What I am trying to develop is the knowledge of being, complexly, what they say “we” are not.

I want to end with a diagram from a Buddhist, a man who lives in Bangkok, Thailand, whose name is Sulak Sivaraksa. His work on conflict has been very useful to me. He draws a circle and imagines that there are the numbers of a clock face on it. He says that at 12 o’clock, noon, you may feel at peace, perhaps too peaceful. At two o’clock, you have noticed the suffering in the world, and at four o’clock, you begin to try to alleviate the suffering in the world. At six o’clock, you are HIT by those who did not want the suffering to end, or did not want you to end it. At eight o’clock, you begin to understand why they hit

you. At ten o’clock, you can even empathize with the suffering which made them hit you. And at noon you are restored to peace. The cycle is repeated in a day, minute, year, or continually, as one grows in awareness.

Two years after I saw Sulak draw this diagram, I visited him in Bangkok, where I was attending a conference. I had been “hit” by the *Wall Street Journal* and Rush Limbaugh and *Heterodoxy Magazine* and other right-wing forces. I told him that I was having trouble moving upward from the position of having been hit, at six o’clock on his diagram. As it happened, I was visiting him at eleven o’clock on a Sunday, Protestant “church time” in the United States. I think I expected a little sermon.

Instead, he answered me very simply in a sentence. He said one could not move away from six o’clock up into the rest of the cycle until one recognized how angry one was at having been hit. It made complete sense. I found this a great antidote to the tendency in me to deny injury, insult, or real defeat. Sulak’s statement said I must face injury and pain honestly if I was to get beyond them. I realized that I had a tendency to save face, to play the untouched person when feeling like the loser, and also that I had theological sanctions in my past against any acknowledgment of pain. When I dawdled in talking to *The Washington Post* about the actual demise of Radcliffe College, I think I was avoiding saying that my desire to salvage the College had been defeated, and that I was angry about it, even though I had predicted it. Yet Sulak’s cycle also urged me into relationship with those who had hit me, urged me to feel empathy for their disconnection, and perhaps it led to the semi-relational stance I was able to take for the strategic letter to Rush Limbaugh, offering to learn from him about the grounds of his “knowledge.” Sulak’s teachings gave me permission for both the anger and the move toward communication. It felt familiar as well as new, for it corresponded to some of those feelings of empathetic identification with critics which I have already described. Sulak’s prescription is useful in talking back to the police-state voices in me which said, “We are not like that.” They have been hit themselves, so now they hit the more integrated parts of me. I doubt they enjoy their jobs. I see them trapped in the police state.

I am grateful to Jean Baker Miller and the Stone Center staff for having given me the time to think over this matter of coming into conflict and for having allowed me once again to use a narrative and conversational style of approaching the subject which corresponds to my home-self. I feel that during the last

15 years, preparing talks for this Colloquium Series first helped me to make a case for the possible wisdom of feelings of fraudulence, and then helped me to define a “home-self” as a baseline resource for the development of authenticity. Working on this talk has helped me to recognize some of the elements that are present when I avoid conflict, and when on the other hand I feel I am coming into conflict in more authentic ways than before. It seems that I feel best in conflict when I am opposing the tendency toward polarized structures and behaviors inside of my psyche and in the society, and acting on the recognition that my identity contains and knits multitudes, like the campground, and feels at home with the complexities of interrelatedness among all living things.

The Moebius strip derived from this rumination reads on one side “I must not let them make me feel like a fraud in coming into conflict.” And on the other side, “Let me continue to spot the fraudulent simplicity of conflict.” Colloquially translated, I feel at times, “I am not up to the fray.” But at other times, “This fray is not up to me.”