

mentor's introduction

ELIZABETH J. SACCA

Concordia University

Miriam Cooley studies the experiences of her students as Loren Cary studied those of her mother as she "turned out" elementary schools her children attended and department stores where she addressed a complaint to the personnel:

He'd use that tone of voice they used when they had *important* work elsewhere. . . . Then he'd dismiss her with his eyes. I'd feel her body stiffen next to me, and I'd know that he'd set her off.

"Excuse me," she'd say. "I don't think you understand what I am trying to say to you . . ."

And then it began in earnest, the turning out. She never moved back. It didn't matter how many people were in the line. It didn't matter how many telephones were ringing. She never moved back, only forward, her body leaning over counters and desk tops, her fingers wrapped around the offending item or document, her face getting closer and closer. . . .

They'd eventually, inevitably, take back the faulty item or credit her charge or offer her some higher-priced substitute ("like they should've done in the first place," she'd say, and say to them). They would do it because she had made up her mind they would (1991, p. 58).

Whether it was through "cold indignation" or "hot fury," turning out was a matter of will. "I came to regard my mother's will as a force of nature, an example of and a metaphor for black power and black duty. My duty was to compete in St. Paul's classrooms. I had no option but to succeed and no doubt that I could will my success" (p. 58).

St. Paul's was an "exclusive" prep-school that had become co-ed and had begun recruiting Afro-American students. White schoolmates and parents would ask Loren Cary and her friend Jimmy how they "managed to get to St. Paul's School" (p. 58). Years later she explained, "The point was that we

had been bred for it just as surely as they. The point was that we were there to turn it out" (p. 59).

Members of excluded groups who enrol in schools *will* those school to recognize their achievements and their ability to excel. Consciously or unconsciously, they are collaborating with teachers and administrators who are committed to inclusive curriculum and teaching (See **Transformations**).

As she asks her students about their experiences learning art, Miriam Cooley is encouraging them to articulate what Marilyn Zurmuehlen calls "the power of the particular, the conviction of the concrete" (1987, p. 27; 1990, p. 64). In doing so, she is demonstrating critical teaching as part of an active endeavor to transform education (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Ng, 1991; Weiler, 1988).

Miriam Cooley cites Julia Kristeva's description of the feminine as the other lacking desire, agency and creative possibilities, and its critique by Trinh T. Minh-ha and Barbara Christian.

Committed to their own creative possibilities, women art students resist the notions of feminine as the other lacking desire and agency. In adapting methodologies to these women in this specific situation, Miriam Cooley works to hear exactly what they are saying, what they are saying to their teachers and school, and how they, quietly or otherwise, are turning out their own education.

References

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