

# Carol Gilligan

## *When the mind leaves the body . . . and returns*

I am sitting with a colleague on a platform at the front of a large university lecture hall. We are psychologists teaching in the same department, brought together on this occasion by students who want to hear how we converse. It is a Monday evening in the middle of the term, and the lecture hall is filled. We each speak briefly about our work and then begin the conversation. I notice that when I say “voice,” my colleague, who studies cognition and intelligence, responds by saying “the notion of voice” or “the metaphor of voice.” I move my chair away from his to signal

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the gap that has opened between us. The next morning, in class, my students want to talk about what happened. I write the word ‘voice’ on the blackboard, the sound sibilant in the still, morning air. One after another the students respond: “The notion of voice, the metaphor of voice.” We talk about what happens when the body drops out of the conversation.

I am sitting with Sundi at a small table in an empty classroom of her public school. She is eleven, in the sixth grade, and a member of the writing and theater club that meets on Tuesday afternoons, part of a three-year project designed to strengthen healthy resistance and courage in girls. It is spring in the second year of the project, and I am interviewing Sundi. I place a photograph on the table in front of her and ask her to tell a story about what is happening. She stares into the face of the girl in the picture and says the girl has just had a fight with her friend – she is angry and sad. “Where is the anger?” I ask. Sundi replies: “In the pit of her stomach and in her throat.” And the sadness? “The sadness is in her heart.”

At age nine, Judy says that she knows how her friend will feel because “I just feel it in my mind.” When she sees

someone walking away from her best friend, leaving her alone “just talking into space,” she does not infer how her friend will feel or put herself in her friend’s place. Instead, she says, “You can just kind of see them walking away or getting sad or something, but you can’t tell right then and there she’s going to get hurt or anything – but you just feel it. It’s hard to explain.” There is little language for this emotional connectedness and the knowing to which it gives rise.

By the age of thirteen, however, Judy has learned that knowing and feeling are “two different things.” Striving to reconcile this distinction with her experience of knowing through feeling, she divides her mind, which she locates in her gut, from her brain, which is in her head:

The knowing sort of comes from the brain, like your intelligence part. Like your smartness, your brightness, your education part. And your feeling is something that it doesn’t matter if you have an education or not. It’s just like something that you can’t put into words, that you can’t really explain, but it’s not, I don’t know, it’s just like a deeper sort of knowing than intelligence knowing.

In following her disclaimer (“I don’t know”) by speaking of “a deeper sort of knowing,” Judy elaborates a split, not between mind and body but between an embodied mind and a disembodied brain:

The mind sort of has your real thoughts and a brain sort of has the intelligence... what you learn in school... but your mind is sort of associated with your heart and your soul and your internal feeling and your real feelings.

Separating her mind – her real thoughts and feelings – from her intelligence and

her education, she offers an observation about development: “Children,” she says, “have the most mind, but they are starting to lose it actually.”

I begin with Judy to illustrate the findings of a five-year study of development involving girls between the ages of seven and eighteen. Prior to this research, adolescent girls, in the words of the 1980 *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, had “simply not been much studied.” By listening to girls narrate their experiences in coming of age – first in yearly interviews and then in the more intensive writing and theater clubs that met weekly or in week-long sessions over a period of three years – my colleagues and I came to see girls as messengers, like canaries in a mine.<sup>1</sup> They alerted us to a process of initiation that required them to separate their minds from their bodies, their thoughts from their emotions, themselves from their relationships. The initiation entailed a paradoxical sacrifice of relationship for the sake of having ‘relationships,’ a sacrifice that was at once culturally sanctioned and psychologically incoherent. The resistance of Judy and other girls to making this sacrifice led me to zero in on the question: what happens when the mind leaves the body and returns?

In *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, Antonio Damasio describes core consciousness, or a core sense of self, as our ability to register our experience from moment to moment, like a film running continually inside us, as well as our awareness of watching the film, which extends the sense of self through time and history, leading to memory

1 The Harvard Project on Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development began in 1981 and continued for twenty years, expanding in the 1990s to include studies of boys’ development and the culture of manhood.

and identity. He contrasts the core self, grounded in the body and in emotion, with what he calls “the autobiographical self,” the self that is wedded to a story about itself. I have found this distinction helpful in thinking about dissociation: how we can know and also not know what we know; how it is possible for our experience not to become part of our story.

For example, in the years between nine and thirteen, Judy begins to tell a story about herself that is at odds with what she knows within herself to be true. At the age of ten, she says with pride, “I hardly ever get into fights with my friends because usually we like the exact same things and we do the exact same things.” Yet she knows that disagreement is a natural if upsetting part of relationships, integral to the process of rupture and repair. In the absence of the ability to address the inevitable breaks in connection, relationships lose their resilience and become fragile, reduced to sameness, a matter of liking and doing “the exact same things.” Judy at ten is aware of a change in her relationships. Heeding an injunction to be nice, she backs off from conflict, fearful that if she says what she is feeling and thinking, people will leave her or “move out.”

The impetus to rein herself in also comes from a growing awareness of danger in the world at large and a fear that acting on impulse will lead her to get hurt. Signs of dissociation accompany this appraisal of reality, as Judy begins to have difficulty remembering her experience. The presence of an impediment to accessing what has happened becomes evident when she tells her interviewer about something that sounded fun and exciting, something she recalls but can't quite remember:

[My friend and I] were deciding whether or not to do something, and, I don't know, it might have been – I guess it was – kind of dangerous because both of us were not sure whether to do it or not. [“*You can't remember what it was?*”] No, I have a short memory. It was recently, too.

*When the mind leaves the body... and returns*

The phrase ‘I don't know,’ spoken four times by Judy at age nine, once after she implied a connection between her brother's anger and her hamster's death, occurs twenty-four times a year later when she is ten, in an interview of comparable length. Rather than an admission of ignorance or an expression of uncertainty about something she has said, it seems more literally to indicate a barrier to speaking – the injunction ‘don't’ standing between ‘I’ and ‘know.’ Associating knowing now only with her intellect, what goes on in her head, Judy begins to talk about, rather than to speak, her feelings – and the ground of experience slips away. As the interview draws to a close, she confesses her sense of a problem: “I don't know what's wrong here; I keep stuttering here. It was tough . . . I know what the question was, but as soon as you asked me, my mind went blank.”

When the mind leaves the body, thought becomes divided from emotion, and we lose an inner compass for navigating the world. Judy registers this loss, but staying in connection with her body now means owning desires that are, at once, exciting and dangerous. Holding thoughts and feelings together, she can read beneath the surface and pick up what is going on around her. She knows that the fight at the dinner table over eating the carrots is not really about the carrots. Yet she fears that saying what she knows would only heighten conflict and lead to trouble.

Except in dreams and flights of fantasy, the mind leaves the body when it be-

comes, for whatever reason, unbearable or untenable to know what in our bodies and our emotions we know. The return of the mind to the body then undoes a dissociation that however adaptive or culturally valued is psychologically problematic. With the approach of adolescence, girls often hover between knowing and not knowing, as if testing the climate they are now entering. Is it possible for them to say what they know without losing relationships and jeopardizing their future? The phrases 'I don't know' and 'you know' rose exponentially in our interview transcripts, implicitly asking: Can I know? Do you know? Do you need me not to know?

When Judy is interviewed at eleven, the lines of her dilemma sharpen. A new framework is evident as she responds to the opening question, "Looking back over the past year, what stands out for you?" with "Well, this was the first year that I started meeting boys, just recently, because someone had a boy/girl party, and I started meeting boys." The parameters of this shift into a different kind of encounter with boys become clear when she is asked about a time she had to make a decision but wasn't sure what she should do. She begins by saying, "Lots of decisions are really simple things," yet the decision she chooses to talk about is anything but simple: "My parents are divorced, and like, next year, I have a choice of which one to live with, and I have just been thinking over that a lot recently. I haven't really decided. I have kind of made up my mind to stay here [with my mom]."

Exploring the choice to stay with her mom, Judy thinks, "I'm getting a really good education, and education means a lot to me now; and I like where I live, where my mom lives... and I like the way I am living right now." But she also measures her life against the standard

of what she calls "the typical life of a child," by which she means, "just growing up with a regular family, and like, I think I would get a regular family at my dad's because there are two parents; they are a two-parent family with already two kids." Asked how she feels about this issue, she says, "I don't know. I feel like either my mom or my dad will feel bad, whichever decision I make."

She moves to resolve the dilemma by privileging her father's feelings:

My dad... would feel bad, because he would feel like I really didn't want to live with him, but it wouldn't be that big a thing if I left my mom instead of staying with my mom; just the feelings, I think, would be different toward the parent, my parents, and it's a hard decision to make. It's like... whatever I do, it depends on my future.

In dismissing her own and her mother's feelings, she minimizes the loss ("It wouldn't be that big a thing") and distances herself by speaking of "the feelings" and "the parent." Her grammatical incoherence ("it depends on my future") mirrors her psychological confusion.

Yet, in fact, she is planning to do what she wants and stay with her mom.

I am thinking I am pretty much going to stay here... I think I'd be just as happy there, but it's hard to explain - I just think like... this is what I want to do, so I think just me wanting to do this makes it right, because there is no really wrong answer unless I make it wrong.

The issue then centers on judgment: Does her wanting to live with her mom make it right? Is there a wrong choice in this situation? Or more pointedly, can she avoid making what feels right to her wrong?

Thus, Judy guides us through an initiation into ways of seeing and speaking

about herself and the world that would require her, in the name of morality and for the sake of her future, to dissociate herself from what she wants and knows. In resisting this initiation, she combats internalized voices that call her 'a troublemaker' and 'childish,' that enjoin her to be nice and to have 'a good attitude,' that encourage her to leave the life she wants and values in order to have 'the typical life of a child.' Sent to her room and grounded for getting "really mad" at her mom, she thinks, "If I had just kept my mouth shut and didn't say anything . . . that would have been the end of it." Yet, she says, "in my mind I was still angry."

In fitting herself into a framework that leads her to silence her expression of anger, her honest voice, and her sexuality, Judy internalizes an honor code that divides girls and women into the good and the bad. She worries that in concealing the "bad" parts of herself, she is creating a false impression. She wonders if this is lying, but she decides it is not. She knows that falsity has entered her relationships and wrestles with the question of integrity. She does not want to be "selfish" or "rude," like girls who do not "think about anyone but themselves." Holding herself apart from her relationships, she strives to put herself in the place of others, attending to their feelings by asking herself, "How would I feel?" She wants to be a good rather than a bad girl, to have a good rather than a bad attitude. Yet this entails losing relationship – her connectedness with others and also with vital parts of herself.

The dilemma she faces is one of relationship, and it appears insoluble: either way she anticipates losing relationship, whether by withholding herself from others or being left by them. Thus an initiation, mandating dissociation and

enforced through codes and scripts of gender, leads Judy to what psychoanalysts have called a compromise formation. By splitting her mind, which is connected to her heart and her soul, from her brain, which she associates with her intelligence and her education, Judy, in coming of age, is resisting losing her embodied mind.<sup>2</sup>

Tracy, her classmate, reveals how this loss can come to seem inconsequential. "When we were nine, we were stupid," she says. The five-year study has ended, and I have come to ask the girls how they want to be involved now that my colleagues and I are presenting our findings and preparing to publish them in a book. The thirteen-year-olds respond without hesitation: "We want you to tell them everything we said, and we want our names in the book." Tracy then voices her concern that their nine-year-old selves will sound stupid. I say it would never have occurred to me to use the word 'stupid' because what struck me most about them when they were nine was how much they knew. "I mean," Tracy says, "when we were nine, we were honest."

When the mind is forced to leave the body in the name of intelligence and for the sake of education, when thought becomes divorced from emotion as a way of avoiding conflict and trouble, when the self moves out of relationship in order to have 'relationships,' an honest voice – the voice of the core self that registers experience – comes to sound stupid. Thus we become wedded to what within ourselves we know is a false story.

2 A more extensive discussion of Judy as well as additional excerpts from her interview transcripts can be found in Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

*When the  
mind leaves  
the body . . .  
and returns*

At a time when research in neurobiology has exposed Descartes' error, when attention to girls and women has revealed a systematic bias in psychological theory, the question arises: how do we come to tell a story about ourselves that is at odds with our human nature, neurologically unfounded, and psychologically untrue?

Damasio has shown that the severing of thought from emotion is a result of brain injury or trauma.<sup>3</sup> Psychologists filming infants with their mothers have discovered that the baby's world is an interpersonal world.<sup>4</sup> As the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott observed, "There is no such thing as a human baby"; the human infant is a member of a couple. We are, male and female alike, inherently relational, responsive beings, born with a voice and into relationship. The separation of the self from relationships, once considered a milestone of development, is a sign of dissociation. It signals a rift in the psyche, a split in consciousness, a need to shelter parts of ourselves.

Studying girls first led me to recognize that separations long associated with development bear some of the hallmarks of trauma: a loss of voice, gaps in memory, the inability to tell one's story. The privileging of mind over body, thought over emotion, self over relationships reflects a culture that elevates qualities associated with masculinity over those gendered as feminine. What seemed at one time a problematic resistance on the part of girls and women to taking what were considered crucial steps on the road to maturity, leading to rationality and au-

tonomy, now appears as a healthy resistance to psychologically and politically costly losses of voice and relationship – losses that would compromise their ability to love and to function as citizens in a democratic society. Yet this healthy resistance is often met with surprising opposition or force.

What is at stake? Seventeen-year-old Iris, the valedictorian of her high school class, observes, "If I were to say what I was feeling and thinking, no one would want to be with me, my voice would be too loud," and then adds, by way of explanation, "but you have to have relationships." I say, "But if you are not saying what you are feeling and thinking, then where are you in these relationships?" Iris sees the paradox in what she is saying: she has given up relationship in order to have 'relationships,' muting her voice so that 'she' could be with other people. The rewards of this adaptation are clear; the costs, for the moment, less apparent. In Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, when Miranda asks her father why he is raising a sea-storm, he responds by urging her to sleep: "Here cease more questions," he tells her, "'Tis a good dullness." Later in the play, goddesses arrive to bestow "Honor, riches, marriage, blessing," the gains for entering her father's order. Miranda will preserve that order. When Ferdinand, her husband-to-be, says he would not "for the world" play her false, she tells him, "For a score of kingdoms you should wrangle, and I would call it fair play."<sup>5</sup>

To resist the structures of patriarchy is to challenge long-standing adaptations on the part of both women and men. It means reopening a wound, revivifying a loss, and questioning a sacrifice made for the best of reasons. Yet children's

3 Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1994).

4 See, for example, Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

5 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1961).

reluctance to incorporate these structures into their psyches exposes their psychological costs. The initiation into and enforcement of gender splits and hierarchies typically begin at an earlier time in development for boys than for girls, in early childhood rather than at adolescence, and are consequently written more deeply into the stories they tell about themselves. For this reason, girls become informants. At adolescence, they are mature enough to recognize and reflect on what is happening and also more aware of the gap between their sense of themselves and their stories.

But children are children, and as Iris says, you have to have relationships and live in the world. Their resistance to an initiation that is socially rewarded, culturally driven, and yoked to gender – which affects feelings about one’s body, one’s desires, oneself, and one’s future – inevitably becomes embattled, leading to inner conflict, open struggle, and signs of psychological distress. The difference in the timing of boys’ and girls’ initiation can explain what otherwise appears as a series of psychological puzzles: why does a heightened risk to resiliency set into boys’ lives around the ages of five, six, and seven; why do boys often begin at this time to show signs of depression as well as learning and speech disorders and various forms of out-of-control and out-of-touch behavior; why are boys throughout childhood more subject to depression than girls; what protects girls’ resiliency until adolescence; why does this hardiness in girls tend to falter at adolescence, when the incidence of depression, eating disorders, and destructive behavior sharply rises? The symptoms themselves – attention disorders, learning disorders, eating disorders, and depression – reflect a disturbance in mind and body; and the loss of voice and relationship,

signaling dissociation, leads to behavior problems. To the usual explanations that vacillate between nature and nurture, evolution and socialization, I add a psychological factor. The heightened risk to resiliency reveals a threat to psychological integrity.

In the years before adolescence, girls, in the absence of severe trauma, tend to hold self and relationship together. The preadolescent years are a time of honest voices and shrewd perceptions, recorded across history and culture by artists ranging from Euripides to Toni Morrison. The frank and fearless girls of this age, with their candid voices and open faces, belie stereotypes of femininity. “We have our voices,” they tell me. It is this directness, this willingness to say what they see and speak their experience – that older girls and women often come to call stupid or bad or wrong or crazy.

Preschool boys show a similar ability to read the human emotional world, including emotions that are being withheld. Four-year-old Sam asks his mother one day, “Mommy, why are you sad?” When she, wanting to shield him from her sadness, says, “I’m not sad,” he tells her, “Mommy, I know you. I was inside you.” Five-year-old Nick responds to his father’s expression of remorse for having “lost it” and hit Nick the previous day: “You are afraid that if you hit me, when I grow up, I’ll hit my children.” Alex, Nick’s father, had been hit by his father and had vowed to break the cycle. Nick picks up his fear that the pattern now will continue into the next generation.

Yet when manhood is established through a gender binary and through hierarchy, when being a man means not being a woman and also being on top, boys separate their sense of themselves from feelings associated with women –

*When the  
mind leaves  
the body...  
and returns*

sadness and fear – and sacrifice love for hierarchy. Covering their vulnerability and calling an emotionally open voice ‘babyish,’ they become less attentive, less direct, less articulate, and less authentic. They are turning themselves into ‘one of the boys’ and entering a competitive male hierarchy.<sup>6</sup>

Violent rituals of shaming enforce this initiation, marked by the internalization of and identification with a father’s voice or law, and like the initiation of girls at adolescence with its vicious games of inclusion and exclusion, it registers internally in the body as a loss of relationship and of pleasure, a loss quickly covered by a voice that labels what has been lost ‘babyish’ or ‘stupid.’ It is a voice that follows dissociation – the voice of a mind split off from the body, of a self divorced from relationship, telling a story about separation that has become linked not with betrayal and trauma but with development and civilization. It is a history written after the fact.

**I**t was her lawless passion that released her from the iron framework of reasoning and enabled her to see the frame.<sup>7</sup> “Is the world then so narrow?” she asks the anguished minister who had been her lover, a man who loved the truth but was living a lie. The Puritan settlement, she observes, was once a forest floor. Built up in one way, it could be torn down and built up anew. She encourages him to leave “these iron men, and their opinions.”

6 For additional examples of boys’ emotional astuteness and an extended discussion of the responses of their fathers and mothers, see Part II, “Regions of Light,” in Carol Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure* (New York: Knopf, 2002).

7 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000).

Meeting in the forest, alone for the first time in seven years, their minds return to their bodies. “Do I feel joy again?” the minister asks, amazed at this resurrection of himself. “I seem to have flung myself – sick, sin-stained, and sorrow-blackened – down upon these forest-leaves, and to have risen up all made anew, and with new powers to glorify Him that hath been merciful. This is already the better life!” Hester undoes the clasp that fastened the scarlet letter and throws it among the withered leaves. “She had not known the weight, until she felt the freedom.”

Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back from what men call the irrevocable past, and clustered themselves, with her maiden hope, and a happiness before unknown, within the magic circle of this hour . . . . Such was the sympathy of Nature – that wild, heathen Nature of the forest, never subjugated by human law, nor illuminated by higher truth – with the bliss of these two spirits! Love, whether newly born, or aroused from a deathlike slumber, must always create a sunshine, filling the heart so full of radiance, that it overflows upon the outward world.

It was an age, the narrator observes, when “men of the sword had overthrown nobles and kings. Men bolder than these had overthrown and rearranged – not actually but within the sphere of theory, which was their most real abode – the whole system of ancient prejudice, wherewith was linked much of ancient principle.” Imbibing this spirit, Hester Prynne, charged with raising a daughter amid a host of difficulties and seeking to cherish and develop “the germ and blossom of womanhood,” envisions what seems a hopeless task:

As a first step, the whole system of society is to be torn down, and built-up anew. Then, the very nature of the opposite sex, or its long hereditary habit, which has become like nature, is to be essentially modified, before woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position [in the new society]. Finally, all other difficulties being obviated, woman cannot take advantage of these preliminary reforms, until she herself shall have undergone a still mightier change; in which, perhaps, the ethereal essence, wherein she has her truest life, will be found to have evaporated.

It is a prospect more daunting than overthrowing nobles and kings because it involves a psychological as well as a political transformation, a change in what has come to seem like human nature.

At the end of the story, Hester, having freed her daughter, returns to Boston to take up, as a radical ministry, her lover's failed mission. She assures the people who come to her for counsel and comfort that

at some brighter period, when the world should have grown ripe for it, in Heaven's own time, a new truth would be revealed in order to establish the whole relation between man and woman on a surer ground of mutual happiness.

The word 'patriarchy' runs through Nathaniel Hawthorne's astonishing novel *The Scarlet Letter*, which he wrote in a heightened state of emotional openness and turmoil during the six months following his mother's death. As a boy of four, he had seen his mother scorned by his father's family after his father died at sea. Hawthorne places the romance of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale in seventeenth-century Boston, and with the exception of Hester, Dimmesdale, Chillingworth, and Pearl, his characters

are historical personages. Most of the action takes place in 1649, the year the English king was beheaded.

As Hawthorne reminds us, we are in the vicinity of Anne Hutchinson, in a world riddled with contradiction: the radical Protestant vision of an unmediated relationship with God, who is everywhere and thus able to be worshipped at home or in the forest as well as in church, clashes with the institutionalized power of an all-male, clerical hierarchy; the vision of a democratic society conflicts with the continuation of patriarchal power and privilege. Anne Hutchinson, assuming a direct relationship with God, criticized the ministers' sermons. They convicted her of heresy and insubordination and banished her from Massachusetts.

Summoning moonlight to illuminate an inner landscape, to show the familiar at once "so distinctly . . . yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility," Hawthorne explores the psychological tensions that reflect and magnify these contradictions. The antagonism between democracy and patriarchy plays out in the lives of women and men as a strain between passion and Puritanism, love and hierarchy. It registers as unhappiness.

Writing in 1850, at the height of abolitionist feminism, Hawthorne, neither an abolitionist nor a feminist, saw into the heart of a problem. A woman must bring the new truth, be "the angel and apostle of the coming revelation." Yet the very passion that releases a woman from the "iron framework" of Puritanism and enables her to envision a new order of living also disables her by leading others to view her as an impure woman. Midway through the novel, however, the framework shifts. As Hester's "nature showed itself warm and rich, a well-spring of human tenderness,

*When the  
mind leaves  
the body . . .  
and returns*

unfailing to every real demand, and inexhaustible by the largest,” many people “refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification. They said it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength.”

This ability of the mind to reframe the world on the basis of experience poses a far greater threat to orthodoxy than sexual transgression because it reveals that the very terms of the orthodoxy are a human construction, a way of thinking rather than reality. Hawthorne’s narrator observes that once Hester’s mind, released from “an iron chain,” had “assumed a freedom of speculation . . . which our forefathers, had they known of it, would have held [it] to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter.” It is not the sexual transgression itself as much as the freeing of a sexual voice, the joining of mind and body, that releases Hester from the psychic imprisonment signified in the novel by the term “goodwife.”

Having embroidered her scarlet A with gold thread, Hester recognizes in her unruly daughter the seeds of a noble woman: “The steadfast principles of an unflinching courage, – an uncontrollable will, – a sturdy pride, which might be disciplined into self-respect, – and a bitter scorn of many things which, when examined, have the taint of falsehood in them.” Hawthorne was the father of a six-year-old daughter when he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, and Pearl has always seemed to me more observed than invented. It is seven-year-old Pearl who sees what the Puritans cannot discern: the connection between her mother who wears the scarlet letter and the minister who keeps his hand over his heart.

In exploring the connection between mind and body and the conversion of psychic suffering into physical pain, Hawthorne anticipates Freud by almost

a half century. He also illuminates dissociation: in the split names of his two male characters, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth, we see what happens when concerns about privilege and honor lead sensitive and intelligent men to conceal their nature and their worth – they render one dim and the other chilling. Chillingworth, moving stealthily to uncover the truth in the minister’s heart, tells him: “You, Sir, of all men whom I have known, are he whose body is the closest conjoined, and imbued, and identified, so to speak, with the spirit whereof it is the instrument.” When Dimmesdale interrupts to insist on the separation of his soul from his body, Chillingworth overrides the interruption:

Thus, a sickness – a sore place, if we may so call it, in your spirit, hath immediately its appropriate manifestation in your bodily frame. Would you, therefore, that your physician heal the bodily evil? How may this be, unless you first lay open to him the wound or trouble in your soul?

In their 1895 *Studies on Hysteria*, Josef Breuer and Freud reported discoveries they had come to in a relatively short time by listening to hysterical women: the intimate connection between our minds and our bodies; the symbolic nature of symptoms; the phenomenon of dissociation and its relation to trauma; and the power of association, the stream of consciousness, and the touch of relationship, to undo dissociation – the power of the talking and listening cure. For Hawthorne as for Breuer and Freud, myself and others studying psychological development, the voices of women and girls have been key to seeing into the psychological and political structures of patriarchy that seem like nature, because they are so closely aligned with manhood and incorporated so early into boys’ psyches.

Maybe it is simpler than we have imagined – to recover what we know and free ourselves from a false story. If we are indeed neurologically hardwired to register our experience in our body, then the body holds the clue. And maybe this is another reason why the body – associated with vulnerability, mortality, sexuality, and women – is so readily suspect; why truth becomes aligned with a disembodied intelligence and education; and why associative methods, long relied on by artists, lack credibility, although their power is repeatedly proven. The separation of self from relationships, which seems at once objective and protective, leads us to overlook what otherwise would be self-evident: that one cannot exist without the other. But when a healthy resistance, the psyche's defense of its integrity like the body's immunity against disease, takes on some of the characteristics of a political resistance in its refusal of false authority, dissociation offers a kind of sanctuary: a way of preserving what we know and sheltering ourselves from harm until such time as we are able to confront the problem.

I have taken the 'strengthening healthy resistance and courage' project I began with nine-, ten-, and eleven-year-old girls into a law school classroom, teaching a seminar on sexuality, voice, and resistance with David Richards, a philosopher and constitutional law scholar. The subject of our seminar is the persistence of ethical contradictions in the history of Western democracies along with a tradition of ethical resistance. Over the years of teaching, we have become increasingly aware of the role of the body as touchstone or wellspring, both empirical and democratic, and also of art and the way artists across time and culture have gone into the problem of loss of voice, showing how culture can crush

voice and revealing dissociation from bodily experience as a central, crucial problem. The repression of sexual voice thus becomes a key to the structure of dissociation.

Freud saw this in his 1908 essay, "Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness," when he traced the so-called intellectual inferiority of women to their sexual suppression. Restricted from knowing their sexuality, women are forced to constrain their intelligence, to keep their minds out of their bodies, not to know what in their bodies they know. Sexuality, as Freud discerned in the early days of psychoanalysis, is a nexus of the psychological and the political, a site of repression and a source of resistance. The traumatizing of sexuality, interpreted broadly to mean the dissociation of mind and self from body and relationship, is the *caput Nili*, the source of neurotic suffering in the sense of condemning the psyche to live, as it were, east of desire and knowledge.

Within a political context, the divorcing of sexuality from knowledge leads to what David Richards has called "moral slavery," the imprisonment of an ethical voice that would contest injustice and harm.<sup>8</sup> In the book of Genesis, the word '*da-at*,' referring both to the tree of knowledge and to Adam's knowing of Eve, signifies embodied knowledge – the knowledge that comes through experience; what you know in your bones, in your gut, by heart. This knowledge is forbidden or hidden because it poses a threat to the establishment of hierarchy: God over Adam, Adam over Eve, Eve over the serpent, sorrow over joy. Thus we bind ourselves to a tragic story.

8 David A. J. Richards, *Women, Gays, and the Constitution: The Grounds of Feminism and Gay Rights in Culture and Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

*When the  
mind leaves  
the body...  
and returns*

The work of our students led me to reflect on what I first saw as an unintended consequence of our teaching: the freeing of a creative voice. The encouragement to overcome dissociations commonly assumed and even valued in the academy – the separation of mind from body, thought from emotion, oneself from one’s intellectual work – and the teaching of associative methods, primarily through reading literature but also through writing and theater work, led to papers of exceptional quality. As students breached the restrictions on voice and the inner divisions that had limited their intelligence, as they gained access to experiences they recalled but had forgotten, the range of their knowledge expanded and their insights became surprising.

As a psychologist, I asked how a two-hour seminar that met once a week in a law school could overcome what often were long-standing patterns that inhibited creative work. Reflecting on the pedagogy of the seminar, I have arrived at a provisional explanation: it is the combination of providing a psychological map that directs attention to times in development when an embodied voice becomes muted or silenced, and a political map, dating back to fifth-century Athens, that illuminates the historical costs of dissociation. A psychological puzzle – why do we wed ourselves to a false story? – joins with a political puzzle – how do we come to overlook the obvious? A critical part of our pedagogy then consists of legitimizing associative methods as a means to undo dissociation, and making our classroom a resonant space for a voice connected with the body.

In a forward to a recent edition of *Beloved*, Toni Morrison writes about her experience in leaving her job. While working as an editor at a publishing

house, she had written four novels, and writing had become her central work. Yet she was surprised when “a few days after my last day at work, sitting in front of my house on the pier jutting out into the Hudson River, I began to feel an edginess instead of the calm I had expected.” There was nothing new or unexpected in any of the problem areas of her life, nothing to explain what was “so unexpectedly troubling on a day that perfect, watching a river that serene.” Yet she heard her heart “stomping away in my chest like a colt,” felt “this apprehension, even panic” that she knew was different from fear.

Then it slapped me: I was happy, free in a way I had never been, ever. It was the oddest sensation. Not ecstasy, not satisfaction, not a surfeit of pleasure or accomplishment. It was a purer delight, a rogue anticipation with certainty. Enter *Beloved*.<sup>9</sup>

Morrison reflects, “I think now it was the shock of liberation that drew my thoughts to what ‘free’ could possibly mean to women.” Inevitably, this thought led her to the different history of black women in this country and thus to the writing of her novel.

Perhaps collectively we have responded to the shock of liberation with a similar apprehension, even panic. Perhaps the Puritanism ingrained in American consciousness leads us to be suspicious of joy. But picking up Morrison’s question in light of the new truths revealed by neurobiology and developmental psychology, my thoughts lead me to imagine what it could mean to free ourselves, men and women, from a false story about human nature, to release ourselves from the prison of a rewritten history and break a cycle of tragedy and trauma.

9 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage International, 2004).