

Reading women teachers: A theoretical assertion for bodies as texts

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ABSTRACT: Using a personal narrative as grounding, three theories create a base for understanding bodies as texts that are read. Ricoeur's (1971/2007) hermeneutic interpretivist theory of bodily action as text maintains that during real-time events, an observer can interpret a person's action for meaning. De Lauretis's (1984) theory of imaging contends that people derive meaning from bodily images based on observer's expectations, the image itself and the context, all which are driven by socio-cultural beliefs that are present before and during the reading. A piece of Gee's (1996, 1999) theory of Discourse proposes cultural models as symbols of what is considered normal, in this case normal for a teacher, as a tool to organise the meanings that people develop in reference to bodily action and image. The social theories (that is, ideologies) that shape the cultural models exist before, during and after the real-time events and affect who and what is supported or marginalised. These three theories, used in conjunction, have potential to guide better understanding of how women teachers' bodies, who comprise the majority of the teaching profession and have a history of objectification, are continuously read by themselves and others in school contexts.

KEYWORDS: Cultural model, feminism, hermeneutics, interpretivism, discourse, Ricoeur, de Lauretis, Gee, teacher, women.

"Do you have a minute?" When I saw the look on Tim's¹ mom's face, I knew anything I was doing that morning to prepare for the school day would have to wait. She confirmed that it probably would "be best" to close the classroom door, and I trusted her on that. Tim's mom did not tend to inflate situations. As I reached for the brass knob with one hand, my other hand grasped the door jamb. I was grateful I could steady my body because I suddenly felt uneasy without knowing the purpose of her visit. I had taught Tim's older sister and now Tim for two years. Surprise visits were not in this family's repertoire.

My stomach churned guessing what she was there to tell me. We took two chairs at the table closest to the door. "I have to tell you something that happened the other day at our house with Tim and his friends." She didn't think it was really serious but something I should know. Thoughts raced in my mind to find something that wasn't serious but would incite her blushed cheeks and make my skin go to eggshell. Here was the issue: She overheard Tim and his buddies talking in an adjacent room. The boys had all agreed that they'd noticed. These 12-year-old boys noticed that when I bent down, they could see part of my underwear peeking above my waistline.

Wide-eyed, I cupped my open mouth, wondering when this could have happened. I never doubted that it did indeed happen. I always knew that elementary school teaching was a much more physical and active job than people were led to think. I was always down on the floor with students, bending to their eye-level or reaching up high to nab some books from an almost inaccessible shelf. And our class was in the

¹ All names of people and places are pseudonyms.

middle of literature circles. I usually spent half my day pretzeled on the floor with kids, a situation that would prompt any woman's wool crepe pants to be uncooperative – especially if she were too focused on the discussion to “sit pretty”. It's funny to consider that I was not so concerned that it happened, but when did it happen? How many times did it happen? In which outfit or (oh, boy!) outfits did it happen? I realised teachers' undergarments could be seen ever since age nine when I saw Miss Monaghan's bra strap from beneath her gauzy white shirt. I was less embarrassed that it happened once than at thinking I might be a repeat offender.

Tim's mom assured me that she didn't want me to feel bad and didn't see the need to go to my administrator about it because she supposed that I probably didn't even realise. Alarm bells sounded in my head. My administrator... over underwear? “Oh no, neither do I,” I responded probably too quickly. But it was her last throwaway detail that landed a blow.

In the family living room, Tim apparently said, “Well, she's single now. You don't think she wants one of us to be her boyfriend, do you?” The boys paused. They broke the silence with several “naws” and “no ways” which fell into giggles that groups of 12-year-old boys indulge in when they think no one is listening. Although I was physically sitting at a table in my classroom, I simultaneously at a snail's pace escaped my body. Hovering above the two of us, my mind's eye saw Tim's mom amused, and I imagined the boys sitting around Tim's living room, hands sweeping the silly idea out of the air, and someone pushing Tim's shoulder with a you-knuckle-head intensity. I returned to my body just in time for Tim's mom to tell me it was “kinda cute”. But all the “naws”, playful jostles and cuteness didn't erase this kind of raw exposure.

Tim's mom told me she knew it was just boy talk but thought I'd want to know. I oh-yes-thank-you-ed in anxious politeness, but did I really want to know this? Did I want to know that my newly divorced status and some ill-fitting undergarments put me in the category of possible dangerous paedophile or in the least a woman so desperate for attention she'd inappropriately flirt with 12-year-old boys? Some boys seeing my underwear was not the problem – a minor breach easily fixed in my mind – but this transgression of what Tim's mom and perhaps society at large saw as an inappropriate teacher image was a matter that I could not shake.

WOMEN TEACHERS' BODIES IN THE CLASSROOM

The image of teacher is iconic. Students in many countries watch teachers each day in classrooms, guaranteeing personal and visual access to teachers. Cultural models, “images or storylines or descriptions” based on the “taken-for-granted assumptions about what is ‘typical’ or ‘normal’” (Gee, 1999, p. 59), often obvious in television, movies, books, songs, art and other media, reinforce the iconic image of teacher, so that people can see how their personal and individual examples compare to wider cultural versions. These cultural models serve to help people organise their worlds into teachers that match the cultural model and teachers who do not. Iconic images are problematic though. They provide a reified view of a subject that is more complicated than any one image would suggest, so that when compared to the iconic “good teacher”, the complex actions and images of real-life teachers don't quite match up.

One way of simplifying the concept of teacher is to ignore the complex matters of their bodies in school. Although compulsory schooling has focused on teachers using their minds to develop student knowledge, the design of classrooms puts a teacher's

body front and centre (Johnson, 2006, 2008; MacLure, 2003). Expecting teachers to maintain the mind/body split (Descartes, 1641/1996) dooms them to failure in comparison to the uncomplicated iconic images of teacher, which ignore teachers' bodies, mask them, or find them unproblematic. If there is attention given to a teacher's body in the classroom, MacLure (2003) contended that it is often not a positive discourse, because the teacher likely deviated from professional expectations, a point demonstrated by Tim's mom's visit and the boys' conversation.

Of course, any treatment of bodies is wrapped in ills that feminists have been struggling with for decades. Women are positioned as objects to be looked at, often at the whim and for the pleasure of others (Berger, 1972; de Lauretis, 1984; hooks, 1992/2003; Mulvey, 1975). For example, although I was unaware at that moment, Tim and his friends were engaged in watching my body. At times the object of the gaze is divided into focused parts of a woman's body, a kind of dismembering, as was the case when Tim and his friends focused on my underwear area. Observing a teacher's body certainly occurs in relation to the enduring image of the teacher at the chalkboard with a whole class of students looking on (MacLure, 2003). Observation of the teacher also exists in classroom practices that break from that image, such as the teacher on the floor with a group of students or in a one-on-one conference. These practices only change the watching of the teacher by increasing the teacher's proximity to students. This closeness may allow areas of her body to be noticeable that may have gone unseen when she was at a distance. In the least, observers are able to see her body differently. During classroom literature circles or reading and writing conferences, I sat on the floor on students' physical level to be part of the discussion. Bending down in unforgiving teacher clothes risked the likely outcome of showing my undergarments, a risk that was maybe too great to take given Tim's mom's reaction.

Matters of the body are especially important for women teachers, because females comprise the majority of teachers and teacher education students in many nations, such as the US and the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2004; Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter & Orlofsky, 2006; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005). Looking at women's bodies "is so pervasive...it necessarily constitutes a starting point for any understanding of sexual difference and its ideological effects in the construction of social subjects, its presence in all forms of subjectivity" (de Lauretis, 1984, pp. 37-38). Seeing a teacher as an embodied person with a dynamic life crosses the boundaries set by a stagnant, iconic image of teacher. One way to work against this iconic image is to acknowledge that teachers display embodied action and situated images.

That acknowledgement includes examining the meanings that are developed about women teachers' bodies within a school context. School systems have histories of exerting control over bodies (Foucault, 1975/1977), and that control extends to teachers, a profession mainly of women. This history raises the question, "Why do women teachers' bodies need to be controlled?" An explicit answer, such as they are problematic, dangerous or unruly, heightens controversy and offense, but an explicit statement is not needed. The answer is conveyed through what a society considers acceptable or normal for women teachers' bodies, and the norm is asexual, conservative and drab (Weber & Mitchell, 1995), at least in the Western society where I taught. In a society such as this where women feel social control over their

bodies, personal expressions, such as tattoos and dress, can draw attention to power dynamics (Levy, 2005; Pitts, 2003), risking a challenge to the status quo. “To invite the gaze of students or visiting administrators is to challenge the constraints placed on women teachers” (Dalton, 2004, p. 92). Personal expressions of the body counter to social expectations are likely to bring about correction, such as silencing the body by making it less visible or denying that teacher social goods, such as community support, which further marginalises teachers (and their bodies) who hint of differences to the norm.

The purpose of this article is to position a woman teacher’s body as a text continuously read by her self and others. Interpretivism and feminism are two primary macro-theories that help in seeing how women teachers’ bodies are texts that are read for meaning. Ricoeur’s (1971/2007) hermeneutic interpretivist theory of bodily action as text dovetails with de Lauretis’s (1984) feminist theory of imaging. Gee’s theory of Discourse (1996, 1999) weaves through the frame that is set by Ricoeur and de Lauretis and reveals the ways bodies affect and are affected by the social and cultural world. These three theories, when viewed in concert around women teachers’ bodies, establish the body as a text that is read for meaning.

BODILY ACTION AS TEXT

Teachers’ bodily actions and images are visual texts (Hagood, 2005) that are continuously read by members of the school community to develop meaning about a teacher. I use the word *read* in the capacity of Ricoeur’s (1971/2007) paradigm of text involving bodies. According to Ricoeur, to interpret a text in hermeneutic fashion, the reader needs to bring the text theoretically closer, interpreting the text in relation to the reader’s life. The reader must then take the text further away, back into the more distant world to situate it in a wider view so that it has meaning outside the reader’s self. During this interpretation, eventually a person develops an understanding, within reach of meaning to the interpreter and meaningful to others in a broader sense. Ricoeur (1971/2007) maintained that the real-time events of a human bodily action can be regarded as a text to be analysed as an object of study for social sciences without being first translated into language (see Figure 1). Bodily action could be analysed directly “without losing its character of meaningfulness” (p. 151). That is to say that one could observe a body in action and interpret it for meaning without first using language to speak about it or write about it. Language was not the medium for meaning; the body was.

As shown in Figure 1, three theories can be brought to bear to explain multiple layers of meaning-making. As suggested, Ricoeur’s theory of bodies as texts applies to real-time events of observers reading my body. De Lauretis’s theory of imaging explains that socio-cultural beliefs are present before and throughout the real-time events. Gee’s theory of Discourse makes it clear that cultural models defined by ideology organise readings of my body, develop meanings, and produce consequences of those meanings before, during and after real-time events.

In hermeneutic interpretation, a person views a human action and interprets it for meaning in his life before seeing how that meaning matters on a larger scale socially, culturally, historically or some combination thereof. For example, Tim and his friends

interpreted my underwear showing as an intentional meaningful action. Tim voiced one of the possible interpretations, that I wanted someone in class to be my boyfriend, a meaning that was in relation to the boys' own lives. Apparently, the boys found that meaning implausible. I can only hope it was because their personal knowledge of me didn't match the social messages they knew about the type of teacher in a position of authority who would try to seduce her student, taking advantage of a child's naiveté, admiration for and trust in his teacher (Johnson, 2008). However, the suspicion also draws on social and cultural messages about divorced women. Divorced women are not assumed to be virginal because the former marriage is wrapped in implications of sexual activity. My divorce removed me from the safe realm of committed "off the market" wife with soon-to-be mother potential and placed me in the category of "on the prowl" sexually active woman. Although I was too young to be considered a "cougar" (that is, an older woman who "hunts" for a young male sexual partner), some people may have assumed my divorce was linked with desperation to replace my sexual partner and that I would seek the attention of males in school, even too-young males, to do so.

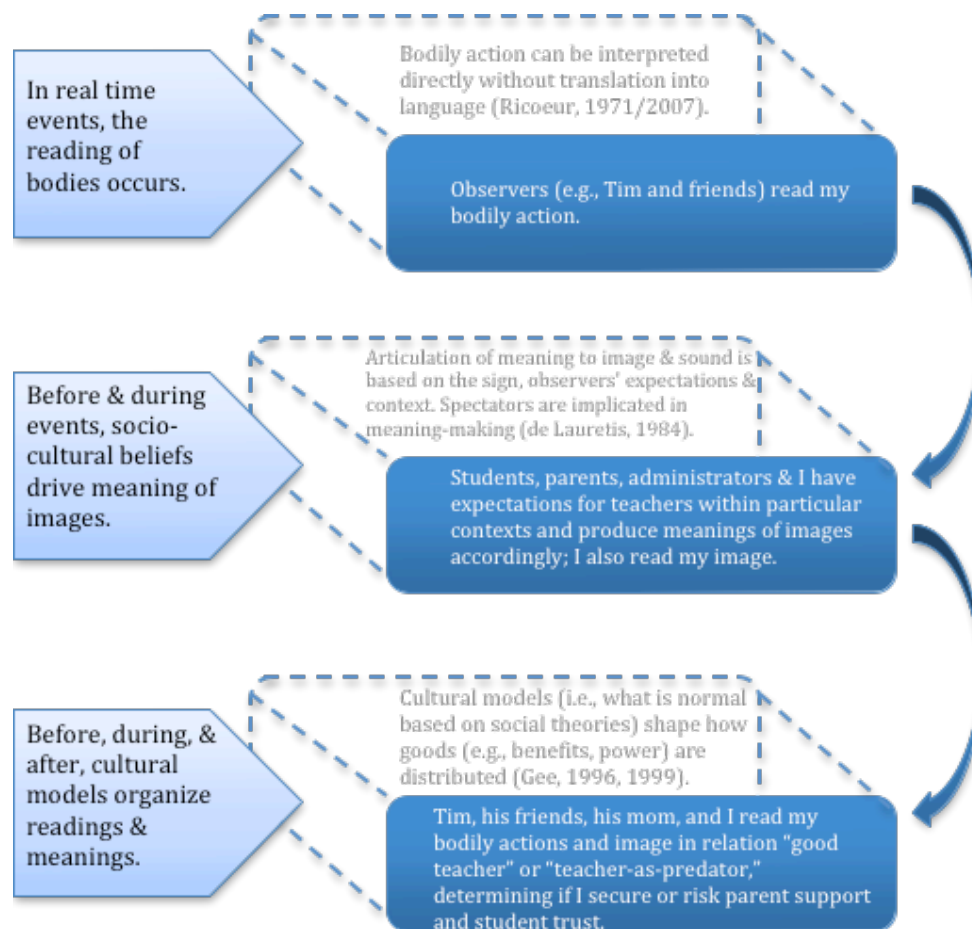


Figure 1. Reading the body

As Tim and his friends interpreted my actions, they were drawing on socio-cultural understandings about women and teachers. Gee (1999) stated, "people, places, times, actions, interactions, verbal and non-verbal expression, symbols, things, tools, and technologies" (p. 23) indicate certain identities and allow one to recognise people and things in particular ways, which form our understandings. The ways people and things are recognised or perceived are in relation to the cultural models (that is, simplified

storylines) available within the Discourse. People's perceptions may be aligned with cultural models or in tension with them, but "you cannot be any old *who* you want to [nor] engage in any old *what* you want to [because the] *whos* and *whats* are creations in history" (Gee, 1999, p. 29), shaped by and shaping the Discourse, meaning a way of "being in the world" (Gee, 1996, p. 125). One cannot perceive any old person or thing but only the identities and realities that are results of interactions of social or cultural groups, social language(s) and context(s) (Gee, 1996). Therefore, the boys could not interpret my underwear showing in any way imaginable. Their interpretations drew from available identities within the Discourse of good women teachers as nurturing wives and mothers (Alsup, 2006; Dalton, 2004; Grumet, 1988) and bad women teachers as sexual predators (Johnson, 2008).

Ricoeur (1971/2007) contended that the bodily action can have meaning detached from the actual event. Through hermeneutical interpretation, once a personal interpretation is taken into the larger socio-cultural and socio-historical realm, the action is able to mean something to others who did not directly see the event. Those other people, operating on a cultural meaning of teacher, may develop a meaning that is relevant beyond the immediate situation in which the event occurred. For example, Tim's mom, who did not directly see the underwear exposure, heard about the action (a re-enactment of sorts) and developed the meaning that the action could not be one of intent because I probably did not even realise this happened. Placing me in the cultural category of "good teacher," she trusted that I did not mean to engage in paedophilic actions or flirt with the boys. In her mind, the lack of intent erased the need for a report to my boss. Tim's mom likely knew a report to my administrator would have carried significant weight and would possibly initiate disciplinary repercussions for me. While the action for the boys prompted curiosity and jokes, the meaning Tim's mom developed was one of kind concern for me that I was at professional risk, in the words of Ricoeur (1971/2007), because "our deeds escape us and have effects we did not intend" (p. 153). The action as text of my showing my undergarments took on a social dimension of its own.

Positing the bodily action as text has affordances and consequences. The action can be accessed by others who are not privy to the body, giving more people the opportunity to read the action. However, accessing the action without proximity to the actor reinforces distance between intention of the actor and the action. It is then able to mean something to more people other than the actor. The reader of the action can return to it, even repeatedly, developing meaning based on his own situation. These actions can be reified in meaning long after the action occurred. "An action leaves a 'trace', it makes its 'mark' when it contributes to the emergence of such patterns, which become the *documents* of human action" (Ricoeur, 1971/2007, p. 153, emphasis in the original). I have no idea whether years later, if Tim and his friends remember me as the young, divorced teacher who showed her underwear, if they told people who did not even know me, or if they revised their thinking and convinced themselves that I really was flirting with them. I do not know if Tim's mom ever shared this story with others or if I passed through her mind when stories about female teachers sleeping with their students hit the evening news and other media (CBS News, 2005; Dakss, 2009; Lauer, 2006). However, these possibilities speak to the fact that people's interpretations of actions are shaped by and shape existing cultural meanings that have nothing directly to do with the action (Gee, 1996; Ricoeur, 1971/2007).

The action of my exposing my underwear played into the complicated social dimension of what showing a woman's underwear has come to mean in a social capacity outside the discursive event. Taking the practical approach, accidental underwear exposure can happen to anyone, especially to women. With the increased number of undergarments women are pressured to wear to suck things in and push other things out, there is a greater likelihood that at some point their undergarments will be exposed. Joseph (1986/1995) proposed that properties of the body are transferred to the clothing that covers those parts, and underwear often holds a connotation of erotic fantasies. Further, the underwear itself needs to be concealed because it becomes taboo once linked to those fantasies. Joseph posited that this may be especially true for women, because women's undergarments (for example, bras, corsets, bustles) have a tradition of being used as props to enhance a public image. Once those undergarments were seen in public, the trick of her enhanced body image would be "found out". Not only would she have shown her own unmentionables and revealed the reason for her own body image, but she also would have put all women's images at risk of being found out. Citing a regulation for women teachers in 1900-1950's rural Vermont that they had to line-dry their petticoats in pillowcases, Dalton (2004) wrote, "These women were not to be considered human beings like the rest of us; their 'unmentionables' must literally be neither mentionable nor visible" (p. 92). A hint of underwear on a woman piques the public interest in what is *really* under there to make her look the way she does. "Plumber's crack" or "builder's bum" on a man may be considered gross neglect, but a hint of underwear from a woman has come to mean an invitation to entertain erotic notions (Levy, 2005). These human deeds become solidified. Their meaning is separated from the actors' intent, and thus the meaning exists in the action itself.

Separating the action from the actor may seem harsh, lacking context and disembodiment, and indeed this may be what happens as the in-the-moment action takes on meanings in itself and runs the risk of becoming totally objectified. However, because new receivers, thus anyone who can read the action, bring "fresh relevance" (Ricoeur, 1971/2007, p. 155) to the action, a productive tension is created. The Discourse shapes the meaning of the action so that only certain meanings are available, but the readers keep the meanings new because they are continuously interpreting it for their nuanced, contextualised lives, so that possibilities for other meanings exist. Ricoeur was careful not to concede that any reading of an action is equally acceptable; he maintained that some interpretations are more easily validated than others. For example, Tim and his friends decided Tim's initial interpretation of my boyfriend-hunting was not easily validated. The probability of verifying a reading establishes its validity. Ricoeur guarded against an anything-goes approach, because like Gee's (1996, 1999) contention, meanings are shaped by the available Discourses.

Discourse is not deterministic. Several Discourses are present at any one time, and an individual enacts agency by choosing to use certain Discourses at opportune times. Ultimately, Discourse can be used to form an understanding of the ideological influences on meanings of an action, who is benefiting, and who is not. There would, however, never be a "last word" (Ricoeur, 1971/2007, p. 162) about an action. Ricoeur considered such definitive explanations as "violence" (p. 162). Keeping the opportunity for interpretation open allows the action to loosen the present state of the reader by providing *entrée* into the time and place where the action occurred. These

personal interpretations shape the social messages and communication among individuals.

Hermeneutics, like Ricoeur's hermeneutic interpretative theory, holds a place in feminist practices (Bowles, 1984) and offers much in this particular theoretical examination of the body as a text that gets interpreted. Feminism maintains that the body is important to the history and future of women (see Kolmar & Bartowski, 2005; Tong, 1998). Löyttyniemi (2006) noted that for all the possibilities that Ricoeur's hermeneutics offers, it makes little space for explicitly female bodies because it yields to the assumptive male perspective as the default for interpretation. Löyttyniemi (2006) made an argument for pairing a feminist perspective with Ricoeur's theories, by asking, "Don't we need a notion of narrative that can speak our bodies and our identities...in relation to the other who is different?" (p. 260). Speaking the female body is particularly important in regard to teaching, because females make up the majority of people in the teaching profession (Strizek et al., 2006; Zumwalt & Craig, 2005).

BODILY IMAGE AS TEXT

Feminist theorist de Lauretis (1984) posited women's bodies as sites for meaning-making. She attended to the role of the woman as an image-text and a spectator-reader as she advocated for her cinematic theory to lead to real-world feminist action. A history of women being objectified as images in film texts is well established (hooks, 1992/2003; Mulvey, 1975), but de Lauretis (1984) insisted that women should also be seen as spectators of film and thus readers of filmic textual images. This call encouraged women to be the readers not only of others' body texts but also of their own bodies as texts.

To examine the production of meaning from these images, de Lauretis (1984), like Ricoeur (1981), did not assume a consistency of signs and meaning, but invoked a more situated and complex meaning system. De Lauretis (1984) developed a theory of *imaging*, which is "the articulation of meaning to image, language and sound, and the viewer's subjective engagement in that process" (pp. 46-47) (see Figure 1). Both the creator and spectator of the image perceive the image. They produce meanings of signs, but these meanings are not direct, simple or predetermined. The ways people see signs is socially determined and contextual. Meaning-making is involved at all levels of "sensory perception, inscribed in the body" (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 56) and shaped by pre-existing socio-cultural beliefs. For example, I unknowingly created an image of myself in the classroom, which was simultaneously perceived by Tim, his friends and, by proxy, Tim's mom. I also perceived my image, but each person's perception was wrapped in social and personal contexts, making each perception and the associated meanings different.

Observers come to an image of a body within the context of ideologies that "permeate the entire social fabric and hence all social subjects" (de Lauretis, 1984, pp. 38-39). People's social theories (that is, ideologies) shape the way they see people and the world (Gee, 1996, 1999). These theories can benefit or harm people and create worlds that perpetuate the sharing or withholding of social goods (for example, status, wealth, power). Had I not had the social good of Tim's mom's trust, it is possible that

she could have wielded her powerful parental influence with my administrator in a way that positioned me as a guilty, deviant bad woman teacher. Some social theories are overt and explainable, and some are more tacit, difficult to express and identifiable only when they are challenged or cause regrettable consequences. When asked to describe a good teacher, it is unlikely that Tim's mom would say, "Someone who doesn't intentionally show her underwear," but when faced with the underwear exposure, she was able to easily recognise that the action went against a good teacher model. Social theories or ideologies shape the way people act in the world and develop meaning.

De Lauretis's (1984) theory of *imaging* is an "ongoing but discontinuous process of perceiving-representing-meaning" that is "neither linguistic... nor iconic... but both, or perhaps neither" (p. 56). In other words, this cryptic description of imaging boils down to a complex system of meaning-making from images that involves context, expectation of the observer and sign production that can change perception as well as material reality. De Lauretis used her imaging theory in cinema, film and art history studies to establish that perception and illusion are intertwined. A person uses illusion to fill in gaps between the image and the real thing, based on judgments shaped by contextual expectations within the material world. In stating that the "relations between meanings and images exceed the work of the film and the institution of cinema" (p. 69), de Lauretis seemingly offered an invitation to apply these cinematic theories to the real-life images that people encounter.

In this process of perceiving-representing-meaning making, if perception is subject to context, so also are representation and its subsequent meanings. As a teacher, I had some control in how I represented my image within the context. I chose to sit on the floor with my students during literature circles. I chose to dress according to what I saw as professional. I engaged in behaviours that I felt conveyed keen interest in my students. In short, within the context of my classroom of 12-year-olds within my school, I aimed to represent myself as a good teacher (Dalton, 2004). Tim and his friends also had control over how they represented the taboo topic of my body to each other (and unknowingly to Tim's mom) as the depiction of a teacher who was teetering between good and bad. These representations are a complicated combination of image and language.

The developed meanings of my image in context were individual to each person, but all meanings grew from the available Discourses about teachers. Discourse is a place where one can see the values of a social group being upheld, and examples that deviate from those ideals being marginalised or excluded from social benefits, causing harm to individuals. Discourse "comes with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognise" (Gee, 1996, p. 127). As my students described the image of me with my underwear peeking beyond my waistline, they were drawing on the Discourse of the acceptable good teacher and unacceptable teacher-as-predator. The context of the classroom (how close I was to students, what I was saying or doing with my body, the topic of conversation, and so on) allowed them to fill in what was unknown or unclear about my image (de Lauretis, 1984). Conceivably, my students could have read me as a sloppy dresser, but knowledge of me as a divorced teacher created a context that led to a more inflammatory meaning, that I was a boyfriend-seeker amongst actual boys. As one might expect, the available meanings for a teacher who shows her underwear

to 12-year-olds are less than positive. Needless to say, I, as a reader of my own body, interpreted the image quite differently than one of a sexual predator. I did not recognise that my underwear was visible and read myself as the good teacher, probably on the floor with her students engaging in important discussion, but my interpretation too pulls from only the available Discourses. While I may have had some control over how I represented my body, I had less control over which Discourses were available and what meanings were developed as Tim, his friends, and Tim's mom drew from those Discourses.

CONCLUSION

Social theories (that is, ideologies) are displayed and deployed through many socio-cultural mechanisms including the body. Gee (1996) reminded us that although we can never be sure we are right in inferring the social theories that drive people's beliefs, actions and words, we have a moral duty to spell out these ideologies because they can harm people in the social world, distributing benefits to only a select few who support and are supported by the ideologies. Using cultural models as emblems of what is idealised, typical and normal, one can see the beliefs, values and assumptions of a particular social group being upheld, and examples that deviate from those ideals being marginalised or excluded from social benefits, causing harm to individuals.

An entire population of teachers run serious risk of being marginalised when the cultural model of what is acceptable for a teacher is so narrow, nay impossible, if teachers are expected to effectually erase their bodies, à la the Cartesian mind/body split, while still remaining a physical focal point in the classroom. Plenty of teachers may already realise their actions and images break with the cultural model of what is acceptable within a particular social group. A Muslim teacher who chooses to wear a head/body covering (BBC News, 2006; Heinrich, 2010), an immigrant teacher who brings an outside culture and home language to the classroom (Daily Telegraph Mirror, 1995; McDougall, 2010), a woman teacher who wears masculine clothes (Mallozzi, 2009) – these people may be aware that their actions and images are in tension with the cultural model of a normal teacher. Their heightened awareness of difference may prepare them for the judgment, the stigmas and the fight that may ensue as they buck a restrictive description of teacher.

But what about teachers who see themselves as meshing with the cultural model? What about teachers, whose social markers such as race, sex, class, religion, physical ability, sexuality and marital status indicate that they do match a typical teacher? Those teachers may feel particularly secure in their chosen professions, because they seem to comply with what is valued in teaching. But what about when circumstances spotlight a teacher's life in a way that shows she is more complicated than the simplified teacher image she once saw herself as akin to? Even when a teacher, such as myself, thinks she adheres to the cultural model, her security can be gone as soon as she switches from one side of a binary to the other.

People switch social categories often. I changed from married to divorced. People are young until they are not. Sickness can make a once physically able body disabled. Teachers who cross to the other side of the binary in the public eye of the school

community are subject to unfamiliar body readings in tension with the cultural model. Teachers previously inexperienced with conflict concerning their professional actions and images may find themselves ill-prepared for handling a publicly perceived dissimilarity with an image they once identified. They may be caught off-guard at the withdrawal of social goods, such as colleague, parent and administrator support or strong student-teacher relationships.

Although reading teachers' bodies and a subsequent granting or removal of social goods is a particular issue for women, because they make up the majority of teachers and have a history of body objectification, this problem is not isolated to women. A parent's complaint, that an Oregon, male student teacher's pressed slacks, button-down shirt and cardigan were inappropriate, was wrapped in the same parent's successful fight to have this teacher removed from the classroom, when it was confirmed that he was not heterosexual but gay (Frost & Harris, 2010; Mirk, 2010). For a teacher who changes to the other side of a binary and who is being judged according to a narrow description of acceptability, an outfit that is fine one day may be questionable the next, as his or her body is read in relation to a cultural model. Unless a teacher pulls off the performance of an unchanging, uncomplicated, stereotypical myth, that teacher cannot escape the possibility that he or she will be found lacking when compared with the idealised version of a good teacher.

The mind/body dichotomy is an insufficient structure for teachers, and therefore it is an insufficient structure for the way teachers and their surrounding circumstances are theorised. Positioning a teacher's body as a text that is read is a way to integrate both sides of the mind/body split. When a physical body as a text is read, it provides evidence for the social theories that we know in our minds but often cannot explicitly speak. Those social theories become especially noticeable as a teacher's bodily actions and image move from safe to suspect, from reputable to risky. The institutionalised and personal social pressures to conform to an idealised iconic image reinforce reification of what a good teacher is, creating a situation in which those who conform may be likely to stay because they feel supported, and those who don't may feel ostracised, discouraged and pushed to the margins or out of the profession. Understanding how teachers' bodies are read as texts is imperative in developing insight into teachers' daily lives and complicating too-simplistic versions of teachers.

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