

neurodiversity.com

AUTOPSY OF A VIOLENT DIAGNOSIS

Deconstructing Mikita Brottman's
Nutty Professors

Kathleen Seidel
September 29, 2005

INTRODUCTION

Increased popular awareness of traits encompassed by the diagnostic criteria for Asperger Syndrome has enabled many people with heretofore unrecognized differences from the neurological norm to gain a vocabulary with which to communicate their experiences, a better sense of their personal characteristics and needs, greater understanding of difficulties they've experienced in their lives, and information enabling them to mitigate those difficulties and thereby improve their quality of life.

Unfortunately, this increased awareness also has disadvantages. Notable among them has been the tendency of popular writers to assume that a fleeting acquaintance with diagnostic criteria qualifies them to make authoritative generalizations about and judgments against all individuals on the autistic spectrum. One example of this phenomenon is the article "Nutty Professors," published in the September 16 edition of the Chronicle of Higher Education.¹ Its author, Mikita Brottman, is a humanities instructor at the Maryland Institute College of Art and an unlicensed therapist in private practice.

"Nutty Professors" is a facile, tendentious work of self-aggrandizement, projection and "othering" — that is, the reinforcement of social hierarchy by means of the devaluation of individuals who do not fall within social norms.² The article constitutes an act of symbolic violence against the subjects of its author's disdain and against all disabled individuals. It opens with a chaotic pastiche of imagery drawn from film, television, literature, and history, followed by a superficial, inaccurate description of Asperger Syndrome. The author retroactively "diagnoses" two disliked former colleagues, then baldly announces her inclination to discriminate against academic job applicants based on her speculations about their possible disability status. As I read the article, I shivered to think that my family members on the autistic spectrum, who have considerable potential to excel in academia, might encounter the kinds of harsh judgments and inflexibility on the part of potential employers and colleagues that are so abundantly displayed by Mikita Brottman.

ANGRY MOTHERS & BLASÉ BOSSES

After reading "Nutty Professors," I sent the following letter to the editor of the Chronicle:³

I am mother to two adolescents, one with a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome. Mikita Brottman's armchair diagnoses of her despised former colleagues, and her arrogant, judgmental, condescending, poorly informed speculations, are tasteless and bigoted. Her reference to AS as a "character disorder" in itself clearly demonstrates that her education on the subject is limited to stereotypes and words on paper.

¹ Mikita Brottman, "Nutty Professors," Chronicle of Higher Education, September 16, 2005 (<http://www.chronicle.com/free/v52/i04/04b00701.htm>)

² Terry McVannel Erwin, "Addressing Issues of Othering in Counselor Education Programs," Ohio Counseling Association Journal of Professional Counseling, 2003 (<http://www.ohiocounselingassoc.com/docs/Othering-Final%20Revision%20.doc>)

³ See Alyric, "Peddling Prejudice" (<http://alyric.blogspot.com/2005/09/peddling-prejudice.html>), the comments on <http://autismdiva.blogspot.com/2005/09/alyric-peddling-prejudice.html> and Lisa Cohen, "Diagnosis By Proxy and Other Logical Fallacies" (<http://aspies.blogspot.com/2005/09/diagnosis-by-proxy-and-other-logical.html>) for more commentary on this article.

Citizens with autism and Asperger Syndrome are not works of fiction, cartoon characters, or figments of the imagination, they are real human beings. Many live a lifetime on the receiving end of the kind of intolerance so abundantly demonstrated by Ms. Brottman. It is alarming that the Chronicle of Higher Education would choose to broadcast such an ill-considered hemorrhage of viciousness against individuals with developmental disabilities. Would you publish such prejudicial slurs against members of any other class of humanity?

In my subsequent communications with Dr. Kathy Smith, Director of the Learning Resource Center at MICA and the staff member responsible for the school's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, I expressed my hope that Ms. Brottman might be called to account for her words; that both she and The Chronicle would issue a retraction and an apology; that MICA's President would make an official statement disavowing this faculty member's conclusions about individuals on the autistic spectrum; and that MICA's administration would also openly reaffirm its commitment to non-discrimination against and active support of individuals with disabilities, whether they are faculty, administrative employees, students, or members of the community.

Alas, this was not to be. In both her professional role and her personal status as mother to a son with Asperger Syndrome, Dr. Smith shares my outrage about the article. However, her superiors responded to her concerns and to the concerns of numerous letter-writers with the reflexive, short-sighted invocation of "academic freedom."

What follows is an in-depth examination of "Nutty Professors," in which I elucidate the concealed meanings of Brottman's disparaging analysis of cognitively and culturally distinctive citizens, and of her former colleagues, each of whom she concludes is "one of them." I analyze the author's use of emotionally charged, biased language to describe both autistic citizens and individuals with whom she has come into conflict; unveil her unarticulated assumptions and her pretext of superiority, which she asserts by highlighting the perceived inferiority of others; and reveal the extent to which the article constitutes a declaration of intent to engage in illegal, disability-based discrimination in hiring decisions by a staff member of the Maryland Institute College of Art.

OPPRESSIVE SIGNIFIERS & MISAPPLIED METAPHORS

Ask anybody what adjective goes best with the word "professor," and the answer will almost certainly be "absent-minded," or possibly "nutty."

The reader is immediately confronted with the assumption that "anybody" might be as likely as the author to make linguistic associations drawn from popular culture rather than their own life experience.

To the author, the image of the professor is readily associated with humorously pejorative terms like "absent-minded" and "nutty" — that is, disparaging characterizations of a person's presumed mental state — rather than more restrained, more flattering terms reflecting objective evidence, such as

“erudite,” “gray-haired,” “theatrical,” or “tenured,” or terms illuminating the speaker’s response to that person, such as “inspiring” or “distinguished.”

We are then presented with a jumble of fictional characters, accompanied by more demeaning adjectives.

*Popular culture is full of addlebrained academics, whether they be villainous madmen like Professor Morbius in *Forbidden Planet* or Sherlock Holmes's archenemy Professor Moriarty; crazy cranks like Professor Emmett Brown in *Back to the Future*, or well-meaning but harebrained eccentrics like Professor Brainard in *The Absent-Minded Professor*, Professor Branestawm in Norman Hunter's children's television series, Professor Pat Pending in the Hanna Barbera cartoon *Wacky Races*, or Professor Dumbledore of *Harry Potter* fame.*

“Addlebrained,” “crazy cranks,” “well-meaning but harebrained eccentrics,” “villainous madmen” — a plethora of identifiers used not only to describe fictional characters, but also as time-tested weapons of rhetorical abuse against individuals with cognitive differences.

These introductory examples include several to whom descriptors such as “absent-minded,” “nutty” and “addlebrained” are inapplicable. *Forbidden Planet*’s “fugitive superscientist” Dr. Edward Morbius — based on Prospero of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* — is not a professor (although he is incorrectly referred to as such on a number of Internet sites), and was not associated with a college. Morbius is well-meaning and naïve, attempting to harness a power that, ultimately, he cannot control. Only one who has not viewed the film, or who missed its point completely, would describe him as “absent-minded,” “nutty,” “addlebrained,” or worse, a “villainous madman.”

Sherlock Holmes’ nemesis Professor Moriarty certainly deserves the label “villainous,” but “absent-minded,” “nutty” and “addlebrained” do not accurately describe this particular evil genius. Arthur Conan Doyle was a creator of deep, complex characters, not ones amenable to sound-bite simplification.

The greatest injustice in this opening litany is that inflicted upon J.K. Rowling’s astute, wise, compassionate, unflappable Professor Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Any “absent-mindedness” displayed by Professor Dumbledore is served forth as a deliberate test of acumen, a means of separating the wheat from the academic chaff. It appears that Brotzman has failed Professor Dumbledore’s first test.⁴

In sum, the only characters accurately described by the author are those from children’s cartoons and trivial entertainments; the essential qualities of those derived from more challenging literary and cinematic works seem quite beyond her reach.

⁴ Thanks to Rebecca and Felix Seidel for their insights into the character of Professor Dumbledore.

NOTORIETY OR DISTINCTION?

*Like many stereotypes, that of the forgetful genius is grounded in real life: Think of Einstein with his crazy hair, or John Nash, the tormented mathematician portrayed by Russell Crowe in *A Beautiful Mind*.*

This simplistic analysis of stereotyping excludes consideration of the motives of those who engage in it. Although stereotypes may be amusing and partially grounded in real life, they are also destructive instruments of social control, born of fear, envy, and the urge to define the self in binary relation to a vividly differentiated and rejected Other.

Eccentric characters seem particularly common in those departments known for the more abstract realms of thought, like mathematics, physics, or, most often, philosophy, the field of notorious oddballs like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Bertrand Russell.

The author resorts to the ominous phrase “notorious oddballs” to describe three of the greatest thinkers of the past 150 years. Nietzsche’s tragic mental deterioration in his mid-forties was the long-term consequence of infectious disease; in no way did it invalidate the worth of a body of work begun in his youth. Russell fell afoul of the law for his pacifism, and fell afoul of public opinion due to his private sexual behavior. Wittgenstein spent many years in intense, solitary contemplation of language and meaning, as befitted a disposition which, upon retrospective consideration, was recognizably autistic. The personal idiosyncrasies of each of these great men have been well-documented; however, none were known to have committed crimes against person or property, or to be particularly malicious or devious. “Notorious” here serves as a gratuitously titillating synonym for “famous,” and contributes nothing to the reader’s understanding of these individuals.

FLIRTING WITH DIAGNOSIS

It has often been observed that the more prodigious the intellect, the more it can compromise other aspects of the personality, such as self-awareness and social grace.

There is indeed a risk that brilliant individuals might tend to be more preoccupied with analyzing the subjects of their unwavering focus, than with analyzing their own psychological processes, or imagining other people’s mental states, or attempting to manipulate the impressions that others might have of them. Individuals who perceive themselves as possessed of “self-awareness and social grace” might also be at risk of self-absorption and excessive hunger for the esteem of others.

Continuing our reading, we learn that the author values fashion sense more than skill at calculation:

Indeed, many of us may have known, and possibly worked with, someone who fits the stereotype of the absent-minded professor – the kind of person who can mentally calculate to three decimal points but seems unable to match her own socks.

This is followed by a fairly accurate characterization of the culture of many colleges, albeit one cloaked in condescension:

Talented thinkers with strange personalities often find a home in academe. On campuses, people are usually willing to overlook the odd behavior of their colleagues, or to accept it as part of the intellectual package; students generally find such characters quirky and lovable.

“Talented thinkers with strange personalities” thrive in communities that value depth, creativity, intellectual accomplishment and heterogeneity more than superficiality, mediocrity, derivative thinking, and conformity.

The absent-minded professor becomes more difficult to handle, however, when his behavior verges on the dysfunctional.

The word “dysfunctional” heralds the author’s descent into pseudo-psychological cant. The disparaged Other is regarded as an object of “handling,” i.e., control, his behavior characterized as maladaptive prior to any attempt to ascertain its origins and function.

All vocations attract certain personality types; academe appeals particularly to introspective, narcissistic, obsessive characters who occasionally suffer from mood disorders or other psychological problems.

The objects of the author’s scrutiny are now described as “characters,” as if they are figments of a screenwriter’s imagination rather than real human beings. Although the author is herself an academic, this lofty generalization functions as a passive declaration that she is not one of those unfortunate souls inclined to a pathological level of introspection, narcissism or obsession. She presumes herself free of mood disorders or other psychological problems – in other words, she asserts her “normality” and her qualification to stand in judgment of others.

OUT OF HER LEAGUE

Often, these difficulties go untreated because they are closely tied to enhanced creativity, as can be the case with obsessive-compulsive disorder, major depression, bipolar disorder, and the kind of high-functioning autism known as Asperger's syndrome.

Many individuals who are aware that their life problems stem from OCD, depression, manic depression or autistic spectrum conditions do not seek conventional treatment because the treatments often offered are either ineffective, expensive, inaccessible, or fraught with undesirable side effects that nullify any benefit they might offer. Individual, person-centered “treatments” such as psychoanalysis are inadequate to counter the oppression chronically inflicted upon those with persistent differences from physical and cognitive norms. Since individuals on the autistic spectrum possess a neurological configuration and cognitive characteristics that differ significantly from those of neurologically-typical individuals, they often do not benefit from traditional forms of talk therapy. Competent counselors for this population are few and far between.

According to the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic criteria, those with Asperger's syndrome will often manifest "marked impairments in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body postures, and gestures to regulate social interaction," a "failure to develop peer relationships," a "lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people," and a "lack of social or emotional reciprocity." In addition, those with Asperger's may be preoccupied with "stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest" that are "abnormal either in intensity or focus"; they may stick to "specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals"; they may manifest "stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms," or a "persistent preoccupation with parts of objects."

Asperger's is most commonly found in people of above-average intelligence, who may have unusually good memories or a natural affinity with computers, and often have problems with casual social conversation. Apparently, in his 1944 paper identifying the syndrome, the Viennese physician Hans Asperger suggested that academe might well be the natural home for those who experience the disorder. If these symptoms sound familiar, it is probably because they are part of the spectrum of ordinary behavior that is accepted - even rewarded - in academic life. Consequently, like most character disorders, Asperger's is a controversial diagnosis.

Brottman recites diagnostic criteria and common personality characteristics borrowed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, then cites an article that she admits she hasn't read. Hard on the heels of this cut-and-paste job, she inaccurately identifies Asperger Syndrome as a "character disorder." With these two words, she exposes herself as an intellectual fashion victim, feigning expertise in a complex subject about which she, in truth, has little understanding.

In the twenty-first century, no professional with the slightest education in autistic spectrum conditions is likely to describe them in such a manner. "Character disorder" is an antiquated term, grandfathered from the era in which significant life problems were essentially regarded as evidence of personal or parental misconduct. By describing Asperger Syndrome as a "character disorder," Brottman holds those with neurologically based differences, or their parents, personally responsible for the difficulties they experience in a society that is only beginning to recognize and comprehend the nature of such differences. Such an interpretation died a well-deserved death with the passing of Bruno Bettelheim fifteen years ago.

The main professional "controversy" surrounding the diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome pertains to whether it is distinct from "high-functioning autism." However, this matter is not addressed in the article. The use of the word "controversial" in this paragraph is as gratuitous as the previous instance of "notorious," providing shock value rather than information.

FAUX NOBLESSE OBLIGE

As with other kinds of autism, there is no cure for Asperger's, although some of its more oppressive manifestations, such as depression and social anxiety, may respond to medication. But most people who have been diagnosed with Asperger's simply have to be taught, through years of counseling and therapy, how to conduct themselves appropriately in social and public situations.

Agreed, there is no “cure” for Asperger Syndrome; it is a distinctive pattern of cognitive and sensory characteristics arising from neurobiological differences that are present at birth. Brottman does not disclose where she gained her insights into the educational needs of “most” people diagnosed with AS. It is unlikely that this occurred in a clinical setting. (The author’s professional qualifications will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this article.) Nonetheless, she assumes the patronizing professional role. She inaccurately refers to depression as a “manifestation” of AS, when in fact it is a predictable consequence of abuse and marginalization. She locates all problems of social interaction in the person of those who have been Othered, without acknowledging the social context in which their difficulties occur.

In most academics, I would imagine, the syndrome goes undiagnosed. Like other professionals who pride themselves on their intellectual acumen, academics may have difficulty accepting that they are in need of clinical help, and prefer to cast themselves as the victims of jealous rivals or narrow-minded opponents.

The author correctly “imagines” that there are probably many academics who are autistic yet undiagnosed, but her speculations about the reasons for this are mean-spirited, and more revealing of her own motives and defenses than of anyone else’s. In fact, there are many legitimate reasons for adults to avoid receiving a psychiatric diagnosis. Clinicians capable of recognizing high-functioning autism and Asperger Syndrome can be hard to come by. In the absence of competent assistance, one is often better off leaving well enough alone. Considerable harm can come to a person who accepts a psychiatric label, especially one assigned by someone as unqualified to do so as Ms. Brottman. Possible forms of harm include loss of privacy, loss of the right to make decisions about one’s legal and medical affairs, loss of health insurance, increased insurance premiums, and loss of child custody. If “official” diagnosis brings with it no tangible benefits, many would prefer to do without. Considerable stigma is attached to a psychiatric diagnosis, not the least of which involves the tendency of those who consider themselves “not one of them” to assume that a label tells them everything they need to know about a person, and entitles them to second-guess that person’s descriptions and interpretations of his or her own experiences.

By initially focusing on characters from film, television and literature, Brottman positions herself at a comfortable spectator’s distance from the objects of her bemused scrutiny. A few choice quotes and strategic name dropping then establish her role as a pretender to the analyst’s throne. She draws an invisible, subjective line between “everyday” forms of personal distress, and behavior which she deems “dysfunctional” and intolerable. Two disdained former colleagues are then inserted into this narrative in such a way as to suggest that her interpretations of their behavior can be trusted to be as dispassionate and detached as any textual or clinical analysis.

VEILED AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Such quirky individuals are often exceptionally talented in their field, and initially – in an interview situation, for example – their dysfunctional behavior may seem no more than everyday nerves, or social discomfort. In my own academic career, I can recall two instances where candidates were hired who, in retrospect, appear to have had many of the characteristic personality traits of Asperger's. Both had stellar résumés and impressive lists of publications; they were dedicated and professional teachers, with superlative references. Both were midcareer with a history of short-term positions, but in today's humanities market that is not unusual, even for those with the strongest credentials, and it's no longer considered a reason for doubt. Both candidates gave wonderful interviews and tremendous presentations, and were hired with unanimous support.

The above description accurately describes the forty-ish, midcareer author's recent employment history. Over the past ten years, she has produced a lengthy list of publications that might impress those who share her interest in horror films, cannibalism, death-by-automobile, sexual exhibitionism, pornography, lewd jokes, and other taboos. After receiving her Ph.D. in English Language and Literature from St. Hugh's College-Oxford in 1994, she has held a succession of short-term academic posts: Lecturer at the University of East London (1995–1997), Visiting Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Indiana University at Bloomington (1998–2000), Adjunct Assistant Professor at Shippensburg University (2000–2001), and her current position as an Instructor at the Maryland Institute College of Art (2002–current). No doubt a stellar résumé and superlative references have enabled her to move easily from one job to the next. Ms. Brottman's career path and qualifications seem not a whole lot different from those of the colleagues she grew to loathe over a few brief months.

ACADEMIC AVENGING ANGEL

Neither lasted more than a year in the job. In the first case — and I'm disguising some details to protect their identities — the new hire turned out to be dismissive of any student incapable of meeting her impossibly high standards, disturbingly fastidious, bad-tempered, and intractable in meetings. She was also arrogant, petty-minded, and obsessed with such matters as the relative size of her office and quality of its furniture.

The author's overt hostility towards this "disguised" person is unmistakable. The characteristics she describes are hardly exclusive or essential to individuals with Asperger Syndrome; they might be possessed by anyone. Furthermore, every one of these negatively-valued traits could be valued positively by other people and in other cultures, especially by those who hold more conservative standards of personal morality and interpersonal restraint than those Brottman espouses. One woman's "impossibly high standards" might be another's "academic rigor." One woman's "disturbingly fastidious" might be another's "good housekeeping," or yet another's distaste for public discussion of the kinds of morbid, sexual or sensationalistic subjects to which Brottman is personally drawn. A "bad-tempered, intractable, arrogant, petty-minded" colleague might be engaged in a passionate, committed defense of positions and values under attack by a dedicated practitioner of *epater le*

bourgeoisie.⁵ A staff member “obsessed with the size of her office and the quality of its furniture” might be justifiably incensed at being provided a closet-sized work space equipped with trashy cast-offs, especially if she was induced to accept an academic appointment of a higher rank than her previous rank, with promises of an office of the same quality to which she’d become accustomed.

In the second case, the new star revealed himself to be an abstemious hermit and hypersensitive to imaginary slights; he was also a compulsive hoarder, and frugal to an unusual extreme. He was discovered to be actually living, Bartleby-like, in his office.

Once again, the author offers an overwhelmingly negative interpretation of another’s behavior that might have had very reasonable bases. Many highly focused, independently motivated individuals find it very useful to have round-the-clock access to a professional library or mainframe computer. Academic starting salaries for provisional employees are often meager enough to make it difficult to afford off-campus housing. An applicant might be accustomed to living on-campus; many colleges provide housing for their staff. A conscientious, frugal person with a modest social life and few material needs might be perfectly content to live and work in a unified space. In this instance, “Bartleby” might have been the victim of his employers’ failure to delineate clearly their expectations and limitations in this regard.

Brottman does not acknowledge the possibility that she herself might have perpetrated the “imaginary slights” to which her former colleague seemed so “hypersensitive.” Indeed, “you’re too sensitive” is one of the most common retorts offered by those who engage in verbal abuse. Withdrawal and seclusion might be adaptive coping strategies for a quiet person faced with an increasingly hostile work environment dominated by passive-aggressive communicators.

Even if the behavior of either of these individuals was objectively troublesome, and even if either of these individuals might have benefited from therapy or medication, it is wholly inappropriate for Brottman to assert publicly that either qualified for a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome.

ETHICAL PSEUDO-QUANDARIES

Perhaps unsurprisingly, neither candidate's referees mentioned their asocial habits, emphasizing instead publication records and certain exceptional student evaluations. We all tend to request references from those who like us, or who are familiar with our strong suits. It's hard to imagine any midcareer candidate so completely dysfunctional, or so universally disliked, that he is unable to get decent recommendations. The difficulty is not getting hired, but remaining in a position once the flaws become obvious.

It is possible that neither candidate’s referees assumed that another person’s private lifestyle or social habits were any of their business. “Flaws” such as a solitary nature, frugality or high academic standards might not seem so grievous to those with a more generous heart and a greater appreciation of human diversity than that exhibited by Ms. Brottman.

⁵ *Epater le bourgeoisie*: to shock the middle class.

In the case of a candidate with real personality problems, however, it seems ethically wrong to pass on the difficulty to another university, even when the candidate will not accept that there is a difficulty.

After such an outpouring of contempt, Brottman's pompous expression of concern about the ethical questions presented by this situation seems particularly self-serving. She fails to consider her own possible contribution to conflicts she has experienced with others. All of her analysis is directed outward; she fails to question the extent to which her own personal issues and subjectivity influence her interpretations of others' behavior and motives.

Wrong, but perhaps understandable. Colleagues who write glowing recommendations for problematic candidates are not only exiating their own guilt, but may genuinely believe – or may have persuaded themselves – that the candidate was simply a bad "fit," and that a different kind of department might be better equipped to deal with unusual behavior. There is also the legal question: Could the author of a negative letter of recommendation, especially one that mentions a candidate's personal characteristics, become the subject of a lawsuit?

Predictably, Brottman finds fault with those who speak in favor and defense of individuals she deems "problematic," and assumes that she possesses privileged insight into their motivations.

The legal question is a legitimate one to which the correct answer is, Yes. The author of a negative letter of recommendation, especially one that is personally disparaging, may indeed become the subject of a defamation lawsuit, especially if the disparagements are as damning and prejudicial as those expressed in Ms. Brottman's article. A good rule of thumb in such instances is, "If you don't have anything good to say about someone, don't say anything at all."

WILLFUL OR FORCED DEPARTURES?

Much to the relief of those involved, neither of our problem hires requested letters of reference, since they both seemed to believe they were leaving institutions that were not important enough for them, and of their own free will. And with recommendations from some of the top names in their field, neither had trouble securing another position elsewhere.

Here, Brottman begins to expose her current and past employers to legal liability. She speaks of "our problem hires," implying that she was an active participant in hiring and contract renewal decisions. She suggests that she and others in her department personally disliked their new colleagues, but were unwilling to speak openly with them about their concerns or creatively address the problems they perceived. She denigrates them by suggesting that "they both *seemed to believe* they were leaving... of their own free will," implying that they were somehow obtuse or naive, and further implying that she and other department members had communicated their displeasure in less than a forthright manner, creating a hostile work environment. This passage is practically an overt admission of workplace harassment, for which an employer can be held legally liable if the harassment is a response to an employee's disability status, race or country of origin.

These silently despised colleagues' decisions to seek new positions "of their own free will" could have been the consequence of a rational evaluation of their circumstances, a healthy response to finding themselves in a situation where they were chronically negatively judged according to standards never made clear to them.

The administrators of each school that employed these individuals could doubtless recognize the individuals described in the articles, who would stand out simply because they remained in a faculty position for less than a year, at the same time that Brottman taught there, then moved on once their contracts lapsed. They would probably also stand out in the memories of staff and/or students because of their differences from the other staff, and the conflicts that arose. If these individuals ever read the Chronicle article, they will probably recognize that they are the subjects of Brottman's disparagement and retrospective diagnoses. Defamation lawsuits could conceivably follow, like the one filed by the Turcotte family of Northampton, Massachusetts, against Augusten Burroughs, author of *Running With Scissors*. Even though Burroughs changed some details in his autobiography, it was painfully obvious to the Turcottes and to many long-time Northampton residents that Burroughs' scathing descriptions were meant to depict their father and themselves.⁶

THAT JE NE SAIS QUOI

While strengths in teaching, research, and publications are what initially qualify one for an academic career, when it comes to finding a permanent job, the lack of collegiality — that nebulous quality — can, on occasion, outweigh even the most superlative record. However impressive someone may be on paper or in the classroom, that is not where their colleagues have to meet them.

"Lack of collegiality" often serves as code to discredit colleagues who persistently object to unjust or intolerable working conditions — in other words, those who refuse to "put up or shut up." Here Ms. Brottman also appears to assert that a colleague's ability to socialize and agree with her is more important than their intellectual ability, scholarship or teaching skills. It is obvious that she has little compassion for individuals who don't meet her exacting standards for social interaction. The faculties she prizes have little bearing on an individual's capacity to perform as an educator — that is, unless the job requirements for the specific position include: instinctive talent for impression management; facility for casual conversation with peers; a knack for appearing chic and witty at faculty meetings, film festivals and art openings; and a consistent willingness to reassure at least one colleague that she is the fairest, hippest, most brilliant member of the postmodern intelligentsia.

Although she superficially appears to promote the development of a healthy academic community in the guise of idealizing an admittedly nebulous concept of "collegiality," in truth, Brottman advocates academic impoverishment via the elimination of diversity — diversity which encompasses the old-fashioned and the new-fangled, the conservative and the radical, the classicists and the avant-garde,

⁶ David Mehegan, "Lawsuit targets 'Scissors' memoir," *Boston Globe*, August 2, 2005 (http://www.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2005/08/02/lawsuit_targets_scissors_memoir/)

the traditionally moral and the relativists. It takes all kinds to make a world in general, and a college in particular.

OPPRESSION, FALSE & TRUE

Nothing is more demanding than the day-to-day grind of dealing with a consistently exasperating co-worker.

Many experiences are far worse than the inconvenience of dealing with a competent professional who is not exactly like oneself and with whom one might need to resolve communication problems. One intelligent young woman on the autistic spectrum outlined a few such experiences in her own response to Brottman's article:⁷

Being repeatedly told that the way your mind works is wrong, your strengths are unimportant and your weaknesses are very important; being bullied by classmates, teachers, colleagues or other people; noticing unfair standards where social problems due to mutual misunderstanding are blamed on you because you're different; getting medications designed to make you into someone else, that really make you disoriented, tired and sick; being forced to live a lie because if you don't, you're seen as crazy, stupid or defective; and many other things that adults and children on the autistic spectrum have to deal with.

PUTTING UP WITH BARTLEBY

Brottman now faces a dilemma. Having speciously and publicly conflated her emotionally-tinged interpretation of personal traits of two individuals she openly disdains with the diagnostic criteria for Asperger Syndrome, how might she exclude individuals from her workplace who are capable of performing their jobs, but whose cognitive and communicative styles are different from her own, and whom she now suspects might suffer from a particular variety of "mental illness" (a state she is not qualified to determine), without breaking the law at the same time?

In two words: she can't.

In the situations outlined above, it was easy enough not to renew the contracts of professors on first-year probation. But in cases in which a person has been in a job for a long time — when, for example, a colleague's eccentricities develop into an obvious mental illness — it must be far more difficult to justify a refusal or retraction of tenure.

It would be far easier and more humane to exercise compassion for those whose challenges become great enough substantially to interfere with their performance, and to seek creative means to help ameliorate those difficulties, than it would to justify their banishment from a community to which they have made valuable contributions over many years.

⁷ Ettina Satot (<http://www.geocities.com/ettinashee/>), letter to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

Moreover, Asperger's syndrome is a "neurological disorder." It is classified as a disability, along with difficulties in hearing, vision, and mobility, that most universities are required to accommodate.

It is indeed classified as a disability, and Ms. Brottman should remember that legal point.

If our hires had permitted themselves to accept a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome (assuming that was, indeed, their condition), would we have been expected to adapt ourselves to the neurological differences that make them obsessive, miserly, rude, and truculent?

Brottman's assumption that only those who have "accepted" a diagnosis enjoy legal protection under the Americans with Disabilities Act is incorrect. Protection is afforded those who have a substantially limiting physical or cognitive impairment, or who are regarded as having such an impairment, who are otherwise qualified and are able to perform essential functions of their job.⁸

"Obsession" and "miserliness" are not the exclusive province of individuals with Asperger Syndrome. For example, "Natty Professors" betrays its author's preoccupation with media images and stereotypes to the exclusion of reality; a tendency to view other human beings through a narrow, self-centered lens; and a meanness of spirit rivaling that of one of the most notorious fictional misers, Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge.

Individuals with Asperger Syndrome diagnoses are often regarded as "rude" when they speak the truth as they perceive it. This is a quality well worth appreciating, and is not so difficult to get used to. Blunt honesty is a rare and valuable commodity in this world and should be treasured in those in whom it arises, just as the capacity for diplomacy should be treasured where it occurs.

Would we have been considered rigid and inflexible for failing to be open to their rigidities and inflexibilities?

A little compassionate communication might enable one to appreciate the perspective of a person who initially seems unreasonable, and might enable one to understand the functional use of behaviors one might otherwise find intolerable. The diagnostic criteria's reference to "inflexibility" can be alternately interpreted as an institutionalized projection. All too often the word accurately describes the response of neurologically typical individuals to those who communicate and interact in a manner to which they are not accustomed.

Would we have been expected to allow our new hire to live in his office, if his disability made it painful for him to spend money on rent?

If a new hire is unable to drive due to sensory impairments, and if public transportation is inadequate, it would be humane to assist him in addressing the problem. The solution could include provision of

⁸ Thomas D. Colbridge, "Defining Disability Under the Americans with Disabilities Act," FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, v. 69, no. 10, pp. 28-32; October 2000.

on-campus housing. If a new hire has difficulty using public transportation, ride-sharing with another staff member might be arranged. If a new hire's salary is insufficient to enable access to acceptable housing within a reasonable distance from the school, it would be prudent for the college to review their salary structure to ensure that full-time workers are paid a living wage.

THE MYTHICAL LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

I don't put those questions glibly. Candidates' disabilities should not prevent them from getting hired. But, at the same time, we are all affected by our experiences.

Brottman here engages in the denial of injurious intent that is common to many oppressors. By failing to name her own advantage while highlighting the supposed deficiencies of those cast in the role of The Other, she glosses over significant difficulties experienced by millions of disabled human beings. She takes refuge in hierarchy and entitlement, defending disability-based employment discrimination on the basis that inconveniences experienced by inflexible individuals in a position of privilege and power are comparable to and more deserving of accommodation than the experiences of those who are chronically marginalized in most spheres of society. She holds the neurologically and culturally different responsible for her own discomfort, discomfort born of her own truculence and lack of compassion when faced with the possibility that she might have to interact with people who do not match her emotional needs, interpersonal expectations, and communicative style. Not only do her glib pronouncements and biased questions provide evidence of extreme intolerance, they also exemplify the lack of awareness on the part of those who are sensorily typical and socially agile, of difficulties faced by those individuals who do not share such agility. This is the essence of ableism.

ODD MAN OUT

And if I am ever put in the position of casting my vote in the hiring of a midcareer candidate with no previous record of tenure — especially if he or she seems ... well ... just a little bit odd — I might, like Bartleby, prefer not to.

The author announces that she would feel justified in discriminating against individuals who are "just a little bit odd" — that is, individuals who she suspects might qualify for a diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome. AS here serves not so much as an enabler of understanding, but as a trendy put-down to describe certain people she doesn't like. This reveals a lack of integrity and humanity, and could also potentially expose either her current or previous employers to legal liability. If any of these colleges were ever faced with accusations of disability-based discrimination, especially pertaining to incidents in which Brottman played a role, the plaintiff could produce the article "Nutty Professors" as evidence of discriminatory intent.

It seems incongruous, however, that Brottman should question the desirability of academic job applicants with no previous record of tenure, given the likelihood that she herself has no previous record of tenure — that is, unless if any of her previous employers took the highly unusual step of granting it for a junior position, abandoned shortly thereafter. The Maryland Institute College of Art does not grant tenure at all, instead hiring faculty under contracts of varying duration.

In her phenomenally vicious article, Brottman gives every impression that she herself is the academic who “prefers to cast herself as the victim of jealous rivals or narrow-minded opponents.” Given her demonstrable ignorance of the subject of autistic spectrum conditions, and her arrogant judgments against her former colleagues, it seems far more likely that her references to AS constitute a grandiose rationalization, a smokescreen to divert attention from a petty, self-centered intent — that is, to inflate the appearance of her own importance by feigning expertise on a subject that currently receives considerable attention in the popular media, and to engage in a game of academic one-upmanship by bad-mouthing two former colleagues who are no longer present to defend themselves.

The article concludes with a statement of the author’s professional affiliation, which serves as badge of identity and intellectual credibility.

Mikita Brottman is a professor of language, literature, and culture at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Her most recent book is High Theory, Low Culture (Palgrave, 2005).

Brottman here and elsewhere identifies herself as a “professor,” but this is a self-designated title. MICA grants no professorships, and gives no titles to its faculty members.

A WOMAN’S GOT TO KNOW HER LIMITATIONS

On her personal website, Brottman solicits clients for individual short-term therapy, “e-therapy” (counseling via email), couples therapy, and psychoanalysis.⁹ On her “Short Term Therapy” page, she states that she can refer clients to a psychiatrist if medication is needed, implying that she is qualified to make such a determination. She states further that she “can help with: depression; anxiety and stress; grief, loss, mourning; major life changes; self-esteem issues; fetishes and phobias; jealousy and guilt; relationship problems; HIV issues,” but that she “can NOT help with: children, child analysis; adolescents; 12-step programs; court-ordered therapy; physical/organic problems; drug addictions; alcoholism; parenting problems.”¹⁰ On her “Psychoanalysis” page, she states that she is “trained in psychoanalytic psychotherapy,” and that she “trained at the Washington Square Institute for Psychotherapy and Mental Health in New York City.”¹¹

Brottman's literature degree may afford her social status and academic job opportunities. Her works on horror films, cannibalism, mayhem and the macabre, may have established her as a pundit with the midnight-movie set and death-cultists. Her studies of psychoanalytic literary theory may enable her to sprinkle her writings and lectures with knowing references to Foucault, Lacan and the like. However, none of these equip her to pass professional judgment on individuals with developmental disabilities. Neither would any extent of training at the Washington Square Institute for Psychotherapy and Mental Health.¹²

⁹ <http://www.mikitabrottman.com>

¹⁰ <http://www.mikitabrottman.com/shorttermtherapy.html>

¹¹ <http://www.mikitabrottman.com/psychoanalysis.html>

¹² <http://www.wsi.org>

The Washington Square Institute offers a program in psychoanalytic psychotherapy grounded in the work of Freud, Jung, and existentialist theorists; autism is not covered in its curriculum. Brottman enrolled there as a part-time student in 2003, and promptly thereafter began to refer to herself as a “candidate” at the Institute; the term appears in the promotional copy for her book, *Funny Peculiar*, published in April, 2004,¹³ as well as in “On the Brink,” an article published in August 2004.¹⁴

In her July 2004 article, “The Two Freuds,” Brottman acknowledges that she “came to Freud through psychoanalytic literary theory, not through science,” and further states, “what appeals to me most about Freud is his art, not his science.” A name-dropping synopsis of the Institute’s curriculum — including courses she hadn’t yet taken and books she hadn’t yet read — is mingled with an exposition on the significance of Freudian literary theory to her own teaching and understanding of literature. She refers to the “paradox” of the “two Freuds” — the cultural Freud, who appeals to her personally, versus the clinical Freud, whose works are approached from a scientific perspective at the Institute. She reveals that her “personal aim in embarking on this program is to gain a better of understanding of the creative process, both in myself and in my artistically gifted (but often troubled) students.” Her only reference to individuals who might seek out the assistance of a therapist is to the “pajama-clad paranoids” of the Green Manors asylum in the Hitchcock movie, *Spellbound*.¹⁵

The first-year student of clinical psychoanalysis also expresses her amusement at the Institute’s “old-fashioned” customs, whereby the state-certified Ph.D. psychologists who teach there are addressed as “Doctor,” but students with Ph.D.’s in other subjects are not. This sentiment indicates a potentially dangerous lack of appreciation of the need to clearly distinguish between those who are qualified to provide and teach therapeutic counseling, and those who are not. Professional certification in health care and helping professions exists not for the enhancement of the practitioner’s ego, but for the protection of clients.

In September 2004, Brottman enrolled in the Institute’s clinical practicum, and began to counsel a handful of clients under supervision. However, in March 2005, after six months of practice, she departed “abruptly and under disturbing circumstances” from the Institute.¹⁶

Brottman’s currently-viewable Craigslist advertisement for her practice indicates that she practices “psychotherapy” and “psychoanalysis.”¹⁷ The Psychology Today “Therapy Directory” site contains a listing for Brottman, who claims that she has practiced as a therapist for three years, even though she herself had written in July 2004 that she “might, in time, begin to consider the possibility of a private practice, but that is still in the distant future.”¹⁸ The Psychology Today listing also claims that she offers psychoanalytic and transpersonal treatment to individuals, couples and groups; that she is qualified by virtue of a graduate degree awarded by Oxford University in 1994; and that she is qualified

¹³ <http://www.analyticpress.com/books/404-2.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.thesubwaychronicles.com/essays/2004/August2004.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.chronicle.com/weekly/v50/i44/44b00501.htm>

¹⁶ Telephone conversation with Kathleen Mays, Ph.D., Assistant Director, Washington Square Institute of Psychotherapy and Mental Health, September 26, 2005

¹⁷ <http://baltimore.craigslist.org/ths/90891709.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.chronicle.com/weekly/v50/i44/44b00501.htm>

to diagnose “depression/mood, anxiety/phobia, thinking disorder.”¹⁹ However, the Maryland State Board of Professional Counselors and Therapists²⁰ and the Maryland State Board of Psychologists²¹ have both confirmed that she lacks any kind of professional license or certification from that state.²²

Promotional materials for the September 30–October 1, 2005 conference, “The Art and Politics of Netporn,” refer to her as a “psychoanalyst-in-training at the Washington Square Institute.”²³ Mention of this affiliation lends an air of professional credibility to Brottman and the subject of her keynote address — “Is the Internet a Portal to Hell? Sex, Magic and Phantom Pedophiles.” It also constitutes false advertising. Although it is likely that Brottman submitted the information to conference organizers prior to her inauspicious departure from the Institute, she obviously did not notify them so that the now-dated information could be corrected on their website and other conference materials.

Brottman’s currently-viewable listing on the “Out in Baltimore” website states that she offers “psychotherapy” and “psychoanalysis,” and that she is registered with the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis (NAAP).²⁴ Her NAAP listing indicates that she is an “Affiliate” member trained at the Washington Square Institute.²⁵ Brottman joined NAAP in April 2004, and has not modified her membership information since then.²⁶ According to the NAAP website, Associate or Affiliate membership “is available to candidates-in-training at accredited institutes or equivalent institutes or programs. Eligible students are those who can document that they (1) are officially enrolled at their institutes and (2) are engaged in the supervised practice of psychoanalysis. Affiliate status is available to students enrolled at an institute or program that meets NAAP standards.”²⁷ Given the fact that she is no longer enrolled at WSI, and is not engaged in the supervised practice of psychoanalysis, it is clear that she is no longer qualified for Affiliate status with the NAAP, that she is in violation of the NAAP’s code of ethics, and that the “Out in Baltimore” listing constitutes false and misleading advertising.²⁸

In sum, Brottman has no business offering her services to anyone in need of professional therapeutic assistance, or representing herself as a “psychoanalyst.” It is also inappropriate for her to pontificate and speculate publicly in her role as an “academic” about individuals with neurobiological differences and those whom she suspects might possess them. She possesses minimal professional education in the field of counseling; prematurely discontinued her clinical training under suspicious circumstances; possesses no legitimate certification from any state’s mental health care licensing board; has misrepresented the extent of her professional education in advertisements for therapy services; and has failed to provide current, accurate information about her qualifications to the one professional organization she cites as confirmation of her status as a “psychoanalyst.” Further, she has admitted

¹⁹ <http://cms.psychologytoday.com/msn/36509.html>

²⁰ <http://www.dhmf.state.md.us/bopc/>

²¹ <http://www.dhmf.state.md.us/psych/index.html>

²² Telephone conversations with agency staff members, September 27, 2005

²³ <http://www.networkcultures.org/netporn/index.php?onderdeelID=1&paginaID=3&itemID=11>

²⁴ <http://www.outinbaltimore.com/resources/List2.asp?Category=98>

²⁵ http://www.naap.org/analysts_details.php?analystID=1615

²⁶ Telephone conversation with NAAP staff member, September 29, 2005

²⁷ <http://www.naap.org/other.html>

²⁸ <http://www.naap.org/ethics.html> NAAP Code of Ethics: 1.2 Members must neither misrepresent their own academic and/or professional training and/or experience, their professional affiliations, nor the limitations of psychoanalysis either to analysts or to the public. 1.3 Members shall not diagnose, prescribe for, treat, or advise on problems outside the boundaries of their own competence.

self-centered motives for the study of psychoanalysis — that is, to enhance her own understanding rather than to help others — and has publicly referred to individuals with mental health problems and developmental disabilities in profoundly demeaning terms. Although it is possible that Brottman might have some undeclared, specialized training in autistic spectrum conditions, it is highly unlikely. No doubt she would have displayed such a relevant credential as prominently, and in the same exaggerated manner, as she displayed her pseudo-status as a “professor” at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

ARBITER OF APOCALYPSE & INHUMANITY

Brottman’s 2003 article, “Apocalypse in Suburbia,”²⁹ opens with a horrific scene of real-life carnage – an airplane crash over a suburban neighborhood in Cerritos, California. The tale is played for maximum shock value, as if the event were theatre rather than a human tragedy, as if the dismembered victims of that tragedy were in fact props designed for the author’s amusement. The narrative then shifts to the author’s reminiscences of a summer holiday spent in Bethesda, Maryland, a place that delighted her with its “sterility,” “uniformity” and “calm.” She describes the birth of an “obsession” with horror movies, an interest now central to her career. The reader is led on a guided tour of urban and suburban America, including lurid passages such as:

This is society's boiler room, the home of rapists, shoe-bombers, pedophiles, family annihilators, snuff movie-makers, internet porn-fiends, and other fashionable demons. Belief in such a place is itself supported by the assumption that it is the evil people "out there" who are responsible for the horrors that occur on a daily basis in American society.

A little “Freud-lite” is thrown in for good measure:

One important consequence of the popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis is the assumption, consistently reiterated in the contemporary media, that perhaps the most reliable index of repression is "normality," and the more "normal" you are, the more you have to hide. The self-aware, psychologically "healthy" individual is typically emotional, confused, messy, open, and demonstrative. Those who remain distant, reserved, and inhibited are often suspected of having "issues" at best — or, at worst, of concealing some dark and terrible secret.

The bulk of the article consists of a bloodcurdling anthology of true crime and the bizarre — grisly murders, kidnappings, rape and cannibalism — all told with an air of sometimes detached, sometimes bemused academic objectivity. The spoor leads inexorably to Cerritos, deemed “apocalypse-worthy” now that the author has graced it with her voyeuristic, soulless postmodernist gaze.

²⁹ Mikita Brottman, “Apocalypse in Suburbia,” *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, Fall 2003 (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4125/is_200310/ai_n9303326/)

CONSTRUCTING & DEBASING “THE OTHER”

Brottman’s article “Nutty Professors” constitutes an act of symbolic violence against all individuals with invisible disabilities by its explicit and implicit justification of the continued marginalization of “others.” Perhaps it is not too surprising that someone who has made a career out of watching gory movies (or, in Brottman’s francophilic intellectualse, *cinema vomitif*), then blending synopses of those films with salacious accounts of real death, dismemberment and destruction, should feel so inclined to cast in the role of “The Other” living human beings who do no harm, who follow an idiosyncratic path in life, who are constitutionally predisposed to mind their own business, and whose chief crime seems to be that they do not share her interests, her values, or her fashion sense. Perhaps having encountered the diagnostic criteria for Asperger Syndrome, she now feels entitled to use them to classify the “evil people out there who are responsible for the horrors that occur on a daily basis” in her life. Perhaps she feels that those “Others” conceal “some dark and terrible secret” that her voyeuristic, soulless postmodernist gaze is sure to ferret out.

“Nutty Professors” reveals that for all her preoccupation with murder, mayhem and sexual fetishism, Brottman has not been quite as successful at jettisoning her adolescent idealization of ideological and behavioral conformity as she might wish. The editor of an anthology of literature about car crashes should realize that it would take nothing more than a slip of the foot, an unexpected breeze, a jerk of the neck, a knock on the head, a twist of the spine — in brief, the luck of the draw — for her treasured status as a non-abnormal, non-disabled, non-oddball arbiter of academic acceptability to descend immediately to the level of those from whom she is so eager to distance herself.

Those who inhabit realms beyond the physical and cognitive norm know all too well the sense, perceived within and without, that there is something “not quite right” with them. This “not quite rightness” is not an objective truth; rather, it is an artifact of labeling, differentiation and social positioning. People on the autistic spectrum are at extremely high risk of depression, which is both a response to specific experiences of abuse, misunderstanding, invalidation, and exclusion, and an internalization of a sense of inferiority that reflects their devalued status in society. This sense of inferiority is established, in part, by means of the kinds of oppressive language Brottman so glibly invokes and mingles with clinical terms. One who is repeatedly told by those in a position of power over them that they and their kind are “flawed,” “defective,” “nutty,” “addlebrained,” “harebrained,” “crazy,” and “mad,” cannot help but begin to believe it unless they access powerful antidotes to such indoctrination. Those who are repeatedly told that disabled “others” are also “villainous” and “evil,” will often come to regard those qualities, too, as inherent to disability.

Perpetuation of negative, dehumanizing stereotypes increases the already significant, disproportionate risk of unemployment and underemployment borne by adults on the autistic spectrum. This injustice persists in spite of the fact that they often possess valuable personal qualities such as dependability, precision, attention to detail, persistence, long attention span, problem solving skills, prodigious memory, artistic ability, technical and scientific acumen, and a capacity for unexpected insights. In the face of negative stereotyping, a labeled individual’s positive qualities seem to disappear, replaced by the fossilization of an abstract concept of abnormality; the unique identity of an individual is swallowed up by the restrictive category to which he or she has been assigned. The identification of disability as

an essentially inferior status may be expedient and even uplifting to those who seek to confirm their status in the unacknowledged social “center,” but it is inhumane, destructive and utterly unnecessary.³⁰

POSTSCRIPT

After reading “Apocalypse in Suburbia,” I was moved to find some fresh reading material to clear the nasty taste from my mental palate. The late Professor Robertson Davies came to my rescue with this apropos insight:

...I am both amused and saddened by the readiness with which people throw themselves into efforts to improve others... without having considered what is wrong with themselves. And I am depressed by the readiness with which people attribute to [others], the evil passions and tendencies that make them dangerous themselves, without any awareness of what they are doing.³¹

I do not anticipate that Mikita Brottman will readily consider what is wrong with the manner in which she denigrates those about whom she knows so little, or that she might develop any awareness of the implications of the inhumane position she has espoused. However, my hope remains that The Chronicle of Higher Education will issue a public apology to all individuals who were deprecated in “Nutty Professors” — that is, all individuals on the autistic spectrum, academics and non-academics alike. My hope also remains that the Board of Directors and administrators of the Maryland Institute College of Art will take the opportunity to productively exercise their freedom of speech, just as Ms. Brottman so poisonously exercised her own, by disavowing publicly their faculty member’s justification of the exclusion of individuals on the autistic spectrum from academic life; and that they will also take a leadership role in openly reaffirming their commitment to creating a hospitable and supportive academic culture for all individuals with disabilities, thereby setting a positive example for all academic institutions.

Kathleen Seidel

anima@neurodiversity.com

29 September 2005

Copyright © 2005 Kathleen Seidel

³⁰ Rose Galvin, “The Making of the Disabled Identity: A Linguistic Analysis of Marginalisation,” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 149-178, Spring 2003 (http://www.dsq-sds.org/_articles_pdf/2003/Spring/dsq_2003_Spring_14.pdf); Ellen Brantlinger, “Poverty, Class, and Disability: A Historical, Social, and Political Perspective,” *Focus on Exceptional Children*, March 2001 (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3813/is_200103/ai_n8935496).

³¹ “Professor Robertson Davies: Courteous Conservative,” *The Toronto Telegram*, 26 September 1970; in J. Madison Davis (ed.), *Conversations With Robertson Davies* (Toronto: General, 1990), p. 63.