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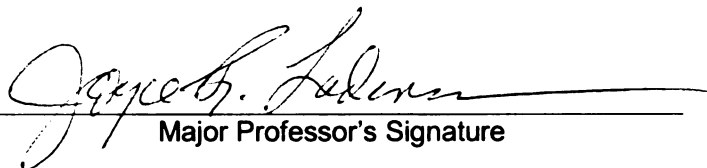
WEAVING A FEMALE SYMBOLIC:  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY, A METHOD OF SCHOLARSHIP

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

Ph.D. degree in American Studies

  
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December 4, 2002

Date



**Weaving a Female Symbolic:  
Autobiography, a Method of Scholarship**

**By**

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**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**American Studies**

**2002**



## **ABSTRACT**

### **WEAVING A FEMALE SYMBOLIC: AUTOBIOGRAPHY, A METHOD OF SCHOLARSHIP**

By

Mary Penelope Gardner

The multiple and fluid nature across time of one woman feminist meaning making of her own personal experiences is demonstrated through autobiographical narratives which both trace and generate a continuum of the achievement of a feminist standpoint. These narratives of selected experiences woven from memories contextualized, historically, personally and politically, produce and represent a level of achievement. In this project: autobiographical representation is the method; personal experiences, mediated through memory and understandings are the raw materials; and feminist practice as knowledge is the product. As the writer struggles for and begins the process of an achievement of a feminist standpoint another personal narrative of the same experience extends and moves down the continuum. Within theoretical frameworks of Nancy Hartsock's feminist standpoint epistemology, Adrienne Rich's compulsory heterosexuality and the continuum of lesbian existence, and feminist autobiography, I not only gain an understanding of the past meanings I have made but I also produce them.

Beginning in the assumption of a vantage point available to women to understand their oppression within the social reality of patriarchy, this work demonstrates for a seeker of feminism a method of using personal experiences

in their struggle for the cumulative achievement of a feminist standpoint. The political intent of this work is to speak to those who wish to engage in the struggle.

For further conceptual assistance in this project and to offset the supposed linearity of time and continuum, I draw on Mary Daly's theorizing and metaphors of the surface level of social reality being of the patriarchy. Daly conceptualizes that in a female symbolic beneath the phallographic surface is where women throughout the ages are connected. Therefore the continuum spirals down deep and deeper beneath the surface and spins a female symbolic.

I enter the continuum of my achievement of a feminist standpoint temporally in the middle 1960s. Achieving a feminist standpoint is roughly acquiring a system of interpretation, literacy, a lens of meaning making, and being. I exit the continuum of this project as an old, white, lesbian, feminist, scholar, with an achieved lesbian feminist standpoint. Although I exit the continuum with the end of this project the continuum in my conceptualization spins further and deeper down below patriarchal thinking. I continue my spin.

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**To lari sanford gates smith  
1938-1994**

**who led the way**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the Women and men, personally, professionally, and socially, who help spin the symbolic in which I complete this work; thank you.

To the thinkers immediately in my life and to whom I turn:

Professor Joyce Ladenson, was central to my achievement of a life-long dream to acquire skills of the intellect. She powered the loom with encouragement, expertise and trust, as I spun a thin thread of possibility into a full tapestry of thinking and doing. Professor Marilyn Frye was an early referent for me. Her patience and confidence guided me to the knowledge that I was already doing that which I aspired. When she told me early on that I already knew how to think, I scoffed and kept thinking.

Teri Swezey and I formed a partnership of support and friendship as we both pursued the completion of our scholarly projects. This partnership endures and will continue as we move out and beyond the academy. I am fortunate to have connected with such a grand scholar and friend. We finish together and I am grateful to her.

Others in the university who have joined with me on this path are my teachers in front of or from behind the podium. They include Patti Stock, Janet Swenson, Carol Fenn, Ruth Behar of UM, Michael Steinberg, Debbie Conlin, Jackie Campbell, Dagny Van Duine, Brent Bilodeau, Anne Tracy, Gretchen Barbatsis, Maria Bruno, and Rita Gallin.

Of course none of this could have been done without my rich and full life beyond the university. When my fears were the greatest, when the tears seemed unending, when the night was the darkest, my life partner, Marilyn Bowen soothed my fears, wiped my tears, lit my light and trusted in me. Thank you.

To my children, Bridget, Casey, John, Levi, and Vail; my mother, Noel Parsons; my sisters, Candy McCann and Lari Smith; My grandchildren, Max, Cade, Austin, and Kendall; my friend Seymour Gardner; my grandmother-Nona Wright, and my great grandmother, Elizabeth Sanford, I thank you for your loving and generous presence in my life.

I appreciate many others who spin the web of a female symbolic: The women artists, workers and proprietors of Goldenrod Music, specifically Terry Grant and Susan Frazier; the women of the Lesbian Connection, especially Margy Leshner; all the women of First Fridays and of the Lansing Women's Softball league—every last one of them including the spectators. To those women in my life prior to this project and are integral to it, named and unnamed, I am grateful: Peg Kinsman, Lillian Buchanan, Fran Bohnsack, Mindy McNichols, Ann Harrington, Fran Malone, Shaloma Shawmat Lessner, and Roxcy Bolton.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: A VANTAGE POINT

*A feminist's representations of her experiences indicate her achievement of a feminist standpoint. Her representations and re-representations of the same experience can be placed on a continuum of her achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint. Her research project participates in and contributes to feminist academic discourse.*

The project claims that feminist knowledge is produced by women understanding how reflective representations of their experiences are relevant to their achievement of a feminist standpoint. Personal feminist understandings have a liberatory effect for some women.

In a reflexive study of self in relationship to feminism, I place personal narrative representations of selected experiences on a conceptual continuum of my achievement of a feminist standpoint.<sup>1:2</sup> Integral to my achievement is my changing sexuality. The more identified with women I became politically-socially-personally, the greater my access to the "education" required for my achieving a feminist standpoint and the less compulsory my heterosexuality. This study follows Nancy Hartsock's theorizing of feminism. She claims it as "...a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women."<sup>3</sup> This study examines the intersections of *epistemology, representation, and memory* as they are contained within and informed by a theoretical framework of women's autobiography and

the achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint. Through autobiographical representation of personal experiences woven from memory I come to feminist knowledge. In this project: autobiographical representation is the method; personal experiences, mediated through memory and understandings, are the raw materials; and feminist practice as knowledge is the product.

Epistemology for purposes of this project is the feminist meaning I make of experiences in my life. Representations are written narratives that express the evolving meanings I make of my experiences. Issues of representation also include whom I speak as and for whom I speak for. I speak as a chronologically old, white, lesbian, feminist woman. It is without intention that I speak for anyone else. Nor do I imagine my representations are necessarily representations of other women's experiences, or of those who may identify with some of who I am. Remembering is how I recuperate the meanings I have made and make. Issues of epistemology include how the achievement of a feminist standpoint, a position of knowledge, both is constituted and constitutes how we represent our experiences to ourselves and to others.

Because much feminist theorizing often exempts individual women and their individual experiences, my work places at its center my experiences and the feminist meanings I have made and make of them in relationship to the degree of my achievement of a particular feminist standpoint. In this privileging of the personal I add an individual perspective to bodies of feminist knowledge. I do not claim to speak for any other old-white-lesbian-feminist, although some women, whether old, white, lesbian, or feminist may recognize something of their

own experiences in mine, and be informed. The meanings made of my experiences change in relationship to the greater access to feminism I achieve. My work exemplifies feminism's grounding in women's experiences, and retrieves from generalization and abstraction the individual woman and her individual experiences. The value of this work is its demonstration of a retrieval of meanings an individual woman makes of her experiences. It provides a model for other women to do the same. Further, many personal meaning makings of many personal experiences can be in place so that individual women might recognize themselves in feminist theorizing to contribute to their own achieving of a feminist standpoint. By placing my representations of my experiences at the center of my study, I claim that the personal voice, reflexive and retrospective, in feminist scholarship is intellectual, liberatory, and interesting.

### **The Problem**

With a critical eye on patriarchal discourses and practices in which experiences are lived, constructed, and interpreted, feminist theorists of women place women's experiences at the center of their analysis and articulate meanings of them. Feminist scholars glean the experiences of women from anecdotal material, letters, memoir, diaries, poetry, historical documents, surveys, interviews and myriad other representations of individual women's lives. To theorize, theorists generalize and abstract from these representations, and individual women and their experiences become textually invisible. Both the researcher's and the researched's specific, local, individual experiences become part of the collective and generalized, *women's experience*. Individual women

become “everywoman.” In this textual disappearance a woman’s own understandings of her lived experiences and the multiple meanings she makes and remakes of them are unavailable to researchers and more importantly to other individual women spinning feminist understandings of their own.<sup>4</sup> Theory by nature is abstract, general, and collective, not idiosyncratic, personal, and specific. As a feminist scholar of how one gains access to feminist meaning making of one’s own experiences, and with a feminist interest in the genre of autobiography, I tell my stories interpreted and informed by feminist theorists and their theories and retain my own voice and subjectivities.

Nancy Miller in Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts, speaks of a limited personalism in feminist criticism as a risk worth taking in order to maintain an edge of surprise in the predictable margins of organized resistance. My work is not to displace feminist theories that abstract out individual women and their experiences. My work is to augment these theories with what Miller speaks of as “limited personalism – at least a movement of a few more degrees in self-consciousness.”<sup>5</sup>

Personal criticism, a term used in Miller’s book, entails an explicitly autobiographical performance within the act of criticism.<sup>6</sup> A form of personal criticism Miller distinguishes is cultural criticism articulated through personal narrative, examples of which offered by Miller include, Joan Nestles’s A Restricted Country, Audre Lorde’s Sister Outsider, bell hooks’ Talking Back, and edited volumes like This Bridge Called My Back, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzuldúa. It is most like the work in which I envision myself engaged.

Miller goes on to identify the poetics of personal criticism: confessional, locational, academic, political, narrative, anecdotal.<sup>7</sup> Miller's "...case for personal writing entails the reclaiming of theory: turning theory back on itself."<sup>8</sup>

### **Theoretical Frameworks: Women's Autobiography**

"Autobiography becomes both the process and the product of assigning meaning to a series of experiences after they have taken place, by means of juxtaposition, commentary, omission", writes autobiographical theorist Sidonie Smith.<sup>9</sup> Within feminist methodology, writing various representations of personal experiences produces knowledge and is liberatory.<sup>10</sup> In naming, defining, and writing our experiences, knowledge is produced that is personal and collective. It contributes to and is feminist discourse.<sup>11</sup> As feminism critically centers women and their experiences, I critically center personal narratives of the meanings in feminism I have made and make over time of my experiences. The meanings exemplified in autobiographical writing both constitute and are constituted by the degree of my achievement of a feminist standpoint. Other women doing the same thing, articulating and understanding their experiences contextually and reflexively, results in a body of feminist knowledge and contributes to feminist discourses.

Autobiography can be understood as a representation of a life. Personal narratives of my experiences are articulated representations of them. How I represent my experiences and re-represent them is relative to the degree of my achievement of a feminist standpoint and my representations and re-

representations can be placed upon a continuum of that achievement. In her claim of the levels of reality, in Hartsock's theorizing of a feminist standpoint is that "the vision available to the oppressed group must be struggled for and represents an achievement that requires both science to see beneath the surface of the social relations in which all are forced to participate and education that can only grow from struggle to change those relations."<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically a personal narrative is not only representative of my achievement it is also an act of achieving. It is from within my current achievement of a feminist standpoint that I struggle to articulate my former and current experiences.<sup>13</sup>

My movement from compulsory heterosexuality to my chosen lesbian sexuality is concurrent with my achieving of a feminist standpoint. Personal narratives of my experiences both produce and represent them. The representation is part of the theory and analysis. These critical articulations could be similar to representations of other women's position (within patriarchy) and can produce a liberatory effect for some women. For purposes of this project, the written representations of my past experiences are from my current white, old, lesbian, feminist standpoint and are recuperated from memory. As the personal narratives as artifacts are exemplars of the status/degree of achievement of a feminist standpoint as well as of movement along the continuum of lesbian existence they are also epistemological tools. I am both at the same time representing my feminist standpoint as I am also achieving it. In my achievement I spin the continuum of both my feminist standpoint and my lesbian existence.

In an investigation of autobiography at the crossroads of “writing” and “selfhood,” Shari Benstock argues that “self” and “life” do not come together in writing: there is no unified self. One definition of autobiography, she suggests, is that it is an effort to recapture the self. This is a common understanding of autobiography but it assumes there is a “self” that is “knowable.” This is not so, writes Benstock. “What begins in a presumption of self-knowledge ends up in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premises of its construction.”<sup>14</sup> The self of today is not the self of yesterday and the self of yesterday cannot be truly represented by today’s self or even immediately after the experience. Writing is not a “self.” It does not even represent a self. It is fiction that attempts to make sense of memories of experience or experiences. And as I write my experiences to represent accurately an historic, personal and political self, I operate with a wavering assumption that what I write will also represent my life, my self.

*Will my story, one of personal narrative, cast-on stitches of a female symbolic, Daly-language, be heard from its locations on the margins of academic discourse, feminist theorizing, and autobiographical patrilineage?*

Bettina Aptheker in Tapestries of Life: Women’s Work, Women’s Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experiences writes of starting her work with women’s experience and forming patterns from it.<sup>15</sup> Aptheker turns to Adrienne Rich as a feminist theorist who, in Of Women Born wrote of her experience of motherhood and transformed it into knowledge.<sup>16</sup> In Aptheker, is a

quote from Sheila Rowbotham that informed Aptheker: "In order to create an alternative an oppressed group must as once shatter the self-reflecting world which encircles it and at the same time, project its own image onto history. In order to discover its own identity as distinct from that of the oppressor it has to become visible to itself".<sup>17</sup> By the same token, in order for her to have her own voice, she must speak her own experience. In the academy, generally to speak from personal experience is to speak and often not be heard. To include one's personal experiences in academic writing is to have them often dismissed and to be charged with idiosyncrasy, or have what is written labeled merely anecdotal.

Being in the academy and working within the genre of autobiography my voice adopts the structures, values and perceptions of the university that generally devalues and demeans personal experiences. Aptheker calls it the subjugation of the life of the mind that renders the speaker at a loss of confidence in her knowledge: in knowing what she knows. It takes away her ability to give expression to experience. It is as if to colonize the minds of women. "At the heart of the colonization is a belief in the superiority of men; in the superiority of male judgment and authority; and the absolute priority given to achieving male approval and validation."<sup>18</sup>

## **Memory**

Memory is the raw material from which autobiographically I make feminist meaning of my past. "Memory," writes Gayle Green, "revises, reorders, refigures, resignifies; it includes or omits, embellishes or represses, decorates or drops, according to imperatives of its own."<sup>19</sup> Charla L. Markham Shaw writes,



“the presentation of self takes the form of personal narrative when our memories take shape through language.”<sup>20</sup> Remembering is the means I use to connect my past with my present. Memory then is both the raw material and the spinner of my evolving *self* and the evolving feminist versions I make of my experiences.<sup>21</sup> Memory is not separate from my thinking, from my meaning making. Memory is an effect of my mind. My mind shapes, orders, and selects my memory.

Re-membering, “active un-forgetting”,<sup>22</sup> is close to the core of feminism and through strategies of consciousness-raising, speaking out, witnessing, and personal narratives, feminists assemble representations of women’s lives. In telling our lives we locate parts of our selves lost in individual as well as collective memory. Consciousness-raising (CR), the ground on which second wave feminism rests, is about re-membering. Women, among women, bring to mind and verbalize memories of past experiences. In applying a feminist critique alternative versions of women’s experiences are created in the conversations. It is on this ground that autobiography also achieves a feminist standpoint.

Speaking out publicly about our private experiences is both a political and a personal strategy. Women, through speaking their experiences at marches, on courthouse steps, in newspapers and newsletters, gain public support and offer opportunities for other women to claim their own experiences. Women learn to value the meaning making of their lives as well as make new meaning in the telling. It is through re-remembering that we collectively and individually create feminist meaning making of our individual and collective past.

Crucial to the achievement of a feminist standpoint is its transformative imperative. The nature of a feminist standpoint is to change the social relations between women and men. In order to bring about change we must remember our past, both collectively and individually. Women seeking change must particularly be concerned with the past. It is through autobiography that I create a record of the meaning making of my past experiences. It is an individual memory of our collective past upon which I/we can build a feminist standpoint. By going back individually I allow for a transformed future both for some individual women and for the collective woman.

### **Feminist Standpoint**

Feminist standpoint, an epistemological tool developed by Nancy Hartsock, uses Marx's approach to class domination to provide a framework useful to feminists in theorizing male supremacy and other forms of domination. Following Marx's claim that the point of view of the oppressed class reveals a less partial and distorted account of social relations, the oppressed class is therefore in a better position to change them. Hartsock claims a feminist standpoint, based on the sexual division of labor. Claims of a standpoint are that material life structures understanding and material life is understood within the concept of opposing dualities. In a materialist feminist approach based on this sexual division of labor, in which "women as a sex are institutionally responsible for producing both goods and human beings..." it is claimed that women's lives differ structurally from those of men, and in this difference women have access

to and can achieve a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy. From this liberatory access and achievement, women effect change.<sup>23</sup>

The nature of a standpoint includes a distinct epistemological claim that “the vision [knowledge] available to the oppressed group must be struggled for and represents an achievement which requires both science to see beneath the surface of the social relations in which all are forced to participate, and the education which can only grow from struggle to change those relations.”<sup>24</sup> It is the achievement nature of a standpoint that spins the continuum conceptualized in this work. “To achieve a feminist standpoint one must engage in the intellectual and political struggle necessary to see nature and social life from the point of view of that disdained activity which produces women’s social experiences instead of from the partial and perverse perspective available from the ‘ruling gender’ experience of men.”<sup>25</sup> It is my intellectual, political, and personal quest to have greater access to feminist theorizing and analysis by increasing my achievement of a feminist standpoint.

## **Representation**

My motivation is to represent an individual achievement of feminist standpoint as a useful example of the process so that some women might themselves take advantage of access available to them as women to engage in the struggle to achieve a feminist standpoint. Prior to this engagement an individual woman may not have a useful understanding of herself as other than an individual. It is that woman that I seek as my audience. Although she may be

a member of groups of women, such as a sorority; or she may be a player on a softball team; or she may be among the group of women who are mothers: she may still understand herself as an individual with individual agency and not necessarily understand herself as a member of a collective with less individual agency. She might not have the understanding, before entering the struggle to achieve a feminist standpoint that she is who she is, in a male dominated, patriarchal society, because of her membership in the class *woman* and its relationship to the class *man*. She might not have a consciousness of who she is in other relations of power either. Following Marxism, she is who she is because of what she does, what she does is determined by her membership in the class *woman*, and is of importance to feminist theorists. I understand this, accept it, argue for it, and still have a keen interest in the individual woman. Not because the individual is so interesting and so important but I want to engage her in the struggle to achieve a feminist standpoint.

“Marxist and socialist feminists alike believe women’s oppression is not the result of an individual’s intentional actions but is the product of the political, social, and economic structures within which individuals live.”<sup>26</sup> Women’s oppression is not a result of an individual’s actions, but individuals live in and contribute to the political, social and economic structures that produce their oppression. They experience it individually as well as collectively. In the early 70’s, consciousness-raising (CR) groups were often women’s first experience of feminism. Individual women came and spoke together of their experiences. This speaking and listening gave them and others an opportunity to understand

how their experiences were shaped more by the fact that they were women, than by the fact of their individuality. Iris Young writes that unless we conceptualize women as a group, which was accomplished in CR, "it is not possible to conceptualize oppression as a systematic, structured, institutional process."<sup>27</sup>

Our experiences as individuals contribute to an understanding of the collective of women. This is not to say that all women's experiences are the same. We are not oppressed/powerless/less powerful all the same, but how we are oppressed is relative to the interplay of our fluid movement between multiple social locations within the relations of power. Your experience, my experience and the next woman's experience do not add up to the generalized women's experience. It is useful that hers, mine, and their experience be understood in the context of them being the experience of Women, not in the context of the experience being of an individual. But still we cannot ignore the individual woman. Her experiences are the data, as well as the *catalyst for thought*.<sup>28</sup>

What can be known of her experiences may not be as interesting as what can be known about them as in relationship to her being a member of the class *woman*.

Understanding her experiences thus provides an access to an understanding of gendered relations of power.

The individual woman, as a worker is a member of the working class. She is also a member of the class *woman*, and of a *racial* class; and may also be simultaneously a member of the class old, or/and lesbian, and of a neighborhood, and of the class graduate student, and so forth. What defines these groups is intricately interconnected systems of unequal power relations.

Different systems of power make one's membership in a group or groups a determinant(s) in her membership in other groups. It is understanding these relations that is more relevant, and interesting to feminist theorists, yea even activists, than understanding an individual's experiences. It is from her experiences though that we gain an understanding of these power relations. Some memberships are more determinant than others are. How I am "white" is more important in terms of my social location than how I am a president of my neighborhood association. And being white, lesbian, old, a student, are all inter-related to how I got to be and how I am a neighborhood president. A member's position in relation to power among groups determines the vantage point from which she can gain an understanding of the distribution of power. To be in a less powerful social position, as women are relative to men, as lesbians are relative to straight women, etc. is to have a certain access to a more complete understanding of the asymmetry of certain power relations than those in the more powerful social position. Although feminist standpoint epistemology is understanding the asymmetry of the power relations of sex, it is also based on the understanding of the power relations of class. These understandings then are useful to other groups defined by systems of power. A standpoint is an oppositional framework from which one has access to views of power relations.

Marxist feminists believe social existence determines consciousness.<sup>29</sup>

How I came to struggle for a feminist standpoint no doubt began in my woman-dominated family history. But my desire and intention spun from my self-conscious gendered experiences, which as I achieved a feminist standpoint I

grew to understand as shaped by the historical, political and personal power relations in which I lived.

### **Lesbian Feminist Standpoint**

Feminists critically analyze the patriarchally defined power relations between women and men in which the class *woman* is subordinate to and oppressed by the class *man*. Within our patriarchally structured culture the class *man* is dominant in power relations over the class *woman*. Feminists understand power relations between women and men as being further defined by other structures of power including racism, ageism, classism, heterosexism, etc. Feminists seek further understandings of how and in what respects asymmetrical power structures determine things about us and what we do, and how we do what we do. These understandings are not only cognitive. We come to feminist understandings through our practices as women and as feminists. It is in my practice as a feminist that I am more skilled at being a feminist and achieving a feminist standpoint, while at the same time I diminish my skill of practicing the patriarchally constructed heterosexual woman. In the diminishment of my practice of heterosexuality I became a lesbian. Thus, my achievement of a feminist standpoint is concurrent with my spinning the continuum of my lesbian existence.

A tracing of my achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint draws on a combination of Adrienne Rich's conceptualizing a continuum of lesbian existence and Nancy Hartsock's feminist standpoint epistemology. In 1980, Rich's theory

of the continuum of lesbian existence confronts the bias of compulsory heterosexuality, current in literature generally, but her interest is in the bias among feminists. This bias prevents feminists from recognizing and studying heterosexuality as a political institution and a source of male power. Rich argues, "A feminist critique of compulsory heterosexual orientation for women is long overdue."<sup>30</sup> Using the concept of the continuum as a tool, Rich theorizes *the continuum of lesbian existence*, "to include a range –through each woman's life and throughout history–of woman-identified experience." Rich posits that this continuum would expand beyond understanding lesbian existence as being only a desired sexual experience with another woman to also "embrace many forms of primary intensity between and among women...including the bonding against male tyranny...." Through each woman's life and throughout history, notes Rich, she is and women are on the continuum of lesbian existence, and feminist's erasure, neglect, and denial of this material reality of women's lives contributes to heterosexuality as compulsory.<sup>31</sup>

Feminist standpoint theory and "the" continuum of lesbian existence are both tools of knowledge. Both are theorized by feminists whose theorizing roots emanate from a Marxist point of view. Both ways of knowing are grounded in the material reality of the knower. In the case of feminist standpoint, the material reality of being a woman in a patriarchal society provides women access to a less distorted and less perverse knowledge of male supremacy than that of men. An understanding of Rich is that the material reality of lesbians is sexuality, and being a lesbian is a material reality of being women-centered as opposed to the



male-centeredness of female heterosexuality. Within patriarchy, the material reality of lesbian's sexuality places lesbians in a subordinate position to heterosexual women, and following Hartsock's standpoint theory, it gives lesbian women access to a less distorted and less perverse knowledge of the compulsory nature of heterosexuality.

Adrienne Rich argues heterosexuality is a powerful patriarchal institution, in which the presumption is that sexual desire for the opposite sex is innate and natural. Homosexuality is therefore deviant, unnatural, and perverse. Rich writes that heterosexuality is made compulsory in its character as a "cluster of forces within which women have been convinced that marriage, and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable, even if unsatisfying or oppressive components in their lives."<sup>32</sup> Within the cluster of forces is the erasure of lesbian existence, however Rich claims lesbian existence as a reality and as a source of knowledge and power available to women.<sup>33</sup> Rich conceptualizes lesbian existence as a continuum. I draw on her conceptualization to illuminate my lesbian existence, which began with my matriarchal lineage and moves to my current degree of achievement of an old-white-lesbian-feminist standpoint. Along this continuum I place personal narrative representations of memories of various experiences. These narratives at the beginning of the continuum epitomize my compulsory heterosexuality, and as I spin the continuum of my lesbian existence and my achieving a feminist standpoint, narratives of the same experience change.

Lesbian professor of feminist philosophy Marilyn Frye theorized the

question about the relationship between being a feminist and being a lesbian, in “Willful Virgin or Do You Have to be a Lesbian to be a Feminist?” It has been the lesbian feminists or the feminists who are lesbians who have insisted on the connection between lesbianism and feminism.<sup>34</sup> In fear of being suspected of being a lesbian or of approving of lesbianism, and with anger at lesbian feminists for being active, present and assertive, many white heterosexual feminists, as well as some lesbians, particularly the closeted ones, denied and defended against the connection being made.<sup>35</sup> Frye posits the connection between lesbianism and feminism as lodged in the “profoundly political” nature of “sexual acts, sexual desire, and sexual dread and taboo.” She argues further “feminist politics is as much about the disposition of bodies, the manipulation of desire and arousal, and the bonds of intimacy and loyalty as it is about gender stereotypes, economic opportunity and legal rights.”<sup>36</sup>

Frye claims the connections:

I believe that all feminist theory and practice eventually conveys one to this proposition: that a central constitutive dynamic and key mechanism of the global phenomenon of male domination, oppression and exploitation of females, is near-universal female heterosexuality. All of the institutions and practices which constitute and materialize this domination (and simultaneously organize males’ lives in relation to each other) either manufacture, regulate and enforce female heterosexuality, or both.<sup>37</sup>

Feminists theorize heterosexuality as both constituting and being constituted in and by the institutionalized asymmetrical power relations of patriarchy. Heterosexuality enforces the oppression and subordination of *women* and the privilege and dominance of *men*. Heterosexuality is compulsory

in a dominant Euro-American culture and most other cultures. Compulsory female heterosexuality systematically advantages practicing heterosexuals while also actively disadvantaging people who are other than heterosexual. Two examples of these exertions of power include naturalizing heterosexuality and de-naturalizing alternatives. Heterosexism is the granting of economic, legal, moral, societal authorization to heterosexuals and withholding economic benefits, legality, morality, and authenticity. The compulsoriness of heterosexuality is practiced through normalizing, modeling, promoting, and hegemonically projecting heterosexual's assumed universality, and the negative stereotyping, thereby systematically disadvantaging lesbians, and other non-heterosexual people. Patriarchy is constituted by the sexual accessibility of females to males. Feminists understand this and lesbian feminists disrupt, challenge, and make visible their inaccessibility to male heterosexual desire. Gaining an awareness of the status quo precedes practice. It is my awareness of women as subordinate to and oppressed by men and in my struggle to change this asymmetrical power arrangement that moved women to the center of my consciousness and desire, which quickly became primary. It was then that I moved from a white, heterosexual, feminist perspective to one of being lesbian centered, as a white feminist.<sup>38</sup>

**Mechanics:**

For stylistic and clarification purposes, in this project I establish particular conventions of the use of font styles, justification, and capitalization. Font style

indicates changes in voice and time. For commentary, I use Ariel. Commentary is generally taking place today, in the year 2002. It is in the commentaries that I contextualize, historicize and discuss.

For representations of past experiences, generally in narrative form, I use Courier New. Personal narratives are the raw material; they are the *Catalysts for thought*; they represent my current memory of the meaning I made then of an experience. Whether the then is early in the continuum or later.

*I also use a convention of asides. I indicate them in Italics and they are right justified.*

Following Mary Daly, I use capitalization practices to indicate a gesture toward a female symbolic. Capitalizing words, not generally capitalized in this work indicates movement to the Background behind the foreground of masculinist, patriarchal, phallographic thinking and dominant reality. Not capitalizing those words that are capitalized in common English usage also indicates the common capitalization of them emanates from the foreground.

## **Method**

Conceptualized as spinning as well as traveling along a spiraled continuum of lesbian existence in conjunction with the achievement of a feminist standpoint, this is a study of my present self, evolved in relationship to

feminism.<sup>39</sup> Temporally, the continuum spans over four decades. As the “self” struggles for and achieves a level of knowledge and has access to a mode of interpretation, it spins a spiraling continuum of the achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint. It is a self that is constituted in the writing of it. It is a self that is both represented and representing. As examples, I resurrect from memory individual experiences. In several written representations of the same experience I query how these representations can be placed in relationship to the level of my achievement of a particular feminist standpoint. I represent my experiences in writing as I remember living them in a particular personal, historic, and political context and how I re-represented them as my achievement of a feminist standpoint grew. Concurrent with this achievement is a movement from heterosexuality to a lesbian existence.

Although a concept of a continuum generally suggests coherency, chronology and linearity, the representations of my experiences indicate a “self” that is multiple, shifting, overlapping and conflicting. To offset this assumed linearity I conceptualize the spiraling downward continuum as being spun as I move along it. This spiral indicates that as I move along the continuum I have access to that which I have already spun. Further I can re-spin it as I go along. Much like being on a mountain trail that switches back and forth in order to reach a destination above or below. On such a path a traveler can see where she has been and has a vision of where she might be going—or not. The concept of continuum used in this project also assumes all representations and experiences are cumulative. Within the achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint, I build

on, revise, and/or delete former understandings for new understandings. All that has gone before is a part of what is. I use my experiences and how I re-member them, as indicative of who I was personally, politically and historically and to both represent and re-present and reflect my achievement of a feminist standpoint. With the presumption that from the gender consciousness of my familial background I struggled for and achieved a feminist standpoint and struggled for and achieved a lesbian feminist standpoint, my interest is how my representations of each experience change relative to my access to a feminist standpoint. My representations, are not only exemplary of my achievement, they are also a continuous act of achieving.

It is as a feminist, and upon a feminist framework, rich in the tradition of self-examination and sharing of the personal, that I apply my research. Feminism, both politically and philosophically has recognized the personal as fundamental to our projects. Laurel Richardson in "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" posits that "writing is a way of knowing--a method of discovery and analysis."<sup>40</sup> Therefore to interrogate my experience(s) as to how, why and what knowledge is produced, I write them.<sup>41</sup> Built on the framework of multiple contexts, various locations and material circumstances, and the fashioning of a feminist standpoint, these stories represent my re-membered perceptions. They demonstrate the changing nature of these perspectives and will be interrogated for the feminist conditions within which perspectives change.

These autobiographical narratives are shaped by my position in graduate school in an interdisciplinary background that includes Women's Studies with an

interest in the historic nature of my narratives; Feminist Philosophy to provide me more complex understandings of feminist standpoint, compulsory heterosexuality, and lesbian feminist theory; and in a sub-genre of autobiography, theory and practice, based in feminism and postmodernism to provide methodological frameworks which query the referentiality, performance and representational nature of my writing.

**Literature:**

*one voice of experience...*

There are many feminisms, and Virginia Olesen writes in “Feminisms and Models of Qualitative Research” in The Handbook of Qualitative Research<sup>42</sup> that all “share the outlook that it is important to center and make problematic women’s diverse situations and institutions and frames that influence those situations...”<sup>43</sup> Olesen further writes that feminists use a variety of styles but interpreting human actions found in women’s reports of experience, their stories, can be the focus of research. Bonnie Mann in an introduction to Gyn/Ecology writes of battered women who read Mary Daly in the process of understanding the meaning of their lives. Mann writes, “when a woman tells her life story, the vantage point from which she is able to tell it, to understand and explain what she did, and the depth at which other women are able to hear it, to hear the meaning of her actions, determine ultimately the meaning of her life.”<sup>44</sup>

*many voices of experience...*

Lorraine Code, critiques positivist epistemology and its anti-narrative stance and writes of a storied epistemology. In "Voice and Voicelessness," an essay in Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations she argues that stories provide the multiplicity of voices of which "knowledge(s) and epistemologies are made..."<sup>45</sup> It is this multiplicity of voices that appear as disappeared in feminist knowledge when the individual woman and her individual experiences are eschewed. Might bodies of individual women's feminist knowledge be likened to a quilt, the AIDS quilt to be specific? A person's story is represented in a square. All the squares together make up the quilt. Viewers of the quilt create an understanding of AIDS and of the people who have lived and died with AIDS, and make connections to their own lives and even their anticipated deaths. In the AIDS quilt one gets the sense that the individual and her or his experience is not diminished through generalization and abstraction.

*A non-story...*

Autobiography reproduces the patrilineage and ideologies of gender, Sidonie Smith argues in A Poetics of Women's Autobiography.<sup>46</sup> The ideology of gender makes a woman's life script a non-story. Fictionalized thus, women are autobiographically silenced. They may write their stories privately in letters, journals, and diaries. But publicly they are culturally silenced.

Autobiographically, the *self* of women discursively constructed is not a self-representation of the woman. Her story of a *self* created in patriarchy is the story created by men. In order for her story to be heard it must be written in the language of the reader. The reader is also patriarchally constructed. If in telling



her story she challenges these gendered life scripts, she does so on the margins of the discourse within which it is constructed. On the margins, she is unheard and "...always removed from the center of power within the culture she inhabits."<sup>47</sup>

In a complex discussion of woman seeking authority to write her story publicly, Smith writes that the female autobiographer commits herself to a "patrilineal" contract. Appropriating the speaking posture of the representative man to gain autobiographical authority, the woman writes her "father's" story. Repressing the "mother" in her, she recuperates her self in the symbolic order of patriarchy.<sup>48</sup> In my story of *overcoming* compulsory heterosexuality, and the *achievement* of a feminist standpoint, I wonder if I committed to a patrilineal contract and am telling my story in the speaking posture of the representative man? If so, how do I break this contract and restore the "mother?"

### *Spinning a story...*

Mary Daly writes of the necrophilia of patriarchy at the foreground or surface of our lives and implores that we journey "for the lesbian imagination in all women" below the surface deep into the life-giving Background, of the connections of all women's lives, past, present and future.<sup>49</sup> Daly insists that we can and must Dis-cover new time and space, that there is something profoundly positive beyond what men have done to us. She implores that we move to the edge of a radical question like "*who am I?*" as an existential leap into free space. Where man is not at the center. A free space of remembering. This is not

without its struggles, this leap into the unknown.<sup>50</sup>

Spinning deeply into the Background requires an understanding of the constraints and restraints of the oppressions of patriarchy, and the injustices of distributions of power. Like the achievement of a feminist standpoint this understanding is not just available to us because we are women, the Background is not just a resistance to or a reforming of the foreground. It becomes available to those who take the leap and spin out of control. Since the Background is outside the scope of what we understand as reality, we have to make what is “real” the illusion and understand what is as illusionary, real.

The journey is for each individual traveler to expand the scope of this imagination within her. “It is she and she alone,” writes Daly of the journeyer, “who can determine how far, and in what way, she will/can travel. She, and she alone, can Dis-cover the mystery of her own history, and find how it is interwoven with the lives of other women.”<sup>51</sup> In the manner of the “Mother” then I imagine a Background of connections of women’s stories, of women’s achievements of and struggles for a feminist standpoint.

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<sup>1</sup> “Reflexivity is located in treating one’s self as subject for intellectual inquiry, and it encapsulates the socialized, non-unitary and changing self posited in feminist social thought,” Liz Stanley. “On Auto/biography in Sociology,” Sociology, Vol 27:1, February 1993, pp. 41-52 (48).

<sup>2</sup> Hartsock, Nancy. “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism, in Feminism and Methodology, Sandra Harding, ed. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Hartsock, Nancy. “Fundamental Feminism: Process and Perspective,” in Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest a Feminist Quarterly, Charlotte Bunch, et al., eds. (New York: Longman, 1981), pp. 32-42 (35).

<sup>4</sup> “I place Black women’s experiences and ideas at the center of analysis,” Patricia Hill Collins: Black Feminist Thought, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), xii; “ ‘Feminist’ for me implies

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*assuming* a perspective in which women's experiences, ideas and needs (different and differing as they may be) are valid in their own right..." Renate Duelli Klein: "How To Do What We Want To Do: Thoughts about Feminist Methodology," in Theories of Women's Studies, Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein, eds. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 89; "A feminist method builds on experience and accepts subjective experiences as valid forms of existence." Pamala Moss, "Focus: Feminism as Method," The Canadian Geographer, 37:1 1993, pp. 48-61 (48); "...the importance of the personal is fundamental to feminist philosophy. That is, accounts of the personal constitute not only a realm for examination and discussion, but also the subject-matter of feminist theory and thus the basis of feminist political activity," Liz Stanley and Sue Wise: "Feminist Research, Feminist Consciousness, and Experiences of Sexism" in Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research, 1991, Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 265-283, p. 266.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, Nancy, Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts, (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. xiv.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Miller, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, Sidonie, A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-representation, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> There are many feminisms, "these many voices share the outlook that it is important to center and make problematic women's diverse situations and the institutions and frames that influence those situations, and then refer the examination of that problematic to theoretical, policy, or action frameworks in the interest of realizing social justice for women." Virginia Olesen, "Feminisms and Models of Qualitative Research" in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., Handbook of Qualitative Research, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 158-174 (158), citing M. Eichler, "The Relationship Between Sexist, Non-Sexist, Woman-Centered and Feminist Research," Studies in Communication, 3, 37-74 (68).

<sup>11</sup> Williams, Patricia J., The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Hartsock 1987, p. 160.

<sup>13</sup> Hartsock 1987, p. 159.

<sup>14</sup> Benstock, Shari, "Authorizing the Autobiographical" in Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) pp. 145-155 (146).

<sup>15</sup> Aptheker, Bettina, Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Aptheker, p. 17, citing Rich, Adrienne, Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 201-202.

<sup>17</sup> Rowbotham, Sheila. Women's Consciousness, Man's World p.27, in Aptheker, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Aptheker, pp. 135-136.

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<sup>19</sup> Green, Gayle, "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory," in The Second Signs Reader: Feminist Scholarship, 1983-1996, Ruth-Ellen B. Joeres and Barbara Laslett, eds., (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 184-215 (188).

<sup>20</sup> Shaw, Charla L. Markham, "Personal Narrative: Revealing Self and Reflecting Other," Human Communication Research, 1997, 24:2, pp. 302-319.

<sup>21</sup> "...Woolf calls memory a 'seamstress' who 'runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither.'" Note 26, Green, p. 192, citing Woolf, Virginia, Orlando, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1956), p. 78.

<sup>22</sup> Daly, Mary and Jane Caputo, Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language, (Toronto, New York: Women's Press, Ltd. 1998) p. 92 "Re-membering: Re-calling the Original intuition of Integrity; healing the dismembered self—the Goddess within women; Re-calling the primordial connections/conversations among women, animals, and other elemental beings. 2. Realizing the power to See and to Spell out connections among apparently disparate phenomena: Spinning, Creating."

<sup>23</sup> Hartsock, 1987, p. 164.

<sup>24</sup> Hartsock, 1987, p. 163.

<sup>25</sup> Hartsock 1987, pp. 159-160.

<sup>26</sup> Tong, Rosemary, "Marxist and Socialist Feminism" in Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), p. 95.

<sup>27</sup> Young, Iris, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 1994, 19:3, pp. 713-738.

<sup>28</sup> "We have used our experiences as catalysts for thought, and as some of the implications of our experiences sink in, we have also asked serious questions of church and state," Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, Sappho Was A Right-On Woman (New York: Day Book, 1978), p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> Tong, p. 95.

<sup>30</sup> Rich, Adrienne, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose, Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Alber Gelpi, eds., (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1993), pp. 203-224 (205-206).

<sup>31</sup> Rich, p. 217.

<sup>32</sup> Rich, Adrienne, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 1980, vol 5:4 pp 631-660.

<sup>33</sup> Rich 1980, p. 633.

<sup>34</sup> Frye, Marilyn, "Willful Virgin or Do You Have To Be A Lesbian To Be A Feminist," in The Willful Virgin (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1992) pp 124-137.

<sup>35</sup> Abbott and Love, chapters 5 and 6: "Mirage" and "Lesbianism and Feminism."

<sup>36</sup> Frye, 1992, pp. 124-125.

<sup>37</sup> Frye, 1992, p. 129.

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<sup>38</sup> Penelope, Julia, Call Me Lesbian: Lesbian Lives, Lesbian Theory, (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1992) "The Lesbian Perspective," pp. 39-59.

<sup>39</sup> Daly, Mary, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990) Throughout Daly's work she uses, among others, metaphors of spinning, and spiraling, weaving and spinsters. Further she uses words, in some cases through re-configuring them, to indicate a Background conceptualization. For instance Re-memembering, "as active unforgetting." I adopt some of her language in this project

<sup>40</sup> Richardson, Laurel, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" in Handbook of Qualitative Research. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publications, 1994 pp. 516-529.

<sup>41</sup> Daly, 1990, "I simply risked leaping into the process of gynocentric writing, which meant that the work, in a real sense, created itself," p. xix.

<sup>42</sup> Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., The Handbook of Qualitative Research Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publications, 1994.

<sup>43</sup> Oleson, p. 158.

<sup>44</sup> Mann, Bonnie Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), p. xii.

<sup>45</sup> Code, Lorraine, Rhetorical Spaces: Essays on Gendered Locations, New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 161.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, Sidonie, "Woman's Story and the Engenderings of Self-Representation" in A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representations, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

<sup>47</sup> Daly, 1990 p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, pp. 52-53.

<sup>49</sup> A borrowed expression from the journal Sinister Wisdom, Gyn/Ecology. P. xviii.

<sup>50</sup> Mann, in Daly, 1990, p xxxvi.

<sup>51</sup> Mann, in Daly, 1990, p. xvii.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SOURCE...

*Spinning back to the beginnings...In 1941, I the second daughter was born to the only daughter, of one of three daughters of a woman who homesteaded in South Dakota at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The threads I spin into my feminist standpoint are from life stories of the women in my family.*

#### **Matrilineal Threads**

The conceptual continuum on which I trace my achievement of a feminist standpoint springs from my lineage of a woman-centered, white, working class, heterosexual family structure. It is through the women, the enduring members of my family that I know my family heritage. I don't claim it as the only story. I don't even claim it as historically accurate. I do claim it as a gendered consciousness, from which was spun my achievement of a feminist standpoint.

Lisa Marie Hogeland makes a distinction between gender consciousness and feminist consciousness in an article in Ms. Magazine.<sup>1</sup> "Gender consciousness," Hogeland writes, "takes two forms: awareness of women's vulnerability and celebration of women's difference." Planted deep in my matriarchal lineage as a gender consciousness is the groundwork of my achievement of a feminist standpoint. In Lesbian Nation, Jill Johnston writes of this kind of consciousness as female chauvinism.<sup>2</sup> Writing about being ill-prepared for marriage, Johnston claims her women centered life in her early years gave her an "...uninhibited chauvinism about my identity as female... I had grown up it seems in a kind of fugitive hothouse of a matriarchy."<sup>3</sup> "Gender

consciousness,” or “female chauvinism” arose out of “my matriarchal hothouse”. My early consciousness was prior to the engagement, the struggle, the science, needed for it to be a feminist standpoint.”<sup>4</sup>

My gender consciousness or female chauvinism began variously named: *women as victim* or *women as present - men as absent*. This consciousness in my women-centered life begins in beliefs, biases, and prejudices. Taught through practice, by example and with spoken and unspoken messages, I learned early the strength of women as victims of men. As the victim and in a state of inchoate feminist awareness I acquired a pre-analytic mixed-message belief in the moral superiority of women. However such a position of gender consciousness is not a feminist standpoint, as theorized by Hartsock. This state was a bias, a prejudice even, a mere position of interest, but not a feminist standpoint.

From Marx’s critique of class, feminists theorizing standpoint epistemology hold an understanding that women’s and men’s lives are structurally different from each other and that the lived realities of women’s lives are profoundly different from those of men. My mom and grandmother, not feminists or Marxists also held an understanding of the lived realities of their lives as being profoundly different from those of the men to whom they were related. The lived realities for my mom and her mother were that they were often in the position of being the sole support of themselves and their children. The men in their lives, often the father of these women’s children, enjoyed a freedom to shirk financial as well as social and personal responsibility for their wives and children. The

women held no such privilege and intuitively understood this though not in the same way as someone knowing it from a feminist standpoint. My mom and my grandmother understood it as just the way things are between women and men: as if it were natural. My mom and her mother did not understand it as structural difference, nor as being historic and subject to change. They did not have an understanding of themselves as being exploited as women. They didn't understand the difference between the material reality of their lives and that of the men in their lives as being lodged in the division of labor, which makes women both the producer of children and of labor. The material reality of my mom and grandmother's lives was that they were white skinned, heterosexual, they worked both inside and outside the home to support themselves and their children, and they survived. The material reality of their lives was that as women they were structurally closed out of jobs because of being women. As women my mom and grandmother had access only to jobs that were low paying. In them they were alienated from their labor and their work contributed more to the finances of the men they worked for than to their own or their children's financial well-being.

My maternal family was farmers. They homesteaded to South Dakota late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Centered in our family structure, women wove stories and histories in which the men were marginal. Marriages in my family were numerous and short-lived. Our children were daughters. My great-grandmother Libby married four times and had three daughters. Her oldest daughter Nona was my grandmother, who twice married, had one daughter Oriole, my mother.



When Oriole was very young her father and Nona's husband abandoned them. He took off and went west never to be heard from again, at least as far as the family story goes. I never heard differently. Nona raised her only daughter to be a first generation college graduate. After graduating from college as an English major and an accomplished harp player, my mother Oriole moved to Washington, D.C., where she met and married my father. They had two daughters. But while married to my mother, my father fathered another child outside of his marriage to my mother causing my parents to divorce when I was a small child. My mom remarried, had another daughter and survived that husband and her next one.

A woman centered family structure is an act of resistance and marginal to the prescribed patriarchal condition of a male-centered heterosexual family. My white, lower middle-class, matrifocal lineage provides me an acquired resistant understanding of women's relationship with men. A local understanding that women were smarter, emotionally and responsibly stronger, and were more reliable than men was shaped in my experience growing up in a woman-centered family. Our family's existence, for all the immediate generations, depended upon the women who maintained, sustained, and supported it. In the absence of husbands, brothers, fathers, uncles, and sons, our family consisted of mostly women: aunts, grandmothers, sisters, mothers, and daughters. Our fathers and husbands were distant even when present. We had few if any sons, our uncles were shadowy figures of our powerful aunts, and a series of husbands of cousins, aunts, mothers and grandmothers came and went. Women were the

source of our financial, emotional, and material well being. The temporary and situational dependency to which we would sometimes revert was based more in manipulation, luck, and exploitation than on needing a man to survive and define us. And even in light of this, traditional archetypes made their presence known.

What over-rode my practical lived reality was a confused understanding of the white-knight-on-a-white-horse archetype of my salvation. Our family's local and specific archetype of men was, "if one comes along, take him, make him your own, and get from him what you can while you can get it." I claim this as my matriarchal lineage of an acquired bias, gender consciousness or female chauvinism. I did not achieve it and did not have to work to understand in this way. I knew it through anecdote, direct experience, and the hegemonic discourse of the women of my family. One such discourse was the importance of politics.

All through my life my mother and grandmother impressed upon me the importance of voting. No wonder, for they each had known a time of being unable to vote. My grandmother was a young adult and a single parent of a young daughter in 1920, when in the United States women won their nearly century long struggle for the right to vote. My grandmother passed on to her daughter and her daughter's daughter how much she valued voting. I associate my active participation in even the most obscure of local elections with my grandmother's and mother's insistence that we all vote. And there was a degree of personal accountability in voting because I could be assured that I would be asked by both my mother and her mother at election time about how and when I

had voted. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a suffragist who my Grandmother may have heard speak. Gilman's travels and speaking engagements took her to Iowa where my grandmother lived. I can imagine that my grandmother and my mother, both long engaged in their own financial independence may have been influenced by Gilman's work.

I asked my mother what she remembered about my grandmother, Women's Suffrage, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. She offered that if Gilman spoke before the Business and Professional Women's (BPW) group in Sioux City, Iowa, my grandmother could have been there. My mom didn't have an accessible personal memory of women winning the right to vote, she was only seven years old, but she strongly asserted, affirming the family injunction, "We damned well better do it!"

My grandmother worked outside the home for a mortgage broker and was involved in the BPW. My Mom's reference to her mother's involvement in this still existing organization creates yet another bridge to my own historical past. My grandma, as a young woman, left to raise a child alone, saw the value of being a member of an organization of women, like herself, surviving in a business arena long before it was commonplace for a woman to do so. As a businesswoman myself, I also joined many activist businesswomen's organizations.

Another vivid memory of how politics was of such value in my family, is of my returning from school in the 1950s to my mother fiercely ironing and shouting at the television set, as the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings

unfolded a parade of hate and fear. I can picture, in the corner of our living room the 13" TV screen spewing forth small black and white pictures of small men hurling suspicions, accusations, and guilt around as if they were preschoolers tossing bean bags at a school fair. Disgusted with the happenings recorded and beamed to her into her own living room, my mom kept on aggressively ironing as she cursed Joe, made crude noises at Roy, and cheered the young Kennedy boys. These moments of my mom's political passions are etched deeply into my personal memory and mark the ethics of my politics and actions to this day.

We were all, at least in what is known as our family genealogy, heterosexual. We married, remarried and married yet again. All the known women in my family, through my two sisters and me, had multiple marriages to men. My account of my achievement of a feminist standpoint, born and nurtured in my patriarchal family heritage, begins in the early 1960s. Concurrent with my heterosexual performance of marriage, motherhood, divorce, financial independence, I conceptualize my achievement of a feminist standpoint as both being and spinning a continuum. It begins in personal narrative representations of unformed, unnamed self-centered interpretations of my heterosexual experiences of abortion, and being a Gaslight Girl and a Playboy Bunny. In a patriarchal society in which heterosexuality is "a beachhead of male dominance"<sup>5</sup> my feminist subjectivity begins in what might be called the hyper-heterosexuality of early motherhood, illegal abortion, divorce and sexual objectifying.

## **The Beginning**

I enter the continuum of my achievement of a feminist standpoint temporally in the mid 1960s. Achieving a feminist standpoint is roughly acquiring a system of interpretation, literacy, a lens of meaning making, and being. I exit the continuum of this project as old, white, lesbian, feminist, scholar, with an achieved lesbian feminist standpoint. Although I exit the continuum with the end of this project the continuum in my conceptualization spins further and deeper down below patriarchal thinking. My spinning continues.

The first experience on the continuum of my achievement of a feminist standpoint was in 1962.

### **The Gaslight Club**

In the 60s most young-white-middle-class women aspired to being a wife, a mother, a secretary, a teacher, or an operator at the telephone company. Having lost my immediate chance for going to college by becoming pregnant and marrying, and as the divorced mother of three children, I was desperate for a job. My first option, I thought, was to become a night telephone operator so I could be at home during the day to care for my young children. I soon learned, though, that night jobs at the phone company were only for the most senior employees. Still working nights seemed best for me.

But in the meantime I needed money right away. My soon-to-be-former father-in-law was a prominent physician,

so I went to him for financial help. After all, my children were his grandchildren and it figured he would want the best for them. While I waited to see him I chatted with a woman in his waiting room and mentioned I was looking for a job. I told her I wanted to work nights and of the trouble I had with the phone company. She suggested I pop next door to see if I might get a job at the Gaslight Club. I laughed. The Gaslight Club I knew was a ritzy place and the women who worked there were very beautiful, very striking, very, very glamorous and I did not consider myself any of these things.

I had been pregnant for three straight years, with only a few months in-between a birth and the next pregnancy, and my self-image did not place me among the striking, beautiful or glamorous. But when my former father-in-law refused me money, my self-image no longer governed my actions. I walked next door to the Gaslight Club.

The Gaslight Club was housed in an unmarked classic brownstone building with a large imposing locked front door. I knocked on it as hard as I could, but no one answered. Just before turning to leave, someone exiting let me into a warmly, but dimly lit ground floor room that I would come to know as the "Library." To the right leading to the second floor was a richly carpeted staircase. I heard voices coming from the floor above and hesitantly walked up the stairs. At the top I asked the first person I saw about

applying for a job and was told to speak with the colonel, the manager. He was sitting at the bar smoking a cigarette and having a drink. I approached him and introduced myself. I told him I was looking for a job and wanted to be a "Gaslight Girl." He asked me a few questions and had me fill out an application. Amazingly he offered me a job starting that night! Holy Moly! That night! A Gaslight Girl! I rushed back to where I was living with my mom and step-dad to arrange for them, my first night on the job, to baby-sit my three kids. I did a quick turn-around and returned to the club early enough to find a costume and to be on the floor for a 5 PM happy hour.

The Washington Gaslight Club was only blocks from the White House. Burton Browne a Chicago Advertising Executive opened four Gaslight Clubs in the late 50s and early 60s of which the Washington Club was one. Entry was by membership only available by invitation to selected white male executives. The Washington Gaslight Club membership included lawmakers, lobbyists, high-level government workers, financiers, media and sports celebrities among others.

In the basement dressing room women donned fancy, revealing costumes to become Gaslight Girls. In the crowded narrow room six or eight women were in various stages of transforming themselves. From a montage of overlapping

images reflected in the brightly-lit mirror, they greeted me without interrupting their routine. The room was awash in the fumes of spray net, make-up and perfume. Someone handed me a ratty pair of black net hose to use that night and told me where to buy some of my own. Another woman showed me where the old costumes were and suggested which one had belonged to someone before me who was about my size. Not wanting to get in the way and having little idea what else I had to do to transform myself-a mother of three-into what I was seeing these women become, I closely watched how the others did it. One woman teased and sprayed her hair until it held an untold height and then sprayed it again into an unmoving solid mass. Another pulled on her elastic black net opera hose and stepped into her high heeled shoes, while yet another woman helped zip someone else's costume. These women walked into the dressing room as mothers, lovers, daughters, and sometimes wives, and left it as Gaslight Girls. Anxiously I hastened to join them. Pretending to know what I was doing, I applied bright blue eye shadow, light brown eyebrow pencil and ruby red lipstick before stepping into the shabby abandoned costume of some former "Girl." As a Gaslight Girl in training I left the dressing room, walked up the steps and entered the second floor Floradora Bar.

*"She walked into that club knowing to please was to*



*survive and that her surviving insured the survival of her kids. She had displeased her in-laws by leaving their son and turned to another resource, her looks and her compliance. In the dressing room, she closely observed the other women becoming Gaslight Girls. They bantered among themselves first about their lives as women--who they were outside of the club--and then about whom they were as 'girls'. Each had regular customers and much like boasting boys in a gym locker room they bragged about their regular customers leaving generous tips. I wondered if and when I as well would have my own stable of regular big tipping customers."*

Soon, I knew the ropes and became one of the most successful Gaslight Girls in the Washington Club. My picture was used to promote the club. I did garner quite a stable of customers who regularly sat at my station and left me generous tips beyond the expected 20%. In the early 1960s, I earned weekly cash-tips of about \$200.00. Among my customers were powerful lobbyists, important politicians including members of congress, celebrities, and highly paid corporate executives. Gaslight Girls were also the entertainment of the club. In the Floradora Bar between serving duties we danced the *Twist* on a marble tabletop while the customers held their drinks and watched us from the bottom up. In the Speakeasy on the top floor, we wore

costumes of the 1920s flapper girls and throughout the night, in a quasi chorus line we sang bawdy songs and danced the *Charleston* to a ragtime Dixieland band.

Other ways we promoted the club was to appear as Gaslight Girls at events particularly directed towards men. For instance before Christmas, Woodward and Lothrop, an upscale department store stayed open late one night exclusively to male shoppers. Gaslight Girls wandered the store entertaining and encouraging the men to buy extravagant gifts for other women. Another time, Gaslight Girls graced a float for the famed Cherry Blossom Parade. I remember an old timer Gaslight Girl giving me advice about riding a float. "Bend over," she said, "you won't look so fat if you bend over." In all the media shots of the Cherry Blossom Parade, there I am dutifully bent over, just as she suggested.

At the Gaslight Club we received no salary. All of our income was from tips, and soon I learned to alert my customers that cash was preferred. At the end of the evening we claimed our tips and owed a percentage of them to pay the bartender, the busboys and to reimburse the Gaslight Club for the costumes we wore. Even though we were not buying the costumes and they did not belong to us we paid for them no doubt over and over again with this cut off the top of our income. Receiving cash tips allowed us, as was

the custom, to hide some of what we made. Dutifully we claimed our cash take as a mere 15% of the tabs, and pocketed the rest. Our really good customers knew this and would put the 15% on the charge slips and also leave a cash tip for us. We of course had no sick leave, no vacation and no other employee benefits. I worked for the Gaslight Club for two years during which I met and began dating two men. Sexually active with both of them, unprotected, I got pregnant.

### **Illegal Abortion: Context**

In 1963, white middle class women wore hats and gloves downtown to shop at various department stores. I was in high school in the 50s when a dominant dream of young white middle class girls was to grow-up and marry a white male doctor, have two children--one a boy and the other a girl--and live happily ever-after keeping house and raising kids.

As a daughter of the 50s, I grew up knowing this dream of mine would come true. I would be a wife and mother but I would also have a job outside the home. I never thought in terms of a career, but I would have a job. Sara Evans in Personal Politics referred to woman of the 50s as "remaining enclosed in the straitjacket of domestic ideology."<sup>6</sup> I had no context in which to envision myself as a professional. All I could imagine was that throughout my life I would hold jobs as a means to a specific end, exemplified in my matriarchal heritage in which my mother and grandmother both held "jobs" to survive.

Divorced and no longer a wife, in 1963 I was the sole provider for my three children when I chose my first of two illegal abortions. The birth control pill was introduced two years before but was widely unavailable to most women.<sup>7</sup> I knew nothing of the pill, although before my third pregnancy, and as a married woman, I asked for birth control from my OB/GYN. Being married afforded me some confidence in asking in a social, political, and personal context of disapproval about having sex outside of marriage. My doctor was a Roman Catholic who knew my physician father-in-law was also a Roman Catholic, and even though he knew I wasn't he refused me. Ashamed for asking I left without birth control and wouldn't ask for it again for years.

The historical context in which I had my illegal abortion was the early-1960s sometimes called a new age of Camelot. President John F. Kennedy was elected and was perceived to hold ideals of integrity and service to our country. Kennedy brought to the presidency values of artistry, equality, and purpose. As a young woman in Washington, D.C., I lived in the glow of this age of "fantasy" and hope. Even with my personal reality being less than ideal, I felt idealism about my country's leadership and progress. My idealism continued even though my experience with men in positions of political leadership was disillusioning as hypocritically they sought sexual favors from me and other Gaslight Girls even while espousing honesty, faithfulness, and integrity. In the '60s my political innocence had not yet been shattered, although in the near future, political assassinations, the Vietnam War, familiarity with the power lobbyists had over my everyday existence, would all begin to take their toll.

Although I have always regularly read the newspapers, and had a general awareness of national politics, none of the important social changes women in the early and mid-sixties were accomplishing politically entered my awareness as of relevance to me. I was not yet engaged enough intellectually or politically to think of myself as a part of the class *woman* and to understand these things in relation to me as a woman. I include some of these social changes as background, not as events that I understood as having meaning to me. It was years later as a feminist activist that I would begin to understand their importance.

In 1963 Betty Friedan published The Feminine Mystique<sup>8</sup> and told the tale of white middle-class American women who were looking at their lives and wondering why when fulfilling their feminine destinies they were so unhappy. Friedan labeled it “the problem with no name.”<sup>9</sup> Friedan’s theories later were critically analyzed as being relevant for only white, heterosexual, middle-class, married women. In the 60s I had never heard of The Feminine Mystique, although being white made me eligible for the problem, I was un-married and held a job outside of the home. I had no awareness of the “mystique in which I was trapped. My unconscious acceptance of the *feminine mystique* was financially supporting me and giving me a skewed sense of my independence.

Also, in 1964 women in the leftist and civil rights movements began to chaff against the sexism of their leadership.<sup>10</sup> By this time, John Kennedy’s President’s Commission on the Status of Women came together and deliberated two years, bringing “visibility and legitimacy to women’s concerns and consciousness raising

among women themselves.”<sup>11</sup> From this legitimacy and visibility, the Equal Pay Act passed the U.S. Congress requiring employers to pay men and women equally when they performed equal work. In Washington, D.C., three blocks from the White House on NW 16<sup>th</sup> Street was a private men’s club that catered to men on expense accounts: politicians, lobbyists and businessmen soliciting contracts from national government agencies. This private club hired pretty, young, white women to serve their heterosexual white male membership drinks, dinner and entertainment. I was one of these young, white, pretty women.

As they have always, in 1964 women aborted fetuses either by themselves or with the help of abortionists. Certain women among themselves, furtively claiming second-hand knowledge of abortionists offered hope to women who were pregnant and didn’t want to be. For example, a neighbor who was familiar with my volatile marital situation told me of an abortionist in downtown Philadelphia, not too far from Washington, D.C. where we lived, in case I wanted or needed one. When I was unmarried and pregnant in 1959, my soon to be father-in-law upon learning from my mother of my condition, offered to arrange for me to have an abortion. When Mom told me of his offer, I refused.

*Johnny was a rich, university boy. His dad was a doctor.*

*For a woman to marry a doctor I believed at seventeen was the achievement of a lifetime. So in the back seat of Johnny’s car, in the parking lot of a racetrack, we fucked.*

*Before “going all the way” with Johnny, I remember being on a date with Hank, a high-school basketball star and an acquaintance of Johnny’s. After a*

*night at the movies and 10 minutes of thwarting his “roaming hands and rushing fingers,” he threw up his hands in frustration and said to me as I daintily straightened my fashionable long skirt, and rearranged my blouse with the Peter Pan collar... “Jay and Johnny both told me you let them touch you, why can’t I?”*

*Because I didn’t let him have his way with my body, Hank turned on me and used as a weapon his knowledge of previous events shared with him by his buddies. After Hank confronted me with denying him his entitled access, I think it must have been years before I ever again said no to a man. I knew then that who I was and what I did was determined by men’s relationship to each other and that my life as a woman depended upon my compliance with a man’s right of sexual access to me.*

*Did I confront Johnny and Jay for kissing and telling? No. I married Johnny and named my second daughter after Jay.*

My three-year marriage from the beginning was doomed. We were so young. I was 18 and he 21 when I became pregnant and we subsequently married. He was the dreamed-for doctor’s son, and wanted to follow in his father’s footsteps. I was just out of high school, starry-eyed, ashamed of being caught in a pregnancy and of being sexually active. I was grateful that he was marrying me when other unwed pregnant women were not so lucky. The problem with being grateful is that often with it comes a sense of obligation. Since in my family the men always left—this man marrying me increased my sense of obligation to him. From my marriage, I birthed three children and

survived several batterings at the hands of my husband and the father of my children. A young high school girlfriend, after the birth of my third child, concerned with my safety, intervened and rescued me from what was surely a path to my complete unraveling. She literally took me out of that marriage. On a visit, seeing me as I was then, she told me I had to leave. She helped me pack the fewest belongings possible for three children and an adult, and with an infant in my arms, and two toddlers hanging on my skirt, and she took me to her parent's home for safe keeping. I stayed there for two weeks before moving in with my own parents. As always, I honor Tyanna Barr, my friend who so bravely and generously saved my life.

In 1963, twenty-two years old, with a job being sexually objectified, and objectively pregnant, I headed for Memphis.

### **An Artifact: 1964 Illegal Abortion**

*Remembered today, 2002, a past spinning begins: I experienced abortion this way. My body experienced abortion. My body endured. This is the way I experienced it. Cut and dried, separated from my body, I took my body to where someone would remove from it the un-wanted living tissue growing inside of me.*

*I did not want my body supporting the further growth of that tissue.*

I got off work at 2 AM and drove to Washington National Airport and checked into the hotel in the main terminal. My plane was at 6:30 AM, just four hours away, and I wanted to sleep before leaving for Memphis, TN to have an abortion.



The year was 1963 and I was twenty-two years old, divorced with three children under the age of four. I did not want to be pregnant, could not take care of another child, and abortion was illegal.

It was as if I was living my life atop a conveyer belt. Sliding along through one troublesome situation to the next. Whether it was a baby sitter that didn't show up, and I had to scurry around to make alternative arrangements; or a man who had taken me out to dinner and a show, and now wanted his "payoff." Unthinking, unfeeling, uninvolved I occupied my space on the conveyer belt and made do. After my brief sleep that night, I dressed and headed for the plane. A non-stop flight, which, like my life, contained no stops along the way for fear, anger, ambiguity ---just stay on the belt, and make it to the end.

At Memphis I was met by a man who would drive me to the abortionist, wait, and return me to the airport to catch the plane back to Washington, D.C. His services, and those of the abortionist, were arranged by one of the two men whom I led to believe provided the sperm for the pregnancy I was terminating. Of course I don't remember my driver's name, how he was connected to the arranger, or what he looked like, other than he was white and youngish. I don't remember whether we talked to each other as we embarked on my mission or whether we both sat blessedly quiet. I do

remember it was sunny and bright as we left the city and drove into the Tennessee countryside. Trees and fields slipped by me as I stared out the window, and the conveyer belt sped forward. After a while we pulled into a little town with white wood sided houses, neat lawns, and old southern trees lining the streets.

Off of the main road we turned right onto an unpaved side street and slowed down to look for the right address. It was the last house on the left and we pulled into the driveway. The house, a white bungalow with a glassed in porch had a small sign pointing to the back door that said "Entrance to DR's Office." I resolutely left the car and entered the back door.

*And in my resoluteness I was also full of shame. I was pregnant again. I already had three children. I was unmarried and sexually involved with two married men: either one of who could have been the other principal in my pregnancy. What I was about to do was called murder. I was making a life and death decision and women were not supposed to do that. Only legislators, judges, priests, and doctors, in my experience: all men, were capable of making life and death decisions. How shameful it was for me, to be choosing my life and my children's lives over the new life growing within me.*

The screen door closed behind me as I stepped into the

neat, sunshiny reception area. I stayed standing and wondered what would happen next. A man entered from a hall behind me. He wore a business suit and tie, and in my memory was much shorter than I. He greeted me in an impersonal, but professionally courteous manner and motioned me to follow. No nurse, no receptionist, just the two of us walking back to the examining room. No names were exchanged, no records, no manila files to represent authenticity to my experience. The examining room had a window and through the curtains streamed sun and light. Having already birthed three children, I didn't have to be told to remove my panties, hike up my skirt, and climb aboard the table to slip my heels into the metal stirrups. I lay there and my conveyor belt of a life inched forward as I dutifully stayed on.

It was going to be over soon, I told myself. I looked up at the ceiling as he, a stranger to me, looked up my vagina, before performing the procedure to end my pregnancy. After a brief examination he injected something into my vagina. This took a little time. I don't remember feeling anything particular, but when he withdrew the syringe, in relief I let go of my held breath thinking that the worst was over. He wasn't telling me what he was doing and in my conveyor belt fashion, I didn't ask.

He wadded a pile of gauze pads into a giant tampon and

began packing it into my vagina. I remember thinking he was wiping up after the abortion, but he wasn't. He continued tucking the tampon all neatly inside of me. When he was done he said his first words to me since we left the reception area: "Don't take this out until you can't stand it any more." Then with an "I'm done," he left the room. What was I to do then, I wondered, was it over? Could I get up? I lay there, feeling empty and full at the same time. Finally removing my heels from the metal stirrups I sat up and swung my legs around to sit on the edge of the examining table. As I stood up, I expected to feel different: not pregnant. Although I felt shaky I didn't feel the desired un-pregnant. But securely on the conveyer belt of my life, I pulled on my panties, straightened my skirt and left the examining room.

The doctor was standing in the small reception area and told me goodbye as I left the glassed in back porch. Softly and sincerely I said thank you and walked out of the door. I got into the car and as if the conveyer belt was reversed we backed out of the driveway and returned to the airport.

The plane was on schedule and I got back to Washington in time to go right to work at The Gaslight Club. At the club, I headed down the narrow steps to the basement dressing room. Placing my abortion clothes in my locker I pulled on long black opera hose, snapped my Merry Widow

undergarment around my torso and slipped into a satin, bejeweled and befeathered abbreviated gay nineties costume before stepping into my four-inch high heels. After putting on my face, and teasing my hair to make it bigger and higher, I climbed back up the stairs and emerged a Gaslight Girl. That night "she" never thought another thing about the wad of gauze so securely packed into her vagina.

Like every other night at 2 AM the club closed and I drove home to my three kids. After a long day and night, exhausted, I took only a few seconds to look in on my sleeping children and our live-in babysitter. Everyone appeared safe and sleeping soundly. I crawled into bed, and fell instantly to sleep. An hour later I was awakened by strong harsh, binding cramps in my belly. They seemed to subside as I adjusted my position so I slid back towards sleep not thinking again about the pain I had just felt. But soon the cramps returned and I doubled over. Unbelievably, I didn't connect the cramps-until the second round to the gauze pads, the trip to Memphis, or the abortion. I was scared and confused as the pains kept coming, stronger and harder and I made my way to the bathroom. Slowly I began to make the connection. The abortion was over, wasn't it? When he said he was done, it meant the abortion was over and I was no longer pregnant, didn't it? I couldn't and wouldn't believe it was not so.

Sitting on the toilet early that morning I remembered the doctor telling me to only remove the wad of gauze when I couldn't stand it anymore. I couldn't; so slowly I pulled it from me and dropped it into the bowl. Waves of cramps, stronger and harder now, gripped my lower torso. I bent down and clutched my arms tightly wrapped and pressed against my belly. Even though I had given birth to three children, I had not experienced birthing. Like women at the time, I had been heavily sedated and delivered of my babies. None of what was happening to me, had I experienced before.

When I felt matter pass out of me, matter not liquid, I finally allowed myself to know what I surely already knew. I was in the throes of labor and my body was passing the fetus, which I had chosen to discard. It created the smallest of splashes as it entered the toilet bowl.

It was over. I was done. The pain subsided and I stood up. God I was scared. I truly wanted to flush the toilet without looking. But I had slipped off the conveyor belt and I was no longer being carried through my experience. Fallen from the belt of denial, I wallowed around in reality. I turned to look at what I had expelled and reluctantly caught a glimpse of the bloody contents of the bowl. Shame and a profound sadness swept over and through me as I saw a small kidney-bean shaped and sized fetus, just like pictures I had seen in the doctors office

when I was pregnant with my other children.

*The image in my memory is blurry, smeared in with the bubble-gum pink plastic babies that clinic terrorists foist upon women entering abortion clinics.*

Tears streamed down my face. Gasping and horrified, I quickly flushed the toilet. I had to get back on the conveyer belt but still crying and horrified I returned to my bed.

Morning was truly here now and, as usual, one, two and then three of my children wandered sleepily in to snuggle playfully in bed with their mommy. Tenderly I hugged them and got them to lie quietly for a moment before we started a new day.

### **Reflection/Analysis**

In my memory, at the time of the abortion I experienced shame, failure, and criminality. I was defiling my identity as mother by having what would become my child, what is thought to be by some, "murdered." To have an abortion was the antitheses of what was constructed as a good mother, nurturing, caring, sacrificing, selfless. By being unmarried and pregnant, albeit with three small children, indicated that I was promiscuous-loose and moreover pretty stupid for getting pregnant in the first place. The first artifact from my

memory reflects my simplistic understanding that I was in trouble. It was my problem and I would find a way out of it. I had resources and they included the men I was dating at the time. Their material reality of being upper class, white males in politically powerful positions, and also being husbands and fathers, enhanced their value in being able to help me out of my problem. More importantly perhaps was that they too had strong interest in my not being pregnant. With my pregnancy I was able to “weave” each of them individually and unknown to each other, into the web of “my” problem.

I grew up in postwar United States in which women’s sexuality was the wrong, as opposed to today’s discourse in which the wrong is a woman killing an unborn child. Therefore my being pregnant then, having an abortion, having three already born children, was unmistakable evidence that I was sexual. Jodi L. Jacobson, for *Worldwatch* writes of the shame of abortion in the 50s as having little to do with harming the fetus but with the shame that aborting connoted having been sexual.<sup>12</sup>

I was not engaging in activities of sexual freedom when I got pregnant. I felt no freedom in performance of my ambiguous sexual duties to men. On one hand I was willing, no one forced sexual activity on me. On the other hand I was ashamed of my promiscuity, lack of emotional attachment to my sexual partners, and my feelings of obligation to the men in my experiences. White, heterosexual men of a class interested in having sex with me spent money and gained my acquiescence. Feeling obligated for what I believed was their generosity, I satisfied their sexual interest in me. I sought and profited from my status as a



desirable sex object.

There was publicity about abortion in the 60s. I don't remember any specifics, but I assume I had read of particular current events about abortion. One such event I recall, although I don't remember it being a factor in my actions, concerned Sherri Finkbine<sup>13</sup>. In the early 60s, Sherri Finkbine, a hostess on the popular TV show, *Romper Room* and mother of four, during her fifth pregnancy took a drug called Thalidomide. It was learned later that Thalidomide caused gross fetal deformities. The Finkbine fetus was grossly deformed, and to protect other women from also inadvertently endangering their fetuses, Finkbine went public about her plans to have an illegal abortion. In the wake of the ensuing controversy in this country it became impossible for her to have an illegal abortion here so she traveled to Sweden and had one there. The public was made very aware that even with such a compelling reason for a woman to have an abortion, that here in the United States there were no social, legal, medical, political avenues open.

My choice to have an abortion was made within the dominant patriarchal ideology that I endorsed, embraced and was very successfully performing. I had three beautiful, healthy children, affirming my fertility. I was an icon of white heterosexual male desire thereby supporting my children and myself. In my being their sole support I demonstrated my responsible motherly love. And I was pregnant. I desired not to be pregnant--it was not a desire to not have children, but a desire to not be pregnant. There were many complex issues involved in my relations with men, which resulted in my repeatedly getting pregnant. But, at

this juncture in my discussion, suffice to say, the issues were about *being* pregnant, not *getting* pregnant.

To be pregnant had serious personal financial consequences. It was from cash tips that I supported my children and myself. My income was dependent on my performance of the role of Gaslight Girl. Since a Gaslight Girl was a role in a fantasy based in the real performance of service, sexual desirability and accessibility, being pregnant and having another being at the physical center of my body, the masculinist fantasy was at best complicated. A Gaslight Girl being pregnant also was a message of the real life consequences of poking a woman and the untroubled fantasy of her availability for poking, of course, was central. In this hyper-heterosexual world of the Gaslight Club, one doesn't want evidence of the material reality of women getting pregnant. Therefore it was impossible for a Gaslight Girl to be visibly pregnant, no matter how successful, young, white, or beautiful. Another foreseen financial consequence of my remaining pregnant was, in my job, at capacity of earning, it would be impossible for me to earn the necessary additional income to raise another child. I was all I could be at the time. There was no more of me to provide for another child for which I was responsible.

At first looking at my reproductive history, it could be said that I was a victim. And with a certain analysis a strong case can be made for that assertion. In the past I used this victim stance to further a reproductive rights political agenda, and for what it was worth I would do it again. Politically being a victim may have its value but personally and theoretically woman as victim is not

empowering. The power of being a victim is limited to self-pity and down plays women's resistance. Although my past understanding of the autonomous nature of my decision making of my reproductive choice was false, at the time I was empowered by that supposition of autonomy. My understanding was that I made my own choices and in each of them I my decisions served me. I gathered my resources, exploited them, and took the action open to me.

*Feminism is a mode of analysis, a method of approaching life and politics, rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women.*

*-- Hartsock, 1991. 35-6. In Hirschmann, 1997)*

Feminist standpoint is not a political positioning but is a methodological and epistemological strategy.<sup>14</sup> What I know from my current and past understandings of my experiences is relative to how well I am able to use a feminist standpoint as a way of knowing. In 1964, with only a feminine consciousness and having no achievement yet of a feminist standpoint, my understandings of illegal abortion were individualistic, self-centered, and episodic. From a felt sense of self blame I understood my pregnancy as my problem and using whatever resources I could muster I was responsible for solving it. Further, my beliefs held that my being pregnant was completely the result of recent reckless sexual behavior and thoughtless choices. It was my understanding, that my experience had nothing to do with personal and social conditioning, politics, or the material realities of my life: woman, white, working

class, young, heterosexual and sexually objectified, and a single mother.

Of course I had no idea of material reality, nor of whom I was beyond my own personal being. But today using feminist standpoint as a method and as a strategy, and having achieved a skill in its use, I have a more complex understanding of my past experiences. Following Marx's account of production, Hartsock's theory of feminist standpoint theory makes an epistemological claim that "material life not only structures but sets limits on the understanding of social relations."<sup>15</sup> Because the standpoint is feminist, *social relations* is the relations of power, governed by the sexual division of labor between the class women and the class men. Because I had not yet achieved a feminist standpoint, I did not understand my experience of being pregnant and not wanting to be; how I saw my resources and used them; and how my passive and detached experience of the abortion; were all structured by the material realities of my life. My material life, my position in relation to production or how I earned money, structured my relationships as a woman with the dominant gender, men. My access to my job was determined by my race, my sexuality, my age, my conformance with behavior and appearance standards of attractiveness to white, heterosexual, high-middle and upper-class men. My success in the job depended upon how well I performed within the current constructions of women's relationships with men. Economic, political, and social structures determined my access to and ability to earn money. My income was directly related to how pleased my customers--all men--were with me and the service I provided them. Because I had not yet begun the struggle needed to achieve a feminist standpoint, I of

course did not understand my relations as *woman with man* in this way. I understood them as Penny, divorced young woman, promiscuous, foolish, sexually irresponsible, and morally bereft. My understanding was about me individually. It was not about me as part of a collective. Only my behavior, individually, defined my success or failures. My success or lack thereof was attributable to who and what I was individually, not because of social or political structures in which I operated. Female bias derived from my matriarchal lineage formed my belief that I alone was responsible and I viewed my sexual partners as resources to solve the problem. It never occurred to me that this resource of mine was also equally invested in my aborting my pregnancy: they both were married to other women. If they were not invested in my terminating my pregnancy neither one of them would have been an instrument of my actions.

#### **Artifact: The Playboy Club**

In 1964 I was twenty-three years old and the single parent of three small children. I had supported myself for two years at the Gaslight Club when I heard the Playboy Club was opening in Baltimore. Having been suspended for two weeks from the Gaslight Club for dating a member, the prospect of a new job was intriguing. From the grapevine of information circulating among the "Gaslight Girls" I learned the Playboy Club was auditioning young women, under the age of 24, to be hired as bunnies. From the required garb for the audition of either a bathing suit or a leotard I chose

the latter in order not to audition bare legged. With a leotard I could wear my familiar fishnet, leg enhancing, black stockings. The age policy for auditioning was very strict. One applicant claimed to be almost 24, but was in fact 26. She was too old and was not allowed in. Also on the grapevine I had heard that Playboy wanted unspoiled "girls," those not already experienced as cocktail waitresses. I was anxious as an experienced cocktail waitress and imagined they would think of me as "spoiled."

Apparently not--I was hired. I immediately quit the Gaslight Club to begin the three-week training to be a Bunny. Keith Hefner, the brother of Playboy founder, Hugh Hefner was the lead trainer of training Bunnies from other clubs assisting with transforming the 30 new hires into Playboy Bunnies. Right off they gave us a *Bunny manual*, a veritable encyclopedia of Bunny rules, procedures, and policies and told us that our jobs depended upon us knowing and following them all precisely. In it were scripts to be learned, drink categories to be memorized, garnishes to be connected to various drinks. There were policies for bunnies to observe both inside and outside the club, including the infamous gold key policy. A gold key was issued to important Playboy executives and when a member's key was gold I had heard that if he asked, you were supposed to sleep with him. The manual acknowledged this "rumor" and

claimed it untrue. What you did have to do though was to know a gold key member was very important and to treat them accordingly. Other inside-the-club procedures included job descriptions for all the different kinds of bunnies as defined by the space to which they were assigned. From studying the Bunny manual we then played, practiced, and pretended, and did not graduate until it was all second nature to each of us.

Like studying to be in a play, we learned our parts. The club was the stage, the members the audience, and the management the directors. Along with scripts, we had stage directions, lines, and costumes. The scripts were different based on which bunny we were assigned to perform, for instance greeting scripts. Although all of us were to acknowledge all members all the time, there was a particular role as the welcoming bunny. She was the first one to greet a member as he entered the front door. As servers, we had a script to ask to see the member's key. "Hi, I am your Bunny Penny. May I see the member's key, please?" We had scripts and an order for asking the member and his guests what they would like to drink. We were told how to write them down on the check so we would know how to serve them without hesitation. There was a particular order in which we would then ask the bartenders for the drinks, and a particular way that we placed them on our tray in order to serve them in a

particular order.

Not only were we taught these scripts and systems we were also taught what was desired behavior on the floor and what was not. It was not OK for a bunny to sit down in the club, but it was OK to perch. In fact around the club were places, pointed out in the manual, where a bunny might without sitting lean against a railing, or back of a couch, while attractively crossing her legs. Defined perch sites, softly lit to draw attention to them, were strategically placed around the club and bunnies were instructed to perch upon them as decoration.

We learned in the training about the different bunny roles that we would be asked to perform. For each shift we were assigned to a particular area of the club, which determined which bunny we would be for the shift. If we were assigned to the checkroom, we, of course, were the checkroom bunnies. Other bunnies were the greeting bunnies, bunnies who worked in the living room, and bunnies who worked in the club, upstairs where a member could order dinner and watch live performances of some mid-rate comedian or almost-making-it guitar player.

During our training as bunnies, we were taught postures to assume at different times and situations. The bunny dip used when we placed anything on the table, such as napkins, drinks, dinner, etc. The dip was also used to change the



ashtrays in the bunny way. Other postures were the bunny stance and the bunny perch. We were fitted for our bunny outfits during the training also. They would be ready for opening night.

These costumes were engineered to accentuate, or create curves and highlight sexualized parts of a female body. Our hips, ass, breasts, waist, legs, crotch were enhanced and highlighted by a protected-from-being-copied design. From the nipped in waist all lines went up and out to the breasts and all lines went down to the crotch. At the hips lacing spread open at the bottom as if our hips were fighting the containment of the tight fitting costume. The crotch was narrow requiring that pubic hair be shaved to a strip assuring none peeked out of the edges. We were encased as if in a second skin in these costumes inspiring images of Victorian ladies needing assistance lacing up corsets. Playboy bunnies assisted one another getting outfits zipped before going on the floor. But we were not through becoming a bunny yet. The costumes required cleavage and for that we needed to lift our breasts, even more than the natural spillage created by the tightness of the costume. Bunnies were supplied with a huge cardboard box of bar sponges to shove under their breasts, lifting them to spill over the top. As we prepared to be checked out by the Bunny Mother, we dove into the cardboard box and stuff sponges under our

breasts until our nipples were just out of sight. No matter how buxom a woman might be there was always room for a sponge or two. I was about average and would use seven or eight of them. We are talking tightly packed.

A role not performed by the bunnies but integral to our position was the Bunny Mother. She was an older woman, maybe even a former bunny. Her office was just outside the dressing room and before appearing on the floor we were subject to her scrutiny. She checked for exposed undesirable hair, under our armpits, on our legs, and of course in our crotch. It was her job to determine that the bunny image we projected was complete and ideal.

We were totally constructed as bunnies. We constructed ourselves as bunnies. We were builders in our construction as bunnies. We worked hard to perform our subjectivity as a bunny. I studied the scripts, sweated the "exam" on the drinks, took the dress rehearsal seriously and did well. Immediately I was asked to become a bunny trainer for the next batch of bunnies that were hired. Apparently, it was expected that there would be a high rate of bunny attrition. And with that, those of us left worked long hours. Soon we were required to work, five days a week with two of them being split shifts extending our ten hours a day to over twelve hours. A split shift was working lunch from 11:30 AM-2:30 PM, or whenever the members were through with your

station. And then working nights, which began at 4 PM for cocktail hour until 2 AM in the morning.

**Artifact: 1967, Illegal abortion**

Seymour's and my relationship of a year or so was at the center of his bitter divorce proceedings when I got pregnant. Having children of our own was not yet on the radar screen of our vision of the future. We had five children between us and it would be some time before legally we could even get married, much less decide to have a child together. Once again, only a couple of years since my first abortion—it was still illegal—I let the man make the arrangements.

On the phone the abortionist told me what to do. I was to come alone, park in a grocery store parking lot and walk two blocks down a hill. His house was across the street. The back door next to the garage would be ajar and I was to walk in and wait until he came downstairs. "Make sure no one sees you," he said, and "come alone."

I followed his directions except that, instead of opening the door that was only slightly ajar, I closed it. It locked and I couldn't get in. Already afraid, I became almost hysterical trying to figure out what to do. Already I had messed up when he had been so explicit with his directions. What if he thought I hadn't come and left me exposed in his driveway? I tucked myself close to the stone wall by the driveway hoping not to be noticed by the neighbors or anyone walking on the sidewalk.

Soon the door opened and a man in his pajamas glared at me and motioned me to come inside. "I told you to wait for me in here," gruffly he barked at me. I tried to tell him how I pulled the door instead of pushing it. He stopped me, and motioned for me to enter the garage where he pointed to the workbench. "Climb up, lay down and take off your panties," he ordered. Dutifully, I did as I was told. Not waiting for him to tell me, I spread my legs wide. His tools were ready and after prodding my belly, and feeling around inside of me, he inserted a speculum. With a spoon like instrument he scraped and scraped and scraped away at my insides. Hot belly pain and intense cramping accompanied each scraping. Paper towels shoved under my buttocks caught the bloody tissue he pulled from me. He said nothing as he scraped and told me not to make a sound. I clenched my teeth, set my jaw, and moved not a muscle. I did not want to do anything to make him not complete the task. Tears poured out of my eyes and filled my ears, as I silently stared at the ceiling. Finally he stopped, looked at the bloody contents, and felt inside me once again. "That's all," he said, "Put on your pants. Here is a pad. Leave the way you came; make sure you close the door behind you." He left and went up-stairs.

I lay there for a few minutes to gather myself together. When I thought I could, I tentatively swung my

legs over the edge of the workbench and pushed myself off to drop the few inches to the concrete floor. Good, I thought, I can stand. Quickly I put on my pants, slinked out of the door, closed it behind me and started back up the hill to my car. When I got there. I sat alone for some time, beginning to collect myself back into me. I started the car and slowly pulled out of the lot. I remember how bright the sun was and how detached still I felt from reality. It was like there was no time or space in which I could find myself. My hands seemed to not really be on the steering wheel but inches away from it. I felt like the car wasn't really connected to the road but was floating inches above it as I moved towards home. Finally, my sense of being returned when I got home. I parked the car and went inside to my children and most likely Seymour. He was a good guy and I am sure he was there waiting for me.

I am OK I said. Not willing to make any more trouble than I had already been. I don't believe we ever talked about my abortion again.

### **Reflection/Analysis**

Being a couple defined my experience of my second abortion as helpless, dependent, and powerless. Being single defined my experience of my first abortion as autonomous, independent, and albeit falsely empowered. In my second illegal abortion Seymour and I were as if married, making my subjectivity

wife-like in a 1976 traditional sense. As wife-like, I was even less an agent in my experience of this abortion. I was financially dependent upon him, and grateful for his active role in parenting my three children. When I left to drive across town to have an abortion, I left Seymour home with my children. He was there when I returned making his presence much more a factor in my experience than the other men in my previous experience. Also, since I was dependent upon Seymour, as if I was his wife, I felt no need to be resourceful as I thought I had been before. As the girl-friend in my other sexual relationships in which I previously had an abortion, rather than as the "wife" in this experience of abortion, I was more able to emotionally detach from what I was doing the first time than the second, allowing me more control over my behavior. Because this abortion was in the same town in which we lived I was also physically more attached this time than being able to physically "leave" where I was who I was, earlier. Leaving town seems to be a component of my perception of my independence and power I had the first time, even if false. Also because of a different procedure being used the second time it was not later that it was over; the abortion was over when I left the garage in the second experience. In the second abortion I went home to Seymour, not back to work. I never left my wife role, as I left my Gaslight Girl role. It was as a wife that I aborted this fetus, it was as an independent woman, mother of three, manipulator of two, that I first aborted one.

*May 2000: I just talked to Mom for Mother's Day and after the appropriate*

*greetings I told her I was working on a personal narrative about my abortion. I asked her about Dr. Sullivan, (Johnny's father and my then soon-to-be father-in-law) so long ago speaking with her about my having an abortion. Mom said it never happened! She said, "the Sullivans never talked with her at all, much less about abortion." Certain of my memory and not of my mother's, I believed she had forgotten. I probed a bit more until she acknowledged that she just couldn't remember.*

*Then my mom said that she always believed in abortion. She said, "I had one, you remember?" Dumbfounded, but not wanting to lose the moment, I said, "No, I don't remember." She then told me it was in NE Washington in the late '40s, just after the war. She said that afterwards she started bleeding and had to go to the hospital. I was probably only 4 or 5 years old. She doesn't remember anything more about it.*

*Yet another generation of women having abortions. Mom said she couldn't talk about it. One didn't. It was money, she said. They just didn't have any to have another child. In hearing my mother's story, I wondered if Grandma had an abortion; whether Great-Grandma had an abortion.*

*Matriarchy... all these women... all these strong, independent women.*

*Mom: "Why are we talking about this on mother's day?"*

*Mothers and abortions... Mothers having abortions... Mothers and daughters and abortions...whew...*

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<sup>1</sup> Hogeland, Lisa Marie, "Fear of Feminism: Why Young Women Get the Willies," Ms. Magazine, Vol 5:3, (Nov-Dec, 1994), pp. 18-21.

<sup>2</sup> Johnston, Jill, Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

<sup>3</sup> Johnston, p.72.

<sup>4</sup> Hartsock, Nancy C. M., "The Feminist Standpoint: Toward a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism." In Money, Sex and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism, Nancy C.M. Hartsock. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985, The Northeastern Series in Feminist Theory) pp. 231-251. A claim of the positing of levels of reality in which the deeper level includes and explains the surface or appearance. The vision available to the oppressed group must be *struggled* for and represents an achievement that requires both *science* to see beneath the surface of the social relations in which all are forced to participate and the education that can only grow from struggle to change those relations," p. 232.

<sup>5</sup> Rich, Adrienne, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, Vol 5:4, pp. 631-660, p. 633.

<sup>6</sup> Evans, Sara. Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left. (New York: Random House, Vintage Books Edition 1980) p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, David E. Anderson. Abortion and Family Planning, Washington, D.C. : The Communications Consortium Media Center, 1993. Insert: Newsroom Guide: History at a Glance.

<sup>8</sup> Friedan, Betty, The Feminine Mystique. ( New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963).

<sup>9</sup> Nossiff, Rosemary. Before Roe: Abortion Policy in the States. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Hartman, Susan M. From Margin to Mainstream: American Women and Politics Since 1960 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982) p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Hartman, pp. 52-53.

<sup>12</sup> Jacobson, Jodi L. Worldwatch Paper 97: The Global Politics of Abortion (Washington D.C.: The Worldwatch Institute, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Nossif, pp. 36-37.

<sup>14</sup> Hirschmann, Nancy J. "Feminist Standpoint as Postmodern Strategy", in Politics and Feminist Standpoint Theories, Sally J. Kenny, Helen Kinsella, eds. (New York: Haworth Press, Inc. 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Hartsock, 1985, p. 232.



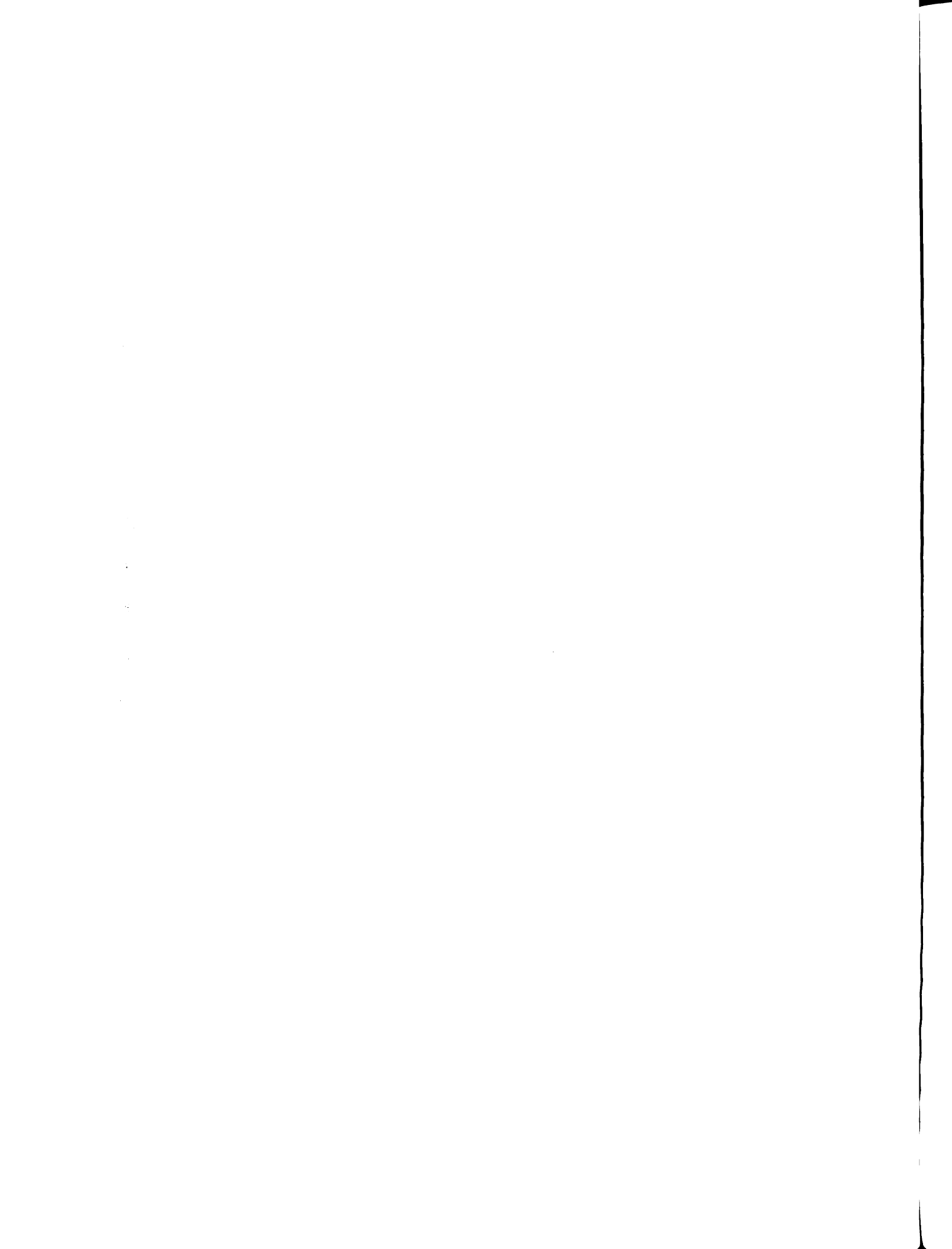
## CHAPTER THREE

### **BEGINNING THE SPIN: FEMINIST ACTIVISM**

*In the context of learning of other progressive movements of the early 70's and hearing for the first time of the Women's Liberation Movement, I aspired to knowing all there was to know about it. I imagined myself leaping into the Women's Liberation Movement as if I were diving headfirst from the safety and stability of land into the mysteries of the ocean. I imagined at some point that buoyed by the movement, I would be carried along in its currents, as well as make waves. In my imagination I would traverse the movement as far as I could see and to the yet unseen far beyond. Even at the time, I knew I was a part of the women's movement and it would take me, and I would take it, somewhere and as in the ocean to get somewhere is to sometimes be carried by it.*

#### **Historical Personal Context**

It was after my second abortion, after Seymour and I married, after we had our first child together, that my feminine consciousness opened up to The Women's Movement. In the early 70's we, a white heterosexual married couple, with "your's", "mine", and "our" children, lived in Columbia, Maryland. The Rouse Company obliterated miles and miles of rural farmland to build a new city between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, MD, which they marketed as "The Next America". In its early 70's beginnings, with only 500 "pioneer" residents, it was a bedroom community to the neighboring large cities. Being relatively far from the urban resources of Baltimore and Washington, white, married,



heterosexual, young women, mothers of the next, next America, wanted more. Among these women, a group of the well placed approached the “city fathers” who held the purse strings and kept literally and figuratively the keys to the community resources of “The Next America”.<sup>1</sup> These corporate city fathers, predominantly white, heterosexual young men affirmed or denied the implementation of anyone else’s ideas but their own. The women turned to them for help in establishing a coffeehouse for the wives and mothers of the “Next America”. The “city fathers” responded positively to their wives’ request, provided institutional resources and gave them a key to a barn designated as a soon-to-be community center. These women, wives and mothers all, asked me to help. Easily I said yes, although it was not initially out of a desire to provide a venue for women, but because it was not ever very easy for me to say no. In saying yes to becoming involved in *It’s Open For Women*, I began in earnest my spin along the continuum of my achievement of a feminist standpoint.

*It’s Open For Women* was a non-profit, volunteer organization, which presented in a coffee house setting, weekly programs featuring “expert” speakers on issues or activities of current interest. One such program, early in the 70’s was on Women’s Liberation. Two women activists from Baltimore spoke about issues, activities, and a history. Having no idea of the importance of this movement to other women, and me I anticipated it no more enthusiastically than I did a previous program on organic gardening. But as the women began to speak, identified as women, to be present to and for us, I in turn identified with them and yearned to know more and to become one of them.

As an active participant and organizer of the coffeehouse, I was poised for this existential leap, For in my *It's Open for Women* roles, I was someone beyond Seymour's wife, and/or my children's mother.<sup>2</sup> I was Penny. I was not your Bunny Penny, nor was I Penny the Gaslight Girl either. I was not an other to another. I was Penny someone of value doing valued work for *It's Open For Women*. Hearing these women talk about their work as women liberationists, I connected our work in the coffeehouse to what the women's movement activists were saying about their work. At that moment of connection of my practice to a larger movement, my tentative spinning became a twirl, beginning the change in my consciousness for which I would struggle to "forever". My work was now Women's Liberation Work, and I was a Women's Libber. Before it was organizational work, more a personal activity in which I was engaged with other women.

I began to see how my work was for me as a woman and for women generally. Maybe what we were doing could apply to all women. Of course what I related to at the time was all women being white, suburban, middle-class, heterosexual, married, young women. We were Betty Friedan's suburban housewives. We were all someone's wives. We all had white heterosexual economic and social privilege as well as heterosexual white male providers. Without this white, heterosexual privilege of marriage to an economically well off man—which I had only recently gained through marriage—I and the other women, would no doubt be downtown working, or doing paid domestic labor in Columbia—but certainly not attending a coffee-house twice a week to hear

someone else's take on the larger world.

It wasn't long before I was in a consciousness raising group, and taking on more roles as an activist. In 1972, I volunteered for the women's rights division of the Edmund Muskie campaign for the democratic nomination for president. I became an active member of the Women's Political Caucus, and served as the county co-chair of the successful ERA Maryland campaign adding an Equal Rights Amendment to the State Constitution.

### **Consciousness Raising**

“Consciousness-raising is the most basic liberation process. Without it there can be no liberation, but only substitutions of personnel in the same structures of power and dominance.”

#### CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING....

(Given to me by Marilyn Frye, from her personal files. Identified by Frye as a mimeographed handout composed by a MSU group called *Matrix* of which she was a member. From the 1970's.)

From *Its Open for Women*, the tentative twirl of my spin along the continuum of my achievement of a feminist standpoint increased with my participation in a feminist conscious-raising (CR) group. My position on the continuum of lesbian existence moved only slightly as I began to value my position among women but remained firmly entrenched in compulsory heterosexuality.

An analysis of feminist standpoint can place it in the consciousness raising groups of the early 70's. Nancy Hartsock wrote of consciousness raising

as a small group of women coming together, most often in someone's home, to examine and come to preliminary understanding of the connection between personal experience and the social structures that patriarchally privilege institutions that define and confine our lives as women. Hartsock further states CR as "the clearest example of the method basic to feminism."<sup>3</sup> The practice of meeting in CR groups demonstrates the importance of building an analysis of patriarchy beginning from our own personal experiences. Following Hartsock, Iris Young claims that to name women as a specific and distinct social collective is a difficult achievement.<sup>4</sup> In CR groups women begin the work.

Consciousness raising, a term coined by Kathie Sarachild of New York Radical Women and one of the architects of the process for politicizing women, learned the practice from its use in the civil rights movement in the south in the early sixties.<sup>5</sup> Alice Echols in Dare to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in American 1967 - 1975 contends that the premise of CR was that among all women there was a sense of commonality, and that also among women, gender was the primary definer of women's experience.<sup>6</sup> In this emphasis on commonality, differences among us generally went unanalyzed, were often dismissed and ignored.

In my CR group, in "*the next america*", we were women in similar material circumstances, all roughly the same age: I was 31, in the same economic class as the others. All of us were white, practicing heterosexuals, and married. Most of us were mothers; and it appeared that all of us were conforming and socially comfortable. In my CR group we spoke and heard only those things in our

immediate gendered experience and preliminarily concluded we were learning about all women.

There were about eight of us who came to the first meeting, where we learned what was "Consciousness Raising." We sat in a circle in someone's living room, some in chairs or on the sofa; others of us sat on the floor. At the first meeting one of the women, maybe the woman in whose house we were, introduced the process of consciousness raising. She told us of some of its conventions. Generally, she said, the process started with an open-ended question to focus the discussion. Someone would begin by answering. We were to speak in the first person, using "I" statements in our responses. While a woman spoke, others listened, we were told. Our safety, in CR the introducer said, was primary. Being safe included being able to tell a truth, to not be interrupted, to not be judged, and to not be offered solutions. What was said in a CR setting remained in that setting. Further she said, hearing is as much a part of CR as being heard and silence was OK. Expressions of our feelings and emotions were part of the truth we were telling and hearing, and could be expressed safely. I, of course, don't remember exactly all she said. I do know though that, for what seemed like the first time in my life as a woman, my emotions were being honored. We were instructed to allow them to be expressed whether our

own or others. For instance a woman being really sad, or angry did not require that we rescue her from her feelings, nor did we have to swallow back that which we were feeling as we heard what she said or told our own stories of our experiences. With each CR convention she spoke it was as if we were being asked to question the familiar and easy for us as women, and risk doing the unfamiliar and more difficult. And in our consciously choosing our behavior as women we would understand better the forces that defined for us the familiar, strange, difficult, and easy. In looking back what we were given, which maybe seldom before as women in our era, race and class had we been given, was the opportunity to disrupt that which we already were and become something that we thought we were not. Who we were already was not at all who we might be.

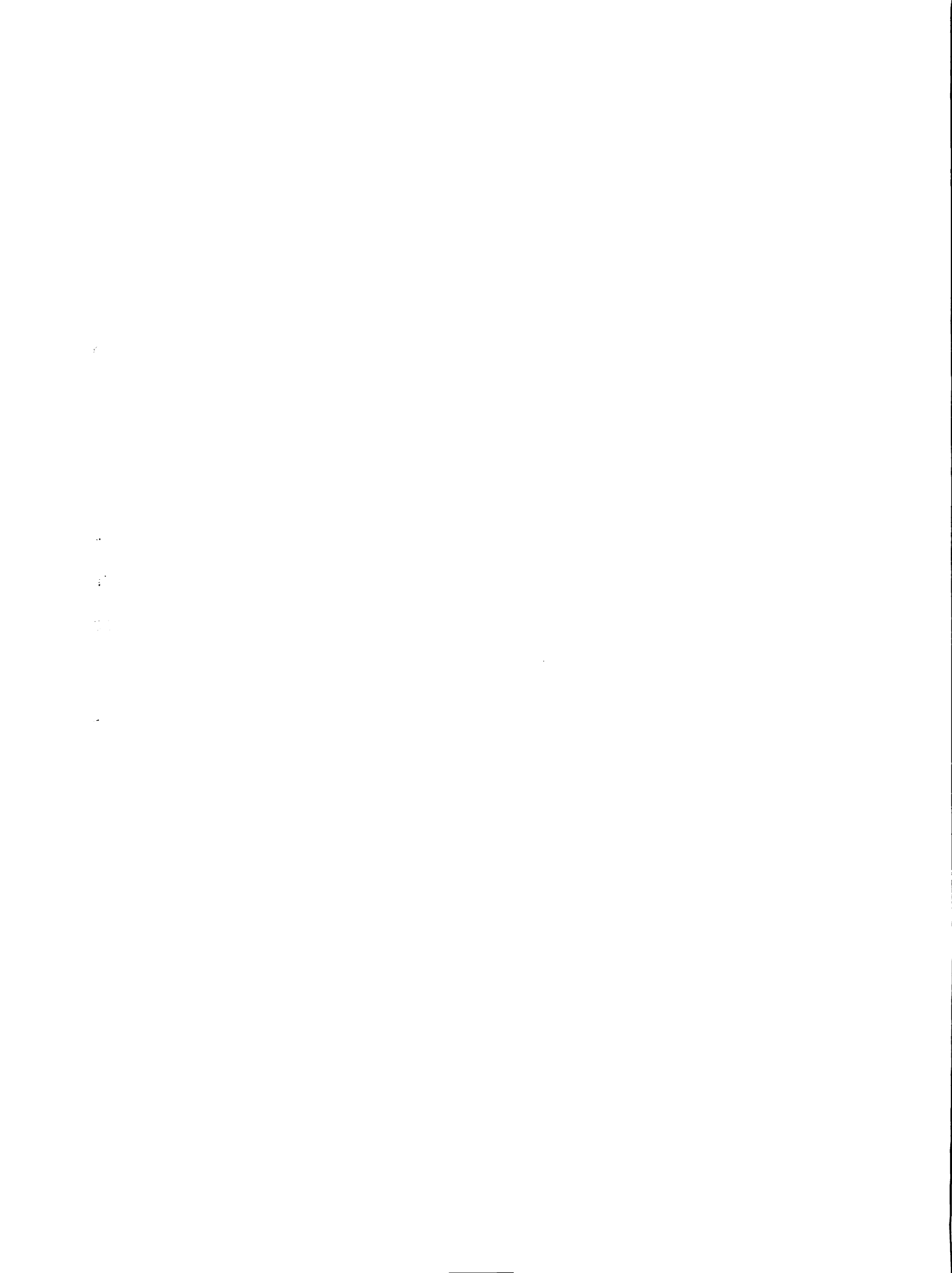
For me this was true. I was very uncomfortable anticipating telling my experiences, even hearing others experiences seemed strange and very risky. I had not prior to being in this CR group been expected or been offered an opportunity, to take my experiences seriously by telling them to others, and having them heard. For me speaking my experiences was to confess to my guilt. Familiarly and easily I had always framed my experiences as personal failures with instances of my faltering in resolve and of my own stupidity. Always, in that frame, I was terribly



contrite and ashamed of my shortcomings, and would wait for the surface forgiveness from the person hearing my confession, and for what I was sure was agreement with me. What would surely follow then would be the implied lesson of "don't do it again!"

My discomfort was not just at the idea of my telling the truth, it was also in hearing other women tell their truth. How to do that? The woman who was telling us the specifics of CR, my goddess, had to tell grown-up women how to tell and hear the truth. Many of us had no experience in taking ourselves and others of us seriously. All I could think of was that I had no other way to hear another's story without interjecting myself into their truth. How could I just hear what they had to say and not perform the conventions of mothering, womanness so familiar to me? Did I have the courage, was I brave enough to not do these things? Could I even imagine another way? At first it seemed I did not. Soon though as others more brave, more willing to take a risk I too spoke up.

**How profound; how radical: to *hear* another woman; to *speak* as a woman; to go inside oneself as a woman in order to move outside to being among women! Other women were hearing us, affirming our experiences with stories of their own, with empathy, with their attention. Certainly among our friends and family we had spoken our feelings about our lives, but in these**



circumstances it was as individuals. The context was personal and we spoke as individual to individual, as defined role to defined role. In CR the context was political. It was coming to know how as women—not as individuals—our lives were structured by male supremacist, misogynist, patriarchal institutions. In that time, in that place, in those material circumstances, it could be thought of as taking a flying leap across a chasm to save our very lives. And while leaping we also truly believed that to do so would end our very lives. And it was true. To be in a CR group at that time was to risk leaving our lives as we knew them and to enter into a new existence as women liberationists not knowing at all what it would mean to us as women, to our loved ones, and to our future. The same group of women met regularly and sometimes not, once a week over a period of about a year. When the formality of meeting as a CR group ended many of us continued to meet informally as friends and activists.

Consciousness raising is a political process of building theory from personal experience for political gain. Concentrating on our commonality we sought equality with men. As a feminist, starting from my personal life became my mode and method, politically and theoretically. In CR, I continued my spin along the spiraling continuum of my achievement of a feminist standpoint.

Although we moved in 1973 from *"the next america"* to one of "America's premier playgrounds for the-very-rich-white-heterosexual-young-healthy-strong-and-beautiful people, Aspen, Colorado, I held firm to my commitment to be active in the women's movement. Shortly after settling in I sought out and found a group of women who met irregularly as the Aspen Women's Caucus.

These women, were also all white, young and heterosexually active but they were not married, not even partnered as I could tell. They were working women in support of their playing who came to Aspen for the skiing, and ski they did. I was the only married woman in our group of women's rights activists, although there was several divorced women who had older children. None of us identified as lesbian and sexuality as a feminist issue was not discussed. Our activism as the Aspen Women's Caucus was local and directed toward particular projects of significance to women in Aspen. One such project was editing out the sexist language in the Police Department Manual. Another project was protesting male sexual harassment of women in bars. Health care was an issue as we critically examined how and where women in Aspen got birth control, treated sexually transmitted diseases, and had access to abortion.

As participants in the culture of the so called sexually free 70s, and for what we thought was our own edification, in 1975 The Aspen Women's Caucus brought Betty Dodson to town to conduct a "Liberating Masturbation" workshop on self-loving. Like a CR group, it took place in a living room—mine to be exact—Unlike a typical CR group, there were more women in attendance and they were unclothed. Also the workshop was a one-time event. Over thirty white young heterosexual identified women came together to learn about self-loving through masturbation.

As we sat around in a huge circle, naked, we introduced ourselves, said how we felt about our bodies, and whether we were orgasmic or not. Easily we answered how we felt about our bodies. No one felt good about her body.

Each woman, one after another stated her felt flaw. She was too fat, or too skinny, or too hippy, or too straight hipped, or too busty, or not busty enough, or shoulders were too broad, or shoulders were too narrow, or nipples pointed out, or nipples pointed in, or legs were straight, or legs were muscular. If it weren't such a tragedy, it would have been laughable. Knowing whether we were orgasmic was not as easy to answer. Although some women did know, most didn't.

Many of us for the first time learned and spoke a truth about masturbation, female orgasms, and the idea of sexual pleasure as our own responsibility. Although self-fulfilling and a step towards a sexual liberation, I don't remember anything in the workshop being about women loving women.

Offered for sale at the workshop was a self-published book by Dodson in which she writes about homosexuality, bi-sexuality, as well as heterosexuality.<sup>7</sup> As a feminist Dodson advocates women move toward sexual independence from men through masturbation and throughout her book makes a case that men's claim of entitled sexual access to women is a part of the problem. Among the solutions she offers—ways of self-love--she doesn't suggest an alternative sexuality of women loving other women. Further, throughout her book are examples of women's statements of their past sexual experiences with men as being negative but by becoming masturbatory all became well. In addition, other "testimonies" from women who had attended previous workshops stated how they, the women, were able to not rely so much on fantasies of romantic boy-girl-for-ever-after sexual ideals and were now able to have casual sexual

relations with men. Still of course very much granting men sexual access to women which presumed their entitlement.

In a section of her book titled "going public", Dodson writes of being annoyed at a public assumption that all feminists are lesbians, and she seeks a way to deal with her annoyance. In the text she writes of announcing her plans for an all female orgy the following Saturday. She states in the very next sentence that "nine women showed, all heterosexual."<sup>8</sup> So as an apologist she makes sure that the reader knows that women can self love among themselves and be heterosexual.

### **National Organization For Women (NOW )**

Before my family and I moved from Aspen to Miami, Florida in 1976, the Aspen Women's Caucus, in order to connect to a larger political context, affiliated with The National Organization for Women (NOW) and became Pitkin County NOW. It is from this connection that in Miami, my spinning along the spiraling continuum progressed and I sought out Dade County NOW.

For the remainder of the 70s and into the 80s activists in Dade NOW worked hard to elect women to the state legislature in hopes in part of increasing our chances of Florida becoming one of the remaining four states needed to ratify the Equal rights amendment.<sup>9</sup> Fifteen states had not yet ratified it. In 1977 Dade NOW also joined the national effort to extend the deadline for ratification and toward this end; National NOW called for an economic boycott against states that had not ratified. Florida as a tourist destination was one of the states

to be boycotted. Dade NOW helped keep this effort current in South Florida. At the same time our energies were directed to training women to run for office, run political campaigns for women candidates, and to be public speakers about the ERA, abortion rights, and other women's rights issues. It was through the ballot box that we believed we would change the world.

It was in 1980 that Adrienne Rich, wrote "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence in which one of two concerns she expressed about the bias of compulsory heterosexuality, was "the virtual or total neglect of lesbian existence in a broad range of writings, including feminist scholarship."<sup>10</sup> She argues that "Any theory or cultural/political creation that treats lesbian existence as a marginal or less 'natural' phenomenon, is profoundly weakened thereby, whatever its other contributions."<sup>11</sup>

In the late 60s, at its beginnings NOW, a political arm of the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement, held lesbians as marginal to its goals. Generally within the women's movement attitudes about lesbians very much reflected the negative attitudes of the rest of society.<sup>12</sup> (See above, Dodson) Some feminist activists though understood that as women's rights activists in support of equality for all women, our work included equality for lesbian women.<sup>13</sup> Equality was the grounds on which lesbians joined NOW and in the early days if these women could pass for straight they became powerful leaders in the NOW as early as 1968.

Feminists were subject to Lesbian baiting, by their friends, the press, husbands and family members. Lesbian and straight women alike were often

charged with being lesbian just because they were feminist activists. Lesbian baiting worked to discredit the movement as well as scare women back into the home, or away from feminist activism. Closeted lesbians and frightened straight women panicked. Some left NOW. Others as a threat to them, claimed lesbians as hurting the movement. Betty Friedan, founder and then-president of NOW, “expressed fears by calling Lesbians the ‘lavender menace’.”<sup>14</sup> In this “don’t ask, don’t tell” environment increasingly more and more leaders of NOW were lesbian. In 1969 author Rita Mae Brown, joined NOW and immediately announced she was a lesbian.<sup>15</sup> Through the efforts of the then New York chapter president she became newsletter editor and a member of the chapter board. In these roles Brown became even more outspoken about her lesbianism. Soon there were efforts, particularly from the national level to silence her. Friedan, warned her, “You can’t talk about this. It will hurt the organization politically.”<sup>16</sup> Brown, incensed, resigned NOW in 1970, taking with her two other important women to the chapter. Angrily Brown wrote a letter to NOW in which she stated, “Lesbianism is the one word which gives the NY Executive Committee a collective heart attack.”<sup>17</sup>

Soon there were other deflections, firings, and lesbophobic purging within the chapters and at the national level. But lesbians were public, persistent, and effective. For example, at 1970 Congress to Unite Women, 20 lesbians took over the stage, and demanded the microphone. They wore T-shirts proclaiming themselves as “the lavender menace”. Many of these women were for the first time out as lesbians before their feminist colleagues in the audience. The



audience in recognizing their friends and stage and knowing of their commitment to NOW and the woman's movement, thirty more women jumped from their seats in the audience to join them on stage as "menaces".<sup>18</sup> Getting the microphone the woman as "the lavender menace", spoke how they were oppressed in the movement making it real to their colleagues in the audience. Society's attempt to crush the independence of the lesbian was presented as a paradigm of women's oppression.

After other dramatic events, including the public claiming by prominent and beloved feminist leaders Susan Brownmiller, Carolyn Bird and Kate Millett of their support of lesbianism, National NOW finally in 1971 passed a national resolution. It stated:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT N.O.W. RECOGNIZES THE DOUBLE OPPRESSION OF LESBIANS; BE IT RESOLVED THAT A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO HER OWN PERSON INCLUDES THE RIGHT TO DEFINE AND EXPRESS HER OWN SEXUALITY AND TO CHOSE HER OWN LIFE-STYLE AND BE IT RESOLVED THAT N.O.W. ACKNOWLEDGES THE OPPRESSION OF LESBIANS AS A LEGITIMATE CONCERN OF FEMINISM.<sup>19</sup>

Before my time in Dade NOW, there was a local version of these events. Locally national events were only alluded to by the current women in power, mostly themselves lesbians. The current chapter leadership had accomplished a coup of sorts and took control of the chapter from our Miami foremothers who held anti-lesbian sentiments. The stories of the coup were understood as secretive, and when questions were asked by newcomers of our current foremothers, all we received in answer were innuendoes, terse pronouncements, and the swift dismissal of our questions. All we knew was that our Dade NOW

former foremothers were “anti-lesbian and tried to keep out-lesbians out of Dade NOW!”

In the late 70s and early 80s the liberal feminist politics of which Dade NOW engaged, we sought equality for “all” women while at the same time as a political strategy we marginalized lesbianism. Internally, though, lesbians were at the heart of our work, politically, socially, and personally. In our campaign for the ERA we often countered a prominent oppositional argument threatening that passing the ERA would allow same sex marriages. To which we would respond dismissively and uncritically to the homophobic charge. It was a political strategy of those in support of the ERA to not get into side arguments about such as restrooms, homosexuality, and day care centers, even abortion. It was our practice to say that these things would not be affected by the ERA and say either that it was outside the province of the law or that a law would have to treat both men and women the same. So a law for or against two men marrying would also have to include two women marrying. Our job was to say what the ERA would do and what it wouldn't do. I don't remember publicly in the context of these arguments using the word lesbian.

Internally though that was not the case. Within state and local chapters of NOW many of our leaders and followers were lesbians. In Miami, among our teachers and mentors of our feminist activism were lesbians. Among our activist colleagues, our friends, our co-activists, our community contacts, were lesbians. Not only were lesbian women's presence crucial to our effectiveness as a chapter and feminist force in the community, lesbians were the content of our

public out-reach. On a card with the Dade NOW program schedule for the year 1983-1984 on October 27, 1983 the topic was "'The Lavender Menace or Why is Lesbian Rights a Feminist Issue,' Chris Riddiough presenting." A list of chapter task forces on the chapter application form, from which a member could select one or several of particular interest, included the Lesbian Rights Task force. During the 1980s in the chapter publication, "The Dade NOW Times", regularly were articles highlighting lesbian concerns, regular notices of a lesbian support group meeting dates, and updates on lesbian and gay rights legislation.

On the continuum of lesbian existence that Rich theorizes as beginning in compulsory heterosexuality I was no longer in ignorance about lesbians. Having that awareness, today I claim my heterosexuality then as chosen rather than compulsory. Which does not say that societal, legal, so called, moral pressures at the time were any less evident in my life. I was still committed to my heterosexual orientation and to being married to Seymour. But it was among my feminist co-activists that I felt most free to be who I was. For instance, I remember a profound sense of freedom at a rollicking NOW dance. Where I, and other women—lesbian and straight—danced and shamelessly and playfully flirted with each other. With great freedom of movement, without the prescribed lady-like behavior I was so familiar with—I felt momentarily free to be who I was. There was no fear that because I flirted and played that I would be misunderstood and would be expected to provide access to my body sexually. But after the dance was over I returned home to my husband. My marriage, my family, my life outside of my activism, were still primary and defining my

sexuality. Lesbian rights were prominent on our agenda but abortion rights in the late 80s took center stage.

### **Speak-out: Illegal Abortion**

Speaking-out, an effective strategy of the women's movement was used extensively during the 70s and 80s to protect abortion rights.<sup>20</sup> Women telling the gruesome details of their illegal abortions, took a position of being victimized by those who stood between women and legal abortion, and emphasized how dangerous for women it was before the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court Decision.<sup>21</sup> They publicly expressed the urgency of keeping the decision intact.

As political activists the speakers told their story to convince others to join the campaign in protecting women's right to choose to safely and legally terminate her pregnancy. Other forms of "speak-outs" included published lists of prominent women who previously risked their lives by having an illegal abortion. I remember in the 70s seeing as survivors of illegal abortion Gloria Steinem, Billie Jean King, and other recognizable women's names printed in a long impressive list on the inside back cover of an early Ms. Magazine. Other speak-outs on courthouse steps, in front of clinics and hospitals, on campuses were a common occurrence, because of its effectiveness as an organizing strategy.

On the Dade County Court House steps in 1985, in Miami, Florida the sun was shining. Along with other women prepared to speak to a gathering lunch time crowd, I stood at the top of those steps. As a political action, to protect women's

lives, in the manner of consciousness raising women spoke their experiences of illegal abortion.

I arrived at the courthouse to a crowd of people carrying signs demanding that abortion is kept safe and legal and I was glad that there were not yet many opponents. It was at the top of the wide marble steps in front of the entrance that we placed the podium. Behind the podium, supporters, hoping to catch the attention of members of the media, held high signs and banners proclaiming "Never Again", "Keep Abortion Legal" and "Protect Women's Rights." We knew from past experiences that it was the signs that completed our message when pictures were taken of the women telling their stories. The audience grew as more and more people stopped to see what was going on as they were out of their offices and on the streets getting their lunch.

Eighteen years later, I of course do not remember all that I said, but I remember the day, the event, and the rhetoric. Words such as "desperation", "risk", "fear", and "butcher" no doubt generously punctuated all that I told of my experiences. I would have spoken of my desperation, saying how I would have done anything, risk everything, to not be pregnant again. I would have spoken about the risk to my own life and health that I willingly took. I would have justified my decision to take such desperate measures by telling of my three children and how at the time I was the sole source of their financial support. I would have added how I was now happily married and had given birth to my fourth child after

having the abortions. After all it wasn't as if I didn't want children, I just "couldn't" have another one at the time, thereby protecting an image of me being a righteous victim. In my speaking out for political purposes I would have made the abortionist, who at the time was my savior, into a "butcher", who was only interested in his own financial gain, who had no compassion for the pain I endured, nor of my desperate situation.

## **Discussion**

The eighties were a time of great activity in the white women's movement. We were on the defense against attacks on a woman's right to choose an abortion. In July of 1989 in the Webster decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the state of Missouri could ban abortion from public hospitals, could force physicians to run viability tests on the fetus. "In Roe the court struck down state restrictions and in Webster it invited state limitations", wrote Ellen Goodman, in her July 7<sup>th</sup> column in the Miami Herald. "Thousands of abortion rights supporters, many not previously involved in the political process mobilized to fight against new restrictions", wrote Kate Michelman, Executive Director of NARAL. Michelman went on to claim "Webster created a tremendous upsurge in activity in the political process in this nation".<sup>22</sup> In Florida an anti-choice governor, Bob Martinez called a special session of the state legislature to discuss following Missouri's lead with the blessings of the Supreme Court, further restricting abortion rights for Florida women. Dade NOW was also affected by this upsurge of political activity. Many new members and activists joined and

could be counted on to protest, write letters, march and generally respond to this assault on women's lives. In all this activity, as President of Dade NOW, I became the spokesperson for our efforts and appeared numerous times in the media. Many large demonstrations, clinic protection actions and other organized public events thwarted an attempt by the Florida Legislature to pass restrictive measures on abortion. Dade NOW was flying high.

### **2002 Commentary: Activism Gone Awry...**

*It happened when I was who I was before I became who I am now. It could be said that it was because of what happened then that I am who I am now. Who I was then was just more of what I had been and now who I am is someone different and also the same.*

Although I write this particular history of Dade County NOW in the first person many other women in Miami might add their personal pronoun to my story. When I say *I*, *me*, or *my*, often in my mind I hear other women speaking in agreement. We together created and were ensnared in the thorny tentacles of patriarchal feminism.

The specific time was the summer and fall of 1990 and it happened in Miami, Florida. When the events of this story occurred, I was a long time member of the Dade NOW and was its current and ineligible for re-election president. It was a time of intense political activity of thwarting attempts to further restrict a woman's right to choose abortion. The events of this story began with a victory that led to betrayal, abuse of power, and lost ideals. It was

in June of that summer, that Mindy McNichols won a contested election to succeed me as chapter president. How, you might ask, does McNichols' victory have anything to do with the epigram of this essay? In Mindy's challenge to the organizational status quo and from her act of courage and defiance, others of us became courageous, angry and autonomous. In our active support of her we changed from dependent, passive, followers of a charismatic leader, to independent, dynamic agents in our own lives.

The classic format of a good story is to have a hero and a villain. The hero in my story is of course Mindy, and the so-called villain is a woman named Janet, the aforementioned charismatic chapter board leader. To follow the classical format further I am the damsel-in-distress, a formerly dependent and passive follower of Janet, and through my support of Mindy's candidacy, I was "saved". It is this transformation around which my story unfolds.

We were good friends, the three of us. All of the core activists of the chapter were good friends. In Miami, Florida, during the 80s, we helped create exciting feminist times. We worked hard together pursuing the liberal democratic ideal of equal rights for women. Also we had wonderful good times cementing our commitment to feminism and to each other. All during the 80's we passionately and untiringly worked to elect women to public office. We traveled long distances to conferences insuring our state and national organization was strong and on target. We were effective spokespersons for feminist issues and appeared on TV, joined panels at public events, led parades of feminists down busy highways supporting equality and justice for all, and we locked arms to

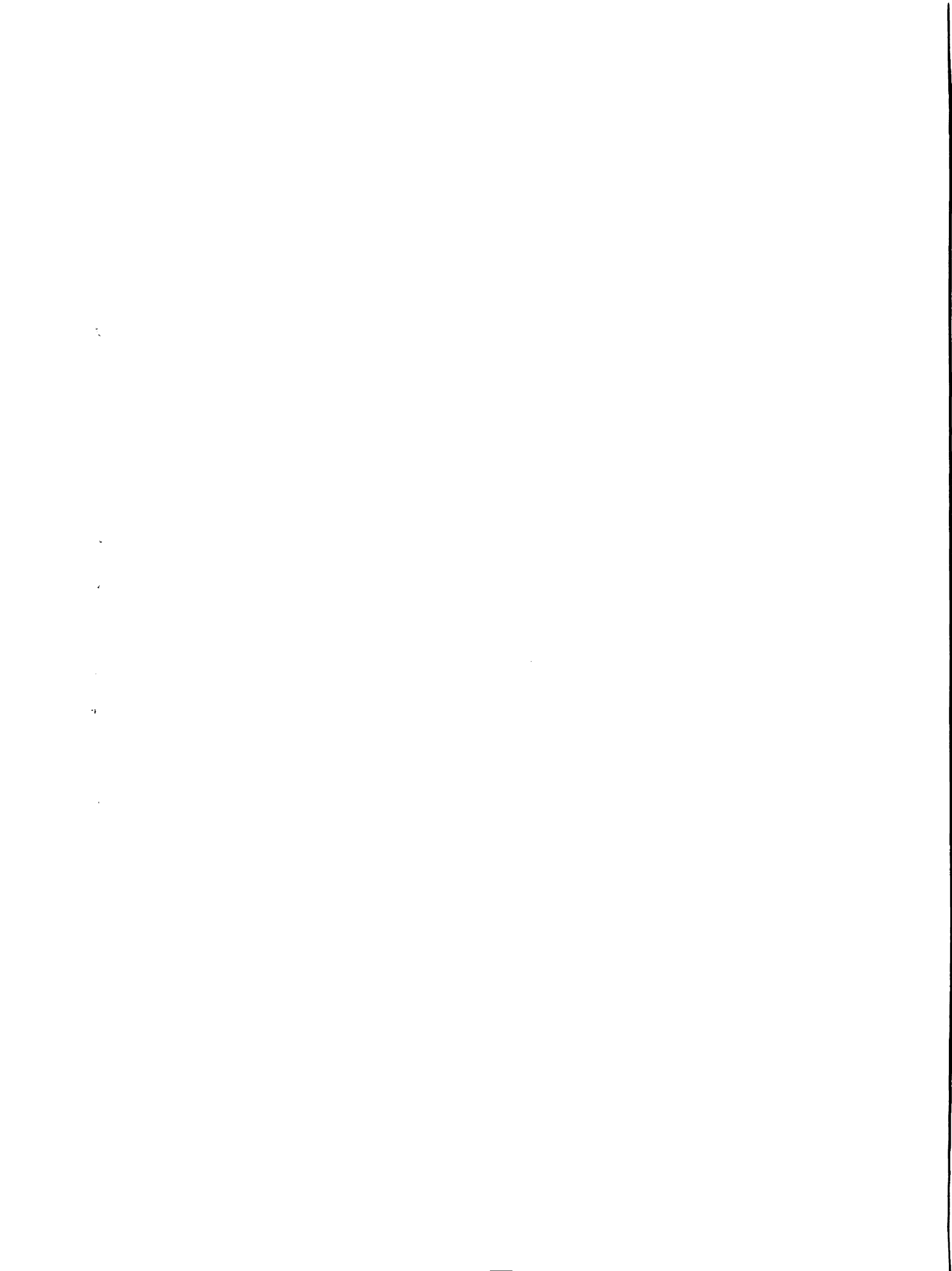




keep abortion clinics open and safe. Throughout, cohesively and united, we remained dedicated to each other and to the particular meaning we made of feminist ideals.

Quite generally, the three principals of this story reflect the class, race, age, sexual orientation and educational experience of most of the membership of the white women's movement of the 70s and 80s, and particularly that of our local chapter. We were the women who twenty years before had read Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique and found a place for ourselves in school, business and the white women's movement. We are among the women who promoted the idea of the condition of women, sold the concept of women's oppression within the confines of patriarchy and capitalism. And I, reflecting back on these times know, within Dade NOW we also created what we most feared, a structure of authority and domination based on race, class and privilege. Our membership reflected it. Our leadership and their loyal followers practiced it. My story is also a revelation of this paradox.

One of my first priorities upon moving to Miami in 1977 was to become involved with Dade NOW. I came to Miami with a fulfilling feminist history. I helped start a NOW chapter in Colorado and led a successful countywide campaign for a state Equal Rights Amendment in Maryland. Two years earlier I earned a BA degree in communications with a concentration on women's issues. Already I knew that I was a feminist and looked to my involvement in a local feminist



organization to provide further opportunity to refine and practice this identity. Also I wanted to change the world and understood Dade NOW to hold that same lofty and idealized goal. From the outset, I attached myself to the President. Her name was Janet Canterbury. She welcomed me warmly when I introduced myself to her at my first chapter action. I willingly offered her my loyalty and friendship. She accepted them and responded by supporting my leadership of various chapter duties and responsibilities. Under her tutelage I served often as chair or co-chair of many actions and chapter events. Soon I was selected to join the board and for years held a variety of positions. I loved my work. I remember remarking to some close friend how I felt most free and most myself while doing my work in Dade NOW. I liked who I was as a feminist activist and as a leader and was effective and well liked. I loved being successful knowing that my achievements closely related to the success of the chapter. For years my identity as a feminist was visible and apparent in all areas of my life and revolved around my activism within Dade NOW.

But as I entered into active involvement with Dade NOW I was reluctant to exert my power and authority. I have always been impressed with those attributes and aspired to own them. But it seemed as though there was always more to learn before I would be ready to practice them myself. As



a female growing up in the fifties, who had gotten pregnant, married, and divorced way too young, I placed my power and authority in the hands of men. I had excellent skills in subordination, even to a point of using it as a position of power, and was afraid to try a new manner of behavior even with women. I ask the question, now as I write this story, how is it that Janet, the titular head of Dade NOW grew up at the same time as I, albeit in different class circumstances, and yet was a genius at exerting her power and authority? She was as adverse to subordination as I was to exerting power.

Our hero Mindy McNichols came to the chapter a few years after I did. She was a recent graduate of Duke University Law School and was an associate in one of the most active and prestigious law firms in the city. Her mentor was Janet's best friend, Patricia Ireland, a chapter star who would later become a long-term national president of NOW. Mindy had a wonderful hard working enthusiasm, was a good thinker and patiently explained to all that asked the complex legalities of our issues.

Mindy grew up in Wisconsin as one of twelve children and was a scrapper. This seemed to protect her from the growing dependency on Janet that many of the rest of us held. Still Mindy carved for herself a niche in the chapter and served at both the state and local level as legislative

vice president. So when she chose to run as a candidate for chapter president there was no question that she was deserving and qualified. It was not about her qualifications that the conflict began, though. The conflict was because Mindy chose to run even though Janet had already selected "the next president". I was the current president and had served my allotted two terms. Before this, seldom had anyone challenged Janet's selection and remained in Dade NOW to tell about it. Mindy's choice was a sure sign of her lack of dependency on Janet.

Although she is cast as the villain, I liked Janet. She was a big, loving woman, with a wonderfully attractive Texas accent and a personality as large as her body and the state from which she hailed. I loved hearing Janet laugh: it was infectious and could get us all quickly into a state of hilarity. Her interest in me, and others upon whom she drew to assume chapter leadership, seemed genuine and warm. As Dean of Students at the University of Miami School of Medicine, Janet held a comfortable position of power outside of Dade NOW. We as chapter members relished being invited to her office on campus for a chatty brown bag lunch and an hour's worth of gossip. When I was invited, she inquired about my fledgling business and often gave me a name of someone to contact at the university for future business. She knew my kids and made some extended complimentary remark

about one or all of them. Of course I gushed and was so grateful and basked in her personal attention. How dependent I was on her acknowledgment of things and me mine. I recognize now how duplicitous was her attention and her astuteness in knowing which hooks to set into whom. Her warmth, good nature and friendliness were forms of discipline keeping me dependent upon her and therefore in her good graces. My deep commitment to feminism, to NOW, and to my identity as a feminist, seemed tied to Janet's good graces.

In Janet's counsel we were identified as valuable, worthy, and of interest. During the course of casual lunches in her office she also let those in her presence know what happened to those who did not tow her line. Humorously and off-handedly in these one-on-one exchanges she identified who was in line and who was not. It was made clear that to not be in line meant you not only would not be invited back, but you also became the enemy.

Dade County NOW in 1990 was one of the largest and most active chapters of a twenty-three year old national feminist organization. We were a chapter that offered many of its members a variety of leadership opportunities. My feminist, activist home for thirteen years, Dade NOW provided me with many opportunities to lead. But when Mindy ran for president, it became like a war zone. Women



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who were previously personally and politically aligned instantly became bitter enemies. A division was created between those in support of Mindy and those in support of the other candidate. Secret meetings, personal attacks, harassing, were some of the behaviors practiced with, to and between the opposing camps who only weeks before were our colleagues and good friends. We stopped talking to each other. We were suspicious, untrusting, angry, and vindictive. No longer was the chapter a safe place for me or for anyone else who supported Mindy's candidacy

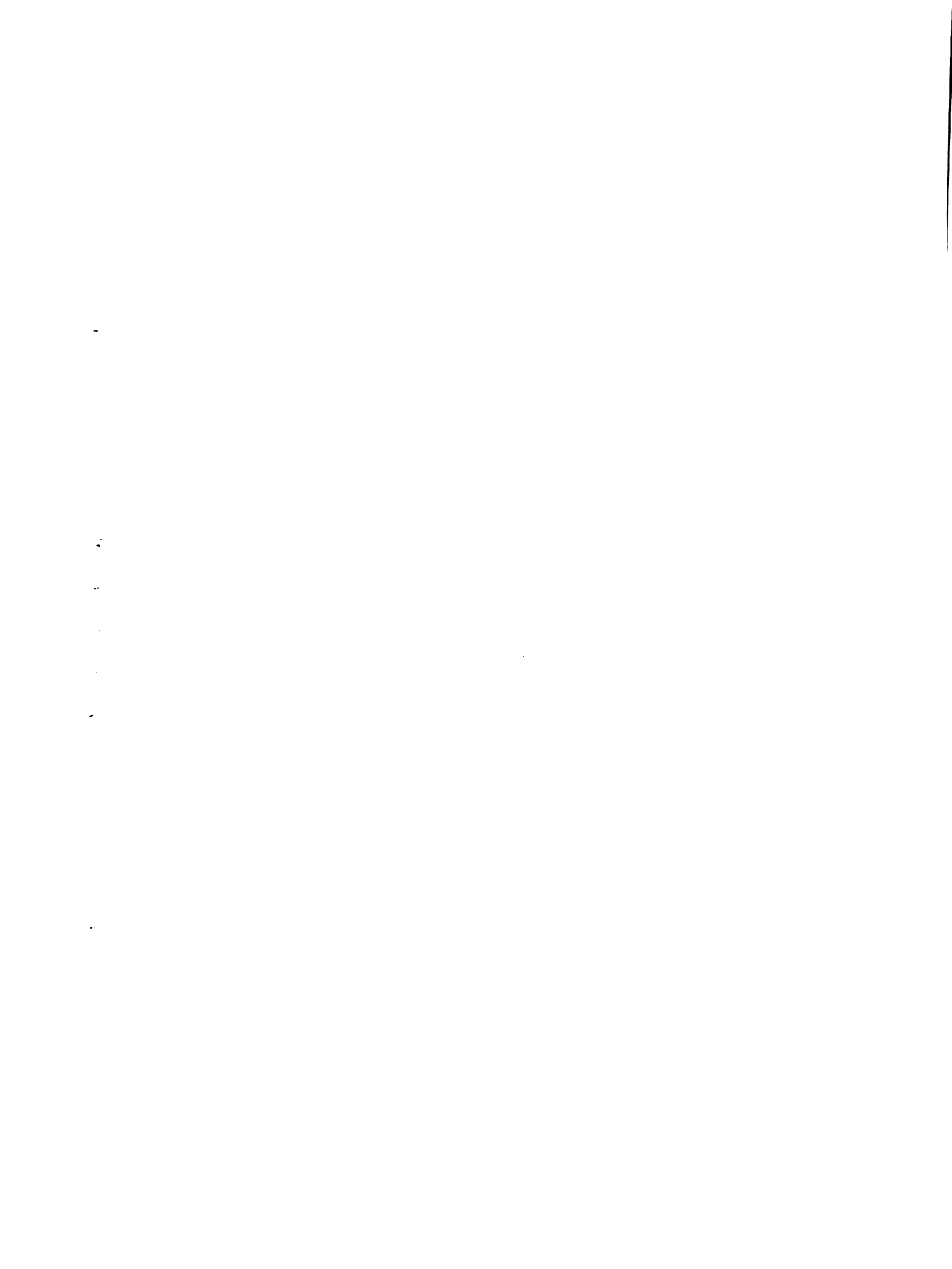
First Janet accused me of inappropriately taking sides as the sitting president. Since I hadn't been public with my support of Mindy, somehow I thought I could defend myself. Then Janet proceeded in vilifying Mindy. She told me that if Mindy became president, the chapter would end up in the toilet. "I have devoted too much time and energy into this chapter to watch it destroyed by Mindy's presidency. Mindy" she sputtered, "is emotionally unstable, crazy, destructive and her presidency will polarize chapter membership, pitting the long time activists against the newly enrolled members, and the straight women against the lesbians."

My personal, political and public identities were tightly entwined around my participation in Dade NOW. Memories of once favored women in the chapter who

disappeared from chapter activities trickled through to my consciousness. It was as if I too would now disappear because for years I had relied on Janet for the truth of my feminist existence. It was easier to let her define what was true, than for me to know it for myself. All I had to do was go along to get along. And now that I had betrayed her by going against what she had expected of me, I feared I too would disappear.

Mindy won the election in a landslide. Janet and her sidekicks were furious. Although elated with the outcome, I knew there would be repercussions. Along with my anxiety about them, the feminist idealist in me believed that Mindy would be allowed her year in office, protected by the mandate of the members who had voted for her. But in a hierarchical arrangement of power, such as was in place in Dade NOW, the membership didn't stand a chance. Through use of her power, which resembled so closely the patriarchal, patronage system of an "old boys network", Janet doled out privileges, favor and dependency. As the powerful person she was, she turned around several members of the newly formed board to side with her against Mindy. These feminist women, swayed no doubt as I had been by Janet's power and leadership skills voted down every initiative offered by Mindy or by any of the other board members aligned with her.

Women, new to the chapter and recently elected to the



board, who were in support of Mindy's presidency, could not stomach the hostility, and resigned. In attempts to maintain some semblance of presidential control, Mindy moved the bank account nearer to her home. Although this was a common procedure for a new president, in the interest of her convenience, Mindy's enemies used it as ammunition against her. They accused her of operating outside of her authority. The battle escalated. Hastily, hostile members called secret board meetings held at Janet's house. At these meetings, selectively following *Roberts Rules of Order*, they decided to bring Mindy to an internal trial. Mindy refused to participate. This further infuriated Janet and she exerted more pressure on me and others to desert Mindy, much like abandoning a sinking ship and leaving the captain to drown. Mindy was going to be brought down, she said, and if we would defect, we could be saved. I didn't, nor did the others.

The "trial" was held and supported the charges of misconduct levied against Mindy. Women chosen and pressured by Janet and obligated in some way to her, recommended Mindy be removed from office. A general membership meeting was held to implement the recommendation, and with a packed house of new members from the medical school securely in Janet's pocket, we knew as soon as we arrived that the vote would go against us.

At that point, before subjecting the membership to a vote, we agreed to a compromise. Mindy stepped down as president, became the vice-president, and still believing in the power of "Sisterhood" we somehow hoped that all of the hostility was over. We acquiesced and believed that now after a bit of awkwardness; all that happened, all the hurt, loss and pain, would be dismissed, forgotten, and together we would heal our wounds. Together again, we would return to securing and fighting for our rights.

At the next board meeting though, hopes for reconciliation were dashed. The acting president, a mouthpiece of Janet's closed out any voting positions on the board all to all who supported Mindy. After several of these meetings, those of us who had long found our home in Dade NOW never again attended another one. We left the chapter. Thirty of us became charter members of a new Feminist organization in Dade County called the Feminist Alternative. Many activists who over the years had disappeared from Dade NOW found a new home in the FA. We published a newspaper with a mailing list of 2000 and became a strong feminist voice in Dade County and Florida. We initiated actions and co-sponsored with other women's organizations, conferences, demonstrations, elections and actions.

*I, and others in support of Mindy, who were contacted and attacked by Janet, did not fold, disappear, or acquiesce, because Mindy did not. She inspired us to stand up to Janet, and we did at great personal, political and emotional costs. Mindy lost her job at a prestigious law firm because her attention was on the battle and not on her job. Our close friend and long time co-activist lost a well-waged campaign for the Florida Legislature by less than 100 votes, leading us to believe if her supporters and the Dade NOW chapter had not been embroiled in this internal battle she would have had a better chance garnering the so few needed votes for her victory.*

Today Mindy, an out lesbian, is the Legislative Aide to Dade County Commissioner Katy Sorenson and helps write laws that affect women and men of Dade County. She and her partner of twelve years have two children. Janet is still the Dean of Students at the University of Miami School of Medicine. As far as I know, she still is a power broker of Dade NOW, Florida NOW and National NOW, all of which have diminished considerably from public view and perceived effectiveness. Among other things I am a now a partnered lesbian and a soon-to-be graduated doctoral student and own

my home in Lansing, Michigan. I have a voice that is  
throwing off fifty plus years of practiced subordination to  
others more articulate and authoritative than I.



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<sup>1</sup> Carol Cathcart, Mimi McKinney, Joyce Brown were the women who conceived of and worked to implement their idea of a coffee house for women. The name of the coffee house would be "It's Open For Women."

<sup>2</sup> Daly, Mary. *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990). Following Daly, I metaphorically use Leaping, Spinning, Spiraling down beneath the surface of phallogocentric thinking. From Daly, "I simply risked leaping into the process...." in *New Intergalactic Introduction*, p. xix. "It was the task of Weaving connections in such ways that I was in fact Spinning the integrity of my own being and knowing, experiencing vertigo, and moving into uncharted Realms" . p. xxi.. " ....*outercourse*, for this is a Voyage of Spiraling Paths Moving Out from the state of bondage. It is a continual expansion of thinking, imagining, acting, being. I now see the Spiraling Paths of my Outercoursing....They are Acts of Leaping through portals into the Background." p. xxii.

<sup>3</sup> Hartsock, Nancy. "Fundamental Feminism: Process and Perspective" in *Building Feminist Theory: Essays from Quest*, Longman, New York and London, 1981, p.35.

<sup>4</sup> Young, Iris. "Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1994. Vol. 19, 3 713-738, p.718.

<sup>5</sup> Echols, Alice. *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism In America, 1967-1975*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 84-85.

<sup>6</sup> Echols, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> Dodson, Betty. *Liberating Masturbation: A Meditation on Self-love*. (New York: Bodysex Designs, 1974) p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Dodson, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> American Bar Association. "ERA: Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Pamphlet. Undated but by content, printed and distributed between 1978 and 1982. The ERA, (text above in the title) first introduced to the United States Congress in 1923 is a proposed addition to the U.S. Constitution that finally passed both houses of Congress in 1972. In order for it to have been added to the constitution it required ratification by 3/4 of the states legislatures. "The ERA would require government to abide by the principle that all men and all women are entitled to equal opportunity to participate in the nation's political social and economic life". Inside, front cover. Even with a four year extension granted by the US Congress in 1978 it never was ratified by the last three needed states.

<sup>10</sup> Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1980, vol 5, no.4. The University of Chicago Press. pp.631-660.

<sup>11</sup> Rich, p. 632.

<sup>12</sup> Abbott, Sidney and Barbara Love. *Sappho was a Right-On Woman*. Briercliff Manor, New York:Stein and Day/Publishers, 1972, Day Book Edition, 1978.

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<sup>13</sup> Abbott, p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> Abbott, p. 110.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, Rita Mae. Author of many books. The one of the most enduring popularity, published in 1973 is Rubyfruit Jungle (New York: Daughters Publishing, Inc., 1973).

<sup>16</sup> Abbott, p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> Abbott, p. 112.

<sup>18</sup> Abbott, p. 114.

<sup>19</sup> Abbott, p. 131.

<sup>20</sup> Hartmann, Susan M. From Margin to Mainstream: American Women and Politics Since 1960, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989. "Working Women United, a grass-roots group in Ithaca, New York, held a speak-out on sexual harrassment in 1975.... " p.113.

<sup>21</sup> A 1973 United States Supreme Court decision, named Roe v. Wade is based on a women's right to privacy, protected women lives by giving them the freedom from interference by the state to choose to terminate a pregnancy. It affirmed that a woman's right of privacy included her deciding for herself whether, when, and under which circumstances she would bear a child. Roe v. Wade made it solely a decision between the woman and her physician in which the state had no business and could not interfere.

<sup>22</sup> Balz, Dan and Ruth Marcus. "In Year since Webster, Abortion Defies Predictions". *The Washington Post*. July 1, 1990, p. A1, A6.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE DEPTH OF MY ACHIEVEMENT

Today--fall of the year 2002--being a lesbian, being a student, being old, are markers of the depth of my achievement of a feminist standpoint. Because feminist standpoint, as theorized by Nancy Hartsock, includes the claim that women occupy a privileged vantage point to what can be known about male supremacy, I argue that as a lesbian feminist I occupy a privileged vantage point that offers me an opportunity to also achieve a less perverse and distorted view of compulsory heterosexuality. In addition, I have constantly sought deeper and richer understandings of feminisms for over thirty years bringing me to the point of this project as a graduating student in a Ph.D. program. Following Hartsock's claim that "women's lives differ systematically and structurally from those of men," my life as a lesbian-- as not a heterosexual--is structured differently from that of a heterosexual woman.<sup>1</sup> It is from my achievement of a lesbian, old, white feminist standpoint that I come to different understandings of my experiences of abortion, being an icon of white male heterosexual desire, and being a white feminist political activist.

My long list of experiences previously identified as possible objects/subjects of my research dwindled to abortion, sexual objectifying, and feminist activism. My understandings of them changed over time. An illegal abortion, without a feminist consciousness, is experienced as shameful, a

criminal act, a secret. As a feminist activist, this same experience was “courageously” shouted out from the courthouse steps as an act victimization, in which women’s lives are discarded, unvalued, and placed at extreme risk. In today’s perspective as a feminist scholar, thirty-five years later, this experience can be constructed as an act of resistance to the dominant, patriarchal imperatives of womanhood.

From my lesbian feminist standpoint I have access to my past understandings of these experiences as heterosexist, classed, raced, aged, contextual and historic. My experience told today from memories of yesterday demonstrates how I a white, middle-class, young, single, heterosexual, mother, professional sex object, in our nation’s capital, coped with an unwanted pregnancy. How I experienced the illegal abortion, as outside of the dominant discourses which would have me not seek an abortion. Then as a feminist activist, and moving from my individuated experience to understanding my experience as being shaped by being a part of the collective woman, I represented my experience of abortion as being that of all women faced with an unwanted pregnancy. I spoke my story as exemplary, as demonstrative, as descriptive, and as representative, without acknowledging the structural differences and interlocking oppressions between women of different races, classes, ages, and sexuality.<sup>2</sup> I consciously understood that I was speaking for the women, no matter their location in the structures of our society, who could not, did not, would not, tell their stories.

Now I am a scholar. I have been trained to problematize, to enrich, to connect and critique the context in which women live their lives. I have many more ways of telling my stories than as an individual or as a political activist. If I look at my experiences of abortion for instance, as chronological, linear, I can tell it one way. If I turn it ever so slightly it can be told entirely differently. An example is my first abortion. Even if I still told it fairly chronologically, but changed the viewpoint to being from the context of my job as a Gaslight Girl/object of heterosexual male desire, the paradigm of working for tips and the common connection between the two men in my story as current customers of mine, it is a different story that I can tell. Today as a student, having achieved a depth of a lesbian feminist standpoint, I have access to telling my stories many different ways. I am able to reinterpret them within many more analytical frameworks than I was able to either prior to my entering the continuum of my achievement or as I did to make a political point.

### **Today's Perspective: Illegal Abortion and Oppression<sup>3</sup>**

Oppression: root of the word is press. To press something, force is applied to mold it, shape it, and distort it. Barriers are created to restrict and immobilize it.<sup>4</sup>

Marilyn Frye, in "Oppression" uses the analogy of a cage to represent the systematically constructed network of oppression that confines, molds, and constructs all women. The cage representing oppression consists of many

interlocking, overlapping and complexly organized webs of meaning and understanding. Within its complexity it is placing an understanding of abortion into this cage-like organization of oppression that I use to weave today's perspective of my experiences, or of women's experiences of abortion. It is from my achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint, that I see more comprehensively how abortion is defined by a system, which subordinates women's sexuality to the definitions and desires of men.

Using the cage as representative of the network of forces that oppress women, shows that by only focusing on one barrier and not seeing oppression as a network of forces in place to confine her, a woman might think she was free if only she could remove the one barrier on which she is focussed. But in her narrow focus she is not seeing that her escape is impossible because of the entire network of forces preventing her from freedom. No one element of the network, or a wire in a cage, keeps her oppressed. How all elements are connected and related to each other is what creates the cage-like structure of oppression.

In the narratives written from memory to represent my initial understanding of my experiences of abortion, I thought of abortion as the solution to the outcome of my own stupid behavior. Even though the solution was illegal, dangerous, and as some would say, immoral, it was a solution available to me and one I chose to rectify an undesired personal situation. In the narratives that represented my early entry into an achievement of a feminist standpoint, as a

feminist activist, I still saw abortion as a resolution to an individualized situation, but as a resolution that should be insured by the government for all women as a basic right. Today my perspective of abortion is that it is part of the sexual difference of women's lives. A difference used to subordinate, dominate, and oppress her. Women have had abortions, or not, across time. Only women have abortions and my vision is that women separate, as best as possible from oppressive institutions, such as heterosexist mores, laws, and structures.

Abortion as a choice for women desiring it in our western culture, and most other cultures, is mediated through religion, government, medicine: all male dominated, conceived of patriarchally, maintained and enforced to make compulsory women's heterosexuality, and their subordination and continued oppression in a masculinist, phallocratic, heterosexist reality. From the depth of my achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint I have a broader access to Frye's conceptualization and can re-understand those experiences as determined by the cage of oppression in which I am confined.

As a feminist abortion rights activist, I understood and made meaning of the denial of access to legal abortion as the problem. To insure women's access to safe abortion through the law, women's lives would be saved. So I was still seeing abortion as a solution. Further, I embraced the feminist political understanding required of me that I only see abortion as if it were a stand-alone barrier to the liberation of all women. Within the cage of oppression this requirement meant that I only see one wire in the cage and from that microscopic

view I could not see, nor did I represent the complete network of barriers to our freedom from oppression. In this microscopic examination we believed that the removal of legal barriers to abortion would amount to women's freedom from sexual oppression. All women would be free once we were granted permission by legal and moral powers to have an abortion. This belief is mistaken, simplistic, and of course untrue. For one thing, someone else granting me permission to have an abortion is someone else desiring it and defining it for me. And in the case of legal, medical and moral power, it is in the hands of the phallocracy.

Further by holding this belief and fighting for either abortion's illegality or legality, the caged/oppressed woman has owned the system that oppresses her! In the complexities of the interwoven forces in which she is oppressed, the engaged constitutes and maintains her own confinement. She becomes a component of that which oppresses her and others of the class *woman*. By looking at only one wire in the cage—abortion-- the rest of the cage of oppression is obscured. Since the state, in cahoots with the medical system, legitimized it, quasi removing one barrier to overcoming women's oppression, we thought we had gotten something. We did not understand yet the full complexities of all the forces in place that deny women reproductive freedom or the ability to define their own reproductive destinies based on their own desires. Other systems in the cage of oppression come into play. Doctors, hospitals, professional care givers, systematically invoked religion, religions invoked the



“right to life” as superceding women’s right to an abortion thereby valuing the life of the fetus over that of the woman. Legislatures and Congress jumped on the bandwagon and began systematically to restrict access to abortion. They put into place, financial restrictions. Only women who had money could have one. No public assistance funds could pay for an abortion. Age restrictions in the form of the requirement of a parent’s consent were instituted. Access was further restricted when hospitals and medical schools pulled abortion practices from their offered training and services. With fewer and fewer practitioners, access was confined to mostly urban areas, and geography became an issue of expense, time, and safety. Soon late abortions were attacked through language and laws by calling them “partial birth abortions”, and by discussions of the viability of the fetus. It made no difference to those with the power to oppress, that safe, legal abortions saved women’s lives. Her life was valueless. Her body was thought an incubator to preserve the life of the fetus. All of these interlocking and interwoven institutions, systems of repression, and others (partially) constitute the oppression of women.

*And there I was on the court house steps positing protection  
by the state would protect all women.*

We live in a reality of patriarchy. We know that biologically procreation takes place in a woman’s body, and under the theory of the compulsory nature of

heterosexuality she is pregnant, less as a result of her wishes and desires than as an outcome (not unexpected) of coerced heterosexual intercourse. Even though in our present historic and political situation, certain pregnant women privileged by race, class, age, location, can carry her pregnancy to term or terminate it, the web of oppression to which she is confined, insures that she is really only able to do what is desired by the patriarchy for her to do. The progeny (descendants of the father) must be protected or not. Any option she chooses will be male defined and desired. With institutional, structural, and personal barriers woven in place to prevent her from having an abortion, motherhood is forced upon her. Conversely, barriers are in place for some women, based on her lack of privilege—or that of the men closest to her in her life—in relationship of race, class, age, location, prevent her from carrying a pregnancy to term and abortion is forced upon her. In western patriarchy, abortion is male defined variously as murder, as a capricious act by women, as the result of irresponsible female sexual behavior, all contributing barriers to women exercising control over their own bodies.

### **Today's Perspective: The Girl/Bunny**

Feminist standpoint is an epistemology. Achieving a feminist standpoint is an achievement of a consciousness that allows an understanding of “phallographic social relations and ideology” within which women in our society live their lives.<sup>5</sup> It is from our lives as women that we occupy a vantage point to achieving an

understanding, less perverse and distorted, of the relationships of power between women and men. It is in my struggle to achieve a feminist standpoint that I understand the nature of power in the Playboy Club as disciplinary. It is with a feminist standpoint that I read Michel Foucault, Sandra Bartkey, and Susan Bordo.

“But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs”.

Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish.<sup>6</sup>

“**bunny** *n, pl bunnies* **1** : RABBIT esp a young rabbit **2**: *a desirable young woman*<sup>7</sup>

Sandra Bartky in Femininity and Domination uses the *Playboy Bunny* as one of three examples of women being sexually objectified.<sup>8</sup> Adrienne Rich in her article “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”, exemplifies “bunnies” as one of the ways women are required to dress for male sexual titillation and are used as objects of male transactions.<sup>9</sup> Catherine MacKinnon in Toward a Feminist Theory of the State refers to *Playboy’s* “Playmate of the Month” in the context of pornography defining what a group is, “including when it raises individual qualities to sexual stereotypes”.<sup>10</sup> *Playmates*, women who are photographed nude to appear in the centerfold of *Playboy Magazine*, were often *Playboy Bunnies*.

What is the power of the *Playboy Bunny* that feminist theorists continue to invoke its image long after the *Playboy Club*, and the *Playboy Bunny* have ceased to exist? I was a Playboy Bunny over thirty years ago, prior to my beginning the struggle to achieve a feminist standpoint. In my experience as a *Bunny*, I was as Bartky, Rich, and MacKinnon assert, sexually objectified, costumed to sexually titillate, and thought of by some people as being pornographic. Being a *Bunny* was the performance of a subjectivity that included practices and qualities of my gender as constructed at that time. In my role of *Bunny* acts of subservience, projection of glamour and the making of accommodations were rewarded with money. Unlike my roles of mother and wife, subjectivities that required the same practices and qualities, as a *Bunny*, I was paid for these gendered behaviors. Any woman with the required material characteristics and able to perform the required behaviors could have also been hired. It was not my particular ability to perform the subjectivity *Bunny* that landed me the job; I landed it because of my membership in the group Woman and my conformance with its phallographic subjectivity.

Michel Foucault's concept of modern disciplinary power,<sup>11</sup> altered in consideration of feminist criticism, and in light of an achieved feminist standpoint, provides a framework of understanding the Playboy Club of the middle 1960s. Disciplinary practices are used to produce the "docile body" of femininity is Sandra Bartky's analysis "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power." Foucault and Bartky's work illuminates the relations of

power evident in the Playboy Club and in the construction of the subjectivity of *Playboy Bunny*. The performance of the subjectivity of *Bunny* is exemplary of the objectification of women through dehumanization, deconstruction, and reconstruction. As *Bunnies*, women were dehumanized through naming. As *Bunny*, the identity Woman or any other identities Women claim outside of being a *Bunny*, within the club were deconstructed through their irrelevance to the construction of *Bunnies*. Our bodies were reconstructed with disciplinary practices enforced through costuming, surveillance, and specific standards of weight, age, and appearance.

Michel Foucault, in "The Eye of Power" writes of Jeremy Bentham's self-proclaimed "discovery" of the Panopticon<sup>12</sup>, an architectural design of a model prison featuring a central observation point. This design ensured that the prisoners always were subject to observation, and always were within range of the guard's gaze. This concept of *architecture and the gaze* is identified by Bartky as the essence of Foucault's idea of the disciplining of society.<sup>13</sup> The Playboy Club exemplifies this concept as well. In our training to be *Bunnies*, couched in terms of performance and being on stage, we learned that there was always a chance that we were being observed, and we were to operate as if we were constantly subjected to the gaze of the subject male. Further, we were held to the strict and rigid standards of behavior and appearance of the ideal *Bunny*.

Architecturally the Panopticon was designed for disciplining observation, so too was the Playboy Club designed in such a way that there were few

obstructed views of the *Bunnies* as they served the customers. The customers/members, in the time period of my experience, were all males, although female guests were allowed entry if in the company of a member. All the men who frequented the Playboy Club were white, seemingly heterosexual, and fairly affluent.

On the main floor of the club was a greeting area, set off from the adjacent "Living Room" and bar area. At the bar itself, were chairs instead of stools. The bar was table high with bartenders, who were *Bunnies* standing in a well set slightly below the surface of the floor in order for a bartender's upper torso to be closer to the eye level of their customers. Other seating was of a modern design that featured low backs and arms, and deep soft cushions putting the person seated, very low to the ground. *Bunnies* providing table service were also viewed at torso level and in close relationship with the viewer. Drinks were served, ashtrays, replaced, and orders taken on low cocktail tables or at small tables strategically placed against the wall: none of which impeded the sight of anyone else. The low height of the tables also required that *Bunnies* contort their bodies in such a way as to not have their breasts literally spill out of their costumes or expose any more of their already exposed back-side. *Bunnies* moved around the club, always visible, always in service. With no broken sight lines there were not areas of the club, open to the public, where a *Bunny* was not in view, where she might catch a smoke, or adjust her hose. Soft subdued indirect lighting shone throughout the club, which eliminated any dark corners or

shadowy spaces in which a Bunny might find space out of the gaze. *Bunnies* exited “back stage”; out of view of the members, to handle any wants, desires, or needs. Not that satisfying their needs was encouraged or provided for.

Designed into the *Bunny* costume was assurances that the *Bunny* was never out of the gaze. The costume was skin-tight and closed up the back requiring assistance both getting in or out of it.

Bartky quotes Foucault, who writing of this constant visibility and its effects said: “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”<sup>14</sup> As *Bunnies*, women knew they were always visible, in fact they were admonished that they were visible even as they approached the club to come to work. *Bunnies* were told to arrive for work with make-up applied, and to not have curlers in our hair.

While on the floor we were also subject to an additional form of observation. There was the Photo *Bunny*. Her job was to sell Polaroid pictures of a member or his guests with a *Bunny* of their choice. Thus producing a permanent record of a *Bunnies* performance to be viewed and done with as someone else chose. Following Foucault’s concept of power as circulatory, this constant visibility within the club also subjected the members and their guests. The power that defined young women as *Bunnies* and also sexual objects, extended far beyond the walls of the club, and conformed to and constructed asymmetrical power relations between men and women. Members of the club, at the club and beyond perhaps too were held within the gaze that required of

them a performance of a manly manner: jokingly speaking sexual innuendo's, exhibiting lust for the *Bunnies*, having lots of fun, and spending lots of money. I am not suggesting that the circulation of power, from the *Bunnies*, to the members, to the management of the club, and beyond was symmetrical. I am suggesting the disciplinary power that resided in the club, and outside, also dictated the performance of others, as well as the *Bunnies*.

In 1963, Gloria Steinem, concealing her journalistic interest, became a *Bunny* under an assumed identity for a writing assignment. From her experience she wrote, "I Was A Playboy Bunny:" first published in *Show Magazine*.

Steinem's article, reprinted in her *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* written in diary format is descriptive and as such does not conflict in content with my early narrative of my experience as a *Bunny*.<sup>15</sup> However, her subjectivity as a *Bunny* was mediated through that of being an undercover journalist. I argue that as an observer of other young women performing as *Bunnies*, Steinem was an accomplice to the disciplinary powers of the Playboy Club. She became a part of the disciplinary gaze as described as the "eye of power" by Foucault.

The Playboy Club was relatively inexpensive to join and served to both popularize and legitimize elitist desires of some men who wanted the exclusivity of a private club and also wanted the sexual titillation of the strip joints. The popularity of the Playboy Clubs could be attributed to Playboy Enterprises' overt promotion of male sexual desires, and the projected receptivity of young "attractive" women to those desires. This promotional message was in contrast



to the traditional downtown private men's clubs which eschewed any overt displays of sexuality, and often were stuffy, boring and further, excluded women. Unlike the traditional private clubs, the Playboy Club featured scantily clad "attractive" young women as service help. Playboy clubs were usually in an urban setting and were convenient to a business clientele often on an expense account.

Foucault writes of space in the home, which prior to the mid-19th century had been undifferentiated until it became specified and functional. He uses the example of the working class family being "fixed" by spaces in the home assigned a specific function, such as the kitchen for cooking, the dining room for eating, and the bedroom for procreating. Foucault identifies this as a prescription of a form of morality for the family.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly in the Playboy Club, space was also assigned for specific function. First, the physical club was often referred to as the "Bunny Hutch." A hutch is a pen or coop for animals and thus the club could be understood as a place where attractive young women, subjected as *Bunnies* lived and were captive to the advances of men. Secondly, rooms or floors were named for the different functions that took place there. The "Living Room" was for lounging and conversing with guests, drinking, and seeing and being seen. "The Bar", with a big mirror in which the patron could easily see all that went on behind him, was a place to drink and watch what other's were doing. And upstairs was "The Playroom." It is in "The Playroom" that entertainers performed on the stage and members were served dinner during the

show. Following Foucault, it could be said that the women who performed the subjectivity of *Bunny* were also fixed by the assigned spaces of the club. Where fixed determines behaviors, identities, and boundaries. There were specific *Bunny* performances for each space in which you worked a shift. In addition, a certain morality was prescribed by the assigning of these spaces to spaces that corresponded with assigned and named rooms in a home. Even though the room in the club, where one was served lunch and dinner was not called the dining room, its name the Playroom was the same name as a new, in the 60s room in the home called either the recreation room, similar to playroom; or the family room. Particularly in the case of the family room, food often accompanied watching television that was a component of activities that took place there. Hefner's assigning spaces within the Playboy Club with names of spaces within the home could be understood as an attempt to provide legitimacy and sense of security to male voyeuristic desires. The Playboy club therefore prescribed a particular morality, which was masculinist, sexist, and exploitive of women.

In 1964, the Playboy Club was a part of aggregate of components of an empire. Hugh Hefner was the sovereign of what I think of as the "Playboy Empire." Other components included *The Playboy Magazine*, which promoted the Playboy Philosophy, Playboy Merchandise, and the Playboy Clubs. The "Playboy Empire" even had a mansion or castle in which was housed Hugh Hefner, as well as the corporate headquarters of *Playboy Enterprises*. The then Playboy trademark, a black shadowy profile of a coded-male rabbit, the

magazine, and the mansion, are all current today, although the *Bunny* is no longer a physical reality of the “Playboy Empire.” The young, attractive, female body, subjected as Bunny—now a powerful symbol—remains the center of Hefner’s profit making enterprise and continues to serve feminists as an example of women being objectified, exploited as sexual stereotypes, and used as objects in male transactions. The material woman has been taken out of it. There are no longer positions available to be a Playboy Bunny. In the past young women served a purpose of the Playboy Club to create a subjectivity of receptive sexuality. That material subjectivity, as well as the space to perform it, outlived their usefulness, to Hugh Hefner and his empire. The Playboy Bunny is still, though, symbolic of the white heterosexual male’s desire for a passive, receptive, young, attractive woman. My reality at the time and until my achievement of a feminist standpoint problematized my experience, was that I was grateful for the glamour of the job, was as yet unable to see myself as a member of a group and subject to political, social and personalized institutions, therefore saw the success of my performance only as a meal ticket. I did not see it as destructive or demeaning to women. Nor was it in my understanding that being a Playboy Bunny or Gaslight Girl was exploitive of women’s bodies, sexualities, or subjectivities. This was my reality of being a Girl/Bunny, and from my experience, the reality of the other women who were *Bunnies* during the mid-60s. It is from an epistemology of the material reality of women in a patriarchal, phallographic society, that I now possess a particular understanding of women’s

experiences from the vantage point as theorized in Hartsock's feminist standpoint.

In "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Power," Sandra Bartky writes of a counter movement to the then current conceptions of political liberty. Foucault identified this counter movement, as being the emergence of a new and unprecedented discipline directed against the body to increase its utility. Bartky quotes Foucault: "The new discipline invades the body and seeks to regulate its very forces and operations, the economy and efficiency of its movements." Altering Foucault's words to accommodate a feminist analysis, the human (female) body entered a machinery of power (the Playboy empire). Foucault concludes that this discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, or "docile bodies."<sup>17</sup> Bartky critiques Foucault's omission of the engendering of this discipline and that the "docile body" of women, produced by disciplines as *feminine*, is left out of his analysis.

Bartky considers three categories of disciplinary practices that produce the body as recognizably feminine. These three categories can be applied to the construction of the Playboy Bunny. In the first of these categories, bodies are produced of a certain size and general configuration. The discipline constructed feminine body of the *Bunny*, in the mid-sixties, conformed to the Euro-American standards of size, shape, and color. I would add age to this disciplinary practice. Clearly to be a *Bunny* was strictly confined to the very young adult female. The production of body as feminine is not an old body, unless it is marked and

recognized as suitably grandmotherly. The second category includes those disciplinary practices that require from the body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements. As already described, to be a *Bunny* was taught as a regime of performance. The third category identified by Bartky is also significant to the production of the body as *Bunny*. These practices include the display of the body as an ornamented surface. The female body is not good enough as it is as and therefore must be ornamented with make-up, and encased in garments that produce the appearance of a specific shape and size. The *Bunny* costume was an ornament, as well as a tool of reconstruction of the body and provided supposed enhancements and visual excitement. Along with this category, the body feminine, as well as the body-bunny, is used as an ornament to enhance the surroundings, much like a stylish lamp, or piece of art. In the Playboy Club, *Bunnies* were ornaments and were used as accessories to the club.<sup>18</sup> The “Bunny perches” strategically placed around the club, were for just such display of the club’s most cherished and sought after ornaments. *Bunnies* also, while not in particular service, served the club’s atmosphere by leaning against a chair or sofa back, railing, or stool.

The Playboy Club employed gendered disciplinary methods that attempted to produce a “docile body” subjectivity *Bunny*. Restricting requirements of becoming a Bunny, rigorous training, ongoing surveillance, constant observation, and long work hours required of the job, constructed young women’s bodies as “docile” within the subjectivity of Bunny. It has only been

recently that I have altered my position that as a young woman I willingly subjected my body to the discipline of the Playboy Club to perform the subjectivity of *Bunny*. I further claimed, at an earlier time in my study, that outside of the subjectivity of *Bunny* that my body was not docile because of the active embodied role that I performed in my other subjectivities. I do not now stand by that belief. In the current depth of my achievement of a feminist standpoint, I know that as women in a patriarchal, phallographic society, that our bodies are always constructed as docile and to be otherwise is, as if it were an aberration, such as women body builders, or athletic super stars like Martina Navratilova. It is as an old woman, in which my body is supposedly subjected as diseased, deteriorated, and infertile, that the docile body of femininity is now supposedly the docile body of an old woman. It is from the struggle to achieve a feminist standpoint that I resist such a subjectivity.

Bartky's analysis of Foucault's theory, the production of "docile bodies" requires uninterrupted coercion, such as experienced by the student confined to her desk, or a *Bunny* confined to the club. The subject *Bunny* never left the club. The subjectivity of the *Bunny* was confined there. Women entered the club and became *Bunnies*. Women took on the subjectivity as they donned figure forming costumes, placed perky ears atop well coifed hair, and pinned on bunny cuff-links, collar and bow-tie, and affixed our fluffy white tail.

This phenomenon is what Bartky terms "body-object relations." Like the examples Bartky uses, the student at her desk, the soldier and her weapon, the

women who performed the subject *Bunny* were enclosed in “costumes”, and in the club. In training to become *Bunnies*, women were taught particular gestures and movements required of the subject *Bunny*. She was an articulation of body/object relations.<sup>19</sup> Taking this argument further I posit that this body-object articulation of a woman/bunny, woman-bunny/club is multiple and even more complex. The body is that of a female, the object is that of an objectified animal. The rabbit as bunny, conjures up ideas of a cute, fluffy, “docile” animal bearing gifts of candy eggs, and colorful jellybeans. But the objectified rabbit also conjures up another image, that of unrestrained sex, exemplified in the myths of rabbits multiplying without effort, with the implications that rabbits are always available for sex and wanting it. The construction of the Playboy *Bunny* was the marketing of a projected heterosexual male fantasy of unobstructed access to objects of their sexual desire.

These disciplinary practices, in Bartky’s analysis, comprise the process of the construction of the feminine body-subject. The training, the design of the club, the costumes, the male ownership, management, and membership, were all disciplinary practices that produced a practiced and subjected body, a body on which an inferior status was inscribed. The image of the Playboy Bunny, which long after they have ceased to exist, endures and leaves doubt in the minds of most women that their bodies measure up to an idealized, unobtainable, sexual attractiveness. The *Bunny* as a feminine body-subject is like images that adorn Playboy Magazine that are “airbrushed”, positioned and located in such as way

as to be unattainable to a woman outside of that construction. The disciplinary construction of the *Bunny*, in the mid-sixties, was as a collective *Bunny*, which served to erase individuality and personality through scripting, and uniqueness of appearance through selection, costuming and standardized cosmetics, much like women in the collective Woman.

Moya Lloyd in “Feminist Mapping of Foucauldian Politics” discusses Susan Bordo’s analysis of the anorectic who, Bordo writes, in addition to being read as victim of oppressive cultural norms, also acknowledges the anorexia’s actions as transgressive.<sup>20</sup> Bordo writes “ it is not unequivocally the case that its practitioners see themselves as victims.<sup>21</sup> Prior to the time of the second wave of a feminist consciousness, both mine and that of the other women who were *Bunnies*, generally we did not see ourselves as victims. We certainly had no ideas of our subjectivity, subjugation or exploitation, but we did resist. And I claim a transgressive component of the construction of *Bunnies* also. We resisted through expressing our personalities, breaking rules, establishing relations with other *Bunnies*, members, and guests outside of the construction of ourselves as *Bunnies*. We tampered with the scripts, modified our postures, and stole food off plates!

The transgressive nature of our construction as *Bunnies* can be understood in the historical context of the times. We were just coming off the 50s in which the age of domesticity, June Cleaver and “Life with Father” were cultural imperatives. The “Playboy Magazine”, “The Playboy Philosophy”, and the

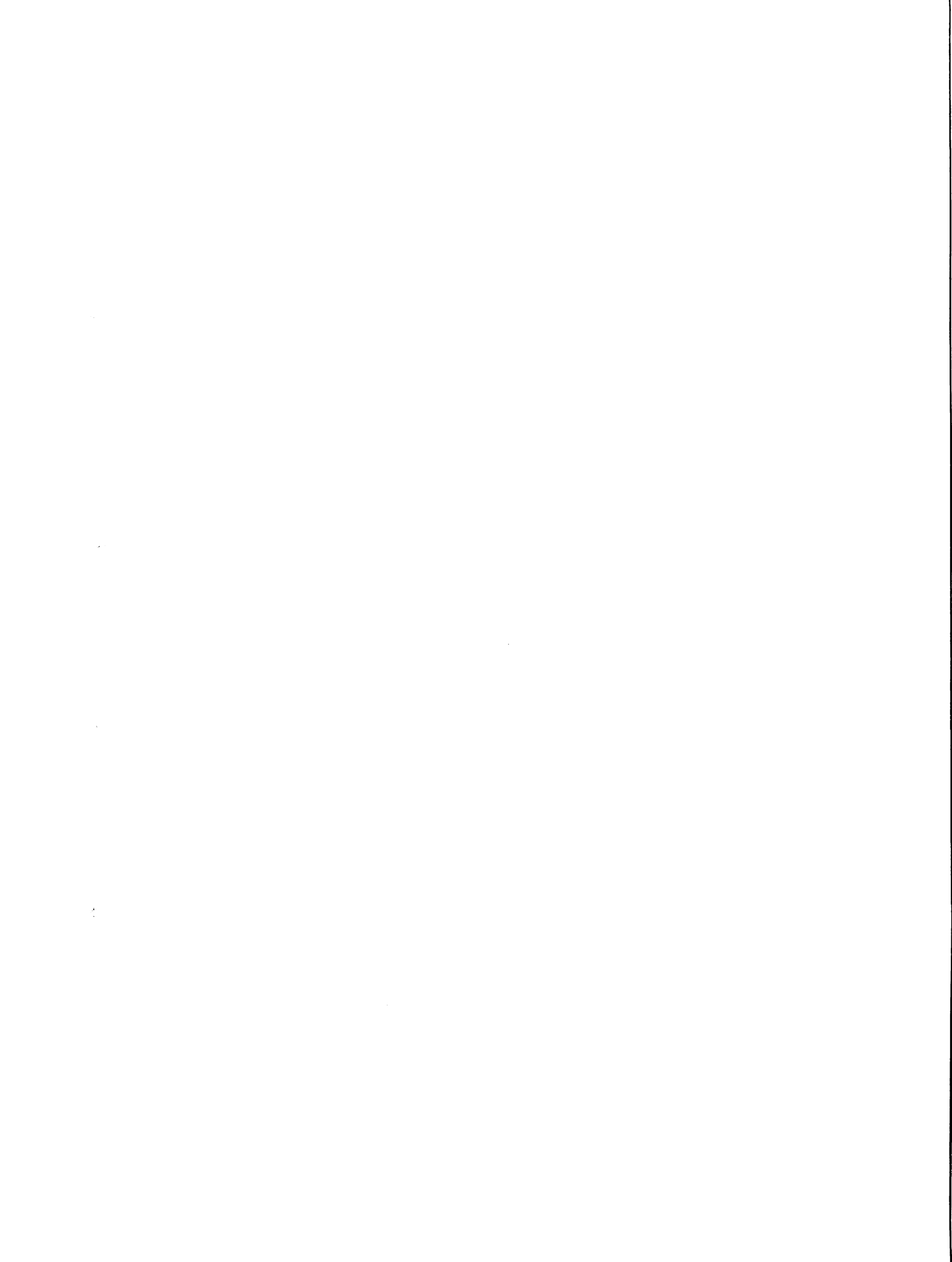


Playboy Clubs were bringing to the surface and into the mainstream of our culture submerged sexual desires of the patriarchy. What had been confined to the burlesque shows in seedy parts of town, was manifested in a quasi-socially acceptable highly publicized private club. Those of us who willingly self-constructed as *Bunnies* transgressed the normalized roles for middle-class, Euro-American, white skinned, young, women of the time. Further many of us were single mothers. It was not a normalized identity of motherhood to be single, to be a *Bunny*, nor was it part of the construction of *Bunny* that we be mothers.

The disciplinary powers that construct the subjectivity of *Bunny* reside within patriarchy. Hugh Hefner, the Playboy Empire, The Playboy Bunny are all constructions of the institution of patriarchy. The power has always been in patriarchy and is there today. The Playboy Bunny of the Mid-sixties was one of a long string of phallogically constructed subjectivities of the feminine that are evident today. These subjectivities can be deconstructed by reconstructing them from an achieved feminist standpoint as women re-member, write, speak, weave, who we are.

### **Today's Perspective: Memory**

Memory is the source of my research. It is memory that provides me the material to construct, reconstruct, perform, and create representations of my experiences as a woman. Using a metaphor of writers mining a quarry of memory, Gayle Greene in "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory" writes:



“Memory is especially important to anyone who cares about change, for forgetting dooms us to repetition; and it is of particular importance to feminists.”<sup>22</sup>

In a search for a current self I dig deep into my past and narrate from memory my experiences. From Greene, “Memory is our means of connecting past and present and *constructing* a self and versions of experience we can live with.”<sup>23</sup>

Of course this assumes there is a self who is searching. The self who is constructing a self, or in the conceptualization I prefer as less masculinist, is weaving a self. This weaver is a student. She is old and white. She is a lesbian and is a feminist. Who I am now determines the self for whom I am searching and conversely the self for whom I am searching also determines the self doing the searching. The method for my search is writing. And it of course is not in search of self but in weaving a self or selves. One such self that I write is a self that completes a requirement of receiving an academic degree. With this degree some will think I am a knowledgeable self.

The self I am writing, through memory is of course feminist. It is a self who consciously sought a feminist standpoint, although the self, prior to my being a student, whom I write, did not yet know of such a framework for her knowledge. The self in a quest for a feminist standpoint, had children and abortions, had husbands, was a young woman, performed or performs the subjectivities of being Playboy Bunny, a white liberal feminist political activist, a partnered lesbian, feminist separatist, a queer activist, an old woman. My practice of feminism preceded my study of it.

## **Today's Perspective: The Category Woman**

As white, in a racially white dominated society, as woman in a male dominated society, as heterosexual in a heterosexual dominated society, I knew exactly what was a woman. I knew it from my women dominated family heritage. I knew it from my life as a woman. I knew it as a feminist activist. But as a feminist scholar I don't know it as clearly. Issues of social constructionism, biological determinism, subjectivity, politics, sex, and gender, all complicated my simple understanding that women were not men and visa versa.

Feminism is based on the concept of *woman*. But contemporary feminist theorists have problematized the category *woman*. Where difference as women gets mixed up with differences among women; and being a particular sex is medicalized in gender selection, at birth in the surgical "correction" of ambiguous genitalia, with surgically and hormonally changing the sex of a person; where sex is questioned if someone doesn't exhibit the assigned markers of their biological sex; when people don't perform the roles as defined according to sex; I too could then access feminist questioning of what was a woman.

At first I believed that there was a natural/real category women. In a consciousness-raising group in the 70s, in a moment of an understanding I grasped a simplistic understanding of women as a social/political category. Identifying myself as a woman, I also knew I was in a class, a collectivity, a group, known as women, and we all shared certain commonalties of being a woman. I was in the camp of the "Same." I also knew that I know what I know

as a woman who is also a feminist. We were a class, as de Beauvoir defines it, as *other*.<sup>24</sup> In this camp the category woman does not exist without the category man. By definition women inter-relate with men from a subordinate position. It is what makes her a woman. Within the political arena, many of us as feminist activists fought for the rights of the natural and social category woman, as other than man.

*The National Organization for Women was founded in the late 60s to bring women into full equality with men. Although conceived in the concept of the sameness of all women, lesbians were initially not included. To the founders of NOW, with Lesbian women only their difference mattered. Their sameness didn't matter. Perhaps in a category of women that is defined as being other than men, a collective of women who are not in primary relationship with men, just didn't fit.*

*NOW 's structure is in a very traditional manner hierarchical: governed from the top. Officers are elected, and the national board is geographically representative. In other words, members in regional chapters elect representatives to the national board. Chapter officers are also elected.*

*Elections insure sameness.*

Women have also been defined by essentialist and biological determinists who say it is anatomy and biology that makes them women. In this conception,

one is born a woman. Biologically, and anatomically she has the capacity to bear a child. All people who are born with this common biological capacity are defined as female. As soon as a child is born it is determined by someone, usually of the medical establishment, through examination of the infant's genitals whether it is a female or a male. And the complexities become apparent. All this defining, determining, witnessing, altering, and is in a context: a context that has a rich history of cultural, societal, personal, political beliefs and practices. All of which, and more, will sexualize, personalize, socialize, empower, subject, politicize, and inculturate, the child as its determined "sex" deems.

To determine solely on one's anatomy, what is a woman is reductive and simplistic. The social, personal, material, and political forces which shape people's lives is profound, and categorizing women by their anatomy ignores how these affect what is a woman. But the owners and their advisors of the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF) decided to use being woman as a birthright.

*Having not been a part of the decision making process of the MWMF's defining women as being born women, I can only imagine what it was. The MWMF, a womyn-only event, has determined that only womyn-born-womyn are welcome to attend this week long, quarter of century old, annual event in rural Michigan. Understanding this fiat provides an opportunity to think through the question of what is a womyn.*

*Although it appears that this biological determination made at birth*

*defines what is a woman, I posit that it is in acknowledgment of the difference in how womyn's lives proceed, in the "unfriendly" environment in which she grows and lives as a woman, that was uppermost in the minds and hearts of the womyn of the MWMF when they authoritatively determined (for themselves) who was and who wasn't a womyn and therefore welcome at the womyn-only festival.*

The determination of femaleness is in effect a determination that one with a vagina is not a male. A major component of the many social, personal, material, and political forces that effect one's life is based on women being not men. So women is a negative category, in the philosophical sense, which places women in a position of being an other. Marilyn Frye, a feminist and a philosopher, offers a way to begin to extricate *women* from being defined by what she is.

not.<sup>25</sup> In the traditional logic of categories, it is only possible to follow the model of A/-A (A/not A). She disagrees with this logic as being useful in categorizing women and states unequivocally that it is "a political function of community and politics as vital to construct a positive category of Women...."<sup>26</sup> The problem of defining *women* can be solved by defining the structure of the category in which she "belongs." Frye explains the philosophical equation that defines negative categories: A/-A. Although this structure appears to be dualistic, it is not. It does not construct two things. Paradoxically, it is dichotomous but not dualistic. The equation means that when one is not an A, one could be anything. To not

be something is indistinguishable from everything else that is also not something.<sup>27</sup> In support of her argument, Frye further explains, that in the social or physical world, away from the abstract realm of set theory, structure, not attributes establishes something discrete, and different from something else. Structure is a set of relations, and relations can differentiate one woman from another. It is important therefore that women are conceptualized within a positive category of Women, thereby giving her subject status. Both A and B would be subjects, as well as D, E, F, and so forth.

*In Dade NOW (see Chapter 3, this project) the projected desire of plurality was not built into its structure. We were not A's and we wanted to be as if A's. In order to achieve equality we needed to appear as one, not several. NOW'S structure was conceived on maintaining the status quo in order to insure commonality among us. Dade NOW's member-activists and leaders during the 80s and early 90s shared commonalities of race, class and age. Any differences detected among us were who we were sexually...either lesbian or not lesbian.*

*We sought commonalities among other women. When we wanted our membership to reflect that all women spoke as one and we currently reflected that only white women spoke for all, we went to other racial communities with messages of all women are oppressed the same, although we didn't use the word oppression as I remember. Basically we said, your problems are our problems, join us and we together will solve all problems for all women. You join us, together we will be strong. Become us and eschew "your" differences.*



*Basically we needed them for a purpose, and they did not need us because they were doing fine without us.*

The political strategy of this categorical logic is that to create a positive (as in logic, not as in good, vs. bad) category of women it must be actively and socially constructed as concrete and historically real, not as an abstract idea. In other words as Frye writes, the category is defined by internal relations and differences. Built in will be the “--deliberately, creatively elaborated, and articulating, differences among women in, by, and as a means to constructing a sociality, a symbolic order, a web of meaning of and among women.”<sup>28</sup> In *Sexual Difference*, The Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, also noting the “fragile concept of woman,” seeks to create a symbolic order for women by writing a *genealogy* “at once discovered, invented, and constructed through feminist practices of reference and address.”<sup>29</sup> This genealogy effectively mediates a woman’s relation to the symbolic, allowing her self-definition as a female being, or female gendered speaking subject.<sup>30</sup> In doing so they “write” a theory of social-symbolic practice. It is a partial, political project in which, among other things, is shown the effectiveness of the concept of a female genealogy.<sup>31</sup> The writing of which becomes the theory.

Like Frye states, the women in the Milan Book Collective as described in *Sexual Difference* “ ...actively and socially construct(ing) a concrete and historically real positive category women--deliberately, creatively, elaborating

articulating the differences among women in, by, and as a means to constructing a sociality, a symbolic order, a web of meanings of and among women."<sup>32</sup> A transforming moment occurred for the Collective in this process when the group, quite by accident, acknowledged their differences among themselves. Their differences became evident in something as concrete as choosing books by women writers to understand what was being a woman. Some women wanted, what are thought of as classic women's books, others wanted something like romance novels. In these differences in desire based on experience, differences in power among them as members of the collective, became evident. Some one of them noticed in seeking women writers as symbolic mothers, as guides, that "the mothers (symbolic) are not the writers ; they are really here among us, because we are not all equal here."<sup>33</sup> By having named the disparity among them they knew a truth and no longer were confined to the ideal of equality. They wrote: "Because of an ideal of equality which neither grew out of our history nor corresponded to our interests, we had forced ourselves to imagine what did not exist and had forbidden ourselves to take advantage of what did."<sup>34</sup> The constraint of practicing as if all differences made no difference according to an ideal of neutrality was now lifted.

It is this neutrality that Frye anticipates as an objection to her theorizing of a positive category of women. The positive category of women will also turn out to be neutral, that is universal in the dimensions of race and culture. Again, *in Sexual Difference*, the way difference did not become neutralized or

universalized was by actively and consciously being difference. They structured their differences into their practice, or “category.” When reading the books selected as *The Writings of Women*, built into the process of selection, is the acknowledgement of the disparities and levels of entrustment among the selectors. As Frye claims, the positive category, again not subject to the restrictions of the structure A/not-A sort, would be constituted by “self-reliant structures of differentiation and relation.”<sup>35</sup> The Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective became the members’ differences built into the structure of it.

Another objection that Frye imagines, is that a category of women structured in A:B mode would become unitary, such as there would be only one subjectivity woman.<sup>36</sup> Frye, again says no. By its very form, A:B implies multiple subjects and the relationships between and among multiple subjectivities can be understood more easily. Where the dichotomous A/A categories have been problematic in understanding women’s multiple subjectivities while at the same time maintaining a category women.

*So the womyn of the MWMF are A, in the conceptualizing of womyn as a positive category, and the women of the son-of-trans camp are B, both subjects, both autonomous, both with an authoritative voice, at least in theory.<sup>37</sup> But I suspect the son-of- trans folk are operating under the A/A belief, and they assume the MWMF womyn are also. In effect the son-of-trans folk are operating as if they have been categorized, by the MWMF, as not A’s. In that negative categorizing, the not A’s (son-of-trans women) resist. They claim no differences.*

*They, as -A seek inclusion into the A category on the basis that they are also A's, and should therefore be admitted and welcome into womyn-only space.*

*In the conceptualizing of the MWMF of the positive category of womyn, the B's (the son-of-trans women) deny their differences from A's. The B's posit they are equal to A's. They would leave behind their past masculine being in the social arrangement of patriarchy as if their world and lives had not been affected by it. As if their subjectivities had not been constituted in anyway by the privilege, no matter how obscure, of their maleness in a male dominated society.*

*In what I call the "NOW debacle" in which members of the Dade Chapter split into two factions and then sought domination one over the other, structure defined our relations. The organizational structure provided power for those with a history of winning over, of material wealth, of strong personality, of strength of purpose, although the purposes were not necessarily for the good of its members. The structure/organization demanded one adhere, conform to what already was. The two camps both thought that what they were doing was for the good of the organization, but each thought their way was the only way to achieve that good. In the camp to which I belonged, we supported opening up, expanding, and welcoming new members into the chapter. The camp to which I did not belong was protective of what we had built and saw openness, and expansion, as an increasing risk to it, if by dilution of their power, if nothing else.*

*Sameness was a necessity to that camp. It was the latter camp that by virtue of history and structure that dominated. Even though we had the numbers to “win” the election, the structure insured we would not prevail in changing anything. Our relations, built into the structure in which we were engaged, relied upon patriarchal practices of power over, patronage, hierarchy and expulsion.*

*The MWMF is a social group. As a social group, the organizers, in determining what is a womyn, are behaving as if they know what is a womyn, and in that determination, we can imagine that they envision what is best for the womyn who attend the festival. Further as a social group the MWMF is highly organized, it has an historic structure of womyn only space. In addition, each of the women attending, identifies herself as a woman, albeit in many and sundry ways. There is no passive identity here. The MWMF is case of a structural relation to material objects as they are produced and organized by prior history.*

*Where the structural relation is how “women” and “men” are related in the institutional systems, and to these institutional systems, which comprise the society in which we live; and where the material objects, in this case, are all the multi faceted, complexities of overlapping sets of structures and objects of gender, as they are produced and organized by prior history.*

Cressida Heyes argues for conceptualizing women based on “similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that.”<sup>38</sup> To conceptualize women in this way, much like Wittgenstein’s “family of resemblances”, there are no

definitive characteristics that all women share, but women are connected by a network of overlapping similarities: some biological and some socially constructed. "But," writes Heyes, " no characteristic is necessary to make an individual a woman, and none is sufficient."

*Even though Heyes specifically makes a case that male to female transgendered women are women, she too, based on the concepts she poses in this article would stand with the women inside the MWMF. Boundaries are fluid, she writes, but can be drawn for specific political purposes.<sup>39</sup> It could be said that for MWMF the specific political purposes of definition, naming, maintenance, and security, of women-only space, it is women-born-women that are welcome.*

Within NOW of my experience the structure of social relations of the patriarchy was the structure in which we related one to another. The system we adopted, because it was all we knew, did in no way consider our sexual difference as women and our differences among women. We adopted a structure in which we were destined to destroy each other. Woven into our structure was no validation of our difference, our social relations, or our experience as women within a patriarchy. Just as laws, social mores, government, history, personal relations, business does not validate the sexual difference of women, the structure in which Dade NOW operated, did not recognize our difference in the universe, of being women. A structure growing out of a female symbolic would have included our difference. It would have been

woven from our experience as women. It would have included woman as a reference point, not man. "Rules" and "regulations" of exchange, instead of as patronage, manipulation, secretive, would be in place.

This Woman as reference is in Women's Studies; in communities of women; in First Fridays in Lansing, Michigan; in rituals of celebration and sorrow by, for, and of women; in the publishing of the Lesbian Connection; in the distribution, appreciation, and purchase of women's music; in the distribution, appreciation and purchase of women's art; in attending and supporting The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival; in women's soft-ball, volleyball, golf, gymnastics, etc; in feministly reading women's writing; in following in the footsteps of our fore-goddesses, our fore-mothers, our fore-sisters; and of entrusting ourselves to our own symbolic, leaping into the otherworld,-outside of the patriarchy, for recognition, authorization, language, and of our sexual difference as women.

### **Today's Perspective: Compulsory Heterosexuality**

Adrienne Rich describes her concept of the lesbian continuum, as including "a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience...."<sup>40</sup> My life today as an old, white, lesbian, feminist, scholar and political activist, is freer than ever from the compulsoriness of heterosexuality. As a former heterosexual woman my lesbian existence comprises, as Rich writes, the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a

compulsory sexuality. As a feminist activist it could be understood that my heterosexuality was chosen. Through access to knowledge of a lesbian existence, through activism, which was for and about women, I knew then, I was making a choice. Then there came a time when I moved the center of my life to women and away from men.

My life is representative of the continuum of lesbian existence and Rich's theorizing of compulsory heterosexuality. In my first marriage, of total accessibility to my husband even to being accessible to his open hand smacked against my face and to being out of control of my reproductive capacity resulting in birthing three children in less than three years; to the double edged sword of gaining independence as a Gaslight Girl and Playboy Bunny which positioned me as a sexual object and accessible to a material fulfillment of many men's heterosexual fantasies; to marrying again and becoming a full time wife and mother giving my husband access to my life long gratitude to him for marrying me and my three children. Finally as a feminist beginning to envision limiting men's access to me, I left that marriage and my sexual identification as a heterosexual woman. More and more I have been able to limit men's access to me to as close to reciprocal arrangements as possible. One, of course is never really free from a phallographic society's pressures to conform to heterosexuality, but certainly as a lesbian I am more distant from its pull.

My search of self has delved deep into my achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint. I have looked among my experiences to demonstrate the



feminist meanings to be made of them. I have explored how as my achievement deepened, richer and more complex feminist meanings became more and more accessible. The deeper the achievement of my lesbian feminist standpoint, the more I know about who I am, and upon which I am grounded. For an analysis of this knowledge Naomi Scheman draws on the theorizing of The Outsider Within by Patricia Hill Collins.<sup>41</sup> Scheman, in Egenderings summarizes Collins' claims : "...the perspective of the 'outsider within' as one of clarity and creativity, grounded in the critical achievement of self-knowledge, including knowledge of where one stands in relation to the structures of privilege and domination that constitute one's marginality."<sup>42</sup>

The achievement, Scheman argues, requires a politics of one's identity in a marginalized and oppressed group and "the conscious chosen identification with that group" in order to gain the benefit of the vantage point to knowledge available to those claiming an outsider within status. It is my identification as a lesbian that grants me a privileged vantage point to feminist knowledge about compulsory heterosexuality as an outsider within.

Today I am a feminist lesbian political activist for the lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgendered (LBGT) community of Michigan. Since coming out as a lesbian my subjectivity as a feminist is now as a lesbian. It is as a lesbian feminist that I am a member of the women's community in my hometown, in my University community, and in my personal connections. It is as a lesbian feminist that I perform my job for Michigan Equality, a statewide political organization

dedicated to ending discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In the university I held an assistantship in the office of LGBT affairs, as well as serving as a board member of the Gay, Lesbian, Bi, and Transgender Faculty Staff Association. I am out in all roles I perform as a student, a woman, a member of my family, and a citizen of this country. My subjectivity as a feminist is continuous, beginning barely negligible in the feminine consciousness of my woman-centered heritage, growing to a rich, thick, nubby, textured and multi-cultured and multi-stranded rope of practice, understanding, achieved and achieving feminist standpoint.

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<sup>1</sup> Hartsock, 1985. p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought" in *Social Problems* Vol 33, 6, pp. 514-532, (The Society for the Study of Social Problems, 1986). As one of three key themes of Black Feminist Thought, Collins claims the linking of oppressions has been made by Black feminists as far back as the 1800's and that "Black women's absence from organized feminist movements...(is due to the Black feminist's) commitment to addressing interlocking oppressions, yet (they) have been excluded from arenas that would have allowed them actively to do so." p. 520.

<sup>3</sup> Frye, Marilyn. "Oppression" in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1983) pp. 1-16.

<sup>4</sup> Frye, 1983, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Hartsock, Nancy C. "The Kinship Abstraction in Feminist Theory" in the Appendixes of *Money, Sex And Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*. The Northeastern Series in Feminist Theory (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), p. 267.

<sup>6</sup> Epigraph: Susan Bordo: *Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture*, from *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition (1998), s.v. "bunny."

<sup>8</sup> Bartky, Sandra. "On Psychological Oppression," Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Adrienne Rich. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5:4, 1980, p. 639.

<sup>10</sup> MacKinnon, Catherine A. Toward a Feminist Theory of the State (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 209.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, Michel. "The Eye of Power", in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977, Colon Gordon, Editor. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) pp. 146-165.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, Power/Knowledge, p 148.

<sup>13</sup> Bartky, Sandra. "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Bartky, Sandra. p. 65. Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (New York: Vintage books, 1979), p 138.

<sup>15</sup> Gloria Steinem. "I Was a Playboy Bunny" in Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983), pp. 29-67, postscript 1983, pp. 67-69. "I Was a Playboy

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Bunny originally appeared as a two-part article, 'A Bunny's Tale' *Show* magazine, 1963." Credits page, *Outrageous Acts*.....

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, p. 64.

<sup>20</sup> Lloyd, Moya. "Power/Politics" in Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault, Susan J. Hekman, Editor. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) pp. 241-264 p.250.

<sup>21</sup> Bordo, Susan. "Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body," in Up Against Foucault, p.192.p

<sup>22</sup> Greene, Gayle. "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory" in *The Second Signs Reader: Feminist Scholarship 1983-1986*, Joeres Ruth-Ellen B. and Barbara Laslett, eds. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996). Originally published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1991 vol 16, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Greene, p.187.

<sup>24</sup> Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books a Division of Random House, 1974) Translated and edited by H. M. Parshley.

<sup>25</sup> Frye, Marilyn. "The Necessity of Differences: Constructing a Positive Category of Women." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1996. Vol 21, 4, pp. 991-1010.

<sup>26</sup> Frye, 1996, p. 998.

<sup>27</sup> Frye, 1996, p. 998.

<sup>28</sup> Frye, 1996, p. 1002.

<sup>29</sup> Milan Women's Bookstore Collective. *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>30</sup> de Lauretis, Teresa. "The Practice of Sexual Difference and Feminist Thought in Italy: an Introductory Essay" in *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practce*. The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) pp. 2-21.

<sup>31</sup> Milan, p.4.

<sup>32</sup> Frye, 1996, p. 1002.

<sup>33</sup> Milan, p. 110.

<sup>34</sup> Milan, p. 111.

<sup>35</sup> Frye, 1996, p. 1004.

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<sup>36</sup> Frye, 1996, p. 1005

<sup>37</sup> For several years transgendered women and supporters of them being welcomed into the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, established a camp across the road from the main entrance into the festival. The camp is named "The Son of Trans Camp."

<sup>38</sup> Heyes, C.J. "Back to the Rough Ground! Wittgenstein, Essentialism, and Feminist Methods." *Feminist Interpretations of Wittgenstein*, Naomi Scheman, ed. (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Heyes, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Rich, Arieenne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol 5, 4 (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1980) pp. 631-660. p. 648.

<sup>41</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* ,33, 6 (Society for the Study of Social Problems, 1986).

<sup>42</sup> Scheman, Naomi. *Engenderings: Constructions of Knowledge, Authority, and Privilege*. (New York: Routledge, 1993) p. 241.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### HAVING LEAPT

“She who has chosen her Self, who defines her Self, by choice, neither in relation to children, nor to men, who is self identified, is a Spinster, a whirling dervish, spinning in new time and space.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **My Mother’s Story, or My Father’s\***

\*Is the origin of the meanings I make of my life, my experiences, female or male? Are they from a female source or not?<sup>2</sup>

In the first chapter I pondered whether my autobiographical writing is in the manner of *my Mother’s story* or of *my father’s story* (“a non-story” pp. 24-25). Sidonie Smith raises the question based on autobiography being an androcentric genre, perpetuating and constituting a patrilineage and its ideologies of gender.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally in the genre autobiography, women are culturally silenced and denied authority to write as the subject of her own life: “most critically the authority to name herself and her own desires.”<sup>4</sup> Smith writes of Elizabeth W. Bruss calling the ‘autobiographical act’: “an interpretation of life that invests the past and the ‘self’ with coherence and meaning that may not have been evident before the act of writing itself.”<sup>5</sup> Any coherence of meaning is made in a cognitive context of women’s subjectivity defined by men as not-men, and as object to men. Have I defied the authority, have I overcome the androcentricity of the genre? Does the autobiographical nature of this academic project perpetuate and constitute patrilineage or have I subverted it and written *my Mother’s story*?

The genre demands a public story of a public life.<sup>6</sup> In choosing to write her life a woman must leave behind her subjective cultural silence and enter a public male dominated and male defined arena. I do such a thing in writing autobiographically in the academic arena. I tell my story publicly of experiences positioned as gendered and of a class, woman. I have spoken my experiences in the past as a political/public act and today write them for an audience to achieve public institutional affirmation. My writing is not private, is not for my private, personal use, and although I write my personal experiences, I write them publicly, politically, with a professional intention.

As a woman writing autobiographically, I can only tell my stories in the language of the male symbolic if I want them to be read and valued within a male symbolic, it is after all that which I seek in pursuing an advanced academic degree. Smith writes that a woman can only tell her story in a way that "will resonate with privileged cultural fictions of male selfhood...(thus) committing herself to a 'patrilineal' contract."<sup>7</sup>

The prevailing ideology of male selfhood is individualism. No matter what he faces he overcomes. No matter what barriers are in place he progresses. This is the *father's story*. It sounds like mine: no matter the power of the patriarchy; no matter the barriers of oppression; I progress in an achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint.

All meaning I make of my life is gendered female, where female is constructed as not male, and is male defined and desired. Smith, in describing the situation, that Frye would call a double bind and Daly a reversal, claims that

in order for a woman to write her experiences she must write them in them in, for purposes of this project, the “fore-ground,” otherwise they will not be understood in a phallocracy.<sup>8</sup> Her representations of her experiences must speak of progression, of success, of overcoming, of becoming. This is of course exactly what I have written. Therefore, in this respect, I tell *my father’s* story. To write it differently is to write as *other* than men and tell *my Mother’s* story of subordination, domestication, and victimization. In doing that, I of course also perpetuate patrilinearity by reifying patriarchal female subjectivities. Either way, there are negative consequences for the woman autobiographer. Either way, she can not tell her stories as the subject, as the originator.

How would I then write autobiographically in the symbolic of *My Mother*? To write *my father’s* story I have to deny my sexual difference, but I don’t. But in the manner of *my father*, I do establish my individuality apart from other feminist academics; apart from what other women may or may not achieve as a feminist standpoint. I do not write of my domesticity. I do not write of birthing, I write of aborting. I don’t write as a businesswoman, I write as a feminist activist and highlight my leadership, as well as my victimization. Otherwise, I do not write of my disempowerment as a woman in a patriarchal society except as a way station to my becoming all powerful. I write as if “free” from the constraints of compulsory heterosexuality, and free from the materiality of my life as an old white woman in a patriarchal, white and youth valuing culture. It is as I spin deep into the Background that I become “powerful” and eschew the powerlessness of





my subjectivity as a woman in a man's world. I write as an old academic, white, lesbian, feminist woman.<sup>9</sup>

I do claim sexual difference and in that respect my stories are told in the manner of *My Mother*. But the experiences I write are engendered in a male symbolic: abortion, sex object, betrayal, woman-as-victim. On the other hand, I tell them relationally in *My Mother's* way, and represent my achievements in context. It is in communities of women; in relationships with and of women; from a self-consciously white feminist perspective about women, that I write autobiographically. My path, though individual, is traversed collectively and relationally, and with an accumulated consciousness of experiences as gendered female. It is whom I am in relationship that I name myself. I achieve, but I achieve in the interest of a woman's symbolic, I pursue to help create change, I reference a female symbolic and come to imagine one, which I constitute and in which I am constituted.

Sidonie Smith analyzes women's autobiographical writings in search of "*her Mother's* " story.<sup>10</sup> In her analysis of Maxine Hong Kingston's Woman Warrior,<sup>11</sup> Smith claims Kingston captures powerfully the relationship of gender to genre. Her work, Smith writes, "... exemplifies the potential for works from the marginalized to challenge the ideology of individualism and with it the ideology of gender."<sup>12</sup> It is in Kingston's recognizing the inextricable relationship between an individual's 'sense of self' and the community's stories of self-hood, Smith argues, in which she "self-consciously reads herself into existence through the stories her culture tells about women."<sup>13</sup> Various thought of as a novel and

as an autobiography, *The Woman Warrior* consists of five narratives based on stories told of women in her family that Kingston's Mother has told her. In textual conversation with her Mother, described by Smith as dialogic engagement, Kingston "struggles to constitute the voice of her own subjectivity" through re-telling in the present her Mother's ancient stories. An example is the one of her Aunt who because of shame surrounding her pregnancy killed herself by jumping in a well.<sup>14</sup> Kingston re-tells it from her Aunt's perspective and "seeks to name the formerly unnamed." Kingston represents her as a willful woman who "enacts in her own body" thereby subverting tradition, the patrilineal line, and "to fool the pain-dealing gods."<sup>15</sup>

I use this small part of a thorough analysis of Kingston by Smith to inform my answer to whether I write *my Mother's story* or *my father's*. It is an academic self for which I struggle. I turn to stories of my past to constitute a voice of my sought for subjectivity. It is in a dialogic engagement with the foremothers of feminist thinking and practice that I struggle for a lesbian feminist standpoint, and for an academic, feminist, lesbian, old, white, woman, subjectivity. In the present, I use what my feminist foremothers write to re-tell my past, to write my current feminist academic subjectivity. Smith writes of Kingston that in her uncovering the layers of the dynamics and consequences of her Mother's interpretations of women's lives, Kingston re-makes her matrilineal ancestors' lives through her own interpretations and passes them on for posterity.

In a similar fashion I also seek to uncover the gendered dynamics and consequences of my memories of previous and current interpretations of "a"

woman's life experiences. It is as a woman that I came to feminism. It is from my vantage point as a woman in a patriarchal society that I sought and achieved a lesbian feminist standpoint. It is a womanly subjectivity constituted, as deeply as my struggle allows, beneath the surface of patriarchy. Through my heritage of, interest in, and commitment to women I have become that which I seek.

*Woman, Women, Sexual Difference* therefore are at the center of this project, they are the subjects of the work. In as much as the content constitutes a symbolic, as much as the writer's subjectivities constitute a symbolic, as much as intent constitutes a symbolic, as much as consciousness of forces operating for and against a particular symbolic, constitutes it, I write *My Mother's* story.

The stories, I write are from memory kept alive by an interest in feminism, by political activism, by the act of speaking my experiences in a gendered discourse. It is from my sexual difference that I make meaning of them through a lens critical of patriarchy while at the same time of it. I accumulated achievement of a feminist standpoint, and came to imagine a female symbolic. I tell my stories that they not be forgotten.

### **Spiraling, Spinning, Semantics**

Achieve a feminist standpoint, writes Nancy Hartsock. Adrienne Rich conceptualizes a continuum of lesbian existence and claims it as a source of feminist knowledge and power; she exposes heterosexuality as compulsory and as a manifestation of male supremacy. Mary Daly compels, commands, and sparks women to take an existential leap to freedom. To leap, she says,

creatively further into the Background and forsakes the patriarchal foreground of our past and current existence. She wants us to spin to beneath the male-centered foreground and take up residence in the Self-centered Background below the surface; to journey deeper and deeper into the Otherworld, our homeland, the homeland of the Other.<sup>16</sup>

*As previously noted, I have adopted for this project Mary Daly's practice of capitalizing words or not according to meaning rather than standard usage. I capitalize words to indicate that they emanate from the Background, where women, past, present and future are connected. I ignore patriarchal conventions of capitalization of words that emanate from the foreground. For example foreground in this context is not capitalized and Background is. Other is from the Background. Not capitalized other is from the foreground. Otherworldness is from the Background.*

It is from an achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint that I have access to an understanding of a female symbolic and that I am even able to imagine something in the Background beyond patriarchy.<sup>17</sup> The Background is where all women, past, present and future, are connected. It is where women Re-Member Selves, where women tell the truth about Selves, women who have leapt existentially into free space, outside the context of deception. Daly insists that we can and must Dis-cover new time and space, that there is something profoundly positive beyond what men have done to us. She moves me/us "to the edge of the radical question, 'Who am I?'" and into the free space

where man is not at the center.<sup>18</sup> To forget, to not Re-Member is to only survive in the non-free space. Where who i am in the foreground is no longer who I am. Who I am begins in the woman-centered Background. It is in the male-made mazes of foreground that we are confronted and killed as women. It is in this space, this Otherworld towards being outside of the influence of the foreground, that I am competent to write a dissertation.

In the Background, connected to all women, I am. Daly says in the foreground what we think of as illusion is real and what we think as real is the illusion. For instance when in the foreground i absolutely know i am incapable of writing my dissertation it is real—i can't! In the foreground, my ineptness is what i know and believe. I must pretend, to act as if, i am capable. My competence is an illusion. An old woman, non-career academic, surviving by being inept, cannot write a dissertation. In an existential leap into free space—"Mary, Mary, Into the nothingness of the Otherworld, I leap!"—I dis-illusion my competency and make illusory my ineptness. I understand it is only an illusion when i am certain i will fail to accomplish this task. The power of my certainty dissipates and the power of the reality of my competence takes shape.

My project has been a metapatriarchal journey back to reality. Although not truly outside of the foreground, I symbolically locate myself Back to an Otherworldness: Other, than the male supremacist, necrophilic, patriarchal world that is the illusion in my work, to the Otherworldness of reality.<sup>19</sup> My project springs from, takes up residence in, and constitutes, for me and others, a lifegiving, Biophilic Background. Daly and others have been my guides. From

this place of achieving a feminist standpoint I have Dis-covered some of my past experiences and transformed the previously unknown of them into uncountable ways of knowing. I Re-member and enter and create a space that is Other than patriarchy. To do that I struggle.

In a study of a Self evolved in relation to feminism, the Self struggled for and achieved multiple levels of knowledge. The Self in search of itself gained access to many modes of feminist interpretation and spun down, down, down below the surface of patriarchy. Paradoxically in the search for self, the Self was created. In the writing, in the analysis, in the re-Membering; I named, I struggled, I achieved, I became, I referenced, I reflected, I originated, I structured, I entrusted, I articulated, a Self in my nascent female symbolic.

The female symbolic in which this project constitutes and exists reflects a level beneath the surface of phallographic thinking. At that distance the structure of this project is defined in the academy. The project conforms to, and desirably pushes, standards that will confer upon me a title. The title will have some meaning outside the academy, and in a female symbolic the title will place me among those educationally privileged. And in that privilege it is a responsibility to understand what it entails in terms of difference. The title though is not what it is that I take from the academy that serves me more deeply into a female symbolic. It is the process I performed in quasi-subverting the academic structure by personalizing, politicizing, criticizing, intellectualizing, emotionalizing, and symbolizing an academic project, which spins me deeper into the Background.

My desire for the academic title preceded the leap. Although it was as a feminist that I had the desire, it was spun closer to the surface level of the phallocracy. My desire can be scrutinized for classist, elitist, heterosexist, divisive, assimilationist, privileged, patriarchal, meanings. At the level of the foreground I thought I needed a mantle of intelligence. Having a “terminal” degree was such a mantle. Although a feminist in a woman centered life, I still understood feminism as hierarchical, and desired to move higher on the ladder of success. I wanted to be a “better” feminist and to me a better feminist was one who could persuasively intellectualize and articulate original ideas, plus had a moniker to prove it. And although my desire held all the trappings of from whence it was spun—the foreground—my beginning level of achievement of a feminist standpoint guided me to women and a few men in the academy to reflect the best of all that I wanted to be. For thoughtful and sincere guidance, it was to them that I entrusted my desire and the project that would fulfill that desire. For an understanding of what I experienced, Mary Daly writes as: “... the task of Weaving connections in such ways that I was in fact Spinning the integrity of my own being and knowing, experiencing vertigo, and moving into uncharted Realms.”<sup>20</sup>

In a manner of the female symbolic, my academic path is woman-centered and it is as a feminist I journeyed. As a woman I studied women. It is to women I turned for feminist knowledge about women. In the manner of the female symbolic, my search for self is subversive to the academy. It is personal. It is self-serving, idiosyncratic, and merely subjective. It is from a particular place



of achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint that I seek the approval of the university. At a deeper level in a female symbolic, bestowing of a mantle of knowledge would come from a woman referent, rather than a patriarchal institution.

Leaping from high in a confined foreground of patriarchy, the continuum of this project began its spiral in compulsory heterosexuality. A male-centered world in which in patriarchal reversal, I am allowed to understand my family's lineage as matriarchal: a family of strong surviving women—abandoned by men. The continuum boring beneath the foreground represents my spinning into Otherworldness, while simultaneously marking my achieving of a lesbian feminist standpoint.

Background requires an understanding of the constraints and restraints of the oppressions of patriarchy, the injustices of distributions of power, similar to the achievement of a feminist standpoint. Background is not just available because we resist the foreground nor is a feminist standpoint just available to us as women in a patriarchal society. The Background is achieved by those who take the leap and spin out of control. To be a Spinster is to take an active role, it is to Dis-cover, re-search, all part of an achievement.

In Outercourse Mary Daly writes of those of us who have “Moved for some Time,” “Who have ‘been around’ and can Re-Call earlier Moments, and who can *bear* the memories and knowledge of destruction.” We, old feminists are the Memory Bearers.<sup>21</sup> Our challenge is to “Spin and Weave the broken connections in our Knowing, Sensing and Feeling, becoming Alive again in our relationships

to our Selves and to each Other.”<sup>22</sup> To meet this Challenge, Daly writes that it requires “Time-Travel—Re-membering our Future and our Past.” In bearing our memories we create rich memories of the future. Daly explains “Memory of the Future as “an action which affects/effect the Future.”<sup>23</sup> For those that come after rely on the Memory Bearers.

At the beginning of the spiraling continuum are my representations of my memories of embodied, sexualized events exemplary of a time and space of a beginner spinner of Otherworldness. First, my spin is but a shy rotation, barely discernable as that of a spin; a slight turn understood as movement; a hint of consciousness of my power as powerless in the patriarchal world of my being. As a “powerless” white divorced mother of three, I break the law. I break with societal and moral imperatives that I give birth to that which I conceive: instead I de-ceive. Connected with all women, I abort my pregnancy. As women have done in the past, and in the present, and will in the future, have, do and will not, I survive. Daly calls Real surviving an extremist act.<sup>24</sup> To best survive as Other women have done, I exploit my impregnators. It is as a Spinster into Otherworldness that I spin my tale this way.

This spiral indicates that as I move along the continuum I have access to the path I have already traveled. On this path I see where I have been and have a vision of where I might be going--or not. In my memory of my beginning spinning, before Re-Membering, I am disconnected from all women, and my de-ceiving was shameful, a result of my immorality and promiscuity, and my own ineptness in preventing pregnancy. In the unbroken male-centered foreground of

my time and space, I was alone and ignorant of my connectedness to other women.

In this, as a beginner spinner, are other of my embodied experiences. In my whiteness, in my youthfulness, in my heterosexuality, in my tallness, in my leanness, I conformed to a dominant standard of sexual attractiveness and performed as an icon of white privileged male-heterosexual desire. Through my successful performance as a gaslight girl and as a playboy bunny, I exploited my conformity and gained financial support from many men, rather than the prescribed support from only one man of white, heterosexual, young women.

In this arrangement of multiple dependency, patriarchy appears as less constraining than if I were dependent upon only one man. My relative independence of this time became evident when several years later I married and replaced my felt reality of independence for the reality of dependence. Being financially dependent upon one man was more constraining than being financially dependent upon many men. In exploiting my conformity to extract financial support from many men, each individual man's entitlement to my services was short lived, limited, and could be renewable. In marriage, the contractual arrangement with one man is "forever", unlimited, and continuous. These experiences are at the start of the spiraling continuum of my spinning deep into an Otherworld. After all in this world we are other, and as other we have access to proceeding to an Otherworld of our own.

And in the ways of spiraling and movement up and down along a continuum, when I married for a second time and became financially dependent

and grateful to my husband for taking on this “great obligation” to support me and my three children, I retreated upwards on the continuum of my achievement of a feminist standpoint. In performances of a traditional wife and mother, made perfect by lessons learned from the historic, political, and personal context in which I existed, I took up residence in and ceased resisting the phallographic prescriptions for white, middle-class women of the time.

When where I was in my performance of these prescriptions became untenable for me I looked at other women’s resistance, saw possibility, and I followed the resisters into the women’s movement. From there it was only a matter of time that I began to, in a simplistic and reductionist manner, distinguish the heterosexual women’s involvement from that of the lesbian women. I saw that as heterosexuals our primary relationships were not women and therefore not necessarily of the movement. Our primary relationships and the material reality of our lives were still centered around men and at home—distanced from it. When something at home was not pressing we could proceed to perform our political work. Lesbian women’s involvement reflected the women centeredness of their lives. Many would stay late into the night, long after those of us in relationship with men had gone home. I envied them – what I thought of as their freedom— to make decisions unfettered by guilt, expectations, and heterosexual roles. This envy led me to relate more closely to the lesbian women in my life and beyond. First one and then another lesbian woman became the objects of my sexual desire. It was scary to me because who I was as a heterosexual woman was still more powerful than who I was as a lesbian woman. Who I was

as a lesbian woman had not yet taken shape beyond desire. I behaved for a while as if I could be both. One secret from the other, one extra to the other, one forbidden, the other being destroyed by the forbidden nature of the first. The one was discarded for the other. I became a lesbian. My subjectivity as a heterosexual woman withered and disappeared.

It is in a Self-defined, Self-serving, female symbolic that I have other understandings of my experiences.

## **Abortion**

*In the aftermath of an emotional discussion with my daughter I wrote this letter to the fetuses I aborted. The writing of the letter was a practice of coming to voice in my work in psychotherapy. 2000*

dear who might have been,

Your soul is free from me. You are not I and I am not you.

I release your soul to find another person who will provide you with what you need to grow and develop. I am free from you and you are free from me. Your soul touched mine in a certain way and perhaps my freeing you from me also has touched yours. When your soul came into my life I had nothing for you except to release you. What I had to give, which was so little, was already in service to other souls. I am sorry I did not know what I should have found out in order for me in our separation to have served us

better. I mourn our loss of opportunity to be entwined for a longer while. I am sad that I have never said goodbye.

In an imagined conversation with you, you thank me for releasing you to another life. You are grateful for my knowing that I could not take care of you, and for taking the necessary actions to set you free. I imagine you saying to me, "do not be troubled that our separation seemed so ignoble and demeaning. I had already separated from the fetus when first I knew that you could not take care of me." You tell me, " you did the right thing, and be proud that you did not hang on to something you could not serve and could not serve you". And in this imagined conversation, we part in dignity, respect, and love.

**Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, in "Telling and Performing Personal Stories" wrote of their experience of Ellis aborting what might have been a child of their's.<sup>25</sup> In reading their narratives I was struck by the similarity to mine of a ritual that she performed at the time of her abortion. Ellis, before having an abortion, in a healing guided imagery performed with a friend, spoke of the fetus as a soul. During this ritual Ellis first embraced what would have been her child and then grieved its loss to her.<sup>26</sup> It is this ritual and healing that in an achievement of a feminist standpoint that I was able to undertake for myself. In the letter I wrote symbolically to an aborted issue of my body, from a feminist subjectivity of being a mental health client seeking an academic voice, and as an**

abortion rights activist. Other aspects of the context of this writing are that my male therapist was anti-choice, was a graduate of Calvin College, which for me marked him as a fundamentalist christian. I was nervous that what I was writing subverted the cause to which I was so wholeheartedly in support. I imagined the therapist gloating and saying "I told you so", although he had never expressed judgement about our political, spiritual, sexual, age, and/or gender differences. My nervousness was from the foreground, where it mattered that others defined my experiences for me differently than I did myself. In the Background from which I wrote this letter, it soothed, named, defined, and constituted another experience of an experience.

Narratives express the values of the narrator's, who also construct, formulate, and remake these values. A personal narrative, then, can be viewed as an 'experience of the experience' intended to inquire about its possible meanings and values in a way that rides the active currents of lived experience without fixing them once and for all. Understanding is not embedded in the experience as much as it is achieved through an ongoing and continuous experiencing of the experience.<sup>27</sup>

Both Ellis and I separately, both of us pro-choice, conceived of, wrote about, and narrated similar experiences. I associate this connection to an imagination of a female symbolic, which values ritual, feelings, ambiguity, and entrustment.

As a reader of Ellis, I identified with her as a woman who also has aborted a fetus, grieved a loss, and written about it. But it is not empathy and identification that are necessarily the most desired response from the reader, writes Ellis. It is that "readers are put in the position of experiencing an

experience that can reveal to them not only how it was for us but how it could be, or once was for them. They are made aware of similarities and differences between their worlds and ours. It becomes possible for them to see others in themselves or themselves in the other among other possibilities."<sup>28</sup> This is part of why I write my experiences.

What does it mean to have first hand experience of that which another is writing? For some references to the history of abortion, I referred to Contested Lives by Faye Ginsberg.<sup>29</sup> Her study is based on the struggle between two opposing abortion activist groups in Fargo, North Dakota. In 1991, while participating in a cross-country political action, The Reproductive Freedom Ride, I visited the Fargo Women's Health Clinic which was at the center of the struggle of which Ginsburg writes.

I was in the Fargo Women's Health Clinic, in the City, in the discourse, as described in the book. I read into Ginsburg's account my memories of the physical location that she describes. While reading I augmented her text with my memory. I sought out those things that matched or not that which has endured in my memory.

#### **Reproductive Freedom Ride, 1991: Fargo ND.**

The clinic is a modest two-story wood framed house in a common enough neighborhood in one of the most mid-western of American towns. Surrounding the walkway to the entrance is a 10-12 foot high chain link fence, with rows of barbed wire strung across the top. Along the sides and over the



top is royal blue canopy providing protective covering overhead and down the sides: a tunnel of safety for women seeking health care. In it they are protected from sight, from being bombarded with prayers, plastic babies, pictures of torn apart fetus', and "rescue" from their own decisions.

Imagine, protective covering for patients of a health clinic! How astounding! It was not a bank robber's den with a fence and canopy to protect bank robbers from being identified, by law enforcement officers. It wasn't a house of ill repute to protect customers from being recognized by a witnessing public. It was a woman's health clinic, for goddess' sake. A place of business serving women in need of services. Women making decisions about their own lives having to hide, enter a fortress, take personal and physical risk to even show up for medical care. And it was not law enforcement agencies who protected the rights of the clinic or of their patients. It was clinic staff, owners and volunteer private citizen zealots for women's rights, who protected the women patients and their access to health care.

The providers of women's reproductive services were perhaps at even greater risk than were their patients. We were shown on our visit where stink bombs had been tossed

by someone who had manipulated their way in. We saw locks that had been replaced over and over again because someone injected them with crazy glue. The clinic workers and health care providers told us of the explosives that broke windows, the threats of murder made against them. In a litany of abuses they had survived, they spoke of guns, assassinations, stalking, loss of privacy, surveillance, intimidation, security breaches, images on wanted posters, that were all part of the arsenal of destruction used against them for providing health care services to their patients.

*In my memory, and while reading and writing of this experience, I cried then and over a decade later as I return to that place in my memory, I cry again. As I revise this piece, once again I cry. It is not a sadness lodged in my memory, it is a current and continuing sadness. The situation is sad now, as it was in my past. It is as a memory-bearer that I write the sadness. It is a Future Memory that my experience creates. In my telling I preserve for the future the situation of women's bodies as sites of violent and killing contest. Religion, laws, tradition, culture, sexism, misogyny, heterosexism, medicine, war, patriotism, economics are entitlements of others to rights over women's bodies, a woman's body.*

While on this bicycle trip across the country, I was also then a memory bearer and spoke of a past partially of my imagination, partially from hope, partially residing in history. In my speaking I spoke of all of us collectively imagining reproductive freedom for all women in which abortion was totally of feminist women's design and definition. We would wrest back abortion from patriarchal institutions of law, religion, and medicine.

With consideration of our wholeness safety and access would be primary. How can we make abortion accessible and safe for all women who choose to terminate an unwanted pregnancy? A partial answer perhaps can be ferreted out from our herstory. Back to "witches", midwives, activists, mostly women who offered health care to other women and took women's lives, living, and life, seriously and of value. Today there are feminist women scientists, chemists, biologists, witches, physicians, feminist theorists, housewives, mothers, and between us all, I don't doubt for a moment that we have all the answers. We can develop, invent, and discover, methods, potions, practices that return our health care back to us.

Perhaps in the beginning our efforts will be underground. Or in Daly's words, deep into the Background. I want an instrument--maybe even crafted by hand. Safe. Easily used. A procedure. A herb. Safe. Accessible. Private.

Much like a so called myth, or urban legend, that says that the technology exists to make a tire for our automobiles that would never wear out, and that there is a fuel that is so highly efficient that gas stations would go out of

business, and there would be no need for war to protect our access to oil. These products, the “myth” goes on to say, are kept from developing to protect capitalism, capitalists, profits, and the rich. Like the “myth” that I believe is true, there is technology for women to control their own reproductive processes, and there is the will to do so. The knowledge and expertise already exists to control our bodies ourselves.

“BECKY BELL b.1971 -d.1988/Indiana PL-106”

That is the text on a stainless steel bracelet that, as a political action I wear every day of my life and have since 1989. Indiana Public Law 106 requires women under 18 years of age to have parental consent to have an abortion. Becky Bell was not ready to share with her parents that she was sexually active, so she sought and had an illegal abortion. She died at seventeen years of age, as a result of that decision.

### **Who I once was and What ‘s the Address, anyway?**

November 2000

I have just returned from Baltimore, where thirty-six years ago I was a Playboy Bunny. In an attempt to weave from a lesbian feminist standpoint memories of my past I locate among my files a yellowed newspaper article. It is from *The Baltimore Sun*, dated July 17, 1964 and was written by a young female reporter on assignment to cover the opening of the Playboy Club. The article

pinpoints the month and year that the club opened but does not reach into the future of when it closed. I search the article for the club's street address.

It was on Light Street I thought, and Cathy Kelly, a friend and long time Baltimore resident confirmed it when she came to pick me up at my Baltimore hotel for a lunch time visit. Off we headed towards Light Street. "There," she said and pointed to a vacant, boarded-up building next to one in which on the ground floor there was a bar. I stared and stared at the two old seamy looking buildings as if by concentrating and focusing history would appear before my eyes. Somehow like someone who has narrowly escaped death speaking of having their whole life appear in an instant before them, I wanted to stare at the buildings and see history magically appear before my eyes. I wanted the buildings to reflect that 30 years ago within them was housed The Playboy Club. I wanted a ghost of the glamour of the Playboy Club to shine through. I wanted to hear a hint of jazz music wafting from the windows and for blurry images of Playboy Bunnies floating from floor to floor to appear on the walls of the deteriorating buildings. But I heard nothing but the sounds of today, saw nothing but the bricks on the building, and no ghosts of times past gave evidence of what once was.

When what I wanted did not appear, I walked across the street to the bar. The bartender told me he didn't know what was there before Shaffers, a bar that had been there a long time but after the Playboy Club might have been there. We left the bar and crossed the street to stare at the buildings once again. I quipped that the man behind the bar was probably not even born when the

Playboy Club opened in Baltimore Maryland in 1964. We left Light Street. I went back the next day with my camera, thinking if I had a picture to stare at long enough, I would see something not apparent in person. Quickly, and self consciously, from across the street, I snapped a couple of shots of the two buildings.

The next night I ate dinner with old friends from when, a few years after I worked at the Playboy Club, I lived in Columbia, Maryland. "No, it was up a block or two" they said in unison, when I pointed to the buildings that Cathy and I had investigated earlier that day.

What is this memory process? I was in the city, I was even on the street, even on the same side of the street, within the possible two blocks where it used to be. I think and act as if it is imperative that I know the exact building. After thirty-six years the building probably bears no resemblance to the building of my experience. In a downtown area that has been massively reconstructed, how would finding the right building be of any help to my remembering? Somehow, I believe that for my memories to be useful I have identify the exact building but I am also skeptical. In the past I have stood in front of The Gaslight Club where I worked for two years, and no new memories were elicited by my being there. My need for the exact building seems to be connected to my fantasy that it will have something to tell me that I don't already know.

I think of my memory as a record of past events etched on my mind. I think of it as layers upon layer of events, emotions, thoughts layered chronologically one on top on another. A compost heap comes to mind. Layers

of layers of material each affecting the generation and decomposing of previous and future layers. In remembering I must disrupt the layers of material. I do that through questioning. I think of remembering as like a wind that blows the top layers of currency aside to expose a past buried among the layers.

Remembering starts from questioning. It starts with a trigger of some sort which is somehow connected to a past event. Layers are not so easily moved aside though as my trip to Baltimore demonstrates.

**March 23, 2000**

Lansing, MI

Mary Daly was in town for my 59th birthday. After her talk at the MSU Union some of us went out for drinks and something to eat. There were ten of us including Mary Daly and her Lawyer, Gretchen.

Two giants, who are two present, past and future Foremothers, who are two leaders, two sisters, two positively revolting hags, sat at the corner of our table. I was seated at the opposite end and faced them full on. One whom I knew so well, and one who I knew of so well: Marilyn Frye and Mary Daly. Frye and Daly, two present day warriors, shared a table, a moment, a celebration. Maybe I can begin to put to words these moments.

I stared in Amaze-ment at the two crones, cronies, positively revolting hags. Mary Daly slightly gagging on

too spicy-hot salsa, and Marilyn Frye commenting on the margaritas as being a spring drink. I am pleased to my core.

Frye and Daly are both distinctly their own Be-ings. Frye so familiar, her tone, her mannerisms, her postures, her hands. She punctuates her words, always precise, pithy and sure. She is saying that she is shy and gentle. And those who know her well know it is so. Those that don't might scoff. Daly is smaller in appearance than one might expect. Someone who has such big ideas, I think, become larger in our perceptions of them. She is quieter of voice. Much like the previous misperception, I am surprised at her soft voice. Her garb is familiar to me. Very much like I remember her wearing many years ago when I first saw her in Miami.

Also present in this moment, which adds to its momentousness, is to Marilyn's right Carolyn Shafer. Bone, is an artist, thinker, teacher, business-woman, designer, avenger, and a project partner of Frye's. Immediately next to Shafer is Annie Courtney, who changes seats with her partner Crista Lebens, to put Crista eye-to-eye with Daly. Annie, integral to the women's community, is a producer. She makes things happen. She organizes, delegates, implements, and creates action, celebrations, and



ritualistic delights. Crista, a student of Frye and Daly, has just written a dissertation and is but a flap of her wings away from changing her student status to that of professor. She is a teacher, a drummer, also an avenger, a friend and colleague. Jules sits next to Annie. Jules is an artist, a healer, and laughing witch. She creates fun, distributes amulets, tokens, markers to would-be witches, friends, and fellow travelers. Jen is diagonally across the table from Frye and Daly. Also a feminist philosophy student, and in a table full of lesbian hags is distinct of age and sexuality. She is present and I positively mark her presence. I am next to Jen. I am a student of Frye, and hence of Daly. I am Be-ing my-Self, bawdy, loud, drinking hearty, celebrating broadly, and in a state of intense enjoyment.

I look to the end of the table and see the tableau, of Frye and Daly in sharp focus with the rest of us in a blur, reflecting and reflected in and from their Courage, and enCouragement. All around me are colleagues, mentors, friends, fellow travelers entwined by location, interest, by these hags at the end of the table. To my right is my partner, love, friend, Marilyn Bowen. A warehouse magician of Goldenrod music. A solid, smart, loving, laughing friend. Around the corner from Bowen is Gretchen, the

lawyer. Kind, enthusiastic, committed, aware-a gift to all of us, this Gretchen, on the front-lines of protecting us through legally protecting Mary Daly's rights.

Coming full circle, Mary Daly sits to Gretchen's right. Mary Daly's eyes advertise like a blinking three story neon sign, her mischievousness, her cognitively serious playfulness, her dead serious playfulness. She is old, wizened, soft and hard just like me. Invincible and vulnerable at the same time, just like me. She is a cognitive Courageous visionary, a biophilac who mourns the loss of even a part of anyone of us stolen by the necrophilacal patriarchy. Softly spoken, powerful words and actions, are her tools of transformation. Lurking behind her positively beauteous smile is the dead seriousness of all of us fighting for our lives and for life--period.

**And so at the end, I begin.....**

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<sup>1</sup> Daly, Gyn/Ecology pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective. Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, in Poetics. p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Bruss, Elizabeth W. Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Genre (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 33-92. cited in Smith, p, 45.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Double bind: "Situations experienced by oppressed people in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation." Frye, Marilyn. "Oppression" in The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1983), pp. 1-16 (2); "A fundamental mechanism ....in the world maintenance of patriarchy...." Mythologizing/lying through inversion. For instance, instead of saying it is within nature that man resides, the myth or lie perpetuated in patriarchy is that man controls nature, or that it is a sign of progress that man does. Daly, Mary and Jane Caputi. Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language (Toronto, New York: Women's Press, Ltd. 1998), p. 93. There are also instances of double reversals of which Daly writes in other of her works. In Gyn/Ecology (1990, p. 90) Daly uses the term "double-think" an example is women are revered for their self-lessness, and while at the same time they are ridiculed and debased as weak and helpless. If she should show strength of purpose in ways that can be perceived as selfing, she is selfish, uncaring, and unwomanly. Much like Frye's Double-bind in which her options are few and any of them invoke negative consequences.

<sup>9</sup> MacDonald, Barbara and Cynthia Rich. Look Me In the Eye: Old Women, Aging and Ageism (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1983). Many have taken exception to my use of the word old. They suggest, *aging, or older*, as more palatable terms for what I mean. I choose though to follow Barbara MacDonald and the axiom of OLOC, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, who claim the word old. They further only acknowledge old when a woman reaches the age of 60. At that age I proudly claimed my status as old. To do otherwise is agist and perpetuates agism. To not use the word old continues its mystification. Or to use old before the age of 60, also denigrates its meaning. For instance, a young woman colleague of mine, said she was old at thirty.

<sup>10</sup> Smith analyzes autobiographies of Margery Kempe, Margaret Cavendish, Mrs. Charlotte Charke, Harriett Martineau, and Maxine Hong Kingston.

<sup>11</sup> Kingston, Maxine Hong. The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts. (New York: Random House, 1977) pp. 151-173.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, p. 151.

<sup>14</sup> Kingston, "No Name Woman," pp. 1-19, cited in Smith.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, pp. 153-155.

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<sup>16</sup> Daly and Caputo, p. xvii.

<sup>17</sup> I am not suggesting that the only way to an understanding is through the achievement of a lesbian feminist standpoint, it is the way I came to my understanding. Relevant to other paths to developing an understanding of Daly's work, Bonnie Mann in the Appendix to the New Intergalactic Introduction by Daly in the 1990 Edition of Gyn/Ecology discusses the use of Daly's Gyn/Ecology in her work with battered women. She writes that with varied levels of education among the women with whom she works, that portions, rather than the whole book, were used to "...open a passage to the Background..." p. xxxv. Having these women read Daly, Mann writes, "was a way to confront, finally 'the confusion that is evoked in all women as a result of sensing simultaneously both the invincible reality of Female Process itself and its erasure/fragmentation in the foreground'" Mann, p. xxxv, Daly, p. 322. These women, could also be said to be in the process of achieving a feminist standpoint. They have stepped into the background by leaving abusive relationships. They are engaging in the struggle and the act of being educated to create change, and it could be said they are achieving a feminist standpoint.

<sup>18</sup> Mann, Bonnie. "Gyn/Ecology in the Lives of Women in the Real World" Appendix to the New Intergalactic Introduction, in Daly, Gyn/Ecology, pp. Xxxiv-xliii

<sup>19</sup> Daly, 1990, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Daly, 1990 p. xxi.

<sup>21</sup> Daly, Mary. Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Daly, 1992, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Daly, 1992, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Daly, 1990, p.17.

<sup>25</sup> Ellis, Carolyn and Arthur P. Bockner. "Telling and Performing Personal Stories: the Constraints of Choice in Abortion" in Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience, Carolyn Ellis and Michael G. Flaherty eds. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1992), pp. 79-101.

<sup>26</sup> Ellis and Bochner, p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> Ellis and Bochner, p. 98.

<sup>28</sup> Ellis and Bochner, p. 98.

<sup>29</sup> Ginsburg, Faye D. Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

## AFTERWORD

### A CHRONOLOGY

After having known and dated him for two years, I was two months pregnant when John and I married in the fall of 1959. Johnny was born May of 1960, 11 months later Bridget was born. In August 1962, Casey was born. My friend Tyanna helped me leave John that fall. I found work at the Gaslight Club soon after. John was arrested for participating in a bank robbery, pled guilty and received a life sentence within the year after I left him. I divorced him in 1963. I obtained my first abortion in 1963. In 1965, while temporarily working at the Gilded Cage Bar in the Shorum Hotel, in Washington, DC, I met Seymour. Within two months Seymour left his wife and moved in with me. I auditioned soon thereafter for a position at The Playboy Club just opening in Baltimore, Maryland. I got the job, worked there two months, quit in the fall of 1965. Had a second abortion in 1966. Married Seymour that summer. Vail was born January of 1969 after which, with my husband's permission, I had my tubes tied. Moved to Columbia, Maryland in 1970 and helped start It's Open for Women. Participated in a CR group. In 1972 Volunteered in the Muskie for President campaign, Helped lead the county campaign for the Maryland ERA, and Howard County Women's Political Caucus. Moved to Aspen Co. 1973. Completed work for a BA degree in communications in a University Without Walls Program, Loretto Heights College, Denver, CO., 1976. Moved to Sarasota FL, then to Miami in 1977. Joined Dade County NOW shortly thereafter. Spoke out on the Courthouse steps, 1985. Helped run two Fran Bohnsack Campaigns for the

State Legislature 1988 and 1990. Started my own business. President of Dade NOW. Had sexual relations with a woman. Participated in the Reproductive Freedom Ride, a cross-country political action, 1991. Hurricane Andrew swept through Miami and in its wake Seymour and I temporarily found common ground. Engaged in another love relationship with a woman and traveled on a women's studies trip to Russia in the fall 1993. Met Joyce Ladenson, applied to MSU, was accepted, and left my marriage, my business, my family, my home, and Miami, for Lansing, MI December of 1993. Began school January of 1994. Completed my Master's Degree in 1996 and began work on a Doctorate degree. Partnered with Marilyn Bowen in 1997. This spring, 2002 I began a part time job with Michigan Equality which will become full time upon my completion of an academic degree.

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