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Life History as Process and Product:
The Social Construction of Self through Feminist Methodologies
and Canadian Black Experience

Lynn Echevarria-Howe, B.A. Hons.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

April 14, 1992

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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May 14, 1991

Abstract

The main focus of this thesis is to examine the process and product of life history work. I present models which illustrate how understandings of the research endeavor and its relations have developed through feminist methodologies. A review of black Canadian history and a critique of exclusionary practices in feminist scholarship and academia contextualize the lives of this project's life history participants, and, illustrate how racism affects the lives of people of color and the production of knowledge. The findings of the thesis illustrate how participants and researcher in an inter-racial relation respond to the construction of self through the narrative and its process. I focus on research relations, response to the texts, and the problems and rewards of life history work. I conclude that new models of methodology are possible in light of postmodern and feminist theories, and that further refinement of researcher/participant relations are necessary in this changing world.

Acknowledgements

Here at the beginning of my "narrative", and on the brink of springtime and a very special year ahead, I wish to express my love and appreciation to those people who have been an important part of the production of this work and the construction of my self as a graduate student. To professors Joseph Manyoni and Caryll Steffens, my thesis committee, my heartfelt thanks for your insights, your guidance, patience, and steady support and belief in me during these challenging years. To my wonderful parents who are both my first models of what it is to be a diligent student and a wise educator, to my patient husband who faithfully encouraged me all these years, to my four dear children who in their own special loving ways have helped me on my journey of learning, and to my dear friends particularly Brenda, Will, Linda, Zilda, Maureen, and my professor/friends Arun Mukerjee, Flo Andrews, Bernice Moreau, and other colleagues who have encouraged and supported me throughout this work, thank you all for *being there* along the way. To dear Deborah and family (my life history participants) I thank you all for your graciousness and affection, and especially to dear Phoenix, my partner in this process, I want to express my love and admiration for your openness, trust and tenacity. Finally, to those generations of women and men in my ancestry who did not have this privilege of higher education, thank you for your strengths and spirit.

Lynn Echevarria-Howe

April 1992

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Introduction

The development of life history methodologies in the social sciences is the concern of this thesis. My focus is on the process and the product of life history research. I wanted to know if it was possible to record the process of doing a life history--the interactions and reactions of the participants to the process and the product. Initially I set out to facilitate the recording of a life history of a black woman living in Toronto. As I will describe, after having recorded two life histories my thesis focus shifted into a more interpretive examination of the interactions engendered during the life history endeavor itself.

My project was experimental. I had not found any other study which explored the actual "labor" of producing a life narrative in any detail, nor the reactions of participants to the process and product. A few researchers Emerson and Pollner (1988, 1991) and Rochford (1991) have recently written about their experience of taking their findings back to the field to engage members in commenting on their research, and about the resulting "membership validation". These studies, however, focused on institutions or organizations rather than on individual life histories. Marjorie Mbilinyi (1989) used life histories in her research. She is one of the first feminist scholars to describe the labor involved in producing a life history, as well as describing her methodology and experience working with a life history participant. However, we do not hear from the participant what *her* experience and response was to Mbilinyi's project.

I was in uncharted territory, except for the ideal model of participatory methodology, which I had synthesized from the works of a number of feminist scholars. These ideas explained how one might best go about collaborative research, but not how to record process and responses to the project. In my thesis I share in a reflexive manner the challenges both my participant and I faced, and what we learned through this experience.

My motivation to produce life histories with black women stems from both my heart and mind. In Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black (1989) bell hooks talks about the first time she entered a women's studies course and discovered much to her distress and pain, that there were no books written by and about women of color. As a black woman, she was represented nowhere in the literature, or in the theoretical articles on the class reading list. When I read this passage I felt a strong surge of empathy for her experience. When I was an undergraduate in my final honors year, I took what turned out to be the best of all my women's studies courses--a study of gender, race, and class through the humanities, specifically through the eyes of women of color. We were particularly fortunate to have a professor who was a woman of color herself, and who had carefully chosen literature by and about women of color. We read books written by black American, African, Caribbean, Oriental, and Native women. The profound absence I felt at that time (1988) was the fact that there was only one book written by a Canadian black woman about her life, and this book had gone out of print! Half of the women in the class were black. As I looked at the black and white women in the class, I felt upset and sad that we knew virtually nothing about the lives and experiences of black women in Canada. This absence confirmed starkly the theoretical debates we read and discussed in class concerning exclusionary practices in the dominant society and its institutions, in the women's movement, and in feminist scholarship.

My experience participating in life history projects and my journey into black Canadian history began in my undergraduate years, both in class projects at university, and in an extra project I was asked to undertake for a colleague. Being both researcher and "the subject" in one intensive class project, helped me to gain an appreciation for the tremendous amount of work and effort--physical, mental, and emotional that goes into life history interviewing. I also learned that the interview does not "end" in the allocated time periods, but rather continues to work on in a person's mind, questioning, reviewing, sorting, arranging and coming up with new ideas about self and other, whether the person

be interviewer or interviewee. One carries away from such an experience a deep bond, the reverberations of another life which keep being called up from the subconscious--fragments of spiritual and social associations which remain with you, even after years of time.

My first full life history experience began with an 70 year old black Toronto-born woman, Rose Downes. Although this project began two years before I started my masters program, the experience and knowledge I gained working with Rose paved the way for me to be able to carry out the life narratives for this thesis with a deeper and invaluable understanding about black community life and activism in the early 1900s in Toronto. It has also given me contrasting and similar experiences to the recent life history projects which are worthy of comment.

I visited Rose once a week for three hours a day for nine months. Over a period of time Rose shared with me her wealth of archival materials and her extensive knowledge of the black community. During that time she recommended reading material to me, and loaned me her own books, newspapers, journals, newsletters, scrapbooks and photo albums. I also loaned her books and shared insights and news about women of color in my classes, and what I was learning about racism and sexism at university.

Being asked to interview Rose was serendipitous for me. The colleague who needed information about Rose and her mother did not know that I had known Rose when I was a little girl, that we had seen each other at many social occasions as I grew up, and that my parents and Rose had worked on committees together over the years. However, I did not know her intimately, for example, I knew nothing about her childhood, youth, working life, activism in the black community in Toronto, or early days as a member of the Baha'i Faith. Being together afforded us both the chance to get to know each other on a deeper level--for Rose to be my teacher and I her student. The small interview project I had been asked to undertake grew into a research paper about the early black community, and with Rose's enthusiasm and willingness, bloomed into a

life narrative. The archival material Rose shared with me is the basis of my data about the black community for this thesis. Along with other research material of the time, this data contributes to how I have constructed the history, and the strengths and survival strategies of the black community which I present in this thesis. I also feel it is important to mention this project because, with the experience and knowledge gained in participating in an extensive life history process, I was able to come to my thesis work more prepared and sensitized than if I had been new to life history interviewing or to the experiences of black women in Canada.

For this thesis, my intent was to record the life history of another black woman. I took my time finding a participant. I was looking for a person who had either been born in Toronto in the 1920s or had grown up there so I could continue recording the reconstruction of black women's historical experience. I considered going to a few black women's organizations, but decided that I could not devote the amount of time needed to facilitate a grass roots participatory project. I also knew that each organization has its own agenda. My goal, to simply gather life histories, might be sacrificed or waylaid to a larger focus that my time constraints could not encompass.

In June 1990 I attended a conference in Toronto whose theme was "400 Years of African Canadian History"; I went to learn more about that history. It was here that I had an unexpected reunion with another family friend of my childhood, Clarence Henry, whom I had not seen for 30 years. Clarence is a Canadian of Black and MicMac heritage. He took me home to have tea with his wife Deborah when the conference was finished. I had met Deborah when I was ten years old but neither of us remembered the occasion.

After our meeting I thought about Deborah, her liveliness, her graciousness and hospitality, her remarkable family whose members encompassed various ethnic and racial backgrounds. I decided to write asking to meet with her and Clarence again so that I could ask her about the possibility of recording her life history. Several weeks later the

mission was accomplished, Deborah was happy to "co-operate", and looked forward to being together. My second life history project came into being July 1990.

Deborah is currently 72 years old. Born in Jamaica, she came to Canada as a young woman to pursue her higher education. She has lived in Canada for the past 40 years. The life history project grew when her 33 year old Toronto-born daughter Phoenix, approached me and offered to share her life story as well. Phoenix, who is married to a white man, felt her perspective as a black Canadian and her knowledge of gender relations in the black community and between the races would be helpful to me. I also conducted smaller interviews with the husband of Deborah, the husband of Phoenix, and the 17 year old grandson of Deborah. The Henry family have lived in an eastern Toronto suburb for the past 35 years. They were the first black family to move into the area, so Phoenix and her siblings were the first black children in that school system.

My intention to use the life histories as a part of the thesis changed after I had completed the interviews and carried out the refining of the materials. A colleague of mine, after having read my thesis proposal, asked how I would solve the ethical dilemma of producing a life history but not exploiting the participant's life. Our discussion on how I had carried out my research up to that point (the fact that I had completed the life histories first and had returned the narratives for approval and correction to the respondents), brought me to the realization that I had already accomplished my goal of facilitating the voice of black women, now I just needed to complete the thesis requirements. I could do that without having to use the entire narratives! I decided to save the stories for publication as a contribution to women's studies and black history, and use the interaction and process of doing the life history as my thesis focus.

My project then, involved the recording of two life histories and family interviews, while the thesis work has evolved to focus on research concerning life history methodology and my own experience of process--the interactions involved in the doing of life story research. The product still has a life of its own, one which we look forward

to bringing to birth when this thesis is finished. There is a sacrifice in not following my original research plan, my work would have been much easier and less time consuming, but the gain is in keeping my ethical stand by assisting the coming to voice of black women through a holistic and appropriate presentation of their work. By "appropriate" I mean that the stories will be first published to benefit the participants and the black community, not primarily for the academic community and personal career gain. Finally, I should say that I viewed this project as experimental in the sense that I would explore the possibilities of recording both process and product. The research would illustrate if my experience could match up with my ideals.

The First Chapter

I think it is important to include in this thesis some examples of exclusionary practices, in feminism and feminist scholarship, and the insights of feminist scholars of color and black feminist theorists about this problem. This exercise points out the need for counter-hegemonic views, and contextualizes the central findings of this thesis which examine the experiences of an inter-racial life history endeavor, and the lives of black women in Canada. The content of this chapter taken as a whole, introduces the academic setting in which I have been socialized, and the discourse from which this work arises; it illuminates both the "world" of a white woman academic, and sets in relief the counter "world" of a self-employed black business woman, and a retired black working-class senior citizen and her family.

The Second Chapter

In the second chapter I explore the development of research methodology from a feminist perspective in order to show the gradual refinement of method and expectations of life history methodology. This exercise follows my own journey in learning, as I searched for ideals and methodology which would match my own heart-felt concerns for

the way in which research could be conducted. My interest in life histories led me to read a number of narratives by and about women which I present as a literature review. When I looked back through the literature, specifically to examine how women of the past had conducted their research, I realized, based on the models I had constructed about feminist methodologies, that there was a correspondence reflected in relation to what I saw as ever-evolving models of methodology. This correspondence I subsequently included and refer to throughout the literature review. The final sections of this chapter look at the production of the narrative form through the contemporary theories of Postmodernism and Participatory theory, both of which have influenced ethnography and life history research considerably.

The Third Chapter

In the third chapter I contextualize the everyday lives of the participants in the life history endeavor, by looking first historically at the circumstances surrounding the black community from the 1920s to the 1950s, then by examining briefly the feminist theories regarding the particular sets of circumstances black women in contemporary Canada live through today.

The Fourth Chapter

In the fourth chapter I present my findings regarding the process and product of my life history research. I focus on the participants' experiences of the process of recording their narratives, and their reactions to the product. I discuss my own reactions and responses to the "doing" of this research, and my perceptions of the different "worlds" in which we live. Through inclusion of the dialogue between the participants and myself, I show some of the dynamics involved in participatory research, and the background to the process of constructing perceptions of the self in narrative form. This chapter is written in a reflexive manner, with the expectation that the reader will

experience a glimpse into the moments of interaction we experienced as life history participants.

Conclusion

In the conclusion I present a synthesis of my thoughts about the research I have undertaken, and I reflect on the development of methodology in life history research and future possibilities in this field.

CHAPTER ONE

The Feminist Movement and Feminist Theory: Racism,

Exclusionary Practices and Critical Issues

In this chapter I will review the arguments regarding the inadequacies of early white feminist theory. These arguments show such theories cannot produce work which is truly progressive. The ground from which the feminist movement has grown was nurtured by a history of male oppressive ideology and practice. The theoretical offshoots of the early feminist movement developed from this same morass, carrying with them the seeds of prejudicial ideology, and disseminating theory and practice which marginalized, excluded, and oppressed black women and women of color. For feminist scholarship to progress from this stage necessitates moving beyond the tangle of old ways of seeing and being to new ground where women can develop holistic scholarship in partnership. One step towards this new ground, I suggest, is to become informed about the lived experiences of women and our relational conditions through black feminist theory, and theories from women of color.¹

In the words of Shulamith Firestone, "before we can act to change a situation we must know how it has arisen and evolved, and through what institutions it now operates" (1978: 136). The starting point in this work is the de-construction of dominant feminist theories and the essential recognition that racism and classism are within the very foundation of the feminist movement and its theories. Feminist researchers must study

¹ The articles I use in this chapter refer to the term "black" as encompassing several races of people. The general consensus indicates that women who are considered "black" in England come from Asian, African, and West Indian backgrounds. Some women also have Mediterranean roots, as well as being from different classes, cultures and politically different backgrounds. American black women are recognized as being from Afro-American roots. I choose to use the term women of colour/feminists of colour to respect women from diverse races who have taken this name to represent themselves. I use the word black when I am referring to black feminist theory, or to women who specifically define themselves as black.

how Euro-American theory has developed, and upon what myths and ideologies it has been constructed.

A brief review of the early beginnings of racism, classism, and exclusionary practices within the feminist movement will be useful here. From the early days of the feminist movement most bourgeois women used feminism to support their class interests. For example, Angela Davis (1983: 53) suggests that the declaration at Seneca Falls was supposed to be the "articulated consciousness of women's rights", but in reality it reflected only the thoughts and desires of middle-class women. The conference did not address the plight of the working class, and completely disregarded women of color. The struggles of middle-class women were against the oppressions of sexism, while working-class women were struggling against the oppressions of class, ethnicity and gender. Women of color of all classes faced the constraints of gender, race, ethnicity and class.

White feminist researchers began to theorize about a universal sisterhood bonding women together. Their mode of analysis, in empathy with women universally, was blurred however by the privileges of class and race. They saw only a common oppression of sex for all women. Men were the enemy, women were the victims. Women were excluded from the world of men and bound together within their own enclave of sisterhood (Hewitt 1985). The real life experiences of other women, and the issues they had to face in struggling against a white supremacy, were neither understood, nor taken into account. The sisterhood, in fact, was a white sisterhood, an exclusive community. This homogeneous view of women negates the diversity of women's experiences and, as Hewitt (1985: 300) suggests, "denies the social and material realities of caste and class in America". Extending that critique, bell hooks claims that factors such as religion, class, race, and sexual preference determine "the extent to which sexism will be an oppressive force in the lives of individual women" (1984: 14).

hooks suggests this focus on gender "mystifies women's reality as if gender were the only determinant of women's fate" (hooks 1984: 14). In choosing this focus,

"mainstream" women do not have to deal with the horrors of other types of oppressions. Amos and Parmar (1984) charge that white feminists' "historical amnesia" allows them to distance themselves from the horrors of racism and classism, and blinds them from recognizing the benefits they have accrued through the oppression of other peoples. By and large white feminist researchers centered on the primacy of sexism in gendered experience and chose to overlook racism and classism.

In this regard, let us consider the works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Virginia Woolfe. These early feminist theorists, extolled for their brilliance and foresightedness, did not acknowledge or perhaps even recognize their complicity in the oppression of other women, but rather incorporated prejudiced views into their theories. For example, the nineteenth-century ideology which promoted eugenics to assure the purity and reproduction of the white race, was a view supported and promoted by Gilman in her writing. Gilman is recognized as one of the foremost socialist feminists; she was a leading intellectual of the women's movement. I suggest Gilman's book Herland is an example of a eugenic solution--a feminist utopia populated exclusively by white women.

Virginia Woolfe the "godmother" of feminist literary work, wrote books heavily biased by class privilege. To have "a room of one's own" was part of the "liberation solution" for the aspiring middle/upper class woman writer, but not for a working-class woman or woman of color, who could only dream of the right to decent shelter (and who in all likelihood would be doing the washing while the madam was doing the writing). The works of Gilman and Woolfe became established canonical texts, the models for feminist theories; they have been read for decades with little critique of their biases.

The "sisterhood" of the early feminists assumes a universal experience, and promotes the idea that gender inequality is more important than other inequalities (Baca Zinn et al. 1986). But for black women the feminist conception of patriarchy as a "determining" feature of women's oppression is inapplicable (Amos & Parmar 1984).

Living in a racist society, black women must address issues related to their survival, and often look to what will conserve their culture and identity. As one woman put it:

A Negro woman has the same kind of problems as other women, but she can't take the same things for granted. For instance, she has to raise children who seldom have the same sense of security that white children have when they see their father accepted as a successful member of the community. A Negro child's father is ignored as though he doesn't exist" (Ferguson 1972: 589).

Priorities then for black women differ in critical ways such as addressing the issues of the elimination of racism and the liberation of black people, as Ferguson (1972: 591) explains:

Obviously the first priority of virtually all black people is the elimination of racial prejudice...the liberation of black people. Second in importance is the black family problem of establishing a decent way of life...when racism is eliminated, then perhaps the black family's stability problem will disappear and more black women will be able to give the first priority to the elimination of oppression because of sex".

White feminist theory has constructed as basic canon, critiques of patriarchy based on the cultural and class-specific white model of oppressive male breadwinner/female dependent. Feminist researchers of color argue that despite sexism in the family, this institution offers a humanizing shelter; it is a source of support from the racism of the state and society (Bhavnani and Coulsen 1986, hooks 1984: 39). Historical factors, such as colonialism and institutionalized racism, have caused the marginalization of black males economically and socially, and have necessitated black women working outside the home, and, in a majority of cases, taking on the position as head of their households (Brand 1984; hooks 1986; Stasiulis 1987; Malveaux 1987). Even though in recent years, there has been some change, for example -- affirmative action has promoted some black women into higher paying jobs in the professions -- nevertheless policies such as these have failed to address the racial ghettoization of women of color and immigrant women in menial low paying jobs, or the educational streaming of young women of color (Brand 1986: 30, Ng 1986).

Feminist scholars of color writing in the past five years, have charged that white feminist social scientists have not given truthful testimony or analyses to the struggle of Third or Fourth world women. By posing their own definitions of the situation, researchers have not addressed the truth of the complexity of historical and contemporary experience, and their own complicity in the racist structures within the society (Bhavnani and Coulsen 1986, Kazi 1986, Hawkesworth 1988). For example, the ways in which labor migration is brought about through imperialism, and its traumatic and tragic implications for the lives of women and their families through the dissolution of family life (Ramazanoglu 1986). This intellectual near-sightedness repeats the racial chauvinism begun in the early social science research by male researchers. hooks (1984) suggests white women, usually elite intellectuals, use the experiences of black women's lives to validate their own theoretical assumptions. Using non-white women as objects implies a superior/inferior relationship. As with early social science, the "subjects" under research remain invisible, silent, and patronized. As Amos and Parmar (1986: 6-7) succinctly describe:

Often, we have appeared in cross-cultural studies which under the guise of feminist and progressive anthropology, renders us as "subjects" for interesting and "exotic" comparisons. Or, feminist theories examine our cultural practices as 'feudal residues' or label us as 'traditional' and conclude black and third world women are "politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western feminism.

The dominant feminist analyses could be found guilty of not conceptualizing the complexity of women's true place in society or the gender relations which existed due to constraints imposed by racist structures (Baca Zinn et al. 1986). For example, in the period 1970-80, black women defended their solidarity with their men on the grounds that they must work in unity to combat racism (Bhavnani and Coulsen 1986, Kazi 1986, Ramazanoglu 1986). bell hooks suggested that women of color recognize..."that the affirmation of bonding between black women and men is a part of anti-racist struggle" (hooks 1986: 70). Several years later hooks was to address the issue of sexism within the

black community; notwithstanding the fact that combating racism is a primary focus, she saw sexism as a serious political concern which exploits and victimizes black women (hooks 1989).

As we have shown, the critique of women of color regarding white epistemology and theoretical models about sisterhood, gender relations, family life, and work, points out the inadequacies and differential experiences which rendered white theory unacceptable to feminist scholars of color. These different perspectives and approaches led to further alienation when women of color entered women's studies. The course material used was from the dominant ideology, and the concepts talked about were divorced from the realities of the experience of women of color and working class women (hooks 1984, Baca Zinn et al 1986).

Women of color have explained that in many ways feminist literature does not fit their lives. As one Canadian social scientist explains:

So this was the issue...there were gaps or silences, that people like us were never present in what we taught and read...I have rarely, while doing work in women's studies proper, come across a framework or methodology which addresses or legitimizes the existence and concerns of women like us...(Bannerji 1987: 10).

In the realm of labor women of color found that literature about work which talks for example, about the "double burden, does not address the work involved with negotiating two cultures, or teaching children a strong sense of self in a racist environment. "The idea of doing a double shift is inadequate to women who feel they are doing multiple shifts" (Frankenburg & Martens 1987: 29). Feminist literature of the past did not fit the lives of women of color, so most often they would reject the dominant paradigms and use their own perspectives. Women of color pointed out to white feminist researchers and teachers that very often many teachers and researchers are out of touch with students who are ethnically² and racially diverse and working class. Work which is

² In defining race and ethnicity I follow Roxanne Ng who states in her article "Sexism, Racism, Nationalism: Between the Lines. J. Vorst et al. eds. Socialist Studies 5 Race Class Gender: Bonds and

produced by students is often not understood because it reflects a totally different perspective from the dominant mode of thought (Baca Zinn et al 1986: 293).

Feminist scholars of color charged that Euro-American dominant scholarship did not acknowledge that racial minorities were denied the opportunities and privileges that white theorists enjoyed. Nor is it recognized, they stated, that institutional structures limit the contributions of women of color. The institutions which produce knowledge and support scholarly research hire few women of color or working class women. There is little possibility of these women producing scholarly work in women's studies. Women of color are not generally editors, publishers, or on review boards. Nor are these women encouraged to write in scholarly journals. There are some women of color who may review articles, but they are not a part of the policy and decision-making process. Competition for the few jobs available and the limited spaces in academic women's journals leave women of color few opportunities to advance and become part of academic networks (hooks 1986, 1989). Women of color now produce their own journals such as Fireweed and Tigerlily.

Dionne Brand (1983: 5) points out that white women's groups find excuses for their all-white publications and meetings:

So often we hear women's publications, presses and organizations excuse all white publications and groups with the cry that they can not "find" women of color. We were never lost. And as you will note in this issue [Fireweed] we are not invisible. On the contrary, we are alive and living in Canada.

Often white women do not know what to say regarding racism. For fear that they will be challenged, accused, or censured they withhold contributions to discussions on

Barriers. (Socialist Studies 1989),12. that these definitions are continually changing, they are social constructions which shift continually according to "the changing dynamics of gender, race/ethnic relations over time". For example, Ng points out that the nature of racism has changed in Canada, in that the colour of a person's skin, or any overt racial differences were not always a criteria to determine racial differences. She points out that, "Historically the Acadians were treated by the Scots and Irish, as people from a different race, and were discriminated against and suppressed accordingly. Today, Ng states that racism " is seen as discriminatory practices directed mainly at coloured people (the Blacks, South Asians, Native people for example"(1989.18).

feminism and racism. They are often very fearful of the anger of women of color. One researcher suggests that silence maintains privilege, it maintains the status quo, which works in favor of white women. She says further, "I don't think that we can ever claim that we're being silenced by black women or women of color. I think that their challenges raise fear in us and we then silence ourselves" (Frankenburg and Martens 1987: 29).

Feminist theorists from the margin claim that there are several reasons for exclusionary practices in women's studies. "Some derive from both the short term and long term costs of struggling to overcome institutionally supported and historically reproduced hierarchies of inequality" (Baca Zinn et al 1986: 293). It is also claimed that white middle-class women profit through the elimination of direct competition from women of color in areas such as "academic equals in universities, professional associations, women's studies journals, and a central place in feminist theory" (Baca Zinn et al 1986: 298, hooks 1986).

At the beginning of this thesis I mentioned that there was a dearth of literature about Canadian black women. In my undergraduate years I noticed that while there were black Caribbean women doing undergraduate studies in the humanities and social sciences, few, if any of these women went on to do graduate work. In light of the difficulties outlined here by women of color who have experienced the exclusionary practices in the academic system, it comes as no surprise that in the life history field and in the humanities in general, aside from the works of S. Hamilton, A. Shadd, D. Brand, M. Silvera and E. Thornhill, there is still a general silence about the lives of black women in Canada.

In the world of scholarship, as well as the social and economic world, women of color have been kept invisible or silenced, and their participation and experiences have been excluded in the making of the dominant feminist movement. The exact nature of how exclusionary the white feminist movement has been, was exposed through a debate

in the late 1980s surrounding the article of Barrett and McIntosh, "Ethnocentrism and Socialist Feminist Theory" in Feminist Review (1985). This article was written in response to charges regarding Barrett and McIntosh's book, The Anti-Social Family (1982).

Many of the scholars referenced in this chapter wrote in response to this debate, thereby providing us with a rich source of academic material of the views of women of color in Europe and North America. Discussion of this debate is useful to my thesis because it illustrates the very antipathy we have been discussing here, and furthermore points out the necessity for white feminist scholars to become more acquainted with the lived experiences of women of color.

Scholars of color felt that the Anti-Social Family did not address the experience of racially or ethnically diverse people and their families, and furthermore was racist in its omission of any other model but the white family. In this book Barrett and McIntosh took the position that the family was the major site of women's oppression. The family's central role was reproducer of class divisions. The particular class under scrutiny was a 1970s "white model". Their article stressed that they finally recognized elements of ethnocentrism in their previous work; they acknowledged that white feminist theorists needed to pay attention to their practice and ideas; and they agreed that the works of socialist feminists have spoken from ethnically-specific positions.

This theoretical work is a prime manifestation of the major problem with dominant feminist theory. The researchers failed to take into account the lived experiences of other women. They acknowledged, "[w]e simply did not know any of the details to which we thought others might pay attention, and had seen no need to acquaint ourselves with these different family forms" (1985: 25). Furthermore they said "at present it would seem contentious for us to deal with these questions on the basis of little experience and sketchy reading" (1985: 42).

In retrospect, although Barrett and McIntosh did not take into account other family models, they did have the courage to engage in the debate which followed and to admit honestly they had neglected aspects of work which were critical to a better understanding of families. This debate brought to the foreground the feelings and theories of feminists of color, and served as a springboard for developing further theories that addressed their issues of concern. I found agreement in all the contributors to this debate regarding the necessity for contextual analyses of black people's lives within their historical and contemporary experience, and acknowledgement by white women of their power relations. As Bhavnani and Coulsen explain, "...white women must acknowledge the material basis of their power in relation to black people, both women and men" (Bhavnani and Coulsen 1986: 82).

Some scholars such as Kazi (1986: 88) feel that it is possible to create a new theory in partnership. She suggests, "[w]hile developing analyses of black women's oppression, white women should work with black women as equal partners" (1986: 88). Other scholars such as Mirza (1986: 103), state that certain feminist theory is rigid and inhibits the progress of black women. She suggests that black women have to use the new radical black theory which "combines the reality of personal experience within the context of a definite economic and political overview". Mirza states emphatically that a feminist theory which conforms in style to male academic conventions says nothing about black women, so she suggests to other black women, "let's speak for ourselves" (1986: 103).

This debate, although centered around socialist feminist theory, was a signpost indicating that deconstruction of the dominant feminist theories was necessary, and that feminists of the various theoretical frameworks should address themselves similarly to investigate the very roots of the construction of their ideology, methods, and practice.

Specific suggestions about what white women should consider in their research and methods have been outlined by feminists of color. Bannerji (1987: 11) suggests

some criteria, saying that white women must look at their "historical social identity, their own subjectivity, their way of seeing and being" (1987: 11). Mirza suggests that any process of introspection must however, be more than a "self-indulgent exercise, exorcising the guilt" (1986: 103). White feminists must learn to listen and engage in constructive dialogue with feminists of color and other minority women. Ramazanoglu says, "[w]e need to hear the complexities and difference in each other's experiences to begin to create new forms of cooperation drawing on common interests" (1986: 86).

Gaytri Spivak (1986: 39) explores other ideas concerning the dialogue between women. She says that feminist researchers must have another focus. "It is not merely asking "who am I" but also questioning, "who is the other woman, how am I naming her, how does she name me?". Spivak suggests this approach is very important in creating bonds between women, she explains that "the absence of such crucial questions creates barriers between colonized women and investigators".

Dorothy Smith (1981) suggests that the inquirer and subject are *both* subjects of history. The inquirer must recognize that she sees through the mediation of a particular perspective and relational conditions. She must locate herself within these relations, and articulate this position; that she sees from a particular context structured by the same system of social relations which structure the worlds of her participants (1981: 48). From the point of view of this argument, even though Smith did not address the issue of race, we may read this perspective as related to race and ethnicity as well as class. This approach, as Smith has theorized, embodies a new commitment to the participant and to academic work: it moves forward from the notion of objectivity as guaranteed by a "detached" observer and recognizes that such claims of objectivity are suspect as each inquirer brings into research their own ideological baggage and relations to the enterprise of inquiry itself. As Smith (1981: 49) describes:

When we begin from their standpoint and know how to do that without incorporating the distortions of our own working relation to the discourse, then we have a method which is concordant with a relation between the sociologist and those she seeks to be of use to, which preserves the

presence of both as subjects...The authority of their experience for her is final. They are indeed the expert practitioners of their lives.

To extend this critique, hooks' (1989: 46,48) observations are useful. hooks encourages cross-racial research and dialogue, but points out that the position the researcher takes in the presentation of her material is critical.

Learning about other groups and writing about what we learn, can be a way to unlearn racism, to challenge structures of domination...problems arise not when white women choose to write about the experiences of non-white people, but when such material is presented as "authoritative".

A consensus of opinion emerged by the close of the 1980s that feminist theorists engaged in the process of inquiry must move beyond the role of expert presenting the role of object. Roxanne Ng (1989: 11-19), addressing both women of color and white women, synthesizes statements made by earlier feminists in pointing the way to a more refined analysis of how we might work to eradicate racism and sexism. She suggests that we must recognize that racism and sexism are not only institutionalized in the judicial system, the educational system, and the workplace, but that in fact they are systemic. These assumptions are present in people's attitudes and behavior, no matter what their gender, race or class position. Ng suggests that:

We cannot simply point a finger at, for example, the media or the school and accuse them of gender and racial discrimination. ...We must pay attention to the manner in which our own practices create, sustain, and reinforce racism, sexism, and class oppression. These practices include the mundane and unconscious ways in what and to whom we give credence, the space we don't take up because we have learned to be submissive. We need to re-examine our history, as well as our own beliefs and actions, on a continuous basis, so that we can better understand and confront the ways in which we oppress others and participate in our own oppression...it is a first step in working toward alternate forms of alliances and practices which will ultimately help us to transform the society of which we are a part.

Fortunately a few feminist researchers have addressed these absences and incongruencies in feminist scholarship. D. Stasiulis (1987) in her article discusses the incorporation of anti-racism in Canadian politics and analysis, and also provides a summary on the black feminist critique. In the Signs (Summer 1989), various scholars expose and critique the dominant feminist analysis: P. Collins discusses racism and

sexism in dominant cultural interpretations; D. Hine talks about black migration-resistance and survival strategies; and S. Mann and H. Gates provide critiques of dominant theory. In Women's Studies (1989), B. Aptheker discusses her personal experiences of discrimination in academia, the peripheralization of women's studies, and unlearning racism and classism in women's studies. In the same volume B. Christian raises the question of where black women should be in academia, and explores the possibilities for black women to participate in black studies and/or women's studies. In Women's Studies International Forum 13: 4 (1990) the focus here is on white women and imperialism as several scholars examine colonization from the point of view of Western women's relationships to the creation and dismantling of African and Asian empires. Shulamit Reinharz in her introduction to Becoming A Social Scientist (1988) talks about the necessity for sharing scholarship cross-racially for review and critique. Finally, around the subject of research relations, R. Edwards in Women's Studies Int. Forum (1990) reviews literature on white women interviewing black women and argues that feminist methodology can facilitate this process.

In sum, white feminists scholars have been challenged to examine the basis of feminist theory, and actively work to address racism in all its manifestations. Feminists scholars of color state that theorists should not prioritize one aspect of oppression, but must simultaneously consider gender, race, ethnicity and class. The critical need in feminist theory is to contextualize social life, to recognize and learn about the diverse lived experiences of women of color and of all classes of women. Mainstream theories should address the problematics that feminists of color suggest in regards to family life, gender relations, labor, academic research perspectives and exclusionary practices.

Returning to my thesis focus, as I became interested in the life history method as a medium for the re-construction of women's experience, I also paid attention to what methodologies feminist scholars were advocating for field work. In the following chapter I explore the development of research methodology in life history research, from

a feminist perspective, in order to show the gradual refinement of methodologies. After identifying this development, I review some of the life history literature to see how women of the past had conducted their research and what correspondence might exist in relation to these methodological models.

CHAPTER TWO

The Life History: An Introduction

In 1939 H. Blumer defined the life history as an "account of individual experience which reveals the individual's actions as a human agent and as a participant in social life" (Blumer 1939: 29). The definition of a life history most cited by researchers today was proposed by L. L. Langness. He suggests that "[a] life history is an extensive record of a person's life as told to and recorded by another, who then edits and writes the life as though it were autobiography" (Langness 1965: 4). The life history is a type of biographical method. It shares with other forms, such as the autobiography, case history, oral history, life story, and case study, the project of extensively recording aspects of a person's life. Each of these forms has a different focus, and according to their authors, are molded into different presentations of textual analysis and production.³ Although Langness is still widely quoted by researchers, over the past 30 years the definition of what the life history process and product should be, has changed considerably. As I explore various methodological innovations in this thesis, I will introduce these ideas.

The use of the human document in the form of biography has been a favorite practice within the diverse fields of sociology, psychology, history, anthropology, and political science; in fact, it can be seen as a "methodological common denominator" (Langness and Frank 1981: 10). In contrast to anthropology, which has used the method as a base for cultural studies, sociology sees the life history as illuminating the individual's connection and interaction with her community and society.

The life history method was used extensively in the early years of sociology 1920-1935 by the Chicago School, who produced a number of classic sociological

³ See N. Denzin's book Interpretive Biography. (Newbury Park: Sage Publications 1989) for an examination of these diverse forms through an interpretive framework.

works⁴. The personal document was first established in sociology by Thomas and Znaniecki with The Polish Peasant (1918-1920) Plummer (1983), then taken up by many others such as F. M. Thrasher, The Gang (1928), L. Wirth, The Ghetto (1928) and Shaw, The Jack-Roller (1931).

Under the direction of R. Park, early sociologists undertook many case studies which together over the years formed, as Becker (1970: 72) puts it, "a mosaic of great complexity and detail" of the Chicago area and its peoples. These studies supported one another, in the sense that they provided a background of data through which other case studies could be understood.

Although life histories were carried out in sociological research, the suitability of life history research has been controversial since the early part of the century. Scholars turned away from the use of this method as they became more interested in the building of abstract theory, less interested in detailed accounts of particular communities or people, and more wary of the challenges and problems inherent in a method which yields subjective data (Becker 1972). It is a method which has generally experienced neglect since the heyday of sociology (Plummer 1983, Becker 1970).

But the method was not abandoned entirely; for example, in the 1970s several deviancy sociologists used this method in their work (V. Swaggi -- the life history of a professional fence; R. Moore -- an institutionalized alcoholic; and R. Bogdan -- a transsexual). Life history work some scholars suggest is marginalized in sociology. "[S]ociology courses, sociology texts and methodological treatises...they all more or less ignore what Thomas and Znaniecki regard as the 'perfect' type of sociological material" (Faraday and Plummer 1979: 773). However, although life history has not been the primary choice of method it has in effect formed the foundation of much of social

⁴ See Kenneth Plummer's extensive review of life history research, Documents of Life: An Introduction to the Problems and Literature of a Humanistic Method. (London: George Allen & Unwin 1983).

science research (Plummer 1983: 148). Life histories provide as it were, the grist for the mill of social theorizing.

In the past twenty years the use of the method has been on the rise. The life history has been used in creating different 'genres' of narratives, for example: working class biographies S. Terkel (1970) Hard Times; spiritual conversion narratives N. McKay (1986) "Nineteenth Century Black Women's Spiritual Autobiographies"); testimony and activist narratives D. di Chungara (1978) Let Me Speak!: Testimony of Domitilia, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines and E. Burgos-Debray (1984), I Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala); or narratives that reflect social and personal change S. Mintz (1974) Worker In the Cane: A Puerto Rican Life History, R. Linden (1990) Making Stories Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust, Marilyn Porter (1988) "Mothers and Daughters: Linking Women's Life Histories in Grand Bank Newfoundland, Canada". The format chosen for these histories may among many foci manifest a statement of opposition to a power structure, may be in and of itself a political act; or may be used to promote change within small and large groups toward individuals.

The most attention recently given to the method has been in the area of literary criticism; anthropologists, sociologists, and literary critics are writing about textual analysis and production. Recent studies from diverse fields explore the various applications of the method and the method itself, for example, through literary criticism (Derrida 1972/81), feminist theory (Personal Narratives Group 1986), anthropology (Geertz 1983, Crapanzano 1981/85, Marcus and Fischer 1986), and sociology (Plummer 1983, Denzin 1989, McCall and Wittner 1990).

Life histories for the greater part of this century have focused on the lives of men within their societies. Feminist researchers fortunately, discovered that this method was ideal for writing women into history through recording their experiences. Since the 1970s an increasing number of life histories about women has been published. The first review of feminist life histories, and the first books to deal with interpreting women's

lives were only recently published.⁵ Few studies if any have been devoted to looking at the interactions involved with the labor of the process and the product of life history work: few studies have looked specifically at feminist methodology in life history work, or at life histories by and about women. I would like to address this absence in life history literature. First I will look in this section at the development of methodology (a theory and analysis of how research could proceed) in the feminist inquiry; then I will review a number of life histories and show the reflection of this development in life history research.

⁵ See Susan Geiger review essay "Women's Life Histories: Method and Content," in *Signs* 11:2 (University of Chicago 1986). Also see Personal Narratives Group (hereafter known as PNG, a research group affiliated with the Centre for Advanced Feminist Studies at the University of Minnesota) Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives (Bloomington, Indiana: University of Indiana Press 1989).

The Development of Methodologies in the Feminist Inquiry

It is not possible to say there is one feminist position, just as it is not possible to say there is one feminist methodology. The development of several clearly defined "feminisms" (with specific theoretical positions) has taken place gradually throughout this century (Jagger and Rothenberg 1984, Mies 1982, hooks 1984). The phenomenon of feminism, Strathern observes, is that the positions are held explicitly in relation to one another (1987: 285):

Through the vast amounts of internal criticism and counter criticism, the voices depend on one another's presence. In other words no one viewpoint is self-reproductive: feminist theory is created dialogically, in the sense that all positions constitute its base.

Though there are many differences, and some areas of agreement among such perspectives as Marxist, Black, Liberal, Radical, and Socialist feminisms, I will take the liberty of creating a synthesis of ideas and practices developed by feminist theorists from diverse backgrounds as a basis of a feminist framework (a set of feminist ideas) in the development of feminist methodologies. I will later use this framework in order to look at the life history method. Indeed, it is refreshing to look at research in the life history field since it is quite interdisciplinary, engaging feminists from the fields of history, science, and literary criticism, as well as the social sciences.

I take a further liberty in this synthesis, in that I illustrate a development of life history method in a chronological order, whereas in fact a number of these ideas occurred to some researchers simultaneously, but in most cases the theory was not put into practice for several years. Stated differently, some researchers had begun to put into practice certain methodologies they had envisioned, but in general it was years later before other feminists had taken up similar ideas or practice. For example, Maria Mies in the late 1970s was not only theorizing about feminist participatory/action research, but was also using this method in practice both in Germany and in India. At that time most feminist theorists were just beginning to explore the idea of alternatives to the traditional

mainstream approach. Anne Oakley (1981) argued that relations between researcher and informant from a feminist perspective could not be distanced or be "hygienic" (a sterile, distanced relation between researcher and researched), as positivist research demanded. I will therefore illustrate a general pattern I have seen indicated in the theoretical and practical work of Euro-American feminist scholars writing about feminist methodology.

In addition, I must acknowledge that it is not possible to talk about "feminist methodologies" as being entirely new creations, without giving credence and respect to the alternative social science research taking place during the past 20 years. This research has inspired feminist theorists and in many aspects has run parallel with feminist methodology, each perspective gaining by the cross-fertilization of new theories (Henriques et al. 1984, Denzin 1986, 1989, Harding 1987). For example Henriques et al (1984: 7) point to the women's movement as providing more than any other modern movement "the necessity for personal change" and the idea that "subjective transformation was a major political site of political change", while "feminist theory has provided much of the recent theoretical work on subjectivity". In turn, Shulamit Reinharz (1988: viii) points out that while many alternative social science critics still overlook feminist approaches, feminist theorists could benefit by exploring other radical critiques, and interacting with others in efforts to develop alternative paradigms.

Returning to the development of feminist research methodologies, there has been a development in the past twenty years away from the traditional model of life history research as demonstrated in Model 1 below.

Model 1

- value free
- hierarchical relations between researcher and "informant"
- controlled
- separated and distanced
- non-reciprocal
- research on women peripheral

Model 1, the traditional model, adheres to the idea that research must be: value free, in that the researcher should maintain a detached stance from the informant (at the same time establishing rapport), remain neutral so as not to bias the findings; and have the upper hand in controlling the research situation. The model that results from such a perspective is that of two people doing a job, one in control, the other "co-operating" but separated by a "scientific distance". The end result is the appropriation of knowledge from the subject, which is then used to further academic knowledge, and usually the career and finances of the researcher. Women's place in this research has been largely peripheral, in that women were most often seen as referents to men in their positions as mothers, wives, and daughters. The early life history works in anthropology and sociology would fall into this framework.

Feminist scholarship greatly improved this methodology by incorporating into its research approach the new grounds of knowledge about women and women's place in the world. The emerging consciousness of gender hierarchy enabled feminist researchers to look more clearly and critically at the social sciences, the research project itself, and the theories about relationships between researcher and informant (Benston 1982). This critique brought forth a recognition that within the traditional methods of collection of data, writing up of research and most particularly the research relationship, there were aspects of invisibility, oppression, submission and exploitation (Smith 1974, Cicoux 1976, Reinhartz 1988). It has taken longer for white feminist scholars to recognize that these same aspects were inherent in their own relations to women of color within and outside of academia.

Model 2 represents the continuation of the first research model. However, a gradual change takes place as feminist epistemology begins to be applied in practice.

Model 2

- more personal involvement between researcher/informant
- researcher open to the "different experiences of women" - their history, their lived experience.
- less controlled study - beginning to incorporate interactions into work
- gender is category of primary importance
- research "on women"

The need to give voice to women's experience is recognized and carried out by feminist researchers. The analysis of those experiences lies in the hands of the researcher. In brief, feminist epistemology argues that women are knowers (capable of knowing) and agents of knowledge; they are actors: they have different experiences than men: they have a history: and their emotional life is important in social life and culture. Research then from a feminist perspective, should reflect more than the knowing of the other. To this end feminist researchers began to depart from traditional methods of objectification, and changed their attitude and behavior toward their informants by incorporating personal involvement and interaction into their work. In the development of alternative modes of research, feminist researchers listened to women informant's personal experience concerning their lives and the lives of their families (Reinharz 1980; Oakley 1981; Smith 1981; Du Bois 1983; Klein 1983; Mies 1983; Harding 1987). They listened critically to how traditional social scientists conceptualize women and men's lives, and they studied gender relations by observing behavior previously seen as insignificant. Feminist scholarship challenged mainstream thought by criticizing dominant theories and assumptions, insisting that "gender must be a primary category of analysis" (Van Kirk 1988: 1). Finally, they generated problematics from the perspective of women's experiences as significant indicators of reality against which hypotheses could be tested (Harding 1987).

The next significant stage in the development of feminist methodology is shown in Model 3. This was the beginnings of an attempt to contextualize the study or to try to "capture the subjects world", or to "see things as they are - a whole, entire, complex" within the matrix of the subject's world" (Du Bois 1983: 111).

Model 3

- attempts to gain holistic understanding of subject's world
- feminist researchers began to recognize the possibility of alternatives to positivistic research
- both researcher and participant are "subjects"
- analysis arising from lived experience as told by subject
- researcher and subject share life experiences: intersubjectivity
- reflexivity seen as a necessary part of researcher's process and product
- social relations of researcher and participant must be taken into account
- research illuminates theory
- research "for women"

Scholars at this time assumed it might be possible to present a whole picture of the subject's world. A few feminist theorists suggested that one way to facilitate an inclusive view was to move away from categorization; the construction of artificial constants; the choosing of independent and dependent variables; and the separate investigation of variables in an additive linear fashion. This new method would try to present a holistic picture (Klein 1983: 93).

Becoming more attuned to the deeper aspects of women's existence, exploring and learning in parallel with researchers from other perspectives,⁶ feminists began to observe, listen, and speak differently, both in and about the research endeavor. In some instances feminist research complemented traditional social science research, as in the recovery and reappreciation of the work of women's scholarship, while in other instances,

⁶ See Shulamit Reinharz "Experiential Analysis: A Contribution to Feminist Research." in G. Bowles and R. Klein eds., *Theories of Women's Studies*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1983), Reinharz states that her creation of a different method "experiential analysis" has similar underlying assumptions as symbolic interactionism and other fields of thought.

Susan Harding in "Is There a Feminist Method? *Feminism and Methodology* S. Harding ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1987) states that she draws on old methods and reworks them through a feminist inquiry. Marjorie Shostak appreciated anthropologist V. Crapanzano's direction regarding her ethnographic field methods (PNG 1989)

such as the study of women as subjects of male dominance, they challenged the mainstream theories (Strathern 1987: 9).

The evolving awareness of the evils of colonial discourse, the rising recognition of the autonomy and rights of all individuals, no matter their race, color, class, or creed, and the struggles of oppressed peoples to bring these critical issues to the attention of the dominant society, caused feminists, along with scholars in every field, to take a serious look at the research endeavor and begin to make changes. By the early 1980s, the language in feminist theory referring to the research project began to change. It was suggested that both researcher and subject were subjects and that the subjects themselves were the "expert practitioners of their lives" (Smith 1981: 50). Feminists, along with other social scientists, recognized the need for a reflexive sociology which would present, not just the world of the participant, but the world of the researcher as well-- what she contributed to the research project through her class position and race, her motivations, choices, and presentation of herself (Baca Zinn et al 1986; Smith 1986; Spivak 1986; Bannerji 1987; Weedon 1987; Christman 1988; Heilbrun 1988). The circumstances in which knowledge was produced became more suspect, and feminist scholars extending the questions interpretive social scientists were asking about the social and political circumstances surrounding the research endeavor, began to ask what effect the gender of the researcher had on the researched (Acker, Barry and Essevald 1983; Stacey and Thorne 1985; Smith 1986; Lather 1986/88).

In Model 3 the importance of women's experience is recognized, and the research findings attempt to present the analysis in a contextualized manner. There is still a sense of the observer/observed relationship however; the researcher has not involved the participant in a fully egalitarian research project as she still has entire control of the research agenda, the process and product, and is the "translator" for her subject's experience.

Feminists kept looking for another type of research model which would provide for, and facilitate change in the lives of women (Benston 1982, Reinharz 1979). There was a need for a model that could provide for active research, for researchers and participants to be agents of change: a participatory action model evolved. The motivation of this methodology was to improve women's lives, translate theory into practice, take into account political struggles, and enable women to become "subjects of their own history" (Mies 1983).

Model 4 is the culmination of how the feminist inquiry on research methods has been used and encouraged by some contemporary feminists (Maguire 1987, Sistren 1986, Mbilinyi 1986, PNG 1986).

Model 4

- participatory
- collaborative
- action-oriented and empowering for participant
- partner relationship: non-authoritarian, egalitarian, trusting
- sharing of understandings and agendas
- joint efforts and monitoring of publication
- research "with" women

This methodology recognizes the agency of women and suggests that research projects should be participatory and collaborative, involving the research subject as a partner in work which will be action-oriented and empowering. The researcher is now involved as a facilitator instead of translator of experience, assisting the women's movement and scholarship by providing the opportunity both for women's voice to be heard and her agency to be empowered. In this approach the subjects become partners, participants, or consultants. The research question must be of concern to them both. The narrator can be given the opportunity to interview the researcher on an ongoing basis about the research. The relations would be non-authoritarian, non-manipulative, and the researcher would have a humble relation to the subject: there would be equality, sharing, and trust (Reinharz 1980, McGuire 1987, Mbilinyi 1986). The exact conditions of data

gathering would be reported, participant observation would take place in the natural setting of the person studied, and meaningful action processes and activities would be recorded. Juxtaposed to the data gathering, the analysis would proceed on the basis of participation from both subjects. There would be a sharing of understandings and connections, and a quest for intersubjectivity of meaning. This method would be self-reflexive, in that the researcher would ask herself such questions as "what is the impact of my age, race, culture or other attributes on the research?" (Reinharz 1980: 182).

Research relations changed radically through the evolution of thought about methodology, moving away from the distanced, "sterile" mode of Model 1, on from the less-controlled studies as in Model 2, past the understanding of subject involvement but researcher control and translation of experience in Model 3, to Model 4 where a refinement of understanding occurs concerning the relation of the researcher to her work and subject. For example, Mies (1983) suggested that the researcher cultivate a "conscious partiality"; this orientation to the work and the subject goes beyond empathy, in that maintaining a degree of partial identity for herself enables the researcher to see distortions in the work and in the interaction of participants. Reinharz (1980: 366, 175) suggested that "a critical self-awareness in the context of engagement with others to whom the researcher is accountable", (which she called 'experiential analysis') could be very useful in creating a "new and heightened sense of awareness" for the researcher.

Mies (1983) argued that it is necessary for researchers to develop a certain approach when engaging in this research. She observed that the research project would not be chosen purely to further the researcher's career, but rather to further the cause of women by addressing issues of vital concern to the women's movement. Lather (1986) extends the foregoing ideas by suggesting that it was the moral right of the individuals being studied to be enabled to participate in the decisions about research which claimed to represent them. This type of research model I would suggest has evolved a research

"with" women. The culmination of such a partnership would be a collaboration in publishing or monitoring publications before their dissemination.

Reviewing the changes in feminist methodologies over time allows us to see that feminist researchers have moved from the idea of doing research *on* women, to doing research *for* women and more recently to the idea of doing research *with* women.⁷ In the progression of methodology there has been a great degree of soul searching, much adjustment, diversification and innovation. This evolution of perspective places feminist researchers in a position not only to investigate issues of import to women at large but also to be of empowering service to the communities for whom they work.

Concerns

In this section, I will discuss and criticize these feminist research frameworks according to new work being done on life histories. In the third part of this chapter I examine post modern theories which critique the assumptions which underlie the models I have presented here. In addition I present new theory about participatory research. At this stage it is useful to see what feminists in the early 1980s perceived could be problems in the new ideas about method, and then to proceed to look at how life histories reflect the changing ideas about methodology.

Reinharz suggests that a participatory model of methodology is an ideal type, one that would be difficult to achieve (1980: 182). Mies (1983), having experienced participatory research, notes that action research can only work in certain circumstances, where there is already an active ongoing women's organization that can carry forward the activities and work created through the original research project. Klein (1983: 100) warns of the creation of what Gloria Bowles coined as a "supermethodology" noting that

⁷ I do not mean to imply that feminist methodology sees only work with women as important, rather I must add that doing research with men, families, and communities is also a major interest and commitment of most feminist methodologies, particularly participatory research.

feminist researchers have to be careful about methodologies which incorporate five or six disciplines, and become too incomprehensible and difficult to put into practice. Acker, Barry, and Essevald (1983) suggested that there are ongoing contradictions inherent in research which aims to be liberating. They stated that ultimately the researcher must objectify the research in order for it to be used in academia, "if an analysis that links the individual to processes outside her immediate social world is to be achieved". In addition they suggested that objectification would be minimized if both participants could share the analysis process, but often there are "preconditions" which cannot be met, such as, "similarity of interest, ideology, [or] language between researcher and researched" (1983: 425). They had begun to recognize that the research process when carried out over an extended period of time becomes "part of the process of change" and in so doing puts the whole validity of the project into question. They theorized that several accounts might more directly reflect the process of change, and that the accounts themselves are "constantly in the process of transformation" (1983: 433). In attempting to reconstruct social reality and generate theory, Acker, Barry and Essevald were hopeful that sociologists could find representations of experience to create a sociology "for" women.

It is important finally, to consider a cautionary word from Dorothy Smith (1981: 49). Smith's argument extends the critique Acker, Barry, and Essevald raised concerning the "objectification" of research work and the fact that writing up women's experiences and analysis for academia predisposes the stance which must be taken in order to process the research. Smith argues further that it is the academic discourse itself and the constraints of the institutional setting which present the greatest barriers. She explains that it is not possible for a feminist sociologist to take up new egalitarian roles and conceptions, then present them in a discourse which proceeds from within an institutional structure which is a core part of the ruling apparatus. She feels this position defeats the purpose and states:

. . . The sociologist learns the setting, the work process, the way the everyday worlds are organized from them [the research participants]. The problematic of her inquiry is somewhere in these. The authority of their experience is for her final. They are the expert practitioners of their lives. But to take up such alternative practice...and to situate the resulting work in discourse, in the university setting and the like, is to nullify the experience. [The] sociologist must find alternative ways of relating her work to their lives and the uses of women and others outside the ruling apparatus... (Smith 1981: 50).

Smith does not suggest what alternate ways could be used in this article, but other feminists took up this idea and explored the possibilities (Lather 1986, Mbilinyi 1986, McGuire 1987) of working for and with women in the community, developing a feminist analysis, and then taking findings back to both the academic community and their participants in the field.

Reviewing the change of the feminist perspective towards methodology over the past 20 years, and creating models to reflect these ideas, assists me in an examination of a number of life histories written by and about women. I will examine some of these life histories and see how the methodologies outlined have related to practice. First, I will look at a few life histories that predate the feminist movement, and then look at texts whose authors have been informed through feminism. We can begin to appreciate retrospectively the refinement of the method and how this reflects in the presentation and production of these histories.

Life Histories: Early to Contemporary

When feminist scholars discovered that the life history method was well suited to the presentation of women's experiences, life histories became a vehicle for the voice of women and their history.

Ruth Underhill's autobiography, Chona, Papago Woman (1971) a research study she conducted in the 1930s, is considered to be an "autobiographical classic in literature" (Spindler in Underhill 1971: vi), and "a responsible effort in cross cultural communication. . ." (Lurie in Bataille & Sands 1984: 7). Underhill's success is attributed to her training in careful observation and cautious interpretation. For Underhill, working within the methodological climate of the 1930s (Model 1), there would have been no thought of consulting Chona about the work itself, for example the prioritization of themes in the work, or any editing procedures. Also, Underhill's work is reflective of other early life histories, in that she chose not to explain her editorial process for her readers, such as the criteria for omissions or inclusions (Bataille & Sands 1984: 50-68). Regardless of the lack of material documentation, this work is still seen as a unique life history, rich and eloquent, because it is a woman's story and has been described as "the only complete personal narrative of a nineteenth century Indian woman that is not romanticized...or a story of a conversion...or a case history to illustrate ethnographic data...or a plea against unjust treatment of tribal people" (Bataille & Sands 1984: 53).

Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Moslem Hausa is a rich descriptive text recorded by Mary Smith in 1949-50. It is described in the preface as being an anthropological document of Hausa culture, and a travel autobiography which will take the reader to "strange worlds". Smith's husband introduces the study and explains the methods used, thereby providing, I would argue, a male authority's stamp of approval and an anthropologist's "cultural key" by which the society could be understood. All this was in accord with the anthropological methodology of the time (Model 1) which dictated a

controlled research situation and separated and distanced the researcher from the informant in the final text, if not also in reality. The only words of Mary Smith are at the back of the book where she shares with the reader a few letters sent to her from Baba. Reading this book today I am struck by the act of the silencing of Mary Smith, whose personal accounts would have added greatly to this narrative. Geiger (1983: 341) observes that much of Baba's life, as recorded by Mary Smith, actually negates the representation of Hausa culture by Smith's husband in the foreword of the book, as well as other studies of anthropologists of the time. This life history illuminates many aspects of the culture which have not been represented elsewhere. Extending that critique, other researchers point out that while Smith's husband "dismisses women's relationships as of little importance", the fact is that Baba's narrative itself "consistently demonstrates their power and vitality in Hausa life" (PNG 1986: 342).

Sarah Levine (1979: 2) voices dissatisfaction, however, with Baba's life history and others of its type. She argues that, "African women appear more as informants on their own culture than as individual personalities of interest in themselves". She also notes that the "social behavior of these women is well-documented, but their patterns of personal experience and private feelings have rarely been explored". Levine is expressing the need for feminist scholarship to move beyond "sociological abstractions of ethnographic description" and to get to the real person and their feelings about the everyday world.

Barbara Sherman Heyl in her study of The Madame as Entrepreneur: Career Management in House Prostitution (1979) uses a comprehensive sociological and psychological theoretical framework to explore the life history of an American prostitute named Ann. During a period of four years, Heyl verifies this life history using extensive interviews, archival sources, written statements and teaching tapes made by her participant, against private and public documents and interviews with significant people in Ann's life. Heyl provides corroboration about the truthfulness of her participant's

statements of her experience, attitudes and behavior, by conducting interviews with, and researching documents of, health and legal officials who assisted Ann.

Heyl shows concern in her study for researcher bias, and acknowledges that the changes she has undergone herself during the study may bias the findings and affect the internal validity of the study. In light of her concern Heyl explains that she kept notes about these changes; unfortunately for the reader she did not share these findings. Heyl's methodology was to take Ann's experiences as data, and through sociological analysis present a theory of career management in prostitution. Although it is Ann's story and extensive time was devoted in the study to all aspects of Ann's life, her own voice is rarely heard.

This application of the life history method is more along the lines of a sociological case study presentation and falls into the methodological framework of Model 2. Ann is the "centre of the data gathering process" (1979: 185), but the researcher is the interpreter and translator who narrates the participant's experience and generates theory from the interpretation of the data. The reader does not get the chance to engage in this process because the participant's voice is fragmented. However, Heyl speaks about Ann and the study in a more reflexive manner in the postscript where she shares with the reader the fact that there were aspects of collaboration in the recording of the history, and some empowerment was a result of the process. Heyl facilitated change in Ann's life, and Heyl discusses briefly how the life history process can have repercussions in the participant's lives. As Heyl explains, "talks and friendship had been among the 'psychological catalysts' behind her [Ann's] ultimate decision to move out of the prostitution world" (1979: 184).

One criticism I have about Heyl's method which may also reflect the racial understandings of the time, is her marginalization of a woman who could have proved a key informant. Heyl gave almost equal interview time to a bill collector-a white, middle-aged, 35 year old graduate student who collected payments for several months for a

prostitute working in Ann's "House", and to a black, 45 year old housekeeper, who was a constant employee of Ann's for seven years. This housekeeper not only knew all the prostitutes, but also knew all the customers, and could be trusted "to work the door and keep police from getting into the house to make an arrest" (1979: 64). Heyl spent 45 minutes with the bill collector, only one hour and some informal conversations with the housekeeper. Yet despite this important oversight, Heyl contributes to life history research development by her discoveries of the dynamics involved in the relations between researcher and subject. She comments that the employment of this method can actually "reshape old relationships and create new ones" and in this process Heyl discovers that using this method obligates researchers to give, as she explains it, "human values top priority and to subordinate possible research gains to the personal rights and interests of the subject" (1979: 189). Heyl's work is one of the few sociological studies written by a woman about women.⁸

In the production of Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian (1961) Nancy Osterich Lurie, in contrast to earlier researchers, was able to take advantage of new technology by using a tape recorder. Lurie records this life history verbatim, adding her comments and cultural information in the notes and appendices, and leaving the story to stand by itself. Mountain Wolf Woman adopted Nancy as her niece and went to live with Nancy in order to record her story. In these unique circumstances Nancy was able to tape record and allow her respondent to edit as they went along. Lurie clearly outlines her method, including it as a supplementation to the text.

Langness (1981: 709) notes that this history "contains nothing in the way of analysis, but Lurie's comments do give us an insight into the relationship of Winnebago males and females, and the Winnebago attitude towards whites". Langness describes

⁸ See Plummer's (1983) review of life histories.

Lurie's work as an autobiography combining individual narrative and ethnographic detail. Geiger, in contrast to Langness' account of Lurie's analysis, observes that this narrative contains some information about personal relations between the narrator and the writer (1986: 346). This study illustrates the beginnings of a reflexivity later seen by feminist and interpretive sociologists and anthropologists as integral to a holistic presentation of method. This study is an example of Model 2 with a gradual coming together in relations between subjects, and with leanings toward reflexivity and involvement of the subject as in Model 3, and in collaborative editing of the work as in Model 4, a highly unusual innovation at that time.

Kelly Holden, in researching Yaqui Women: Contemporary Life Histories (1978) carried out 25 interviews in Yaqui communities between 1968 and 1972. She chose to present four of these narratives. Her concern was to investigate the factors which affected the structuring of interpersonal relationships, and the adaptive strategies women used. Other topics were generated in the course of the work. Holden's text is an example of earlier ethnographic works which answer to the traditional model of scientific research, but are moving toward an appreciation of the neglect of women in such works. I say "moving" because Holden chose to write these histories in the third person, which creates a distancing effect for the reader and detracts from the presentation of the women's voices. Holden made sure to include a very detailed introduction of 69 pages explaining her research methodology and the circumstances of her research. She diverged from previous ethnographic research by recognizing the need to select informants on grounds other than "stellar personality, high status, eloquence, or unusually dramatic lives" (1979: 4). Holden stated that her sample was both too small to claim statistical validation or to be typical or representative of Yaqui society, but that her approach "was primarily to offer insights into some aspects of the lives of these Yaqui women that are not otherwise available in ethnographic reports" (1979: 31). Holden used comparative data from other sources to evaluate her findings and chose selected topics

such as "household", "emotional bonds", "kinship", etc. within which to frame the life history narratives. Holden used the life history narratives to fit into theoretical frameworks. As she explains, "[t]he basic tenet underlying this exercise in collecting life histories is that individualized data can contribute an important dimension for anthropological problems..." (1979: 31).

In this regard she was following the anthropological model of presenting a life history as supplementation to a cultural study in order to illuminate theory. But Holden proceeded to diverge from the traditional methodology: she chose women informants only, recognizing they were underrepresented in the Yaqui literature and in the field of life history research. She recognized gossip as important, and she described her relationships with the women in detail, she also situated the women within their communities and families. Holden did not involve the women in the production of the life narratives, nor did she engage them in any other aspect of the research. Her study was devised to produce narratives about women and prove the usefulness of the method in solving anthropological problems. It stands as a fine example of traditional ethnographic work with some influences of the feminist epistemology, though Holden does not acknowledge any feminist orientation. I would suggest Holden's study reflects the methodological stance of Model 2 in her appreciation of gender as a category of primary importance as well as the fact that she is open to the lived experiences of women; her research is "on women". Holden's text is one of the very few histories which deals in great detail with matters of reliability, and representativeness -- issues I will discuss in the last section of this chapter.

Sarah Levine's Mothers and Wives: Gusii Women of East Africa (1979) is a study based on the use of seven life histories of women in Kenya who belong to the Gusii ethnic group. Levine focused on the effects of male labor migration caused by postcolonial rural impoverishment, on the women of the community. Levine, aware that ethnographic work should move "beyond sociological abstractions" and should look to

describing the real person and their feelings (1979: 2), chose to reflect more of the women's feelings about themselves and to include herself as "reactively present in the lives she describes" through a psychosocial analysis (Geiger 1986: 343).

Levine's study falls between the methodological stance of Model 2 and Model 3 because while operating through a theoretical orientation of doing work "on women" Levine shows a disposition toward Model 3 with her awareness that the women's words about themselves are important, that she should attempt to gain an understanding of the subject's world, and that reflexivity and intersubjectivity are important factors in the research relation.

Levine's work provoked interesting debate among feminist theorists. Jane Monnig Atkinson (1982) addressed the importance of cultural context in her critique of Levine's research. She observed that Levine's work on Gusii women was criticized by other feminists for representing women as passive victims instead of actors with their own agendas. Atkinson states that Gusii women chose implicitly to represent themselves as victims in one phase of their lives, whereas in other societies women are inarticulate about their oppression. "A fuller analysis needs to be given of Gusii personhood", Atkinson says, "in order to fully understand common cultural themes and the place of Gusii women and men" (1982: 251).

It is important here to diverge from our life history review for a moment to consider a further extension of Atkinson's critique of "feminist ethnography". Atkinson makes an observation which could be argued as questioning one of the "planks" in the platform of feminist epistemology. This position holds that women are actors. Atkinson says however, that it is critical that feminists do not insist that women in ethnography should "always appear in control of their lives", more specifically she argues that,

... we need to analyze the gender constructs through which people express themselves and to play those cultural formulations off against the structural and situational dimensions of women's and men's lives in a given society, passive, active, victim, agent-our own stereotype can further confuse our readings of informant's presentation of selves. If Gusii mothers can portray themselves as

victims, we must explore that assertion in the context of Gusii culture and social relations (Atkinson 1982: 250).

Atkinson assists feminists in the realization that research must be constructed according to how the participants situate and construct their selves in their culture.

A critique of Atkinson's work is important for highlighting another element of methodology which needs consideration. In her review essay of anthropology in *Signs* (1982), Atkinson evaluates the impact of feminist theory on the writing of ethnography in anthropology. She states that, "[a]nthropology as a discipline thrives on a tension between theory building and fine-grained ethnographic investigation. The anthropology of women is no exception to this pattern" (1982: 237). This statement seems to indicate that ethnography illuminates theories about women's lives. While this is no doubt true, a step forward was made with the development of a methodology which sees the narrative method as illuminating *the lives of women*, rather than illuminating *theory*. It also sees the importance of facilitating the liberation of women in helping their "coming to voice". Atkinson describes her field as "an anthropology of women". This research had value in bringing women's experience to the fore. Other feminists in social science at that time were beginning to look toward social science research "for" women (Oakley 1982, Smith 1982).

This article reflects the trend of the time to "fit" ethnographies into theoretical frameworks. Although it pays close attention to giving voice to women and the contextualization of women's lives, nevertheless it could be argued that the purpose of the research Atkinson is presenting and reviewing, anthropological research "on" women, is motivated to use the lives of women to *prove* theories, perpetuating the traditional model of social science research. Useful to this discussion is the charge that hooks (1984) leveled at white feminist researchers whom she said were using the contributions of black women's lives to validate their own theoretical assumptions. This approach she felt repeats the racial chauvinism practiced by earlier male researchers.

A further example of life history method in which the recorder shows creativity, flexibility, and the ability to move beyond theoretical constraints is Julie Cruikshank's Women's Lives In Athapaskan Narrative (1984). Cruikshank set out to record life histories of Athapaskan women, in order to learn about the social history of the North. She had obtained the agreement of the women and offered to give the histories to the women and their families when completed. However, the informants decided after several months of recording that they wanted to talk about traditional stories rather than their own lives. One woman said, "I have no money left to leave for my grandchildren. My stories are my wealth" (Cruikshank 1984: 9).

What is unique about Cruikshank's approach is that she immediately shifted the focus of her research and took the lead from her narrators. She said, "I gained a totally different perspective on their lives and experiences than I would have if I had persisted with my own original research plan" (1984: 9). Cruikshank gained considerably by being flexible, for as a result of hearing these stories she came to realize there were conceptual differences between how Athapaskans and Europeans view their gender system. She also, and more importantly perhaps, began to see how critical it is for the researcher to recognize the concepts and analysis arising from the narrator's understanding of her world. Cruikshank (1984: 9) observed that, "Western researchers inevitably approach problems from a set of conceptual models and theories developed from a western tradition". She suggests that any theory used to explain a woman's life "must begin from her own viewpoint, within her own framework". Cruikshank's work seems to fall nearly wholly in the methodological framework of Model 3 in her recognition of alternatives to positivistic research, her attempt to gain an understanding of her subjects' world through their desires and their own constructs of their experiences, and her reflexivity in her text. She does not talk about her social relations to the women, but her research orientation, as she expresses it in her article, does reflect an appreciation about research "for women".

New Models for Life History Research

The final three life histories in this section represent significant moves forward in the writing and production of life histories.

Marjorie Shostak's book Nisa a !Kung Woman is widely regarded as "one of the more successful experiments in rehumanizing ethnographic writing" (Pratt 1986: 42). Shostak, like Lurie, allows the narrative of Nisa, a woman of the !Kung bushmen, to stand by itself, separate from ethnographic comments. She assists the reader however by prefacing each chapter with data from previous research, which gives a contextual framework for Nisa's experiences. It also allows the reader to make comparisons with the other !Kung. Atkinson (1982) observes that Shostak had the advantage of access to extensive knowledge about the !Kung. She also mentions that Shostak's book is strong because it is simple. We may ask is this because Shostak does not have to be concerned with analysis? Atkinson suggests that "Shostak does not have to press beyond the task of placing Nisa's narrative in the context of Kung society and culture. But given the excellent material available on the Kung that suffices" (Atkinson 1982: 251).

The motivations of a researcher, and the social and political context in which a researcher interacts with participants, are important considerations in the research project. This is illustrated clearly in Pratt's critique of Shostak's research endeavor. Shostak was searching for clarification of some issues of concern to Western feminists. She expected that the study of !Kung women, whom she said had undergone, "only recent and subtle" cultural change, would perhaps provide some answers. However, Shostak failed to acknowledge, as Pratt (1986: 45) charges, that three hundred years of persecution, massacre, and enslavement of !Kung peoples is hardly "recent and subtle change". This oppression would most assuredly alter how women saw themselves. I would suggest it can be argued that not only was this an error of gross oversight, but the silence on this issue also reflects the ongoing problem of race relations between the black

and white races, both historically and in contemporary times. Within this context, it was also not acknowledged that anthropologists had been visiting and studying the !Kung for nearly a century before Shostak arrived. These research projects had already predisposed the !Kung to expect suitable rewards, material goods and behaviors. There can be no doubt the !Kung learned certain survival strategies in order to interact with anthropologists!

In light of these considerations it is interesting then to read Shostak's defense twenty years after her research took place. "Since then the !Kung's long history of contact with other cultures, which we were aware of but did not emphasize, and the "myth" of their isolation, have come much to the fore" (Shostak 1989: 23). Pratt suggests that anthropologists stand to gain from looking at themselves as writing inside as well as outside the discursive traditions that precede them, inside as well as outside the histories of contact they follow. Yet another way of refining Pratt's observation is to apply Dorothy Smith's (1981) admonition that feminist researchers need to understand their relations within the ruling apparatus and how they stand in relation to their subject. A serious question for researchers could be, whether the power of class and the possession of privilege hold the participants apart. The researcher, Smith feels, needs to understand and acknowledge the social relations underlying the experienced worlds of her subject and herself. As mentioned previously, Gaytri Spivak addresses this point succinctly by saying that feminist researchers must have another focus. It is not merely asking, "who am I", but also questioning, "who is the other woman, how am I naming her, how does she name me?" Spivak says this approach is very important in the creation of bonds between women, because "the absence of such crucial questions creates the barriers between colonized women and their investigators" (Spivak 1986: 39).

To return to the discussion of Shostak, regardless of the critical oversight in Shostak's work, the text itself is memorable and informative, and has been lauded as a model for contemporary academic research (Geiger 1986, Atkinson 1982). The reason

for Shostak's success, as cited by Atkinson and Geiger, is that Shostak presented several voices in her text: Nisa's voice, her own voice as she describes their relationship and her research, and the background cultural narration. Shostak assists her reading audience to make their own decisions about the representativeness of Nisa's life by carefully presenting the life of the subject within the contextual material about the !Kung. This life history study is one of the first of its kind to present multivocality, reflexivity, and attention to the experience of the subject and her world, as well as considering and discussing reciprocity --in that Nisa would benefit from publishing royalties. It falls into the frameworks of both Models 2 and 3 as the research is "on women" and also "for women"; Shostak's goal is to find answers for anthropology and women's studies from her subject (using the subject to prove/disprove theory), but an additional goal is to illuminate one woman's life for women's history and anthropology. The relations between participants are non-egalitarian; the life history followed Shostak's agenda, and she was in charge of interviewing, editing, theoretical conclusions, and publishing.

Marjorie Mbilinyi conducted her life history research study in Rungwe Tanzania with Rebecca Kalindile. In order to find out about women's responses to colonial rule, she set up a local history project and conducted many oral histories and interviews. Mbilinyi shares the details concerning the labor process involved in the production of the major life history work, in an article I'd Have Been A Man: Politics and the Labor Process in Producing Personal Narratives (1989). Mbilinyi has pressed beyond the feminist researchers preceding her to both open up the life history process and to make it truly interactive and holistic. This approach exemplifies Model 4 in the careful attention Mbilinyi pays to collaborative research, the egalitarian relationship between participants, the sharing of understandings and theory, and attention to how the project will affect Mbilinyi's participant and her community. It empowers the participant, and enables the participant and community to acquire a reconstruction of their history as well as producing resource material for academia.

In this article Mbilinyi describes the working process of participant interaction, the context of both participants' lives (the researcher and the researched), a summary of the actual life history (to be published separately later) and most unusual, "an analysis of her participant [Kalindile s] objectives to the personal narrative, the changing nature of [their] relationship and the "crisis of perspective" they experienced (1989: 1).

Mbilinyi's research was informed by participatory research and feminism. Her research goals were to conduct a democratic project in order to share "knowledge with the knowledge of the oppressed, in the proces . of the production of new knowledge". Mbilinyi consulted with her participant about all aspects of the research and production process. She shared her concerns and anger with Kalindile her participant, taking courage to face difficult and painful confrontations regarding misunderstandings between them. Mbilinyi acquired information from Kalindile which, while showing up her own western conceptual and cultural blindness, opened her eyes to Kalindile's remarkable survival strategies. Mbilinyi and Kalindile agreed to have the life history reproduced in written and visual forms which were made accessible in the local languages.

Mbilinyi has many suggestions for life history researchers. To use a few examples, she suggests that the life historian (her term for narrator) should know from the very beginning that she "will be a full participant in later stages of the production process, in transcribing, editing and organizing the material" (1989: 35). The recorder must realize that historians will have their own agenda for the creation and production of the history. Furthermore, Mbilinyi suggests setting up a local historical society that would support the historian, and help to create a feeling of accountability on the part of the historian. Mbilinyi has consciously set out to create a new form and process for the creation and production of the life history, based on a feminist participatory orientation. It is one of the first practical applications of the feminist participatory model published by an individual. Mbilinyi may be one of the first researchers to discuss in detail both the process and product of life history research both with her participant and her readers.

The final life history presented here is a text whose writers have gone through the participatory process entirely and which exemplifies Model 4 in every aspect of that methodological framework. Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women (1987) is a book produced by the Sistren Theatre Collective, a group of working class Jamaican women. These stories tell of women's oppression and their survival strategies, and touch upon issues of concern to many women in Jamaica, such as housing, violence, work, and relations between women, men and children. The material for this book was created through collective meetings in which the women consulted about and took part in every area of the division of labor. One woman was designated as interviewer/editor, and "all Sistren took part in secretarial work, transcription and in discussing and shaping the material" (Sistren 1987: 15).

The women explored together, through the drawing of pictures, the themes they wished to pursue; their voices were then recorded as they described and discussed these images. This process led to a second stage of individual interviewing which focused around central questions and was also tape recorded. Several other refinements of the material occurred through discussion and collective agreement. An important aspect of this book which should be noted is that the women chose to have many of their stories recorded in Patwah (Patois) dialect. This was a political decision, a statement to the world that their language is a reality, that they refused "to imitate a colonizer" (1987: 17). For the benefit of an English readership they included a glossary at the back of their book explaining their terms.

In all details this book is a reflection of the "ideal type" of a feminist-participatory method. All aspects of the life history process were discussed and subject to consensus decision-making, including the modifications of the final draft, the authorship credits, and the use of the proceeds from the sale of the book. In the published text, Honour Ford Smith, artistic director of Sistren, introduces the life histories and provides the setting for the stories in the context of Jamaican life. The women themselves provide the analysis

of their situations within their life stories. The women of Sistren use this book to make a political statement about the oppression of women in Jamaica. In keeping with a participatory action model (as previously defined by Mies) we can describe these women as being agents for change within their community and the larger society. They have used their experiences, as described in their book, to mobilize and support themselves and other women in creating economic, educational, and aesthetic⁹ opportunities for women to uplift themselves.

The situation in which *Lionheart Gal* evolved is unusual in that a *group* of women reproduced parts of their life stories together. It has been more usual, as we have shown in our literature review, for life histories to be produced by two people, a researcher and a participant.

⁹ Sistren is known not only for its street theatre, but also for silk screen designs, and a quarterly magazine.

Conclusion

This section has shown the gradual development of feminist methodology as reflected in the process of life history research. I have illustrated that the life history methodology has been greatly improved through the stimulation of feminist scholarship, in moving from a research "on" women, to a research "for" women, to the contemporary perspective of facilitating research "with" women.

In comparing the latest manifestations of feminist research methodology with early positivistic approaches, I would argue that feminists have in practice redefined the definition.¹⁰ Langness gives of the life history. I suggest that a new definition of the life history method is in order; it could be as follows:

A life history is an extensive record of a person's life and a description of a social process. This method combines the talents of a narrator, who tells her life story and a researcher who records it. Together they create and produce the major narrative, and a record of their understandings of the life story.

This new definition serves to indicate the much larger range of interaction, intersubjectivity, and collaboration possible in this method.

During my library research I found in the literature that postmodern theories analyze a number of foundational aspects concerning life histories, ethnographies, and texts. I realized that the innovations I had noted in feminist methodologies in all likelihood had been influenced by postmodernist thought. I understood then that I must explore what these frameworks offer to an understanding of the production of process and product in personal narratives. Also I found a perspective which critiqued the participatory movement and provided an additional perspective on collaborative research. In the second part of this chapter I will discuss new thoughts about life history methodology within the framework of postmodern theories and contemporary feminist participatory theory.

¹⁰ "A life history is an extensive record of a person's life as told to and recorded by another, who then edits and writes the life as though it were autobiography" (Langness 1965.4)

Life History as Topic of Investigation:

The Social Production of Knowledge

We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we use to make new fictions, new narratives (Heilbrun 1988: 7).

Contemporary researchers in sociology and anthropology, as well as researchers from other disciplines have begun to explore the merits of narrative texts and the life history method. McCall and Wittner (1990: 81) argue that the narrative form has been depreciated in Western language usage. As a discourse, the narrative form, in comparison with other discourses, (such as those considered "scholarly, scientific, technical, or the like)"... has been disdained, discouraged, diagnosed as evidence or cause of subordinate status". They go on to say however, that recent research from such diverse fields as narrative theory and psychology are showing that narrative is a "fundamental mode of comprehension" (quoting Louis Mink) and that stories, along with arguments, are modes of cognitive functioning, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, and of constructing reality (quoting Jerome Bruner).

Recent methodological thought in sociology and anthropology, building on the growing realization of the merits of narrative texts, have expanded the perspective which sees life history narrative as a "touchstone" for evaluating theories (Becker 1970: 67), or as a sensitizing tool for issues and problems in the field, or as a complement to other methods (Plummer 1983: 72). The life history method, for example, is no longer simply regarded, according to Marcus and Fisher (1986: 182, 183), as "a narrative frame for stringing together life cycle rituals, socialization patterns, and a generational history as experienced by one individual; nor is it left to unique individuals". Rather, they state,

"the life history deconstructs in the fullest sense: not making the subject disappear, but rather illuminating the social and constructive elements of an individual that makes him or her potent in a social context".

Personal narratives, as life histories are currently being called, are recognized as illuminating, "both the logic of individual courses of action and the effects of system-level constraints within which those courses evolve". Each narrative has the potential to describe, not only the historical context in which the individual has lived, but also "the working out within a specific life situation of deliberate courses of action that in turn have the potential to undermine or perpetuate the conditions and relationships in which the life has evolved" (PNG 1989: 6). These thick descriptions, by presenting the details of lived experience, are able to assist in the clarification of sociological abstractions, such as "society", "social structure", and "social change" (McCall 1985: 169-70).

Life narratives can provide counter-hegemonic insights, exposing the absences and inadequacies of the dominant ideology, and often proving that the dominant viewpoint is "particularistic rather than universal" (PNG 1989: 7). Most recently, as we have shown in participatory research, life histories are proving to be an excellent tool for groups of people who have been marginalized and/or ignored. Producing life histories can help these individuals and groups in their efforts towards "formulating, publicizing, and pursuing change"... "reconstructing knowledge"...and for "developing their own past and future", as well as presenting new knowledge about the larger society (McCall and Wittner 1990: 47). As these scholars further point out, "who speaks and who is heard are political questions, a fact that is especially apparent when people in positions of low status and power find their voice".

Past interest in life histories focused on how such narratives could assist sociologists to expand theory, but this singular orientation is rapidly changing. Kenneth Plummer (1990: 126) states that contemporary scholars in the past ten years have become increasingly interested in the life history as a topic of investigation. The way in which a

life history is carried out, the interactions of the participants, their "worlds" in relation to each other, and the recording of the research, are now also areas of interest and importance to social scientists (Crapanzano 1980; Personal Narratives Group 1989; Smith 1986; Stacey 1988; Christman 1988; DeVault 1990; Clifford & Marcus 1986; Geiger 1986; Linden 1990; Visweswaran 1988; D. Gordon 1988; Denzin 1989). Experimentation in the field of anthropology and sociology are yielding new genres of work which produce multiple authorship and facilitate the informants speaking for themselves (Linden 1990; Marcus & Clifford 1986; Mbilinyi 1989). In addition, researchers are becoming more interested in the exact conditions of interaction between participants (Denzin 1989, Emerson and Pollner 1988; 1991, Rochford 1991). The postmodern movement has, for example, expanded our understanding of narrative discourse, deconstructive criticism, and the meanings of gender and language (Weedon 1987: 19), all of which can be useful in forming new insights and theory about life history methodology. Many scholars in life history and women's studies are writing and debating various aspects of life history methodology as seen through postmodern theoretical frameworks.

Postmodernism and Ethnography

Postmodern theories have presented new and interesting ideas to the study of life history methodology. In attempting to define postmodernism, a synthesis of ideas is useful, as the term relates to diverse theoretical positions, some inconsistent with others; the term has no one fixed meaning (Weedon 1987: 19,20). Dickens and Fontana (1989: 183) suggest postmodernism may be defined as "a crisis of representation" where traditional standards no longer apply. Postmodern theories seek to criticize positivist assumptions about beliefs concerning the self, language, power, and knowledge. The neutrality and objectivity of scholars and the academy have been called into question, as have the taken-for-granted assumptions that "serve as legitimation for contemporary

Western culture" (Flax 1987: 624). Postmodern thought seeks to develop theory which does not rely on "traditional philosophical underpinnings" (Fraser & Nicholson 1990: 21).

Theories about postmodernism have developed through the works of scholars such as Derrida, Kristeva, Lacan, Lyotard, Foucault, and Althusser. These theories, Weedon (1988: 34) suggests inform: American literary criticism, "in which they are concerned with the free play of meaning in literary texts..."; French feminist theories concerning, "...the rewriting of the meanings of gender and language"; and the work of Foucault concerning his 'detailed historical analysis of discourse and power....'. In the realm of social theory, Denzin (1990: 146) suggests that the postmodern perspective seeks to "resist attempts to produce and apply the classical 'sociology-is-a-science-of-the-empirical-world' model to the current moment." He explains that postmodernists see the "grand sociological masters" such as Parsons, Merton, and Goffman as producing work which "mapped out a social world" not experienced today. The mandate of postmodernists, according to Denzin, is to make sense of the complexities of everyday lived experiences in the world today, through an interpretive framework; one which does not use preconceived categories.

It is in the realm of epistemology concerning the production of knowledge, language usage and subjectivity that the postmodern perspective is useful to inform life history methodology. Denzin suggests these inquiries seek to know how "words, texts, and their meanings play a pivotal part in relations of race, gender and class, and how they shape the emergent political conditions of the post modern world." The postmodern inquiry attempts to connect, "the world of lived experience to the larger textual-cultural systems which create and impose their meanings on everyday life" (1990: 146). Tyler (1986: 131-2) describes this process as fragmentary, one which "cannot be organized around familiar ethnographic categories such as kinship, economy, and religion.... At

best, we can make do with a collection of indexical anecdotes or telling particulars with which to portend that larger unity beyond explicit textualization...."

In his book Interpretive Biography (1989: 35) Denzin criticizes traditional approaches by sociologists to autobiographical literature. For our purposes it is useful, as both an example of postmodern analysis, and for the concerns Denzin raises, to include part of his analysis here. Denzin examines the traditional approach used by sociologists. He suggests they canonized early life history works, then measured or produced new works by the criteria established in the earlier works. Denzin argues that this type of approach is flawed, because it fails to see that the genre itself is a social construction. He argues:

This view dates the beginnings of the genre with an original text and compares all subsequent representations of it to the canonizing text. Thus sociologists compare contemporary life histories and sociological autobiographies to their earliest version.

Denzin states further that the traditional approach is too narrow and confining; it reproduces "the concern for linearity in life histories" and, "fails to consider how subjects and authors are created by specific ideologies in specific historical moments. It assumes that authors of autobiographies and life histories have been the same since time immemorial". My own brief review of life histories affirms a facet of Denzin's argument, in that the changes I present in methodologies mirror the change in academic perspectives developed over particular periods of time in this case, 1930 - 1990.

Subjectivity

As social scientists are becoming increasingly aware that inquiry itself is a behavior, more attention is being placed on the subjectivity of the researcher and the interaction of the participants. Although the subjective aspect of personal narratives has generally been viewed for the past 60 years with suspicion or disdain, some researchers (such as sociologist C. Shaw) recognized the inherent possibilities of the subjective

stance, and made use of the life history method in their work- even achieving fame in the face of mainstream methodology. Shaw (1951: 2-3) explains his perspective in light of the research he was conducting at the time with a juvenile delinquent:

It should be pointed out...that the validity and value of the personal document are not dependent upon its objectivity or veracity. It is not expected that the delinquent will necessarily describe his life situations objectively. On the contrary, it is desired that his story will reflect his own personal attitude and interpretations, for it is just these personal factors which are so important in the study and treatment of the case. Thus rationalizations, fabrications, prejudices, exaggerations are quite as valuable as objective descriptions, provided of course that they can be properly identified and classified.

What is also evident in Shaw's explanation are aspects of the academic criteria of his time: to properly *identify* and *classify* the subjective aspects of his informant's narrative.

A great deal of change has taken place since the publication of Shaw's book in the 1930s. Researchers began to look differently at the research endeavor. In 1970 Gouldner (1970: 494) wrote of a reflexive sociology which would transform the relationship of sociologists to their work. He suggested that "the assumption that the self can be sealed off from information systems is mythological...the self may also be a source of valid insight that enriches study, and of a motivation that energizes it". Gouldner envisioned a reflexivity which could intensely guide the sociologist in overcoming the propensity to not accept certain information from their participant.

He further suggests:

A reflexive sociology looks therefore, to the deepening of the self's capacity to recognize that it views certain information as hostile, to recognize the various dodges that it uses to deny, ignore, or camouflage [that] information ..., and to the strengthening of its capacity to accept and to use hostile information. In short what reflexive sociology seeks is not an insulation but a transformation of the sociologist's self, and hence of his praxis in the world.

In the past twenty years, attention to reflexivity in the fields of sociology and anthropology has produced theory about "interpretive analysis" and "experimental ethnography", and the production of the self-reflexive fieldwork account. For example, in 1980 anthropologist Victor Crapanzano published a work he defined as an auto-ethnography, a narrative in which he wrote his own autobiography into the text. This

innovation, Denzin (1989: 34) points out as an "important variant" from traditional accounts. It is also important to note that anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff introduced important innovations into her work in the 1970s. Riv-ElLEN Prell (1989: 256) ventures to suggest Myerhoff anticipated the field of "experimental ethnography" in her commitment to maintain "the polyphony of human society". Prell states that Myerhoff "consistently violated scientific norms for life history, by introducing herself into the life of her subject, and introducing her subject into theorizing" (Prell 1989: 241).

Attention to the merits of reflexivity led some researchers such as Myerhoff and her colleagues Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, and Jay Ruby, for example, to "use reflexive events and experiences"...to analyze how people are "active constructors of their own place in society"(Prell 1989: 25).

Sixteen years after Gouldner's observations, and in the wake of postmodern thought, Patti Lather (1986: 259) states that "inquiry is increasingly recognized as a process whereby tacit (subjective) knowledge and propositional knowledge (objective knowledge) are mutually informing". In order to produce research in the absence of formulas which "guarantee social knowledge", Lather suggests self-awareness is the key in operating "simultaneously at epistemological, theoretical and empirical levels," and in constructing research designs that "demand a vigorous self-reflexivity".

New areas of focus in life history methodology developed out of the concern to incorporate self-reflexivity. Clifford (1986: 14) explains that matters such as discussing "confusions, struggles, and economic transactions with informants", which had been previously ignored, are now seen as "inescapable and constitutive".

Postmodernism and Grand Theory

Within postmodern theoretical frameworks, ethnographers are criticizing the foundations of the production of knowledge in ethnographic writing. McCall and

Wittner (1990: 47) point to a perspective which is increasingly favored in preference to a conformance to classical theory:

... The authority of "grand theory" styles seems suspended for the moment in favor of a close consideration of such issues as contextuality, the meaning of social life to those who enact it, and the explanation of exceptions and indeterminants, rather than regularities in phenomena observed-all issues that make problematic what were taken for granted as facts or certainties, on which the validity of paradigms rested.

A group of feminist researchers (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 264, 262) emphasize the importance of focusing on the kind of knowledge feminist scholars seek to convey, as compared to the kind of knowledge traditional mainstream academic disciplines have sought to promote. "Our academic disciplines have more often discouraged us from taking people's life stories seriously." They go on to observe that certain kinds of "truth" in traditional research have been elevated over other kinds, and become criteria for validity. This "truth" is most often not based on experience. Generalizations from such distanced research produce controls on data production and eventually what constitutes knowledge. These scholars go on to explain that personal narratives cannot stand up to these tests:

Considered in these terms, the truths in personal narratives cannot stand the tests to which they are subjected, i.e., the tests of verifiability, reliability, facticity, or representativeness. Using such a limited definition of Truth admits only one standard at a time for the perception and interpretation of a small segment of a complex reality. While such a conception may be "safe" in its claim to meet any challenge to its scientific validity, it inevitably excludes certain experiences that require understanding.

The idea of "grand theory" style analysis has been extensively criticized by Denzin (1990: 147) who suggests that there are two modes of interpretation operating in the field of social sciences today. There is the classical mode of interpretation practiced in the social sciences

... which seeks to discover the truth, the origins, the centres, the essences, the inner structures, and the obdurate meanings that operate within and shape particular forms of experience, interactional sites, social texts, and social institutions.

This method Denzin suggests, "... has dreamed throughout sociology's history of representing and capturing human beings in society, and doing so scientifically" The second method does not hold the same orientation to "study origins,...structures, laws, or empirical regularities". In the postmodern perspective Denzin (1990: 147) argues that experience can never be fully represented:

The human being is never fully present, to herself, or others, except through a process of deferral and delay.... [L]anguage... is itself only a process of deferral and delay, and hence never fixed in its representations or meanings.... [S]ociety, as conceptualized by conventional sociologists, is a fiction....[P]resence and lived experience can never be fully captured because language will not allow this to occur.

He goes on to argue that because these representations are incomplete, the experience "can only be given in texts (interviews, field notes, life stories, films, etc.), which are themselves indirect representations of what they purport to represent". Another point worth mentioning here is that not only are representations of lives incomplete or fragmentary, representations in the form of personal narratives are not static. Lives change, as do thoughts and reflections about those lives. I came to appreciate this phenomena as I listened over a period of two years to the change in reflections and constructions of a life, regarding life passages and life changes as expressed by one of my life history participant (see findings in Chapter 4).

A review of some aspects of a recent debate in the life history research field between K. Plummer and N. Denzin concerning postmodern theories, gives an indication of some of the divergent viewpoints held. Plummer (1990: 157) has misgivings about the postmodern project as it relates to life history research. He suggests that postmodernist thought can be dangerous in that it "ultimately rejects the whole of modern thought and politics". Denzin (1990: 146) points out that the world of today is not the same world about which the "grand sociological masters" theorized. Denzin suggests a new interpretive framework is necessary in order to make sense of a radically different and changing world- a framework which will not use "preconceived categories".

Plummer in turn questions the postmodern notion that society is a fiction, and asks how we can know what an interpretation is without referring to other texts, worlds, genres, films etc. from the empirical world. Denzin suggests that Plummer is trapped by assumptions concerning a world which is "out there" and can be captured. In other words, although postmodernists themselves may draw on other texts, worlds, genres, films etc. their interpretations are based on the assumption that these resources are fragmentary, historically specific, and cannot be objectified as social realities which fit into preconceived categories. Plummer responds by stating that he does not claim that the "multiple objective perspectives" he searches constitute *the* truth, but rather are a part which needs to be wedded to other perspectives in order for the researcher to be able to grasp a wider phenomenon. Plummer concludes that "a more cautious approach is needed until the postmodern project becomes clearer" (1990: 157).

The question could be posed that a postmodern critique of the foundations of knowledge is still premised on a Western philosophical critical theory, so how could it be possible to conceive of criticism without philosophy? A solution is suggested in the work of feminist scholars Linda Nicholson and Nancy Fraser (1990: 9, 34) who suggest that such a criticism is possible if the theorizing is historically and culturally specific, "situat[ing] its categories in historical frameworks". Feminist postmodern theory, they suggest, would be non-universalist:

When its focus became cross-cultural or transepocal, its mode of attention would be comparativist rather than universalizing, attuned to changes and contrasts instead of to covering laws.... [This theory] would dispense with the idea of a subject of history. It would replace unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity with plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one relevant strand among others, attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation.

My view of the issues in this debate regarding "capturing lives" is that there are people who have subjective perspectives about their lives; their views along with perspectives of other people in similar circumstances can provide patterns of meaning. Recurrent themes and theories of life circumstances from these lives can be used not as

generalizations that transcend that particular culture, but as linkages between groups of people of the same class, race or culture. Attention to what the people in question have to say about their lives, and attention to the discourses in which these people position themselves, would be critical. An interpretive interactionist framework would provide an orientation toward the contextualization of the lives concerned.

I find Wendy Holloway's (1984: 260) concept of change as being helpful here. Change in consciousness, she suggests, is not accomplished by new discourses,

It is accomplished as a result of contradictions in our positionings, desires, and practices, and thus in our subjectivities-which result from the coexistence of old and new. Every relation and practice to some extent articulates such contradictions and therefore is the site of potential change as it is the site of reproduction.

Using this to explain the positioning of the two foregoing perspectives, and taking into account that I am in favor of looking toward postmodern theories for breaking ground in life history research, I read this as saying that traditional approaches and postmodern perspectives will work alongside one another until such times as the contrariety of both in practice will prove the usefulness of postmodern theory.

A theme I have found in the recent life history literature is the desire to discover patterns of meaning, links between experiences of people, and connections between individuals or groups. Lather (1988: 571) describes the methodological task for contemporary feminists as "generating and refining more interactive, contextualized methods in the search for pattern and meaning, rather than for prediction and control". Other feminist scholars explain that, "[w]hile we do not deny the usefulness of some generalizations, without attention to the truths of experience it is fruitless, therefore rather than focus on the objective truth we focus on the links between women's perspectives and the truth that they reveal" (PNG 1989: 262). Similarly the interpretive interactionist orientation seeks to record "[r]ecurring structural, interactional and meaning patterns...."(Denzin 1989: 43).

Addressing life history research specifically, Denzin suggests that:

A sociologist's task cannot be one of determining the difference between true and false stories--all stories are fictions...The sociologist studies how persons and groups culturally produce warrantable self and personal-experience stories which accord with that group's standard of truth. We study how persons learn how to tell stories which match a group's understandings of what a story should look and sound like (1989: 77).

Language

Other experimental ethnographers agree that, as it is not possible in the first place to hear a full representation of someone's life, so it is not possible to fully manifest, through any mode of communication, that life.

As the epistemology of ethnography has changed, assumptions that whole "truths" can be captured has evolved into an understanding that "truths" are "inherently partial... and incomplete" (Clifford 1986: 7). "All constructed truths", Clifford explains,

...are made possible by powerful lies of exclusion and rhetoric. Even the best ethnographic text--serious, true fictions--are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot fully control. ...The maker of ethnographic texts cannot avoid expressive tropes, figures and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it...

As with other postmodernist perspectives, the feminist postmodern or poststructuralist perspective assumes that language and consciousness are problematic.

Weedon (1988: 32) suggests that:

We are neither the author of the ways in which we understand our lives, nor are we unified rational beings. For feminist poststructuralism, it is language in the form of conflicting discourses which constitutes us as conscious thinking subjects, and enables us to give meaning to the world and to act to transform it.

These ideas might be challenge enough to discourage academics from life history writing and research, but Weedon's (1988: 33) explanation of how important the recognition of conflicting forms of subjectivity is for women and the *rewriting* of their lives gives merit to engaging in such research and practice. Her explanation through the

feminist poststructuralist perspective is also useful in clarifying what Clifford means by "systems or economies of truth". She states that the individual is "always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity". Through language we learn to attach meaning to experiences which we understand through certain existing discourses and modes of thinking "which predate our entry into language". The sense of self and consciousness is structured through ways of thinking and identification with certain positions. Being accustomed to a certain system of meanings and values, (which in and of themselves Weedon says may well be adversative), we may not seek out alternative ways of thinking; or, we may through education or politics be attracted to different ways of constituting meaning.

Holloway (1984: 236) argues that this positioning within diverse discourses, creates contradictory fragmentary relations. These relations can evoke feelings of powerfulness or powerlessness, an anxiety state which in turn creates a motivational dynamic towards "wholeness ...a coherent identity". Holloway's inquiry into the reasons behind taking up positions in a discourse are useful to this thesis. She suggests that the idea of choice does not reflect the complexity involved in such an action, rather she argues that every person has some kind of "investment" some "satisfaction or pay-off or reward" which is inherent in the discourse they operate within (Holloway 1984: 238). She suggests that attention should be paid to "the histories of individuals in order to see the recursive positioning in certain positions in discourses".

Holloway's study is an analysis of gender difference in the production of subjectivity. Her explanation is useful for a clearer understanding of why people take up positions in one discourse or another, and certainly affirms the goal of this thesis regarding the importance of life histories. I would suggest an expansion of understanding and redefinition of her concept of "investment" is necessary when considering the case of ethnically and racially oppressed peoples and their search for identity. The language used to define the "motivational dynamic" or "the investment",

does not address or capture the nature of the search for, or positioning within, an alternative discourse--a discourse which provides a frame of reference for survival strategies, which promotes self-esteem and understanding of self and society, and relieves the anxiety and trauma of operating solely within a racist discourse.

The words that black feminists use to describe the priorities and concerns of their lives, includes for example *liberation* (Ferguson 1972: 591), *legitimization of existence* (Bannerji 1987: 10), and *visibility* (Brand (1983: 5). These goals call for a definition of "investment" surpassing "satisfaction", "pay off" and "reward"; a definition which could indicate a different positioning, a transformation of being to another state of being. I do not think it is my place to provide a definition of "investment"; this should come from a person who has grown up through a black discourse, but I can point out aspects of black feminist discourse which indicate another way of knowing and describing. In Pat Collins' (1989: 750) argument regarding the social construction of black feminist thought, she suggests that black women value their own subjective knowledge base. Taking elements of their own experiences received from black folk wisdom, culture and traditions they can "infuse them with meaning... [and] rearticulate a consciousness" that already exists as the standpoint of African-American women. In addition, June Jordan's statement is a powerful example of the particular motivation surrounding an "investment" in an alternative discourse for oppressed peoples. She says that "our language is a system constructed by people constantly needing *to insist we exist*" (in Collins 1989: 764, my emphasis). These statements are significations found in the contemporary Afro-American discourse which provide alternative productions of meaning and practice, and for my purposes illustrate the necessity for broader definitions of motivational orientations of the subject toward alternative discourses.

The work of constructing such concepts as "investments" will benefit by the inclusion of theories from people from other parts of the social system; people will give different meanings to their orientations based on their positioning in discourses. It is

highly likely, considering the exclusionary practices in academia, that the alternative discourses which black people have created and developed, have not been sought nor taken into account in the building of post modern theories. Post modern theories in practice then, in all likelihood, operate from a deficit of knowledge being class and racially structured.

Power

In postmodern ethnography the study of power relations concerns the ethnographic endeavor itself as well as the relations of power within the larger society. Feminist postmodern perspectives explore the language of "conflicting discourse" located within "social institutions, modes of thought, and individual subjectivity" which give rise to "detailed historically specific analysis, to explain the working of power on behalf of specific interests, and to analyze the opportunities for resistance to that power" (Weedon 1988: 41).

Stacey (1988: 24) argues that critical ethnographers and feminist ethnographers are exposing "scientific pretensions of neutral observation or description" and are revealing the presence of hierarchies, and power relations in the ethnographic endeavor. They are bringing to their work the idea that ethnographic research is not "cultural reportage, but cultural construction, and always a construction of self as well as the other".

The postmodern sees discursive practices as producing, maintaining, or playing out power (Henriques et al. 1984: 25). As I read a postmodern ideal of methodology, a researcher acting in a research relationship would be acutely aware of the perceptions and practices of the dominant discourse -a discourse which still situates academics as superior and exercising ultimate control in the research relationship and the product of that relation. It would be their responsibility to not only recognize that they construct

themselves as they interact with the other, but also, and more importantly that they are obliged to construct a self and a relationship to their participant which *transforms* this practice of power. In this regard Tyler (1986: 126) points out that postmodern ethnography, "privileges 'discourse' over 'text', it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer".

Weedon addresses another aspect of the transformation of positionings within discourses which constrain through power relations. She explains that through the collective discussion of personal conflicts and problems, it becomes possible to recognize that what may have been felt as individual failings are in reality "socially produced conflicts and contradictions shared by many women in similar social positions". She explains further that "[t]his process of discovery can lead to a rewriting of personal experiences in terms which give it social, changeable causes" (Weedon 1987: 33). It follows that this process gives women the opportunity and exposure to alternate discourses or the beginnings of understandings which lead them to create alternative discourse, as in the beginning of the feminist movement itself. In light of the argument in this thesis, that the life history could be a mode of empowering participants, Weedon's latter point illuminates the process of discovery that can happen when women have the opportunity to construct their lives and the theory of their lives, in the telling of their personal narratives, and in the discussion of the lives of women in similar situations.

Feminist Postmodern Ethnography

Feminist scholars have greatly improved life history methodology by incorporating into their scholarship the emerging new grounds of knowledge about women and women's place in the world; a few feminist scholars have also addressed the postmodernists' debates which criticize the practice and methodology of ethnography.

The feminist agenda for ethnographic research is both similar and different from mainstream ethnography. The similarity exists in the perspectives on how language, power, subjectivity and the production of knowledge are problematics as we have already outlined. One of the ways in which feminist postmodern perspective differs from other postmodern perspectives is in their criticism of the male-centeredness lines of the ethnographic inquiry itself. Ticineto Clough (1990: 43) states that the genre of autobiography is in itself gendered. She explains that most criticism on autobiography has focused on male writers, with little research on women's autobiographies. She goes as to say that women's writing is still treated as inferior: "when autobiography is treated as a degenerate literary form, it is referred to as women's writing" (Ticineto Clough 1990: 43). Likewise, Kamela Visweswaran (1988: 27) points out that the classics most often referred to are ethnographies written by males, while women anthropologists' writing is dismissed as "subjective" work.

DeVault (1990: 10) identifies issues which are absent from most discussions on ethnography and how this absence could be changed. "How to make visible that which has been suppressed, and how to attend to the sexualization of people's lives," are the two major issues which could be addressed in ethnography, but in fact "have not been adequately treated". She goes on to say that these are "non-issues in non-feminist communities, but central ones for feminists, ethnographers, and others". DeVault states that she wants to identify ethnography as feminist when it "wrestles with these issues". Gordon in another critique locates the perspectives of experimental ethnography as arising from a masculine avant-garde "which measures feminism in relationship to that standard" (Gordon 1988: 16).

Gordon suggests that feminists have to "be willing to displace this hierarchy, because the position of feminism in relationship to any avant-garde, cinematic or ethnographic, is much more complex and shifting than these criteria allow". She

suggests it is "not antagonistic to question the engendering of an avant-garde and to ask what's in it for women..."(Gordon 1988: 11).

Another criticism of postmodern ethnography, and a critical aspect of consideration in the transformation of ethnographic practice, looks at the selection of participants for life narrative studies. Visweswaran (1988: 38), acknowledges that colonial discourse has been transformed through experimental ethnography into intercultural dialogic texts which reflect multiple voices. She points out however, that the people ethnographers are interested in are those who "clamor to be heard"; and these voices are most likely male. DeVault (1990: 8), commenting on Visweswaran's observation, calls the voices that do get heard the "strong voices". Some feminists then, are saying that experimental ethnography does not address the problematic of who speaks, and the process involved for people who have no voice - the "coming to voice" which feminists see as critical. DeVault suggests that the fact that feminists address various problems, such as invisibility, exclusion and silence, "means that we have begun a methodological discussion that should be an essential supplement to postmodern calls for multivocality".

Feminist researchers have to look critically at the ethnographic agenda and be aware of ethnocentrism and androcentrism. The focus of past life history endeavors, as we presented in our literature review, was to show whether the individual's life is typical or deviates from the cultural norm. This belief, Geiger (1986: 337) suggests, assumes there is already knowledge existing from which to evaluate the individual. She goes on to say:

It is precisely this assumption that feminist scholars challenge in noting the failure of traditional social science research to encompass women's experiences and perceptions. Women's life histories provide concrete substantiation for our claims that these cultural generalizations and models of social life are typically androcentric.

The recording of women's experience is a primary focus of the feminist ethnographic inquiry. Now several scholars (PNG 1989, Denzin 1989), are suggesting

that the interpretive acts which shape the life and narrative need to receive as much attention. In this regard, DeVault (1990: 10, 6) suggests that she would like to reorient our understanding of "feminist ethnography", "...from an emphasis on the mechanics or ethics of method, to an emphasis on communities of thought and discourse. 'Feminist ethnography' ...can point...to distinctive contributions to ethnographic method and text, contributions arising from continuing feminist dialogues on issues of particular significance to women and our understanding of their lives". She explains further:

I . . . want to suggest that in judging whether research can be "feminist" we will need to think beyond single studies and examine developing traditions of research. While individual efforts may often seem only 'partially feminist', researchers whose commitments are feminist, and who learn from one another, can provide interpretations from diverse locations that collectively build a view of the social relations shaping women's experiences. Thus, lessons learned in the field are surely not discharged when we "finish" a piece of work, but would shape continuing agendas.

As we have shown, the recent research in feminist studies shows a commitment to not only pursue the transformation of ethnography as do experimental ethnographers, but also to explore areas of social life where knowledge of women's experiences is absent; to work towards the acknowledgement and production of women's autobiographies in the field of life history work and experimental ethnography; and to remain conscious of, and committed to, the inclusion of feminist theory in the theoretical realm of experimental ethnography.

Ethnographic Method: Descriptions of Process

As the orientation towards the ethnographic endeavor has changed, so also have descriptions of the ethnographic method, process, and product. Where ethnographers have in the past described their research in terms of precision and rigour, now researchers are talking about "authenticity, and thick description" (McCall and Wittner 1990: 53). Tyler (1986: 129) suggests that the ethnographic text is "a means, the meditative vehicle for a transcendence of time and place.... the text can 'evoke' an understanding of meaning, and in doing so is freed from the constraint of having to represent: "...[F]or if a

discourse can be said to 'evoke', then it need not represent what it evokes, though it may be the means to a representation". Tyler (1986: 129) goes on to explain:

... [E]voking" rather than "representing"...frees ethnography from mimesis and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric that entails 'objects', 'facts', 'descriptions', 'inductions', 'generalizations', 'verification', 'experiment', 'truth', and like concepts that, except as empty invocations, have no parallels either in the experience of ethnographic fieldwork or in the writing of ethnographies".

Similarly, Denzin talks about how when one thickly describes statements that are "truthlike", they can create an empathetic response for the readers of the text:

... [T]he feeling that they [the readers] have experienced, or could experience, the events being described. Thick descriptions are valid experiential statements, if by valid, or validity, is meant the ability to produce accounts that are sound, and adequate, and able to be confirmed and substantiated (1989: 84).

The very elements that C. Shaw (1951) discovered to be the sterling qualities of the life history process, feminist scholars now confirm are important areas of study. These are areas that researchers have not previously paid attention to in their research of the lives of men and women. For example, when individuals create fabrications, Klein (1983: 91) suggests that this faking, -"giving socially desirable responses rather than honest attributes", is necessary for the psychological survival of many women, because without it reality would be unbearable. It is an aspect that must be acknowledged and incorporated into research methods. Other elements of personal narratives, such as rationalizations, prejudices, and exaggerations, are revealed, feminists assert, in the lived experiences of people who have to deal with the complexities and confusions of life. Their revelations manifest "important features of conscious experience and social landscape" (PNG 1989: 14). Precisely because life histories are able to illuminate the experiences of the everyday world of people through the richness of subjective texts, Geiger (1986: 338) argues, "they exhibit integrity: they do not claim *ungendered point of viewlessness*" (my emphasis).

Feminist scholars, experimental ethnographers and postmodernists have questioned the act of interpretation and the theories and methodologies which have dictated epistemology and practice. As our review has shown, a profound shift has taken place which reorients life history scholars to a greater self-reflexivity, different understandings and orientation towards research, methods and participants' lives. So far we have shown a kaleidoscope of ideas about the life history inquiry and practice, through the lens of these various theoretical perspectives.

We have shown a move away from traditional modes of research design toward discussions of, for example, self-reflexivity, evocation, thick description, linkages, and meaning patterns. We have shown that postmodern perspectives are questioning the very foundations of mainstream assumptions and methodologies. These theories have critiqued the notions of an 'original life history genre' and shown that ethnographic research is itself cultural construction. Contrary to the positivistic approach of objectivity and neutrality, postmodernists advocate reflexivity and collaboration within the ethnographic enterprise.

The next section includes a brief overview of the development of participatory research methodology, and recent theory by feminist scholars who throw new light on participatory research and research relations.

Empowerment- Participatory Research

Participatory research has its roots in the political and social upheavals of the 1960s. About this time sociologists such as L. Humphreys, J. Galtung, and M. Glazer, among many other scholars from diverse fields, were questioning the end results of social theories and research. They began to realize that they had a responsibility to actively extend their services to the oppressed and exploited. Myron Glazer (1972: 151) for example, suggested that it may be more beneficial to listen to what the people under study had to say about their own needs and concerns, rather than the notions of uniformed

academics, sponsors, or other superiors. Brian Fay (1975: 110, 102) questioned the function of social theory and suggested that a social theory must in and of itself be a catalyst for social change. The means to such a change lies in a reordering of the social science project. As Fay explains:

[T]he translation of a critical social science into practice would necessarily require the participation and active involvement of the social actors in this process. The reason why this is so is because such a science is composed of an interpretive element, and therefore its theories can only be validated in the self understandings of the actors themselves.

A further development in methodology recognized that not only should academics listen to people about what they think about their lives, and involve people in theorizing about their lives, but they should also take the responsibility to share their knowledge with the oppressed, and work with them democratically to produce new knowledge to be shared with the wider community (Mbilinyi 1989).

Pat Maguire (1987: 74) takes a feminist approach to participatory research and argues for improvements in the method based on the feminist inquiry. She sees a critical need to change the focus of participatory research to "reflect the diversities of both female and male realities". Another feminist perspective looks at the methods Western feminist ethnographers have used in anthropology. Kamela Visweswaran (1988: 28, 38) suggests focusing on women's relationships to women, and the relationship between "women of the colonizer and women of the colonized". Visweswaran states that "it is not really whether anthropologists can represent people better, but whether we can be accountable to people's own struggles for self-representation and self-determination".

Maguire (1987) offers a powerful critique of Western feminist research methods. She makes the point that feminist researchers have still to recognize the benefits of participatory research; and that this critical oversight impedes social progress. "Until feminist research more actively experiments with ways to make the process, not merely the products, empowering for both the researcher and researched, the goal of producing knowledge for women's emancipation may not be fully reached" (Maguire 1987: 104).

Extending that critique further she states that while some feminist scholars suggest the researcher become more vulnerable they ignore the fact the researched could and should become empowered. She points out that liberation in the production of knowledge will come when "ordinary women share power, rather than when powerful women share vulnerability".

This view mirrors methodologies we have mentioned in postmodern theories, where the researcher needs to be aware of the discourses of power they operate through and within, and the quest for a practice which is collaborative and empowering to the participants.

To summarize, feminist scholars have pointed out the need for participatory research scholars and field researchers to focus on both female and male lives; for scholars to assume obligations towards their subjects; and the need to make the process of research a resource of empowerment for the participants. All these concerns deserve attention in order to improve methodology and participatory research in practice.

The next chapter presents a brief overview of one perspective of black Canadian history--a perspective which shows the constraints leveled against the black community historically, and against black women in contemporary times. It shows the generational background through which the participants in this life history study have struggled, resisted, survived and prospered. This overview helps to contextualize the fourth chapter which introduces the life history participants and my findings of our research together.

CHAPTER THREE

Black Canadian History: A Perspective. An Overview

The life history work that I conducted for this thesis involves a black family in Toronto, specifically the lives of the mother and daughter which span a seventy year period. Also an earlier life history I researched, focused on the life of a black woman born seventy years ago in Toronto. In order to contextualize these lives in the framework of Canadian society during the last 70 years, and to try to understand 'the worlds' of the life participants, I researched resource materials concerning the black community of the early 1900s to the 1950s. To strengthen this contextualization it is important to include a brief investigation into the world of black immigrant women, and how it has been structured institutionally and socially through gender, race, and class.

Black Canadian recorded history extends back to the early 1600s when peoples of African descent were brought to this country as slaves and used by French explorers as domestic servants, trappers, and translators (Bertley 1977). Although Winks (1971: 1) states that there is no memory of a slave period in the minds of white Canadians, the reconstruction of black history in Canada by black and white scholars, is bringing out previously suppressed data which confirms the black folk memories of such a time period. Shadd notes that, "By the time of the British Conquest in 1759, there were more than a thousand slaves, about half living in and around Montreal" (1987: 5).

The earliest large scale migration and settlement of black people occurred in Eastern Canada (1777-1781). During that time about 3,500 freed black men, women, and children accompanied the United Empire Loyalists from the United States (1776-1781) to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Shadd notes that slaves also accompanied their Loyalists masters, and that the total black migration made up ten percent of all Loyalists (1987: 6). In the years between 1813-1816 after the war of 1812, 2000 former

slaves followed (Hamilton 1982: 33). During the Fugitive Slave period an estimated 40,000 blacks arrived in Ontario (Shadd 1987, Walker 1985).

By 1860 there were approximately 50,000 Negroes in Canada. However, after the American Civil war ended in 1865, many migrated back to the United States and others set out in groups to establish new colonies in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and in the British West Indies (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture n.d: 106).

Many of the black settlers were skilled tradespeople and farmers, who settled in several communities across Canada.¹¹ Early black settlement concentrated mostly in the areas of the Maritimes and Ontario, with a community also establishing itself in Montreal (McClain 1979; Henry 1981; Walker 1980). For those blacks who settled in Southwestern Ontario some lived in abject poverty, while others, regardless of white racist attitudes and constraints, became successful in their trades, businesses and agricultural pursuits (Talbot 1984; Hill 1981; Winks 1971).

The Toronto area also attracted black refugees and immigrants:

Toronto became a major haven for fugitive slaves from the 1820s onward because it was a thriving commercial centre where jobs were available, it was easily accessible by land and water, yet it was far enough from the American border to give fugitive slaves greater safety from pursuing masters. During the 1850s the black population of the city reached 1,000 out of a total population of 50,000 (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture n.d: 15)

In the late 1800s and early 1900s a few black families such as the Abbots and Hubbards acquired wealth and position, and were "well-placed" and respected in Toronto society. William P. Hubbard for example, had a successful career in Toronto politics for nineteen years and in 1861 Anderson Ruffin Abbot graduating from the University of Toronto, received a license to practice medicine; the first Canadian-born black to achieve this distinction (Winks 1971: 330). Other blacks were able to take advantage of the educational system in Canada at that time. Walker (1980: 61) points out that many

¹¹ See Hill (1981), Winks (1971), McClain (1979), Thompson (1979), Walker (1980), and for Nova Scotia settlement, Hamilton (1982), Clouston and McClain (1974), Shadd (1987)

fugitive slaves received an education in Canada and on their return to the United States during the Reconstruction period (1867-1877) were able to assist, in their diverse professional capacities, their liberated southern brethren and the wider community.

During Reconstruction several factors combined to radically change the climate for blacks who lived in Canada. The ideology of new "scientific" race studies from Europe and United States and the overt racist propaganda from the Southern states, became more widely known and accepted in Canada. The notion that blacks were a threat to the perpetuation of the white race and white settlement in Canada, established itself in the minds, and subsequent political and social behavior of white Canadians (Walker 1985: 14). Winks (1971: 292) suggests that Canada had played an "honourable role in the continental attack on slavery" in harboring fugitives, but after the Civil War the presence of blacks became an embarrassment. Expectations were that the blacks would go south where they belonged. Walker (1985: 4) in his book on racial discrimination in Canada, illustrates that blacks were made to feel alienated and peripheral to Canadian society. From the highest authority in Canada at the time came the following statement:

We see in the United States what grave problems may arise from the presence of a race unable to become full members of the same social family as ourselves" (Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier 1910, quoted in Winks 1971).

Winks describes this period as one in which the "Negro in Canada found himself sliding down an inclined plane from mere neglect to active dislike" (1971: 292). By the early part of this century blacks in the United States were participating in a fully segregated black society with black universities, black newspapers, black hospitals, black lawyers, doctors and tradesman, as well as waiters, laborers, and small farmers. In contrast, Canadian blacks, living in a non-segregated society (with the exception of blacks living in communities in Nova Scotia), were excluded from the white domain of

higher professions and institutions. Blacks had to go South if they aspired to an education or practice in the professions (Walker 1980: 67).

By 1911, Henry states "the majority of Negroes in Toronto were native Canadians whose ancestry in this country in many cases extended back to the mid-nineteenth century". In the 1920s there were approximately 1,236 black people living in and around Toronto (Henry 1981: 2). The black population of Toronto by the 1940s consisted of three main groups:

The Canadian born Negroes, descendants of early settlers; Negroes from the United States who migrated to Canada after the civil war to work on railroad construction and as railway porters, and Negroes from the British West Indies who came to Canada during and immediately after World War I in search of employment (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture n.d. 107)

A smaller number of blacks in Toronto were of Nova Scotian heritage. A number of the descendants of the Nova Scotian communities joined a second migration to Toronto during World War II in attempts to better their living (Henry 1981). The Canadian National Railway recruited blacks to work on the railway as porters for the sleeping cars and as a result many men came up from the United States and from rural areas in Canada to work in the terminal cities (Department of Citizenship and Immigration 1960: 107). In addition some blacks worked in jobs in the post office and customs department (Henry 1981: 37).

But by the 1920s, with rare exception, blacks were not employed in any highly visible job except domestic and porter work. There were no blacks employed as teachers, clerks, cashiers, firemen etc. (Gairey 1981, Howe 1989, Tulloch 1975). Walker (1985: 15) states that blacks between the two wars, "were concentrated in specialized corners of the inter-war economy, the men as waiters, janitors, and barbers, and the women as domestic servants, laundresses and waitresses. An elderly man describing the 1920-1930 period said:

The Blacks were nothing you know. You couldn't go to Eaton's and ask for a job or to the Bell telephone. It was unheard of to go to a restaurant or a public dance. You wouldn't go there because you knew you weren't welcome (Gairey 1981: 9).

Henry suggests that even up to the mid-1950s regularly paid employment was rarely available outside portering, domestic and factory work, or the garment trade (1981: 36).

On the social scene, blacks were not allowed to attend the performances of black groups and dance bands when they performed for whites. White audiences were entertained by the "Big Band" performers like Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway. The Toronto blacks however, were not allowed to buy tickets and could only stand outside and stage protests (Howe 1989). The entertainers did not have an easy time themselves when they came to perform in Toronto. One black band leader recalls:

Toronto was very prejudiced in the early days. For instance when a band like Duke Ellington's or Cab Calloway's came to town, they couldn't stay at the top hotels. They would have to stay in local people's homes. He remembers how his mother 'kicked' him and his brother out of their room so Sammy Davis Junior could have a place to sleep when he performed in Toronto with his father and uncle (Richard 1979)

Social distance was upheld in all spheres of life, although the manifestation of discrimination was as one scholar notes, "more subtle, frustrating and strangulating. ...[u]ntil you run into discrimination, you don't know how far you can go" (Lightman 1948: 3). At one time there were some clear indications of an expected "standard" outside Toronto. Talbot (1984: 68) mentions that in her father's younger days (circa 1920s) beaches in the Windsor, Colchester, and Amherstburg areas of Ontario, displayed signs such as "Whites Only", "White Gentiles Only", or "No Jews or Colored People Allowed". In Toronto the situation was apparently different. One man recalls going out for the evening and having the door slammed in his face and told, "no niggers allowed in here". He said, further, "there were never any signs to tell you this...it was never overt, but it was there...consequently you never went outside the community" (Brand 1986: 69).

As far as church worship was concerned, black people of different denominations were refused entry at the white churches, and were told to go and worship with their own

people. As a result black Anglicans and other denominations, found themselves worshipping with the black Baptists, (the oldest black church in Toronto) until churches were built to accommodate the different denominations (Howe 1989, 1990).

The Toronto black community's sphere of activities, as with other Canadian black communities of the time, was directly circumscribed by the dominant white society which imposed residential segregation, institutional segregation and managerial refusal of services (Lightman 1948, Winks 1981). The blacks had to form their own organizations and plan their own activities and recreation because they were not welcome in the larger society. Henry (1981) states that the anti-black feeling maintained the communities' isolation and effectively curbed them from acquiring any strengths economically or politically.

In the 1920s and up to the end of the 1940s, political activism was minimal as the community itself was small, subject to "crippling popular racism, internal divisions, and a lack of leadership" (Henry 1981, McClain 1979). One of the ways in which some of the black community dealt with discrimination, was to meet regularly once a week and discuss the "goings on" people had experienced. As one woman recalls:

It was something everybody was involved with, everybody had something to say about it you hear the stories of experiences people had or knew about" (Howe 1989: 11)

Sharing these happenings and incidents people were able to diffuse anger, develop survival strategies, and plan organized responses and protests such as the porters protest- the march of the Pullman porters on Ottawa (Talbot 1984: 69) and the protests of black women concerning discrimination at the dance halls and recreation centers (Gaurey 1981, Howe 1989). Walker (1980) documents the agency of many blacks in confronting racism through social confrontation, individual and organized activities.¹²

¹² Also see H. Gaurey's book *A Black Man's Toronto 1914-1980. The Reminiscences of Harry Gaurey* D. Hill ed. (Toronto, Multicultural History Society 1981) for an account of a protest which resulted in an anti-discrimination bill being passed. In addition to these efforts there was also organized activity toward the removal of racist literature from the schools

In the 1920s the residential settlement of blacks was scattered throughout the down town core of Toronto (Brand 1986: 152, Howe 1989). Lightman's study in 1948 shows that in the early 1920-40s there was no marked delineation or formal segregation of blacks and whites, but informants from that time period state that they were unable to acquire a home. They were refused constantly when they went in person to negotiate a deal. These informants were very dark blacks, whereas lighter-skinned blacks with educated backgrounds were able to move into previously all-white neighborhoods (Howe 1989). As Lightman (1948: 10) notes:

Although there is no marked delineation of Negro districts or formal segregation in the residential areas, yet many settled in the area of deterioration surrounding the central business section or 'The Loop'. In 1922 'The Loop' was so crowded and over populated a group of light West Indians moved to the East and formed a separate Negro community there....Negroes were discouraged from moving north because of opposition of landowners who refused to sell or rent property. In 1923 some Negroes settled in the St. Clair district and in 1938 the third area north of Eglinton and between Bathurst and Yonge Streets opened up.

Distinctions within the community based on coloring, class and ethnicity placed great constraints on many black people's lives. The early associations and groups like the Home Service association and the Eureka Friendly Club were based on color and class. Some of the old established black families had intermarried with whites so their children's coloring was lighter. Elder blacks from the time note, "The fairer you are the more acceptable you become (Gairey 1981: 14), and "You might be able to get a better job if you were a lighter color"....(Howe 1989: 6). As one woman of very dark complexion described the situation:

[W]hen you get to know them [those that 'passed'] they are like anyone else, not that they look like anyone else, but they had problems with you as you had with them because they are as much white as they are black. I mean when your blackness is holding you down you see them differently (Howe 1989: 6)

It has been noted that lighter-skinned blacks were among the established prominent people in the community:

Light skinned negroes are considered more desirable, and as a result are socially more prominent and carry more prestige. Almost every important negro in the community was light and in some

cases almost white. In the 1940s.. color became subordinate to economic power but still closely related to one's position in the community (Lightman 1948: 13)

The distinction of class separated the poor and working class blacks from the East-end blacks. Living and working conditions for poor and working-class blacks were lamentable, as expressed in a study carried out by the Negro Youth Council in 1944. It was found that there were many preventable illnesses such as tuberculosis and other serious ailments that were traced to bad housing and unhealthy working conditions, such as poor ventilation, poor lighting and long hours (Youth Council).

The East-end blacks [the railroad porters' families who moved into the eastern suburbs of Toronto] had the best paying jobs and subsequently were able to afford better housing and a more comfortable life style. They were considered the middle-class by the black community (Henry 1981, Howe 1988, Lightman 1948). Lightman was told by her informants that the porter was considered the aristocracy of the Toronto black community (1948: 37).

Although some of the older established Canadian blacks worked with the poorer blacks in the managing of the Home Service Association, and were appreciated for the work they did for the community, nevertheless they were seen as a clique and did not associate with the poor or working-class blacks socially (Gairey 1981: 14, Howe 1988, 1990).

The early women's "Negro" groups accepted members according to shade of color and husband's occupation. Women living during that time stated that the first group of women were chiefly 'Canadian' from the older families, who did not accept the West Indian women (McClain 1979, Howe 1988, 1990).

The further distinction of ethnicity played its role in constraining members of the black community. American blacks were said to integrate well and were aggressive. They were able to acquire jobs, for example in community social work, that native born blacks were unable to even think of applying for due to their lack of opportunity in

education. Many West Indians in contrast to native blacks, came from educated backgrounds and were used to blacks being in positions of authority and power in their homeland; they could not understand why the Toronto blacks had not achieved the same (Henry 1981, McClain 1979, Howe 1989). Lightman (1948: 13) notes the problems based on ethnicity apparent in the community of that time:

The three dominant groups are jealous of one another and hate to see each other get ahead...West Indians keep their national pride by setting themselves off as a distinct separate group and as a result their attitude is one of superiority over Toronto Negroes who have progressed little as compared with their occupational, economic and social achievements.

A native born black described the situation this way:

Others were coming along and disturbing things. When West Indians came here they considered themselves better than the Canadian born West Indians. Anyone who marry a Canadian was considered to be marrying below themselves. All black, but West Indians considered themselves better than Canadian Negroes! "How come you here all these years and you couldn't do this [they'd say], or, you haven't got that, --how come you aren't this way"? The fact that you had been struggling and struggling to get this thing [equal rights-they don't recognize]. Some of them tried to help out, [but] if they were educated they wanted to separate themselves, they got away from the community (Howe 1989: 5)

The hostility between the three groups during the 1930s-1950s, which manifested itself in prejudiced stereotypes (Henry 1981) and "acute friction" (Lightman 1948) changed after 1950 to feelings of indifference and a "callow disregard" from the West Indians toward the native born blacks (Henry 1981: 17). It is important for our study to note here that Henry states that by the late 1960s most West Indian migrants "had not met or even heard of native Afro-Canadians".

As far as economic conditions were concerned, World War II was the beginning of overall change for the black community. The war opened up more opportunities. Industries and offices experiencing the labor shortage began to hire blacks. "The job ceiling was broken in semi-skilled work and there was a slight filtering into clerical work" (Lightman 1948: 49). The number of people in the skilled and professional classes increased also (Canadian Citizenship 1960). The black community were rightly cautious and realistic about these changes as Lightman (1948: 49) notes:

The second world war resulted in a restless dissatisfaction among the Negroes because their subordinate position in labor and in industry became obvious ... Negroes have not made the progress that the European immigrants have because employers know that they can pay Negro labor still less than European labor.

Fair Employment Legislation and the war opened up more job opportunities for blacks, and also facilitated the much needed interaction of the two races. As Stanley Grizzle (n.d.), one time secretary-treasurer of the Toronto C.P.R. Division of Sleeping Car Porters said in an article he wrote about discrimination: "There are people of good will who do not give their support to 'Fair Practice Laws' because they are convinced that it is impossible to legislate against prejudice. Education, they say is 'the answer'." Mr. Grizzle goes on to describe the case of a restaurant owner who could not be "educated", and refused for 20 years to serve colored people. Only after numerous court cases did this situation change. He says further:

... Anti-discrimination laws do not pretend to eliminate prejudice, but experience has taught us that the law is an educational force. Legislation brings about a commingling of the majority and minority groups thus creating the setting in which education can be most effective

Gradually attitudinal change in Toronto began to take place through a wider contact between black and white people, and, with the emerging consciousness about civil rights and trade unions, contributed to a more promising economic and social environment for the black community as a whole, and for the work of the politically active in black Toronto (Henry 1981). The National Black Coalition NBC was formed in 1969 to address the concerns and needs of black people in Canada, and functioned as an umbrella group for 60 black organizations across Canada.¹³

New job opportunities and better income for black families resulted in a rise in the general standard of living within the black community. More black families were able to buy their own homes, and as residential segregation broke down black people

¹³ See P.D. McClain's thesis The Political Behaviour of Afro-Canadians (Palo Alto, CA: R&E Research Associates Inc., 1979) for a description of NBC, its mandate and challenges

were able to integrate into wider areas of the city (Canadian Citizenship 1960). By 1967 selective immigration laws which had been designed to keep out non-white immigrants were broadened to promote immigration to fill the labor shortage (McClain 1979, Brand 1984, Stasiulis 1987, Ng 1986). As a result a great influx of West Indian immigrants added to the black communities numbers in Toronto.

Incidents of violence, threats, defamation, vandalism, Ku Klux Klan and John Birch activities, have been carried out against the black community throughout the past 50 years (Walker 1985). On a daily basis in schools and jobs black people have been denied opportunities, rights, and respect and been subjected to bodily harm and obscene and racist remarks. Some of the more violent acts rarely reported by any white newspapers (see: Gairey 1981, Tulloch 1975, Brand 1986), were recorded consistently through the 1970s by the Black newspaper Contrast (McClain 1979: 19-30).

In summary, the communities responses were limited by their marginal position politically and economically. They were also constrained by a lack of leadership and by divisions based shade of skin and ethnic differences; there was not a 'black community' per se (Henry 1981, McClain 1979, Winks 1971). Walker describes how the blacks at that time had to create a parallel society. Few blacks had the option to assimilate into the white mainstream because of the color line. He explains that:

While it would be a mistake to interpret black culture solely as a negative response to white racism. It must be recognized that whatever tendencies the blacks have had to preserve those aspects of life considered valuable by themselves, they have been reinforced and enhanced by the fact that alternative, total assimilation has been denied them. Any examination of black community life must proceed from a basic understanding that a color line has existed in Canada, and that it has imposed physical and non-physical restraints on the choices open to the black Canadian (1985: 105)

To be a black child in a Canadian school before the 1960s was especially difficult. These children would in all likelihood be among the few if not only black children in their school (exceptions being the communities in Nova Scotia). There were few successful black role models and most parents worked at menial jobs. Even those parents who had managed to get an education were in most cases unable to get a job in

the profession for which they were trained. For example a McGill psychologist with an masters degree had to work in a factory, a journalist worked as a postman, and deacons and preachers worked as garbage collectors (Brand 1986, Howe 1990, Talbot 1984). Representations of black people in children's textbooks and the larger media were derogatory, racist, and stereotypical. Blacks were usually mentioned in connection with slavery, and stereotypes were supported by jokes and everyday language which carried such expressions as "nigger work" (the lowest jobs fit only for black people). The barrage of negative images, and the threats and taunts from racist teachers and students took its toll on black students. Many children didn't make it past high school. As Carol Talbot (1984: 80) describes:

By the age of sixteen I saw very few black boys or girls in school. The black boys seemed discouraged early, and success in sports was not enough to sustain them. More often than not they had records of fighting and classroom behavior problems-small wonder in a world where colored' was synonymous with "dirty", "stupid", and "nigger"

The drop out rate according to the black community was high. They felt this was caused by economic and psychological reasons. The youth had to help support their families who were living on meager wages. In addition the youth had feelings of hopelessness about the possibilities of getting a good job--it made little difference if a black acquired an education since he/she couldn't get a decent job (McClain 1979: 79-80). The reality of this situation was well known by blacks; they knew that the only jobs in the early days were portering, domestic or factory work. By the 1950-60s other job possibilities had opened up. However, the fit between educational background and opportunity did not find a match for everyone brought up in this time period. McClain was told in the mid-1970s that Canadian whites show their true colors when blacks try to move ahead.

One of the demoralizing situations which occurs frequently in the life of many black people living in Canada, is the situation in which strangers meeting black people for the first time will question them regarding their birthplace. It is assumed that they

can't possibly be Canadian. For the native born Canadians the assumption was that they must have come from the Islands. This constant negation of a Canadian identity, of Canadian black history, and the misplaced assumption that they are immigrants, creates a feeling of intense anger, and resentment (Howe 1990, McClain 1979, Talbot 1984).

Brand suggests that the dominant society perpetuates the ideology that Canada is "white" by constructing a perception of black people as being in "a continued state of migrancy" (Brand 1984). I found, in addition, that the wrongful assumption by whites that all blacks must be Jamaicans, and that all Jamaicans are criminals (this based on some actual criminal incidents involving a few Jamaicans), has created an antagonism between native black people, other West Indians, and the Jamaican and white communities (Howe 1990).

Factors then, such as race, ethnicity, shade of color, and gender were the primary deciding factors for every major move of a black person's life in those early years in Toronto. There was not a chance of a black person moving out of their sphere unless they were lighter skinned, could "marry out", had money and/or connections with the old established black families, had white patronage, or indisputable expertise and education. Any of these factors could determine in what class they functioned and subsequently influence the type of life they could lead.

Black Women in Canada: Immigration and Work

In this section of the chapter I examine how black women have experienced their lives in Canada. Using black feminist theory as a framework I focus on immigration and work, and show how race, class and gender structure the lives of women both historically and in contemporary life.

Black feminist theory contends that black women experience the world differently than white women. Their political and economic status in society dictates different sets of experiences that in turn affect the social construction of their world. Collins (1989: 747) suggests that not only are experiences different between black and white women but the interpretation of those experiences will also be different. She explains:

... The unpaid and paid work that black women perform, the types of communities in which they live, and the kinds of relationships they have with others, suggests that African-American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not black and female. In brief, a subordinate group not only experience a different kind of reality than a group that rules, but a subordinate group may interpret that reality differently than a dominant group

A sociologist shares her interpretation of the reality of a minority woman in Canada:

In Canada there are only fleeting images of us. A few allusions to "slavery" a few numbers indicating a statistical state of being in the records of government agencies, some reference to an entity called "immigrant women" ...are what we have so far (Banner: 1986: 11)

Roxanne Ng (1986: 269, 284) has argued that the terminology "immigrant women" is not only naming a certain group of people but also identifying their position as products of historical and social processes. She says:

When we call a woman an "immigrant woman" we are naming knowingly or unknowingly, the social relations which lead to the commodification of a certain group of people (in this case women belonging primarily to visible minority groups) in Canada. That is we are not simply identifying a group of people, more to the point, we are identifying *how* some people are *transformed* in relation to the productive processes of society...Immigrant women are the products of a set of historical and political processes.

terms of chronology, themes, categories, etc. My suggestions along these lines would also be discussed with the narrators, and we would endeavor to create a work which is fully participatory. This idea has been deferred until my thesis is finished and we can work together on the life histories in book form.

10. For the thesis text, I prepared those excerpts from the life histories that would serve to introduce the participants to the readers, and went through the transcriptions and journal notes to find the dialogues and thoughts which would best express our experience of process and product.

A year passed during which time I stayed in touch with Deborah and Phoenix by letters and one visit. I recorded the narratives of the major participants during July and September 1990, but the project ended up being extended a full year, so that I was also able to conduct interviews and have visits with the family in July and November 1991.

11. In November 1991, exactly one year later from the last interview, I arranged to spend a long weekend with the two families and catch up on the news. This was a good chance to record some new thoughts and observations about several major life passages which had occurred.

12. In January 1992 I talked further with Phoenix by telephone about developments in her life. I have an ongoing friendship with both women and their families.

Historically, in Canada the migration of black people has been directly linked to providing cheap slave labor in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then in the twentieth century cheap domestic and railroad labor (Brand 1984, Henry 1981). It is these demands for cheap labor which direct demographic growth in Canada, and dictate immigration law and policy (Ng 1986, Stasiulis 1987). In this regard Silvera (1986: 12) notes the historical participation of West Indian immigrant women in domestic service for Canadians:

In 1911 immigrant women formed 35% of the female work force in domestic and personal service, even though they make up only 24% of the female work force in all other occupations including service jobs. Female domestics were preferred immigrants long before 1880, but the drive to recruit immigrant domestics intensified as industrialization diverted (Canadian) women from service in other occupations.

In the 1940s-1950s black women were not employed in any highly visible jobs, and, if they were in the public eye they worked in low ranking service jobs. "Blacks were usually hired only for visibly menial positions...not as clerks, waitresses, or other positions of status visible to the purchasing public (Talbot 1984: 75).

Not all immigrant women remained in domestic service or menial jobs. For some women the immigration scheme was useful for their purposes of upward mobility. Many well-educated and professional women from the Caribbean took advantage of the Domestic Scheme of 1955 to enter Canada. These women could complete a year of service, acquire landed immigrant status, and then continue on to other occupations (Silvera 1983: 2, Talbot 1984: 21).

Brand, writing in 1984, argued that racism still kept black women in segregated occupations and service positions such as nursing and nurses aides, food and service workers, factory workers, telephone operators, hotel workers, and clerks. High-school streaming in the schools in and around Toronto perpetuate the notions that black girls are only capable of these kind of jobs (1984: 30).

Later studies found that black women and some other groups of non-European women are found in more diversified occupations; Stasiulis (1987: 6) states that these women are:

... [B]i-modally distributed across the occupational and class structure, (i.e. they tend to be found in both professional occupations (in the fields of health care, education and research) as well as in low-income processing and service occupations.

Stasiulis explains that these divisions exist due to selective immigration policy "which since the early 1960s sought to recruit Third World immigrants with high levels of education, professional and technical skills". Ng (1986: 275) argues that immigrants are "inserted" into certain labor positions by government employment agencies, and thus in turn into certain class positions. Stasiulis, confirming this point, argues in addition that there exists racial stratification within domestic service. British women occupy the higher status positions as nannies in contrast to Filipina and Caribbean women who are hired as maids and servants (Stasiulis 1987: 6).

Other prescribed "social locations" in which Blacks have been allowed to operate and acquire excellence are in the realms of sport and entertainment. For example, Brand (1984: 30) points out there is a "proliferation of black women in sports" who have made it to National team levels.

Although there has been a continuous history of constraints leveled against most women of color in Canada, some of these women in their struggle to survive, have been agents of change in and among themselves. Several authors have written about the achievements of black women in Canada, and some work has been done to document organizations formed and run by black women.¹⁴

¹⁴ See R. Brathwaite Black Women in Canada, (Westhill: np., 1977), and list of organizations of black women in D. Brand "Black Women in Toronto: Gender, Race and Class." Fireweed 19 (Summer/Fall 1984) 26-43

My review of Black history in Canada, and specifically the Toronto Community, has shown that divisions based on skin color, class and ethnicity within the black community began with the settlement of blacks in the early 1800s, and was well established at least sixty years before the mass influx of black immigrants. Racist ideology and practice lay behind the differentiations established within the community. These divisions affected the lives of women and men in terms of the social and economic spheres in which they could live and operate. Our research indicates that certain blacks were rewarded by the dominant societies preference for lighter-skinned blacks, and subsequently these people were offered better educational and work opportunities, white patronage, and were given greater social acceptance. In contemporary times dominant racist ideology manifested in immigration policy and educational streaming, keep certain women of color in job ghettos and prescribed social locations.

This review of the black community of Toronto prepares the background for the next chapter which introduces my life history participants and presents my findings about the process and product of a life history research endeavor.

CHAPTER FOUR

To be Black and female in a society which is sexist and racist is to be in a unique position of having nowhere to go but up. Rosemary Brown in The Black Woman in Canada (Braithwaite 1977: 1x).

The Process and the Product

In this chapter I will present my findings, those elements I found interesting regarding the process and product of my life history research. When I started this project I had no idea of what the interactions would be, and although I was hopeful my participants would be willing to share their views of how the process went, I was not sure whether in fact *any* response would be forthcoming. As it has turned out, there have been numerous areas of response on which to comment. Through engaging in this process I discovered some of the understandings of the participants about the project: what their commitment was to the project, what expectations they had as to how the narrative would turn out, how they felt about their life and themselves after having read their story, how the environment, the process, and the researcher affected them.

From my perspective, I comment on numerous aspects of my method, from noting how the work was scheduled to exploring the problems and rewards of transcribing. I discuss my reaction to the product, the problems and rewards of partnership, and the interactions we experienced through the process-the handling of emotions, the family dynamics, and the managing of dialogue. In addition, I discuss how I perceive the different worlds we live in as black participants and white participant/researcher.

The product, which is the text itself, has given rise to an analysis of themes, language, and perspectives within the text, a discussion about the reading of a text, and the response of the participants to that reading. I have been able to explore through the

participants words, their feelings of empowerment through the reading and possession of the text. We have looked together at the "managing of the text", aspects of which involve ethics, the preservation of dignity, the preservation of silence and how to present the text. As a means to illustrating the nature of the process for the reader, I include an extensive amount of dialogue. Inclusion of the dialogue serves to contextualize our interactions, and the words of all the participants as to how they thought and felt. This thick description provides the possibility of "evocation" (Tyler 1986: 129) or the calling forth of meaning from the dimensions and depths of interactions for the reader.

To begin this section in the spirit of personal narrative research, I provide an introduction to Deborah and Phoenix through a collection of descriptions from themselves, myself, and some perspectives of their loved ones: Clarence husband of Deborah, Travis husband of Phoenix, Mathew nephew of Phoenix and grandson of Deborah. To remind the reader of the origins of the life history participants (discussed in the Introduction), Deborah was born in the West Indies and emigrated alone to Canada in the 1940s to continue her schooling. Phoenix was born in a Toronto suburb in the late 1950s and has lived there all her life.

Introduction to the Life History Participants

Deborah Henry (My description)

A petite 70 year old woman (who looks 10 years younger), copper-skinned, fine-boned, always freshly dressed and ready to smile, a hospitable woman. She worked through her child-rearing years on the night shift as a clerk in the telephone company. Mother of three children of her own, all now in their thirties-- Jeze, Roy, and Phoenix she adopted and also fostered five children till they were fully grown, and she cared for numerous other children and youth over the years. Her activities at this time include weekly fitness classes, caring for babies at a nursery, her church activities, and taking care of her own home and husband.

Phoenix Henry-Neils (Phoenix' description of herself written in the third person)

Phoenix is 32 years old, she has her black hair worn in a "mushroom" style, shaved close on the sides and back, long on the top. A heart-shaped face with high cheek bones, black eyes with a ring of gray in the middle, clean teeth, coconut brown skin, curly eye lashes, and full lips. Athlete's body, high waisted with strong forearms and legs. She dresses in a lot of black and mostly casual clothes. She is a national athlete in her sport. She lives close to her mother and father (in the same neighborhood). Beside playing her sport several times a week, she likes to dance and goes out to clubs regularly.

Deborah Henry

Growing Up:

When I was just about eleven years old my grandmother took a paralytic stroke... The people around her couldn't do anything to please her. So I took over at eleven years old! I was the only one that could give her a bath, and I was, I have to say, pretty well developed at that time to know what to do. I could change her from her bed to a small bed, and get her bed all made. I could clean her up, dress her, get her supper...have everything fresh and nice for her...comb her hair... and she liked me to read the Bible to her. I always have a feeling for old people. I myself can do for them. I remember slipping away from the home, into another lady's home where she asked for help, and I would be there doing the best that I can for her. My folks would get mad and say to me what are you doing? They said to me you're bending quite low, and they thought I was going low in myself to do this. Sometimes I hide, just to do the things that I like to do for people.

So I always going towards helping someone. I never like to see advantage taken of young people, children, or of people that are old and can't help themselves... I help other children, teenage children-these children aren't only black, they are white children who come into my home because they are having trouble.

On coming to Canada from Jamaica:

I can only say that when I came to Canada I find that with the black and white there is a lot of changes. Now it isn't like it was before. There were a lot of places that black people weren't allowed to go. Black people had to keep to themselves because of the discrimination. There were a lot of people who wanted to worship in the different denominations of the churches, but they were told to go and worship with their own people. There is a difference now- they go right in and worship with the people...these are the white churches.

On Discrimination, Difference, and Change:

[In the early days 1920-40s] there was a black women's club. I'm not belonging to it. I wasn't interested in it because I understand they go by complexion, they go by position, what you were in, what your husband do...I didn't think they were right separating people by color, positions, whatsoever it is. The group is different now,...they are West Indian, Canadian, and American now.

We were the only black family in the neighborhood. I guess we were a little strange to some people who had never seen black people before. Our children sometimes meet up with name calling and discrimination. After they get to know them those children are in my house just like any other house.

When you were walking down the street you might see a mother coming up the other way with a baby in the carriage. The baby might be crying, but as soon as the baby see me or someone else that was black that baby stop crying and start laughing! (laughter) A lot of changes. Now there is black people all over anywhere you go! Anywhere, everywhere. I wonder sometimes when I go down to see the Caribana parade, when did they have all this immigration of these people!

As a Wife from a Husband's Perspective:

I met Deb at a social occasion and we were married within six months. And from the outset she showed a willingness to do for others.. she took in my brothers children.. we took in children from Children's Aid. we cared for my father til! the final years of his life and until the work became too much for Deborah (he was a big man and too much for a slight woman to manage).. When I went to school she made it possible for me to study by not making demands on me. ...She was thrifty,... as a result we were able to get a house after two years of marriage.... We are different in nature, but yet it seems to me we complement each other's needs. I need the stability of someone that is going to be there for me. She will always be there for me.

Trials of a Mother told by the Daughter Phoenix:

My brother's education was sabotaged completely...when he was in grade one he was told that he was stupid, that he was never going to be successful ..the principal came to my mum's home and told her that he was going to jail by the time he was sixteen years old!--they put him in a school for mentally retarded kids...well he learned later how to operate very complicated machinery, for which you have to have a license and extensive training...if he was mentally deficient he wouldn't be able to learn how to do that!

On being a Mother from a Daughter's Perspective:

My Mum is a soft, loving and caring person, but she doesn't take any crap off anybody. she has got spunk. My mother has insurmountable strength and my mother's faith has done a lot, her faith in God and the way we are supposed to live in harmony in this world has a lot to do with her character and how she has survived...Now I know she happens to be my blood mother, regardless of that she is a phenomenal example of a real loving human being. I admire her for that. I admire her for all the shit she has had to put up with, to still be able to do the right thing....She is so selfless, so concerned with the people that she loves, that she kind of forgets her own needs.

My folk were always hardworking people, dedicated people. I'm just glad that they don't have to do jobs like that anymore. I think that they could have been better used in different capacities. They were just never given a chance. What is a bit of a heartbreaker is to see my brothers go through the same thing now. To see the whole thing perpetuated.

Survival Strategies of Deborah as told by Phoenix:

Did your Mum ever talk about discriminatory experiences of her own?

I know of incidences, it wasn't like we ever sat around the table [specifically to talk about these things]. I remember the time my mother related that she was sitting on the street car and there was a bunch of Chinese people and they were talking in their tongue. My mother was raised with quite a few Chinese in Jamaica and the derogatory name for black folk, the name which is comparable to nigger is wugwee. My mother [heard] them say wugwee, and she turned around and said "Who you calling nigger!" And of course these people were quite surprised that she knew what this term meant! So we would talk about an incident like that around a Sunday night dinner and just be in tears of laughter, it was all amongst ourselves. It was "black humor" something that you laugh at but it is not funny at all. I know that there was a petition to get us out of the neighborhood, when my folks first moved to this neighborhood. The neighbor next door tore it up. I guess he was a little bit different in his own right you know.

Deborah's Husband as told by his daughter Phoenix

What about your Dad?

My Dad, the way he fought for us in the school system was amazing.... When they realized that my father wasn't an underling to them, that my father could speak to anybody at any level of administration about anything, then they grew to have a little respect for what he could do. He had books and films like Tar Baby taken out of the school curriculum.....

He seems like a very gentle soul, he wouldn't want to set out to hurt anybody. Yet I know he has been through a lot of discrimination himself, as a man even you know! As a black man. As to his intellect being questioned, as to people taking for granted that he is going to be stupid before he opens his mouth! [yes that happened all the time]. And having to put on that uniform [not wanting to] and yet doing it anyway-to support his kids, to give them a better opportunity, a better foundation to push off from! That's really admirable because he gave up his own status for how he could have been regarded by these very people who would take for granted that he was a dumb black man.

He could have been a journalist you know. He could have been many things, but because those doors were not open at that time, he did what he could in order to make his family work. I admire him a lot for that! It is like me working at Burger King because that's the only thing that I could do in order for my kid to have shoes on his feet. I think it has been a battle for him, proving that he is not a dumb security guard. Whether some of these people liked us or liked us in their neighborhood or not, they had to give respect where respect was due. He got respect.

Phoenix

On Herself:

I was the only chip in their cookie. I was raised to be an individual, and when there is something that rubs me the wrong way and I feel that has to be addressed then I'll say it no matter how unpopular it is raising it. Through all the pain that I suffered as a young kid I would never trade the things that I learned about human nature, these are things that no one can take away from me. Even to this day I have dealt with very racist people who are confused because I don't fit the mold that they have envisioned. Therefore they would "compliment" me saying, 'oh, you are a real nice black person, I haven't talked to many black people before', or, 'you're a real nice one, you're just like a white person!' Which to them is like a *compliment*. I will correct them about that!"

So far there have been times that I have been so low that I have had to reach up to touch the bottom. You just don't want to play this game anymore.... Sometimes I think about the things that I have been through, and how I rose above them. Jesus, I could be a girl named Phoenix. You know I think I could wear that name quite well. Maybe that's the name I will choose to keep my privacy in this situation

On Being Black Canadian:

There are not many people that have come up the way I have. Being the only chip in the cookie, and not being of the West Indian culture there's very, very, few of us, and some that have not made it. Some that have decided to get off the bus [commit suicide], just because they don't have anybody to relate to. They have these monsters inside them for so many years. Some marry white and move to rural communities, some go radical black, some marry Americans.

I felt that I had to wear some kind of a sign [because of being black Canadian and not West Indian] which said this is what I am *not*. You see me coming and perceive me in a certain kind of way but I am not that. I shouldn't have this stress every waking part of the day.

On Racism:

I deal with it by being a little bit reclusive at times. My husband and I have our own business and I don't have to deal with these racists, and that's a part of my sanity right now-not having to deal with them. My husband [who is white] was cleaning a machine we own in a factory a couple of months ago. The supervisor came in and saw him down on his knees cleaning the machine and said, "What are you doing that for, that's a job for a black man."

The only time I ever heard a "nigger" joke was when they turned it into a "pakki" joke. There is no one going to approach me and tell me a "nigger joke", no one in their right mind anyway.

When you walk into sports clubs here in Toronto you will see black people in positions of service, picking up the towels, doing the laundry and the cleaning. I walk in as a player or a member, a lot of them smile at me, and I want to take them aside and say what are you doing here? I know what it is like to support a family, everybody has to do something, and yet at the same time I resent it. I feel like all the black folk are picking up after the white folk. It makes me angry!

How Racism Affects People and Relationships:

There are things I think that we all deal with that we don't talk about much. It has been a real dishfull to cope with. Every human should have a right to feel insecure about this or that but when we voice our insecurities it is like showing our weakness to someone you don't want to show weakness to. That's really difficult to let our loved ones see that. We have a very difficult time expressing that. We always want to show strength, to show that you are stronger than what they think you are, and they [racists] are not going to deter you from doing things that are important to you. ...

I feel like a very strong person who would never want to trade my capabilities with anyone else. And on the other end of the spectrum for all the times I was told *I can't*, and I am not good enough, it is a constant battle. So when I am putting in 150% yesterday, it's not good enough, and so I start to believe they're right. And that for me--to feel the insecurity of not being able to do what I am capable of doing--rips me up inside.

Husband's Perspective:

I see her as a fighter and rebel, but she is a talented person, a genuine person, and very intelligent. I think things can't stop her.

Her Mother's Perspective:

This daughter of mine she was beautiful. She should be either a social worker or a psychiatrist--anything to do with the lives of young people...She was very good with talking with them and keeping

them away from drugs and things like that. And they told me the satisfaction they get with Phoenix and how they respect her. she never reveal their problems to anyone...and they would be all right.

Phoenix come across some discrimination too with some of her teachers. They set her back a lot, instead of pulling her forward. That is something bad too.

From her Nephew's Mathew's perspective, in connection with our talk on past exclusionary academic practices and the life history project itself:

I would have expected my aunt, the way she has been pushed around by so many white people, to be one of the people that would refuse to work with you, but she is too smart for that!

Phoenix on her Mother and Herself:

How does your life differ from your mother's experience?

My life was much less controlled by my parents. They gave me room to grow as an individual, than the opportunity my mother had. I think my mum had certain expectations put on her and that was all she knew that life was about. To step outside of that for any selfish reasons of her own...Not that I stepped outside of the realm my folks set out for me, but they gave me room to grow, room to have my own opinions. They didn't tell me how I had to feel about this and that. Even going to the park and playing on my own for hours at a time. I wasn't saddled in a small environment where everybody knows you. I think that she had household responsibilities that were far beyond her years. She looked after her grandmother when she was only 10 years old. That is usually an adult that does something like that.

In a lot of areas I matured differently from my Mum in that my mother was thrown into a situation of responsibility to others, whereas I only had to be responsible for myself, but I got to spend more time with myself and my needs and what I felt was right or wrong, and I got to draw conclusions about life. So things my Mum learned in her later years I learned in my younger years, but I can still definitely say I am learning off my mother. I am still an open person to learn off others. I think that my mum through her life experiences has learned a lot. She became well rounded through the years, more rounded than many people that I know. She even knows how rigidly she was raised. The fact that she couldn't have a boy kiss her on the cheek, things like that. It was just so strict, a lot of women were unwed mothers. That was the other end of the sphere, her parents wanted nothing like that for her, and they made sure nothing like that would happen to her. They scared that into her.

Method: The Scheduling of the Work

With very rare exceptions it is the researcher who narrates, who "authors" the ethnography. In the last instance an ethnography is a written document structured primarily by a researcher's interpretations, registered in a researcher's voice (Stacey 1988: 23).

1. After my initial visit with Deborah, and the chance meeting with Phoenix in the early summer of 1990, I returned to Toronto mid-summer for another visit to talk to the participants. At my second meeting I explained the nature and purpose of the research. I spent an hour or so explaining my views on the type of research which had been conducted in the past, and my commitment to women's studies and black history. I wanted to make absolutely clear (having already had a negative experience in this regard which I will explain later) that my hopes and expectations were for the life histories to be published later as a collaborative project. After hearing all this they confirmed their desire to proceed with the project. They understood their anonymity would be respected, and that they would have a part in reviewing the materials which would be published. I promised the other participants to send copies of their interviews to them for their correction (the smaller interviews were on the average two hours long, while the longer ones were three to five hours long). Another relative of the family, a 55 year-old man, nephew of Clarence, whom I did not know, stopped by and listened to my explanations. Afterward he offered to do his life history with me if I needed additional participants. This was a happy occurrence and helped to alleviate my concerns about black people refusing to work with white researchers.

2. When I returned to Ottawa I wrote to the major participants individually, outlining my expectations of how the research scheduling might go, what I needed them to do, and

asking for a schedule convenient to them. I suggested it would be useful if they gathered together whatever family albums, maps, and memorabilia they would like to show me.

3. The actual narration and interviews took place in the late summer of 1990. I stayed with a friend who lived one hour's distance away, and drove by car every day to visit. I visited both families in their homes daily and the interviews took place in Deborah's and in Phoenix' living rooms. At that time I got to know other family members who would pop in for visits. I usually took fruit to share, and Phoenix and I would sometimes go out to lunch together, though most of the time we worked through lunch, and instead joined Deborah for tea in the afternoon.

The unexpected development was that Phoenix devoted a lot of time to her life story, and it became the major focus of my work. We were together initially for a ten day period, working on the average five to six hours a day, and a few days working up to eight hours a day. I recorded 16 hours of Phoenix's personal narrative on tape which resulted in an eighty page single-spaced transcript (not including her reflections and thoughts about the process of our project). Deborah and I spent about 40 hours together, our interviews usually taking place in the evening from 6.00 to 10.00 p.m. Seven of these hours were recorded and resulted in a 30 page single-spaced transcript. I would often pay Clarence a half an hour visit too, and he would show me how he was getting on with his memoirs, and the archival materials about the black and native communities that he had gathered over the past 50 years.

4. During the two weeks of daily visits I recorded journal notes every day, reflecting on process, and thinking of further questions and clarifications.

5. When I arrived home I immediately wrote to Phoenix, as she was in a very delicate situation emotionally, and in addition she had asked me to write to her and tell her how *I felt* about the process.

6. The last weeks of the summer and early Fall were spent transcribing the tapes and writing my reflections on the process.

7. When the narratives were finished in September I sent the copies to Deborah and Phoenix with letters asking them to make notes of their reactions to their texts. I also requested a future meeting to go over the texts, and to arrange for other interviews.

8. In October all of us met during a two week period to go over the texts and I conducted interviews with other family members. I enjoyed spending extra social time with the families. I recorded on tape the participant's reactions and observations concerning the process we went through in the reproduction of their narratives. I also set aside time to allow for the theoretical and emotional reflections of both women on their written narratives, and I recorded those reflections.

Deborah and I spent one evening together revising her narrative, and Phoenix and I spent a full week together doing revisions and more taping of her reflections on her life and the process of doing life history work. On Phoenix' request we devoted an entire day to "rewriting" her narrative, so that she could dictate how it "read" best, and I could write it according to her grammatical corrections and the rhythm she wished reproduced in the text.

9. The next few months I transcribed the reflections and changes of the text by the two participants. I anticipated that later in the year, time would also be spent going over the final transcripts together and ordering them based on the suggestions of the narrators in

terms of chronology, themes, categories, etc. My suggestions along these lines would also be discussed with the narrators, and we would endeavor to create a work which is fully participatory. This idea has been deferred until my thesis is finished and we can work together on the life histories in book form.

10. For the thesis text, I prepared those excerpts from the life histories that would serve to introduce the participants to the readers, and went through the transcriptions and journal notes to find the dialogues and thoughts which would best express our experience of process and product.

A year passed during which time I stayed in touch with Deborah and Phoenix by letters and one visit. I recorded the narratives of the major participants during July and September 1990, but the project ended up being extended a full year, so that I was also able to conduct interviews and have visits with the family in July and November 1991.

11. In November 1991, exactly one year later from the last interview, I arranged to spend a long weekend with the two families and catch up on the news. This was a good chance to record some new thoughts and observations about several major life passages which had occurred.

12. In January 1992 I talked further with Phoenix by telephone about developments in her life. I have an ongoing friendship with both women and their families.

Expectations and Responses of Participants

Although I knew that "the natural setting" would be an opportunity to see my participants within the circle of their family life, I did have reservations about our recording sessions being a part of the rhythm of daily life. I had hoped that my recording sessions would be inviolable-uninterrupted, because there is no way of knowing exactly how much material can be covered at one time. I had time constraints, and living five hours away, I knew it would be difficult to arrange follow-up visits. If only a short time period is available, or little material is covered and there is an interruption, that period of opportunity may be finished. As it turned out I did end up with enough material, and was able, like so many researchers before me, to relax and appreciate the flow of everyday interactions that went on around me. Interruptions became opportunities to see family life in process, and to get a feeling for interactions inside and outside the family through phone calls and family meals.

As far as the reading of the narratives was concerned, I had specific expectations about how I would like the participants to approach this task. I wrote a letter to each participant providing some instructions on what to do in order to record their responses when they read their narrative. I find it rather embarrassing now to recollect that I had two sets of directions, one to be read before and one after. At least one letter was necessary in that it explained that the texts were not finished products, that they read differently than how they sounded when narrated, that the sentences were often unfinished, the grammar may seem strange, and there would be repetitions etc.

Some of the requests I made of my participants I now see as overly ambitious for example, that the participants should make comments in the margin about their reflections, note any additions that should be made, and note mistakes. When it came time to go over the text I found out that neither participant had recorded any response themselves. Phoenix was happy to do it with me in person, taping her response over a

period of several sessions. She did give an extraordinary amount of time to correcting the grammar and style. Deborah, on the other hand only had to spend an evening talking to me about the text. She was happy with the text and didn't want to work on it anymore. She was glad to co-operate with clarifications but had no interest in correcting any grammar or modifying her style, nor did she have any interest in talking about the process except in a very general way. So I have no "on the spot" reflections as to how these women received the first reading of their life story. I also now realize in retrospect how my instructions and expectations were somewhat unrealistic!

Commitment

At the very beginning Deborah seemed willing to participate in the project but noncommittal about having the work published. I was concerned about her understanding the importance of her 'committed participation', and the importance of publishing the material for black women and society at large. Her response was, "We will see". I think meaning "don't worry, it will work out fine". In my journal that evening I wrote, "thinking back it was a grueling process last night trying to ascertain if Deborah felt committed to this life history. I think she sees it as important but is not really sure of how it could be used by people." Much later Phoenix was to tell me that her mother was a very private woman.

I wondered whether I should bring my concern to Deborah again, and mention that if she was not willing to have it published that I would have to search for another participant-she had already mentioned another woman from the community who might be interested. I decided to go with my intuition and her assurance that it would be all right. Later we talked again about it, and she felt fine about the publishing part, as long as her anonymity was protected.

Interactions in the Process: Patterns of Response

The finer human qualities like patience, honesty, compassion and empathy are very important in a research endeavor, and are being spoken about as an important part of an ideal research relation (as discussed previously in the fourth methodological model). (Many factors such as malfunctioning tape recorders, interrupted schedules through sickness and lateness, emergencies that arise, heated emotions during the recording, all the everyday occurrences, can sometimes make a recording session a challenge to get through for both participants.)

In establishing a working relationship between myself and the participants I found some patterns emerging which I now feel arise from a heart-felt desire on my part to communicate on all levels-kinesthetically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, with my participants. These connections are mentioned frequently by Phoenix in her dialogue about our relationship (which I include throughout this chapter). The following are examples of the kind of interactions we participated in together.

I found Deborah requires verbal assurance and positive body language from me to keep her going. She looked to me to see if I have understood and to see if she should go on. She also waited sometimes for me to share some thoughts with her. I have ended up "uh huhing" throughout the tape in affirmation, and also encouraging her on with resolutions to her statements by nodding and maintaining interested body posture- I leaned forward, relaxed and facing her. From both participants I understood their unspoken need to feel comfortable and at ease with me. I in turn try to approach my co-workers with sincere humility, so that I can do my best for them and make the project worthy of their time and efforts.

I recorded similar occurrences with Phoenix. Phoenix does not need encouragement to begin speaking, nor to carry on with her conversation, but she does look to me for me to signal I understand what she is saying. As I noted in my journal: "I suddenly realized Friday morning when I said to Phoenix; "We are going to hear a lot of

'uh huhing' on the tape," me agreeing or encouraging her on) that there is a kind of call/response here. Is this me falling into a pattern which I have unconsciously picked up from my black friends, or is this a part of my natural empathy? I think the latter, perhaps more accentuated now as I think it is necessary to show that I gained some understanding of these complex experiences which I do not know-having not lived them.

Pat Collins (1989: 766) has some useful observations in regards to caring about others and how this is manifested in black culture. I think these observations have their place in personal narrative research. She argues that African-American culture has an 'ethic of caring', three components of which are "the values placed on individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy". Collins suggests further that the call and response discourse mode manifests this ethic in practice. She uses the black church service as the example of the presentation of ideas by the minister and appraisal of knowledge claims by the congregation. I have heard this kind of dialogue at black Canadian church services, in many conversations between black Canadian friends, and I have heard similar modes of discourse between white women of diverse ethnic backgrounds. These conversations reflect ways of knowing which arise from peoples' everyday experiences and which are verified and affirmed through the listener's everyday experience and their response to the speaker as she unfolds her story.

Collins argues in her article that there are ways of knowing which are unique to black women, and ways of knowing which are similar between black and white women. To know through connecting with another using emotion, caring, and individual expressiveness, are aspects Collins suggests of many women's experience. Having later realized how comfortable my participants became during our project together, and recognizing these patterns and qualities in our behaviors causes me to believe that along with, trust, honesty, patience, courtesy, and empathy, which many researchers have already mentioned, these other qualities - attention to individual expressiveness, and

encouraging the appropriateness of emotions could be positive qualities for life history interviewers to nurture.

Dealing with Emotions

Phoenix was very angry for a number of our sessions. It was heartaching. For the first few minutes it was alarming, then I came to terms very quickly with what the intent of this expression of anger was, and how I would respond to it. My reaction was to remain open, receptive, and encouraging so that she might express anger without any judgment or reserve from me. The emotions penetrated enough that I was horrified by the situations and very moved, but I did not become immobilized, rather I let the emotion flow through me rather than feeling insulted. I understood that Phoenix was speaking to me/through me to a wider audience. Letting the tape recorder do its part in the recording, not having to worry about taking notes at this time, allowed me to devote my complete attention to what Phoenix had to say.

Phoenix was beside herself with rage at the racists who continue to come into her life. From job hunting to personal friends there was always the shock of encountering them yet again. As she told me of these situations she expressed her anger by leaning forward and accenting her words by banging her hand on her legs and often her finger in the same motions on my knees. Listening to the tapes later I cry! When we are together I am moved by her sorrow and pain, and appalled at her story.

Were you ever concerned you might scare me off when you were really angry several times, and were speaking to me, or through me rather to a white audience, did that ever cross your mind?

No, and only because I felt that bond with you and that was intangible. I think that if it hadn't been you I may have said well you just don't fucking understand me, and I can't make you understand and so on. I may have gotten that frustrated. But no it didn't happen that way with you and I. I felt very comfortable because I felt you were being very honest with me. There was something that was... you are very real...there wasn't a facade. You really did want to know, there wasn't some kind of charity thing in order to

feel like you are giving to the unfortunate, the subservient kind of people. You understand what I mean?

Journal Notes: Today was a breakthrough for Phoenix as far as I can see. She talked about family and the polarization of different members, and the absence of physical affection in her childhood. She cried so much she was not able to converse. She asked me at one point what I thought about her and I told her that I loved her qualities and gave her a hug. This was accepted well. I'm not quite sure how to go with her emotion, on the one hand I want to comfort, on the other hand I know that she needs to feel she is in control. I go the middle path-drawing close physically in some manner and leaving her the space to be in control. I asked her how she was feeling before I left and she said okay. I expressed that if at any point she wanted to stop and consolidate inside, we would rearrange our schedule. She said it would be fine and she would like to see me tomorrow.

Journal Notes: Today was a crisis for Phoenix. She told me she spent the night awake crying. She feels emotionally exhausted. I suggested we not continue today with the questions, but she said that she wanted to because they were definitely bringing up memories /residues that she hadn't looked at, and the process was helpful. There was a difficult moment in shifting into formal questions when I knew that Phoenix was so upset. I chose questions that I thought were less likely to evoke memories of an emotional nature. She was also concerned about whether she was articulate or not-she felt the narrative was so disjointed and would not be clear enough to understand. That night I was very, very tired, I went to sleep very early, and woke in the night with questions to write down for Phoenix.

Journal Notes: We came into the middle of deep feelings and emotions yesterday. I have a concern that I am not a therapist. Having helped Phoenix to come this far, is it detrimental that I cannot help her to overcome her fears. Or can I? I can see the struggle and understand it. Her subconscious is helping to bring her to a state where the conscious mind will have to deal with all of this. She wants to take action, to move out of her reclusivity and to fulfill other aspects of herself, but she is full of fears, having been told so many times in her childhood and youth that "*she can't*".

Post Journal: Here is one of the problems I can now see regarding the breaking of silence. It can be very painful for both the participants, but especially for the narrator. I have decided, based on this experience, that there should always be a backup-a colleague, a professional who would be willing to step in to assist the participant if necessary. The researcher should take the initiative and responsibility to be prepared in this regard. Fortunately in our case Phoenix was able to turn to her brother and husband for comfort and support.

I think there could be a whole chapter written on the emotions one experiences and observes during the narration of a life history. Stated briefly, there were several occurrences in which emotions of the moment dictated certain responses or initiatives. It was a challenge to find a balance between comforting during emotional moments and leaving the person to be in control of themselves. I discovered it was important to not push the work at the expense of the participant but to remain in tune with and respectful of their physical, mental, and emotional condition. There were many times when it became necessary to assure the participant of the validity of their emotion in the work. Dealing with the anger of the participant was the most difficult challenge. Having acquired a background knowledge through study and friendship about the lives of black women in Canada, really prepared me to engage in this dialogue and as a listener to be able to confirm my knowledge of the existence of such situations and circumstances.

Phoenix told me later that my ability to understand her, my sincerity, and my willingness to listen and learn without judgment, had enabled her to share her innermost thoughts and feelings. Expressing anger for those incidents which have given her intense pain was a profound release for her. Sitting through those sessions I kept feeling that these are the stories that white people have to hear in order for them to realize their complicity in the perpetuation of racism. The anger of Phoenix, rather than deterring me from my purpose, further resolved me in my motivation to facilitate her voice.

Transcribing The Text: My Reflections

Journal Notes: I am excited and yet reluctant to start Phoenix' tapes. It is like another adventure, a huge block of time to be taken, an involvement which will be exhausting, an engagement which I anticipate will be all consuming. That's it, I can't listen to Phoenix without experiencing "being there" again, and I want to make sure that I can capture everything that went on. It is a challenge. My inner self knows I need a certain space in which to do this, because so much of the material is full of anguish and it is heartaching for me to hear it. So here I go. I feel like I will be joining her physically again, and I wonder if I shall feel the same emotions as when I went through the experience or whether this experience will elicit different feelings?

It has just occurred to me that this listening could be like a play to someone else who had not been there. They could be moved by the story, the interaction, could feel like they were there. But I was there and will the smells and light and the environment come back to me--the whole experience?

Post Journal: I found that at the beginning of listening to the tapes I could remember the room, the lighting, the smells, but I was taken away from those sensory memories as I got caught up in the content of the narrative. This happened every time I listened to a new tape.

Transcribing: Challenges and Rewards

Journal Notes: I have transcribed two tapes now. During the second tape I became increasingly irritated and eventually fed up with the way the narrative was going. Phoenix focuses a lot on her own philosophizing, and on her own qualities or lack of. The language is also quite dreadful. Incidents arise that I realize will not be appropriate to include in the text, because she says her Mum and Dad would not like to know these things. I solve this dilemma by indicating what the incident is in the text and about where it comes on the tape. If Phoenix says it should go into the narrative then we can discuss how.

Later I reflect on my irritation, why does this bother me? It didn't bother me when she was talking and I was listening. Then I realize I want her to have *finished understandings!* And what is it that is really happening? She is weaving all about, going from one idea, event, to the next and back again. Phoenix is *working out* what she thinks about herself. As the literature says she is constructing her life, she is stating certain opinions and then connecting them to a situation in her reality, or vice versa, then reflecting on this and providing theory for herself. In fact, as I begin to look behind the words and understand what she is doing, I become quite fascinated with the process. Sometimes, Phoenix herself realizes she has broken through to an understanding by way of connecting events and positions of people together, that she hasn't thought about in that way before. She facilitates that process by speaking about these things, or by reflecting on it out loud.

Phoenix: There were things that I told you that I haven't even really told myself. I have known them but haven't said them out loud. Hearing myself say some of the things that I have to say [wow]!"... Emotional as the content may be I am glad that I shared it with someone who I can now call a friend. And that it was without judgment, it was very, very, important to me that I wasn't judged on the things that I said. And that lent itself to me being as open as I was. Sharing the experiences that I shared with you was sharing them with myself...for the first time too. I think that it was the appropriate time to do so.

The challenges then in transcribing were twofold. I had to remain true to my commitment to my partner to transcribe all of her narrative (which was repetitive and extensive), and remain true to myself by being honest and including all the invective as difficult as that was. The rewards were in hearing the life history again, and in having new ideas and making new connections myself as I learned about "social construction" first hand-second time around!

The Reading of the Text

I have wondered how the narrative affects the life history participant when they first read their life history, for example what do they *feel* reading their story? I have not come across any account which explores this question. I have had one experience of someone responding to a personal narrative we worked on together. It was a shocking, sad, and good learning experience for me.

My first response to a life history project came from Rose Downes, the elderly lady who spent nine months working with me on her narrative. After I had sent the transcript to Rose I received a phone call from her saying that she had spent the entire weekend correcting it and she was sending me back the text in the next mail. She said that she did not want to keep the life history in the house because another family member might see it and would be upset. This relative, according to Rose, had never got over their early experiences of poverty, discrimination, the unfair treatment of their mother and grandmother (both domestics in Toronto) and the racism they all experienced. Rose deleted these personal family matters from the text, but this was not the aspect which concerned her the most.

When we had our next visit she told me that she was *shocked* by the amount of racism in her history. She said she knew that I had not added any words, they were all her own. But she was sick of talking about racism, sick of reading about it. There was

no way that she wanted this story published. I was stunned. One of my professors (a woman of color herself) who had read part of the life history was very excited about the material, recognizing the capacity of these words to break the silence of women from the 1920s and illuminate black women's history of that time. She had asked Rose and myself to consider publishing this material for the benefit of women's studies as well as the black community! But Rose responded by saying there was no way that women's studies could have the transcript for their courses--"over my dead body". The only allowance Rose suggested was that I submit the history privately to the professor so I might be marked on my efforts.

Could I have averted what I saw at the time as a catastrophe? I was not aware when I started interviewing Rose that our work would develop into a full-blown life history project, or that there would come a point where this work would be publishable. As I understand now the negotiations and contract made between participants at the beginning of their work can protect both parties. The anonymity of the participant is essential as in the case of Rose.

The other aspect which "bowed me over" was my meticulous care to preserve Rose's grammar and West Indian/Canadian way of speaking, and Rose's subsequent correction of all her grammar, expressions, and style. I had not realized that Rose might not appreciate her own way of speaking being represented, and that she would want it to be correct English and in accordance with an Anglo-Canadian manner of speaking. It went against everything I had been learning in my gender, race, and class studies about preserving people's style and mode of expression and not translating it to the dominant mode. If I had thought more deeply about how I would feel if my life narrative was reproduced, reflecting exactly my "bubbly" way of speaking, I would have understood Rose's need to be represented in an "acceptable" form of English.

I still have Rose's story, and I respect her request. The information in Rose's transcript is still not published in any other histories. In fact, my argument in one of my

undergraduate papers, was that black women's everyday experience was not represented in any books by black or white male historians of that time or since.

Having had this chastening experience led me to be much more careful in entering this recent project. But I was still eager to have a more detailed response. I wanted so much to be able to capture first responses about how the participants felt narrating their story, and how they felt upon actually reading it. So I asked both participants to make notes, as I mentioned above; this I realized later was not very realistic. Both the participants did have the time, but how many people would have the interest or wherewithal to devote energy to writing their responses as they read?-only researchers I expect! It seems now that a natural response is just to READ!

Responses of my Participants elicited through an Interview Process:

Phoenix's Response (after we finished the first two weeks of the project)

In reference to getting into my memories, it puts me in a different mindset. I remember after the first time we spoke I was quite emotional about the things that I had brought attention to myself. I think that it is important to deal with the residue that I have to deal with in order for me to move on. Darcie my best friend, you know the black girl, we haven't spoken for awhile, and yet we spoke this weekend. We are anxious to see each other, we always are, but circumstances don't allow that as frequently as we would like. I think if anything this whole experience has been good for me, I have vented some things. I feel your interest about what I am venting is genuine and therefore I feel like you are not just hearing me but you are sharing with me.

Yeah, I am going to be really interested to see the results of all of this, and I would love to have a little piece of myself that I could reflect back on and be able to have as reference for myself. I just think it would be really good for me. Funny how these things present themselves to you at certain points in your life, the timing is phenomenal. Sometimes you really wonder whether these things are predestined or not!

It has been therapeutic for me, to think of my circumstances. One usually has to have been able to experience some of the same kind of things in order to be able to relate, it helps you through something. I know you didn't come up in my circumstance but your interest and what you have been taught, and your interest in what you have been taught has lent itself to you to being somewhat of a different person. It's funny I have thought within myself that I could even seek out some therapy to deal with some of these things, because I am such an intense person. I wouldn't want to admit that vulnerability to

anybody. Here we are thrown together and all these things have come up quite comfortably, I feel like you understand without feeling vulnerable to you. I feel like you understand without judgment, you know what kind of person I am because of some of the things I have gone through. It makes me feel quite comfortable.

The essence of the timing of this whole thing is perfect. I have been dealing with a lot of these things by myself, and it is difficult to talk to yourself at times. It is not so difficult to talk to someone who is really interested, knowing how you feel and why you feel that way. You hear yourself, and when you hear yourself you are challenged to meet these things that are bothering you.

Lynn: Yes, the interesting thing too is when researchers open themselves to the process, which is what a lot of women and men are trying to do in their research. You [the researcher] also learn things, like I learn things about myself through my interactions between you and your Mum. Through your lives I learn things about myself, how for example I have been privileged in certain ways that I haven't realized.

To Phoenix: What do you particularly like about the narrative?

I am happy with how I sound as a person. I think it says something. I hope that isn't conceited.

It is good because it says something, because it has a message?

It's real. Yeah. I want my nephew to read it, I want him to know! There has been so much that has been covered up for him, he has had an instinct to know that there is a cover up and I love that kid so much, and I see so much of me in him and him in me, that I want him to know that I am not part of any denial.

There were a number of things we thought we might have to wipe out later?

I don't want to wipe out anything!

A Year later November 1991, Response to Project by Phoenix:

In regard to how I felt about doing this project. I had no idea how big it could become, and how big it did become. I went into it thinking that I was just going to share with you some of the experiences I had gone through, some of these experiences that have made me who I am today, where I draw my lines, what I think of certain issues. But I had no idea that the buttons that you would push would bring such a purge from unresolved residue that I was holding in myself. I had no idea that you would even know what questions to ask, in order to be able to push those buttons, in order for me to be so emotional about the whole thing as I was.

I had been through a lot, I always realized that, but I didn't realize the kind of negative residue I have within me that I haven't really dealt with. In so far as feeling any kind of conflict, I can't imagine having been more comfortable with somebody to be able to

unleash some very, very, private things. I have never found myself unloading especially with a stranger-when we met we were strangers! I don't know maybe that is why I felt so comfortable, I have no idea really. I did feel comfortable, and I was honest, I must admit that I was naturally comfortable with you. I can't imagine just revealing those innermost thoughts with a stranger. There must have been some kind of good chemistry happening for us to get that deep.

My perception - well I am more concerned about others' perceptions. I am pleased with how it came out. I wish that someone could read it and say 'well this is a fascinating person, I would love to meet her!' I would love for their reaction to be that. I can't perceive that that is what their reaction would be. I would like for them to be interested and want to know more...to want to be curious enough from the first page to read the second, and so on. I was -- but maybe that was selfishness, because it is me.

What control did you feel that you had in the recording of the narrative?

What sort of position did we have together?

I felt like you and I were on par with one another in an undefined, intangible, kind of way. A spiritual way. I found myself with a lot of respect for you that you could bring out the best, the most in me, the most from me. As I read the transcript back it is pretty much like a book. But I wouldn't have been able to sit down with pen and been able to write it, and yet I know that my contribution was great.

Did you feel any frustration or irritation at any point.

No, none whatsoever, I felt very, very, comfortable

Do you think it would have been any different if I were black and working with you?

It would of been different because there are certain feelings within me that I wouldn't have to explain. It is not that you can't empathize because you can, but to be there is a little bit different, than to hear somebody's story whose been there.

So when white audiences will read your story later will it be removed from what the reality really is because they haven't been there, or, can your words speak out enough that the audience can grasp something?

I would love for white folk to understand as well as black folk. The best teacher in the world is the one to make the weakest kid in the class understand. That is a gifted teacher. If I could make the most racist white folk understand that would be fantastic! To say that I would be flattering myself. I think there is a lot of people today that feel these injustices happened a long time ago, it's not that way now, and they [the blacks] are just using it as an excuse not to succeed in this world, they have the same opportunity as us. But they don't see that we aren't given opportunities, they don't see the applications being thrown in the garbage after you leave their place of business. They don't hear about my friend's mother-in-law who used an agency to hire people for her place of business (a glass company) she specified she didn't want any niggers or any pakkis, and the agency

abided by what she wanted. Whose going to make that front news without cutting off their own nose to spite their face--not too many people. But I know these things happen. It's out there.

Phoenix' response to the project in retrospect was that she thought it was good, it had been an emotional experience and had put her into a different "mindset" than normal. It had given her a new perspective which was important because it allowed her to deal with the residue of memories in some coherent way. She acknowledged her feelings of exposing her inner anguish, yet felt comfortable talking about her experiences. Any discomfort which might have existed in our relationship as researcher/participant had been overcome through the comfort of sharing together and relating as partners producing a work together. It was important to Phoenix that the work could be enlightening and "real", providing meaning for others. She felt the narrative would especially benefit her nephew by shedding light for him on issues about which he had been kept "in the dark".

Phoenix says that there are some things which wouldn't be told to a black researcher--she would just know them having "been there". She had to tell me these things because I am white. This is the very information the dominant society needs to know, *how* have they been complicit in perpetuating racism. We need to know what black people think we should know about their everyday experiences and what they feel and think about their oppression and oppressors. What is it that the dominant society does which constricts a black person's life, and what needs to be changed? My position as white researcher then, elicits some explanations that would not be forthcoming in a relationship between two black people doing the research together.

Response to the Project by Deborah-(Paraphrased)

How did you feel when I asked you to participate in this project?

I thought you were joking, but when I realized you were not and were serious I thought I would not mind. This would be all right." Deborah agreed it would be difficult to know

how the process would go but she was willing to try. She felt working together was important. There was no thought of me being white. This did not make any difference to her. She felt it was good for any person to write about black history. They didn't need to experience it in order to write about it. Many blacks themselves do not know their own history. Research needs to be done. No matter what the color of the person she will talk to them.

It is important to know the lives of older people, their wisdom needs to be respected, and their experiences shared with younger people. Black women have had many struggles and challenges and still do. In the past especially, women of Deborah's age and their mothers were extremely dominated by their men. They were kept in the kitchen and helpless. They had no means to make them independent. No skills or education or opportunity, because it was the boys who were sent abroad to England or America for further education, to be doctors, lawyers, and teachers.

Women nowadays have more opportunities. They are gaining skills and going forward. Men need to encourage them. For black and white women it has been hard to get their rights, but they have struggled. One black single mother of five children recently got her nursing degree-It is wonderful how she persevered under her difficulties. Black young women should do all they can to get an education and skills so they can be independent. Black men should do the same so they can support their families. Women have held the community together, they are the backbone of the Church and organizations. If the men are carefree it is the women who hold the family together! Yes, black women are very strong-they have to be! It is important for young people to know all this.

Working together on the project was important for Deborah. She felt there shouldn't be a color barrier for research about black people's lives, but rather the focus should be on getting the history written. She was glad to be able to make the history of older people's lives known. In particular, she wished the young people to know the stories about the struggles of black women to be granted opportunities and have their rights recognized by the black and outer communities.

Phoenix: Post Transcript

(two months after the narration and after reading the transcript)

How was it waiting for the transcript to come?

At first the waiting was really really hard. It was difficult, I had been through so much, and there was nothing to really show for it. I had a curiosity also about how you found

it. But it started to subside with time. But when I got it!! Mail comes pretty early to this house, and I think that I read it before I washed my face!! I couldn't put it down.

Were you nervous?

Yeah. Very. This is a big part of my life on paper!! I felt positive after having read it all. There would be something of me left.

Tell me how did you feel when you read the transcript?

I should've had a pen in hand, when I read it the first time. I would not even interrupt myself to go and get a pen to write down what I was feeling!

So you didn't pay any attention to my letter?!

Well you're close. No I did read your letter, and there were a couple of pieces you advised me to read after I read the transcript. I was just so engrossed. First sitting I did two readings of it! I don't know how long it took me but I remember writing "I am only three quarters through page two and tears have started to fall". When I read my words about feeling betrayed, I couldn't hold back the tears. Having read through this manuscript for the second time, my first instinct is to punctuate it so it reads the way we talked it. The third time I read it I remembered *how* I said it, I remembered all the punctuation, I remembered everything, how it should be read. I wanted to put it on tape so that you would have it, so that it would be complete. I felt like I could do that.

You got the rhythm of how it was spoken. ?

Yes exactly.

Phoenix Reading the Text and her Feeling of Empowerment

I guess that was my first feelings about it. I credited you for being able to bring so much out of me that I didn't know was there. You did press the right buttons in order to get what was captured in those 80 some odd pages. I didn't know that I would have 80 pages in me about much of anything. I was really quite surprised to just read and read and read and realize that it was me, and that it made sense. It all made sense.

There was somewhat of a resolve, in reading it and completing it. It is a little strange, to explain how I feel. One of the other things that came to mind was if anything ever happened to me a lot of questions could be answered through reading the transcript. That was really potent to me.

A lot of these things expressed in this transcript were very private feelings for me. Never really shared with anybody, maybe little bits and pieces here and there, but not as in depth as what we were able to share. It was so good for me, and it is so good for me to have that presently.

Deborah: Post Transcript

(two months after the narration and having read the transcript)

How do you feel about reading your narrative? Does the narrative sound like you?

Yes, in a way... yes, that's what I told you.

How did it feel when you read it?

It wasn't anything that would shock me, it is what I know I told you.

Sometimes you might read something and you would say, "I didn't say that!". It was no news like.

Was it anything different than what you thought it would be? Were you surprised with anything you wrote-talking about one thing more than another for example?

No. What I thought was that you had accumulated a lot of work. I was surprised to see the amount of material, how it comes out. But it is what I have told you, not anything you have put down on your own.

Did you find a difference with when you read it than when you spoke it?

No, [except] the grammar of it wasn't somehow how it should be

Was there anything you liked or didn't like ?

There were good parts and not so good parts. I mean what happened as a young girl. When I took the responsibility to take care of my grandmother, it sounds like it wasn't so pleasant. But to me it was a satisfaction because I had done right in my own way. I feel like I was the granddaughter and couldn't run away from my grandmother. If there was anybody to stay then it should be me.

So when you were reading it you had a different feeling about how it read than how you really felt about it?

Uh. Huh I am quite satisfied, and I thank God every day I did it. At that young age I did my duty, and with my father-in-law.

Perhaps I didn't ask you enough questions about how you felt, as well as what you did, do you feel that's true.? It is good for me if we talk about things that I could do better.

You know at the time I didn't think about it. You went so far already I think it is best to carry on with the way you have it. I guess it is not too late to say I did it with good heart!

No, not at all. When you are speaking it and when you are involved in it, you don't see it in the whole sense, you only experience the parts of it you are involved with at that moment. But when you go back and look later you can see like with a book, oh I missed that, or I didn't want to talk about that or whatever.

When you read it, I think you would see how you had expressed parts of your life as important. Did reading the narrative change the way you saw any of those things?

No. Just that I noticed that there were things that were repeated. That's all I find. I know that there would be some people that would know me through the book.

So in one sense you feel that it really does reflect who you are?

Uh. Huh.

In the times that we had together, was there anything you feel I could have done that would have made it easier for you to talk about yourself?

Well I feel that talking about the life history of a person you have to tell it just like it is. No matter what it is you got to tell it like it is. Instead of saying something[else]. I could say that I felt very comfortable talking to you. Sometimes your talking to people and you feel a little bit -you don't know, and you are still a little bit nervous of talking to this person about things. I don't feel uncomfortable with you.

I enjoyed so much reading it, and doing the project with you.

I talked to Deborah about how this experience of her life is etched on my mind through listening to the narration, listening to the tapes, typing out the transcript, reading the transcript, correcting etc.! It is amazing really how many times the researcher has to go over the material. No wonder that memories and fragments of these conversations stay with the researcher for years.

I noticed in your life story that you didn't talk about any discriminatory experiences, and I wondered is this because of your idea that people shouldn't harbor bitterness in their hearts. I thought you probably did have experiences in your work life, but chose not to mention them. If this is so could you comment on why you chose not to mention them?

Well I felt that sometime or another there was something that wasn't right. But I never dwell on it, especially when you are working and you find that your fellow workers discriminate against you. Just ignore that person and keep on doing the work. The only way it would affect me is if it was going to damage my job, interfere with my work, or cost me my job. I would tell that person off, [tell them] what I think about them. That would be okay, I think I don't keep any burden in my heart, I just let the person know. In all my working it never interfered with me that much. I just approach that person and that's it! I wouldn't even bother to complain to anybody about it, because I think that when I deal with it myself I feel comfortable then. I often do that. Sometimes I feel that Phoenix deal with her part about discrimination. Things would happen that she never mention to me. Sometime it might come up when it was long gone.

Confidentiality

When I asked Deborah about her first reading of her narrative, she mentioned that some people would know her through the book. I took this to mean that it was a good reflection of who she thought she was. It was pointed out to me later that she was perhaps expressing concern that people would know her by reading her life history. During the process of "managing the text" Deborah had enjoyed picking out names and occupations for her family members, which would protect their anonymity. Regardless of this preparation, if we are interpreting correctly, the reading of the text suggested there were aspects of her life which she may have felt clearly singled her out among others. This issue is one which must be addressed in the final writing of the life history. It is of the utmost importance to negotiate with the participants how best to present their lives without violating their reality.

Summary of Responses

All three of the life history participants responded differently to their life narrative. Rose was shocked when she read her words. She didn't want to read about the years of poverty and deprivation, to be reminded of all the work she went through to fight racism, she didn't want the focus of her life to be "*still* fighting racism". She was also concerned with how the narrative was written; it disturbed her that her English and her grammar were not corrected by me; and so she went through the whole narrative and indicated where changes to her West Indian manner of speaking should be made. Rose in the end did not want to share her life story it was too painful for her. She said she wanted to "move on".

Phoenix on the other hand wanted to tell her life exactly as she experienced it. She was pleased with the stridency and honesty portrayed in the narrative. The amount of swearing in the text was a surprise to her, but she felt strongly about preserving her

emotion in those words because they were necessary to get across her point of view as she felt it. She wants others to know what a burden racism has been for her and her family, and she wants whites to know their part in it. Black men she felt should know their part in black women's oppression. She wants people to know her bitterness and her sweetness, and her hope for more humanity in the world. She uses the life story process as an opportunity to vent these concerns and angers, and as a tool for educating others. Phoenix had trouble in the beginning waiting for her story to arrive, and said when she had finished the narration she felt like she had *nothing to show for it*. Later when it arrived she felt positive, and was moved by the content. She felt that actually having the text for herself was good, she could refer to it from time to time, and it could serve in the future as an explanation for the questions people had about her.

Deborah felt that she told the truth in her story, this was very important to her. She was surprised to read that she had not expressed her feelings about some things, in fact, in some cases had made some events sound negative, and so she wanted to add that she had done things in her life with "a good heart". Deborah approached our project as my teacher, and I think she was pleased with the result, not seeing the need to change anything except the grammar when necessary. She was not concerned with my having kept her West Indian way of speaking intact in the narrative.

These experiences reinforce my belief in how important it is to have full collaboration with the participants, so that if they do have misgivings with their narrative, all efforts can be made to keep their representations of the truth while not violating their reality. Phoenix decided herself that preserving the truth was possible, and decided how we could do this without my having to explain any techniques. Beyond reciprocity, the possession of the narrative for the participant seems important and necessary. Although in Rose's case she did not attach any importance to keeping the text, for Phoenix reading the text and having it for reference brought about a resolution. This could be for her a

sense of closure to the project and of course a material reminder of the life as well as the effort itself.

Environment and Scheduling for Phoenix

How was it recording at home here? Could it have been different if we were recording at York University for instance and you had to come to me there.?

It would have been sixty pages less than what it was, probably very cut and dry, very emotionless. Compared to what it was I don't think we would have had the emotion that we had being in my own home. I don't think there could have been a comparison. There is something about my comfort zone, I mean being on my own-on my own turf. I wouldn't have walked through York University with the tear-watered face, after having gone through this! It would have been very different. No question there!!

Process-Family

Have you read your Mum's?

No and she hasn't read mine. My Mum is private, it is a very big step for her to do this.

With Travis, how did he feel about having the sessions here?

What wore on Travis was me after the fact! Travis is a very perceptive man, I think he knows that this was very timely for me, and good for me. This was a healing thing for me.

Did your Dad mention anything about you doing the life history?

No it has been kept quite private between us all. I guess you felt like a doctor having to keep everybody's confidences?

Yes, exactly, well nobody pried at all, your parents said they thought it was good you were able to have the opportunity to express yourself.

How did recording work out in your schedule? Any tips if I do this again.

I think the fact that we did it day to day was good for me. Because after a session it wasn't like it was over, because it wasn't finished, and so I would be waiting and thinking about what had transpired and what was to yet transpire. So I liked the idea of continuing everyday. If it was a once a week thing it would have been much more difficult for me.

In terms of getting into the material itself?

Yes.

From my part in getting to know one another it was certainly different.

because we were together so much that I really missed you when I left, it was strange not seeing you!

I felt the same way.

You trusted me enough to share with me. How did you feel about me taking away this material? It's all about you and someone is taking it, and working with it?

Well trust wasn't a factor, that wasn't something I even thought about. I wanted so much to have left you with something potent. Other than that, if this piece of work can touch people in some way then I feel good about that. I am not ashamed about what I have said.

My life history projects have all taken place in the homes of the people concerned. The responses of Phoenix and Deborah confirmed for me the advantages of such an arrangement, when it is convenient for the people involved. Phoenix felt that consistent daily interviews were better because she could get into the narrative process easier that way, and could remember the previous days conversations, and anticipate the next day. Having her husband close and able to respond to her after our interviews was an important aspect which Phoenix realized also made her feel comfortable about being at home. There are of course many other types of situations where this would not be wise, such as the presence of unsympathetic family members or others who may resent a researcher's presence and make life difficult for the participants.

Working Together

I explained to Phoenix that I would be writing my impressions of the process and it would be good to know her feelings too.

She said, "I am curious to know what you feel like this very minute".

Well I feel that you have been very honest and forthcoming about it all. The only thing that concerned me the whole way through is that as we became friends, we may move towards consensus issues rather than issues on which there may be conflict. So that if there was anything that I was very dumb about, and you could see that it was going right over my head, well you may have kindly ignored it and skirted an issue because I couldn't understand. That apparently happens. Even in the way a researcher frames a questions. For example looking at a person and nodding their head as they ask a question. All the subtle body language we have for eliciting responses.

I am not afraid to disagree. I think that in my friendships to disagree is okay, your friend doesn't have to be your clone!

*Or in kindness even,
I am a great diplomat...*

Well that's it you see, have you been...?

Well if you were wrong about something or I disagreed I would put that forth. I would put it in a manner that you would understand what I meant.

I feel myself that bringing the transcript back to you was critical. Having you add some things which you felt conveyed the meaning better, for me was being to the utmost degree honest. Really trying to stay with the perception of the moment that you had.

It was real good for me to read my anger, to put it in the perspective I wanted to put it in.

Was it good for you to read the positive things you said about yourself?

Yeah.

Did that help?

I think that it did. But it wasn't at the forefront. The most bizarre kind of revelation was realizing the kind of stuff I had harbored.

Partnership: Problem

Lynn To Phoenix: I got to know your Mum, that was really nice for me. When I came back to talk to her about the process itself, me interviewing her and that kind of thing, that was not what interested her. She was interested in the telling of her life. Once she had told it that was sort of the end of it. Of course I respected that, because I am not going to try and drag her into conversation about how we did it and what did she think. But part of the purpose of doing a life history was to experience the process, not only bringing out the story but also to go through the process with somebody and record that. Why have you been interested in helping me out?

Well, because I think that it is worthy for people to understand, I think what you are trying to do is a great thing. I have a lot of respect for it. I only wish that I could have been interesting enough that I could shed some insight into this whole thing. I think the thing we should do now is embellish my story! And she went on to fame and fortune !(laughter).

Rochford's (1991: 107), review of the research carried out by Bloor (1983) and Emerson and Pollner (1988), sheds some light on the difficulties of acquiring critical

assessments by members about the researcher's work. These researchers found when taking findings back to the field that they and their respondents tended to favor consensus negotiations rather than ones of conflict and challenge. In the case of my interactions between Phoenix and Deborah, we were talking about their own lives of which they were/are the expert practitioners. But in examining the process of our life history interaction we investigate an area which brings into question my performance and theirs. Deborah was not interested in talking about this in any detail but Phoenix set me straight by responding that she was not afraid to disagree.

The Text: Themes, Perspectives, Self-Image, Language, Silences

Phoenix, when you read your narrative did you frame it in a certain way? Is there a word that describes what the nature of the narrative is to you?

I don't know what word would be befitting right now. I think it has been a journey that has had tragedy in it, that has resulted in a very intense understanding of human nature.

Often life histories are written and developed around turning points in a person's life. Phoenix's narrative began with the words "I was the only chip in the cookie", and was framed around her struggle for self-identity, being the only black among the whites, and the development of the whole text concerns her self as a unique black individual in a white world. Here she sees her text as reflecting the tragedy which has enabled her to develop her deep perceptions of people. Deborah began our very first meeting by choosing to tell me about herself at 11 years old as a caretaker of her grandmother. It was the central theme in our first conversations, and has turned out to be a central theme in her presentation of her life's role, which is her identity as a mother.

Mother and daughter carry the burden of racism in a totally different way. Although the constraints of discrimination affected every member of her family in their history of jobs, friends, and housing, Deborah mentions it only briefly. My understanding of her reticence is that she has a particular view which helps her to take racism in stride, and she has a strong sense of her self-identity and human nature which has developed over 70 years of particular experience. In addition, women of her time and place were not brought up to be as vocal in public as they are today.

As a child Deborah grew up in an all black community in the mountains of Jamaica. She went against her family's rules to associate and serve people less fortunate than herself. Later she came to Canada and lived in the home of her aunt, a black West Indian woman, very well-respected by the elite families of Toronto. Her aunt served as a role model to Deborah in her early twenties: she owned a large house, and was a governess for the leading white Toronto families, most unusual situations for any woman of her race in the 1940s. Deborah chose to marry a man who was open-minded and

open-hearted to people from all races and backgrounds as well. Deborah's view of racism to this day is to go about your business and keep an open heart and mind:

You could be angry but you figure that everybody is not the same. You have to allow yourself to have love in your heart, otherwise people could become very hateful. May as well not be bitter about it, getting bitter will not solve the problem.

Phoenix grew up in an all white community. She and her brothers were for many years the only black children in the neighborhood and the school. She experienced constant racism throughout her childhood, youth and early adult years, as did her two brothers and other family members. Later school friends would eventually come to know her, admire her, and seek her counsel. Phoenix, although socialized by Deborah and Clarence to be a humanist, has experienced the harsh reality of racism while living in Canada, and still has to carry the burden of educating ignorant people. To this day at 33 years of age she questions, according to her everyday experience, whether there are really any whites around that are capable of true friendship:

It makes me feel like, god damn, are they all like this? Do they go this far with you and then hold you somewhat at bay. 'Cause if this is the case then I will do just fine by becoming a recluse and not dealing with these people.

In addition she struggles with the fact that she is not recognized for who she is--a black Canadian. She generally does not mention her mother's Jamaican roots:

And then there is what is right now, where every black person you see is presumed to be an irresponsible Jamaican [To the] white folk that figure that everyone black is from Jamaica, I say, 'As a matter of fact I am eighth generation Canadian and my great, great, grandmother is Mic Mac!

Phoenix feels very deeply for what her parents have gone through, particularly her mother, and all the struggles and heartbreaks she went through with her children throughout the school years. The sacrifice and hard work of her mother was not appreciated or recognized. This theme echoes throughout the literature about black women, and throughout this narrative.

Phoenix frames her narrative as a journey with tragedy, through a life of discrimination for her parents and brothers, her friends and herself--a journey which has resulted in her developing a deep understanding of human nature. She expresses the fact that she doesn't know what is "befitting" to describe her life story *right now*. Here I suggest Phoenix doesn't just mean she is at a loss for a word, rather I think that she recognizes her story is not static, that possibilities exist to change her perception of her journey in the future, as do the possibilities to change the direction or the circumstances of the next part of the journey.

Language in the Text

Phoenix: If this is supposed to be reflective of me I know what is me, and how I said a lot of these things, and I think that that should be retained. I swore a lot though didn't I? That was part of the emotion rather than anything else. It wasn't for the sake of swearing just to swear, it was how I was feeling. Sometimes there is nothing else that can put that forth. I wouldn't want you to think that I have to rely on swearing because I can't express myself any better than that! The swearing seemed to be within the context and mood of what this created.

Lynn: *At first the swearing bothered me, it shocked me, but then it went over my head, what I was hearing was not the words anymore it was what was behind the words. I was going through it with you. The words became non-incidental. However, when I came to typing it ...it was awful! (laughing). I've never had to do this before, because I don't talk like this. So do you know what I did? I started cutting it out! First I left blanks, then I started paraphrasing it, then about the third tape along I realized what I was doing. "I can't do this I told myself--what am I doing?"*

You must have been frustrated?

Well it is all learning, I was frustrated when I was doing that part of it. The turnaround was when I started to realize I can't do that. What I respect here is what you are saying! My whole project is respect for what you're saying, and for it to be a collaborative work as far as I am concerned you go to the person and work on their text together. I realized that I would have to go back after and listen to those first three or four tapes and put the swearing back in again. So I did it! From then on I put in all the swearing. I don't know what will happen if I include this in my thesis?

Phoenix: I can't really imagine this without it. But it really makes me understand the emotion of swearing!

Lynn: *What struck me while I was recording this is it is a performance. All our interactions are performances of one kind or another...not meaning it is false, but we all*

take on roles. Your choice of language, the way you speak directly to the white people who will be part of your readers-it is shocking, powerful.

Meanings and Absences

Phoenix and I talked about the absences in the narrative. Domestic affairs were absent, it wasn't important for Phoenix to talk about those things. We might be interviewing other women about their life history and they may want to frame it in terms of the kind of jobs that they do in the home.

You love knitting but it was never talked about, but I saw you knitting and that was a part of what you did while we were together! I don't know if you like cooking and stuff like that?

Phoenix: I'm a good cook and I enjoy it when I do it. It is one of these necessary things not like, "Oh. I look forward to cooking a roast on Saturday"! It is kind of non-incidental to me,--these are functioning things of life that we have to do and that is that!

We talked about likes and dislikes of food, dress, and entertainments while we were socializing. I am not suggesting any value judgments about these things. You have obviously talked about what you think is important.

Uh huh.

Phoenix and I both came to realizations about the power of words in the form of swearing, and how we must manage this invective within the text. She recognized the power of her choice of language and the necessity to keep this language in the final text. I nearly eliminated this possibility by reacting at a very deep level to the effect of the presence of these particular words. Fortunately my sociological training brought me to my senses in time to repair the work I had undone.

Phoenix' goal goes beyond talking about the basic necessities and niceties of life to articulating what racism means to her and to addressing issues related to her identity and her survival.

Silences and Confidences

It wasn't until I began the major work of transcribing that I realized that Deborah had only given me an overview of her life. She had chosen to cover the general, and the major events, but the pain, the joy, the feelings about these events she left out. I pondered how to bring this in--perhaps careful questions, assurances that this information is private and can be disguised. I realized two things upon reflection. Deborah chose to present her life this way and that was that. She also needed to be silent about many things; there were absences in her narrative about her sons and husband which Phoenix unwittingly filled in within her narrative. These silences I realized were planned as Deborah needs to practice this survival strategy to protect herself and her loved ones.

Phoenix shared things about her brother's lives that her mother did not. When I mentioned this she said, "Of course Mum would want you to think the best of her sons". It is the ideology of her time to protect the sons and husbands. Here we have the understandable absences which are talked about in the feminist literature by and about women.

Phoenix shared with me her concerns about male dominance in black households. These specific observations are not taped, but we discuss however how important it is to say these things and have them known as behaviors in gender relations which need to be changed. Phoenix accordingly spoke of incidents which she had experienced in the larger black community.

Just one session with Clarence indicates there are more areas which are either absences in Deborah's narrative, or areas that I need to clarify. Clarence talks of marriage and his early family experiences with Deborah. He alludes to many cultural differences between Jamaicans and Toronto-born blacks, and that he and Deborah had to come to terms over these differences. I remember Deborah only mentioning the courtship as new and difficult for her.

Phoenix was able to explicate those issues black women face within gender relations by making the problems generalized ones common to many black women. In so doing she protected her family, but at the same time exposed the problems women and men face. In the same regard she creatively came to terms with another ethical problem: how could we write about how she feels regarding most black theater, but not hurt her friends who are involved in its staging. The kind of theater Phoenix detests is the "multi-cultural type".

Phoenix: It's a little bit of folklore, but it doesn't have a poignant point. I don't want to be dancing around in some African costume....Let's get me into some poignant stuff, that reaches out to black and white, that makes them come together with conclusions like 'My God I am very much affected by all of this'. Put me in a jail situation, a school situation...an unemployment office situation!

Would you be able to let your friends read your transcript?

Well I wouldn't want to offend them. I remember I said that I wouldn't want to be involved in a certain kind of theater. I wouldn't want to do the poetry the music, that has been done. I want to make a statement, a brazen, blatant statement that wasn't through poetry. It would be through story line. They have done phenomenal work, I am very proud of them and glad things are going well for them. Whether I will subject myself to another audition with others is another story again.

Would you not feel comfortable with these friends reading the final transcript?

Oh yeah, but I would not want to offend them in any way-for them to question themselves, because they shouldn't be doing that. I know what it is like to do that. I know what it is like to question your ability.

Well quite frankly what you had to say about theater was quite critical, it was important, it might do them good to hear it.

Well they have all gone through a metamorphoses, their past approach is not what it is now. The way some of them work now has more power.

How can we handle the problem of protecting these friends when we prepare the book?-- To not offend but to keep to the truth of your statement? Your statement is important because it is educational, it alerts people to the fact that there is something amiss with this other kind of theater.

Well I have to get my point across without being too critical. I want to see theater with storyline that gets across the point.

Participants say things in the life history that they later may regret or realize that they can't publish. It is an ethical dilemma. Here is an excellent example. On the one hand it

would be good for both black and white people to know that the theater of the past has been careful in how it portrays black issues. And that's not the kind of theater you want to see, you want to see real stuff-people really using the stage to get their message across. On the other hand you want to protect your friends as a producer?

Well it doesn't have to include my friends. There are black groups who are doing this stuff, songs, poetry, or profiles of the Caribbean black life.

So you think we can still keep the truth and protect people?

Yes.

Worlds: The Everyday World of the Participants and this Researcher

I was struck by the humility and honesty of Deborah regarding her mothering role. She said that she had not done anything great but she had done her good deed for Canada. The Children's Aid, she said, was quite pleased with the parenting of her husband and herself, not only of their own children but many others as well. Deborah could say quite frankly that she knew she had done a good job in her role as a mother.

The background to our mothering worlds was so different. Deborah was raised to an adult age in a culture of extended kinship and caring, where grandmothers and aunts took on the care of babies and young children so their daughters or nieces could go back to school or go out to work, or because they wanted to have a child in the house to help out or bring up. Even Deborah herself had become a caretaker at the young age of 11 years. When she moved to Canada she lost the extended kinship network but gained a network of friends who became 'godparents' and aunts to her family as she did to theirs. She rarely saw her husband's family because of geographic distance.

I was raised primarily in Canada in a nuclear immigrant working-class family with relatives virtually unknown (to myself) overseas and no family support nearby for my parents. My mother and father took in other new immigrants to Canada who needed a helping hand for periods at a time, and they stood by our family, but we did not have a wide support network.

There are other differences we have faced in regards to our backgrounds, most profoundly the discrimination which constrained Deborah and her children. My background being Basque and British, I only ever remember people's curiosity being piqued by my unusual roots. Deborah on the other hand had problems with being from Jamaica, not only with her color, but with her ethnicity too. She was upset at how whites today treat Jamaicans:

People think that all black people are Jamaicans. It can be pretty disgusting because it gives Jamaica a pretty bad name. All the crime which is done by blacks they will be saying it is Jamaicans, and it *isn't*! And one can feel very bad as if Jamaicans are up to no good, whereas they are some pretty fine Jamaican people here.

I never had to deal with a child's pain at being persecuted for being colored, a husband's or grown children's experiences of job refusals or lack of opportunities. We did have a history of discrimination on my father's side of the family. The major reason for my parents emigrating to Canada was the fact that my father was denied a job in Britain that he was well qualified for because of his skin color and background. Our family history includes stories about how my father was seen as very dangerous by my mother's family because he and his family were "dark and foreigners". However, I don't ever recall my father saying he had come across any prejudice regarding his skin color or background in Canada.

The similarities between the Henry family and my own are that we had a constant stream of visitors of all different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Welcoming and enjoying people was a taken for granted aspect of my upbringing. Deborah and Clarence created the same type of welcoming home for their children and friends.

In contrast to my experience, Deborah never experienced the pride of seeing her husband rewarded for his educational achievements by a job which could use his capacity and give him financial security. Instead she and her children would always know that the father of the family had been denied access to that opportunity because of his skin color. Besides having to give up his dreams he had to suffer through years of discrimination in order to keep his job. Deborah saw the same pattern emerge in the next generation in her son's lives.

The differences between Phoenix and I as middle-age women are also vast. My skin color stands me in good favor as to how I am perceived in this society. It allows me privilege and opportunity, it has never denied me the opportunity of a job, a place in society, never denied me respect, never elicited lewd or derogatory comments. I do not

have a shadow in my mind which hangs over every social circumstance and keeps me wondering how the whites will react, will I have to straighten them out? My skin color has never necessitated explanations of which "kind of white" I am. It has never stood in the way of my believing I can go after certain jobs, certain relationships or friendships. My skin color is never used to describe my person. I do not have to "prove" I am something or not something because of my skin color and culture. My image as white woman is not regarded as second class by white or black men.

Our similarities are also many. We are sympathetic, sincere, intense, we share a love for people, a concern for their well-being and their rights. I could go on about how similar we are. We all live in communities in Ontario, Canada, we have families and we are women, but our experience of this society is radically different because of the color of our skin. We do experience different worlds.

Theory created by Participant through the Process of Narration

As Phoenix created and shaped her narrative, she began to make connections and develop her own theory about what had happened in her life. For example, she began to realize some deeply held feelings which were dictating to her what she would and would not do in terms of jobs. Part of this understanding she expressed as the realization that she would not work at "Burger King" (a fast food restaurant), because she would feel a loss of pride that she couldn't work at a job that uses her capacities. She wouldn't want her future kids to see her there. Here what she has felt about her parents having to take on jobs below their capacity surfaces in a resolve to not allow herself to be put into a similar position. Her strategy of running her own business with her husband where they have minimum exposure to the public, she describes as allowing her to keep her sanity so as "not to deal with those racists".

Phoenix chose a job which would be conducive to preserving her integrity and self-esteem. This has become a survival strategy in one very important area of her life. Her athletic career is another important area of her life. In this regional and national venue, her capabilities are totally exposed, as is her color. She has the skills, knows she can excel, knows she is accepted on the court, and has earned her place. In contrast to her reclusivity (a word Phoenix chose to describe her work life) her sports life is very competitive, very open, very public. She is able to function in the part of her life which she really loves athletics-where she can define her playing power and where she can be self-reliant and self-sufficient.

Nevertheless, even though this is a venue that recognizes the excellence of black people and supports their participation, she sees herself as having to continually prove she is excellent because she has been told so many times in her early life that she couldn't excel:

Always haunting me is proving something, proving to them all that I can beat them...it would quash those fallacies that I have learned that I am not 'as good as'--that I will never achieve.

As she develops the narrative she connects the constraints she feels about jobs and the continuous pressure she puts on herself in the sports field, and concludes that they are both manifestations of racism which affect institutions, organizations and through their policies and their people, her very self in her choices and her understandings of her capabilities.

Further theory evolves as Phoenix describes her family life. She creates an analysis of the relationship between her brothers and herself. As the following dialogues illustrate, these understandings change over time and precipitate Phoenix taking action to contact one of her brothers and bring about a closeness between them.

Anything that struck you as being new, that you hadn't realized you thought that way, like what you mentioned to me as the polarization of your family. ?

It was a realization yes, I knew that we were disjointed, but to really think about these things and put it together to come to the conclusion- 'Well that's why- that could polarize any family.' So yeah, I did draw some new conclusions as to how certain things had affected me. You know the long term results of having gone through these things had affected us.

Did reading it create any new understandings of that process?

Yes it did, and I guess made me feel a sadness about it.

Phoenix was immediately able to create a theory about why the brothers weren't communicating or why one brother had not come home for many years. Later reading the transcript elicited other feelings and understandings.

So when can you see sharing this [the text] with your family?

For instance my eldest brother is in the throes of what it is all about for him at the present. He has never accepted that he wasn't an equal or viewed in the same way as his friends. He was just another one of the guys up until now--but now he has realized that he is not going to be able to work in the venue he wanted to, and that his blackness does have something to do with his lack of job and status. He is having a very difficult time accepting that because of racism he hasn't been able to live the life he worked so hard to live.

So does he understand where you are coming from now?

No he is completely delusional.

If he read it?..

Well it might be an education, he would realize we are not as far removed as what he thinks we are. He was always wrapped up in impressing the white folk, wearing a very intellectual facade in order to impress his educated white friends. This is something I have never done. I think that I am brazenly honest. Do you think so?

Yes.

I don't believe in facades. I hope that the people that care about me will see it as positive, that it won't be an empty narrative to them.

What do you mean by empty?

That it doesn't touch their heart. I want them to feel something, to be able to empathize. It would hurt me if somebody I cared about didn't respond.

So you feel that it is a touching piece of work then?

Yes I do.

Family 1990

Phoenix: I can't see any kind of resolve with how things developed with my family. I can't ever see myself becoming thick with my brother on the East Coast or my sister here. I don't see any future development in those areas at all. I don't know about my oldest brother, he is in a place by himself. We have shared some good times and mutual friends but he has really pissed me off too. There are certain things that he chooses to not realize that have led us to a level where we talk about the weather and not much beyond that. That's not fulfilling to me at all.

This process could have be seen as being intrusive into a families life. I guess because no one has read your transcript as yet the only intrusiveness might be in my coming to see you, and taking of your time. I wonder if this would be a bombshell in your family

Well I don't think it would be a bomb shell--they would be reading things they were feeling too...these common denominators are too damn common, and I [think they would say] "didn't know that you felt that way", "and how could you feel that way and not share that with me". And yet at the same time, "well I felt that way *too*". Wouldn't it be nice to know that we all felt the same way?

Spring 1991

Have there be any changes in the family since last year? Anything to do with your work-in recording the narrative.?

No one in my family has read the transcript. I guess I could let my Mum read it, I could definitely let Travis read it, but it still is very private. So as far as relationships go between the people that are closest to me, I can't say that they are stronger or weaker for it. I have always had deep, deep feelings for my mother and the kind of woman she is, but I have never articulated it. I knew that Travis was a very special man, that it would take a special man to fulfill my needs. It is not like there were great revelations and I treated people differently because of them. These things that I shared with you are things always within me, I just never spoke about them.

Fall 1991

So, I want to ask you about your brother -the niddle brother and you--your reconciliation. This is the only area in which the life history process had results within the family so far. They may have come about naturally in time. What do you think? It is not that I have to find other proof that this proce.s has empowered you, cause I know that I could write that it has. Do you know what I mean?

Yes I do. I think that he and I got together when he was having trouble dealing with the residue in his life. Not being where he wanted to be at this time in his life- and me being able to relate to it, because it was just fresh on the block. He gave me credit for understanding--the first time that he has realized that I do understand, and that we do have very common denominators. I understand because I feel the same pain that he feels. As soon as he recognized that, and he could not *not* recognize it, because it is the same pain that he felt, then there was a new understanding of one another. He shifted his

anger away from me, I was no longer little sister who hasn't had any life experience and doesn't understand his pain. We are fighting the same battle. It helps to know you are not alone in the kind of negativity you have to fight sometimes.

Some of these things that we have gone through have left us feeling quite sick inside, and in a way that we wouldn't share with just anybody. He was concerned for me that all of these things had been brought out but there was no bandages for them. We both realize that this kind of residue will not be solved by putting a Band-Aid on them. It was as though he didn't want me to be alone with those emotions because they are very dangerous. That was the catalyst that brought us back together again.

When Phoenix and I finished the life history narration she had talked to her "middle" brother once. Later she phoned him and shared more of what had been happening to her. She described their coming together in the foregoing. It is useful to note that had I not been able to include Phoenix' reflections from a year after the initial interviews, we wouldn't have been able to see how her narration of the life history and her attention to those aspects of her life she had suppressed, would lead to her empowerment. She later did manifest a greater sociability with her brother, sharing her newly understood theoretical insights which were instrumental in bringing them closer together.

Problems in the Research

Phoenix: I guess in hindsight my only reservation, the only negative thing that came out of any of this was that I didn't have any answers to deal with what was brought out. No answers about how to solve the problems. It was just re-opening cuts, and not having any bandages. At the same time, I am glad that they were open when they were because they needed to be. I think that I could have acted very negatively in the wrong place at the wrong time because I had such negativity festering in me. I am glad that it was unleashed in the proper form.

You have said you unleashed these feelings, and you have said that I took the kettle off, you said "It was a good thing for me, the water was beginning to boil and you took the kettle off.")

You are saying two things here so what does taking the kettle off really mean?

I could have gone on the way I was going and somebody could have looked at me the wrong way sometime and I would have killed them, for anger and residue in me that I

didn't understand. Now I realize that I do have anger and residue in me for specific reasons. They are easier to deal with when you know where they have come from.

Since we did the work that we did together, it has still been really hard. I am not where I want to be, I don't know how I am going to get there...if I am going to get there. I said to you before I thought that I was meant for some great type of contribution in this life, I honestly felt that I was a little bit gifted-that it should present itself sooner or later. It hasn't, not for me to recognize anyway. Well there are little bits-attributes that I give myself credit for, the little things that add up. You know when you shed a little bit of comfort to somebody, something you could forget the next day, but perhaps it would mean something great to who you shared it with...it might not change their life, but it might make life easier for them. All in all I can say that I am truly glad that we worked together.

Do you feel then that it could be unwise for some people to go through this?

It just depends on how close to the edge you are. You can go over. You can feel 'where do you go from here?'. So I know how I feel, I know why I feel the way I do, but there is no resolve, there is no way of fixing it. I am dealing with it and yet it is not like you can have an operation and things will be okay and you will be happy for the rest of your life. Yeah I do feel like some people are on the edge. I think that I am a very strong person, and if I am close to the edge, then I feel a weak person could easily go over.

Well you have said there were a number of your peers when you were growing up that did commit suicide?

Well that's not a number, but of the black people I have known in the community, yes there has been suicide, and there has been a lot of talk about it. Yes, I have talked of it, and people very close to me have called to talk about it. Because you just get tired, tired of showing the strong side of yourself, trying to make things better, and trying to be an ambassador of your race, and trying to educate people, and trying to rid people of their preconceived ideas, of what you are all about, because of what they see coming. The load can be a little bit hard to bear sometimes. Especially when you don't have someone real close to you that you can share it with.

I have Travis and Darcie.

Well if there was another researcher doing this work -a life history study with a group of people who were oppressed, do you think there is some kind of a backup that the researcher should have.?

I think that the researcher should know that it can bring out a monster, a very serious monster that can be destructive to themselves and others. I was really angry, there were times when we had finished that I just wanted to go out and smack somebody.

There has been a lot of talk in feminist studies that black women are angry and don't want white women to work with them.

That's really unfortunate.

White women who are scared, because of this anger.
 Yeah.

So what can we say to encourage that. You are saying here that there were dangerous feelings unleashed. I am a white researcher.

Yes you are, and it is important that we have white researchers delve into this and make the rest of white society understand what is happening. This is not just a black fight, this is a fight within humanity and we have to have white folk fighting for us.

Do you think that black women should be doing the research and then white women and black women working on the research together after it has been done? Or do you think that the black woman telling her life history and the white researcher recording it can work?

Yes I do think it can work. Very much so.

Partnership: Rewards

What can be the advice to women who would undertake this-for example the researcher may be scared to bits approaching this work - the sociologist would have to be prepared.

I think that this is healthy in the sense that the black subject or the black person's subject matter is basically in the role of teacher. I think that it is good that the black person should be the educator about something. They need to be respected by the white researcher. I think that when you see that kind of honesty [that comes out from the narrator] how can you not respect it or learn from it. White women are closest to white corporate America, and who is going to have more influence on it than white women?

Meaning and Empowerment in Writing a Life History

This makes me feel like I have really contributed, like even [sharing] my experience [makes me feel] in a sense that perhaps other people that have had such experiences won't feel alone. These are [experiences] that should affect people with great magnitude. I think I have been honest with myself in that I have to answer to them, get the residue out, be honest with myself about how it has affected me, presently or in the past and for the future.

I guess if I could aspire to teach other people the common sense behind being a humanist then that would be so great, that would be so fulfilling to me. To have influence over people like that through the experiences that have wreaked havoc with my life in the past!

So you are seeing yourself using what you have constructed here and affecting other people?

Uh huh.

So all the things that have happened have strengthened you in your humanistic resolve?
 Yeah. My philosophy reads back- not black, not white, not Canadian, but humanist.

What some feminist scholars say is that when we do research we should be facilitating the empowerment of the person. The person involved shouldn't just be telling their story for the good of the researcher. There should be a consciousness raising, which happens as you just said when you tell your life story, you hear the things that you have to say to your self, and then also a consciousness raising about the fact that what has happened to you has happened through the larger society. If I can remind you, about your family... there were certain things you saw about your family, you saw that in ways your life had been constrained in your relationships with one another because of society. That was a new thought for you. That is very important theory, in terms of what happens to people through racism.

Yeah, yup.

That thinking process is a kind of empowerment for the person, because they can realize that some of those things that they have seen as their failings, or their inabilities, are actually a result of some social constraints -and that lots of other people may be feeling and experiencing the same thing.

Yeah.

It can help them to go further in what they want to do.

To resolve their conditions.

Yes.

Expectations

What would you hope for in terms of the work that we have done?

I would hope that it could touch the dumbest most racist white person.

What about black men?

I think it would give them a different kind of perspective. I think black men should show more respect to black women.

There will hopefully be black male students who will be reading this in women's studies.

I would love for men to gain some kind of an insight.

Another thing is that we haven't gone the extra step yet-completing the book and publishing it. So the stuff that I am talking about right now is the interaction that we had between us, which I will write about in my thesis. Because I decided not to use your total life history in my thesis, I thought it was more appropriate and in keeping with my aims to have that published separately as a joint project, yours and mine. And that I wouldn't use that to further my academic research. But what I am doing is to use the parts that situate you for the readers of the thesis, so they know your background --so they can understand somewhat how you and I have (although we may have actually been together

when we were girls) lived in different worlds, because of our society, because of the way it is. And so part of the thesis is written to show those two worlds, to show how... Different they are?

Yes, exactly, and how we meet--do we meet, that is a good question! --meet in a world different from those two worlds, because we have our own world together. So that is what I want to write about. Cross-racial research where women and men of different races are working together and promoting this kind of work together...that's how we are going to have social progress.

Where it touches everybody.

Yes.

Phoenix Experiencing the Power of her Narrative

I sat with a girlfriend, she is a mother and has been through a lot. I told her about going through this with you and she was quite interested in the final result. I read about twenty pages--she was in awe, engrossed. I remember pausing--but she wanted me to continue. She phoned me today and asked me when I was coming back to read some more! So I feel like this *is* saying something, it is not only perhaps an interest to me but there are other people who are interested too! When I feel bad I am going to be able to read this and know where it comes from. It is like a part of me, like a diary of my life.

Conclusions Regarding the Findings

In undertaking this thesis I set out to see if it was possible to record the interactions and dimensions of the process and product of a life history project. I was also interested in the possibilities of inter-racial research, in light of the exclusionary practices in feminist scholarship of the past and the virtual absence of black women's life history material in Canada. I could see the possibility of a white researcher (myself) facilitating the voice of black women because I was in a position of privilege which would allow me the time and financial support to carry out such a project.

The motivation and spirit in which I approached this project was to work for a unity of purpose. This I hoped would produce a harmony in research relations, collaboration, and cooperation. In nurturing that environment the research bore fruit. I was accepted to work with these women, and they felt comfortable enough to share with me. My approach worked even with Phoenix who was very angry at whites and their institutions, and who expressed her anger vehemently to me. But the reason my approach worked is only partially due to my own efforts. Obviously my two participants had to be amenable to my approach, personality, project etc. The point here is that Deborah and Phoenix did not *see me as white*, they saw me as a person -- Lynn. My acceptance by them was due to their openness of heart, and perhaps in very small part to the nature of the research. They were not afraid of my being white. Perhaps I could convince myself that was because I set their fears to rest, but in truth it is because they have worked with and loved white people all their lives. I was not a threat to them as I might have been to another group of women. I would like to believe that the attributes other researchers such as Reinharz (1980), McGuire (1987), and Mbilinyi (1989) have talked about such as equality, empathy, and sharing, and the spiritual qualities I have discussed in this chapter:-- courtesy, respect, caring, patience, and honesty would pave the way for me and other researchers to establish trust in any research relationship. I

would like to believe that the nature of the research I wish to carry out would also touch the hearts and win the allegiance of people with whom I would like to work.

Setting out to *prove* that I could work with black women was not a part of my agenda, but I think now that the warnings I received must have made me so determined to persevere and make this project work. I was told many times that it would be very difficult to work with black women or men, especially as racial clashes in Toronto were on the increase. I also knew the stories of "over-researched" and exploited black communities in Nova Scotia, where blacks were ready to throw any white researcher "out on their ear", with every good reason. I initially chose Deborah and Phoenix as participants because of their color, their personalities, and their life experiences. I listened to their stories in the "black context" of their lives, but I saw them as Deborah and Phoenix--friends, friends before their color. And that is the positive side of what happens in relations between people, and what I venture to say can happen in research relationships. According to the new generation of researchers coming up through graduate school, in the future we will not have to talk about "inter-racial" research being necessary -- it will be an established fact.

The Process: Commitment to Participants

It is not difficult for the reader of this thesis, having read my understanding of the history of the black community in Toronto, to realize why I became committed to recording the narratives of these women. I decided from the beginning that I would record and transcribe the whole of both narratives before I finished my thesis. My decision to not include the entire life histories has respected I feel, the reality of the participants, and goes a tiny step in reversing the social science research trend of appropriating knowledge from marginalized peoples. The parts of their lives I have included are introductory; they present a context, evoke a feeling, and are an educational

tool to allow the reader to meet the two participants as women living and surviving in Toronto today. I see this descriptive section and the dialogue that followed as necessary for lifting the process of doing this life history out of the realm of objectified analysis to the realm of self-illuminating discourse. The reader then becomes a part of the process we went through.

As we have not yet embarked on producing a finished product, I do not yet know what challenges this further collaboration will entail. I can only be positive and hope that our friendship and the qualities we have engendered in our relationship together, will carry us through whatever difficulties we may encounter.

Reading and Response to the Narrative

I learned that my expectations for participant collaboration in some respects was completely unrealistic. Acker, Barry, and Essevald (1983: 425) suggest that objectification could be minimized if the analysis process was shared by the participants. For this to work there needs to be a similarity of interest, ideology and language, but often these preconditions are not met. Although both women had an interest in seeing the product (the narratives) recorded and published, neither had any motivation to write down their responses to the reading of their narratives. Deborah had no interest in talking about the process; it was the product that engaged her participation. Phoenix however was happy to have her comments recorded about the process and the product, and to talk in detail about how the project affected her.

Acker, Barry & Essevald (1983: 425) also suggest that ultimately a researcher must objectify research in order for it to be used in academia, "if an analysis that links the individual to processes outside her immediate world is to be achieved". Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the research was to learn how the *participants themselves* can be very capable of making these connections. As Phoenix explained her life to me, and

put together the various events, circumstances and relationships which had affected her deeply, she was able to distance herself and ask herself the hows and whys, thereby making theory she had not understood before. She was able to articulate the strained relations between her family as being caused by the constraints of discrimination from the outer society. There was a change in consciousness which she attributed to the opportunity to talk about those things she had always known but had never said, or had never understood as an effect of something else. I think this process reflects the catalytic validity Patti Lather (1986: 272) describes as, "the degree to which the research process reorients and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it".

I do not know if Phoenix will choose to change any aspect of her life. She has used her agency to protect herself as well as to survive. Although opportunities may exist to further herself through schooling or training, she is reluctant to go the way of many others who sacrifice something of themselves by "bowing and scraping" to get ahead. She has fought for her identity as a black Canadian, and the fight has taken its toll on her. She felt there were no bandages to heal the wounds she has suffered. Our project took its toll on her as well. But she was glad we had gone deeply into those memories. The life history process brought her consciousness to a psychic space in which she now knows she must find ways to channel the energy she has from her anger into positive projects and relationships. She has already begun that process. She was able to converse with an estranged brother and offer him her own experiences--freshly formed-- to consider during his difficulties, and this changed their relationship.

I do know that Phoenix sees the narrative process as having educated her about her self. That self knowledge is a great step and in the end it may be the most radical transformation. I do know that she sees the narrative as a tool to educate others, and that she has already used an opportunity to share her narrative with another woman who is experiencing a difficult time. She looks forward to the publishing of this story in order to make black Canadian history better known.

The Product

Keeping in mind the negative experience I had with Rose Downes in the rewriting of her story and the positive one I had with Phoenix, in the future I would pay attention to introducing my participants to some other life history works. I would discuss with them the political and cultural dynamics involved in retaining a mother tongue, in order that they could decide how the final text could be written. In this project allowing the opportunity for the participants to read their texts was an important decision for several reasons. This opportunity creates closure, a resolution for the participants. Phoenix said without having the story in her possession she "didn't have anything to show for it". It also allows for important absences to be included and material to be deleted if necessary. The participants need to read their stories so that they can see from the distance of the reader how they framed their life, what they left out, what rings true to them, and what they represented differently than they meant! For example, Deborah wanted us to know she did her caretaking with a good heart [not just out of duty]. How important it was that she got the chance to see she had not expressed that feeling, and to be able to rethink that aspect of her self and include it in her story.

Researchers in the field of narrative studies suggest that the narrative can be "viewed as fluid rather than fixed in the variety of shapes that it can assume" (PNG 1989: 99). Narrators may give to their stories a form which reflects the emotional resonance of their lives, the meaning they have given to their life and the purpose they see for the narrative. Phoenix' story is a statement of opposition to the power structure. Her goal in her life story was to make the racism in her life visible to her readers, and she used a language full of anger and bitterness to express her feelings of betrayal and hopelessness. She is black as she tells this story of growing up a black Canadian long before the large influx of Caribbean immigrants. But in retrospect she wanted her life, her philosophy, to

read *not black*, not Canadian, but humanist, because that is how she thinks of herself. In everyday life that is what Phoenix is--a humanist, that is her philosophy and behavior. Her everyday life is full of situations in which she is a warm, happy, charming, humorous person and a humanist! She has expressed in small measure her humanistic stance in her life story, but the central theme in the story is herself as a black person fighting with racism, and her struggle to affirm her native born Canadian identity. Her understandings about herself after having read her narrative reflect the multiple perspectives we have of our selves.

Empowerment

I can say that through this research I personally saw the empowerment that happens as a woman constructs her life. All three women could find positive things about themselves in their life stories. They were fulfilled about certain aspects of themselves: Rose about her activism, Deborah about her mothering, Phoenix about her counseling of others. Their reactions to the thought of their stories going public were different. Deborah overcame her feelings of humility to agree that her history would be interesting and educational and important for people to know. Rose saw that so much of her life had been taken up fighting racism that she didn't want the story published. Phoenix was quite overcome with all the racist incidents she had been through and how they had added up to become a burden she carried. In her case, although she was saddened by those memories, Phoenix felt they must be used to educate others. In this way she overcame what to others was unbearable and unthinkable to share. I would suggest that she envisioned an alternative for a negative aspect of her life; the story became the tool for that vision.

Has my Research lived up to my Ideals?

What I have Learned Through this Research

I wanted to record the interactions involved in the process of doing a life history, and the responses of the participants to the finished product. If Deborah had been my only participant, then my resources for this goal would have been minimal, and in fact the project would have been impossible. I was idealistic in my expectations of the participant's enthusiasm to embrace my "process project" as well as the life history narration! Fortunately, Phoenix was interested, patient, and provided the time to answer my many questions. I was able to record a great deal of dialogue about the participant's reaction to process and product. However, I now understand few people would be prospective participants for a project like this one.

My curiosity about how people *feel* taking part in the process and reading their product, has been rewarded by hearing from these women, and I think the results offer some interesting data for others who are considering doing a life history. For example, the topic of reciprocity to one's subjects has been duly talked about in social science literature. What I can add is that a tremendous amount of energy and commitment goes into the act of being a narrator reliving your life. To have the researcher go away with the narrative material is to be left with a feeling of loss. As Phoenix said, there was "nothing to show for it" at first. My thinking is that researchers should take the time and effort to provide their participants with a transcript and tapes of the narration: anything less is unjust.

The main insight I can offer to sociology as far as what happens when participants read their text, is that it seems to be a unique experience for each person—from shock, to being pleased, to being moved to tears! I would say that with all respondents there was a feeling of resolution upon reading their life history and seeing for themselves the results of what they had created. It is interesting to note that Rose did want a copy of her life *to keep* (after it was corrected) even though she did not want it

published. I found it *is* important to encourage and welcome the participants' involvement in correcting their text so that the written text reflects their presentation of self as they wish it. All my participants were vocal about the reading of their text, and Rose, Phoenix, and Deborah welcomed the chance to correct those aspects they wished otherwise.

The construction of theory which occurred in these histories was enlightening for me. I think a researcher sharing her theories about participant's lives with the participants would be very challenging, but the rewards could be as great. I wasn't able to do this to any extent but Marjorie Mbilinyi (1990) managed to do this in her work, as described in her article. It would be interesting to see the *dialogue* which ensues from such interactions.

I did learn how very differently people approach the telling of their lives: the framing and the choice of form, the language, the extent and development of themes, whether feelings are presented or not, which specific messages or testimonials are presented. Some areas I wished I could have explored further were the absences, silences, confidences and contradictions in the lives and the texts. Had I not been involved in trying to record the interactions around the process and the product, I would have been interested in talking to the participants about these factors. More work needs to be done in this regard, especially from the point of view of the participants.

How did I affect the research? If I had not been a mother would Deborah have focused on mothering as much? What if I had only expressed interest when she talked of her work life? I cannot be absolutely sure. But with Phoenix I have no doubt: she took control and told what she wanted to tell. Did my initial talk about exclusionary practices in women's studies and the feminist movement set the tone for the research endeavor? Actually I believe that it convinced the participants of the sincerity of my interest, but I don't think it affected their decisions about what they would say. I believe I expressed interest in anything the participants wanted to tell me during our sessions together.

Deborah did not focus on racism, but Phoenix and Rose did. Rose focused on individual and collective activism, while Phoenix focused on personal struggle and acts of racism. Each of the women chose her own focus and developed her themes as she wished.

I have had some feedback on what my participants thought about various aspects of the research setting and the life history process itself. In light of this I think it might be useful for researchers and participants to discuss beforehand the research setting, schedules, their likes and dislikes, etc. --but more importantly, to evaluate *with* their participants how the research process is going early on in their work together. In this way the best potential for the relationship can be nurtured in both partners, as they work towards their goal.

I think I have gone a few steps onto the path of recording process and product. My goals were idealistic, but through the experience I gained new information and understandings about the interactions that can play through the life history process and more about the qualities necessary for a researcher and the dynamics of participant response. All this prepares me for future work in a field which is ever-fascinating and rewarding. A further change to the life history definition considering Mbilinyi's work and my own could be described as:

A life history is an extensive record of a person's life, and a description of a social process. This method combines the talents of a narrator who tells her life and a researcher who records it. Together they produce the major narrative, a record of the relations engendered between them, and their understandings of the life story.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

My journey through the research and writing of this thesis has been circular. Here at the conclusion I find my thoughts going back to the beginning to reflect on the methodologies and practices of life history research which have resulted in the movement away from exclusive, distanced research toward egalitarian, collaborative endeavors. Although the main focus of the thesis in the beginning was twofold--to facilitate the production of a black woman's life story and to look in depth at the process of life history work--I found myself having to write about why it was we needed an expansion of knowledge about women's lives, what we were achieving through using the life history method, and how that method has been subject to an evolution of methodological development.

In this process I have examined several aspects of the production of knowledge in the context of feminist scholarship and life history research. I reviewed the exclusionary practices which have existed within feminist scholarship and academia, through the lens of counter-hegemonic theory: these are practices which make the production of knowledge and the kind of knowledge produced exclusive to certain people. In turn I have explored several methodologies, in the context of life history research, and shown how understandings of the research endeavor and research relations have evolved over time. I have gone on to present a review of black Canadian history, referencing for the most part black feminist theory, and focusing on the exclusionary attitudes and practices which existed and exist in this society. Finally, I have shown how participants and researcher in a inter-racial relation respond to the process and production of the personal construction of a life story. In this process I specifically focused on the importance of

participants' responses, the dynamics involved in personal narrative process and production, and the relations between the researcher and the participants.

My decision to not include the complete life histories in the thesis precludes examining the positive or negative effects the publishing of the product might have on relationships between researcher and researched. I do not know what empowerment, if any, exists for the narrator of the text, her family, and her community, once her story is published. I am also not able to comment on how a partnership works when people together produce a finished product--working on the chronology, ordering and style, the refining of the text etc. Also I am not able predict what would have happened had I developed a theory about the lives of these women and taken that theory back for their response.

What I have experienced and learned through conducting these life history projects is most profoundly, "the coming to life" of my academic work; I participated in the construction of lived experience, rather than just reading historical or contemporary theory about black community life. From my very first experience with Rose Downes I came to realize that life histories reflect many aspects of social change, even as they reconstruct aspects of the individual's personal experience. I also found out that the absences in the historical record about certain women's experiences in Toronto in the early 1900s -1950s, were alive and present in the minds of women like Rose and Deborah. Interviewing the families of Phoenix and Deborah also expanded my understanding of the generational linkages and differential experiences that males and females live through, and how people face the challenges and constraints in their lives in present day Canada.

Having experienced the responses and reactions of Phoenix, Rose and Deborah to the life history work, I now know how important and significant the participant's own responses are to the research and methodology. My initial inquiry was to hear what the participants felt about the text and the process. For example, I felt it was important that

the participants had the chance to comment on, and develop their own theory about their lives, as well as the researcher developing her own theories, but I had not realized that I would learn so much about the development of the narration itself, or what the researcher could do to better the research process.

Work for Sociology

How do I see these life histories as beneficial to sociology? Although only small parts of the life histories appear in this thesis, the excerpts here illustrate how racism is still perpetuated in behaviors, attitudes and institutions: how whites still perpetuate it, and how people of color suffer through it, manage it, and in some cases overcome its effects. In the light of black history, these life stories tell about aspects of life which are missing from mainstream studies. They tell of the struggles of black mothers and daughters, their survival strategies, their agency, and their pain. They tell how black women define themselves in the context of Canadian society. These stories fill in the gaps of everyday women's experiences from the 1920 time period. Deborah's and Phoenix' family life stories tell of ethnic identities, inter-racial marriage, and the children of inter-racial marriages. All the stories talk about gender relations, and the joys and struggles generationally. Finally these histories reflect social change as it has occurred through the eyes and lives of these women and their families.

Reflections on Theory and Methodology

My reflections have caused me to consider several aspects of my research in the light of various theories. One theory I will mention here is the postmodern concept of conflicting discourses; this has led me to a different understanding of the presence of conflicting meanings and values in people's lives. The early concept in feminist methodology was the notion that feminist researchers could work toward capturing the subject's world, "seeing things as they are-"a whole entire complex within the matrix of

the subject's world" (Dubois 1983: 111). Postmodernism has shed light upon this notion by suggesting that the subject's world is a flux of conflicting discourses never fully present to the subject or others, and impossible to "capture" (Denzin 1990). It is certainly not possible to capture the essence of a person's life or communicate such a thing--I learned this first hand. Phoenix told me several times that she was a very deep and private person. Things she had revealed to me she had not told other people. Some things she had not known herself, or had known but never expressed, or had expressed but never connected together in certain ways. Yet we have not got the whole of Phoenix' life, not even a few of the many parts of Phoenix on paper, despite the fact that she recorded what she thought in her own words --and we spent hours, days, and weeks at this work. I talked in my findings about how Phoenix constructs herself in her text as a person battling racism, how she constructs her major identity as a black Canadian, but at the same time wants her philosophy to read "not black, not white, but humanist". I also included the dialogue about how she is happy with who she is and wouldn't change places with anyone else. Yet at the same time who she is painful because she constantly has to challenge her sense of self in wondering if she is "good enough", "could she?" etc. Although we never did embellish the story as Phoenix had jokingly suggested, we did try to stay with the perception of the moment and reflect the diverse views Phoenix has of herself. It is very useful to understand these diverse views in the light of postmodern thought which explains how the sense of self can be structured through certain existing discourses and ways of thinking, and how the subject can be attracted to different ways of constituting meaning in their life. The life history affords the opportunity to facilitate this process of finding further meaning in the reconstruction of aspects of a life in narrative form.

Several of the conclusions in my findings have shown me that there is much work still to be done in refining methodologies. Also, the research relation in practice still falls short of a realization of the ideals of theorists, whether feminist researchers,

experimental anthropologists, interpretive sociologists, participatory researchers, or postmodernists. In terms of exclusionary practices, research shows more effort and commitment needs to be made to facilitate the inclusion of women and men of color in academia, in developing theory, in writing and publishing, in policy and decision-making positions, and in field research. The negative attitudes and behaviors of most white people in Canadian society toward people of color reflects in all areas of life, and similarly the backlash of these perspectives affect how cross-racial research is regarded by both black and white--whether in fact it is possible to carry out.

There is hope however in the new work by feminist scholars. It is six years since the Barrett and McIntosh debate ranged across the Atlantic, involving feminist scholars of all backgrounds. Since that time more about what women of color feel about white women and men has come out through the works of Canadian women. The creation of such terms as "rainbow feminism" and the working groups that are beginning to develop around this theme have come to give us hope that there are possibilities of women of all colors working together unitedly and cooperatively.

More work needs to be done to follow in practice the postmodern ideals and the theory of such researchers as Mies and Mbilinyi. To include for example, the reflections of the researchers about their world in relation to the world of their participants, the responses of their participants, how their participants were empowered, or how the researchers managed to collaborate with the participants and serve the community at large.

In addition to the topics I have examined in the thesis, I feel there are certain areas of inquiry which need to be explored further. Postmodernist theorists and feminist theorists have pointed out the need to question basic assumptions regarding the nature of the human being and its functions, attitudes and behaviors within the world. Those assumptions affect the way that people are seen within the research endeavor as well. I see a critical need therefore for new work to be done in order to explore the assumptions

of what researchers could be: their motivations, orientations and conditions (states of being), and how they can better prepare themselves for the research field (I mean particularly in the field of personal narrative production where a state of intimacy is imminent).

In the methodology chapter and the postmodern chapter, I have presented a number of concepts concerning the researcher, her stance, presentation of self, interpersonal relations, behaviors and attitudes. As I conclude this study I have come to realize that I can examine these concepts in light of the experience I have gained through the life history project and I can see an alternate viewpoint. As an example of what could be a focus for future methodological studies, I will briefly examine two concepts I think deserve attention.

Maria Mies suggested in 1983 that we could try to cultivate a "conscious partiality", an identity with the subject which would go beyond empathy. The researcher, Mies said, would maintain a degree of partial identity for herself while at the same time be able to see the interaction of the participants and any distortion in the work. Perhaps during the early years of feminist theorizing there was a concern that in a research relation, being less (or being more) than objective was a risk in losing a sense of self--a sense of self that women had struggled hard to come to know, maintain and affirm. There was probably a tension inherent in how to behave in the research relation. On the one hand, female researchers knew that "going soft" was a mainstream concern (some male researchers feared this would happen in an intimate research situation), while on the other, it was this very personal connection with the participant toward which women researchers were inclined, and which made the work real for them. Hence an idea emerged among feminist theorists ("conscious partiality") that to reconcile the tension one could establish empathy, but the researcher must somehow rise beyond that state to see the work objectively--all the while being certain to hold on to a partial identity of self so that one would not get lost, either in the empathy or in the objectivity.

I suggest that theoretically speaking we have grown to a stage where we have new information that can help researchers learn to respond to the subject in a new and congruent manner, rather than having to separate parts of the self in order to be able to function with the heart as well as the head. During the 1980s women's writing has produced works which assist women and men to look deeper into the construction of self, for example to look at the ways women learn and know (Belenky et al. 1986), develop psychologically (Gilligan 1982), and approach intimacy and anger (Lerner 1989). I think that women are coming to terms now with the negotiations involved in maintaining a sense of self-identity in personal relationships, without betraying, losing, silencing the self, or getting lost in the other. The issue now for female and male researchers who have addressed these concerns about the self is to work toward connectedness with the researched.

Examining the usage of the terms involved in the research relation and what they really mean, is a useful exercise in understanding what our assumptions and expectations are of the people involved in such a relation, and what can be done to improve them. Although the aim in participatory research and postmodern ethnography is to facilitate and promote collaborative research (non-authoritarian relations and people acting as partners in producing the work), nevertheless, as many of the researchers I referenced in this thesis state, there is always an aspect of unequal relations in research which proceeds from an academic discourse or background. This background demands certain administrative, academic or financial obligations of the researcher. Unless the researcher finds alternate means to serve the concerns of the researched and promote partner relations (for example to become a part of a grassroots project where the project and product belongs to the community), the researcher will always be in a position of privilege with the control, the information, and means to process the information. A researcher who wants to work toward egalitarian relations in as many aspects of the research endeavor as possible, will have to explore which attitudes and behaviors would

be helpful in nurturing such a relation. This is particularly true in the case of people who undertake life history studies, because, as I have mentioned earlier it is a research relation which tends toward intimacy.

In this regard, Maguire (1987: 104) addresses the current notion that researchers in the field should become more open to their participants. She states that although other scholars suggest the researcher should become more *vulnerable*, she thinks the critical issue is that researchers should share their power so that participants become empowered.¹⁵ In order to understand how a researcher can be non-authoritarian and empowering it is important to examine whether *vulnerability* is a useful or apt concept for researcher relations. I do understand why researchers would want to exonerate themselves from the burden of academic imperialism and make changes to their presentation of self in the field. Adopting the concept of vulnerability I do not think is a suitable solution. A positive definition of vulnerability suggests that becoming vulnerable is the state of being open to criticism. However this term also means being weak, exposed, wounded, or defenseless. I suggest the notion of researcher vulnerability also assumes that the subject is then positioned or motivated into being the aggressor. The underlying notion here is that the only way a connection will be made between the participants is by the researcher making herself open to criticism or attack from the subject. The premise here is that someone will always have to be the aggressor in a relationship. This positioning of the subject toward the researcher is the opposite of patronizing behavior and perhaps just as harmful. To illustrate what I mean, Phoenix expressed how she felt about being in a position where there was a possibility of feeling vulnerable. She said, "I feel like you understand, without feeling vulnerable to you. I feel like you understand without judgment." Presently I will explore what I have learned

¹⁵ Maguire's focus was directed to making the participants empowered, and making researchers pay more attention to their unfair control of the research situation

in order to nurture an environment which allowed this type of communication to take place.

A more useful, progressive and positive concept we could examine is humility. We could raise the questions "how do such concepts as humility or vulnerability, translated into behaviors, play themselves out, or are enacted in the research relationship? And what meanings do they have in our understanding of the process of that relation?"

I have already discussed the concept of vulnerability, and to expand my understanding of what humility might mean I will examine what I have learned from my participants. Phoenix pointed out to me that those who are the researched need to be respected, to feel that they can be the teachers about something, and to know that they will be appreciated for their honesty; when all this occurs she suggests it is a healthy relationship. Phoenix' theory of healthy research relations is also a useful definition of humility. Aspects of humility are respect for the other, acknowledgment of that person's being and experience, the ability to show an appreciation and respect for their honesty, and a sincere willingness to learn (outside of what it will give one academically). One dictionary defines humility as a state of being humble, of having a modest opinion of one's importance or rank (Webster's College Dictionary 1991). Being humble then, would mean approaching the participant with the understanding that they are also important in the research relationship, and with information to teach that the researcher may not know. This idea of human behavior in a research relation contributes to a picture of both participants working toward the best possible environment for bringing out information of a deeply personal nature. It does not demean either person in that relation by labeling them an aggressor, exploiter, or weak person, but rather creates the opportunity for the emergence of the best of both persons' qualities to emerge.

Maintaining a sense of modest self-respect, treating the other with courtesy and respect, and nurturing a sense of empathy and support is possible while paying attention to the recording and ordering of the work. This state of functioning can be achieved

without becoming either defenseless or incapacitated. I think that this approach is actually an empowerment to both the researched and the researcher--it is a sharing of a type of power which facilitates the subject's voice and positive imaging of self, while it encourages sincere receptivity on the part of the researcher. I think we can move on from the notion of a researcher who has to be consciously partial and/or vulnerable, to anticipate a researcher who is centered within herself enough to evince humility in her attitude and behavior.

The input of the researched gives us the kind of sensitivities which can really shed light on our understandings about what may be lacking in the research relation, or what we may be doing that is helpful and can be shared with others. The concept of self-reflexivity in sociological and anthropological writing *has* inspired researchers to share their inner thoughts in writing, but little opportunity has been given for the researched to have similar input. As far back as 1972, Myron Glazer suggested that it would be most helpful for research and researchers to be exposed to "the observations and sensitivities of their subjects". He could see the value of this exchange of understandings and recommended that..."seeing ourselves as others do would be an invaluable aid in planning future field work, or perhaps deciding that certain kinds of research should not be pursued at all" (1972: 43). It is this kind of analysis that I think would be useful in developing future methodological discussions and practices in the research field.

Along the same mode of inquiry, when I consider the fourth methodological model¹⁶ I see that there are various concepts which underlie aspects of the research relation and give rise to further questions. What for instance, are other qualities needed to support a partner relationship? Paulo Freire (1973) in Pedagogy of the Oppressed addressed the concept of social justice in order to come to an understanding of how

¹⁶ Model 4: participatory; collaborative; action oriented and non-authoritarian, egalitarian, trusting; sharing of understandings and agendas; collaborative efforts at publication (see p. 28 of text).

researchers could work with oppressed peoples and enhance their empowerment. Would an examination of such concepts as fairness, trust, frankness, courtesy, sharing, appreciation and compassion be useful in gaining a clearer understanding of the possibilities inherent in the research relation? Would exploring these concepts with the participants involved before the work begins, be useful to researchers in terms of their own expectations and agenda for their research? Would the sharing of these meanings be useful to the researcher and participant in order to have the best outcome for the process and product?

The work in postmodern thought and black feminist research presented in this thesis and my own experience of a life history project, have caused me to think that a fifth methodological model can be created from this synthesis.

Model 5

- Life history as collective social construction
- Focus on both process and product
- Attention to thick description and contextualization
- Attention to discourse positioning of researcher and researched
- Affirmation of participant's emotion in the work
- Researcher pays critical attention to the development and presentation of their "self"
- Environment of caring is cultivated: humility, dignity, honesty, empathy, support, trust, and respect
- Unity of purpose respecting diversity of views

Life histories are now seen as social constructions in which the narrative reflects the construction of researcher and the participants. The process of the endeavor is seen as being important in the empowerment of the researched, as well as reflecting the interpretive acts which are a part of the creation of the narrative itself. Scholars in this field suggest that thick description, evocation, and contextualization are necessary for reflecting the interactions surrounding the narrative work, and providing a glimpse into the meanings within the life itself. Similarly, attention to the discourses through which both researcher and participant develop their meanings and values not only illuminates the understandings of the participant, but also assists researchers in contextualizing the positions of the researcher and participant in relation to one another. Attention to the

expression of feelings and the appropriateness of emotions of the participant should be "reclaimed and valued" (Collins 1989). In addition to these ideas I would add that researchers could examine critically their behavior and their presentation of themselves in the research project. Researchers could be responsible for creating an environment of caring which would pay attention to such qualities as humility, trust, upholding the dignity of the participant, empathy, and support. Finally, a unity of purpose could connect researchers and participants; this is more than a sharing of agendas and expectations--it would be a unity of intent which can support a diversity of views as it arises from collaboration, ethical motivations and behaviors.

Model 5 represents an expansion of the foundation laid in Model 4 (the participatory model) as this methodological model looks to the finer details of the writing of the text, the process and interpretive acts involved in the endeavor and the research relation; and the researcher as actor in the delicate position of facilitator of the work, empowerer of the participant, and in possible service to a larger community.

New methodologies must answer to the changes which have taken place in our world and in our self-understandings. In this thesis I have shown how researchers are growing toward a maturity of knowledge, volition and action, where they recognize the inadequacies of past methodologies and are formulating new ideas, they have the will to work for transforming, change-enhancing research, and are going out into the field to work and learn with their participants. Similarly in the larger community minority peoples are attaining this maturity and will no longer accept the unquestioned authority of academics. They have developed a self-respect for their own wisdom and knowledge, and are acting on their own ways of knowing. Some of these people are willing to enlist the aid of anthropologists and sociologists to assist them in their search to reconstruct their histories or support their resource claims. In some cases this development carries with it new rules for controlling researchers' activities, which are primarily directed toward regulations for access to communities, acceptance of researchers by communities,

and the use and control of the information accrued (Richer 1988: 415-16). The development of methodology along the lines of Model 5 may assist researchers with whatever community they have the privilege of working.

In conclusion, it seems imperative to me to encourage and engage in research which will promote understanding and redress the imbalance which exists in our knowledge of women's and men's lives in our society. Just as we now understand that knowledge will not be complete until women's perspectives are represented and contribute along with men's in all fields of endeavor, so too must we recognize that the pursuit of knowledge and progress for humankind, will not be complete until all races and peoples are able to give their contribution to the production of knowledge and its application. I believe there is a moral obligation behind preparation for life history research. We must go on an inner journey in order to make the outer journey the most meaningful. As Jonathan Schell suggests:

"If the inner landscape of our souls does not change, the outer landscape of the world will not change either "

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