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CHANGES IN SELF-SUFFICIENCY:
A FEMINIST APPROACH TO LITERACY PROGRAM EVALUATION

BY

Marcia A. Makris
B.A., University of New Hampshire, 1969
M.A., University of New Hampshire, 1971

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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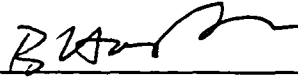
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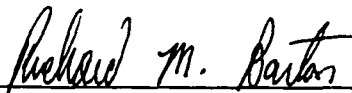
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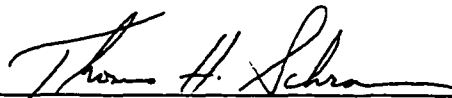
Dissertation Director, Barbara E. Houston, Ph.D.
Professor of Education



Richard M. Barton, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Education



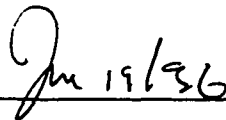
Paula M. Salvio, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Education



Thomas H. Schram, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Education



William R. Woodward, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Psychology



Date

DEDICATION

To my sister Gail Susan, who always asked the practical questions when I was deep into the theoretical and who helped me to laugh when I most needed to lighten up. Her courage, her wisdom, and her spiritual energy have sustained my work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	xi
INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	1
The Research Question	4
Dissertation Overview	5
Part One. The Evolution of a Dissertation	7
Chapter One. A Framework for the Research Project	8
A Contextual Frame	8
Overview of Contextual Foundations	8
The Environment	9
The Setting	13
The Participants	16
The Researcher	19
Contextual Post-Script	22
A Theoretical Frame	23
Overview of Theoretical Foundations	23
Poverty	25
Gender	30
Adult Literacy	35
Social Identity	39
Chapter Two Methodology: Choosing a Perspective	43
In Search of a Method and a Perspective	43
A Feminist Research Perspective	45
A Feminist Research Method	47
Symbolic Interactionism	49
Preliminary Research Methods	51
Preliminary Data Collection and Database	51
Developing and Sending Out the Survey	52
Reviewing the Response	53
Redefining the Population	54

A Feminist Method: Interview Research	55
Responding to the Respondents	55
Establishing the Interview Text	56
Getting the Stories	57
A Feminist Perspective: Co-Researcher Analysis	58
Listening to the Voices	58
Reading the Voices	60
Confirming the Voices	61
Selecting the Case Studies and One More Meeting	63
Part Two. Portraits of Four Women: Private Troubles and Public Issues	65
Chapter Three. Framing the Portraits	66
Chapter Four. Germaine	72
Introduction	72
Reflections from Workplace Skills	73
Private Troubles: Stories from the Past	78
Childhood Memories	78
Schooling	86
Relationships and Gender	90
Germaine Today	97
Chapter Five. Trudy	105
Introduction	105
Reflections from Workplace Skills	108
Private Troubles: Stories from the Past	114
Childhood Memories	114
Schooling	119
Relationships and Gender	125
Trudy Today	131
Chapter Six. Theresa	
Introduction	139
Reflections from Workplace Skills	141
Private Troubles: Stories from the Past	145
Childhood Memories	145
Schooling	150
Relationships and Gender	154
Theresa Today	159

Chapter Seven. Lydia	166
Introduction	166
Reflections from Workplace Skills	167
Private Troubles: Stories from the Past	173
Childhood Memories	173
Schooling	178
Relationships and Gender	182
Lydia Today	189
Part Three: Attention Must Be Paid	193
Introduction	194
Valued Characteristics of Workplace Skills Program	197
The Program as an Opportunity	198
Institutional Environment and Structure	202
Curriculum and Academic Standards	207
Faculty and Teaching Style	209
Characteristics of "Self-Sufficiency"	213
Education: "All of a sudden, I'm intelligent"	216
Society: "It made my world look bigger"	217
Work: "Even management will note what we do downstairs"	219
Prestige: "That's my mother graduating"	221
Gender: "I don't let myself get walked over by a man"	224
Future: "Change. That's exactly what happened, a sense of change"	227
Chapter Nine. Conclusions from the Launching Pad	230
Introduction	230
Discussion	231
Recommendations	235
Notes from Chapter Two	239
Bibliography	240
Appendices	249
Appendix A: Survey Instrument	240
Appendix B: Interview Scripts	252
Appendix C: Follow-Up Package	256

ABSTRACT

CHANGES IN SELF-SUFFICIENCY:
A FEMINIST APPROACH TO LITERACY PROGRAM EVALUATION

by
Marcia A. Makris
University of New Hampshire, September 1996

This research was a follow-up investigation of a federally-funded literacy program which was established to assist its participants to achieve self-sufficiency through employment. The program was designed and implemented in response to the federal legislative law, the Family Support of Act of 1988 (FSA), which mandated that states provide Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs to "assure that needy families with children obtain the education, training, and employment that will help them avoid long term dependency" and "assist recipients to become self-sufficient." The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the characteristics of the program that were valued by the program participants.

The basis for conducting the research and interpreting the data is located within the methodological literature of feminist interview research and interpretive interactionism. In seeking to understand the impact of a federally-funded program on the everyday lives of the female participants in this program, I conducted multiple interviews in which I gained data about their biographical histories, their participation in the program, and their current lives. I framed their reflections on the program within the context of their life events because I wanted to understand who they believe they have become within the context of who they believe they were. I asked a group of women for permission to enter the domain of their

private lives and to hear their stories as a shared investigation of the value of an educational experience.

The women in this study have identified the important characteristics of an adult literacy program as those which allowed them to believe that they had a right to claim prestige within their particular worlds and that they had the capacity to change the conditions of their lives. Their current sense of self-sufficiency is grounded in their belief that they are intelligent and capable human beings. Their evaluation of their literacy program offers makers and administrators of public policy, as well as educators in both public schools and adult programs, an important rationale for designing and implementing educational experiences that will be valued by participants.

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

This research study is a follow-up investigation of a federally-funded literacy program called Workplace Skills which was established to assist its participants to achieve self-sufficiency through employment. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the characteristics of the program that were valued by the program participants. Although the participants of this program were both male and female, this study is examining the impact that this program has made on the female participants.

My decision to limit this research project to the adult women attending a literacy program was based upon my interest in the particular circumstances of women that have led to the trend in the last ten years toward "a feminization of poverty." It is predicted "that by the year 2000, most of the nation's poor will be women and their dependent children" (Bradley, 1987, p. 166). The composition of households in the United States has changed significantly between 1980 and 1990, with women's assumption of responsibility as the head of the household increasing by 21%; in 1990, 6.5 million women were raising their children by themselves (Hodgkinson, 1992, p. 4-5). It was my belief that as women are caught between the conflicting demands of their conventional roles as mothers and homemakers and their increasing obligation to assume the primary financial responsibilities for their families, their sense of self-sufficiency is complicated by conditions of poverty, lack of education, and unemployment, the characteristics that established their eligibility for entrance into a publicly-funded program.

The women who participated in this program were publicly defined as dependent either because they were recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or because they had been laid off from jobs that did not provide them with transferable occupational skills. Both groups of women were seriously lacking in academic

background, either because they had never graduated from high school or had graduated with low-level literacy skills. Because they were unable to find employment that would even minimally support their families, they were unable to meet the financial obligations of their everyday lives for themselves or their children.

My interest in these women was predicated upon my recognition that the public, through the statements of politicians and the media, have formed a negative view of the competence of women on public assistance. By suggesting that their economic dependencies are pathological, women on public assistance have often been characterized as "public issues" because of fundamental flaws in their character. In C. Wright Mills's conceptual injunction for a "sociological imagination," he provided a meaningful distinction between "private troubles" and "public issues."

Troubles have to do with an individual's character and with those limited areas of social life of which [she] is directly and personally aware. Accordingly, to state and to resolve troubles, we must look at the individual as a biographical entity and examine the scope of [her] immediate milieu--the social setting that is directly open to [her] personal experience and to some extent to [her] willful activity. A trouble is a private matter: values cherished by an individual are felt by [her] to be threatened.

Issues have to do with matters that transcend these local environments of the individual and the limited range of [her] life. They have to do with the organization of many such milieu into the institutions of the society as a whole. . . . An issue is a public matter: values cherished by publics are felt to be threatened. Often there is debate about what these values really are, and about what it is that really threatens them (1963, p. 395-396).

In examining Mills's characteristics of troubles and issues, I came to see the importance of framing my follow-up study of publicly-assisted women in "the individual as a biographical entity" and in "the social setting" in which she lives and she acts. Having been labeled "public issues" because of their dependency on public assistance, the women might be able to clarify the values that are important to them and to reveal the particularities of their personal experiences that had brought them to be recipients of public aid.

These women were recruited into a workplace literacy program under the provisions of the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA) which mandated that states provide Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) programs to "assure that needy families with

children obtain the education, training, and employment that will help them avoid long term dependency" and "to assist recipients to become self-sufficient by providing needed employment-related activities and support services." Although the Family Support Act was specifically addressing the needs of welfare recipients and thus classified JOBS legislatively as a welfare-to-work initiative, it was founded upon the assumption that "an inadequate education is the principle obstacle to self-sufficiency" (Chisman & Woodworth, 1992, p. 4). In the language of the law, the instrumental components of this legislation were that the recipients of its entitlements were "needy families" and that the goals of the initiative were "to assist" them to "avoid long term dependency" and to gain "self-sufficiency" by preparing them through education and training for employment.

What the Family Support Act did not address in its welfare reform initiative, however, is the availability of employment that provides a living wage to people willing to work. In "Back Country Blues," a public television documentary about the poor people of Maine, Carolyn Chute offered the following description: "We work very hard for what we haven't." She presented the stories of people whose work when they can find it is physically and psychologically deadening; and she argued that those who leave their communities to find "better work" for "better pay" are losing themselves in a different way because they are losing their extended families, their support systems, and the continuity of their traditions. If the goal of the legislation is to have recipients gain self-sufficiency through work, then two other national problems of the economy need to be addressed: job creation and the cost of living.

In The Promise of JOBS, an investigation of the basic educational services provided by JOBS as a result of legislation, the authors concluded that there are simply not enough jobs in the United States today that provide a living wage and "allow a single parent to support a family in any decent fashion." Also because of the cost of living, particularly the cost of health care, "it is unrealistic and irresponsible to expect single parents with dependent children to take jobs without health care benefits, or to hold those jobs very

long" (Chisman & Woodworth, 1992, p. 11-12). The reality of dilemmas faced by people in poverty in regard to work and to the well-being of their families raised some enabling questions: If the opportunity for work or gaining a living wage is not available after the recipient has completed her educational program, does her inability to find work mean that she lacks "self-sufficiency"? Should a person's achievement in completing an educational endeavor be ascribed with a value of self-sufficiency only if she gets a job? Does the outcome of not getting a job mean that the person "failed" rather than "succeeded" academically as well?

The legislated goal of JOBS programs was to have its recipients achieve self-sufficiency. I was intrigued with the possibility of examining and perhaps extending the meaning of the term "self-sufficiency" from the perspective of the women who participated in the program. Because of my desire to gain their perspective, I grounded my research in a methodology that centrally located the experiences of the program participants in their own testimony through the use of an open-ended survey instrument and a series of interviews. This research project was conducted as a follow-up study over a two-year period; thus, an important characteristic of the data collected is that all of the research participants had completed the program at least two years before I began to interview them. Consequently, their retrospective evaluation of the program is framed in the current, verifiable conditions of their lives today.

The Research Question

My research method was based upon the following central question: What characteristics of a publicly-funded educational program do the participants who completed the program find to be valuable? I became interested in pursuing an answer to this question because I believed that traditional methods of program evaluation, particularly in regard to publicly-funded programs, are grounded in the interest of the administrators of programs to maintain their funding. They are therefore attentive to those characteristics of a program that provide justification and accountability. Individual successes and failures in the

achievement of personal goals are not as significant as the aggregate data that can be gained by quantitative analysis of the outcomes of groups of participants.

I also believed that by conducting this research project I might be able to inform policy-makers of the right questions to ask in conducting an adult literacy program evaluation. A program evaluation based upon the perceptions of the participants would emphasize the interests of the recipients of the educational services rather than the educational providers. Moreover, an open-ended feminist interview methodology would expand the opportunity for participants to reveal a fuller, more descriptive assessment of the program's effect upon their lives.

A collateral question that interested me in conducting this research was in regard to the primary goal of JOBS programs, namely to enable the participants to achieve self-sufficiency through work. As an aspect of my survey and interview methods, I was interested in expanding this notion of self-sufficiency to include my interviewees' reflections on their sense of self-sufficiency before and after participation in the program: What did the program accomplish in enabling its participants to have a sense of self-sufficiency, and what does self-sufficiency mean to my interviewees?

Dissertation Overview

The body of this study is divided into three sections. In Part One, I present the contextual, theoretical, and methodological frameworks for the dissertation. Chapter One sets the context, the micro-environment in which the research was conducted, within the particularities of the economic environment, the setting, the people, the program, and the researcher. In this chapter, I establish the assumptions and limitations of my study. Chapter One also draws upon the literature in the intersecting theoretical frames that have informed this project. This chapter extends the context to the macro-environment in which the conditions of socio-economic class, gender relations, literacy, and social identity are examined as socially constructed and politically conflicting issues in the United States. Chapter Two establishes the basis for conducting the research and interpreting the data by

locating the project within the methodological literature of feminist interview research and interpretive interactionism. It also summarizes the stages and scope of this study to clarify the evolutionary nature of this study from the preliminary research methods to the analysis of data.

Part Two presents the portraits of the four women I selected from my interview data collection. Chapter Three provides the reader with a sensitizing rationale for reading the narrative data presented in the portrait chapters. Chapters Four through Seven offer the reflections and experiences of Germaine, Trudy, Theresa, and Lydia, by revealing their biographical histories and their current lives as they are framed within their participation in the Workplace Skills program. It is within these chapters that the reader may find that a qualitative study has the "political value of humanizing stereotypes" (Agar, 1990, p. 11). It is in the portraits that particular women come to be known in the complexity of their lives.

Part Three provides the interpretive results of this research project. Drawing upon the portrait chapters, I bring the other interviewees into an interpretive discussion of Workplace Skills and self-sufficiency in Chapter Eight. My conclusions in regard to literacy programs and their evaluation offer implications and suggestions to policy-makers, educational administrators, and teachers about their opportunity to enable changes in the self-sufficiency of dependent women by simply being open to understanding the complexity of these women's lives.

PART ONE:
THE EVOLUTION OF A DISSERTATION

CHAPTER ONE

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESEARCH PROJECT

A Contextual Frame

Overview of Contextual Foundations

The context in which the Workplace Skills program was designed and implemented was both political and personal. This study is limited to a particular state that had (and still has) particular economic problems within an environment of economic problems in the United States as a whole regarding unemployment, recession, and inflation. Balancing the budget both locally and nationally became an agenda through which politicians established their viewpoints regarding both the War on Poverty and Welfare Reform. This debate will be examined in the section of this chapter on theoretical frames.

However, welfare and poverty in New Hampshire must be examined within their context of a politically conservative rural state where the state ethos is proclaimed on every vehicle license plate as "Live free or die." When "rugged individualism" is presumed to be the character and the obligation of the state's citizenry, dependence on public assistance is clearly regarded as a character flaw. As an example, amongst the particularities of individualism in New Hampshire is the assumption that all adults have cars. Because public transportation is not readily available, being poor often means living on remote back roads without reliable cars or living in low income housing within communities where access to employment and educational opportunities are minimal. Vehicular travel is required, for example, to attend every technical college within the state because they are placed in regional locations off highways to accommodate adult commuters in the circle of small communities surrounding them.

This section of my study establishes the historical foundations of the Workplace Skills program in New Hampshire in regard to the political and economic environment and

the setting in which the program was formed and offered. It also provides a contextual overview of the program itself and its participants. It concludes by framing these contexts within the personal lens of my own autobiographical foundations where my particular interest in conducting this research began and where my biases and assumptions are revealed as elements of the subjective "me" that selected a feminist research methodology to study participants in the Workplace Skills program.

The Environment

In New Hampshire, during the period in which the Workplace Skills program was first implemented in 1991 through the federal funding of JOBS programs, the economic climate was precarious, and the political climate was conservative. The previous two Republican governors had run on a platform of "No broad-based taxes," and New Hampshire had consequently distinguished itself as one of only seven states in the country that did not have an income tax and as one of only five that did not have a sales tax. Consequently, the basis of state revenue under which public programs in health, education, and welfare could be supported was as tenuous as an accurate prediction of one of its primary sources of revenue, namely recreational taxes and fees, which include beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes, meals, lodging, gasoline, and fuels, as well as fees covering every available license in New Hampshire from dogs and marriages to vehicle registration and Fish and Game licenses. Each biennium in the last ten years, fiscal management by last minute retrieval of unspent funds has been necessary because predictions for revenue were inaccurately high. Moreover, the key funding to support state aid to local public schools increasingly came not from the general fund, but the lottery; by 1990 lottery profits constituted the entire state aid to public education. During this same period of time, public institutions of higher learning were increasing tuitions and losing programs because of reductions in their operating budgets from the general fund. Balancing the state budget has most significantly been achieved by reducing services to health, education, and welfare.

During this same period a major New Hampshire industry, Pease Air Force Base, was closed, and regular reductions in force were experienced by another federal installation, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. Moreover, major companies were leaving the state, such as Northern Telecom, Dictaphone, Allied Leather, and AMCA International, and many who were staying were cutting their work force. Manufacturing as a primary economic activity in New Hampshire, dropped from 30.3 percent of employment in 1980 to 22.5 percent in 1988 (Cowan, 1990, p. 11). Many New Hampshire employees, particularly those in semi-skilled, working class jobs, who had devoted most of their adult work life to a single employer, found themselves without jobs and without skills to compete for new jobs. With one sector of New Hampshire population on unemployment and another sector on welfare, the opportunity for the undereducated work force to find employment was slim; most of their occupational skills were not transferable. Most of the affected unemployed had earned living wages above the poverty level and suddenly found themselves on limited unemployment with short-term benefits that didn't begin to meet their financial obligations. The primary jobs available were in the service sector, and for the most part offered minimum wage positions with limited or no benefits. It was clear that when the unemployment benefits ended, this population would be increasing the demands placed upon Health and Human Services.

In 1987, in anticipation of the Family Support Act of 1988, Governor John Sununu had appointed a Coordinating Council for Welfare Prevention. This effort, entitled "New Hampshire's Employment, Training, and Welfare Initiative," established an interagency council comprised of representatives from the Department of Employment Security (DES), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Job Training Council ((JTC), and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) for the purposes of developing a comprehensive single system of training, education, and employment programs to respond to the needs of New Hampshire citizens. These agencies, who had previously each held a separate and single mission, were required to create a joint mission

statement. This newly-formed council adopted a mission for a single system whose goal was to "ensure that New Hampshire residents receive the services needed to achieve long-term self-sufficiency and economic independence" (in-house State Department Report).

The significance of this joint endeavor was that it laid the foundations for a communication network among agencies to make central to their services an accountability to the individual seeking services, regardless of whether he/she was disabled, on unemployment, or on welfare. One of the key principles adopted was that services must be individually centered and developed without regard to the service provider in order to accomplish the individual's goal of employment. As the walls between agencies collapsed, the distinctions between public assistance categories of rehabilitation, welfare, and dislocated worker clients also collapsed. Those individuals who were out of work would be guaranteed to achieve their goals of self-sufficiency and economic independence regardless of which agency was their service provider. With this new council in place, New Hampshire was prepared to implement the Family Support Act of 1988.

The Setting

The Workplace Skills program was formed in response to the initiative described above that emphasized the coordinated efforts of agencies to respond to clients' interests and needs and to place at the center of human services the client seeking assistance. In a spirit of cooperation, therefore, a committee comprised of academic administrators from the New Hampshire Technical College System (NHTCS) and educational specialists from the New Hampshire Job Training Council (NHJTC) met and developed the educational plan that is the basis of this research project. In partnership, a job training agency and an educational institution formulated a curriculum, established a financial base, and developed a procedural plan for implementing the Workplace Skills program in technical colleges throughout New Hampshire.

There were significant differences between this program and many of the training services previously developed between JTC and the colleges. Training services for New

Hampshire unemployed have historically taken many forms. Placement of the unemployed has been developed with business and industry to include apprenticeships, on-the-job training programs, and community service jobs. One type of program that has supported the efforts of economic development organizations in the state is job-specific training programs that have been established as an incentive to bring new manufacturing to New Hampshire. For example, if a company making brooms has moved into the region and needs laborers for the production line, it can request specialized training by developing a partnership effort between the manufacturer, the training institution, and the economic development office. Those completing the program are usually guaranteed a job. Data entry, clerical and office support, broom-making, machine tool operations, maintenance and food services training are some of the examples of training programs that have recruited trainees from the agencies of the unemployed. Typically the recipients of this training have been the unemployed recipients of the welfare system; typically the work is task-specific with little opportunity for advancement and growth, and the wages begin at or below poverty level.

Other programs, such as the Family Independence Program (FIP), are focused on helping the client to achieve a mainstream employability profile. This supportive curriculum includes developing skills in hygiene and clothing selection, the use of correct English, and the management of health and nutrition, as well as in how to fill out a job application and participate effectively in an interview. Basic skills development in math and English are also provided, but the emphasis is on having the clients practice worksheets to attain enough foundational skills to pass the GED.

Any discussion of federally-funded programs tends to be politically charged, particularly when the people involved are in power and subordinate positions; the people in power are able to sustain their rationales behind an institutional structure while the people in subordinate roles have no structures to sustain themselves other than those offered for their own good. The types of programs I have described above have often been criticized for

their emphasis on pragmatic changes that will improve a client's public image, occupational skills, and credentials to make her fit the mainstream profile of employability. The fact that in the past bureaucrats have defined the personal characteristics that welfare recipients need to accrue in order to get jobs is a clear statement of the subordinated status human service clients have in the perception of the agencies who are employed to help them. I believe that socialization and training programs have been derived from the legitimate belief that a change in credentials, skills, appearance, and the use of language offers clients an opportunity to become employed and that this realization of a job will establish their self-sufficiency. Often the programs offered, however, are created under the presumption that it is justifiable to treat human beings with personal troubles as an economic resource without regard for the individual's needs.

In designing the Workplace Skills program, the committee agreed to offer the clients a different kind of opportunity. Providing an educational remediation program through the college system seemed ideal. Not only were the seven technical colleges situated in every region of the state, but their mission combined both access to undereducated adults and experience in providing remediation programs. They also had veteran faculty, the physical space, and a complex system of support services already in place.

The Program

The Workplace Skills program was one of several regional programs that were provided between 1991 and 1994 throughout the state. Although each campus had its own faculty and staff and its own operational style, the fundamental components of the program established by the joint committee of JTC and NHTCS were the same.

Foremost was the agreement that the program would be a transition period for participants to discover how to be a student again. For a period of time, they would be provided with all the resources necessary to participate in an educational program as if it were a full-time job. The funding included all of the books and supplies necessary for

course work, transportation, and child care costs, as well as whatever subsistence they were receiving upon entry into the program, either in the form of continued welfare benefits or unemployment benefits through displaced worker programs. In previous practice, unemployed individuals and welfare recipients had been funded to attend college with similar benefits; however, they were placed immediately into regular college programs. Although supportive tutorial services were available, many undereducated adults were unable to manage the demands of college classes and their family obligations while they were also trying to retrieve remedial skills, and the drop-out level was high.

The Workplace Skills program provided an educational transition program to unemployed clients that I believe was unique in a number of ways: It acknowledged that remediation needs to occur before, not during attendance in regular college classes; it recognized that a major part of becoming a student is practice in being a student in the midst of everyday life demands; it established the potential for participants to continue in academic programs after the completing the remediation course work; and it was funded with no obligation for the participants to decide a particular follow-up plan before they completed the program. It was "free" to the participants. From the perspective of the agencies involved in its implementation, however, it was an expensive endeavor because their orientation in providing programs had been directed toward immediate occupational outcomes to justify per person expenses. Federal funding under the Family Support Act of 1988 and the Jobs Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) legislation alleviated some of the financial risk and made the Workplace Skills opportunity possible.

The Workplace Skills program was offered eight times over a three year period with the first cycle beginning in March 1991 and the last in October 1993. The class size averaged fifteen participants. Under the basic requirements of JOBS legislation, the participants were required to be in classes and on campus for at least twenty-five hours a week. After the first cycle of the program was completed, faculty and administrators requested a longer cycle than the original eight-week schedule to strengthen the skills of

participants, and the last seven cycles of the program were extended to ten weeks each. The cycles of the program were coordinated as much as possible to end at a time when the participants could choose to enter a regular college program in New Hampshire within a few weeks of completing Workplace Skills if they chose to do so. A unique component of the Workplace Skills program was its advisement to participants to examine programs outside of the technical college system if their academic goals were not supported by technical college curricula.

The Workplace Skills program combined the practical and the academic, with courses in math, language arts, and computer keyboarding. It also provided a values-based seminar on life management skills which combined practice in the strategies of test-taking, homework planning, time and financial management, and family adjustments, with simulations of group process, personal independence, and peer interdependence. Weekly meetings with the director of the program, regular meetings with faculty and tutors, and practice and study with peers between classes were also part of the formal and informal schedule. Central to the academic course work was a curriculum designed to prepare participants both for the workplace and for college level work. All of the support services of the regular college community were available to the participants as well.

The faculty in Workplace Skills were selected for their experience in working with under-educated adults. Either they were permanent full-time faculty at the college, or they were adjunct faculty who had been working in the pre-tech programs that the technical colleges offered to support regular applicants whose skills were identified through testing as remedial. Their educational ethos was based upon the belief that a teacher needs to begin the course work "where the students are" in their knowledge, skills, and dispositions. They also believed that a learning environment needs to be relational and interpersonal, one in which the students are recognized as having knowledges and skills to share with each other. The Workplace Skills program was designed, therefore, to centrally locate its implementation in the particular needs and capabilities of its participants.

The Participants

The people who participated in the Workplace Skills program were the clients of various social welfare agencies in New Hampshire, including Health and Human Services, Employment Security, and Vocational Rehabilitation, although some participants had not entered the welfare system when they first heard about the program through newspaper and local television recruitment advertisements. The primary criterion for admittance to the program was evidence of poverty. Displaced homemakers, displaced workers, people with disabilities, and single parents with young children were all eligible because they had either no income or an income that was inadequate to subsist. A second criterion was evidence that the applicants were at an academic level that could be enhanced by participation in the program. Through a standardized testing procedure using the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), the applicants' grade level equivalencies were assessed. Generally, if the results were below 8th grade level, the applicants were advised to attend a community-based adult basic education program first. Applicants were not required to have a high school diploma to enter the program, but they were expected to take the GED exam by completion of the program.

The demographic characteristics of the participants included the following:

Although males were admitted to the program, the overall ratio of male to female participation was about one to eight. Several of the cycles had no male participants. One cycle had six males in a class of twenty.

The majority of the participants were eligible because they were supported under the provisions of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as single parents with young children; with the exception of one male, this group was all female. About thirty-five percent were displaced workers; almost all of the male participants entered the program under this category. Many of the women who were categorized as displaced workers had been AFDC recipients in their previous history. In the category of displaced homemakers, there were a small number of women, whose eligibility was based upon

death or disability of a spouse or a divorce. Although only a few participants were supported under Vocational Rehabilitation, many of those classified under AFDC would also have been eligible in this category because of physical or emotional disabilities.

The range of age of participants was nineteen to sixty, with the majority of them in their thirties.

About ten percent of the participants entered the program without their GED. Fifty percent had graduated from high school, and the rest had passed their GED, some within weeks of entering the program and others ten to twenty years before.

The family composition of the participants was difficult to discern from the records. Some AFDC recipients were married but eligible to receive benefits because their spouses were not financially responsible for their children or because their spouses were permanently disabled; others had cohabiting partners, but were officially categorized as single parents. Some of the older participants had already raised their children to adulthood, but they were now raising grandchildren in their homes. Some participants had never been married, some had no children, and some had as many as five children under the age of sixteen.

Although the bottom limit on grade level equivalency to enter the program was 8th grade, the testing records of participants revealed that applicants were admitted if they met this requirement in at least one area of their test results. Consequently, the grade level scores in math ranged from 4.5 to 12.9 and in reading from 7.2 to 12.9. It is clear from the records that the participants were quite diverse in their tested academic proficiency, many scoring 12.9 in both math and in reading and others scoring minimally in one or both parts of the test (e.g., 12.9 in reading and 6.1 in math, or 9.1 in reading and 7.9 in math).

The participants were also tested at the beginning and ending of the program using the Multiple Assessment Program/Services (MAPS) of the Educational Testing Service (ETS), an instrument that the college had used historically to assess its regular applicants for advisement and placement. This instrument provided a more discriminating range of

percentile differences at the beginning of the program than the TABE: in math the participants were assessed between the 4th percentile and 87th percentile, and in language between the 9th percentile and the 94th percentile.

The descriptive profile offered in this section suggests, I believe, that the participants in Workplace Skills were difficult to categorize and even more difficult to imbue with generalizable characteristics. The only categorical statements that could be justified were that they were all unemployed and living in various stages of poverty. Moreover, despite having access to the individual records of all participants, I was unable to find within them a consistent method of record-keeping. About 200 participants entered this program in less than three years. One hundred and thirty-five of them were women. Less than 20 dropped out during the program, and the reasons listed included serious family problems, health, and getting a job. Over 90% of the people who entered the program stayed until the end. Almost no participants stayed the same or regressed in their test results at the end of the program. Most had significant gains on the MAPS with some participants gaining up to 70 combined percentile points in their post testing.

More than 80% of the participants who completed the program enrolled in a follow-up program in a college environment or in industry. Some of these programs were one-year certificate programs, some were associate degree programs, and some were job-specific training programs like welding and Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). The records referred to the participants who went on to other programs as "roll-overs" and indicated to which regional college they are been admitted. However, the college records for Workplace Skills participants ended when they had completed the program. No comprehensive method of collecting follow-up data about the impact of the program on participants had been established as part of the initial procedural plan of the program.

I had observed a generalized enthusiasm in the participants of Workplace Skills during the time I was an academic administrator in the technical college system. I saw a group of people studying, eating, and smoking together between classes, and I heard their

laughter and felt their connection to each other in the classes and the library. I saw the pride in their extended families at the end of the program--their spouses, friends, children, siblings, and parents--who came to participate in their "graduation" and to celebrate their achievement. I wanted to know more about what had happened to them after they had completed the program. I wanted to hear from them what program characteristics they valued and whether the program had helped them to achieve self-sufficiency. My decision to do this follow-up investigation of Workplace Skills was not simply because I was invested in it as an academic administrator. Most of this research was conducted when I was no longer working for the technical college system. My decision to conduct this research was rooted in my own autobiographical history.

The Researcher

A number of personal labels related to my gender are fundamental to my subjective orientation in this research project. The familial relationships I have sustained within my gender identification include daughter, granddaughter, sister, niece, mother, and wife; it is also within my familial context that I have accrued other labels in my adult life, including friend, teacher, divorcee, and feminist.

My normative upbringing in the 1940's and 1950's was firmly established in the religious tenets of the Golden Rule and the Ten Commandments, as well as in traditional tutelage in gender role identification and obligations. My female role models growing up worked hard both in the home and in the factory. I was imbued with a traditional female work ethic from a very young age that included ironing all of my father's and my two brothers' clothes every week on laundry day and learning how to use just the right amount of starch on their collars, as well as baby-sitting to earn the money for my clothing and recreational activities until I was old enough to become a waitress and be of service to the public world as I was taught to be of service in the private world of my home.

My father's parents immigrated from Greece, established themselves in a New Hampshire city, and worked hard raising eight children and laboring in factories to feed

them. My father, one of the eldest children, left school in the eighth grade to help support the family household. My maternal grandmother, a Vermont farm girl, became pregnant at fifteen by the itinerant movie man, who arrived once a month in rural communities to show the latest silent movie. My mother, the oldest of three children, assumed much of the responsibilities for her younger siblings after my grandmother was deserted by her husband and went to work in the local shoe shop. Like Esther Greenwood in Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar, my mother was told to take the secretarial course in high school so that she would have a job to fall back on when her husband deserted her. Although my father didn't desert her while I was growing up, (he did later for a younger woman), she also learned to manage a public life of work in factories and offices while bearing and raising four children. My father was almost never there, and my sister and I began to assume the child care responsibilities for my younger brother as soon as we were old enough to do so.

By the time my siblings and I had reached high school, however, through the influence of our church, school friends, and family members, we had become acknowledged in the public world as students. Persevering in academic classes and setting goals to attend college after high school graduation were fostered by all the women in my childhood. They wanted us to be the first generation of college students and graduates in our family. Consequently in the moments between public work and house work, I became excellent at academic work as well. I learned metaphorically how to put just the right amount of starch in the collar. Despite the lack of formal education of my parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents, they always fostered my educational growth, and going to college was always a priority. It was in this atmosphere of respect for education that I gained the foundations to acquire a set of institutional labels--bachelor's, master's, and associate's degrees, and now a doctorate--that collaterally provided me with my adult work as an educator and my most recent work as a researcher.

The same gender roles I was taught to assume in my growing years, I continued to assume in my marriage. I became a mother, a housewife, and a homemaker. I did all of the "female jobs" in the home, and I worked in the public world as well. However, it was in my adult life that I developed a public-private split that essentially continued until I entered the doctoral program in 1990. I worked in the public world as a competent professional, advancing through the ranks from novice to master teacher and respected by colleagues and students. The view from the far side of the bridge was a good one (Martin, 1992; Woolf, 1938). At home, on the near side of the bridge, however, I accommodated an explicit disregard for my personhood by maintaining the peace and remaining silent in an atmosphere of psychological denigration and physical abuse. I became a victim.

My first encounter with feminist philosophy occurred in the doctoral program. During the seventies I was simply too busy working to pay much attention to the feminist movement and to recognize my own life as an example of its importance to women. In my first course in the program, I began to learn about research work in women's moral development and women's ways of knowing, about a new psychology for women and sexual politics. Then an opportunity was offered to write an intellectual autobiography in another course in the doctoral program which allowed me to examine the important events in my childhood and young adult life as elements of my emerging mid-life identity. As I came to examine the recent work of feminist academics and literary writers in light of my own gender-based history, I began to link the feelings of marginalization and oppression that had been apparent in my life for a long time with my passivity and subordination as a woman. I became a feminist, and I became a divorcee.

The roots in my own biographical history that both tacitly and explicitly established my gender identification also gave me the power to move forward in my life. The women who had been my mentors and role models, although they had taught me well to be subservient, had also been strong women. Their ability to sustain themselves both publicly and privately had prepared me well to overcome the bases of my private-public

split. My interest in focusing my study on the female participants of Workplace Skills program was a response to my own uncovering of my beginnings and discovering of my gendered voice. Although I had many of the advantages of professional status that my research participants did not have, including education, economic stability, and prestige, I believed that I was more like them than not. I did not believe that I would be engaging in a project in which I would be "studying down." What were the elements in their particular histories that had brought them to a place of dependency, and where had they come to as a result of an opportunity to re-educate themselves? Beneath the surface of my preparation for research these questions were simmering, and my decision to engage in a feminist research project was ordained.

Contextual Post-Script

At the end of 1993, funding was eliminated for the Workplace Skills program. Budget cuts at both the state and federal level presumably required a reassessment of educational services. A different kind of partnership developed between the social service agencies and the technical college system: The funds previously allocated to provide course material, faculty, the director, the classroom, and support services for the Workplace Skills program had been reassigned to establish academic resource centers at each college, where individual remediation would be conducted with tutors and computer laboratories. Some of the advantages of this new approach to literacy education included a flexible entry-exit admission process and a less costly investment in personnel. However, the characteristics that had been viewed as important in designing the Workplace Skills program--a collaborative environment, the presence of experienced teachers within a community of learners, and an atmosphere of shared moments amongst people who had time to get to know each other--were lost in an orientation toward individualized acquisition of skills. Perhaps a future research project will evaluate this latest bureaucratic answer to adult remediation programs.

A Theoretical Frame

Overview of Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical elements of conducting a program evaluation on a publicly-funded program are complex because the literatures required to provide a knowledge base and an enabling perspective have been categorized by the particular interests of researchers in distinct academic orientations. The following list establishes my rationale for the specific theoretical frames that have informed this study:

Because the Workplace Skills program was developed in response to a federal legislative act, The Family Support Act of 1988, and because the basis of this act was to alleviate the economic condition of dependency, I needed to be attentive both to the theoretical basis of poverty and to recent research specifically focused on public policy analysis. Within the category of poverty both the sociological realities of an increasingly stratified American society and the philosophical contradictions between the inalienable rights of the individual and the hegemonic interests of the state continued to surface. Fundamental to the continued political effort to conduct a war on poverty with legislation like the Family Support Act is the public acknowledgment that America is not a classless society (DeMott, 1990, p.25). Central to the discussion of poverty was the reality of socioeconomic class, and within this discussion, the philosophical question of whether adult literacy programs are politically justified to benefit the individual or the society and whether their purpose is to improve the general quality of life of adults or to improve the productivity of the society.

Because the program was developed in response to a theoretical connection between economic dependency and literacy, I needed to examine the foundations of literacy education and to examine the meaning of "literacy" as it is delineated in adult education programs. Within this aspect of my study, I also needed to look at research studies that have examined the kinds of literacy programs that currently are offered and the impact of literacy education on its participants.

Because I as researcher was interested in looking at the impact of Workplace Skills on women's lives, I wanted to examine feminist literature in the areas specifically addressing the conditions that have led to the "feminization of poverty" in the United States. Within this literature are raised the characteristics of gender role identification, oppression, and marginalization within women's personal troubles in their every day lives. Also within the category of gender, I was interested in examining the "subjectivity-objectivity" debate in research methodology that has become a central discussion in the literature of feminist epistemology. My decision to use a feminist interview methodology (which will be delineated in Chapter Two) was grounded in the literature on traditional and alternative methods of conducting research, as well as the literature on data analysis and presentation using biographical narrative text as a basis of evidence.

Because the participants in the Workplace Skills program were categorized as dependent and the program was designed "to improve self-sufficiency," I found it necessary to gain some foundations in the literature associated with motivation, self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. The literature on adult literacy programs has revealed an important connection between participation in programs and self-concept, and the literature on the characteristics of poverty has examined conflicting views about the attitudinal constraints in poor people in regard to motivation.

I have found no research projects that have specifically addressed the interwoven interests that this overview has provided. Consequently, although I have offered a summary of particular kinds of research that could be categorized within each of the following sections, I have not been able to locate within any literature review a study of this kind: a feminist interview methodology in which the narrative text of participants was used as a basis of evidence in evaluating a publicly-funded program and its impact on the legislated goal of self-sufficiency.

Poverty

Although poverty is statistically measured by the counting of the number of recipients of AFDC and other benefits of social programs, the number of people living in poverty is not available in the United States. At best are estimates of the number of homeless people and poor families that are living in poverty, as well as the number of people who are working full-time but earn a wage below the poverty line. A recent study announced in the news media in April, 1996, found that the majority of children living in poverty in Maine were living in families where both parents worked and earned a wage every day. Some of the conventional beliefs associated with poverty include the following: (a) that welfare is a political construction to support the Black mother in America, whereas the statistics in the past ten years have revealed that there are approximately equal numbers of whites and African Americans receiving AFDC payments (Kornbluh, 1991, p. 35); (b) that most welfare recipients are unmarried teenage mothers, whereas only eight percent are under the age of nineteen (Ehrenreich, 1995, p. 2); (c) that women maintain their long-term dependency on welfare by having more children, whereas the average family on welfare has the same number of children--two-- as the average family not on welfare (Ehrenreich, p. 2); and (d) that most welfare recipients don't want to work, whereas the studies on the attitudes of welfare recipients in regard to their desire to work have consistently revealed that work is instrumentally important to them (Beder, 1991; Chisman, 1992; Kornbluh, 1991; Bradley, 1987).

Research suggests that the two major routes into poverty include family composition changes due to death, desertion, and divorce; and labor events such as job loss. There are two primary theoretical perspectives about the condition of poverty, and it seems that many of the confusions that legislators face in making decisions on welfare reform are rooted in the opposing views of the culture theorists and the structure theorists.

Those who believe in the "culture of poverty" argue that the underclass are poor because they have a psychological disposition to be poor. Those who believe in the

"structure perspective" argue that the underclass are poor because the structure of the society limits their opportunity to be independent. In a theoretical examination of the causes and persistence of poverty, researchers have reviewed the literature on the behavioral assumptions associated with poverty and offer an explanation of the opposing views (Corcoran, Duncan, Gurin, & Gurin, 1985).

The culture theorists assume that the poor need training in socialization (Knapp, 1981), that they need to be retaught values and attitudes about responsibility and success. This theoretical frame characterizes the poor as follows: "(1) the poor (underclass) have distinct values, aspirations, and psychological characteristics, which (2) inhibit their achievement and produce behavioral deficiencies likely to keep them poor and (3) persist not only within but across generations through the socialization of the young" (Corcoran, Duncan, Gurin, & Gurin, 1985, p. 517). Clearly, the culture theorists would choose welfare-to-work programs that emphasize socializing the poor who have "deviant" value systems and to have them adopt the values, attitudes, and characteristics of mainstream society. Moreover, there are some culture theorists who would argue that "there is no solution to poverty" because the "deviant values and attitudes of the poor are immutable" (p. 517). The resulting conclusions of the culture theorists include the following: that personal pathology is a cause of persistent poverty, that the poor do not value education or mainstream employment, and that the principle cause of poverty is the "extreme present-orientedness" of the poor (Kane, 1987, p. 405).

The structure theorists, on the other hand, argue that the cultural approaches to examining poverty have no functional basis for their rationale and that the "culture of poverty" perspective is an hegemonic viewpoint that "blames the victim" and justifies withdrawing economic support for educational programs that will strengthen the ability of people in poverty to achieve in mainstream America. The structure theorists dispute the causal sequence by arguing that policy makers need to create and expand real opportunities for the poor. They basically hold the view that the economic structure and its consequent

constraints on undereducated and under employed people is the real problem. They believe that resocialization programs do not provide the necessary marketable skills for the world of work and that what are called pathological problems of the poor are really the structural constraints placed upon them by the lack of jobs and the inability to gain purposeful employment.

The authors I have reviewed conclude that neither the culture theory nor the structure theory of the condition of poverty has been adequately studied or is an adequate explanation for the causes and persistence of poverty in the United States. For the most part the reading I have done on the condition of poverty establishes a framework for looking at people in persistent poverty as having learned not to seek self-sufficiency because their efforts do not produce desired outcomes. This conceptual frame establishes the link between the conditions of poverty and psychological theories of motivation, including attribution theory, expectancy theory, and reactance theory. All of these theories link the performance and achievement of people within their motivational dispositions, but claim that these dispositions are influenced by the opportunities and constraints that they have encountered in their previous experiences. The clarifying concepts can be explained by exploring the differences between motives and expectancies. While a motive is a generalized disposition to approach or avoid a class of incentives, usually based upon needs for achievement, power, or affiliation, an expectancy relates to an individual's assessment that performance will lead to desired outcomes (Corcoran, Duncan, Gurin, & Gurin, 1985; Gurin & Gurin, 1970; Brehm & Brehm, 1981) and that the locus of control of the outcomes do not totally rest on external conditions (Weiner, 1985; 1986).

Kane (1987) argues that poverty is a condition which has at its foundation the loss of expectancy by the poor to be able to make changes in the conditions of their lives. If those who are the dominant players in the culture of power usurp rather than grant control to people in poverty, then people faced with uncontrollable circumstances will give up trying to make change, a condition that has been characterized as "learned helplessness."

Consequently, according to Kane, anti-poverty policies in the United States must be instrumentally concerned with giving power to the people the policies are established to help. "The entire process should be geared to rebuild a sense of efficacy rather than take it away by mandating work" (Kane, p. 417). The sense of efficacy that Kane suggests will be discussed more thoroughly in the section of this chapter on self-efficacy theory.

With this brief examination of the theoretical debates about the characteristics of the poor, we need to look at the political issues surrounding policies about poverty. There are two political phrases that have been traditionally used and currently pervade the media today in 1996 as the basis of innumerable debates: "The War on Poverty" and "Welfare Reform." Each new administration in the last several decades has politicized the problems of poverty in the United States by publicly debating what to do with the indigent and the poor, as well as the children they produce in poverty. Moreover the public vacillation that has been exhibited by legislators is revealed in their conflicting desires (a) to restore traditional family values to our society, which is essentially accomplished by returning the mother to the home, and (b) to provide opportunities to assist welfare recipients to become economically independent of welfare by preparing them to get jobs, which is essentially accomplished by putting the mother into the work force.

This bifurcation is made more complex by the political orientation of the legislators, whether they are conservative or liberal, whether they are members of the Republican or Democratic parties, and whether they support the traditions of patriarchy or the interests of capitalism (Kornbluh, 1991, p. 23). This tension is clearly evident among the political parties as they have developed and approved legislation as a way out of poverty for economically marginalized populations:

Policy makers [have] remained deeply divided. Conservatives didn't much concern themselves with welfare; when they did, they favored the stick: restrictions on eligibility and low benefit levels to reduce costs and make welfare unattractive. Liberals favored higher benefits, and looked to lead recipients out of welfare. They wanted training and education programs, job assistance, subsidized day care, and the continuance of Medicaid during

employment, all at the option of recipients. And legislators across the spectrum were reluctant to offer to persons on welfare benefits unavailable to the working poor (Szanton, 1991, p. 592).

In analyzing the contradictions in public policy legislation regarding such collateral issues under the rubric of family policies as equal pay, subsidized child care, and federally supported health care, I would locate the contradiction as one between a traditional value system that places the mother in the home with her children and a contemporary value system, strengthened by the feminist movement, that places the woman in an equal position with men in the work force. Kornbluh (1991) suggests that until recently, "the interests of patriarchy and capitalism have been closely aligned" because men have provided "the primary labor pool" while women have provided "unpaid house and child care" (p. 24). The increasing tensions come from the fact that "capitalism would have mothers work, patriarchy would have them stay at home" (p.24). Without question, however, legislative uncertainties about what to do with the welfare mother are clearly related to legislative uncertainty about what to do with the social issues of marriage, divorce, and single parenting, and how these relate to what a woman's role in our society should be. As I have mentioned in my theoretical overview, views about effective welfare reform and the policies enacted based upon them can not be separated from the socially constructed views of gender role identification.

The development of AFDC as part of the provisions of the Social Security Act of 1935 was initially intended to relieve the burden of poverty on children caused principally by the "death, continued absence from the house, or physical or mental incapacity" of a parent. "Recipients were overwhelmingly white, and most were supported only for brief periods" (Szanton, 1991, p. 592). The functional basis of the Family Support Act of 1988 was to provide welfare-to-work programs that would give both incentives and entitlements to welfare parents to go to work. The law's language was intended to ameliorate the differences between partisan philosophies by establishing a revised purpose of support: to

provide the opportunity to create economic self-sufficiency for welfare recipients by assisting them in preparing for and finding employment.

The construction of the law was firmly based in legislative committee evaluation of social science research conducted by Manpower Development Research Corporation (MRDC), in which the evidence offered was compelling: those states that provided welfare-to-work programs had a positive statistical gain in employment as a result of welfare clients' participation. Two conclusions to this study were that welfare recipients were "willing to work" and that legislators should "characterize reform as an investment" (Szanton, 1991, pp. 597-599). Another conclusion of the study was that it would be an economic gain to support the education and training of welfare clients, because an economic evaluation revealed a positive reduction in costs as a result of employment (Baum, 1991; Haskins, 1991; Szanton, 1991). In examining the results of the MRDC study, legislators concluded that federal financial gain could be realized by helping the welfare recipient to gain financial self-sufficiency.

Gender

Dorothy Smith (1988) claims that there is no theory about the world that does not begin in someone's everyday experiences. In conducting a feminist interview study, I believed that narrative accounts of everyday experiences of the particular women who participated in a Workplace Skills program would not only make real their behavior, their thinking, and their beliefs but that these experiences would provide further clarity about the behavior, thinking, and beliefs of all women. When I began to write my own intellectual autobiography a few years ago, I realized that telling about and reflecting on the important events in my life was the beginning of understanding my experiences in relation to other women. I came to see that being a woman in a patriarchal society is oppressive and that all women have experienced oppression related to their gender both in the public world and in the private world of their homes.

Marilyn Frye (1983) analogizes the experience of oppression through the image of a birdcage. Its individual wires, when looked at with myopic focus, seem benign: an individual wire does not a prison make. The space on either side in relation to the wire seems vast and uninhibiting, the wire trivial and insignificant in relation to the space. When people identify that they are oppressed and begin to discuss their sense of oppression, the details seem much like those wires of a birdcage—each wire not much in itself, but taken together producing a sense of being "surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers" (p. 5).

In my discoveries about myself, I realized that I had felt oppressed for most of my life, yet hadn't even been aware of it for much of the time, so much oppressed was I that it didn't feel like a bad condition. I became aware of an undefined neediness to rebel surfacing in particular situations related to my being an employee, a daughter, a wife, a friend, even a mother, though less so. Usually this feeling could be compared to a dull ache or pain, to a mosquito in the tent, to a static sound on a slightly off radio station or a tiny pebble in the toe of my sneaker; it was there, but not always there, irritating but forgettable.

In my decision to conduct my research using feminist interview methodology, I believed that women in poverty were by the nature of their dependence in an oppressive state of being. Moreover, they were publicly defined as subordinate because of their economic condition and their lack of education; they had been publicly exposed for their incompetence and their dependency. I had not been exposed to public view and could hide my discomfort with my subordinated status by keeping the details of my personal life in a journal in my closet.

I began my own personal emancipation by examining the concept of oppression as an atmosphere, a climate, a condition of imprisonment from which a person or group is unable to escape. Oppression is a loss of freedom of the most horrific kind because the

jailer and the jail are often not visible to anyone but the oppressed. If they are not visible, then those who feel their existence may be accused of being crazy.

It is now possible to grasp one of the reasons why oppression can be hard to see and recognize: one can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will without seeing the structure as a whole, and hence without seeing or being able to understand that one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged, whose motion and mobility are restricted, whose lives are shaped and reduced. (Frye, 1983, p. 5).

Women have accepted the socially constructed image of the female as dependent, as passive, and as subordinate. Oakley (1976), in her study of women's work in Great Britain, suggests that "behind the structural ambivalence of women's situation, with its emphasis on femininity and domesticity, stands the woman-as-housewife" (p.91). She also believes that "the social trivialization of housework inheres as the social trivialization of women" which sustains the "continuing belief in 'natural' differences between the sexes" (p. 93).

When Oakley interviewed housewives, she found that restricted experiences before marriage, insecurity because of educational background, and a progression of negative experiences in work, marriage, children, poverty, and spousal abuse, did not provide housewives with a chance to gain confidence in themselves as independent persons. Oakley delineated two prevailing myths about women's place in society: (a) The Myth of Women's Place: Division of Labor by Sex, and (b) the Myths of Motherhood. The myth of labor division constitutes a validation of the institution of the family in which men go out to work and women stay home, a condition that is natural and universal. The motherhood myth is established from both feminine gender-role socialization which stresses maternity as women's destiny and from a cultural emphasis on women's parental role in which the rejection of motherhood is the rejection of womanhood.

I have chosen here to link feminist notions of oppression with Oakley's study of housewives and the myths by which they adhere to their socially defined roles because I believe the feminine mystique has served not only to keep women in their place (Miller, 1986; Smith, 1988; Ruddick, 1989; Millett, 1990;), but to prevent them from recognizing

the oppressive conditions in their lives. The subjection of women is not a contemporary phenomenon (Mills, 1869); It is only in the contemporary society that women are beginning to acknowledge it publicly. The problem that Oakley reveals about myth is that it functions as a way "to validate an existing social order. It enshrines conservative social values, raising tradition on a pedestal" (1976, p. 156).

The discussion in the section on poverty locates the condition of poverty within the psychological dispositions of the poor and the political dispositions of the people in power. I have already established that not only are the majority of poor people in the United States women, but also that their social identity has been institutionalized to be subservient: to be of service and to give the significant others in their lives control of their life events. This research project is grounded in my belief that women in poverty are in a double bind: they are subordinated both in their homes and in the public world of work because they have accepted their subordination as natural, and when conditions require them to adopt a stance of competency they don't have the capacity to change the conditions in either environment (Mulqueen, 1992). The conditions of women's marginalization are the conditions inherent in a patriarchy, and in a patriarchy, women are oppressed. A condition of poverty is a condition of power relationships between those who have institutional power and those who don't. Within the traditional American family, particularly so in the working-class family, the male has power and the female has none.

Barbara Ehrenreich, an activist for women's rights, refuted most of the myths associated with women on welfare by talking to a group of women who are welfare recipients. She calls the emphasis in the news on the welfare mother, "a great witch hunt. You pick as your scapegoat the social group in America that is least able to make itself heard because of poverty, because of children to care for, and you go after them" (1995, p.2). I have shown that one of the primary routes into poverty comes from divorce; as a result of divorce, the single parent ratio in the United States is one male to six females functioning as the head of the household in single-parent families (Hodgkinson, 1992,

p. 5). Erhenreich is collecting data that indicates that "one of, if not the biggest factor leading a woman to go on welfare is domestic violence" (p. 2).

In a study of survivors of sexual violence, Liz Kelly (1988) conducted her research using feminist interview methodology. She prepared to do her research by accepting her ideological identification with feminism: "For research to be feminist it must be predicated on both the theoretical premise and the practical commitment: its purpose being to understand women's oppression in order to change it" (p. 4). Kelly believes that an understanding of the autobiographical self is also critically important because "feminists doing research both draw on, and are constantly reminded of, their own experience" (p.5). Adrienne Rich agrees that "to make visible the full meaning of women's experience, to reinterpret knowledge in terms of that experience, is now the most important task of thinking" (1986, p. xxiii).

The women who participated in Workplace Skills and those who were willing to participate in my research study had particular frames of reference regarding family, marriage, children, and education that were different from mine and different from each other. Their lack of power was publicly defined by their economic dependency. What would their stories reveal about their private sense of power? Feminist standpoint epistemology is a "relational epistemology," one in which knowledge is uncovered and constructed through the texts of women's experiences. "The powerless, more than the powerful, need a comprehensive 'theory' about their relations and conditions of their exclusion and oppression" (Currie, 1993, p. 15).

Annette Baier raises the question of what sort of moral theory might be established that would take into account the particular qualities that characterize women. Discussion about issues of power and domination must be positioned within the historical presence of oppression in our patriarchal society and the primary influence of obligation as the basis of moral behavior. The problem centers on how to provide nurturing, caring, loving, loyal support in the face of ruthlessness and tyranny (Noddings, 1984). Baier proposes that a

tentative answer is the concept of "appropriate trust," one based upon her own "attempts to consider what was right and wrong with men's theories" (1985, p. 228). As she interweaves the strands of the morality of love with the morality of justice and obligation, she claims that the morality of proper trust implicates both moral agent and enforcer of obligations:

It takes very special conditions for it to be safe to trust persons to inflict penalties on other persons, conditions in which either we can trust the penalizers to have virtues necessary to penalize wisely and fairly, or else we can rely on effective threats to keep unvirtuous penalizers from abusing their powers (p. 229).

In conducting this study with women who were recruited into the Workplace Skills program, I became attached to the notions of the paradox of trust explicated by Baier: to expose oneself to the possibility of harm, to become vulnerable once more, was a risk which might empower these women to take other risks, in a spiraling awareness of the distinctions between appropriate trust and reasonable distrust. I came to believe that "if the best reason to take such a risk is the expected gain in security that comes from a climate of trust, then in trusting we are always giving up security to get security, exposing our throats so that others become accustomed to not biting" (1985, p. 230).

Adult Literacy

The literature on adult literacy is framed in a continuing debate on what adult literacy is and an uncertainty about how to assess and count the illiterate population in this country. On the basis of the 1980 census, it was estimated that 51.8 million adults who were out of school and had not graduated from high school comprised the adult literacy target population in the United States (Beder, 1991). However, the use of high school graduation records as the defining characteristic of literacy has intrinsic problems. The majority of adults (51%) who have been identified within this target population are 60 years old and older. Given the nature of educational opportunity in the past 50 years, it is difficult to accept that this older generation of adults have not acquired strong literacy skills despite their lack of formal education. In my own biographical history, both sets of

grandparents and my father would have been classified as illiterate by this measure, and they were all highly literate individuals. Moreover, the presumption that graduation from high school assures literacy is not a valid one in light of the varying standards by which students are passed through our public schools.

"The attempt to define literacy is like a walk to the horizon: as one walks toward it, it continuously recedes" (Taylor, 1990, p. 466). At its most fundamental conceptual level, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write. However, assuming as a foundation for discussion the definition of Csikszentmihaly as the ability to code and decode meaning stored in symbolic form, Beder (1991) identifies the three most common definitions of adult literacy in discussion and debate today:

Traditional literacy is the ability to code and decode print within a general context. Functional literacy is the ability to code and decode the symbolic meanings embodied in a specific context, the workplace for example, and emancipatory literacy is the ability to code and decode the symbolic meanings of society itself (p. 122) [emphasis added].

Within the context of these definitions Beder also identifies that the basic goals of adult literacy education include social mobility, social change, economic productivity, and learners' attainments of their own goals. What is clear is that the Family Support Act of 1988 was legislated because of a belief that none of these goals can be achieved by low-literate adults without education and training and that dependency on public support is directly correlated with a low level of educational attainment.

The literacy of a work force strengthens the country both nationally and internationally. Because the human capital argument for literacy education is intricately tied to the goals of national productivity, Beder notes two policy issues that need to be examined: "whether adult literacy policy favors the accumulation or the redistribution of wealth" and "whether policy should favor economic growth or economic development" (1991, p. 126). A national literacy program, if its intention is to promote social and economic equity, needs to be grounded in policies that "redistribute wealth from the most affluent to the poor." While economic growth considers only productivity, economic

development "focuses on the broad based personal and social development of the poor as well" (p. 127). As I have already discussed in the previous sections, the fundamental human issues of institutional power or the empowerment of the individual are instrumentally involved in the kinds of adult literacy programs that can be offered. If literacy advocates perceive that literacy programs should provide the society with successful job performers, then programs need to be designed only to develop occupational skills, to train individuals in aspects of functional literacy. If, however, literacy advocates perceive that literacy programs should capacitate individuals not only in the workplace but in the world, and not only as economic capital but as critics of the social order, then adult literacy programs need to incorporate the curriculum of emancipatory literacy advocates.

The literature on critical pedagogy is rooted in the belief that an informed public is necessary if democracy is going to work. Moreover, the advocates of emancipatory literacy believe that it is society that produces illiteracy and that a "critical consciousness" needs to be developed to foster collective action and social transformation (Ehringhaus, 1990; Freire, 1990; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Fingeret & Jurmo, 1989; Giroux, 1987, 1988; Hart, 1990; Quigley, 1990; Shor, 1987; Weiler, 1988). Freire (1990) claims that dialogue and critical consciousness are necessary to overcome the domesticating control of oppression and oppressors. The components of dialogue that he finds necessary are love, humility, hope, and an intense faith in the human being's power to make and remake his/her world. He believes that "hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it" (p. 80) and that this condition results in a "fear of freedom," where the oppressed are "adapted to a structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom as long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires" (p. 32). I have previously discussed Baier's notion of risk. Freire explains risk as a condition in which people are caught between "following prescriptions or having choices," "being spectators or actors," and "speaking out or being silent" (p. 33).

Adult literacy programs that have been developed in response to the provision of funding through the Family Support Act and JOBS have not been directed toward emancipatory literacy programs which "represent but a small minority of the available adult literacy programs, and they tend to be isolated and underfunded" (Beder, 1991, p. 125). However, some of the characteristics that have been discussed by advocates for emancipatory literacy have sensitized the administrators of public programs to the issues of power inherent in designing and implementing programs for undereducated adults. Quigley's study (1990) has informed literacy educators about the marginalization that is inherent in describing this adult population in the language of deficiency, with words like "rehabilitation," "malfunction," "affliction," and "abnormality." The deficit model that represents the public view of undereducated adults adds to the pervading social stigma that is believed to affect participation in adult literacy programs. Also studies indicate that a change in the power dynamics in the classroom, as they are negotiated between the teacher and the students, may be a reflection of the teacher's willingness to get beyond the stereotypical view of adult learners as deficient. One of the enduring problems in adult literacy education is the lack of adequate training in adult teaching practice (Chall, Heron, & Hilferty, 1987).

Instruments have been developed to evaluate motivation, pedagogical method, and the classroom environment that seek the responses of participants as a basis of program evaluation. Some of the instruments being used to evaluate program effectiveness include the Educational Participation Scale (Boshier, 1991), the Attributional Style Questionnaire (Weiner, 1989), and the Adult Classroom Environment Scale (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989). Although these instruments and the research studies based upon them offer some qualitative summaries of the participants' views of educational effectiveness, they do so through the use of surveys and questionnaires that provide forced-choice options for respondents.

The primary evaluations of adult literacy programs that have occurred since the inception of literacy legislation (FSA and JOBS) have been developed by asking the

administrators and agencies of publicly-funded programs to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs (Beder, 1991; Chisman & Woodworth, 1992; Pelavin Associates, Inc., 1990). Survey and telephone interviews were the primary methods of data collection. It is clear to me from the results of these studies that little is known about how participants assess the characteristics of the programs they are enrolled in. One study (Chisman, 1992) conducted by the Southport Institute for Policy Analysis (SIPA) interviewed 22 groups of welfare recipients in different parts of the country to investigate how the educational provisions of the Family Support Act were being implemented. A similarity between the SIPA study and my research came from the researchers' orientation to listen to participants. The researchers found "most of them to be extremely articulate people. We were impressed by the insight and cogency of many of their remarks. And most of all we were struck by their point of view. The welfare system does look different in some important respects when seen from their perspective" (p. ii). However, there were major differences between the SIPA study and my methodology and results. Although they talked with 171 people, they interviewed them as groups within the classrooms of their programs, and the resulting interview data is categorized by questions asked and then presented as a list of quoted responses. There is no interpretation other than the categories, and there is no sense of the fullness of individual people speaking about their lives in the answers. I have not come to know anyone who participated in the SIPA interview process. The SIPA study is a beginning, however, to reveal the voices of participants speaking out about their interests and their concerns in regard to public policy.

Social Identity

In the perspective of feminist theory, "the personal is political." As I have presented the above sections on poverty, gender, and literacy, I have come to an understanding once more that my research study is unquestionably a study about power and the politics of power. The poverty theorists I have presented reveal a consistent belief that power and control issues are at the heart of dependency and self-sufficiency. Policy

analysts acknowledge that hegemony dictates both the human capital and deficit models by which undereducated adults are often perceived and that mandates and sanctions in regard to welfare reform are control and power usurping. Feminists identify the oppressive conditions of gender role identification as a socially constructed and institutionalized subordination of women under the control of a patriarchal society.

The goal of the Family Support Act of 1988 was to assist recipients to achieve self-sufficiency and economic independence. However, it is my opinion that this goal is too narrow to take into account the cognitive and affective characteristics of the client of public support. Long term financial self-sufficiency is presumably attained by getting and maintaining permanent employment. Yet the behavioral changes necessary to persist in a difficult economic environment would seem to require a more complex orientation.

Bandura (1977) distinguishes between "outcome expectancies" and "efficacy expectancies" as follows:

An outcome expectancy is defined as a person's estimate that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes. An efficacy expectation is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes (p. 193).

While the law is concerned with outcomes (financial self-sufficiency), a central acknowledgment of behavioral change caused by an increase in self-efficacy may render a different perspective on the success of a program and its participants. Rather than perceiving the woman on public assistance as an object that can be controlled by environmental forces (laws, mandates, sanctions) in the narrow sense of being coerced to learn and go to work, social cognitive theory "subscribes to a model of emergent interactive agency" whereby persons "make causal contributions to their own motivation and action" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). In examining the psychological dispositions of the poor, Kane summarizes that the importance of expectancy in motivational theory involves both the desirability of an outcome and the expectancy that one's own actions can help to attain

it. Kane believes that "people need to feel that they exercise some control in their lives" (1987, p. 410).

In the model of emergent interactive agency, Bandura (1989) claims that "cognitive, affective, and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants" (p. 1175). He distinguishes between the results of performance, which may be described as outcome expectations and the "complex process of self-persuasion" that produces self-efficacy beliefs. In his theoretical framework, he claims the following:

Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs function as an important set of proximal determinants of human motivation, affect, and action (1989, p. 1175).

Bandura summarizes the three primary conceptualizations of the way human agency operates as autonomous agency, mechanical agency, and emergent interactive agency. He believes that permanent behavioral change occurs by creating an environment that fosters emergent interactive agency. In autonomous agency theory, there is the notion that people are totally in control of their outcomes as independent agents. The nature of the dependency of people on public assistance would discount autonomy as a fundamental characteristic of their sense of agency. In mechanical agency, environmental forces are the agents of action, and the "self system is merely a repository and conduit for them" (1989, p. 1175). This concept supports the view of some of the structure theorists who argue that the poor are "victims of societal systems and that their problems are produced by the constraining experience of poverty" (Kane, 1987, p. 409).

In his work with human agency and emergent interactive agency, Bandura argues that "people strive to gain anticipated beneficial outcomes and to forestall aversive ones. However, the effect of outcome expectancies on performance motivation are partly governed by self-beliefs of efficacy" (1989, p. 1180). Bandura's research has provided compelling evidence that perceived self-efficacy is instrumental in the decisions people make about goals. Based upon their self-beliefs of efficacy, "people choose what

challenges to undertake, how much effort to expend in the endeavor, and how long to persevere in the face of difficulties" (p. 1180).

Spindler and Spindler (1989) have examined the importance of self-efficacy theory in refining their assumptions about linkages between self-esteem and instrumental competence by looking at the success or failure of linguistic minorities to meet instrumental performance expectations. It appears that the outcomes of performance are based upon an individual's view of how likely he/she is "able to meet the demands of a situation effectively" (p. 38). People engage in instrumental activities that are linked to their "acquiring possessions, recognition, power, status, and satisfaction" (p. 36). When they gain instrumental competence, it is because they understand "what activities are linked to what goals and how to perform the activities" (p.39).

One goal of my research study was to examine the participants' notions of self-sufficiency and to analyze their characteristics of self-sufficiency within the conceptual frame of Bandura's emergent interactive agency. My discussion of the participants' views of self-sufficiency, self-efficacy, and self-value may reveal an emerging social identity that locates agency within the individual.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY: CHOOSING A PERSPECTIVE

The central assumption of my research: that the way people talk about their lives is of significance [and] the language they use and the connections they make reveal the world that they see and in which they act.

Carol Gilligan
In a Different Voice

In Search of a Method and a Perspective

Since the primary purpose of this research project was to investigate the importance of a federally funded literacy program to the present and future lives of its participants, I found myself from the onset to be caught in the on-going debate in social science research between quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, analysis, and evaluation. I wanted to know what characteristics of the Workplace Skills program the participants who completed the program found to be valuable. I also wanted to examine the notion of self-sufficiency from my participants' perspectives.

As an administrator in a public institution at the beginning of this project, I was aware of the need to provide justification and accountability to the funding sources by collecting and examining data from the perspective of the stated goals: an academic gain in pre- and post- test scores and an increase in permanent employment among the participants. Such data could justify program design and implementation. At the same time, the funding source would be able to justify continuing the necessary financial support because for a given percentage of participants the funding had indeed provided educational and training opportunities and the participants had achieved self-sufficiency by getting a job. The publicly-funded bureaucracy's decision-making mechanism in selecting such programmatic funding out of the many possible requests for limited public funds could be proven to be sound.

As a feminist, however, my grounding in feminist research methodologies raised significant questions about engaging in a research project about adult women merely to justify programmatic funding and bureaucratic decisions. These women had already been labeled and documented as marginalized both economically and academically in order to become eligible to engage in this program. They had already been defined as dependent on public support (either welfare, disability, or unemployment compensation) because of their lack of employability and as less than capable of academic achievement because of their scores on standardized tests and their previous public school records: they were indeed lacking the characteristics mainstream America would define as necessary to achieve continuing occupational (and thus economic) "self-sufficiency." ¹

I needed to find a research paradigm that would get beyond the patriarchal interest of the government in justifying its own policy-making rationale. Under the current system, the government through its social service agencies decides who is eligible to participate and then decides on the basis of extremely narrow data collection whether the program has met its goals, in this case the improved self-sufficiency of participants measured by the completion of the program and getting a full-time job within the field studied. If a participant, for example, graduated within the field of human services support but gained employment within the field of office management, that person would have failed to justify the expense associated with the contract created between agency and participant to achieve certain occupational goals. One participant explained that she was counted as a failure because of her choice to work after graduation as a waitress rather than a junior accountant. The reasons for this decision, the schedules necessary for the shared caretaking of two children and the greater income generated in fewer hours in the service of food, were less important to the tally takers than the fact that the bureaucracy had financially supported her education in a field in which she was not working--thus she was considered a statistical failure.

A Feminist Research Perspective

A feminist research paradigm provides the researcher with both a method and a perspective: by taking a feminist standpoint, the researcher acknowledges that "females are worth examining as individuals and as a social category" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 241); and by using the interview as a data gathering methodology, the feminist researcher establishes the significance of the participant's perspective through her own voice. The participant has the opportunity both to tell about her experiences and to explain the connections she makes between them. In this project, attention to the voices of the participants gets at the heart of an alternative program evaluation: the participants' perceptions of how the program served them is an important and critical validation of their own sense of the criterion of "self-sufficiency" and one that public policy makers and administrators might gain from hearing.

In this study I have adopted an ideological identification with feminist research methods—because I am a feminist and because I see this research as advancing a particular knowledge about a group of women who have been classified as dependent. Reinharz characterizes feminist research methods as those used in research projects by people who "identify themselves as feminist or as part of the women's movement" (p. 6). The viewpoints toward women on public assistance have been clearly evident in the media and in the political rhetoric under the rubric of the debate on welfare reform. These viewpoints rarely reveal a regard for the women trying to support themselves and their children on inadequate incomes with few opportunities for employment in a positive light. A qualitative methodology has "the political value of humanizing stereotypes" (Agar, p. 11). Thus, for this project, I wanted to gather the kind of evidence that could only come from the participants themselves: individual women revealing their viewpoints by intensive conversation would clarify a personal notion of "self-sufficiency" that would be inaccessible and transparent in a quantitatively-based data collection strategy.

Oakley (1992) in her research project in Great Britain which combined both quantitative data collection about pregnancy and class and qualitative interviewing of about 50 pregnant women argues that the two paradigms serve different purposes:

One basic dilemma of social research concerns the aggregation of data. Combining information from different sources and different individuals is necessary in order to arrive at a composite picture; indeed, this is the essence of the 'quantitative' method. But, in the process of doing this, the uniqueness of individual standpoints--the core of the 'qualitative' method--is sacrificed.... [With the data] what is 'significant' according to statistical tests may be a product--an artifact of the aggregative method. It may be a 'chance' finding, of no significance in terms of the personal meaning of everyday life. People themselves may speak of connections between aspects of their lives which are not revealed by tests of statistical significance. In this sense, 'qualitative' material is able to uncover the nature of social processes (p. 187).

Traditional quantitative research methodologies have not been successful in dispelling the mythologies that pervade the view of the public regarding minority populations. In Oakley's study of women's work (1976), she argues that "the value attached to women's situation may be ambivalent but the outcome is unequivocal, . . . the conservation of traditional forms of behavior rather than the initiation of change" (p. 89). The women in my study have faced similar confusions about their value and similar ambivalences about their choices, particularly in regard to their traditional roles as mother, housekeeper, and caretaker on the one hand and economic provider on the other. Oakley saw that "the social trivialization of housework inheres as the social trivialization of women" a view that has continued to establish a social value stereotype in which women are "neurotically preoccupied with unimportant matters" (p.93). In regard to clarifying which characteristics my participants accept in adopting the label of "self-sufficiency," I believed that my interviewees might explain their views about what constituted important or unimportant matters in their daily lives.

Because the women in my study were classified as dependent upon public support to survive, they were in fact relegated to a position of subordination and marginalization. Shopes and Olsen (1991) claim that the social identities of underprivileged women have a

"complex web of power relations" associated with their class and gender (p. 191). Like Shopes and Olsen's study of working-class women, I came into this research project with clear "assumptions about the primacy of gender in women's lives" (p. 192).

A Feminist Research Method

The interview is a method of data collection that may support a feminist perspective or may support traditional objective sociological inquiry. The orientation depends upon the style of questioning and the stance of the researcher toward the interviewees. Oakley (1981), in her essay, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms," distinguishes the traditional sociological interview as a "masculine paradigm" where the "respondent" has a passive role in the interview, one of answering the questions and not asking them and where the interviewer remains objective, detached, and unopinionated. Oakley analogizes the interview under these conditions to the interviewer being "a combined phonograph and recording system" and the interviewee being "an object or data-producing machine" (p. 37). She also critiques another key strategy recommended for successful interviewing within this paradigm, the importance of rapport: "a balance must be struck between the warmth required to generate 'rapport' and the detachment necessary to see the interviewee as an object under surveillance" (p. 33).

An alternative interview method, based upon a feminist project, has several distinguishing characteristics. It produces "non-standardized information that allows researchers to make full use of differences among people . . . [and it] offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (Reinharz, p. 18-19). It provides an opportunity to share understanding and develop meaning that begins in someone's everyday life and experiences, "the everyday world" that is "necessarily local" and "necessarily historical" (Smith, 1987, p. 88). It is "consistent with many women's interests in avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with people" (Reinharz, p. 20).

Some practical considerations that are raised in defining the methods used in feminist research interviewing include traditional methodological questions such as where the interview will take place, who will decide, how many interviews to conduct, and how long they should last. The requirements of consistency in regard to time, place, questions asked, and stance adopted are inherent in large scale sociological interviews with many interviewers conducting the research and are made to assure reliability and validity across researchers' styles and environmental factors. I found that as the only interviewer in this project, I was not constrained by such considerations and was able to achieve an informal consistency by the use of an open-ended script. The invitation for participants to talk about their histories, their experiences, and their feelings about their lives creates a potential for significant "digression" and also for variations in the length of interviews. I found that my interview project, focussing as it did on individual women's experiences, was best conducted in a semi-structured interview format where the script is a guide rather than a rigid format.²

Some of the controversies and concerns that Reinharz has raised in regard to feminist interview research are related to the researcher's role in the interview, for example, the question of whether an empathic style is always possible in interviewing women. In one study, British social psychologist Susan Condor discovered that "despite her use of an open-ended questionnaire, she could not sympathize with 'traditional women who support the existing roles of men and women.'" In this project, I had no trouble sympathizing and empathizing with the participants in this research. My personal interest in their views of their failures and successes as mothers, wives, and daughters, for example, was authentically grounded in my own autobiographical gender relations. Since a stated objective of this project was to come to an understanding of my participants' lives in their own words, I was particularly open about revealing my own biases and hearing theirs. I simply did not view the interviewee as a "subject" under my scrutiny.³

Another controversy raised in establishing the methodology of interview research is the stance of the interviewer as friend or stranger. Though Agar (1990) supports the notion of the "Professional Stranger," this stance belies the kind of relational connection that women make with each other in women-to-women talk.⁴ The need to equalize our roles in the interview conversation was a critical element of my stance as friend. Most of the recipes or suggestions made in the literature for establishing the right kind of atmosphere are lessons in good human social relations and good communication skills regardless of the interview project. In an interviewee structured interview, if the researcher establishes a genuine stance of caring and interest and reveals that she cares about the participant, that her study is intended to be of real interest to a particular group of women and to clarifying some confusions in the political arena, it is likely that the participants will respond authentically to the issues.

Symbolic Interactionism

This feminist research project is grounded in the theoretical and applied basis of interpretive interactionism. In Denzin's practical guide to symbolic interpretive interactionism (1989), he reveals that it is an "attempt to make the world of problematic lived experience of ordinary people directly available to the reader." This perspective is drawn from the work of C. Wright Mills (1959), who "challenged scholars to develop a point of view and a methodological attitude that would allow them to examine how the private troubles of individuals, which occur in the immediate world of experience, are connected to public issues and to public responses to these troubles" (Denzin, p. 7). The link between interpretive interactionism and feminist interviewing is made both by Denzin and by the feminist scholars that have informed this study. Denzin argues that "feminist research, like interpretive interactionism, is biographical and naturalistic, . . . [and it] demands that the voices of women speak through the interpretive text" (p. 27).

In Oakley's introduction to her study on motherhood (1992), she also links the issues of private troubles to public issues by citing C. Wright Mills. Her interest in

examining not only the institutional data associated with health awareness during pregnancy and its effect upon the fetus and the infant, but also the qualitative basis of women's attention to their health and bodies was grounded in her assumptions that personal, private lives instrumentally affected the quality of early childhood health. Thus she came to see that staged interviews throughout pregnancy and after birth became a basis of both understanding and intervention. She argues that her study is following:

Wright Mills's (1959) injunction to deploy a sociological imagination in connecting private troubles to public issues, and, in perceiving their common ground, to identify some of the crises in ideology and practice confronting contemporary culture . . . to expose complex problems rather than provide simple solutions. . . . You cannot have a solution which works if the problem it addresses is not the "real" problem. Or, to put it differently, "reality" may be considered to be the problem (p. ix).

My belief is that knowledge of the "reality" of marginalized women's lives needs to be a fundamental basis of designing programs to enable change. If the "real" problem is that they don't have occupational skills to get and keep a job, then any specific job training program will correct that problem and these women will no longer be public issues. However, the purpose of eliciting and exposing complex problems requires at the first stage an acknowledgement that the every day lives upon which public policies are based cannot be simplified by universal characteristics amplified to a mythology about women's every day conditions, choices, and confusions.

Peshkin (1988) claims that the foundation of qualitative research is to understand the complexity of a phenomenon. Within his aim, "to explore the notion of complexity within the context of [his] study on ethnicity," he offers three attributes as critical to understanding complexity: bringing the range of senses to the investigations; providing sufficient time to be attentive; and allowing a breadth of scope in what the researcher is "willing and able to attend to" (p. 416-417). My research project is examining the complexities inherent in the every day lives of women who participated in a literacy program. Like Peshkin's study on the complexity of ethnicity within a high school setting, my study is also "idiosyncratic in regard to its ends, its means, and the forms it uses to

present its findings" (423). It follows the process of interpretive interactionism that seeks to find meaning in the primary turning points in my participants' lives and to examine the distinctions that a literacy program made as a critical turning point in their sense of self-sufficiency. The difference between this study and the studies that Denzin cites is mostly one of the setting in which much of the data is drawn. His interactions include working in the field in group interactive settings (Alcoholics Anonymous meetings), as well as interactive interviews (hot line work for battered women). The interview is a critical method of gaining and finding meaning in the experiences that transform peoples lives--their epiphanies. My scripts in the interview process were designed to evoke such memories and the telling of them.

Preliminary Research Methods

Preliminary Data Collection and Database

The first stage in the development of this research project was to gain access to the records of all participants in the program over its three-year time span. During the orientation at the start-up of every program, as academic administrator I had welcomed the new program participants, explained my interest in developing and providing programs to meet their needs, and gained their agreement to have access to their records through an informed consent (IRB approved, "Once You are Real, You Can't be Ugly", 1991-92). When I relinquished my position as administrator, I was given formal permission to continue my research and to have access to the files of those who had entered and completed the Workplace Skills Program and those who were continuing in follow-up programs. These files provided standardized testing data, resumes, and demographic information regarding marital status, number of children, age, employment history, educational background, and addresses.

The database realized out of this review of files was virtually all of the 135 female participants in the Workplace Skills Program during the ten consecutive offerings of it. The files also yielded some additional data related to follow-up studies the participants had

selected in either certificate or associate degree programs in two-year colleges, both private and public, throughout the region. Because the ten-week cycles of Workplace Skills Program were offered over a three-year period, some of its first participants had graduated from follow-up programs while others were just completing the last Workplace Skills Program when I reviewed the files and built my database. This three-year time span allowed me in the early stages of developing my methodology to consider the possibility of cohort studies or at least a representative sample of participants across the life of the program. Hence my decision to send a survey instrument to all participants at their last known address was made with five goals in mind:

- (1) To locate as many of the Workplace Skills participants as possible;
- (2) To gain a demographic update and verification of file information;
- (3) To invite them to participate in an open-ended written narrative about their participation in the program, their life history, and the quality of their life previous to , during, and after completion of the program;
- (4) To ascertain their willingness to be part of the interview process;
- (5) To update an informed consent document in light of my continuing research.

(Appendix A, Survey Package).

Developing and Sending Out the Survey

The basis of the development of the specific open-ended questions I used in the survey came from my desire to extend the survey with an intensive interview process with a limited number of respondents.⁵ I anticipated a staged interview process in which the interviews are thematically arranged around (a) life history; (b) events surrounding the program experience itself; and (c) reflections on the interview process, the program, and the future.⁶ The survey was thus organized structurally around these stages with the intent to evaluate the survey responses to gain a diverse population for the interviews. I intended to code the demographic details of education, marital status, work history, funding source,

children, and age and then to select randomly at least five women that represented differences in those characteristics to interview.

I struggled with a number of concerns about initiating my study with a survey. I knew that the recipients of the survey instrument had already been "surveyed out" by the social service agencies who require follow-up reporting by funded participants regarding employment. I might be perceived as making just one more survey request, moreover one that was not required. I also knew that many of the survey recipients might have moved and might have chosen not to be located by withholding their forwarding address. Finally I had a strong sense as a woman and an educator that a survey instrument is not the ideal way to request personal narratives and that many recipients of this survey would choose not to respond at all. It was my belief that a survey instrument needs to evoke a strong immediate interest in the recipient in order to gain a significant response. I also believed that in the daily demands of these women's complex lives, a survey might be relegated to the bottom of the pile of tasks to do --or not to do.

Reviewing the Response

I mailed all surveys out on March 18, 1995. Within days of sending out the survey, I had received ten responses. A few more filtered in over the next month, and by the end of the second month, I recognized that I had received probably most all of the responses I was going to get. Out of the original mailing, thirty-five were returned with either "Unknown" or "Beyond the Forwarding Date" indicators on the envelopes. I began to understand why Hal Beder (1991) found that most follow-up studies of adult literacy programs are conducted within the first six months of program completion.

Through contact with one of the respondents, I was able to locate one participant who had both moved and married causing the "Unknown" designation on her survey and was able to redirect her survey. Consequently, the population of surveys actually delivered was increased to one hundred and one, and of those, I received responses from eighteen women, which constituted only about 18% of those delivered and only about 13% of the

possible returns. Of these responses, two women indicated that they had not completed the program because of personal difficulties (a detail that was missing from their files). One other woman said that her current circumstances did not allow her to be a participant in the interview process. All other signed the informed consent card and indicated a willingness to participate in the interviews if I needed them.

Redefining the Population

In an intensive review of the survey responses, I concluded that the women who had completed the survey represented the diverse characteristics I had hoped to use in selecting interviewees, which included differences in age, family composition, educational background, funding source, and work. The range in age was 24 to 62. In regard to family composition, three were grandmothers, one had never had children, and the rest had between one and five children. Only two women had never been married, and of the rest, only one was still married to her first spouse. The rest had experienced at least one divorce, three were married to second husbands, three were living with significant others, and the others were living as single women. In regard to their educational background, nine had either received their GED as a result of the Workplace Skills Program or had attained it before entering the program, while seven had graduated from high school. Of those who had dropped out of school several left because of pregnancy. Half of the respondents were funded through AFDC; the rest were funded through unemployment because of recent job loss. All of the respondents had a work history, though some had not worked for several years.

Because of the diverse characteristics of the respondents, I was intrigued by the circumstances that caused this particular group of women to respond to the survey. Consequently, in a revision of my research protocol, which had been to select interviewees randomly from the survey respondents, I concluded that my research population was now defined by the respondents themselves: I would conduct at least the first interview on life

history with all those women who indicated a willingness to be a part of the interview process.

A Feminist Method: Interview Research

Responding to the Respondents

A letter was sent to all respondents on April 27, 1995, thanking them for their response and indicating my interest in interviewing them. I offered them several settings for the interview--their own home, my office, or my local residence--and indicated that I would be following up the letter with a phone call to schedule the first interview. During the next several weeks, I arranged and conducted my first interview with fourteen women, six in their homes, three at the University, and five in my own residence. Their willingness either to host my visit or to travel ten to thirty miles to meet with me was a strong indicator of their interest and investment in this project. One interviewee did not drive and was not able to invite me to her home but met me in a park, and after an abortive attempt to interview her in the open air, I brought her to my home for the interview and later dropped her off at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

The two other respondents to the survey were never located to interview though they had indicated their willingness. One woman had changed her phone number to a private one and did not respond to repeated attempts to reach her by mail. The other woman simply did not return the messages I had left with her friend.

I share these anecdotes about connecting with my interviewees for a number of reasons. Throughout the process of interviewing these women over the period of about eight months, the mechanical details of scheduling, finding an interview site, and meeting with them took considerable effort not only on my part but also on theirs. Some did not have phones but made arrangements through friends or employers to communicate with me. Child care, jobs, vacations, illness, studies, and in one case, graduation from college were complications in scheduling both the first and the follow-up interviews. Though I conducted fourteen life history interviews, I was able to conduct only twelve second

interviews on the program itself. One of the interviewees was under a doctor's care and on significant drug therapy. Another woman had indicated that she was leaving the area for a few months and that I could reach her through her ex-husband. Though I left several messages, I am not certain whether she ever received them.

My decision to conduct the second stage interview with all of the remaining participants (twelve women) was again based upon my recognition that the interviewees had made a considerable investment in my project already and that they wanted to continue to be a part of it. Without exception they disclosed that my interest in their viewpoint was important to them and that the interviews had helped them to sort out their own life events.⁷

Establishing the Interview Text

The first two interviews (Appendix B, Interview Scripts) were based upon my belief that the program would constitute a turning point experience in participants' lives. Similar to the rationale in the original survey questions, I clarified that the first interview would construct a life history up to the entrance into the program, and the second would focus on the program itself and what had happened since. Denzin (1989) discusses turning point experiences in troubled personal lives as "epiphanies." Several of the questions in the interview script were designed to evoke the interviewees' retrospective construction of such experiences. For example, in the life history script, I asked, "Can you pinpoint a moment in time when you began to think about your independence as a person?" and "Can you tell me a story that represents a moment of awareness that your gender might be significant in defining your life possibilities?" At the end of the first interview I explicitly brought forward the turning point interest by describing Robert Frost's poem "The Road not Taken," and asking the following "Can you identify any of those branches in your life? Have you had any such significant turning points in your life?"

The second interview script focused on change. After asking about their sense of self at the start of the program and a description of their experience in the program, a key question was, "Did being in this program change the way you think about yourself in the

world?" Other specific questions continued this thematic focus by asking for description of changes in patterns, in relationships and in views of school, self, and learning. The last questions in the second interview focussed on "life after the program."

Getting the Stories

Before I began the interviews, I examined several of the critical issues facing the feminist researcher and discussed extensively in the literature. They include how to label the researched: are they "subjects," "respondents," "participants," "interviewees," or "co-researchers"? Whether or not to tape record or note-take the interview? Whether to maintain an objective stance, stick rigidly to the script, answer questions that are asked, and share own personal experiences?

I found that the labels of my research participants shifted as the methodology changed. Early on I called the population "program participants." During the survey phase, I called those who returned them "respondents." Once I had established personal contact with the women I began to call them "interviewees" and "project participants." Our relationship had indeed evolved to a more personal relational level. In the final phase I and they began to see ourselves as "co-researchers."

My decision to conduct my interviews with a tape recorder was based upon my desire to create an atmosphere for and have a conversational experience. I could not imagine a conversation of ninety minutes or more during which I would be taking notes. I have spent a lifetime involved in "women's talk," and I wanted these meetings to be casual but focused, intimate but respectful. I was clear in my introductory comments to the first interview that I was seeking conversations about "the problems and pleasures" of their "everyday life" from childhood until now because of my interest in "what kinds of educational support are necessary to bring about positive change in adult women's lives" (Appendix B, Interview I, Introductory Script).

Olson and Shopes (1991) have raised a critical concern about the inherent inequality of power between the academic researcher and a marginalized population in interviewer-

interviewee research, one that they have examined in their studies of working-class women. Can there be a way of "equalizing the encounter . . . [that can] shape the interpersonal dynamic and so contribute to a more egalitarian encounter"? (p.196). As researcher, I was entering my participants' lives seeking their stories as a way of understanding their world from an intimate perspective. I wanted to "know" these women.

Shopes (1991) believes that the researcher should not be "seduced by [a] sense of mutuality" but she also admits that we "may overestimate our own privilege, even our own importance, in the eyes of the people we interview" (p. 196). Because I engaged in the conversation and shared some of my own stories on occasion, I came to see that the interviewees saw me as a person with similar labels and similar issues.⁸ I like them was a mother, a daughter, a wife, a divorcee, a student, and a woman. I am certain that during our interaction we developed at least a temporary intimacy;⁹ I am also certain that this intimacy would have been qualitatively different had I still been a college administrator or had I been a man. I followed carefully Oakley's injunction that "finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (1981, p.41) This model of feminist interviewing that strives for intimacy through both self-disclosure and belief in the interviewee is supported in Oakley's stance against the impersonal interview in research on women. She argues that "personal involvement is more than dangerous bias--it is the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives" (1981, p. 58).

The testimony of my interviewees can be likened to the process of testimony as it is explicated by Fellman and Laub (1992). In this "age of testimony," both listener and speaker are changed through the discursive experience, "a privileged contemporary mode of transmission and communication" (p. 6). As my interviewees related their biographies and their current life events, they were providing me with "a tension between textualization and contextualization" (p. xv). Fellman argues that a "life testimony is not simply a

testimony to a private life but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can penetrate us like an actual life" (p. 2).

A Feminist Perspective: Co-Researcher Analysis

Listening to the Voices: Interview Playback and Transcription

Each interview with my participants required travel, scheduling, and up to three hours of introductory and wrap-up time, along with about ninety minutes of interview taping. Though Seidman (1991) recommended a short interim between interviews, this plan proved to be impractical with my research project. During the first interview period I had set up two interviews on the same day, one in the morning and one in the evening. I immediately recognized that the intensity of the interviewing and the importance of listening carefully and responding affiliatively to the interviewee required a level of energy that might be compromised by tight scheduling. I thus adjusted the schedule to spread out my first interviews over several weeks rather than the original one to two weeks I had planned. I also decided to complete all first interviews before continuing with the second interview. Thus the first interview took place between June 10 and July 11.

Summer vacation intervened for most of my participants, and I finally began the second interviews in mid-August. I had purchased a transcription machine and had begun the process of transcribing the interviews verbatim. Before each second interview I listened to the first interview within a few hours of meeting with the participant. This playback was extremely helpful to me in keeping the interviewee's personal details fresh and thus increasing the connection between the interviews and making the relational and conversational style of the interview more authentic. They came to see that I was interested, I did care, and because of my attention to the details of my participants' lives, they became invested in the project as co-researchers, reflecting on their stories and clarifying details that brought new meaning to their own complex histories.

I have found that in feminist interviewing, there is a dialectical relationship between disclosure and belief. If participants believe that the researcher is genuinely interested and

believes their stories to be true, they will extend the level of the conversation.

"Interviewee-guided research requires great attentiveness on the part of the interviewer during an interview and a kind of trust that the interviewee will lead the interviewer in fruitful directions" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 24). Consequently, interview playback consisted of both listening to the tapes between interviews to become intimately familiar with the details of the participants' stories and then transcribing the tapes verbatim so that the voices were realized on paper. Identifying details, such as family names and places, were changed. Each of my participants helped me in assigning pseudonyms for themselves and family members. Most locations were generalized to the state or region rather than the community.

Little has been modified in regard to the actual voice of the participant--the particular language style of speaking, including expressions, localisms, grammatical uniquenesses, and syntactical patterns. For example, each participant had unique expressions, such as "right from the get go" or "You aren't going to believe this!"; all of these stylistic repetitions have been retained. When a word seemed to be needed to clarify meaning, I inserted it with brackets []. Also when a verb tense shifted between sentences or within sentences that might be confusing to the reader, I changed the form.

I edited out the repetitive use of a phrase like "you know," "um," or "like" if it seemed to be an habituated speech pattern and it interfered with the conversational flow converted to paper. When it seemed integral to the conversation, such as when it sounded like a request for my verification (i.e., "Do you know what I mean?"), I retained it. A final editing of transcripts eliminated unnecessary repetitions. For example, perhaps the interviewee would begin a sentence with a repetition such as the following: "I want to tell you about, [pause] I want to tell you about . . . ". Since my purpose in this research was not to do style or linguistic analysis, this kind of repetition interfered with the voice unnecessarily.

Reading the Voices: Coding the Themes

The emergent themes that were generated from hearing the stories of my interviewees were gained from both listening to and reading the voices of our conversations. During the interviews, the semi-structured interview script was a backdrop to the actual interview. In the first interview, for example, the request for certain kinds of factual background data regarding high school graduation, family history, and marital and work status, at the beginning of the interview often became the central focus of the interview. Since the first question of the first interview asked for clarification of educational history and since all of the interviewees' educational memories were intricately connected to their family memories, this question evoked a complex response. I discovered within the first few interviews that the script would be covered before the conclusion of the interview, but that the response to the opening questions would frame the chronology of the conversation. Most of the interviewees, in being asked about their parents and their childhood memories, established the significance of their relationships with their parents, siblings, and schools as central to the decisions they made at young ages to leave school, go to work, leave home, get married, and have children.

Confirming the Voices: Mailing Transcripts and New Questions

What was the truth of the stories became a major concern at this stage of my research. The details that seemed to contradict each other emerged through multiple readings/ listenings, and I did not want to misrepresent the "truth" as my participants "knew" it. "A feminist researcher should begin the research project intending to believe the interviewee and should question the interviewee if she begins not to believe her. A task for data analysis then becomes a discussion of this conflict between belief and disconfirmation" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 29).

I recognized the importance of both the suspension of disbelief and the need for questioning and confirmation/ disconfirmation of confusions and inconsistencies in the testimony. As I came to know the stories, I saw that an interviewee could not have been

both married and unmarried in 19__ or that her statements about parental abuse seemed inconsistent . The co-researcher basis of my study emerged at this time as I sorted out the details, created chronologies, and began to interpret my interviewees' stories and interpretive statements about their lives.

One more letter was sent to the participants, this time with a copy of the complete transcript and another open-ended questionnaire (Appendix C), asking for interview reflections. I had decided that the data I needed to develop my data chapters was essentially complete and that I didn't need a third interview with all of the participants. What I did need was to give all of the interviewees an opportunity to note errors and corrections in their transcripts and to clarify the confusions in their stories. I also wanted to ask them directly the question about their notion of "self-sufficiency" because I had not raised that question in the interviews. Their reflections on the Workplace Skills program and its effect on their lives had revealed a fuller and more complex meaning to the term "self-sufficiency" than the economic goals established in the legislation. I was extremely concerned with not misunderstanding or misrepresenting the meaning that my interviewees attributed to their experiences.

Not all of the interviewees were responsive to this last correspondence from me. Indeed as I came to the recognition that I was not going to hear from some of them by mail and began to call them, I came to understand the significance of the transcripts as documents of considerable importance to their sense of themselves. Voicing their histories in an interview and reading their voices were two entirely different experiences for them. With the relational element of dialogue missing in their private reading of their lives, they were confronted with their stories on paper in a way that they had never been able to organize for themselves. They could "see" their own histories, and for many of them, it was the first time they had read their own texts. My decision to send out a follow-up open-ended survey with my interviewees' transcripts was made with the intention of providing them with a frame for reflecting upon and examining their own stories and viewpoints. I

did not anticipate that the transcripts would generate for them a difficult encounter with their own histories. Of the twelve two-stage interviews I completed, only seven completed the follow-up survey. Of the remaining five participants, I have talked to only two. The others have not responded to messages. Those with whom I have conversed by phone or heard from by mail described their encounter with their transcripts as a difficult process. One woman said that every time she started to read it she got a headache. Another said, "I started reading part of it, and it's like, my God. It made me realize the things I had said, and it made me start thinking, and I didn't want to think, so I put it away." Some of the comments were related to accuracy, the misspelling of names, the correction of a date, or the confusion of a transcription error. One interviewee wrote several pages of corrections and returned the transcripts to me with a request to have me return them after I made the final edits.

Without exception the experience of reading the voices that documented their histories, though difficult, was an important part of their participation in the research from their perspective. One woman said, "This is the first time I have ever had the opportunity to talk about it so thoroughly, and it's been very helpful to me, very helpful." As one interviewee reflected on her transcripts, she found the written history to frame her sense of herself: "It has shown me that now that I look back on my life, I have not always stayed on one road. I seemed to have taken many little side roads. Since school I have been staying on the main road, . . . and I have done well."

Selecting the Case Studies and One More Meeting

My researcher experience with correspondence and survey instruments, though a valuable component of this research for a different kind of documentation, verified once again in the follow-up instrument that conversations, woman-to-woman talks, were instrumentally important to understanding the complexity of marginalized women's experiences and their interpretation of their meaning. Had I ended the research project at either the institutional documentation stage or at the initial survey stage, the data gained

would have been flat, one-dimensional. Dialogue is an essential component of bringing meaning to experience. With my examination of the differences in articulateness about the events in my participants' lives as revealed in the written responses to the first survey and the responses offered in relation, I concluded that I needed to have one more interview with at least a sample of my interviewees.

My selection of the women for my portrait chapters was made in advance of asking them for a third interview. I was interested in capturing essential characteristics of similarity and difference, since all of my interviewees were unique and alike in many ways. Germaine, Theresa, Lydia, and Trudy are women who have varying degrees of articulateness, varying ages, numbers of children, and work experiences, and varying responses to their struggles in daily living. Their commonality is that they seem to have come out the other side of very hard roads of personal trouble with a desire to continue the journey on their own and in their own way. These four women were willing to meet with me for a third dialogue in which we reflected upon both their stories and the interview experience. I believe that these final interviews extended the results of my study by verifying my sense through all of the transcripts that a publicly-funded program with certain characteristics can establish changes in the participants' sense of self-sufficiency.

PART TWO:
PORTRAITS OF FOUR WOMEN: PRIVATE TROUBLES AND PUBLIC ISSUES

CHAPTER THREE

FRAMING THE PORTRAITS

Teaching is more than just a subject, you know. It's a person, too.

May Sarton

The Small Room

The foundations of my interview research with a group of graduates of a workplace literacy program were entrenched in my personal belief that their individual assessments of the value of the program to their lives were as important as other traditional measurements of programmatic success. This belief was grounded in the theoretical framework of interpretive interactionism, in which research participants' points of view can inform public policy makers by providing their own "working theories of their conduct and experiences" (Denzin, 1989, p. 110). These "local theories" are intricately threaded through the events and experiences of individuals as they uncover and reveal the stories that represent their biographical selves. The meanings that they offer in their accounts of their experiential histories can inform not only the researcher, but also the participants as they dialogically reconstruct their significant life events.

I also believed that in order to create for my readers the verisimilitude that my interviewees offered me in our interview conversations, I as researcher was obligated to frame their interpretation of their lived experiences in their own text. To detach an interpretive statement from the narrated event that contextualized its meaning for the research participant would be to fail to give my readers an experiential sense of my participants' everyday lives in the full context of their relational, emotional, and cognitive awareness of those events. I would indeed be converting their stories for my own research purposes into another kind of aggregative statement where the fullness and powerfulness of their individual biographies would be effaced and where the reader would once again "see" the "subject" rather than the "person."

In struggling with the decisions about how I might best present my data to satisfy my obligation both to the interviewees of being attentive to their perspective and to the research purpose of investigating the significance of their participation in a publicly-funded program, I came to see that I could offer a resolution to my dilemma by presenting several portraits where the text of the participants would provide a framework for examining change. The structure of the portrait chapters, therefore, was a purposeful design to juxtapose my interviewees' stories about their current lives and their experiences and reflections on Workplace Skills with their reconstructed biographical events that brought them to a moment that required public assistance. I also purposefully decided not to begin with their life histories, though I had gained most of the data regarding their biographical events in the first interview. Since I was seeking through the interviews to gain some understanding of how my interviewees perceived their lives to have changed because of participation in the Workplace Skills program, I saw that their evaluative statements about the program's significance could best be validated by revealing differences in their own viewpoints about themselves and the experiences of schooling prior to entrance into the program. In other words, I saw that framing their current views of themselves as women and students against their remembered views would constitute a form of evidence of change and that readers could generate their own interpretation of change through the narrative text.

The value of organizing specific portrait chapters around the lived experiences of my interviewees was that the readers could verify their sense of the complexity of these women's lives through the interviewees' own words. Dorothy Smith (1987) argues that a "sociology for women must be conscious of its necessary indexicality and hence that its meaning remains to be completed by a reader who is situated just as she is—a particular woman reading somewhere at a particular time amid the particularities of her everyday world —and that is the capacity of our sociological texts, as she enlivens them, to reflect upon, to expand, and to enlarge her grasp of the world she reads in, and that is the world that completes the meaning of the text as she reads." (p. 106).

I have identified as a basis of this research that the program offered the potential for being a turning point experience in my participants' lives, one which might be transformational or one which might be vicissitudinous. As I have previously suggested, one of the public profiles that has been offered as a negative rendering of dependent women is based upon the belief that their condition is immutable. By providing portraits in which my participants' stories and interpretations of their current lives are juxtaposed against their stories and interpretations of eventful moments in their biographical histories, I believed that not only their analytical testimony but the actual "existentially problematic, emotional experiences" that occurred in the lives of these ordinary people (Denzin, 1989, p. 105) in their past would become visible to the reader in an important way. As Denzin has forcefully argued, "The perspectives and experiences of those persons who are served by applied programs must be grasped, interpreted, and understood if solid, effective, applied programs are to be put in place" (p. 105).

The women I had chosen to research were labeled as "public issues" because of their dependence on public assistance. I came to see in analyzing the data from my interviews their dependency seemed to be related to their incapacities for personal agency, and that this agency appeared to have been stifled by their life events. It was clear that their dependencies were connected to their personal troubles and that these troubles were affixed in childhood traumas, particular events through which they had accepted specific limitations on their possibilities as students, as workers, and as women.

The participants had certain experiences in family, schooling, and marriage, that in their own words established the way they saw themselves in the world. The stories that emerged in regard to my interviewees' early lives revealed fundamental problems with their senses of personal identity and self-value. Their identities, both their assumptions and their beliefs about their capacities and their possibilities, were inured in their parents' expectations of their gender obligations as daughters and eventually as wives and mothers. Their beliefs that their only way out of difficult family circumstances was to get out of

school and get a job or get pregnant and get married, for example, mirrored the attitudes they remembered about their parents who had aborted their own education to get married and/or go to work. With only one exception, the parents of my interviewees were not educated and did not express interest in the education of their children; and the parents were themselves so grounded in their own daily patterns of hard living that they were apparently incapable of seeing, hearing, or responding to their children's uncertainties about their social identities. Theresa, the exception, despite the college education of both of her parents and the status gained by her mother being an educator, experienced similar marginalization growing up.

Lillian Rubin (1977) in her study of American working-class families, Worlds of Pain, reveals the following: "The dominant memories for me, as for the people I met, are of pain and deprivation--both materially and emotionally." She hypothesizes that "when material aspects of life are problematic, they become dominant as issues requiring solutions . . . financial insecurity and marginality are woven into the fabric of life" (p. 94). For all of the interviewees, the material aspects of their lives were problematic for them. Their parents' financial marginalization mostly in wage earners' jobs created an atmosphere in their homes where the focus was the meal, the household task, and then some rest to begin the next workday and where their obligation was to contribute to this dailiness. Most interviewees' lives were grounded in a belief system at a young age that their value was constituted in their successful completion of laundry, housework, and meal preparation, and as daughters they were being prepared to continue the roles of their mothers as child caretakers, workers, and wives. As previously mentioned, I believed that my interviewees might both reveal and explain how the events in their daily lives defined for them their ability as students and members of the social world both growing up and since.

Dorothy Smith (1987) characterizes that "for women (as also for others in the society similarly excluded), the organization of daily experience, the work routines, and the structuring of our lives through time have been and to a very large extent still are

determined and ordered by processes external to, and beyond, our every day world. I think I would be by no means alone in seeing in my past not so much a career as a series of contingencies, of accidents, so that I seem to have become who I am almost by chance" (p. 65). The implications of this notion that we become who we are by chance and accident seems particularly cogent to a discussion of the childhood memories of my interviewees. As they revealed their childhood memories, the critical "accident" to their presence in the world appeared to be their births to parents that didn't really care for them and perhaps didn't know how to care for them. Reports of both tacit and explicit family violence pervasively materialized in almost all of my interviews with the women whom I came to know.

Perhaps it was by chance that each of my interviewees was eligible and accessible to the suggestion by social welfare agencies that they attend school at the particular moment when the conditions of unemployment, welfare, and educational training opportunities coalesced through federal funding to provide a workplace literacy program. And perhaps each of the previous events that had inured these women in dependencies because of chemical abuse, family dysfunction, spousal abuse or indifference, occupational and economic deprivation, and academic insecurity were aberrations. However, it seems likely to me that those women willing to come forward and talk about their experiences in the program and their biographical histories may be speaking for countless others who are not able or willing to articulate their lived experiences.

This research project is not intended to generalize to all women who participated in the Workplace Skills program in New Hampshire nor is it intended to generalize to other female populations that have failed to fit the mainstream image of self-sufficiency in other urban and rural environments in the United States. Through four extended portraits and some selected experiences and reflections from my other interviewees, my purpose has been to acknowledge and bring some meaning to the interview data that reveal the lives of a particular group of women through their narrative text. The next four chapters--the

portraits of Germaine, Trudy, Theresa, and Lydia--contain their stories, organized around both their current lives and their reconstructed experiences. Though there is an occasional reference to other interviewees within their text, Chapter Eight places the portraits in the context of all my interview participants. It is in Chapter Eight that the others--Lana, Eve, Jane, Mona, Jana, Tessie, Lori, Susan, Ramona, and Lorraine--are also given an opportunity to speak, though briefly, to make "real" the importance of asking the participants themselves to assess the value of a publicly funded program to their lives.

Dorothy Smith (1987) argues that the work of a sociologist is "to develop a sociology capable of explicating for members of the society the social organization of their experienced world, including in that experience the ways in which it passes beyond what is immediately and directly known. . . . Rather than explaining behavior, we begin from where people are in the world, explaining the social relations of the society of which we are part, explaining an organization that is not fully present in any one individual's everyday experience" (p. 89). The portraits begin to explain the social relations of particular women, by offering their accounts of their own everyday experiences that have brought them to where they are today.

CHAPTER FOUR

GERMAINE

There is a history of abuse with everyone in the program. I thought that you could look at somebody and decide what kind of life they had or what kind of person they are, and this program made me realize that you can never judge a book by its cover. People would look at me and think that I came from money because I always dress nicely, but that is just me. I have always liked to dress up. If they could only see right through me, they would have known that I was the least person to worry about because I had absolutely no self-esteem whatsoever. By the time I was finished with the program, I had more self-esteem than I had ever had. And it was with the help of the instructors, the director, and the people that I went to school with (Interview II).

Introduction

Germaine is a twenty-eight year old woman with one child, Justin, who is now eight years old and was born during Germaine's first marriage at eighteen. All interviews were conducted in Germaine's third floor apartment. During the interview process Germaine has experienced illness and family disruption on the one side and the securing of a "dream job" in which she competed and was hired amongst a large candidate pool.

She has been married for two years to a man who has provided her with stability and love. He has just received a promotion and one more raise, which she sees as bringing them closer to realizing their dream of a house with a white picket fence in the country. Though her current living quarters are tiny, her apartment is adorned with collectibles and craft projects that reveal her interest in making her house a home. She has joined a local church, attends with her family weekly, and sings in the choir. Her son, Justin, is enrolled in karate lessons, and as she describes her schedule on a typical day, she says that she is always tired between the demands of a full-time job and the pushes and pulls of being a wife, a mother, and a valued employee. She says that having faith in God is important to her but that sometimes it's hard to maintain commitment in the real world to a spiritual life.

Reflections from Workplace Skills

Germaine entered the Workplace Skills Program because of a lay off due to downsizing at a major industry in the area where she had worked as a semi-skilled laborer. When I asked Germaine to describe herself when she first entered the program, she said, "When I first started the program, I had very low self-esteem. I was doing the program just to see where I was academically. I figured that after I got done with the program that they were going to realize that I couldn't go to college because I wasn't smart enough and that I didn't have the knowledge for that. When I did the pre-testing, I did excellent, but I still didn't believe it. I thought that I was just having a good day. I really didn't believe that I could do anything as far as that went."

After Germaine completed the Workplace Skills Program, she enrolled in an allied health certificate program. She had always wanted to work in the health field, particularly with the elderly, and she became focused on the symptoms and treatment of Alzheimer's disease. When she completed this program, she continued in school for several more weeks to complete her certificate as a nursing aide. With these two certificates, Germaine was able to secure work in the allied health field almost immediately upon completion of her studies. Germaine attributes her exceptional grades in the follow-up programs and her acquisition of a job to the changes in her personal sense of self that occurred in Workplace Skills:

I wouldn't even know where to begin. Like I said, I had no self-esteem and no confidence in myself. I thought every job that I had ever gotten before I entered Workplace Skills was because of somebody else having put in a good word for me, that type of thing. It was kind of nice to know that after I got out of school, I would have to go by the things that I was capable of doing, not by thinking that somebody else was going to get me in somewhere. It was kind of nice to know, 'Well, this is it. If I make it, it will be my accomplishment and if

I don't, it will be my failure.' So that was kind of nice to know that. The program changed me an awful lot, it changed pretty much everything about me. Not my personality, but certain things that I thought about myself. And other people saw things in me that I never knew I had, they brought a lot of good things out of me.

The most valuable characteristic that Germaine identified in talking about her participation in the program is the sense of community she gained through the conversations and revelations that occurred between her peers both in the classes and in the casual breaks between scheduled time. The fact that most of the students were coming from similar experiences of marginal economic and academic background was understood. That they also had experienced difficulties emotionally and psychologically from their childhood events and from their marriages became the basis of a positive transformative dialogue, as Germaine revealed when she acknowledged that "there is a history of abuse with everyone in the program." Though mainstream and inclusion are the buzzwords in the educational milieu at this time, the similarities of abusive backgrounds that came out during the program seemed to strengthen rather than diminish personal value amongst the participants. Germaine felt less marginalized by hearing the similar stories of others in her class, and this sharing of histories strengthened her sense of personal value. She found herself amongst a group of survivors and began to accept that she and they could have even more value.

It took probably a week or so because we were together constantly, me and this little clan of people. You have no choice, you are put together and you have to get along. I started to connect with almost everybody there, even the men. It was wonderful, it was just like a family. I mean we used to all laugh together, we accepted everything about each other.

We got to know each other because I probably started to open up after the first week. I started to talk a little bit and maybe answer a few questions

here and there. It was more like a chore to go to school, I hated it. I knew I had to do it but I hated it, because that would be the only way that I could accomplish something. I knew that I didn't want to stay on unemployment. I never wanted to be on the system at all, and I was so stubborn. I just didn't want to be there, and I think everybody knew that about me. But then, after the first week I decided, "I do want to be here; this is great!" Especially even though I hated taking tests, after every test, I was getting more and more self-esteem. I had such a wonderful time with the people. And if it hadn't have been for that group of people, I don't think that I would have made it because they were just so supportive and helpful. I was very good at English and other people might have been great at math, and so we helped each other all of the time.

I think that the thing that will stay with me about this program is that some of the assignments were hard and some of them I didn't want to do at all, but I did everything. I tried 100% with everything that I did. The people in the program were wonderful friends and very supportive. They were very dedicated, and they really cared what their grades were going to be, and we cared about each other. We had a blast together, we laughed a lot and hung out a lot. Breaks were a lot of fun when we would go out and sit on the lawn, on the picnic tables, and just hang out. That I will miss a lot. We talked about life, we talked about everything together. In a nutshell here we were stuck together for a summer, and we knew more about each other probably than anybody knew about us, that had known us all of all our lives. It was incredible.

Another important characteristic that Germaine insisted was critical was the presence of the Workplace Skills program within a college setting and with the regular supportive faculty that also taught the admitted college students. The teachers, the staff,

the tutorial support, and the services available were all important to Germaine. As she described the changes in her attitude about school work, Germaine offered memories that were similar to my other interviewees--the daily insistence of faculty and staff that the participants could do the work required and do it well, and the persistent encouragement they gained from understanding material that they had always believed they could not master. Germaine and many of the other participants scored at less than ninth grade math level upon entering the program. Many admitted to being math phobic because they had strong negative memories of their experiences in high school math classes.

The staff helped a lot too. They made us feel like we weren't second class citizens because we were going through this program, and I think that was my attitude at first. That I was going to this Workplace Skills program and that it was a stupid program and I just had to do it so that maybe I could get into college. I just had to get this over with. And the reason I thought that was, "Why would they be offering this for nothing?" Then when I realized these were the real teachers from the college, I had thought that they were just people off the street that came in to teach it, then I started to pay attention, "This is great, you know." I think just the feeling of being at the college, because I had never been to college before, I thought even if I don't make it to college because my grades are not good enough, at least I spent the whole summer in college. I think having it in a college environment is really important.

The idea that you had an itinerary, that you knew what classes you had to be at, and what time you had a schedule to keep, and that the college had opened their doors for us to be there the whole summer: I thought that was wild. It had a library, and I thought that was great because I love reading. The idea that they were going to open this library for us also, I thought that was fantastic. Because of that library at the college, I got a library card from

my home town's library just so that I could go to the library all the time. I really thought that I never had a reason to go there before, now I was in college and I wanted to go there all of the time. It was unbelievable. I learned how to use the computers in the college and in the library. I started to learn how to retrieve information, and I thought that was the best thing. It was all stuff that I should have done years and years ago, but I never thought that I could so I never did it.

As Germaine and I discussed the Workplace Skills program, she continually supported the nature of the academics as significant to her sense of gain. The fact that she was in a real college, that she had "real teachers," that her "assignments were hard" established for her that this wasn't as she initially believed "a stupid program" but the basis of her future as a student and a person. A teacher made the difference as her struggles with math lessened and she began to realize that she "was really good at it."

At the end of the program when I took the post-tests I had gained a lot, especially on the math. I can't remember what the scores are, but they were so much higher, there was such a dramatic change and that meant more to me than anything else because my English, of course, was, I don't know if it was in the 100 percentile, I don't know what it was, but it was real close to that.

But that didn't mean as much to me as the math did because I had struggled all my life in math and here we were learning algebra and I was really getting it. It was only because of the math teacher pushing me all the time and making me mad. I really hated her for a while because she kept saying, "I know you can do this and you make sure you do your homework, I know you know how to do this. You are just being stubborn." And I just didn't want to listen to her. As the program started to progress, I was doing more and more, and I realized that I really was good at it and I didn't know.

At the end of the program she wrote on my progress notes that I should go into mathematics because I had some good concepts of formula and what not, and I just couldn't believe it, because I had always been an idiot when it came to math. I couldn't understand it. There was something about her, I understood everything that she was teaching and I think that has a lot to do with not having [pause], once you have just let that wall go down, you are open to suggestion, and I think that is just what it was. So I think that that really helped a lot.

Germaine's enthusiasm for her gains in academic scores by the end of the program was clearly a change from her previous view of herself as a person and as a student. Her description of herself as "an idiot," as "a second-class citizen," as "stubborn," and as having "no self-esteem and no confidence" was a fundamental self-assessment that was threaded throughout Germaine's stories about her childhood, her parents, and her relationships with men, as well as her stories about schooling and her dread of math.

The next section of this portrait presents some of those stories, the childhood and relationship memories that Germaine now understands to have been significant in establishing her negative view of herself as a girl child and as a young woman with a child of her own.

Private Troubles: Stories from the Past

Childhood Memories

When I began the first interview with Germaine and asked about her family history, I was unable to anticipate the complex traumas that she would reveal about her childhood life. On the original written survey, the question about events, memories and people that stand out as important in childhood years (1.a) was left blank. The only hint that her early years were not happy was indicated in her description of herself as a student in public school: "I was always criticized and told I was stupid." Both in my interaction with Germaine when she was a student at the college and in her initial cordiality and manner

when I arrived at her home, I saw a young adult woman who seemed to have the advantages of physical attractiveness, economic stability, and capable relational communication skills. She had written me a letter in which she gave clear and precise directions to her home and had rearranged her work and family schedule to accommodate my visit. When I arrived, she told me that she had asked her son and husband to give us space in her small central living room, and other than to pass through the room to the kitchen or the outdoors, they respected our privacy for almost two hours for each interview.

Germaine remembers growing up in Connecticut until she was thirteen years old, when her parents moved back to Maine where her mother was originally born. Germaine, in telling her stories about her childhood, reveals that her history emerged as a result of visions that began to occur because of stress at the job she was working at just before she entered the program. "I started to see visions of my father in specific times and started thinking to myself, 'Now it all makes sense.' All these years I had been having these flashes, and I didn't know what they were, and now it was starting to make sense so I sought counseling and things started to come out by talking things out." As she began to pursue the details of her childhood, she also gained from talking to her siblings who verified memories that were hard to hold on to. One sister told her that "her only memory of Connecticut at all was father beating the hell out of me and me just screaming. That is her only memory, so she hates to think about Connecticut."

The abusive episodes that Germaine offers are similar in result to those shared by others—a loss of self-esteem and a retrospective understanding of her inability to see herself as valuable, self-sufficient, and capable of managing the complexities of her daily life. The main distinction in Germaine's stories is that her parents appeared to have material means, earned a good income, and spent it regularly on parties and social activities with other adults. Like many other interviewees, Germaine remembers parental substance abuse contributing to the daily instability and uncertainty she suffered.

As far as remembering myself as a child, I was scared, I was depressed, I never found any pleasure in anything. I was bitter, and didn't make friends very well because I was shy and so mixed up. We were very wealthy, very wealthy. My father was a skilled worker in large equipment. He made a lot of money and my mother had a job some place else, doing clerical work. They had a lot of money. We lived in the South End which was for all the rich people. The North End was for all the poor people. So we were very wealthy but we didn't benefit from any of it. We were never poor.

My mother is an alcoholic and my father is also, along with [all of] my mother's family except for my grandparents. She has [several] brothers and sisters and all of them are alcoholics. My father came from a family in Canada, he left the house when he was thirteen. I believe he might have been abused, but I am not sure. He came from a family, I am sure, of alcoholism because he ended up, he is a severe alcoholic.

My father met my mother in Connecticut, and that's where we lived until I was thirteen. The day that they were going to sign with the priest [to get married], they had to show their birth certificates, and he had told her that he was three years older than her and it was this day that she found out that he was sixteen years older than her. It has always been something that my father denies but we all know that he is. He is 66, I believe, but that is something that he will carry to the grave. He swears that he is not. He looks so youthful that it was easy to believe what he said.

They always had a terrible marriage. My parents got divorced I believe when I was a sophomore in high school. My sisters and mother and I all lived in the same house, and my father moved out. My father didn't live with us, but he still thought the house was his and would come in anyway.

He would open up the door and just walk in and sit around the house and stuff. My mother didn't know what to do. He was always hanging around.

My father was angry, I don't know what other way to describe him, he was always an angry man. He was just an angry bitter person, very bitter. He is different now, he laughs, he jokes. We don't talk about the abuse. I believe he has Korsakoff Syndrome. The alcohol has killed the brain cells. He doesn't drink any more, he stopped cold turkey one day because he is so stubborn. He just quit cold turkey. He is very private, but [when I was] a child he was very angry. He was hot and cold, we walked on eggshells constantly because we didn't know what kind of a mood he was going to be in. And when he was in a bad mood, you stayed away because whatever he had in his hand he was going to hit you with it or he was going to kick you.

Only three of the women I interviewed remember their relationship to their parents in a positive way, seeing their parents as hard working people who did their best in a tough financial and material environment. Most of the women I interviewed have memories of being physically and/or verbally abused by their mothers growing up. Almost all remember the physical abuse, silence, or absence of their fathers. Some also remember direct or subtle sexual abuse either from their fathers, family friends, or relatives. The pervasiveness of family assault in the memories of my interviewees is most strongly represented in Germaine's stories, where she can not remember a time growing up when she was not being assaulted by one of her parents, either physically, sexually, or verbally.

I was abused from the time I was two until I was eighteen. Physically abused by my mother, physically and sexually abused by my father, emotionally by my mother and father. My father was the only one that sexually abused me, and then a neighbor too when I was living in Connecticut sexually abused me also. And a baby-sitter had physically abused me for years. She used to beat me with a yardstick. My mother

would never take me out of that situation. She used to tell me that I would have to deal with it and that I had probably done something to deserve it. And I used to think that I probably did.

I remember going to that day care provider, she wasn't registered or anything, she was a baby-sitter. I can remember going there with my older sister, and my older sister used to play with the daughter of the woman, and I used to be put in a bedroom by myself, and I was kept in there all day long until my mother came to pick me up at night.

My mother used to beat me all the time with her hands or anything that she had in her hands, it didn't matter. This was not because she was drinking, this was because I just think that some people were meant to be mothers and others aren't. She was one of those that was never meant to be a mother, or never should have had four girls or four kids, [although] this didn't happen to my sisters. I was the only one that was abused.

Germaine's attribution of her mother's treatment of her to her mother's nature--she "was never meant to be a mother"--is a contradictory one because of her recognition that only she was the abused child, not her sisters. In seeking explanations of why she became the victim of her mother's and father's abuse, she has tried to find other explanations for her treatment, including her parents' alcoholism, her gender, and her own behavior. She has wondered if her behavior evoked her parents' response because she now believes that as a child she was both gifted and hyperactive, conditions that she has identified in her son Justin as stress-producing for parents.

I remember one time one of the relatives pulling me over and saying, "I know it is really rough for you, but you were supposed to be a boy." So I always grew up knowing that they were expecting me to be the boy, and it was a major disappointment when I was born and I wasn't a boy. So that is one way to look at it, and another way to look at it is that I think I had an

attention deficit, a hyperactive disorder, so that probably played a lot into it. I was also gifted as a child. I know this now because Justin has attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and the way he acts is very much the same as how I remember acting. Always energetic and a lot of wonderment. Why this and why that, always questioning things constantly, and talking a lot.

My mother denies everything happening, but my sisters know because they were there living it. But I learned to be inward from the time of seven on. I can remember never smiling or laughing, just keeping to myself because I was so afraid everywhere I went. So if I was a nuisance, it was for a very short period of time because I learned how not to bother my parents. They were always screaming at all of us but for some reason, I was the one that was always getting beat.

I remember one time that my mother tried to poison me. I remember, and I have told her this story over and over again and she will never admit to it, she would probably feel better if she did. But my father used to drink so much that we used to have a package store deliver to our home, that is how bad. They are called package stores over there, and the Budweiser car would pull up and start loading in the beer.

My sister says that she remembers that she thinks my mother was an alcoholic back when we were being raised but I don't remember that. I don't remember my mother ever being inebriated. I don't remember her ever drinking anything, I remember my father [drinking]. So either she hid it very well, or maybe she never picked it up until later. My mother never fought, my father was the one that was always fighting and screaming and yelling, but he never laid a hand on her. So I think them fighting all the time, she was frustrated so she would take it out on me, and he was frustrated so he would take it out on me. So this is the kind of thing that I lived with.

Oh about the poisoning, I remember we also used to get cases of soda, they were little bottles of soda, and I remember my mother telling me on this hot, hot day to go down to the cellar and start a load of laundry. And I thought this is kind of weird because all of the laundry is done. You don't argue with them, you just do it, so I ran down to the cellar. Before I ran down I had opened a bottle of orange soda and had put it on the counter. Well when I came back up I was sweating profusely. My mother looked at me and said, " You must be really hot." And I said, "There was no laundry down there, I don't know why you sent me down there to do laundry." And she said, "Well you must be thirsty, drink your soda." "I will ," I told her and she told me to hurry up and drink it; " you don't want to get too hot" and I said okay and I drank the whole thing down because it was small. And I started vomiting and it was red so I thought I was bleeding internally. I wouldn't have used that language back then, but I knew there was something in there and I was vomiting blood, something happened. I must have vomited for a couple of hours and it was really hot. I was screaming my head off and she was laughing the whole time. I could hear her laughing, and laughing and laughing in the kitchen. So when I had come back into the kitchen I opened up the trash can to throw some paper towels in there and I found a bottle of Tabasco Sauce emptied and I found that little coiled wrapper that went on top so I knew it was a fresh bottle she poured into the soda to get her kicks.

I remember another time she filled a glass with about four or five inches of dish liquid, and it was sitting behind the sink and I asked her what the glass was for and she said, it was like she was trying to get me to ask about it, and so I did ask what it was for, and she said, "All right, that is it, I have had enough of you, now drink it." I said, "What do you mean, drink

it?" She said, "You drink it right now." I had to drink the whole thing down and again I was vomiting and vomiting and vomiting, and she was laughing and laughing and laughing. It was just the things that she did. I don't know. Sometimes I wonder why. My other sisters were aware of some things but at those particular times my mother never would have done something like that in front of them. They were probably outside playing. They were aware that I slept with my father until I was thirteen. My little sisters might not, but my older sister remembers.

Germaine has spent much of her adult life trying to understand why her parents treated her as her memories and the verification of them through particularly her older sister draw this abusive picture of her childhood years. When we talked about her memories of sleeping with her father, she is absolutely certain that her mother "made her do it" and that her mother also continues to deny this collusion.

And as far as the sexual abuse goes she made me sleep with my father until I was probably thirteen. My bed, I shared a room with my older sister, but I never slept in that bed. Very rarely did I ever sleep in it, we had separate beds in our bedroom, we shared a room. My stuff was all in there but every night, I don't know where she was, probably on the couch or something, because every night just like a little soldier I would go right into bed and sleep with my father. I used to try to tell her that he was sexually abusing me, and she didn't want to hear it. It was fondling and groping and all that kind of stuff. And I remember specific times that he did different things.

My father also sexually abused one of my sister's girlfriends and the whole family knows that, but it was kind of pushed under the rug. He has never been called on it. When my mother got divorced she wanted to get good grounds on why she was divorcing him and then she wanted me to

testify against him saying that, "Yes, this happened." I said, "No, you never did anything for me the years he was abusing me physically or sexually and you were abusing me physically and emotionally, I am not helping you out in the least bit to pull him down just for your benefit. It is not going to benefit me at all and I am not going to do it. He knows what he did, I know what he did, you know what he did. Nobody in the court needs to know what happened." I would never testify, I would never do it because my life means more to me. Just from struggling all those years to where I am now, that I didn't need to drag anybody down with me and I won't do it. I will deal with my problems on my own. Well, with the help of counseling, with the help of a good family now, it wouldn't make any sense to me to bring anybody down.

Throughout Germaine's testimony about her childhood, she combined expressive narrative style with reflective questioning, both knowing that she had struggled and seeking the answers to be able to attribute cause, and both acknowledging that she indeed might have been "a nuisance," but remembering that "it was for a very short period of time because [she] learned how not to bother [her] parents." Her uncertainty about which characteristics comprised her identity carried over into her schooling memories as well.

Schooling

Germaine looks back over her time as a school girl with mixed feelings. Both in Connecticut and in Maine, she attended a parochial school until she entered high school, and then she continued her education and graduated from public high school. She remembers as part of the verbal abuse she experienced as a child that she was always "the stupid one." Though she now attributes that her behavior might have been from being a gifted child and a child with attention deficit disorder, because her Justin has now been diagnosed with these conditions, at the time she remembers always feeling stupid. Over

half of the women I interviewed remember being called stupid regularly by one or more parents.

I was going to be the stupid one. I was called stupid by my parents. My older sister was going to be the one to succeed and I was the one that wasn't. I was the one that was always going to need a man to make anything out of me. I was going to be the one that did nowhere jobs. They used to come up with this because I used to get poor grades in school because I was being abused all the time. I was scared to death and I couldn't sleep. I wet the bed until I was fifteen. I had a lot of problems; as a child I was really mixed up so I failed in school terribly.

My favorite class in high school was psychology. I had Mr. P_____ as a teacher. I thought it was interesting, and I liked learning about the mind. I liked learning about different personalities, and I think what it probably boiled down to was that I was trying to cure my family. I don't know, it could have been trying to heal myself, but I wouldn't have admitted it back then. I never would have thought that I had a problem or anything. I just dealt with things as they were happening to me.

My least favorite class was math. I just remember feeling stupid. I didn't like math and when I don't like something, I block it off. I just have a block, and I won't do it, and I don't want to hear about it, so I did really poorly in math. When I was telling you I was gifted, I was always smarter, and I knew the answers to everything but I would never speak up about it. I remember going to Catholic school in Connecticut and the education was much higher, but when I moved to Maine to go to the Catholic school there, you have to do testing to see where you are at educationally, and it was before the seventh grade year and it was in the summer. I was going to be going into the seventh grade, and my sister and I were being tested, and I

was in senior English. I hadn't even made it through the seventh grade yet, and I was already reading at a senior level. I did a lot of reading, I read anything that I could get my hands on so I learned. But nobody ever would have known it.

My family would have never thought it, and they would never have believed it, so what I did was to live to their expectations. I was sick of hearing, "You can't do it," and "Your sister is going to make it, and you are not," that kind of thing. So I started doing what they thought I was going to do anyway. So I almost failed in everything, every single thing from seventh grade on. I would not fail, but I wouldn't excel in anything. I took English and all the core classes, but I took all the lowest level I could possibly get into until English. My first day in trying to get into a general English, I sat in and the teacher said, "You do not belong here, you need college prep English right now." So he sent me to college prep. I got an "A" in that class and I thought, "This is really weird; they must have just given this to me, because I am not smart." All of my teachers thought that I was smart, and that I was just not performing. They knew that I did not care about school, so they just went along with it. I graduated at the bottom of my class, pretty much. I could care less, I had no aspirations at that time because I didn't think that I could do it. I always dreamed of things, like "Wouldn't it be nice to have the brains to go to college," but I was hard on myself and I never had any confidence in anything that I ever did.

As Germaine described her school years, she revealed a mixed perception about her capability. On the one side, she had accepted her parents' judgment that she was stupid and couldn't do well academically, but she also had a sense that she was smart. The test results, her teachers' assessment that she wasn't performing to her capacity, and her secretive habit of reading were bases that she could have succeeded academically, but her

admitted lack of aspirations toward school seemed to be her way of consolidating in her mind the viewpoint that her parents had established about her value. One area Germaine identified where she did feel confident was in her skill as a gymnast:

I was on a gymnastics team and I was pretty confident about that, but I was the only person on the whole gymnastics team that my parents never saw one of my meets. I was embarrassed. All the family members were there, and I was the only one there by myself. Nobody came to watch me, and I was a good gymnast. From the age of two on I was a gymnast--a dancer, jazz, tap, and ballet. My parents provided me with these things but they never came to see the stuff. You have to understand too that when you are in Connecticut and you have money you have to show it off. So their way of showing it off was putting me in dance, because they knew I had potential because I was very flexible, double jointed and everything so of course they wanted to show me off and that makes them look better. So they would put me in these things but they would never come to see any of my recitals. It was totally embarrassing so finally my junior year was my last year in gymnastics. I said I am not going to do it my senior year because nobody cares anyway, so I am not going to do it.

It seems that Germaine's decision to quit gymnastics exemplifies her recognition that her demonstration of competency was not going to be noticed by her parents anyway, and like her mixed picture of herself as a student growing up, she sustained her parents' viewpoint of her by her quitting an activity in which she had excelled. The one area where Germaine showed enthusiasm during her high school years was in her ability to make friends and increasingly to distance herself from her family through her social life and social activities. By her mid-teen years, she had found both a voice and the physical strength of rebellion against her mother's cruelty:

I would never be rebellious toward my parents except for one time I can remember with my mother. She read my diary, and to me my personal stuff is my personal stuff. Well, my mother looked through my diary and she read something. She read that I had gone to a party. When I was in high school I used to just casually drink. I used to drink and get drunk with the people and stuff, but I knew I was going to get out of it because I didn't like it anyway. Well, she had read my diary and found out that I had gone to a party the night before, and she called me a slut. That was the farthest from the truth because I was afraid of men.

I told her, "That is not even true, I don't know why you are calling me that, that is not even true." And she said, "Don't you ever talk back to me." She backhanded me, this was when I was seventeen, and I slapped her back and I threw her up against the wall. And I said, "Don't you ever do that again, you have no reason to be laying your hands on me now because we both know that I run a lot faster than you do."

Relationships and Gender

When Germaine describes her relationship with friends throughout high school, she identifies a few girlfriends with whom she felt really connected. One of these friends and she took a two week trip to Florida to visit Disney World the summer before her senior year, and this event stands out as one of the most important in her teen years. She describes her friend as "the first person that I had shared what was happening in my life, so she was very important to me." She didn't have a lot of boyfriends in high school, though she remembers two steady boyfriends, one for a year and one for a year and a half. Germaine remembers that her school was stratified: "They used to call you upper class or lower class, and of course I was upper class, but I used to have plenty of lower class people as friends. . . . Some of the guys were like motor heads and they were always

working on their cars and stuff. Most upper class wouldn't even talk to them, and I would sit there and talk to anybody about anything."

Shortly after Germaine graduated from high school, she ended up working at a local market where she met her first husband. She saw marriage as a way out of her family life and was the basis of her decision to marry at eighteen to this young man:

It ended up he was very immature, but I thought that once we got married it was going to change. You know you always think that, you are young and stupid. And I wanted to get out of my house, I had to get out of my house. I was eighteen, and I couldn't stand to live there any longer so I had to get out. And when he asked me to marry him, it sounded like it was a good idea, it was better than what I am doing now, so I said sure. And I was always told, my father always told me that you can't make it without a man. So I never had the option of moving out and having my own place because that was just totally unheard of. My father would have never accepted it, and I had to marry a French Catholic so it all worked out real well.

I married my husband in June. I met him the summer I graduated, after I graduated. He was one year behind me in school and he wasn't planning on going back to school. In other words he was out of school and so was I, and we were both working at the same store. And when we decided we were going to get married, I told him that I wasn't going to settle for him not getting his high school education, and I said I wouldn't marry him until he did get it or he had to at least enroll. When we met and got engaged, we probably got engaged within six months, that was when I told him we are not going to set the date, we were not going to get married unless he at least had an intention to enroll. He made all the moves. He called the school and said, "Are you taking enrollments?" So he did end up enrolling ahead of time, so that is when we made the plans and everything. He had

started working in Massachusetts doing sheet rock and drywall. All the French people did that around here at that time.

And that was a story in itself. He did enroll, and he was going to night school, and he broke his arm, so I graduated him from high school. I had to do all his reports for him; that was his excuse. He broke his arm, and that was his way out for him, too. It worked out good for him in the end because then he could say to me, "See I can't possibly write any papers or do what I need to do because my arm is broken, and I can't write with my left arm." Well, then it started, "Can you write this for me, can you write that for me?" It ended up that I did everything, I did all of the reports because I was too humiliated to accept the fact that I had a husband that wasn't going to have a high school education, so I did everything. I did the English, Math, and Science. He didn't even have to take the tests [at the school] because when you do night school, he was in a program called Work Study. He worked all day but his stuff was at night and since he worked in Massachusetts, they, believe it or not, I would go there once a week and pick up all his homework and bring it home with me, tests included, and bring it back to them at the end of the week until he graduated high school.

Germaine, in her stories about her marriage to her first husband, retrospectively recognized that from the beginning it was not going to work. Not only had she assumed responsibility for her husband's school work and his graduation from high school because of her own sense of pride, but she became pregnant a couple of months after their wedding and remembers that "it was a big mess that I got myself into." With her husband's job requiring his travel to Massachusetts, "sometimes he would stay there the whole week and just come home on weekends, and it was fine at first, but then when I had my son it was terrible because he was always gone. Even if he wasn't working, he wasn't home anyway, so it was quite a wake up call."

In Germaine's desire and effort to get out of her family home, she then found herself in a situation where despite her father's insistence that she needed a man to take care of her, she was now obligated to take care of her husband, a child, and a household. As she came to know her husband after her marriage, she began to see his faults:

He gambled. He was a compulsive gambler, he had a bookie and the whole nine yards. And here I was, I didn't know anything about that stuff, and I used to get phone calls here about it. And I wouldn't know anything about that stuff, so I would tell them that I would have him call them when he got home. He would owe the bookie some money, and I didn't even know what a bookie was, and then finally I started to have to hide the rent money in a baggy under the toilet. I am telling you it was a big mess, a real big mess.

It was all down hill from there. I spent many nights alone. I never saw him, he was either playing cards at card parties or at the horse tracks or dog tracks, betting on football and having football parties at people's houses. I never saw him, never. And then I had my son. I did it all by myself, he was never around. My son didn't even know his father really. He just knew him as probably a visitor that came by because he was never home. There was no medical coverage to speak of, we had an apartment but nothing to our name. We used to argue quite a bit about how I needed more in my life, and I wanted my son to have more. I couldn't stand this. We started to, or the arguments started to get more and more heated because I just couldn't handle living by myself. I didn't get married to live by myself, and when you have a child, you expect that the father is going to be right in on it with you. It was foolishness because he never really wanted a child. He said he did, but when it was time, he was never there for the changings or feedings or anything. So I did it all myself. And I remember times where he had

gambled all the money away, and I didn't even have money for the formula. I would have to scrape from penny jars and everything just to get money for formula.

So I was in a real deep depression and finally, seven weeks after I had my son, I went back to work. I tried working at this company, and it was a very small job. One of these filing things and data entry, really a job that you don't need much of a brain for anything, but I figured that at least I had a job. It ended up that I was falling asleep at work all the time because I was up with my son all through the night. So I had to leave there because I couldn't handle it, and things started to go down hill even more after that.

Finally one night I decided I wasn't going to take it any more and I called my aunt in Connecticut and her husband came down with a van and we packed my son's and my clothes and just his personal belongings and left. And I started a new life for myself in Connecticut. Meanwhile, he wanted me back, oh yeah he wanted me back. He was going to change and everything was going to be different, and he was going to be more responsible and this and that and it never happened. Within one month I got myself a car, an apartment, a new job, a wonderful baby-sitter. Everything was going great, I had a waitressing job. Then I fell for it again. He called again and said, "I swear to God I have changed." So being the loyal person that I was, I let him come pick me up, all my stuff, I got out of my apartment, I sold my car and did all that stuff, and moved back here to Maine. I lived with him one week and said, "You haven't changed a bit, I am out of here."

Germaine's stories about her second exodus from her husband included a move to another apartment in Maine and the search for and acquisition of the job she ended up retaining until she was laid off before entry into the Workplace Skills program. Her husband went on the run to avoid child support, she began working up to twelve hours a

day to support herself and her son, and she began divorce proceedings. She liked her job and was earning enough money to live:

It was going really well, but my husband had been dragging out the divorce. We had been separated for probably about a year and he was still dragging it out. He wasn't going to get divorced from me, and he wasn't going to have it, but he didn't want anything to do with my son. He wasn't paying child support and the whole thing. It was a big mess.

While the divorce continued to proceed slowly, Germaine ended up meeting a guy where she worked. After dating him, she agreed to live with him and did so for two and a half years, a decision that she later recognized was a move from a man who was immature to a man who was abusive: "Which is in my genes anyway. They always say if you have been abused all of your life, you are going to end up with somebody like that. So when I married my husband, I said, 'Geez, that must not be true because my husband does not abuse me, so I will never fall into that pattern.' Well, sure enough, it was bound to happen."

It was emotional, a lot of emotional stuff. I was always crying and depressed and didn't know why. I thought this was how I was supposed to live. I didn't realize that there was anything out there for me. So I was with this man for two and half years. He was never abusive to my son, but he used to beat me all the time. To the point where I had to see a doctor. There were times, I remember one time when he choked me by the phone. In fact, right after I got out of the hospital for my first kidney stone surgery, I was bleeding and everything and he dragged me right off the bed by my hair. I had to clean the rug because there was a puddle of blood, and I didn't want my son to see it. So I think of it now and think how I would never put up with again because I know I wouldn't. I would kill somebody before they

would do that to me again. But you see, when you grow up in that kind of atmosphere, I thought that I deserved it.

Anyway I lived with him that long. I thought I loved him, but I think I was seeking out somebody that was more with it, had a good head on his shoulders, had a career. I was looking for somebody that was like a solid person, but it ended up that what I got was somebody who was going to control me also, which he did very well for two and half years. He was pretty good with my son, but he was not very patient. I used to step into that a lot, I would protect my son from anything. He had never been married or engaged and had no children, and never a long term girlfriend. Now I know why.

Germaine made the decision to kick her friend out in the same year that she was laid off from her job and entered the Workplace Skills program. However, she admitted that she finally asked him to leave, not because of his abusive behavior toward her, but because of a discovery that he was behaving in a bizarre manner outside their relationship.

The reason I had kicked him out was because he was writing sick, sick love letters to the girl upstairs, and putting them under her door. The whole talk of the apartment complex was this psycho leaving notes. Little did I know that it was the guy living with me that was doing this. The girl was my age and she was a model, and happily married. She used to lock herself in her apartment all the time because she was scared to death and I didn't blame her. I didn't know it was my boyfriend. I remember questioning him one time about it because I don't know if I could tell by the way that he looked at her, or what it was, but I said, "This is a stupid question. You wouldn't be writing these crazy notes to the girl upstairs, would you?" And he said, "What are you talking about?" and he was really mad, so I thought it must not be.

But then one day I was cleaning the house and he was sleeping in late and I don't know what ever possessed me to do this, but there was a pad of paper stuck to the fridge, but I took the first sheet off the pad and scribbled over it with a pencil and I found one of the love letters and knew it was him. So I told him he needed to leave right now: "Get out! I don't want you ever coming around here again." We had a reasonable income while I was with him. We had what we needed and felt very comfortable. When I told him he was out of here, that put me in a lot of jeopardy. It was living with half of an income, but then I realized that I could live like this because I had lived like this before. I could certainly do it. I had never asked anybody for anything so I just did it.

Germaine's decision to ask her partner to leave was an important step toward her own independence as a person. She had left her parents' home, and twice she had left her own home with her husband when she had decided she was better off living alone if she were going to be alone anyway. This time, she stayed where she was, and she demanded that her cohabiting partner leave. She had withstood constant verbal and physical abuse because he was decent to her son, a combination of characteristics--abuse and decency--that many of my interviewees attribute to their spouses or partners. It was shortly after Germaine once again was living alone with her son that she was laid off from her job and entered the Workplace Skills program.

Germaine Today

Germaine's notion of self-sufficiency is very clear in her mind. It isn't just about getting and retaining a job. It is about making good decisions for herself and her family, it is about staying patient and walking away when Justin's behavior evokes anger, it is about communicating honestly and regularly with her spouse, it is about doing a good job at work, and it is about maintaining a spiritual connection to God. It more than anything else for Germaine is a sense of her own personal value: "I have the ambition now to keep going

on for more schooling, I don't let myself get walked over by any man, I don't feel intimidated by my sisters now because I too have graduated from college." She has indeed come to see herself as able to manage the complexities of daily living that are certain to surface. In regard to her self-acknowledgment of her new strength, she offered the following to the readers of her stories:

When I read my transcripts, it was like "Boy, I've made this big climb." I want to let people in on what's happening that isn't going to be so wide open in my life. It might seem like, "Yah, I've come out of all that, no problems now." There are many problems that happen, as a result long term, that won't go away from years of constant abuse like that.

In our final interview, Germaine and I talked about her stories and tried to reconstruct how she had felt in reading her transcripts and whether she had reconsidered some of her stories in a new way. We returned to discuss some of her experiences with her parents as a child, particularly focusing on her mother's cruelty and her father's sexual abuse. Germaine has tried to confront her mother about these memories, but her mother denies that any of it ever happened:

You know it's funny, my husband and I have talked a lot about that. It's just one of those things I grew up with, so I never questioned it. My father went to bed early, always early, and so of course I did. My mother was watching TV. I remember one time I got up to go to the bathroom, and she was asleep on the couch. It didn't click, and I thought, "Why isn't she using my bed?"

I remember asking my mother a couple of years ago, but she totally denies it. She says, "Oh, no, you never did that!" and I say, "Yes, yes, you made me do that!" I remember one time in the car, I don't remember whether I talked about this, there was a song on the radio, "Voulez-vous couchez avec moi, ce soir?" It means [whispering] "Do you want to go to bed with me

tonight?" And I am sitting in the back seat and I'm singing it, and my mother and father are in the front seat, and she said, "Honey, did you hear that?" and he said, "What?" and she said, "Your daughter?" and he said, "What?" and she said, "She wants to sleep with you tonight," and he said, "Oh, OK."

Germaine consistently described her mother's treatment of her as cruel. For example when she was still wetting the bed as a young adolescent, she remembers her mother exposing her accidents to visitors: "I would wake up and I would be drenched and company would be coming over, and she would say, 'Why don't you tell Aunt Jane what you did? Why don't you tell them that you pissed your bed?'"

One story she had told about her mother involved her mother's nearly poisoning her son one night when she had taken him for an overnight visit. From everything Germaine had related about her mother's treatment of her as a child, I found it difficult to imagine that she would allow her mother to take care of her son overnight when he was quite young. Her two memories of being "poisoned" by her mother were relived in the story she told about her mother having Justin for an overnight visit:

I once allowed my mother to take my son overnight. He has never spent a full night over my mother's house since because I refuse. I never let him drive in the car with her, she will not take him anywhere. If she wants to visit, she can come up here and see him while I supervise, I don't trust her.

When he was little, he was fifteen months and still on Gerber baby food, and I was very strict about what he ate. He wasn't allowed to have candy and stuff that was nonsense to give a kid that age. This is when her second husband that had died of a heart attack was still alive, and she took Justin over night and promised up and down that she was just going to feed him the food I gave her, the juice and that. At that point he had never even had straight apple juice, that is how strict I was about what he ate, because he had a very weak stomach, so it was half water and half apple juice shaken up.

That night just to go against what I said, she fed him hot sausages from a spaghetti sauce, those big hot sausages. He had never even had meat before. She fed him a big mug of Pepsi, and he had never had soda in his life, and coffee brandy. Her husband fed him coffee brandy because he thought it was cute. My mother said, "Well, he wanted it."

I had to rush him to the hospital. At 2:00 in the morning I was woken up. My mother called and said, "You are going to have to come and get him he is screaming all night long, I don't know what is wrong with him." I went to pick him up, and he was straight as a board flat. He was screaming and he was turning colors. I brought him into the emergency room, and they told me I had to call my mother right now because they needed to know what the child had ingested. He has something toxic in his body. So I called my mother, and she would not tell me anything. She said, "All I fed him was Gerber Baby food that you gave me blah, blah, blah." Well my little sister got on the phone and said, "I don't care if I get in trouble, Germaine, (my mom was still on the other line), Mom fed him this stuff." And she told me everything that she fed him.

I was furious, so I had to tell them. They were close to pumping his stomach, but it ended up that they gave him medication, and he was able to get rid of it. That was the last time that she has ever seen Justin alone. She has seen him since then, but I have never trusted her from that day on. And he is eight years old now. I am always in his presence when she is around. There is never a chance that she will be alone with my son, never.

The one area of Germaine's life that continues to be problematic for her is her relationship with her parents, each of whom lives within ten miles of her home. A recent event in which each of her parents attempted to use her as a go-between was her mother's pursuit of an annulment of her first marriage so that she could return to the church.

Germaine said, "I don't like the way you have to do it. You have to say you disown anything that happened in the marriage, including the children. You have to say that it was all a mistake. So I have a hard time with that. I'm sure God doesn't look at it that way, but I do." As Germaine described that in the church the effacing of the existence of the marriage means the effacing of the existence of the children, she poignantly juxtaposed her parents' continuing intrusion in her life with the fact that "it [she] was all a mistake."

I asked her why she doesn't move. She answered that she and her husband were making a life there, that the region offered them good jobs and a good life. I once more asked Germaine to clarify for me what made her continue to stay in contact with a father who had been so abusive and a mother who had been so cruel, not just to her, but more recently to her son:

Why I haven't distanced myself, I don't know. I would have liked to and would still like to try to work through it all. I guess one thing I do understand after reading, I have a lot of books on this, and one thing is that you'll never see more devotion than the devotion between an abused child and their parents. For some reason, there's this undying need to still keep impressing them and still keep protecting them, and standing by them.

Germaine and I then entered a dialogue that I would like to offer as a close to her chapter, one that reveals both my relational connection to her stories and her authentic and deep response to her feelings about her life:

Marcia: I think psychologically I can understand that, yet I find it hard sometimes, when you call her "Mom" in your relating a conversation with her, to understand. This is a person who has treated you terribly. I couldn't even call her mom. But you continue to try and explain who you are to your mother. A couple of people I am interviewing have said, 'I will never allow my mother or my father to be alone with my child because of the abuse I suffered.' You say that now yourself, but you let your mother

and your step-father, this man who was also an alcoholic, take care of your son overnight. Why?

Germaine: I'll clear that up. My mother has gone through different periods of her life when she was clean and sober. I used to believe a lot of what my mother would tell me, and that particular span of time, supposedly a couple of months when she was clean and sober and she asked me, now this is not the first time she had asked me, she had continuously hounded me to keep him overnight, and she finally wore on me, and I went through a whole list of things she was and was not to do. She was going to be alone, her husband was not coming home that night, he was spending the night at his brother's, and I fell for that.

I guess, it might be my Catholic upbringing, you try to forgive, and you try to forgive, and you just, how do you know that the one time that somebody apologizes to you, that maybe they're really sincere, maybe this is the turning point for them, and if you were to turn your back on them, how do you know that couldn't have been the time, when you end up dying and going to heaven, how do you know that that particular time, God says, "I want to show you this particular time" and you see your mother and your mother is trying to apologize to you and you turn your back on her and say "No way, get away from me, I don't want to talk to you." What if God was to say "That was the critical time in your life. That's when you two were inseparable for the rest of your life and you had that much more time. And instead you chose to turn your back on her when she needed you the most."

It's always been important to me, although some people will never understand why I do some of the things I do. Well, they haven't lived it. I can only do what I know best. At that particular time I was making a decision that I thought was an adult decision, I thought it was the best thing, and I screwed up royally.

Marcia: You didn't screw up. I am not attributing blame here. I'm in awe. I don't have that much forgiveness in me.

Germaine: Put it this way, another way to say it is if I can try to forgive my mother for the things that she has done, then it is easier for me to forgive other people for minor things that they have done. I would hope that God is looking at it like, "Boy, you really did a good job. Thanks for forgiving her that time. And for that, I am going to give you a break the next time you screw up." You know?

The dimensions of Germaine's spiritual life are connected to her strong belief in daily religious practice. She goes to church every Sunday and sings in the choir. "We were going to one church, and the music didn't call me. A friend said, 'Just come to one of our practices,' and the music just called to me." Germaine claims "a real true love for religion in that way."

But I fall off the wagon a lot too. It's easy to be in the church and in the music and all that, knowing that you love God, love the Church, but then to practice it when you are at home, it's very hard not to lose your patience. I try to have Christian values, but a lot of times it's really difficult, going to work, hearing the values, the stuff you hear, and try to remain devout. It's really hard.

When Germaine and I discussed her love of religion, she revealed her recognition that the daily struggles of maintaining patience with a difficult child, with parents who continue to intrude upon her life, and with the confusions of being in the church and in the world, she appeared briefly to understate her own control of the events and decisions in her life. She said, "It's no secret that the things, the good things that have happened to me weren't from me, I mean, God sent someone down to help me out, and it worked." Though she believes there is an angel sitting on her shoulder to provide support, she has not relinquished control to God's helper. The changes in her life are a testimony to her own capacity to act in her own behalf. Her management of her parents' access to Justin, her installation of caller ID and refusal to answer the phone every time her father calls, her research and request for specialists to come into her home to observe Justin's behavior

within the family: all of these decisions reflect personal changes she described as a result of enrolling in the Workplace Skills program

Germaine's assessment of the program was grounded in her intrinsic sense of what constitutes "real" academic work and her acknowledgment that "some of the assignments were hard." She was articulate about what kinds of gains she had made through the program: a library card in her local town library, an ability to maintain a rigorous schedule, a newfound access to information technology through an improved understanding of computers, and knowledge about both herself and her field of study that have allowed her to feel that her current job and any future jobs she might hold are attributable to her own accomplishments: "It was kind of nice to know that after I got out of school, I would have to go by the things that I was capable of doing."

She was also articulate about the characteristics of the program that she believed were important in creating the environment to help her to achieve those gains: the location of the program in a college setting, the "real" teachers instead of "people off the street," and all the "wonderful people" who "cared about each other." Her notion of self-sufficiency is clear: "To get by on my own, with what I have: more self worth, esteem, [and] confidence."

CHAPTER FIVE

TRUDY

You can build your wall as high as you want and as thick as you want, but if you don't put a window in, you're not only keeping the sunshine out, but you're keeping your goodness in. You have to have windows. You can do whatever you want with your windows: you can lift them up, you can take them out, you can put screens in, but you have to have windows, or you are isolated within your own tomb (Interview I).

Introduction

Trudy is a thirty-two year old single parent of a seven-year old daughter, Rainbow. The first two interviews were conducted at my local residence where Trudy would meet me after she completed her work day nearby. She arranged to have her daughter cared for after work so that she could concentrate on our conversation without worry. Upon my request, Trudy and Rainbow hosted my third interview in their home, a town house structure in a low income project where they have lived for several years.

Trudy's daughter is at the center of all of her decisions: where she lives, where she vacations, how much she works, and what her goals are going to be are all decided on the basis of what will be best for Rainbow and how it will affect Rainbow and their relationship. Her expectations of Rainbow extend to Rainbow's contribution to the household tasks of cooking, cleaning, and communicating regularly. "We go for walks in the woods, we celebrated the summer solstice this year, we take rides up to Maine, we share the chores and responsibilities of the house, we write, we read to each other, we go play and dance, we dance in the house, on the chairs and everything." When I responded that her description sounded as if Rainbow were her playmate, she answered, "Yah, but I'm her disciplinarian too, and she knows when it's time to get business done and do it."

Until Trudy learned that she was pregnant, she would describe her life as hard-working, hard living, and chemically dependent. She says she doesn't remember a time

when she wasn't drinking growing up. Her pregnancy was a major turning point in her life--it changed her life. Trudy has never been married, and although she intended to marry Rainbow's father, she offered the following reflection about her single status:

I signed myself into a dry out center, instead of getting married. I set up the wedding, it was supposed to be May 26th, about eight years ago, with Rainbow's father, but I decided to sign myself into a dry out center, because we were not, I don't how we'd have been together without the drugs and alcohol. And if you want to make a commitment with somebody, you ought to have more of a basis than be drinking buddies.

I really didn't know him as far as, I didn't know what interested him, how his mind worked. I didn't know anything. I knew he liked to drink and party and at that point in time, that's what I wanted to do, then I ended up pregnant. I signed myself into the dry out center and then found out that I was pregnant. I did it because our date was right around the corner. I didn't love him. I didn't love him. And he kept saying he loved me, and he loved me, and I thought "Something is wrong with him. He wants a replacement for his mother or something. He didn't know me well enough to love me. He knew nothing about my life, he didn't know how I worked inside, or anything. He loved what? What he'd seen? He didn't know nothing about me."

I quit drinking, I quit all drugs, I didn't smoke cigarettes, and I didn't drink coffee. I didn't think it was fair. It wasn't my life anymore.

I found Trudy to be a curious mixture of tough and soft, inarticulate and eloquent, traditional and eccentric. She described herself as a poet in her original written survey, and many of her reflections and experiences are explained in extended metaphorical language. Though her written language reveals a sub-standard literacy awareness of grammar and spelling, there is also a glimpse of her poetic voice that often emerged in our dialogue.

Her apartment revealed a similar combination of beauty and confusion. Because of her limited space, her small kitchen was crowded with stacks of kitchenware, notepads, correspondence, books, and food precariously balanced on every available surface, with a space cleared at the table for meals. Two walls of her living room were lined with shelves, where she had an attractive display of Native American Indian artifacts—statues, headdresses, and dream catchers. She and Rainbow explained that they had learned how to construct dream catchers and each had one hanging over her bed to gather in the night time sleeping memories.

Even Trudy's physical appearance suggests a contradiction in styles: long, well-groomed hair combined with several tattoos displayed on both of her arms; a cartilage ring and multiple earrings as accessories to rugged laborer's clothing. She has a wiry, physically tough looking body and a mild manner and voice.

Of all of the interviewees, Trudy seemed the most politically resistant to power plays by bureaucratic agencies and the most certain of her capacity to provide for herself and her child by "working hard." Throughout the interview process, Trudy has worked at the same job, one that she has had for over two years. This job, working in the shipping and receiving department of a local manufacturer, is physically demanding, a condition that is critically important to Trudy in any work that she does. One of her dreams from childhood was to have a motorcycle license and a bike, both of which were realized during the past nine months.

A critical change in Trudy's life was her giving up drinking, though she admits to having had a few binges when her daughter has been away visiting her grandmother (Trudy's mother). Trudy throughout our interviews qualified every story she told with some uncertainty as to its accuracy because she believes that her continual drinking has affected her memory some. She said, "After I had my daughter, I stopped drinking. I want to remember her childhood, not that my memory is very good. She's at the margins

of my life. I can't write over her paper any more. I have to kind of stay within my boundaries."

Reflections from Workplace Skills

Unlike many of the other women I interviewed in this project, Trudy did not see participation in the program as an opportunity as much as a stopgap. She is the strongest proponent of the viewpoint of the bureaucracy about what a program for the unemployed should be and what it should produce in its final result--training and a job. She was the most pragmatic about entering the program. She couldn't find any work, and she needed a financial base to care for herself and her child. Trudy described herself upon entrance into the program very differently from most of the other women I interviewed. Others were either anxious or excited about the opportunities that the program would provide. Trudy admitted that she entered the program because there were no other options. She really wanted to go to work: "I was just going through the motions cause that's what they wanted. There wasn't very much. Go there or try to find a job, and I had already been trying to do that. I had resumes everywhere. And I could get some education. I figured any education you get in any field, it doesn't hurt you." Trudy had been on welfare for almost two years when she entered the program. She was both frustrated by and resistant to the case workers defining her life possibilities and referred to all agency people as "they" and "them."

I was trying to establish a destination. I didn't have a job, I was raising Rainbow, and doing part-time jobs here and there. I was trying to get into truck driving school. I had taken that other program before, an ACT program [Access to Career Training], and we had to decide what we wanted to do with our life and everything, and I had already decided. I wanted to drive truck, and I had to meet with some of the head people and had to try to convince them. I had gotten letters from truck driver companies, and they had said they would hire me after I finished the course. They sent letters back to the

place, saying how much I would be making, the pay scale, the benefits, and everything, and I had other companies that sent me back that information, and I brought that to them, and I had done research at the library and with talking with a woman that went on the road and stuff, and they didn't think it was a good idea.

I was pretty thorough. I wanted what I wanted. But I was getting frustrated, so I said, "Why don't you tell me what I want to do with my life then?" They gave me some options. You can do this and you can do that. So I said, "I'll do that [Workplace Skills]." "Yah," they said, "do that," and then I could make a better decision, and they'd see if they could help me do what I wanted to do. So when I went into the program.

I knew that what I wanted to do with my life didn't matter anyway. I wasn't getting anywhere by fighting with them, so I said, "I'll go for the welding. It's not going to hurt me." At least it was a job I could do that wasn't a typical woman's job. I didn't want to sit on my butt all day, I wanted something physical. I wanted to be able to drive truck and load it myself, I wanted a physical job. I didn't want to have to use my head. I can't sit on my butt too long. Yah, I was in their net, I did what they said so I could survive. And I figured, I'd take the welding, get a job, make some money, and I'd go to truck driving school anyway.

Trudy's viewpoint about the program and the changes it wrought in her were also very different from other women's testimony. Her frustration with having little option but to remain indolently on welfare or to use welfare to come into this program was reflected in her discussion of the program experiences:

I thought it was a good program, I suppose. A lot of people gained from it, most people gained from it in some aspect, if nothing else to brush up on things. I think the main point of the [life skills] class was personal,

like tips from the book, like people started putting notes on their door to remind them of things, stuff like that, how to better handle their time, stuff that they had to do on a day, handle their schedule better. It never affected me, cause I didn't study anyway. I'd do my homework while I was there. I'd do it while they were talking. Math, I'd do it way ahead, while she was telling us how to do one thing, I'd just do it from the book. When I took the test at the end, I did worse. The tests, I wasn't even doing most of them anyway. I'd do half the test, that would pass me, and then I'd fill in the dots. As long as I passed. I wouldn't want to be considered a failure either. Average is good. I didn't care much. Why strain my head when it didn't matter?

I never found academic studies to help a person at all, not me anyway. I keep trying it. It's interesting for awhile, but I don't see that it really helps. The knowledge I've gained on the street far outweighs the knowledge I've gained in the classroom. I find most of the people in the classroom, they haven't been there.

I went out of it the same way I went in, except that I had a couple more friends. I met some people, and that's always good. My teachers said something negative, that I didn't assert myself through my classes. Well, I suppose that wasn't negative. They were calling it the way they were seeing it, and it was accurate.

Trudy's insistence on supporting her teachers' assessment of her as accurate exemplifies her desire to keep the record straight about "truth." She described her work in the welding program very clearly and as in the Workplace Skills program, she insisted on making apparent what she had earned and had not earned:

I went into welding because I knew that was what I was going to do. I did well, except for one book class. I didn't do well in that. It was the one on

the gases and stuff. I think I got a D in it. I asked him to fail me, but he didn't. He said I deserved a D. No, I deserved an F, and I wanted an F, and he wouldn't give it to me.

I asked Trudy why she wouldn't want to know about gases if she were going to be a welder. As with all of our dialogue, Trudy's response to this question was practical and clear in revealing that her interest in any kind of education was simply to gain what she needed to know for the job at hand and not to extend her knowledge for some future possibility.

Why would I need to if I was going into a weld shop with all the mixtures there, it's already set in the tanks, all I have to do is learn how to turn it on. It wasn't that big a goal for me. It was just something to take up some time to get a little ahead so that I could be a truck driver. It was just a filler. It was no ambition of mine to be around sparks, with my hair and stuff, and burning my body up. I got scars from welding, I wasn't that fond of it; it was just something to do for awhile.

When I went to school, I could not have anything I wanted. It was within their guidelines. But I passed. It's not like their money went down the toilet, I passed. I learned what it was they wanted me to learn. In the welding program, I didn't really have any interaction with other people. I went there, and I went in my booth, and I did my job. We'd just weld. I'd just go in there and figure it out by trying it. If it didn't flow good enough, I'd try it a different way, until I'd get a good bead and then I'd go out and show it to him. You find out after you do it, you can see. Actually some of the stuff I didn't do the way you were supposed to, but it came out all right so I just kept doing it that way.

Trudy's description in the above passage of the way she learned welding is consistent with her desire to "figure it out by trying it" in all aspects of her identity as a

student and as a person. Her inability to anticipate where she might get herself in trouble in advance of being in the midst of it is metaphorically represented by her learning to weld: "You find out after you do it, you can see" the weaknesses that inform the next experience.

Despite Trudy's insistence that both programs changed little about her life, she continued to emphasize the importance of the relationships that she made while attending Workplace Skills and the changes she made in her living circumstances. As she pointed out above, she believes she came out of the program the same way she entered it, except for "a couple of friends." She remembered with humor the competition she established with one of the participants who became her friend; they would try to outdo each other in speed and accuracy in the typing course. After Trudy had been in the program a few weeks, she was offered a job and decided to drop out of Workplace Skills. Within a few days she realized she had made a mistake, and it was through the negotiating of her friends in the program with the director that Trudy was allowed to return to classes. She also described the friendships she developed with a few women in her program who had children Rainbow's age. After classes she occasionally visited some of these newly acquired friends in their homes where their children came to know each other. Though Trudy did not see her program participation as more than a bureaucratic stop gap, some of the relationships she made during her enrollment are still sustained today.

She followed up Workplace Skills with the welding program. She was the only woman in this program, among a group of men who saw welding as a man's job. As Trudy described the changes in her experiences in school during her year of welding curriculum, she "didn't really have any interaction with other people." She occasionally saw some of the women she had met during Workplace Skills between classes, but their schedules and goals were different. In the opening statement to Trudy's Chapter, she claims that "you have to have windows. . . or you are isolated within your own tomb." Trudy's decision to enter the welding program isolated her within her own welding booth. Both during the program and in the welding jobs that followed her completion of it, she

continued to be isolated in a man's world where the "tough" resistant side of Trudy was required to "do her job." She worked at a few jobs in it before there were cutbacks and the few jobs available in the region were retained by the most experienced welders. The rest of them, including Trudy, went back on unemployment.

The welding jobs I held were just spot welding mostly. All you had to do was just spots. They'd have a little drilled hole, and all you had to do was press the stick in it and *ZZZZT, ZZZZT*, that was it. The only welding job I had to construct very much was one where I made dumpsters, the welded frames, I made the frames. They showed me once, and then I just did it.

The image that I saw revealed in Trudy when she described her participation in Workplace Skills and then in the follow-up welding program is consistent with other pictures that Trudy drew about herself. The interaction with people she gained in Workplace Skills was its most important characteristic. In articulating the difference between competing with a friend for the top speed on a typing test and closing herself for eight hours a day in her own welding booth, Trudy had learned that though she wanted a job that required physical work rather than sitting on her "butt" all day, she needed to do this work in the context of people. As we will see in the last section of this chapter, Trudy is a relational person who ultimately considered the value of the program from the perspective of many of the friends she had made there, some of whom she has continued to be in touch with.

Trudy was the only participant I interviewed who had already attended college before entering the program, and though she was resistant to bringing energy to her course work, she retrospectively came to see that its foundational support was critically important:

That's exactly the way, whether people look at it in those terms or not, that's in essence what's going on, because if you put a space shuttle on sand and try to have a lift off, you've got an awful mess. You've got to have

the launching pad first, and that in essence was exactly what the program was-- a launching pad. It gave people a little footing and a clean footing, a place where they could start and feel secure on the land. You know, that's about what it did.

Trudy's image of the program being a launching pad, a place where people could "start and feel secure on the land," became for me an image I wrestled with throughout our interviews about Trudy's own history, her own beginnings and transitions to the Trudy I have come to know today. Related to me often with humor, sometimes with passivity, and always with strong moral judgment, Trudy's stories about her childhood and her young adult life are threaded with violence and deprivation. At the same time, Trudy remains philosophical and poetic, refusing either to attribute blame or to deny the importance of each of her experiences in bringing her to feeling certain about establishing and maintaining a stable life for herself and Rainbow.

Private Troubles: Stories from the Past

Childhood Memories

Trudy's earliest memories of childhood are grounded in a picture of a mother who was always working and of a father who was always absent, both in her youngest years in Connecticut and then in the rest of her growing up years in a small rural community in Downeast Maine. Her father was a truck driver, a job that took him away from the family, but as Trudy described her father's absence and presence intermittently in her family's life, a portrait emerged that reveals more than an occupational obligation to be away. Trudy's childhood memories of her own identity and her sense of herself in the world seem to be separate from her sense of herself with her parents. In fact as her reflections on her mother and father were offered, it became apparent to me that both of her parents were absent most of the time, although only her father was often gone. Unlike many of the other interviewees, Trudy's portrait of both of her parents was presented without any negative

judgment of their responsibility for what happened to her growing up or of their role in causing her pain or deprivation:

He was a truck driver, he was never home. She worked, all of the time, waitressing mostly. My father didn't live in Connecticut, he left after each one of us was born. I have two older sisters, one's 31—Margaret; one's 34—that's Jane; and I've got a younger brother, 29; his name is Jerry. My first sister was born in Bangor, both of my parents were from Maine, and then we went right to Connecticut. When we got down there, he left. I don't know, he was gone for a few years. After he had my oldest sister, he stayed for a couple of years, and then he left, and she got pregnant again and then he left, and then he'd come back, and she got pregnant again, and he left again for couple years. I think he was just immature, it was too much for him.

And then he came and got us. He brought us to Maine, they had kept in touch and he had come down, and he decided that he wanted us all to move up there. So we all moved up there, and then mum had to run out all his girlfriends from town. As soon we moved up to Maine from Connecticut, when I was eight, then he was there, well you know, honestly, his clothes and stuff were there but he wasn't around.

After their move to Maine, Trudy's mother once more found a job and continued to work as a waitress to hold the family together economically. They lived remotely and poorly, about five miles from the town where they went to school and Trudy's mother worked. It was in this environment that Trudy came to see work as a physical activity, as she and her siblings learned to contribute to their hard living life.

Yah we worked ever since we were kids. There was big potato farms, and hay farms, so we'd bale hay, and work in the potato fields, and cut wood, and do chores for the older people and help them out. We rented a

farmhouse on like 100 and something acres of land, it was humungus, 75 dollars a month. All the time we lived there, they never upped the rent.

Me and my brother were like the boys in the family, I guess you'd say. We did outside chores: we shoveled, we split the wood--split the wood, hauled the wood, stacked the wood, lawns. We did most of the outside stuff, like hauled the water, because most of the time we didn't have water, so we'd have to go up, I don't know about a mile and a half and lug buckets of water down. We had most of the outside chores. We had a bathroom, but we had to flush it with a bucket of water.

There was plumbing, we had a well, but in the summer it'd run dry, and in the winter it'd freeze, so in the fall and the spring we had water. We bought food, we'd go out to the store and get it, I don't know about five miles. My older sister is the one who swept the floors most of the time. She was, I hate to say it, kind of prissy. She was the inside person, not to get dirty and stuff like that. We had inside chores too. My brother's was to take out the garbage and burn it, mine was cat boxes, dusting. What did Jane do? I don't know what Jane did. She had a chore though, she was a year older than me. I was always the fat one in the family. My nickname was "Bull" all the time I was growing up. I used to beat up people and stuff. I was aggressive.

The absence of her father continued to have an intermittent influence on their lives. She remembered the last time her father came back as one where her mother pretty much gave up on the marriage:

He had taken off one year, a couple months before Christmas and didn't come back, and then three or four months later, he come back and asked where his stuff was, and she smacked him over the head with a frying pan. She thought she'd killed him. She'd knocked him out. I was in my

middle teens. She probably sent us out of the room, she usually did when they were going to have an argument or something. We were sent outside, go do something. I didn't hear them argue that much.

The frying pan incident related above was in Trudy's memory the time when her mother decided to seek a divorce. Though her mother remarried about six years ago, her father never remarried before he died when Trudy was twenty-nine years old. "He was still in love with her. He was waiting for her to come back. He kept telling her to smarten up." Trudy's description of each of her parents in her memory of them as a child provides a revealing portrait of Trudy's own character that I previously related of disciplinarian and playmate, a blend of both of her parents in her relationship with Rainbow.

[Your mother?] A pillar of strength, the backbone of the family. What she said went, and that was that. Because you knew. I mean you could tell that she went through so much, had to work so hard, you didn't want to give her any grief. It just wasn't right. She did everything in her power to make our lives better, you didn't disrespect her.

[Your father?] Playful, I don't know, he was just playful. He took life, ah, you knew he felt things, but he never really showed it. Even if they bugged him, it was a joke. He was light-hearted, carefree. I don't think he had an enemy around. She always loved him. She told him that when they got a divorce, that she'd always love him. She was just tired.

While this strand of Trudy's childhood regarding her parents was being offered with a reflective respect for each of them, her mother because she worked so hard and her father because he loved and played so hard, the strands associated with Trudy's own development and identity awareness as a child revealed a pervasive absence of attention toward herself and her siblings because of her parents being so constrained by their own interests and obligations. Throughout her childhood stories, Trudy established a clear basis for her history of substance abuse, her suicidal orientation, and her regard for hard

physical work as an antidote to her confusions that she often covered up with aggression. The first story was evoked by my asking Trudy to tell me the story she most often remembered about her childhood years. She brought me back to her earliest memories in Connecticut.

The first thing I thought of was the tooth fairy. My tooth fairy didn't leave change under the pillows. Usually one of my baby-sitters when I was younger, he didn't leave change under my pillow, or gum or anything, he used to come in and fool around. That's the first thing I thought of was the tooth fairy. Yes, the first memory I have was, well not the tooth fairy, but stuff along that line. But I always just call it the tooth fairy.

I thought, when we were kids, you know mum had to work, so we had baby-sitters, and I always thought I could fly when I was a kid, and I didn't know until later, that it was because I was stoned all the time. Cause our baby-sitters were hippies, and they smoked a lot of dope and did a lot of acid, and they used to feed me beer and shit even when I was in diapers. So I was always drinking. Really, I can't remember a time when I didn't. I remember it being a part of my life at all times.

They lived there, and my uncle, her only brother, hung around them and they were mostly his friends. They were kids too, I mean when I think about it now, they must've been kids too. And I don't blame them. I think it was just because they were shot with drugs and stuff, and they didn't know. Usually they'd come at the same time the tooth fairy would come, so I just called them the tooth fairy.

My mother weren't even aware of it. She was so busy and stuff, and I think that because it started so young, I mean it wasn't like well when a teenager all of sudden decides they're going to get into stuff, you notice a

change? There was nothing for her to see because I had always been that way.

[You didn't judge it as something horrible, see it in an unpleasant way?] No, I don't remember associating it in those fashions at all, but I remember finding out later in life that it wasn't happening to my brother and sisters. I always thought it did. I have no idea. I know they used to think I was cute. I remember sitting there, I remember I used to ride around with my uncle and he used to give me a beer and cigars, and I was in a diaper, standing up in his car, and we'd drive around and I'd drink with him, I was his little drinking buddy.

When Trudy's family was transplanted to Maine, the pattern of being treated as a sexual object continued in her new home. "When we, when I was eight, they didn't come along, it was in Connecticut, it was my youngest memories, but when I moved to Maine, it was different ones. All the way through my life just about." We will return to the stories of Trudy's emerging sexual identity as a young adult in the section on relationships and gender. First, however, I would like to establish Trudy's conflicting identity as a school girl who drank her way through a very successful high school career.

Schooling

The contrasts in Trudy that I have already noted were apparent in all of her stories about public school. She focused particularly on her high school years. Her high school "wasn't very big; our graduating class was maybe forty-two." Both in her written survey and in her interviews with me, her stories revealed that she was part of a teen-age community, she was well-liked by her peers and teachers, and she gained a lot of prestige in her activities and classes, despite the fact that she was always using drugs and alcohol throughout her public schooling.

When I asked her to talk about her favorite classes in school, the same characteristics that later were revealed in the Workplace Skills program were apparent in her stories. Her school work was inconsistent, yet she managed to "pass everything."

I really liked all of my classes. I got along with all of my teachers. Miss D____, my math teacher, I never had to pay attention to what she was doing because I was good at math in college level courses. She told me I had to [continue], but it was my senior year, and I didn't want to do the work. So I went to Math 3, addition and subtraction and stuff, after I had Algebra I and II, and I had aced both of them. One of the teachers I had in senior year didn't require me to spell correctly, no punctuation. She said I had poetic license in her class, so I didn't need to spell words right, I didn't need to use punctuation, capitalization. She gave me a book on e.e. cummings, all I did was keep a journal.

I got C's in Biology and stuff like that, but other than that I got A's and B's. I got into the University of Maine and I passed to get in the Army too, but I was 50 pounds overweight. I always was [overweight]. I didn't start smoking until my senior year. I used to go out and smoke dope, but they told me if I wasn't smoking cigarettes, I couldn't be out in the smoking area, so I started smoking cigarettes. You weren't supposed to if you were an athlete, but they let me stay on the team.

Trudy's stories about her high school years also revealed her emerging political stance against unjust treatment and where she came to identify herself as a champion of the underdog.

I didn't think it was fair for anyone to pick on anyone else, because everyone is an individual. You don't pick on someone because they are different. You're supposed to intertwine yourself around them and gain knowledge. It's like going in a forest and cutting down all of one kind of

tree, because there's not as many as the other ones. You don't go and cut down all the baby trees because the big ones are stronger, because in years to come, you're not going to have the strong ones. You don't do that.

Trudy's view of ethical behavior was defined very clearly by her and came from her mother's instilling her with "morals and strength. With that I can go throughout the world. Don't lie, don't steal, if somebody's hurt, help them; if somebody's dying out, talk to them. Open your heart to people." Two stories, one about a teacher and one about a fellow student, revealed both Trudy's sensitivity to appropriate relational behavior and the aggressive stance she adopted when she felt somebody was getting hurt:

I didn't get along with one of my PE teachers. I don't know, it was like she was pretending to be like a kid, and she weren't. She didn't know what responsibility was. She tried to humiliate people in Phys Ed, and some people just aren't athletic, you know. They're not there to be humiliated by anybody. They're there to take that class because they need the credit. I didn't care for her approach. I mean, if you don't like a student, that's fine, but you never try to embarrass a student in front of her peers. That's just distasteful.

I observed it and I told her what I thought about it. And she usually kicked me out. I didn't think it was fair. You don't downgrade anybody for anything they do. You can give them constructive criticism, pull them to the side, but never humiliate somebody in front of peers, you never know how much damage that's going to do, that's just not appropriate. And if you're going to be in a status like that, you can't be like that. I didn't care for her. I didn't put up with too much. If they did something that was inappropriate, I'd let them know how I felt about it, and I'd relieve myself from class, and I'd go talk to the principal cause I got along good with the principal.

Trudy's judgment about her PE teacher was not just about what she saw as the teacher's unfair treatment of less able students. It also revealed Trudy's attitude about the obligation people in authority have to behave in an appropriate way, one that befits the status of their position. Her vocal stance on fairness was again recreated in another story she told about her friends' insensitivity to a classmate who had been voted King of the Prom. She became the Queen by default.

None of the girls wanted to go with him. We voted him, he had a great personality, but he had buck teeth, big deal. The whole class voted for him, but the girls who were nominated wouldn't march with him, and I got up and gave them a lecture. That was inappropriate! They were hurting his feelings, and they were belittling themselves by thinking that the looks of somebody makes them a whole person. I lectured the whole class about it, and then they asked the runner-up if she wanted to do it, and she declined too. I lit right into them: "I'd be proud to march with him; any woman should be proud to march with him. He is a damn good person." "Well, you can march with him," they all agreed. So I marched with him! He thought it was wonderful, he was thrilled. It was like a big uplift for him. It wasn't fair.

Trudy's sense of herself as a teenager in regard to her peers was very similar to the stories Germaine, as well as other interviewees, told about a mix of friends in school. She found her value in being ecumenical, in accepting each of her friends and not establishing a particular strata to identify with:

I felt that everybody was an equal friend, because I'd go with the people who partied, and I'd go with the jocks, because I was in all the sports, I'd go with the people who walked around with ah pens and people would call them nerds. I got along with everybody, I was the go between, I had to have a taste of each of the lines.

I varsitied in all the sports--soccer, field hockey, volleyball, softball, basketball. I varsitied in all of them and I got trophies in all of them. [How

could you be a drinker and an athlete?] Don't ask me, because my coach knew I was a drinker, but he kept me on the team. I used to drink with his roommate. And the Phys Ed teacher who left was my coach for field hockey and volley ball, and she knew I drank because I drank with her husband.

Trudy graduated from high school with above average grades and an acquisition of labels that revealed that despite her daily drinking, she had managed to maintain a public self that her peers admired. She was president of the pep club, president of the student council, president of her class, and a varsity athlete in five sports. But she was also kicked out of Upward Bound, a college prep program two summers in a row for "drinking and drugs." When I asked her how she felt about herself as a teen, she said,

I don't know, numbed. I poured myself into writing, I wrote all the time. If I ever had any kind of emotion, it went on paper, because as far as emotions, I weren't crying or anything like that. Nobody would see [my feelings], unless I was cutting myself up or something, cause I did that for awhile too. Most of the time, most of the time. It was like an outward thing, instead of using emotions like crying. In order to cry, I had to feel the pain. I only went to the hospital once, this one [shows a scar], it wasn't that much. I knew I wasn't going to kill myself. I didn't really think I was going to die, but I didn't care either way.

Trudy really wanted to go into the military after high school. She was 180 pounds and 5'1" and needed to lose fifty pounds to be accepted. "No piece of authority ever seemed to bother me. I would never stand up and take notice. That's why I wanted to get in the Army. I thought I needed to get in a situation where I had to face authority. I had to listen to it instead of going right up to it or walking aside." Unable to have her first choice, Trudy decided to attend the University of Maine:

I went to college for a year, majored in behavioral sciences. I was kicked out of the dorm, but I could still go to school, but it gets kind of cold

up there. I was sleeping under bridges and in churches or whatever to keep going to school. I had just gotten out of the farm when I went to college. The farm is a dry-out center. As soon as I got out of high school, I tried to dry out and then go on to college, and I wasn't in college very long and I started doing it all again.

I was a hazard to the student body. I had a drinking problem and I was doing a lot of drugs, and I tried to scare somebody by hanging her over a balcony two stories up. I wasn't going to drop her! They asked me to leave the dorm, so I lived in, jeez, about seventeen places, I lived at the convent for awhile, and a couple of families, and garages and stuff that I could get into.

Trudy remembers doing "pretty good" in her courses at UME. "I didn't get A's, but I passed." Just like in high school, she never stopped drinking and doesn't know how she passed. She took anthropology, speech, creative writing, music appreciation. She passed everything but psychology, "because I disagreed with everything he had to say. He didn't know what he was talking about. He hadn't lived on the streets before, he didn't know what he was talking about. So I argued with him and left."

During much of the interview process I sustained an uncertain stance, almost a suspension of disbelief, in listening to Trudy's stories, which I wanted to label as "bizarre," a term that to me implied a negative judgment of her behavior. Her particular mixture of terrible tales and reflective articulateness about them and her juxtaposition of alcoholic recklessness and moral rectitude caused in me a disconcerting wavering between anguish for her suffering, irritation with her destructive behavior, respect for her courage, and affection for her intrinsic goodness. As we continued our dialogue, as I came to know the complexity of Trudy's behavioral crises, her dependency, indeed her reliance on alcohol clearly became the foundation upon which she both survived and on many occasions almost died.

Surrounding all of Trudy's important life events was her connection with people. With the exception of her siblings, and one important female relationship she described in her teens, all of her young adult relationships were made either on the streets or in a bar, mostly in an alcoholic haze.

Relationships and Gender

When Trudy left the college at the end of her freshman year, she continued her life as a worker and a drunk. Her sister was having problems in Florida, her boyfriend was "beating her and stuff," and Trudy went down there to help her out by working at a fast food restaurant. She took a second trip down there, a year later, a trip that eventually resulted in a suicide attempt. She, her brother, and one of his friends took a car that was "illegal" and drove down.

I'd bounced a lot of checks, I think over \$3000 in checks, and my brother was wanted for something, DWI or something, so he didn't want to go to jail, so we all just took off for Florida and hung out for awhile. It seems I affronted many people, because if you're drunk, well, I was staying in the car, and all I had was just the clothes I had on, I didn't have any other clothes. We'd stay in the car, try to walk around during the day. We hit it at the wrong time because the time to pick oranges was up. I must have looked pretty grim.

We had to get rid of the car because we stole license plates out of a junk yard to put on it to get down there. We sold it for fifteen bucks, we each got five dollars, and we all headed in different directions. They thought I'd get quicker rides if I went by myself. I slept under bridges, and it took me, oh boy, a good month and a half to make it back to Maine.

I ended up having some problems in Hartford. I got beat and stuff. I was trying to find my way back to Route 95, cause I had met some guy in New York and he insisted that I couldn't walk through New York so he

bought me a bus ticket to get me out of New York. The bus went from New York to Hartford. I got off at East Hartford, and I didn't know how to get back to Route 95, so I was asking some people, and they said that they'd show me where. So we were going through all these alleyways and stuff, and there was a whole lot of them, and they beat the hell out of me.

I went out on the highway, no not the highway, there were like four lanes, I walked right out in the middle of that, and finally this policewoman pulled over, and picked me up, and dropped me off at a crisis center. I was just kind of roughed up a little. As soon as you woke up, they gave you something to eat and you had to leave. And I didn't know where to go and I was a little shaken up so I went into a church. It was all in Spanish too, and I hung out there cause there was a service going on, and I met these older ladies that didn't speak English, but their granddaughter did, and they brought me to a blood draw, so I donated some blood so I could get something to eat. They left before I was done donating, I don't know where they went.

I got back on the highway, and instead of going to Maine, I started heading the other way. I was in pretty rough shape, and I didn't want anyone I knew to see me, so I started heading the other way. I ended up in Wilcot for awhile. I hung out with this drinker for almost a month.

He found me. I was standing outside a bar, and he says, "Why don't you come in and have a drink?" and I said, "Cause I ain't got no money." And he said, "Well, come in. I'll buy you a couple." So I went in with him, he was in his late fifties, I'd say. I went in and that dropped, and I ended up going back to his house, and I stayed there about a month, in the same clothes. I was wearing about 36 waist pants, because the clothes that I had been wearing were all a mess and ripped up and stuff. They were the only

clothes they [the crisis center] had, so I was wearing these pants, big string, and a shirt down to my knees, pretty pathetic looking.

Trudy's relationship with alcohol and with the people she met surrounding her drinking always seemed to put her in physical and emotional danger to me. I asked her how she could smile while telling her traumatic tales.

When I was a kid, I had a list of things that I had to accomplish and they weren't like the normal things that people would like to accomplish. I always wanted to go to jail, I wanted to be homeless, I wanted to find out what this bottom was that people talked about, which I think I never found. [Isn't get beaten and raped in an alley close to the bottom?] Yeah, and from different people's standards of life, it probably was, a lot of people that would have been their bottom, but I could take it, and I don't think anybody gets dished out any more than they can handle. It's all the way your mind's going to take it.

At that point I didn't care. I didn't think my life was that big of a deal. I didn't care if I died, so I didn't hold a fear on what the next day was going to bring because I didn't care. It was like it was nobody's fault. When they beat me on the streets of East Hartford, it wasn't their fault really. It was what society had done to them. I was an outsider walking in, and I was a white person, the person that had been stepping them down all of their life, and they had to get back at society, and to them I was a piece of society. I don't think it was a personal attack on me as an individual. It was what I represented.

Trudy's insistence that her discoveries about herself had to be founded on lived experiences and that her understanding of other people's needs could only be developed through feeling them herself is reminiscent of my earlier observation of the way Trudy preferred to learn welding and other subjects in school. Whether it was an alcoholic binge,

living in a car, or trusting strangers on the street, she continued to accrue an inventory of experiences that she would use to help other people in trouble.

That's the stuff I had to put myself through to help people when I got older. But I didn't want to help them through a book. I had to be there. You can't help somebody to become, you can't tell somebody not to drink, if you've never taken a drink in your life. You don't know what you're asking them to give up. You can't tell somebody that you understand what they are going through when they think about putting a gun to their head unless you've been there. Until you've heard that click, that trigger snap, you just don't understand. [Did you hear that trigger snap?]

Yah, in Bristol, when I was living with that older man. It was a Ruger, and I couldn't open it to check if there was a shell in it. I couldn't open it, and I just assumed, since he kept it inside the door that it must have been loaded. Why would he keep it beside the door so handy? So I wrote a nice little poem, you know, and I sat there and I cried a little bit, and then I clicked it and I collapsed. There was nothing in it, and I was shaking, and it was loud too.

Trudy's description of her month long event in Connecticut ended with the click of the Ruger. She wasn't drunk at the time, but it might have been "an overshoot from a drunk, I suppose, because as soon as he got home, we'd go to the bar and drink until they closed, and then I'd wake up. I was his drinking buddy, and he never did anything with me. He slept in the same bed with me, but he never did anything with me." Trudy decided to leave because "she was going nowhere."

When Trudy was in trouble in Connecticut, she called neither her sisters nor her mother. "I would have called my mother, I would have called somebody, but it wasn't somebody's problem. I got myself on the streets, I'll get myself off the streets." The one call she did make was to her friend Anne, whom she had met when she was in high school.

In all of her stories, Anne is the person that Trudy has contacted by telephone or correspondence to share both her happiness and her fears. In Trudy's description of this relationship, Anne was both a mentor and the object of Trudy's first infatuation:

I had a friend between my sophomore and junior year, and junior and senior year at Upward Bound. I met one of the counselors that was there and she took a liking to me. I don't even know why. But she was a photographer, and I gave her some of the stuff that I wrote, and we used to go and shoot pictures together and stuff. We became pen pals and we still write. I went and seen her after I had Rainbow, and she couldn't believe it. She was ten years older than me. I'd call her when I was drunk, I'd hitchhike over to her house, she lived on Prince Edward Island, with a woman.

Peculiar how it just started, and in all of the years, I've only seen her four times, first in those two summer programs, and then I didn't see her for years, till after I had Rainbow. We kept writing to each other, and when I was in Hartford, I called her. I told her what stuff was happening, and she said, "Why are you calling me?" And I said, "I don't want you to do anything. It's my life, I'll work it out. I just wanted to hear somebody I knew." I always loved her, she was like a big sister or something.

We had a relationship that was so tight that we didn't need words. A lot of times people use words as fillers, because they are not comfortable with the person, so they've got to speak. We, we didn't have to speak, we'd go out shooting together. We went out on one of my photo shoots when I got to pick what we wanted to shoot, and it was a windy day, and the volleyball net was blowing, and we just threw the ball in the center and took pictures of the ball on the bounce. [Another time] we was in Boston, I don't know what hotel we were in, but it was all these stories up and we took pictures like down through all the stairwells.

Anne remains in Trudy's head the first love relationship that she had where she wasn't regarded as a sexual object. "I don't see her in any sexual way. I love her, but I would never taint the relationship." Trudy regards her gender as a significant factor in her childhood sexual experiences.

I think it had an impact. I don't think the tooth fairy would have come to my bed had I been a boy. When I was in Hartford, when I got mugged and beaten and everything else, that was part of the tooth fairy. It was, if somebody wants it that bad, what are you going to do to stop it. Take it. Who cares? It's not like it affects me. I'm a mattress, I'm an inanimate object. Do what you have to do and go about your business. And then I'll put my act together and go about mine. I don't know how else to say it. If I was a man, perhaps that wouldn't have happened, but perhaps I'd be laying dead.

In Hartford, in Florida, sometimes I wondered, Jeez, I must just keep walking right into it, like I ain't got a clue, or something. I don't know. I don't know how I didn't end up with a child. There was one stretch of time that I would just screw anything. I was like a whore. I didn't get paid for it though. It was almost like I had become, towards screwing around with people like I was toward the bottle. It happened, big deal. It wasn't a pleasurable thing, even when I was doing it. It was like punishment or something, I don't know what I was punishing myself for.

Trudy's relationships in recent years have all been lesbian ones. She has publicly acknowledged her sexual preference and has recently been frustrated by the treatment Rainbow has been getting in their housing project: They picked on Rainbow because someone told them that Rainbow's mother was gay. So Rainbow said, 'Well gay means happy, and my mother is not happy.' In regard to her gender, Trudy offered the following reflection:

Being a woman I guess represents, ah, you have to face all of your issues, I think. If you're going to have children, you're going to have to be the main source of everything for that child. So if you're a woman, you're going to have to be stronger because look at society. It's mostly male-based and it most always will be. If you are a woman and you are going to get anywhere, you have to be harder, because you can't break down and cry. If you want to get someplace, where are you going to get? You are making yourself out to be weak. For what? For the man to come in and pull your life around. No, you have to take the reins of your own life, and for a woman, you have to be harder. It's not easy running away from your issues, I think, because it's never just your life. If you don't have children, I don't think it matters whether you're a male or a female.

And really, in this life, it is so unpredictable, with jobs and everything else. I'd be scared, I'd be scared to have another one. There's no way I'd be able to afford it. I imagine I'd have enough income for two, but I wouldn't want to share my love anyway. It's all Rainbow's.

Trudy Today

Trudy, like all of the other women I interviewed, is resilient and committed to independence and self-sufficiency. For her self-sufficiency is more than just a job. "Anybody could have a job really. It's more what you think about yourself." Trudy's political stance in regard to the underdog is strongly articulated when she talks about the welfare system and its provisions. Her positions evoke the notions of "false generosity" (p. 29) that were raised by Paulo Freire (1990) in Pedagogy of the Oppressed:

I'm not even sure they believe they're doing anything. I don't know as they even care. They are pacifying the middle-class by saying they are going to help the underclass, or what is labeled the underclass. They are giving people winter clothes forgetting that sometimes it's summer, and what

happens in the summer? They go naked? Nothing is forever except for ah your inner self--what you believe, and even that changes, but you can come to terms with yourself, like you matter. Almost everything that the government has designed to help the needy or less desirable people, they give it and take it at the same time. They give you a home that they need a key to and they can prance through your home whenever they want and they do. They unlock the door and walk in.

I have written them letters about trespassing. Once a year they inspect, and I have asked them not to do it unless I am here but they do. This isn't my home, this is their home that they can walk in at any time. They do that. You can say anything but your actions are completely different. I've gone around and around with these people. And this is just a small example of what they do. The education that they offer: "We'll give you an education if you choose what we want you to do." I didn't want to be a welder, I wanted to be a truck driver. I wanted a home that I could have, I'd struggled to get things that I wanted and then I had them stolen right out of my house. And who takes responsibility? Am I supposed to take responsibility? Someone comes into my house, something was happening down cellar, they weren't supposed to be in my house, but they were down there. They stole all of my power tools and most of my hand tools. [Who is they?] That's a good question, someone that housing let in here. But they won't take responsibility for it. Some sub-contractors. I don't know, but all I know is that this time, I'm out all my power tools and hand tools.

Last time, they unplugged my freezer, and I didn't notice it for three weeks. If they would have told me that they were down there and that they had unplugged something, I might have been able to plug it back in, but three weeks later, I have one of those big chest freezers full of food that is all

ruined, five big garbage bags that I have to haul out of there, my freezer is now ruined, all the water and everything, that's \$500. Who took responsibility? No it's not their responsibility, it's my responsibility, but I am at work and I don't know who is going in my house.

Trudy wants to get out of the system even to the support she receives by living in low income housing. Her desire for control of her own life that is tenuous in her dependency on the bureaucrats for her housing is a central goal in her decision to go for maintenance and stability in the years since she was in Workplace Skills. "I want a house, I want some land, and I'm saving for it." Between the time she was laid off from her last job as a welder and the one she has had since, she did not return to the welfare system.

She found this job, one that she wasn't prepared for specifically by her studies, but one that in the past two years has become important to her for many reasons. Trudy needs to work and to feel some personal sense of value in the job she does. For her another characteristic of self-sufficiency is not just a job, though work is extremely important to her. The atmosphere of relationship among workers and the commitment to taking pride in the work are essential characteristics of her view of responsibility as a person.

Like Trudy's testimony about her high school stance against dishonesty and unfair treatment, in Trudy's job she is vigilant about uprooting unspoken tensions that she feels in her job in shipping and receiving. She has found a voice to build a community, and she uses it. "They weren't working as a team with common goals, so I called a meeting and we talked about it. And they said that they were really feeling inadequate and stuff, like they really didn't have to give it their all. [Now] everybody pulls their own weight, most of the time, and if they don't, they know that they're not. I usually let them know." The voice that is revealed in all of the interviews with Trudy is a voice that every woman I have talked to demonstrates about themselves in one way or another. It is the voice of a person with spirit, a strong work ethic, an independence, and a self-value. Trudy describes the importance of care in helping people to see if "they're not working to their

potential." There was a problem in her department regarding one of the workers, Bobbie, who was not "pulling his weight." Her basis of caring is similar to Nel Noddings' (1984) notion of "engrossment," an acknowledgment of "the other" and a recognition that relation and reciprocity are significant in the day-to-day partnership that a working team must have:

If you are near a porcupine and you are careful not to upset it, it probably won't raise its quills, but if you startle it or get it on the defense, then somebody is going to get hurt. I asked them how they felt about it, I got them to describe what they were feeling, because you could feel that, the weight on everybody.

We all wanted to have cross-training downstairs, that was last summer, and that was one of the reasons why Bobbie didn't feel adequate and stuff, was because he didn't feel like he, ah, like we needed him and stuff, so we decided to cross-train. You'd think that would be a management decision but it wasn't. It bettered our work atmosphere, and I think it was pretty much [that] we all wanted to do it.

Trudy's primary characteristics of disciplinarian and playmate that I have described earlier are very apparent in her style at work. Her job is physically hard, but she wants to have fun while she does it.

We wrote out a form, all of us in shipping. Well, we didn't all write it, but we all signed it. We agreed upon it before we gave it to the management about how we thought we should be upgraded, because we have to deal with the hazardous waste that comes in, we have to inspect the material, re-label the material. We do the job of quality control and everything else, it seems, because we are the last outlet to catch the problem, which there shouldn't be any problem after it goes through four or five people's hands, but you know, there's a lot more than there ought to be, and

I think it's due to a lack of ah , really, interest. I don't think that many people care. They just don't.

Downstairs, we've come a long way. It seems like we have really united together, and we've done things, ah, I suggested that we have show and tell, because it seemed like morale was slack, and people brought in stuff for show and tell last week. Joanne brought in a porta potty because we don't have a toilet on our floor. We have to go up a few flights, and Debbie brought in one of them pillows that is anatomically correct. Rainbow made some stuff for me to bring in, and it's too bad, that was Friday and I was sick, and it was my idea and I didn't get to tell about anything. But they all had a good time.

And during October we all dressed up, we decided that we were all going to dress up and everybody brought in a few things just in case one of the men, we have two men downstairs and they don't like to join in, so we dressed them up too and then we went on a parade during lunch break through the whole factory. [Are these all your ideas?] Yah, I believe that one was too. But it adds something interesting and it brings our bond together. We have to work together and we're getting so we know each other's moods. We know that if, everybody knows that if I'm in a bad mood, the best thing to do is to try and find something to do away from me, because I get real testy, like the porcupine thing. When Joanne's in a bad mood, instead of leaving her alone, like they do to me, we know to do more work so she can slack off more. We've gotten to a good point where we know when we are supposed to cover for each other.

Even management will come down and note what we do downstairs. We've got a mascot, an overstuffed bear we pulled out of the dumpster

because we wanted a mascot. Debbie went down to the dumpster and pulled it out.

Trudy has been working at the same job for almost two years, a job that is physically demanding and stable, the two attributes that Trudy finds most important in maintaining her life with her daughter. "I don't have the same drive as I used to have, in terms of the goals I have for myself. I've calmed down and realized that just to maintain is all I can do. As long as I have stability with Rainbow, I'll be fine."

Trudy's level of stability has changed. Though she claims that nothing that she "wanted to accomplish can be accomplished," her current life belies that claim. Last summer she was able to get her financial life stable enough to get a loan for a car and her motorcycle, a childhood dream. She recently went to her bank to pre-qualify for the purchase of a home of her own. This goal of buying a home is tied to her desire to create an environment where Rainbow has both space in nature to grow in a healthy way and chores that will teach her responsibility.

I just went through my bank. I wanted to look for a house, but I wanted to know a price range. I asked them for a fifteen year mortgage, and they said I qualified for nineteen thousand nine hundred dollars. So that doesn't give me too much, probably a trailer, well it has to be a trailer. If I wanted to get a thirty year [loan], I could get double that, but I don't want thirty years for nothing.

Trudy's desire to create a place for her and Rainbow is a significant contrast to the life she related growing up in rented places where she had to walk miles to school and lug water with her brother at least two seasons of the year, and where she accepted being treated as a sexual object for most of her life until Rainbow was born. When she talks about her life with Rainbow, she is insistent that Rainbow know through their conversations about her rights regarding her body. "She knows that her body is just hers, and not even a doctor will be touching her body unless I am there and unless she OK's it,

because until she's old enough to make a choice, then it's my choice, and it is my choice that nobody can see her body, nobody can touch her body, that is the only thing in her life that is 100% hers.'

I asked Trudy how she reconciled her protective role with Rainbow against the role she described her mother assuming when Trudy was a child, one where her mother simply did not know what was happening to Trudy and her siblings. Trudy's explanation exonerated her mother from responsibility:

She was way too busy. She didn't have a clue. I never told her.

And she had too much going on for me to tell her about something like that.

She had a couple of nervous breakdowns, she was, she had just so much to raise four kids by herself, my god, I don't know how she did it.

We have already visited Germaine's reflections on her mother's inadequacies that caused her to have no confidence and no value as she came to be an adult. We will see again in the childhood histories of Theresa and Lydia, as well as many of my other interviewees, that a persistent theme in the childhoods of these women was the absence of a presence of a mother in their lives. Trudy's memories of being a street person, a whore, and a drunk, and her desire to know all aspects of hard living, were grounded in her inability to talk to anyone including her mother about the things that were constantly happening to her. The Workplace Skills program changed that capacity because she came to share her experiences with others whose lives have similar traumatic beginnings.

Trudy claims that she has always been reflective and has always written about her feelings. She has rarely shared these writings with other people. When I asked her how she felt about participating in my research, she said, "I am always, a lot, looking inward anyway. I think the more you look inwards, the less often you are apt to make the same mistakes and if you can figure out the reason why you've done something then you can avoid it later on. So the process of the interview is just like evaluating yourself and that's a daily process anyway."

Trudy's decision to go to a bank to pre-qualify for a loan represents to me a change in the way she manages her life now. She is forward thinking, she is planning, and she has goals that are substantially directed toward a better future for herself and her daughter.

CHAPTER SIX

THERESA

You know, I had a small life that gave me no social interaction. It was very small, but I had enough to be able to go up to somebody and say hi and so on. I knew where I was coming from. I remember Trudy just floored me from her personality, she was just so cool. I can't even begin to tell you. . . . And where I was coming from at the time, literally isolated for close to eighteen years in my home in this tiny, tiny setting. Granted my mind might have been many places by reading or movies or TV or any of that, but my self was not. So all of a sudden meeting real people who have these fantastic personalities was absolutely grand, I just can't tell you (Interview II).

Introduction

Theresa turned forty during the span of our interviews. She lives with her daughters in a low income housing project, works at the first real job she has had in almost twenty years, and is effusively articulate about how her life has changed as a result of the opportunity to go to school. Married twice, her adult life as a woman has been defined by her two spouses, the first a "stable but boring" man with whom she lived for twelve years and the second, an abusive alcoholic with whom she lived for another six years. When asked about the roads she has taken, she responded, "The marriages gave me a fate, five kids. And that is still my identity, taking care of them, it is still the biggest factor of who I am. . . .I am 'Mom' until the year 2009; there is no changing that."

My first two interviews with Theresa were conducted at my local residence. It wasn't until we were in the midst of our first interview that Theresa disclosed that she had been cited with two consecutive DWI's and was driving without a license. I somehow felt responsible for her breaking the law and was discomfited by the de facto collusion that my invitation had wrought. She explained that she had become an instant alcoholic when she began to drink for the first time the previous year as a result of trying to combat depression. The drinking condition worsened as a result of her losing her license and thus losing her ability to go to her job, which required her traveling almost one hundred miles round trip a day. Her driving without a license was a decision that she made to save herself. She

attended all the required AA meetings and was in weekly consultation with an alcohol therapist, both obligations of her rehabilitation, but she admitted that she "needed to lie to her on the alcoholic counseling level and yet try to use her at the therapy level to try and get better." She continued with the following explanation:

My life is such a sham right now. I need not to drive. Check this one out. I am a mother of five, and I can't drive to get to a job. I understand this, that is a law. I need to go to her because I need to get my license back, she needs to write a paper to the state saying this gal is fine, she can drive again. I need to lie to her and tell her that I have abstained and that I am not driving, and I need to confess to her my problems. I can't begin to tell you the added torment I am going through right now because of needing to go through this to get my license back. It is tough. It has got no basis in reality. I probably should not be given my license back, to be honest with you, but yet I need it so who knows. What seems possible is that I am successfully lying. I became good at it as a teenager.

In this self-evaluative story and all the others she related over several hours with me, as well as in correspondence and phone calls, Theresa continued to insist on honesty, directness, and disclosure in our conversations. As disconcerted as I sometimes became with the sensitivity of some of her stories and issues of confidentiality, Theresa argued strongly that "We are not a family that cares whether we are talked about or not. We are struggling so much, each and every one of us, that any help in talking about anything helps in some small manner."

The third interview was conducted in Theresa's home in a low income housing project. I was able to meet her children, to see her living style, and to understand some of the complexity of managing a large family of children in a physically compressed environment. Despite the presence of all the artifacts of daily living of a diverse family ranging in age from three to forty, there is a presence of beauty and richness in her

decorative efforts. Her living room and hallway walls are a gallery, displaying a series of powerful photographs of barrios, church altars, small church exteriors, many of which contain beautiful people standing together, having conversation or posing for the camera. In our last interview in Theresa's home, I learned more about her brother, the photographer, in the presence of his work, and we will return to Joseph in the last section of this chapter. First, however, we need to establish Theresa as a woman returning to school for the first time since she was sixteen years old when she graduated from high school.

Reflections from Workplace Skills

Theresa came into the program in reaction to her second husband's verbal abuse toward her. In their six years of marriage, they "probably lived together three," just enough time to get pregnant again. Her youngest child was three months old at the time, and she had not worked for almost twenty years. Her only job had been delivering newspapers at four in the morning when she was married to her first husband. It was during this time that she ended her first marriage after meeting her second husband, also a newspaper delivery person. When several years later he called her a "welfare mom" even though he was "doing nothing but collecting my welfare," she reacted by going to AFDC and saying, "I am ready to get a job."

"Yeah, right. You haven't been doing anything for twenty years." I didn't work, I had a very small work history before I married and had the children. I never did work during that time. So they said, "You might be smart, you do well on the tests, but you just haven't got a clue." They are the ones that suggested that I go over to job training, and they are the ones that put me in touch with the director of Workplace Skills.

Theresa had hoped for an occupational way out of the place she was in. Unlike many of the other interviewees, going into an educational program was not an attractive opportunity for her. Like Trudy in Chapter Four, Theresa wanted what she wanted, and

she wanted a job. She was both passive and resistant. When I asked Theresa to draw a picture of herself when she entered the program, she links her state of mind at the time with her abusive relationship with her husband and a continuing battle with chronic depression:

I was a mess. I had no confidence. I was absolutely oppressed by my husband. I can't begin to tell you how negative my going was, just even to Workplace Skills, let alone the possibility of college. That wasn't even close because I was so passive. He had the control. The first day, I fought with the director: "I don't need this, tell them not to do this to me, tell them to find me a job." I went to human services to let people do the job search, I was ready because they do help you to try and find a job, but I couldn't because I had no skills.

The director thought that I would fit into this picture of people coming in to do this thing, and they need to be educated perhaps. I wasn't that picture, but I also needed some math training because that was where I was lacking. I had forgotten my math from my high school years, so I flunked miserably on that when I went through the testing. That is why they suggested that I do the program. But it was like I was always so isolated, and I don't want anybody messing with me, and she wanted to mess with me. She wanted to make me fit this mold and make me out of this work skills program into this wonderful egotistical person who is going to ace tests and whatever. And I am so different, I just don't like people in my life.

But at that same time she is so outgoing, and I was twenty years in the hole, so it is difficult to deal with her, to be honest with you. I can have conversations with people and not let them know what I am feeling, but my inner thoughts are "get out of my life." I hated her energy and enthusiasm. Understand my depression, understand that I want to be dead right now. Don't think that my life can be any better, it can't. She had this one hour

interview with me, and I went because my husband had said, "Go in and cancel this out, this sucks."

That was pretty much it, that was my goal. But of course I succumbed, the energy she had and me being such a mouse. I was protesting, and she was saying, "No, don't protest." I would say, "I need school like a hole in the head. I have skills, they will figure it out that I have them, that I could do any kind of training and figure it out. So why don't you let me go for that?" And she was like, "No, you need to go to college."

I was in protest mode. I was told to resist, besides my own resistance. I was told to resist by my husband. He didn't want me being social. This was hard for him, he thought he would lose control, which is exactly what happened.

Despite Theresa's resistance to entering the program at first, she excelled beyond her "wildest imagination." Her description of the changes in her viewpoint because of the program was one of self-discovery. Both in the workplace skills program and the follow-up program she selected as a software specialist major, she discovered her "brain again and the ability to face a challenge."

I probably could say that the very first day that I was there, I knew I should be there, exercising my brain, be it either socially [for] which I had been so limited and/or academically, probably after the fact because I can't say it was my thought at the time. . . .I can say assuredly that it was just great to be in a social environment again. I know a lot of people that came into the program from jobs and so on that were satisfied, me I just came from this isolated life. When you come into the program from a vulnerable position, your main focus is the people, your teachers and your peers. It's got nothing to do with your academics. Any one who is coming in there with

any basis for learning will learn, but what helps you to learn is the people and what makes you better is the people.

Theresa repeated often during our interviews the importance of the program to her social transformation, her sense of herself in the world. In response to the question in the follow-up reflections survey about the practical difference the program made to her everyday living, Theresa wrote: "I can't reiterate enough that it made me a social creature again (so many years I had hibernated). The practicality of this is that it allowed me to go into the shopping centers without fear, it allowed me, after a time, of course, to value my ability to communicate with others. Marcia, do you have a clue what I mean? Do you realize what an isolate I was by the time Workplace Skills caught up with me? Do you realize how stifling this was to my 'all'."

At the same time, the program propelled Theresa into an ego high about her intelligence and capacity to do academic work. She attributes her decision to go into a college program to the encouragement she received from her math teacher and to her improvement in the post-tests in math.

You know the math teacher in Workplace Skills program, she was wonderful. If there was no other person in Workplace Skills program, she made the difference. She looked, she noticed you. You know the form that Job Training gives as an evaluation at the end of the ten-week program, that little form that you get at the end? I already knew that I was good in English, and I knew I was good in the English entrance test, but I ended up acing the math and aced a volunteer algebra one. And the teacher wrote, "Theresa has this comprehension of algebraic law."

Now would you think that with my background of staying home and taking care of kids that I would have [this] comprehension, but she wrote it in such a format that it was like, "You are put into another realm." I was like, "All of a sudden, I am intelligent." It was in very important words, maybe

written at her whim, I haven't got a clue to this day except that she did befriend me when I was still there in my two years. She always said, "Hi Theresa, how's it going?" But at that very moment that I got that back, I was all of a sudden, "Theresa, look at your brain and look at what you are capable of." I can't tell you, just that small amount of acknowledgment was extremely important.

Theresa's transformation as a student was publicly acknowledged as well. She became so strong as a student and as a leader that she ended up functioning as a student teacher, a tutor, and a lab assistant during her enrollment at the college. She also was named "Student of the Year" at a legislative awards ceremony, an honor that made her distinctive amongst several thousand college students in associate degree programs throughout the state. At the same time, her chronic depression heightened because of the pressure on her, and twice during her last semester at college, she crashed and ended up being institutionalized for brief periods of time. With one D and the rest A's through her college course work, Theresa finally graduated with honors, sought her first job in her technical field, and gained the opportunity to be self-supporting for the first time in her adult life.

The next section of this portrait takes us back to Theresa's beginnings, to the places where she began to establish her self-value. Her stories are unique amongst my interviewees because of the childhood she experienced in a fervent Catholic family.

Private Troubles: Stories from the Past

Childhood Memories

Theresa's parents were the only ones of my interviewees who were college graduates and were not working class employed. Theresa would claim that their education and religious ideology were the foundations for the traumatic childhood she suffered. Until she was nine years old, she knew neither her parents nor her siblings because she and the rest of her family lived in a Catholic religious commune in Western Massachusetts where

families were separated upon arrival there. Stories of Theresa's adult life were interspersed throughout our interviews with her reconstructed tales about her parents' decisions as young adults and the effect these decisions made upon Theresa and her three siblings, Eve, Joachim, and Joseph.

There was a group of about two hundred people at that time getting together, and they were all from Boston Catholic colleges, very strong, Catholic religious; as a matter of fact, the founder was a Jesuit priest. My mother was from the North Shore and my father was from Arlington. They met at the meetings. This guy used to do this preaching thing, and that attracted the Catholics. And this was kind of a time of fervor. The way Catholicism was being treated at that time, which would have been in the late forties and right after World War II was that it was starting to break down. It was starting to lose its identity. They were starting to sing in English at the masses instead of in Latin. They were starting to say, "Oh very possibly, Protestants can get to heaven."

And these were fervent people who believed, "Absolutely not," and that is why this guy Father Fanny was in trouble with the law because he would go, he would just bash Jews and bash anybody that wasn't Catholic. He would just damn them to hell. My father had already graduated and my mother was two weeks shy of getting her degree. They did this thing of a giant retreat, pulling back from society, because they were getting a lot of flack, being thrown in jail for protesting; they were doing these things on the Common on Sunday. The guy who had the control pretty much said to everybody, "We're out of here." So they bought a house in Cambridge and didn't go out after that.

Theresa knows much of this history of her parents through a reconstruction of this early period from her brother Joseph. "To be honest, I think what had happened was that

over the years, Joe, who had this passion to find it out and fix it in his mind, he talked mostly with my grandmother, to get the history, and then it came to us from him."

Theresa was the fourth child to be born to her parents in Cambridge, all within a five-year span. As Theresa understands the chronology of her childhood, this Cambridge group eventually purchased and moved to a farm commune in Western Massachusetts. Theresa has been told that she was the last of forty children to be born into this community, though she remembers nothing about this stage of her childhood.

My very first year I was in a family situation, but I don't recall it. The whole thing was that they took vows of celibacy. I was the last child to be born before they took vows of celibacy, and that was back in Cambridge. It was getting too expensive to feed all these kids, they were just popping them out. It certainly didn't have any impact on me. Once they split the families up, the people got their roles. My father was the tailor, and my mother was the laundress. [There was] nothing personal at all. As a matter of fact, we were all like-dressed in little uniforms. Our identity was taken away from us, very purposefully.

It is so hard to explain because they weren't our parents for my first nine years. We were raised by these women who took care of the children, zealot kind of people. There were forty children who lived with us. And when my mother took us out, it was the first time I was introduced to her as a parent. I didn't really know that she was a parent; she was just one of the caretakers.

Theresa does remember vividly the day she learned about her siblings and her parents. Her mother had run away and come back with legal support to get her children out of there. The children were gathered together by Sister Catherine and told that they were brothers and sisters and that they were going to be leaving the farm with their mother. Sister Catherine also said that they were being "taken away by an evil woman" and that

they should try to get back to their real home any way they could. Theresa's mother then brought this newly formed family to their grandmother's house in Chelsea where they lived throughout their school years. When I asked Theresa if she knew why her mother had run away, she said, " Yes, she was being beaten by the people in authority. She was mentally ill. There were two hundred adults at the time, probably ten of them had authority, and the rest of them were held accountable, not only the kids, but the adults as well. It was very fierce. She took us away because she was having a real bad time there. She would do things, I couldn't say what they were, but whatever it was was against the rules. She just about had had enough, so she ran away in the middle of the night."

Theresa's parents ended up getting a legal separation, her father stayed in the commune where he still lives today, her mother completed her certification to teach public school, and her grandmother became the primary caretaker of the family. Theresa's description of what occurred immediately upon being moved out of a Catholic farm commune and into a city environment was tied to an instant relationship that developed between herself and her siblings.

We were all close. Everybody was close. You can't pull somebody out of a commune and not have a bond. We had to protect each other. We were getting beaten up every day because we were so odd. This would have been in the sixties, they were just starting with fashionable things, the kids were into clothes, and we had our uniforms, we were getting beaten up every day. We were so odd. The kids were swearing, and we would say "You can't swear."

Theresa's relationship with her mother was never good. "I didn't have a rapport, a motherly feeling. She took us because she was having a real bad time there." The transitions that Theresa and her siblings had to make were overwhelming, in her opinion. The kids, the streets, the move from a rigid, restrictive, institutional environment to a family home where the grandmother who took care of them did not know how to control

their behavior coalesced into continuous behavior problems, particularly with Theresa's older sister, Eve.

My mother, of course, was a teacher so she wasn't around, so grandmother pretty much took care of us. My grandmother was very nurturing, absolutely beautiful, beautiful. She just absolutely played it by ear. For every event that happened, she didn't know what to do.

My mother, she was terribly abusive, terribly physically abusive. She used hangers, big time. Basically we were wild, we had gotten wild wicked quick. And my sister particularly suffered most of the brunt of it. She had started drinking about ten. I bonded with her so quickly, I would stand up for her, and then I would get a lot of that physical stuff too. Then she ended up in reform school when she was thirteen, and then it let up a little bit. I stood up for my brothers, too. I don't know why it turned out like this. I was the peacemaker, that's very real. I can visualize some definite things going on, and it was that whole hippie era and she [my mother] just freaked. She couldn't believe what was going on, for us to go from these little angels which she wanted us to be to being so terrible.

My sister ended up in reform school for about three years. She was in one of those homes all that time because she was just out of control, . . . not in the sense of the law, but more in the sense of my mother not knowing what to do with her, so she would put her in reform school. If your child will not mind you, not do what the child is told, at least at that time--she used to run away from home a lot and just not come home for a couple of days and things like that. We were very, very close. I can recall when she went away feeling very angry, I don't know, abandoned and stuff, but then I had my brothers to make up for the loss.

Theresa's memory of herself was that she was peacemaker. "Being the youngest and lacking courage, I didn't end up really breaking out until after I left home." I asked her to what she attributed her sister's rebellion and use of drugs before thirteen years old. Theresa believed that it was "probably just lack of family, a sense of family, a sense of being cared about." She does not remember early on being rebellious because she was "too scared" as she faced the transitions that her mother's decisions had required of her. At nine years old she not only had to adjust to a new family life with siblings, a mother, and a grandmother, but also she found herself in a very different schooling environment than she had experienced at the commune. In reflection of this period, she said, "The only thing I can think [is that] when you take children at tender ages like that, you know, really, really tender ages, and totally change their life style, then you make the change in them into total opposites. Does that make any sense at all? You can't imagine how sheltered we were. We didn't even go off the property. We didn't have a clue."

Schooling

Theresa has strong memories of her life in the commune as a child in school. She described herself and her siblings feeling like oddities with children on the streets and in school because of the dramatic difference between being in the commune and being in the world.

They started us wicked early at the convent. We were age four in first grade. A bunch of smart kids coming from these smart college people, so it was easy. Nobody lagged behind. As a matter of fact, we were so advanced at that time because of the smaller school system that they had within the commune, literally probably a one-to-one ratio, so we were flying. So when we came out to Chelsea, that was another reason why we got beat up because we were so smart. We were teased.

You see, they didn't have toys at the commune. We weren't allowed any toys, so what we did have was the farm, animals, and musical

instruments. You know, in a sense it came out of the Thoreau type stuff that was going on back at the end of the forties. I am surprised more of them didn't crop up because people were really into it, you know, alternative life styles. This just happened to have a religious component to it. [Was it a censored type of education?] O, my God, very much so, and it wasn't very funny. We went to mass three times a day, we were beaten for the most minor infractions, I can't begin to tell you, [with] a rubber hose, very, very painful. I remember those!

When Theresa and her siblings moved from commune schooling to city schooling, they were once more enrolled in Catholic parochial schools where they remained throughout high school. Because of beginning their education so early in the commune, they were immediately placed in advanced grades, the reason that Theresa ended up graduating at barely sixteen. "We were all smart. None of us were very good students. We tried to get away with not doing our homework and all that good stuff, but we always managed to get by just because we had an innate smartness. So we all did fairly well grade-wise and everything."

Theresa's memory of her academic subjects as a teen is scanty and seems to be tied to her desire to find some answers to the ideological circumstances she had been placed in from infancy. Throughout her high school years, her best friends and her "gang" included her brothers, as well as her sister when she wasn't in reform school. It was the hippie era, and Theresa remembers that they all were using drugs recreationally. School became a backdrop for her social life and her self-discovery through the use of acid and marijuana from about fourteen years old till she graduated. When asked about her favorite subject in school, she said:

I guess it would have to be English. It was probably the only subject I did particularly well in. I was an avid reader. I loved to read at that time, probably [starting] at age 12, a lot of philosophy, searching for the meaning

of my life. I recall C. S. Lewis, Siddhartha, just my favorite people at that time, just checking out a lot of religions. [Religious talk in our home] was almost taboo, because the original experience had been so extreme. We were made to go to church on Sundays, and we went and did our thing for an hour, you know? My mother kept trying to push for us to keep up with it, but it was like, I don't know. I don't remember a lot of it. I remember having a couple of arguments because at that time I had become an atheist. I remember having an argument with this blond girl, this fellow student. I just remember a couple of points where we argued, trying to tell her to wake up, there is no God. And she was just so firm. And then, most of the time, I probably slept, not slept, just drifted in fantasy world. Most of my high school years, I wasn't really there.

For Theresa, adolescence was a time of experimentation with drugs and a time where she solidified her personal status through her siblings. Threaded through her discussion of this period in her life, she was contradictory about her capacity to do academic work and her feelings of being intellectually marginal. This sense of herself seemed to be tied to her worship of her older brothers and became the basis of her decision to go to work after high school instead of continuing on to college.

I just had had enough of school. I didn't enjoy it, and a really key factor is that my siblings were so smart. I felt like a stupid idiot. I couldn't keep up with them in conversations. I am talking about these mind boggling philosophical conversations. I couldn't keep up with them. I felt pretty dumb, and I think that was why I chose to go to work. I really didn't have a good sense of myself to make it.

I would tend to think of [those years] as just kind of a mush--my sister, having gone away to reform school and losing her companionship, my oldest brother, finding out he was gay and getting involved with a whole

different kind of thing. I was very supportive of him. I was the only one he could talk to about that, as a matter of fact. So that was very important too. I went in a negative direction from the experiences of my teen years, because it was an important factor that I did feel less confident than my siblings. I just didn't know what I had, and that . . . put me in the direction of going to work instead of exploring my brain.

Theresa went from high school to her first job in some kind of switchboard position. She was still living at home. Her brothers had already graduated from high school. Joseph had gone to work, Joachim had enrolled at a Boston Catholic college, and Eve had "ended up marrying right out of high school and doing nurse's aide work for a few years." When Theresa was seventeen, her family received a devastating phone call:

Joachim had just finished a year of college and went cross country in the summer to Colorado, a bunch of guys, my brother was with him. And they were boozing, and oh what a pretty mountain, let's go climb it, and he fell from it and died. I really don't know the details.

We ahh just got a phone call in the middle of the night from Colorado, Joachim is dead. It was the first real pain, something that couldn't be dealt with, we just didn't have the ability to deal with it at all. My brother Joseph was there, they were there together, so he brought the body back.

He had called at about 10:30 at night, my sister was out, I was sitting watching TV with my grandmother and my mother. I ended up being the most sane of anybody to deal with the phone call. Joe couldn't talk to anybody on the other end, so a friend of his that was with him ended up giving the news to me. My mother got on the phone at one point, and Joe had started saying it to her, and she said "Yah, but he's not dead." She couldn't accept the fact that he was dead. So I had to get on the line cause she handed it off to me, and this guy started talking, and I dropped the phone

and had to go off in the corner, and I recall the phone just hanging there for five or ten minutes, and I don't know if my mom got back on the phone. I just remember the screaming and the crying, is all I really remember, just people screaming and crying in utter anguish. By that time [we had] absolutely no religious resource to fall back on. As a matter of fact if it didn't further plunge us into atheism, I don't know what else could have.

I had started working, I can remember quitting work. I remember just fidgeting for a couple of months. My sister had major difficulty. Just a very, very sad household, a devastated household.

Theresa, in telling this story about the death of Joachim, tied her memory of their deep connection to each other and their collaborative frustration with their mother to a dream that recurred for a long time after his death:

I used to dream about his death. I used to dream about him and running into him on a particular street in Brighton. I would say "Hi" to him. "What is up? I thought you were dead," and he would say, "Oh no, I scammed the whole thing to get away from Ma." And like it was so real, the dream was so real, that I thought that maybe there was a possibility that he was alive, cause I saw his dead body, you know, but for some reason, I thought he could pull it off. He was so smart, Marcia, that if anybody could have pulled it off, he would have been able to. So I really kind of thought for awhile that it might have some reality.

Relationships and Gender

Theresa defines Joachim's death as the major turning point experience in her life. Her view of herself as a student, as a female, as a friend, and as a member of her family was connected to her attachment to Joachim. "My siblings were certainly the strongest relationships I had." Theresa even attributes her gender identity to her desire to be like Joachim. What she seemed to be most attracted to was his daring and his recklessness,

characteristics that did not sustain him well on the Colorado mountain side. In talking about the significance she attributes to growing up a female, she responded:

Everything. Just not being able to do the things that my brother could get away with. Just anything bad. We used to live across from a trucking place, Mack trucks, and he would go in and drive the trucks around, break into them and drive the trucks around. He was such a rebel, but I was female and I think it would never have occurred to me to try something. So I was feeling very jealous of him, and my mom wouldn't touch him, but she could beat me. He was six foot two before he died.

Unlike other interviewees who saw their gender definition in terms of the household and parenting tasks that they were assigned from childhood, Theresa "didn't do a thing" in the house. "My grandmother did everything, everything. We weren't taught to do anything." She became aware of the significance of her gender in defining her life possibilities when she recognized something about her own sexuality.

Probably my first sexual experience at age fifteen. Probably just finally recognizing the distinction. It was something I chose to have. All of a sudden you gained a little bit of power when you started to have sex. Recognizing your own sexuality and what you can do with it, to attract who you are after and stuff like that. It is a tool. In terms of my own sexuality, in terms of pleasure, I haven't got a clue. I am forty, and I haven't had an orgasm. I think it is possible that I am bi-sexual, but I haven't investigated that and I am going to sometime. I enjoy sex in a small way sometimes. I pretty much satisfy what the guy's needs are because I just wasn't getting satisfied myself. I used it as a teen to try to establish love relationships and wanted to be loved in the worst possible way, but it didn't work.

Theresa linked her desire for love to her relational experiences that came out of Joachim's death. She moved in with her sister for about a year, and then she lived with her

brother Joseph until she got married to her first husband. She has a clear sense of how much her need for love and stability defined her decisions for her.

I didn't have any close friends after high school. I never really had any close person that I dated, until I met my husband, and that's why I married him so quickly. We lived together right after the first month of knowing each other. We married a year after that because he had to get a divorce. He was ten years older than me, and he already had a couple of kids.

I didn't have good work experiences, I was living from one job to another, and so I had no identity in that way at all. The marriage, I think, gave me an identity, or that was what I was looking for. I didn't even love him, and I knew that before we even got married, but I did it anyway because I said that I was going to. Oh yah, stability. Definitely. I was starting to get too wild, going out with strangers, sleeping around, and I knew it wasn't really me. I am a one-person very loyal type of individual. And things were getting crazy and I met him.

I didn't have a car with my first marriage for twelve years and didn't get out much. I didn't drive or go anywhere. As a matter of fact, I felt kind of alone during my first marriage, because with my first husband, we lived in real houses. I don't think I will ever see that again. I had neighbors who cared about their lawns and shit, which was nothing that I was interested in. Music was what I was living for. I cleaned, I had spotless houses, and I listened to music and took care of my kids. I was a very good mom.

Theresa described her first husband and their lives together with no anger or rancor toward him. She saw him as an answer to the chaos of her life, and though a "boring" man who wore three piece suits and watched a lot of TV, her description of her marriage to him was similar to her recognition of her sexuality as a tool when she was fifteen.

I basically took wicked advantage, this is getting even more honest, I think I definitely took advantage of it. Immediately upon marriage, I couldn't work. I am very good at a budget, and he was making a modest income. I knew that we could handle our finances on his income if I took over. And I never worked again at that time. I am a homebody, by that time I think I had five cats, and with the depression, you want to hide away, and I did. Five cats, they were my babies at the time. I stayed at home, compulsively cleaning, and he thought this was grand, you know.

The marriage was all right but it wasn't, after a time, my romantic side, you know watching a movie with romance in it, after 12 years, I just thought, "Am I missing out on something here? I am bored out of my tree." I was in M_____, we had bought a house there. We had very few neighbors, and I was really an outcast in the neighborhood, but this one woman, she turned out to be pretty cool. I shared with her that I was absolutely bored, I didn't love the man. It wasn't that I had thought of cheating on him, it didn't enter my mind, and I had just started to go out to work, delivering newspapers, and it was my first job in ten years. I told her that there was this hip-looking guy at work, long hair, giant mustache, tattoos all over his body. When we delivered newspapers, we'd run into the other drivers, and he was the exact opposite of my husband. I said this to this girl one day, that he was awfully cute, and she said, "Go have an affair." It never would have entered my mind. This would have been something I would have taken into my own little fantasy world and do what I needed to do, because I used to do it with the actors on the screens. We watched movies every night, and I lived that way for many years, just in my head.

Theresa's decision to have an affair with this acquaintance from work and to end her marriage with her first husband became the second step in her fate to have five children.

"This guy, after this boring twelve-year marriage, this guy is going to do the trick." His attractiveness to her shifted as he unreliably moved in and out of her life over six years, sometimes just long enough for her to get pregnant again. They were living in Southern New Hampshire, and she ended up moving to the Seacoast "after a really bad incident" that they had gone through.

I just, in my brain at that time could not handle being alone raising the kids on my own, so I yet again, I asked him to come back in one more time. And they [AFDC] allowed him to live with me because he was going through Voc Rehab. [Was he physically abusive?] Sporadically. It was mostly verbal, very, very bad sometimes, and then he would throw things around, break things, destroy my plants. My poor plants. God, every damn time, [laughter] there went another plant.

One thing that Jay did one time, I ended up leaving him, I had gone into a shelter because he was threatening to trash my car and stuff, so I went into a shelter for a couple of days and then I ended up at my sister's. This was, the two first were born by then, so about half-way into the marriage, and so I was out of the house and he expected me to come back. He cut every single wire of every single appliance, you know the vacuum cleaner, we had a freezer at the time, because he used to major league stock food, he had my mother's tendencies, and when I came back, I had to repair all of these things. I ended up being a fine electrician, trying to put it all back together again. He left a note, he said, "Something seems to have gone wrong with the freezer. I wouldn't trust the food in there."

I would certainly say that my second husband negatively influenced me to become who I am now--the control he had over me, the fear that I lived under there. At small times, I had a few physical incidents, mostly it was

verbal. But it has definitely put me in a stronger place of never wanting to be abused again.

We already learned about Theresa's decision to go into Workplace Skills in reaction to the regular humiliation she suffered under her second husband's oppressive verbal abuse. Theresa was unable to gain any economic support from him because he chose to drink instead of work, yet with five children at home, she was unable to evaluate what alternatives she might have. The Workplace Skills program provided her with a bridge to self-sufficiency in her own view because her second husband lost his control over her, and she divorced him by the time she had graduated from the follow-up program.

Theresa Today

"I would define self-sufficiency as the ability to care for your family by your own means. I mean by this: a job and being able to change a tire or light bulb, even learning how to use tools to do the things that have always been pegged as the man's job. (I must admit I haven't got it down as yet.)" In the reflections survey that followed up the second interview, Theresa revealed that her relationships with men and her ability to control the every day details of living as a parent and a family member were significantly important to her. Independence to her was the physical means of doing it herself. She never saw herself as independent,

Never, until the workplace skills program. It was moving from one dependency to another, going from one husband to another. And even more so than another person that did these same things because I just didn't have a sense of self at all, and I was so depressed for just years. I was in a heavy, heavy depression that I didn't know was a depression. I wanted to kill myself from about the age of twelve, I just constantly had those thoughts.

Earlier in this chapter, we learned how Theresa linked the childhood change that occurred in her life at a "tender age" to this sense of dependency. She also acknowledged a lack of caring that she felt existed in her family home. In our final interview, Theresa

connected her stories about her siblings, parents, and grandmother to her changing sense of herself. In each case, as she revisited her memories about various members of her family and her relationships with some of them today, she continued to focus on her search for honesty about her feelings. What she has learned from reflecting on her life stories is a significant part of her feeling valuable today. " Being a participant in this research has altered my personal sense of self: it is treasureful that I am even considered special enough to be interviewed. It is rewarding, albeit painful, to recreate some of the times that I needed to speak of. It is flattering to be considered special; special is so excellent." As a member of the family,

I definitely felt inadequate. When I was reading my transcript, I wanted to star that as being a very important thing. [Did they make you feel that way?] Not at all. This was just my own paranoia. Not at all, as a matter of fact, they never once shunned me. It's just that when we were in conversations, we always were in groups, if you remember, it was very social, and I just couldn't keep up, I couldn't keep up with them. I have, I have, I don't watch TV, I don't watch the news, I am not political, I'm not up on current events, they had all of that plus. So there was so many conversations that I was left out of.

In Theresa's conversations with me, she seemed to be doing her own personal inventory of each of the important relationships in her life and their current value in regard to her own self-assessment. I asked her to clarify for me, for example, her sometimes contradictory view of her grandmother, whom she described as both a martyr and as a nurturer:

Marcia: I have noticed contradictions in your testimony about your grandmother-- both a saint and a martyr. I think of mothering as loving and not as having this conditional love associated with martyrdom.

Theresa: Well, to be perfectly honest with you, I perfectly understand that. Because up until recently that is exactly what I did too. I mean I slaved for these little guys, but in a martyring kind of way, poor me, abandoned and so on. Now I've got a much different attitude. I can fully understand that I don't find that contradictory. I think the two can be side by side. Because you are put in a position that you don't want to be in, hence comes the martyrdom; but you also love and work hard for your children.

I am a chronic martyr. I have to deal with that because it is pretty much what I inherited from my grandmother who used to be a martyr. And then of course I lived a life that made it absolutely a fact, and I am trying to break that pattern. I think hers, the martyring thing, was towards my mother, to try to make her behave more appropriately.

Marcia: What about your mother? Do you see her?

Theresa: No, I don't like her. She just won't be honest. She has gone to some shrinks and stuff, and it is always . . . about her children. My brother is a homosexual, or my sister is a teen alcoholic, and one of her sons is dead, and, you know, because at that time Joachim was dead, but never with any honesty so that she could get help.

As we have already learned, Theresa's loss of Joachim at seventeen was devastating to her. When she began to drink a few years ago, she had another "visit" from Joachim, the first since her recurring dream after he died.

He came to visit me, and that is weird because I don't believe in anything, but I swear I had a visit from him, and it was the last time I saw him. He was trying to talk to me about the booze, as a matter of fact, because at the time it was a very serious problem. That is the only time say in the last fifteen years that I have felt any vivid thoughts or memories. It just kind of went into this other place after awhile, you know. Until that one episode and again it was the last time. I haven't heard from him since.

The photographer, her brother Joseph, created a series of aesthetically compelling portraits of religious settings that I briefly described in the introduction. He took most of

them in California where he lived for many years, working as a computer hardware specialist. Theresa described the basis of these photographs as part of her portrait of Joseph.

He had two shows and has actually put into words, he made a little video, a friend of ours taped him actually talking. The video is about a half hour long, it would probably interest you to hear it, I don't have it presently. He tells us exactly what his photography is about: It's all the same. It's a search for God.

Theresa also reconnected with her early memories of Joseph because of being his confidant when she was a teen in regard to his homosexuality. They shared a passion for music, and she inherited his library of tapes of blues, soul, and jazz that they both loved to listen to.

Joseph died of AIDS, a victim through homosexuality. He died three years ago; he would have been forty-one. It was an absolutely terrible, horrible thing. He had been HIV for four years, right at the beginning of the public recognition of the AIDS epidemic. He was on AGT, he was part of all the experimental stuff they were trying. He lived in California when he was first diagnosed. He moved back here with my sister to die when he got too sick.

Eve, Theresa's older sister who spent three of her teen years in a reform school, became an allied health professional. Her care of Joseph in his dying time was the only alternative available to Joe. Theresa, with her five children, simply could not bring him into her low income housing. After working as a nurse's aide, Eve went to college, got a degree in nursing, and has worked mostly in psychology intervention, including running a shelter in Boston and doing special assignments at mental health institutions. "She is a heroin addict, currently not drinking, but an alcoholic as well. She's been in more rehabs [herself], she has been in kicking."

Theresa and Eve have spent more time with their father in recent years than ever before. He comes to her home every Sunday to spend time with his grandchildren, as well as Theresa.

What had happened was that when my brother died, all of a sudden, my father came into our lives, just all of a sudden. My second brother had died, and he realized he only had two daughters left, and he wanted to show his two daughters kindness. We both responded because we both needed it so badly. Along with that came extreme honesty for the first time in our lives. My sister's life is a shambles. All of a sudden she is in addict rehab, and he is paying for it. And she's started being honest with him.

I crashed twice back then, and the first time everybody thought this is just because she's so overstressed. And then I crash again, and it looks like suicidal stuff, and everybody starts to look. He would ask, "How's it going? How's school today?" and I said, "Well, Dad, I flunked a test in C++."

"Oh you'll do better, you still make your grade. You'll still be on the honor roll."

"Dad, maybe I won't. Give me the fact that maybe I won't."

And he couldn't. He wanted it for me, it wasn't for himself, he wanted it for me because he knew how much it meant. All of a sudden, I had been reaching this place where few people go, intellectually and academically, and then crash.

As Theresa related this dialogue with her father, she seemed to be trying to sort out the differences between them, to demonstrate her unwillingness to continue to live her life as "a sham." She was grappling with her own troubles and wanted him to deal with them honestly. Because her father was unable to give her "the fact" that she might fail was proof to her that he had not come up to the level of honesty that she was seeking in her own life. Another example of this same sense of their difference became clear in regard to his

accepting Joseph's homosexuality. Theresa acknowledges her father's struggle to reconcile his religious beliefs with Joseph's death as a homosexual Catholic:

It's certainly not Catholic. He couldn't reject him, he truly loved him. He hated that [the homosexuality], he hated it with a passion. He still has not been able to reconcile that in his head because he wants Joe to be in heaven so bad. I think he keeps thinking that at the end he converted or something. [Do you mean that your father believes that Joseph gave up his homosexuality?] I don't know how he can do it, but his love is stronger than that, and that is shocking.

Theresa's life is in a positive pattern right now. She has a job, her children are functioning well, she has recently developed a new relationship with a man that in her view is quite different from any she has ever had:

This is the thing, Marcia, and I swear to God, this is the first man in my life who has actually been decent. I am in shock. I am still in shock when we're together, you know, and then I realize when I hear some of the absolutely sweet things he says, "Jesus, I deserve this." I really am a nice person, "Guess what, Sam, you're right." And I can't tell you how warm my heart is.

She once more makes the connection about her improved self-value to the Workplace Skills program and once again sees that particular experience as the fulcrum upon which she has discovered her brain and thus her balance:

I just could go on and on. For me and this is so personal, I think it happened for Germaine as well, because I observed her in the classroom. It was basically recognizing that you could do it. You could do this work and be very, in my case, be very good at it. I hadn't needed to tap that part of my brain for so many years that I think it created a new person, a more whole person. Yes, I had watched English movies for ten years with my ex and

I've read, and I've done things to keep it all going, but I hadn't really used my brain. So it made me more whole.

I don't ever want to be totally normal. See, Joachim and I we hung together so much and I think that is when I decided to be different. We always did crazy things, we needed to do crazy things, and the thing is I have no idea what would have happened had he lived. I was very wild with him.

I think I am happy with Sam because we go and shoot pool. Joachim and I had a pool table. I am finding out that I am good at another thing, the ego boost is amazing, and every thing that happens is another boost of my self-esteem.

Theresa's transformative experience through her participation in the Workplace Skills program is visible in her new-found excitement about the details of her life. Her new male friend, her ability to play pool with him, her job, her capacity to go into malls and to drive fifty miles to work—as she does her personal inventory, she finds more every day to be valuable about. She claims, "I think it's all happenstance. This is all just a fluke, just a fluke. We are flukes, you know? in a fluky world." However, her testimony about her changes belies this claim. It seems more a protest against the fixed notions about religious fervor that she has rejected from her past. She also says with humor and a fine sense of personal agency, "It's wonderful. There's nothing wrong with that. I don't need belief, I am very lucky to say, to make sense of things, or that's my belief, that's what I stand by. It's great as long as it's going good, but why do you have to put any more on it than that?"

CHAPTER SEVEN

LYDIA

Change, that's exactly what changed. The sense of change. I was always afraid of change. Being locked into a relationship as long as I was, and it was a bad relationship, and I didn't have much self-esteem at that time, and going to school and discovering all these things about myself, I can do this, I can do that too. And what I do with myself doesn't necessarily always have to involve other people. I mean some of the changes you make in your life of course involve other people, but I got to stop and think that what I have to do is right for me, because if it's not right for me, I'm not happy and the people around me are going to know that I'm not happy (Interview II).

Introduction

Lydia is a thirty-nine year old mother of one young adult daughter, Janie, and the grandmother of two boys under five. Janie was born when Lydia was married to her first husband whom she married when she was eight months pregnant at sixteen years old. My first two interviews with Lydia were conducted in my office at the university, and the third conducted in my local residence. Though I asked Lydia if we might meet in her home for our third interview, she felt that with her two grandchildren there, we would have more privacy almost anywhere else. In the past year her daughter and grandsons have lived with her, and her mother has come in daily to care for the grandchildren in her home while Janie and Lydia went out to work. Her fiancée also has lived in her two bedroom mobile home for the past seven years, and just recently she asked him to leave her house.

She came into the program because of a lay-off from a company that had closed down its operations in the area. She had worked at this company for almost ten years, and although she was offered an opportunity to move to another plant out-of-state, she did not want to uproot her daughter who was in high school at the time. When she spoke about her work, she was quite proud of the fact that she had advanced through three promotions and was making over \$11.00 an hour when she was laid off.

When Lydia entered the program, her daughter was going to be a senior in high school. During the time Lydia was in school, Janie "graduated from high school, got married, and had a baby all within one year's time." The marriage was in trouble from the beginning because Janie's husband is "selfish and immature, he doesn't keep a job, he's always in trouble for driving after revocation, he drinks quite heavily, and he's very quick-tempered." Lydia learned from his mother after the marriage that he had been diagnosed as an alcoholic at fifteen. "'So,' I said, 'Why the hell didn't you tell me this information before he married my daughter?'"

Last year, Janie came to her mother and said, "I'm not going to do like you and wait fifteen years. I have had enough, it's been three years, and I've had enough." Lydia said, "That's when I opened up the house and told her to come home." Lydia was happy that Janie had the courage to leave a difficult and unhappy marriage and was willing to disrupt her life so that Janie could get a job and get a decent start for herself. However, Lydia also was adamant that the arrangement would not be long-term.

Throughout our interviews, Lydia has grounded the directions her life has taken in the relationships she has had with her parents, her spouses, her siblings, and her daughter. The decisions she has made from early adolescence on were based upon her need to find a place in relationship that would allow her to feel secure. Particularly in her relationships with men, Lydia's life history revealed her difficulty in being alone and feeling independent. It will be clear that her return to school helped to change her sense of self.

Reflections from Workplace Skills

When I asked Lydia to draw a picture of herself when she entered the program, she said, "I was very excited about the fact that I was going to have a chance to go to college. I was locked into going to work, and when my company closed, that avenue was offered to me so I took it. I didn't want to find a job, I wanted to go to school. I figured, 'How many times in a lifetime will you have a chance to go to school.' It was laying right at my feet and I felt that if I didn't take it, then it was a lost opportunity."

Her attitude coming into the program was similar to many of my interviewees who had aborted their education and dropped out of school as a teen. Though it had been almost twenty years since she had been in school full-time, she had attended some evening classes: "I took a couple of the adult learning courses at the education center. They were just sporadic classes here and there to brush up, because eventually I wanted to go to college. I just didn't know how to go about doing it." An important characteristic of the Workplace Skills program that seemed to make a difference was that the idea of returning to school was stimulated through the suggestion of the network of unemployment and welfare agency personnel that it was a possibility. Most of the participants did not of their own volition presume that they should enter a preparatory program nor did they know "how to go about doing it."

Because Lydia had been working at the same job for over ten years, many of her patterns were not significantly different upon entering the program. She had been used to a daily routine that included being at work on time and managing her household before and after her work day.

I had been working at the plant, days and Saturdays. I took Workplace Skills on as another kind of job. The first year through the Workplace Skills, and then the first year of college, everything I did was school. That wore thin, because then the grandchildren started to come into the picture and I wanted to be part of their life. I was really hard on myself, because at the end of the first year [in the follow-up program], I still had a 4.00 average.

In Workplace Skills, I was dedicated, very much so! In my free time, I did homework, I studied at school during breaks. A few of us would work together. We, people who didn't have as much of a problem, saw other people struggling and we tried to work with them. Most of the problems seemed to be in math.

I knew one person when I started the program. He worked at the same company I did. He didn't do too much with it, but he was the only person I knew. He didn't put an effort into it, he was young, only in his early 20's and still living at home. I was constantly after him. I was kind of like his mother, trying to push him along, which kind of paid off in the end because when we had graduation, his mother thanked me. She said that I had been pushing behind him and helped him get through that program, because he had been the kind of person who doesn't follow through with anything. I got behind people and kept them going; they all got depressed and stuff like that. Smoking does have its advantages, because the smoking area, we all got together there.

Lydia saw herself as different from many of her classmates in the program because her only child was almost an adult and her home life was less frenetic with daily obligations than many of the younger mothers of small children. Though the patterns in her home shifted because she studied in the evening, she described her contributions in the household as similar to when she had worked. Though she had begun to be resistant to the assumptions that she should be the primary caretaker, she didn't make an issue of it during her schooling; it wasn't until recently that she took a stand:

With my daughter, it wasn't so bad with her, because she went to school full-time, and she worked at an evening job. It didn't bother her too much, as long as I was there if she really needed to talk about something. She'd come into my room where I worked and talk.

I continued to do all the household stuff, cooking and cleaning, while I was in school. It's probably been just in the last three months that I have said, "I'm not doing that any more. Everyone is going to help. I'm tired." As far as I'm concerned, they're all old enough to take care of themselves. Why do I have to take care of them?

Do the cooking, do the shopping, do the laundry, do the cleaning, everything was so routine, that I was sick of it. Either something was going to have to change within the household or the people were going to have to change. [During the program], I didn't want to put that much energy into any other thing besides the schooling, it was easier to do it than to get into discussions. Before, when I worked, I'd come home, cook supper, do the dishes, and sometimes we'd go out somewhere and shoot some pool, maybe have a couple of drinks, maybe watch TV. After school started I was pretty hard on myself.

As we will see in the section on Lydia's previous schooling, Lydia was not hard on herself as a student when she was a teen. She was simply absent most of the time. In the Workplace Skills program, Lydia discovered her capacity to do academic work and to use the voice she had been developing as a working adult:

The Workplace Skills program was a breeze, it seemed like a breeze. It was nice to have a little brush up here and there, and the interaction with students, but as far as the courses went, it wasn't hard. The only place it really made a difference for me, it helped me to brush up a bit on things I hadn't used for years, and it helped me to set up studying habits and schedule myself so that I would know what I could do and couldn't do without overburdening myself. I think I got that out of the program more than anything.

For math, I had a man for a teacher. I didn't have a problem with him, but a lot of other people did. I don't think he knew how to express himself at the level some people were at. He wasn't able to get it down to basics, and it was hard for him. There was one person who used to badger the hell out of him, pardon the English, and it would provoke him. I mean he had it difficult, there were students in class that didn't understand anything.

They set him up as a bad guy, so when some of the students were having problems, they wouldn't go to him.

This particular testimony from Lydia was quite informing to me in its contrast to the stories many of the other interviewees had told me about their very positive experiences in the math component of the program because of the female teacher they had learned math from (See Germaine and Theresa, for example). The difference between their memories of a teacher who cared, offered constant encouragement, and validated their capacity to do the work revealed once again the significance of the teacher's style in working with academically vulnerable adults. Lydia had no problems with the math:

Math was my favorite. I've always enjoyed math. As a matter of fact, he had me teach the math one time, from my perspective, and a lot of students understood it. He pulled me aside after class and said I would have been a natural, I should have gone into teaching. I said, "You say that to me because I was able to help them out in one particular situation. How do you know that I won't get like you and lose my cool?"

He laughed, because I was very outspoken with my teachers if I thought there was a problem. I even went to him, I approached him and said why I thought he was having difficulties and stuff like that. He thanked me. Some people would get defensive and annoyed with it, but he didn't, he thanked me.

After Lydia completed the Workplace Skills program, she enrolled in and graduated two years later with an Associate Degree in Business with a major in accounting with a grade point average of 3.8. At her graduation ceremony, she remembers her daughter Janie's pride in her: "Janie thought it was so great, she was so proud. 'That's my mother.' Someone came off the stage, and I introduced them to her, and she said, 'This is my mother!'" Lydia hopes that this experience will stimulate Janie to go back to school some day.

Lydia's job search following her graduation was a major frustration to her and once again raises a question about using the criterion of getting a job in the field studied as a measure of "self-sufficiency." As with Trudy's willingness to work as a welder in a region where experienced welders were increasingly being laid off, a graduate's attainment of any job is limited less by the client's capacity and willingness to work than by the employment market.

You're not going to get a job in accounting, not with just an associate's degree. It's not going to happen. There are too many people out there that have their CPA's, their bachelor's, who are going for the same thing. Unless you can find a company that is just starting out and is on the ground floor and they can't afford somebody of that caliber, yah, you might have a chance of getting a job in accounting. I tried. I sent out fifty to seventy-five resumes, just opened the phone books and went through the accounting firms, and there was no response.

Unable to find a permanent job in accounting, Lydia went to work for a temporary placement agency, and after doing a job for a major corporation, she "decided that working for someone else was not what [she] wanted to do." She then established her own business in detail cleaning of personal residences and has successfully maintained an adequate income in this business for the past two years.

The changes that Lydia saw in herself are reflected in the opening statement to this chapter that she made about change and are evident in the kinds of changes she has made in her life circumstances with her daughter, her fiancée, her parents, and her work. I asked Lydia if being in the program changed the way she thinks about herself:

Yup. I discovered I can do anything I put my mind to doing. If the access is there, I can do it. It changed me, and just going into the business proved that. I wouldn't have done that ten years ago. I wouldn't have dared.

I always wanted to own my own business, but I never would have attempted it. I wouldn't have dared.

Some of the days, I had bad days like anyone else, when I would say, "What the hell am I doing here, why aren't I working?" It was almost a relief when I graduated, but it was also a let down, like reading a good novel and coming to the end of it. And then you wish you had more involvement. That's exactly the way it felt. But I do want to go back some day. And as far as learning goes, you learn no matter where you are and what you're doing. Book learning, no, I didn't even like to read. I read now!

Lydia's vitality and energy about her life and her future were evident in all of our interviews. Also evident, however, was her heaviness, almost a palpable unhappiness, that she remembered feeling during in her growing up years. Her private troubles as a child and a young adult came from her sense of isolation and her need for a different kind of relationship with her parents than she was ever able to develop until recently. Lydia's inability to talk to her parents was particularly difficult in regard to several experiences of sexual assault that she suffered and will be revealed in the section on gender and relationships. It was only in response to my questions about her unhappiness at home and at school in her teens that the rape she experienced when she was fourteen surfaced.

Private Troubles: Stories from the Past

Childhood Memories

Lydia was the first born child of seven children in her family. Both of her parents worked throughout her childhood, her mother doing piecework at a local shoe shop and her father working in construction. Her mother "worked through pregnancies and then went back to work after the pregnancies." Lydia's siblings were about a year apart in age, with an age range of eight years from Lydia the oldest to her youngest brother:

One of my mother's children died when she was fifteen months old. I was twelve when she died, and then there were six of us, three boys and three girls. She had lost a couple in between there too.

When I was born, my dad was twenty years old, and my mom was seventeen. She was pregnant with me, and that's why they got married. My mom was a Ward of the Court; she lived in foster homes. My mom knew her mom; the state had moved in and taken her and her brothers and sisters away from the mother and put them in foster homes, but she never knew her father. She had contact with her mother maybe once or twice after I was born, and then her mother died. I didn't ever really know my maternal grandmother.

My mother's foster mother took her out of school when she turned sixteen to stay home and clean the house and do that type of stuff. Her foster parents weren't very nice people. She had lived with them for a long time. They live in this area, and I met them once. My first meeting with them they didn't seem like bad people to me, but some of the horror stories that my mom has told me that she had endure while she was living there, Cinderella type stories, you wouldn't think it was really happening, but it does.

My dad was originally from Rhode Island, and my grandfather got moved up here to work on the rolling mill. When they moved back to Rhode Island, my father had already met my mom, so they just stayed.

We moved a lot when we were small. We were a poor family. My dad worked sometimes two jobs, and then mom was working. My mom was always bringing home strays, people, the homeless, and she would bring them in, like people that she had known, like a family member from one of her friends or something. The next thing you know, the family is living with us and that type of thing. It was never just us growing up. Sometimes it was

whole families and sometimes it was just individuals that would stay with us for months on end.

Along with the confusion Lydia remembered because of the birth of all her siblings and the constantly changing list of strangers that kept coming into and out of their lives, Lydia also was asked to bear increasing responsibilities for the household.

I think they put a lot of responsibilities off on me because I was the oldest; where they were still young, they would like to go do their own thing. As soon as I reached a baby-sitting age, they were never at home. Before that, we had baby-sitters, or mom would be home and dad would be out, or something like that. By the time some of my brothers and sisters got to the age of eleven or twelve, I was no longer living at home. I guess they got a little more lenient for each child as there was less at home. There wasn't as much of a burden as far as the responsibility of the cooking and laundry. There wasn't so many people.

I also did the laundry and housework, in addition to baby-sitting. Saturday morning was the big day of doing everything. Everybody was supposed to chip in, but the boys didn't have to do anything. It was always the girls, basically my [next] sister and I. The chores had to be done first before we could go out and play. Growing up as kids, we didn't really get along that well, my brothers and sisters, because there was a lot of favoritism with the children from my parents. Mostly my mother favored the boys, and to this day, her favorite is her youngest son.

Lydia created a picture of herself in relation with her mother that she has connected to her mother's prolificacy and the consequent relationship that Lydia developed with her paternal grandparents that she described as her most important one growing up.

You see, my mom didn't like me when I was a child. I don't know why she didn't like me, she just did not like me. One reason that I think she had a problem with me was, after I was born, when my mother had another one eleven months later, my grandmother took me for awhile, and I spent a lot of my summers at my grandmother's. I think my mother resented that because I had a relationship with my grandparents. If I had a problem at home or anywhere, all I had to do is call my grandmother in Rhode Island, and they would be there that night. I did that a couple of times, and they would come and get me.

And I was all set to live down there. I was going to go to school down there and everything else, and my father was going to do it, but my mother badgered him so much that he wouldn't sign the papers, so I couldn't stay down there. She said it wasn't fair to the other kids; that is why she wouldn't allow it. But the other kids were happy at home, and I wasn't.

Lydia has done a lot of reflective analysis of her years growing up, in trying to understand some of the reasons for her unhappiness. They seem to be placed in the frame of the differences between her life at her grandparents' home during her visits there and her life at home with parents who "were never there" for her. "I was lucky that I had my grandmother that I could rely on if I really needed someone there." This contrast is represented in the two following portraits:

My mother was mostly verbally abusive. Dad never said too much. My father never intervened on my behalf when my mother yelled at me. She never really would yell too much when dad was home. But all day long we would hear, "Wait until your father gets home." And when dad would get home, nothing would happen. He would come home and read his paper and eat his supper and then go to bed. And we would be sitting there anticipating all night what was going to happen when dad gets home. You think we

would have known after the first couple of times. It was kind of like that latent threat constantly. "Wait until your father gets home." I will always remember that. My father, you asked him a question and it would be, "Go ask your mother." Back and forth all the time. It didn't work.

The most important relationship that I had growing up was with my grandparents. They were always there for me. No matter what happened or what was going on, they would always be there for me. I used to spend all my summers there so it is hard for me to name one event when it came to me and them. I was perfectly content just going to their house and not doing anything all summer, just being at their home. It was peaceful, no one yelled or screamed. They lived on the outskirts of town. There was nobody screaming at me and criticizing everything I was doing or anything like that. There was nobody badgering me. If I wanted to go and read, I could go and read. If my grandmother was doing something and I wanted to help her, she would let me help her. She would show me how to do things. I had a relationship with my grandmother that I should have had with my mother.

In our last interview, Lydia talked about her recent building of a new relationship with her parents. They were divorced a number of years ago, after twenty-five years of marriage, when Lydia was twenty-four years old and into her own crises. Her father remarried a woman only a year older than Lydia, who had four children of her own, so between the two families, Lydia said, "I think that is enough children." Her mother remarried on the rebound, and her second husband committed suicide when he lost his job. Lydia believes she has dealt with a lot of the issues of her childhood directly with her parents, but her siblings refuse to face the issues.

I was devastated by the divorce. I was a very angry person at the time. I think my father had had a lot of relationships. At the same time my mom also had. I think it was because I finally realized that we are all human

beings and nobody on this earth is perfect. My parents were both young when they got married. My mother came from a dysfunctional home, being raised in orphanages and foster homes. Dad did have a functional family, but my grandmother was the person in the family in his household that made most of the decisions, and maybe he assumed that my mom would assume the same type of responsibility. And she was young, and she had no clue, she didn't have the knowledge, she didn't know where to begin. I step back and I look at them as people, rather than as my parents. They didn't have a chance to grow up themselves so how can I hold that against them? I am not angry with them any more.

Schooling

Lydia quit high school in 1973 when she was sixteen years old and a sophomore. She attributed much of her feelings about school to being unable to talk about her unhappiness with her parents. Her lack of communication with them that she described in the above section became an insurmountable barrier to her when she was a teen-ager. Her pattern of skipping school began early and continued until she quit.

I had a real bad time in school. I was in a college town high school, and at that time if you didn't come from a family that had wealth, then you got kind of lost in the shuffle. It didn't have any curriculum, and it was open campus, which I didn't agree with either. I mean they didn't have anything there that really interested me. I just wasn't ready to go through school. And I was having difficulties in my personal life at home. I didn't have a very happy childhood, so I kind of rebelled in my own silent way and just went about my own business.

My mother never talked to him [her father] about all that we did so he never knew anything that we were going through until something drastic would happen. Like me with school. Mom knew about it. She knew all

about me skipping school, but she just let it go. She never talked to dad about it, and dad was shocked when they called him at work to talk to him about it. By that time it was too late. I had already set my pattern.

I walked out of school during the school year, and they were always tracking me down. I would take the bus to school, and then they would call my father and say, "Where is she?" Then I would go back to school again, but I would spend most of the day around the mall, around the campus, walking around. I would be by myself. Then I would go back to school to catch the bus to go home. That went on for probably the whole sophomore year. I quit around January. As soon as I was sixteen, I was out of there. I waited till sixteen because that was the law. My father and mother got tired of fighting with me to keep me in school, so they just signed the papers for me to quit.

I don't know why I was afraid to ask my father for help. We were always, when it came to doing things and stuff, we were always afraid. I think it was because mom used to threaten us so much with him that we would never talk to dad. All those years he never knew anything about what was going on with any of us.

I hated school, and I had a baby-sitting job. I used to baby-sit for my brothers and sisters, and my dad used to give me an allowance. When I would go home from school, I used to have to start dinner and do the laundry and stuff and watch the kids until they got home from work, and sometimes that was for three or four hours. I would skip school all day and then get on the bus and go home and work.

In the above description of Lydia's day to day existence, hanging about the mall and streets during the day, and then going home to assume the responsibility for her five

younger siblings, she revealed little about how she felt about academic work because she was so rarely in the classes. Her memories of her school work were minimal.

There were only two teachers that tried to help me and convince me to stay in school. Mrs. J_____ was the typing teacher sophomore year, and my algebra teacher my freshman year, I can't remember his name. That was the only class I passed my freshman year. I got an A in algebra. Everything else I flunked. I didn't go to class. I went to his class because I liked the subject, and he was a good teacher. He would get your attention and wasn't so stern and straight-laced. He was more down to earth.

My English teacher, I couldn't stand him, I couldn't stand him at all. He always insulted the students. He didn't insult me, but he was insulting students in the class, and I can't stand that. Even when I was in the class, he didn't address me in the classroom. He probably didn't dare to say too much to me because I wasn't there half the time, and the times that I was, he wanted me to be there. I observed him using humiliation tactics, and he would make some of the other students cry.

The way I felt about myself depended on what I was doing. Like in math, I knew I was good in it. I was very quiet in school and I always sat in the back of the class. I just would never mingle in conversation or try to meet new people and stuff. I was more or less a loner. And I never thought of myself as smart. There were a couple of students in my classes that I thought were quite intelligent just by the way that they presented themselves and by the way that they talked. And they seemed to know quite a lot about different things, you know, a variety of things, not just one certain area. Some of the teachers seemed to know what they were talking about.

Lydia's stories about her schooling experience were similar to Trudy's and other interviewees in regard to their resistance to teachers who were hurtful or dishonest. Lydia

told the story about not doing the preparation for an oral science presentation. When she told her teacher that her project was stolen out of the garage, the teacher made her give her report anyway and gave her a D instead of the F she knew she deserved. She also felt somewhat powerful about her ability to evade them.

As far as authority, I didn't see any. I mean, here I was a student that could just slip through their fingers and walk in and out of the building and they didn't know where I was. I just felt like nobody cared, one way or the other. And I felt like they didn't have too much control of what was going on in the school system, if they couldn't keep a student. And I wasn't the only student. There would be other students that were doing it as well.

As Lydia told her stories about her schooling, her description of herself moving through her days from bus drop to bus pick-up sounded almost somnambulant. I asked Lydia to tell me how she felt about herself at that time, and she was very clear about her feelings: " I didn't like myself, I thought I was a nobody. I liked all the things I couldn't have. It wasn't material things; it was family bonding. To be able to communicate with somebody without somebody putting me down."

Lydia's inability to communicate with her parents seemed to be an overwhelming problem for her. Her descriptions of being a loner, very quiet, always in the back of the class were elements of her invisibility as a student in school as well. As she shared her most memorable story from her teen years, the schooling aversion and subsequent absence during her freshman and sophomore years were clarified as a deeply based depression, which she now attributes to her silence about several experiences of sexual assault, the most significant a rape in her freshman year of high school. Lydia retrospectively identified this rape as the major turning point experience of her life, where she started "not really caring about what was going on."

Relationships and Gender

I got raped when I was fourteen. I was raped by a person that used to hang around the high school. Everybody knew him. I think that I was fourteen and that was the time, I think that is when I started not really caring about what was going on. I didn't tell anybody, I didn't even tell my parents or anybody else what happened until I was thirty-one years old. I went home after he raped me and took a hot bath and went to bed.

This was outside of the school. I was about fourteen and he was about twenty-one or so. I was not afraid of him after it happened. I ran into him about five years ago. He was hitch-hiking. I had all I could do not to run him down with that car. I just kept right on going. I don't know if he still lives in the area. I knew him by name, I knew him by appearance. He was known for getting in trouble. After that, I would read in the paper lots of crazy things that he was doing in town, and stuff like that.

I never had a sense of responsibility to report him because he might be doing it to others because at that time I was more afraid of what my parents were going to think of me. I never even gave it a thought about what was going on, if he had done it to anybody else or anything like that. Back then you really didn't hear that much about responsibilities socially and all that thing.

I did try to commit suicide a couple months afterward. I couldn't stand it. And from that day up until that time that I was thirty-one, my father never knew why it was that I tried to slit my wrists. My brother stopped me. I was in the hospital for a couple of days. My brother had found me after I did one, and then he stopped me from doing the other one. He broke down the bathroom door. My parents were not home.

I don't know how he knew that I was doing it. I never asked him. I don't know how he knew, he just kicked in the bathroom door. And he sent my little sister across the street to the neighbors. The neighbors are the ones that took me to the hospital. He might have known that I was depressed, he yelled to me in the bathroom, and I didn't answer. It was strange that day, come to think of it. It was my brother that was eleven months younger than I am. I was fourteen years old at the time and he was thirteen.

Lydia's narration of this assaultive experience and its effect on her was offered in a muted, emotionally flat voice. Her repetition several times of the fact that she was fourteen years old at the time was a dramatic explanation of Lydia's next year and a half of schooling that we have already seen, a somnambulant child trying to be invisible by working hard at home and by hiding in the back of the classroom. When Lydia and I had our final interview, after she had read the transcripts, she said, "I started reading part of it, and it's like, my God. It made me realize the things I had said, and it made me start thinking, and I didn't want to think, so I put it away." Lydia told her parents about this incident when she was thirty-one. I asked her if her parents had ever investigated the reasons for her attempted suicide? She said, "Of course they asked. They even brought me to a psychiatrist, and I never talked there either. I'd just sit there."

I think that, when I started to, when I put that away, the first part of it, that rape played a very important part in my life, and I didn't realize how much. I had buried it until talking about it again, and then seeing it on paper, it's like when I was reading the transcript, it's going, like everything bounces back and forth. It's like I'd start talking about something and I'd end up somewhere totally, I'd end up somewhere else. I was avoiding going into depth about what I was initially talking about.

Lydia, in discussing her reaction to the rape, also related other sexual molestation she had memories of from early childhood. Though she couldn't remember the details of

her childhood experience, she began to investigate the basis of her memory by talking to her father.

Well, I also was molested at a very young age. When I was three years old, the only way I knew what age I was at, was that I asked in passing one day, I just asked my father. I described the house so that he would tell me where it was we were living and what years we had lived there to find out what age I was when the molestation started. I was three. It was a very good friend of my parents who molested me, and then in turn I didn't find out until later, because of my silence, I didn't say anything, he also molested my sister, both of my sisters. My younger sister got it worse than my other sister and myself, he went further to the part where he was threatening her with killing my younger brother and the whole thing. He in turn also molested his granddaughters and my cousins, the girl cousins.

I have been doing some research about it and actually sat down and talked to my sister, cause she still has nightmares till this day, and I wouldn't have realized so much except for some time a few months ago we were at a party and we were drinking, and whatever she was drinking brought back all this to her. She had blacked it all out. And she was going to run, and she kept telling her husband to call me, call me. Two o'clock in the morning, I get a phone call. He knows all about it, she was open with him about it in the relationship. "I've got to run away, I've got to protect my daughters from him. He's around, he's back."

I kept saying to her, "If you run away, by yourself, how are you going to protect your daughters? You're leaving your daughters vulnerable. You have got to stay there and watch over them."

"No, no, no." She was frantic on the phone. I was on the phone with her for an hour and a half. At one point she threw the phone down, she

wouldn't talk to me anymore. Her husband is in the background trying to get her, she was trying to get out of the house. But it brought everything out. So since that time, she and I have actually sat down and talked about the situation, and, of course my parents, they didn't want to believe it. You know, they can't believe that about their friend.

So the rape in school, that time I was molested, and then one other time, that same man, that molested me as a child and molested my sisters, it was after I was raped in school, and I was fourteen then. I was fifteen, and he came to the house drunk, and I was home from school that day. For some reason, I was the only one in the house, but one of my dad's friends was out in the garage working on his snow machine. He attempted to rape me that day, and somehow, I got him off me. He was a big man, 6 foot four, about 200 and something pounds. But I managed to run outside, and I asked the other guy if he'd please stay till my parents got home. He said, "What's the matter?" and I said, "Nothing. Would you just please stay?"

And I didn't tell my father about that either. That guy did tell my dad that I had asked him to stay, because he said I looked like I was scared, but dad never researched it. He never bothered to ask me.

When Lydia and I talked about her experiences of assault, we explored the problems intrinsic in remaining silent about sexual assault and not only in the sense of the unvoiced fears but also in the sense of the safety of others. Lydia still feels guilt about her lack of disclosure of the family friend and its effect on her younger sisters. Lydia and I entered into the following dialogue about this family friend:

Marcia: Has this person ever been prosecuted for this?

Lydia: No.

Marcia: Nobody's ever brought it out?

Lydia: No. I don't know.

Marcia: Is he still around?

Lydia: He's around the area, he lives in Maine somewhere. He even had a little girl he molested.

Marcia: There are little girls still being affected by this man. That's scary as hell.

Lydia: The statute of limitations is gone on something like that. You also get a mental block when it comes to a relationship. You know, you kind of lose it. One of my cousin's reaction is that she blocked it.

Marcia: And you dropped out of school.

Lydia: I don't know. It was after that that I had dropped out of school. I lost interest in everything. I had just started high school. I just wanted to be alone. I remember days that I would just go down to town and go into one of the pizza places for hours and I'd just sit there by myself.

Though we have already heard Lydia's stories about her hiding through her first two years of high school surrounding the rape she experienced as a freshman, the second assault by her family's friend the year after her rape and attempted suicide seemed to solidify her vulnerability. Lydia once more linked her sense of isolation with her fear of talking to her parents about what had happened to her and the coordinate fear of being alone in a dangerous world: "I didn't feel safe anywhere. I mean if I was living at home being molested as a young child, and then being raped by someone in school, and then being near raped again, in my house, I didn't feel safety or security anywhere, and least of all from their protecting me from anything."

When Lydia dropped out of school, she went immediately to work in a shop where she worked around cement all day. She had met a young man at her aunt's when she was still in school. She had not had any previous relationships with boys during school.

My aunt introduced me, but she didn't do me any favors. He was nineteen at the time, and he had quit school too. I did not have an immediate relationship with him, but then I did and I ended up pregnant. Between the

time I left school in January, I was pregnant because I had the baby in December. We ended up getting married at the eighth month of pregnancy. It was different. I didn't care one way or the other what was going on. I just didn't care. I was still sixteen at the time.

My dad found out that I was pregnant at the same time that his best friend had died in a car accident, so he was kind of like, he said to me that life was too short for him to make decisions as to what I wanted to do with my life. That it was up to me what I wanted to do and he would stand by me with whatever I decided to do. I didn't want to hear that at that time.

The marriage didn't last very long. He couldn't keep a job or anything like that. We had an apartment. My dad for a wedding present had paid for us to move into our own place to start off with. Daddy ended up paying our rent, buying our groceries, and everything for probably five months after Janie was born. My husband wasn't responsible, and I told him, "This isn't working, I might as well go home. If my father is going to pay all the bills here, I might as well live at home where there is room for me and the baby."

I really didn't care for him either. I don't know why I married him. I didn't care for him at all. We had lived together for probably five months and that was it. Then I moved back home, and we got divorced in September of the following year, so we weren't even married for a year. I just didn't want anything to do with him.

Lydia ended up on welfare and then moved back to her home where she had been so unhappy. Her grandmother in Rhode Island offered to have Lydia and Janie move down there, but Lydia said she "just didn't feel right" about it. She didn't have a job, and she had no way of supporting herself and her daughter. "I had gone there and stayed many summers and not thought anything about support, but here I was bringing my

responsibility with me, bringing Janie with me." During this period, Lydia made some important decisions. She had now become a public issue, she was collecting welfare, a school drop-out, and living back at home. "I looked at my life and didn't want to go that route. I had seen too many families that were on welfare that really abused it, and I didn't want to be put in the same category."

She went to the welfare agency, told them she wanted to go to school, and they put her in a program similar to the one that Trudy entered before the Workplace Skills. "I took exactly three weeks of classes, and I was testing high enough in the classes that the teacher told me, she says, 'You don't need any of these classes.' So she scheduled me for the test and I took it and passed it. And that was it for my GED. It was weird and so much easier than going to school. In 1977, I was going to be twenty-one years old."

Lydia's second relationship began about six months after she returned to her family's home. She believes that she became interested in him because he showed an interest in her child.

At that point in time I think I was looking for someone to help take care of her more than I was to be with me. We were together for fifteen years. That was not a healthy relationship either. He was, he still is an alcoholic and was very abusive when he was drinking. He was a violent alcoholic, physically and verbally. That wasn't a healthy relationship either, but I stayed in that for a long time. I had a six-year relationship with him before I got married. We lived together. I was a glutton for punishment. He was working, and when he wasn't drinking, he was an excellent person. We got along fine when he wasn't drinking, he worked, he was a very good worker. He was a good provider for my daughter, who wasn't his. He accepted her, he raised her as his own daughter. He still has a relationship with her today.

The most significant characteristic that Lydia attributes to her long-term marriage with her second husband was that he was a worker, a good provider. Rooted in a family that knew how to work hard, Lydia sustained the marriage despite the abuse she suffered when her husband was drinking. Lydia's second marriage ended after several episodes where her husband left to be with his girlfriend and returned because he wasn't certain he wanted to end the marriage. Lydia finally asked him to leave and began divorce proceedings. She had refused to marry him until she was working, and after she found the job at the plant that she remained in for ten years, she finally agreed to marriage. "We separated in 1988, he left me for a younger woman. I am the one that took the initiative for the divorce. He wasn't too pleased about it because he wasn't too sure how things were going to work out with his younger girlfriend, and he wanted me to kind of hang tight for awhile." Lydia said that she had come to discover that "there are so many things out there that can change people in a split second in the course of events."

Lydia Today

In our final interview, Lydia admitted, "I had to have one relationship before I got out of another." Recently in ending her relationship with her fiancée, she recognized that she was once more in the pattern where she was seeking a new relationship to have an "excuse" to get out of a failed one. Indeed, she began her relationship with her fiancée as a way of getting out of her marriage with an abusive husband with whom she stayed for fifteen years. She attributes her decision not "to date someone right now" to recognizing that she was getting angry with herself: "I saw a pattern and I didn't like it. I saw what was happening and I didn't like it."

Lydia's self-assessment is on-going. Her entry into the workplace skills program was a choice. The results have been dramatic in regard to Lydia's sense of herself today and in the future. She has become a source of support for some of her siblings who are now disclosing their own sexual assault experiences from their childhood. Her parents' denial of their experiences is not very important to Lydia at this point.

Lydia's completion of the Workplace Skills program and then her associate's degree have restored her sense of herself as a student that had been buried in the fourteen-year-old high school drop-out.

Lydia: My dad promised me a car if I graduated from high school. So when I graduated from college, I said, "Well, Dad, where is that car you promised me?" and he said, "That was from high school," and I said, "Yah, but Dad, this is one step better. Does that mean I get one step better car?"

Marcia: So did you get it?

Lydia: No, I didn't even expect to. I don't even know how he was going to find the means to do it back then.

Marcia: Well you have said your parents weren't there for you, but your father kept trying to bribe you to stay in school with the car.

Lydia: Yah but this is after all the other shit happened. All the rape happened. When they were having a hard time keeping me in school, I think I was fifteen, I'd go to school but they just couldn't find me. And they finally stopped calling my mother because there was nothing she could do. They couldn't find me. I was right across the street from where they were at. But he did, at the end of it, he tried.

Marcia: I see that there is a different kind of strength in you as a result of going through the program, and I want to know if that is true from your perspective.

Lydia: Well, I think that a lot of it is that I have always known deep down inside that I had the ability, but I think that going through school and doing as well as I did in school, after being out for so long, it just kind of clarified things for me. Because I always wondered, what would it have been like if I had gone through school and graduated, and sometimes I think in a lot of ways I was punishing not just myself but my family as well. When I was in the program, my daughter graduated from high school, and my whole family went to her graduation. My father said, "You know, it's pretty bad when you have to wait thirty-six years for somebody in your family to graduate from high school." Not

one of us graduated from high school. There are three of us that have a GED, and I am the only one that's attended college. There wasn't one of us.

Lydia's recent decision to help her daughter move into her own place and to ask her fiancée, a cohabiting partner of seven years to leave, was a huge step toward independence. "I have the independence, but I want inner independence. I want to be able to, I can come and go as I please. I have spent most of my life not being alone. I want some time."

Lydia ended her relationship with her fiancée in the fall. She worried about the financial problems this might cause her, but she decided that she would be able to manage now that Janie is working and on her own. Fifteen years ago, a great uncle of Lydia's contacted her to ask for her social security number because he was doing some estate planning. She had been close to this uncle from childhood because he lived near her grandmother in Rhode Island. In November her uncle died, four months after she had asked her fiancée to leave. He had made her the beneficiary of an annuity that will help her financial stability. "I have a small inheritance, I receive so much for the next eight years. It was a very nice surprise."

Lydia's voice in talking about her excitement and her uncertainty reminded me of Germaine's when Germaine said, "There are many problems that happen, as a result, long term, that won't go away from years of constant abuse like that" (Chapter 3). Similarly, Lydia acknowledged, "I am trying. I mean that's a struggle, to keep functioning every day. There's a lot of nights that I don't sleep very well. And there are a lot of days when I feel depressed and I go through phases when I get down in the dumps." Lydia is safe and secure, in her own home, with her own business, with her small annuity, and with her confidence that she can do almost anything at an all time high. As she proclaimed in the opening statement to this chapter, "What I do with myself doesn't necessarily always have to involve other people. . . . What I have to do is right for me."

Lydia, her mother, and her daughter all were pregnant and married before they were seventeen. When Lydia decided to forgive her mother for not being available during her

childhood, she was ready to move forward in her own life. And when Janie decided to get a divorce after three years of an unhealthy marriage, the differences between the generations became visibly apparent: with Lydia's mother it was twenty-five years and with Lydia it was fifteen years. Her retrospective description of her mother was really quite powerfully a description of her own self (and Janie) and formed a basis for her self-forgiveness and self-acceptance: "She was young, and she had no clue, she didn't have the knowledge, she didn't know where to begin."

Lydia has a new kind of knowledge now. Her sense of self-sufficiency has at its roots her success in graduating from Workplace Skills and then from college, her certainty that she can take care of herself financially and emotionally, and her newfound comfort in being alone with herself, a dramatic change from the invisible child in the back of the class. With a lilt in her voice Lydia proclaimed, "Thirty-nine! I just had a birthday, and in all those years, I have never lived alone. I'm kind of excited."

PART THREE:
ATTENTION MUST BE PAID

CHAPTER EIGHT

CHANGES IN SELF-SUFFICIENCY

She had been pushing on a massive oak door that she could scarcely budge, leaning her weight on it and thrusting with all her strength until her muscles ached. Suddenly it had folded back like a paper fan, leaving her still poised to push, unbalanced with surprise. She was free to move forward now, it seemed, at her own speed.

Marge Piercy
Fly Away Home

Introduction

The primary purpose of engaging in this project was to offer an alternative method of program evaluation than the one typically engaged in by the institutions and agencies of publicly-funded programs. As I have argued, aggregative data methodology offers one kind of evaluation, the documentation of the "success" of the program statistically by the measurement of employment gains as a criterion of self-sufficiency. But I have also shown in my portrait chapters what I perceive to be significant gains in self-efficacy, in a sense of self-sufficiency that is more personal and individual and is defined in a more qualitatively complex way than the definition based upon pursuit, acquisition, and retention of a job.

The kind of self-sufficiency that my interviewees have gained is defined by them more as a capacity than as an outcome. As my interviewees revealed the changes wrought in themselves through their participation in the program, the substantial difference in their viewpoints about their present and future lives is one based upon a changed belief system, a sense of their capacity, indeed their personal sense of agency, not only to handle their private troubles, but also to initiate changes to improve their life circumstances. This contextualized sense of self-sufficiency is grounded in their current view of themselves juxtaposed with their view of their possibilities before they returned to school. Bandura (1989) has conceptualized the importance of self-efficacy as a basis of capacity to change one's life directions: "Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or

pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives" (p. 1175).

The perspective I have offered is the reflective viewpoint of the participant by engaging her in both written surveys and open-ended dialogue about the program and its meaning for her. This alternative perspective has gained us a depth of understanding of the characteristics of the program that the participants viewed as the most important and valuable to them, particularly in regard to developing their sense of self-sufficiency. My assumption was that their dependency on public support at the beginning of the program was at least a public acknowledgment that they were indeed not self-sufficient in some essential ways.

All my interviews indicated that individuals who were fundamentally different at the moment of entrance into the program in age, marital status, number of children, and work history were there because they had common characteristics: (a) They were out of work, (b) they needed some academic remediation to alter their state of unemployment, and (c) they had become in their past or their current lives "public issues" because of their dependency on public assistance to survive. Most were receiving some form of welfare benefits: Aid to Dependent Children, disability, child care, transportation, medical benefits, low income housing, and/or food stamps. Though unemployment benefits are not considered welfare, those who entered the program because of job loss were eligible because their unemployment status was either from a permanent reduction in force or a company close-down. The kind of work they were trained to do was no longer available and was not transferable to other companies.

The program became a center for them to build a community of friends, to discover their academic potentialities and interests, and to define some goals for achieving a better present and future for their lives and the lives of their families. Through the building of a community, an essential characteristic of the program, these women also came to understand that their histories had fundamental similarities in one or several ways: in their

impoverished sense of personal value, in family instability, in parental and/or spousal abuse, in negative schooling experiences, in chemical dependencies, in gender objectification, and in sexually assaultive events. As their "private troubles" came to be shared with each other, they found a voice among new friends who revealed similar struggles that allowed them to understand their personal sufferings in a different frame, one less self-defensive and self-accusatory and more self-strengthening and transformational. The stories revealed to each other and more recently revealed to me through our interviews were an instrumental part of their self-discoveries about change. Although they acknowledged that their struggles would continue to exist as an element of their daily lives, their personal resources for confronting them and dealing with them had changed.

In this chapter, I want to bring together the reflections of the women in my portrait chapters and my other interviewees on their experiences in the program and on how they perceived the program to have altered their personal sense of self-sufficiency. As we examine some of the experiences and reflections of my other interviewees in relation to those provided in my portrait chapters, we will come to see that an effective method of evaluating public programs is to ask those people who participated in them how they themselves would evaluate the program. The valued characteristics of the program and the characteristics of "self-sufficiency" are framed in this chapter of analysis within the voices of those women who validated the changes they have experienced in the program by talking about their current lives and futures in relation to their histories. Their view of the effectiveness of the program and their definition of self-sufficiency within the context of their lives are as complex as their histories and their changing perception of themselves.

Valued Characteristics of the Workplace Skills Program

We have already heard the voices of the women in the portrait chapters reflecting upon their experience in the Workplace Skills program in relation to their biographical histories. I requested all of my participants' assessments of significant program features both in the survey instruments and in the interviews. Although my research scripts are available in the appendices, I want in this section of my research study to offer a brief review of the construction of the open-ended questions used and a reproduction of at least some of the specific questions that were asked.

The questions on the first survey were neutrally constructed to avoid revealing my assumptions that positive changes had occurred in my interviewees' lives. I strongly believed that participation in the program constituted at least a temporary change in their daily lives because of its weekly demand for a commitment of presence on campus at least twenty-five hours a week, as well as its requirement to travel daily and to make financial and familial adjustments. However, I wanted to avoid imposing this assumption on their responses. I hoped that by forming neutral questions, I would evoke a critical response and that the participants' evaluation of the program might suggest both negative and positive features that had affected their performance and their sense of themselves. Consequently, the questions on the survey under the heading "Workplace Skills Program" asked my respondents to tell me about the experiences in the program that have stayed with them and whether the program changed the way they think of themselves in their worlds and relationships:

- 2.a What do you think will stay with you about your experiences in the program?
- 2.b. Did the program change the way you think about yourself in the public world and in your home?
- 2.c. Did the program change your relationships with significant people in your life?

Though the survey responses to these questions were brief, they verified that my assumptions about change were accurate. Almost all survey respondents in answering the above questions indicated that the program introduced major changes in their lives. In

constructing my interview scripts, therefore, in my interview on the program itself, I incorporated the above survey questions as well as an extension of these questions regarding change during the program and after the program was completed.

My first direct question in the second interview requested them to reconstruct their memories of their feelings when they were first admitted to the program and during the first week of attendance. This question was intended to frame their sense of themselves within their biographical histories as they began to engage in an academic remediation program. The rest of the questions I raised in regard to Workplace Skills were constructed to elicit their view of the characteristics of the program that were significant to them. I repeated the first two questions of the survey (2.a. and 2.b., above) to evoke dialogically a fuller response than I had gained in the survey, using as a sub-question, "I want to know everything you can remember about the program and your involvement in it, both good and bad." Other questions were raised to gain my interviewees' perspectives on what was "most helpful," "what the program didn't provide," and what they were able to learn and "were unable to learn there."

From my interviewees' responses, I was able to categorize some important and valuable characteristics of an effective adult literacy program. The categories under which these positive characteristics emerged include the dispositions of social welfare agencies, the institutional environment and structure, the academic curriculum and standards, and the credentials and teaching style of faculty. Within these categories my interviewees were articulate about what they valued in regard to community and choice in their development as students. The following sections offer my explication of and evidence for the evaluative characteristics that emerged in my interviews.

The Program as an Opportunity

The women who enrolled in Workplace Skills did so because it was available, because it was free, and because it was offered. Though the previous statement might seem truistic, not one of my participants would have initiated entry into a preparatory

program entirely of their own volition. Because they were required to report to the agencies that were assisting them financially, they were informed about the opportunity to attend the program by social welfare agency personnel. They came to know about an educational option because the funding had already been established and the program existed. Moreover, a communication network had been formed between the social welfare agencies to offer the program as an alternative.

Only two of my interviewees learned about the program indirectly rather than in dialogue with case workers in their offices. Eve, who was not on any form of public assistance and therefore did not report to welfare agencies, learned about the program through a recruitment advertisement for Workplace Skills in the local paper. Her eligibility was based upon poverty-level income as a self-employed seasonal worker, who had been doing part-time work to survive off-season. She said, "They were recruiting people who needed a career change, no income, or whatever. And when this opportunity took place, it was at a low point, I had hurt my back, so I met with the agency, and they said I was definitely eligible." Mona learned about the program from a friend who had also been laid off from her job: "I called the agency after I heard from a girl that they were going to pay for her schooling. They had me in for an interview and asked me what I wanted to do."

Most interviewees came to be in the program because their case workers advised them about it. Entering an academic preparatory program was simply not within their views of themselves or their possibilities. Though some of them remembered their previous schooling in a positive light, for the most part, their view of themselves as students was pervasively negative. They had memories of being humiliated, being called stupid by parents and teachers, and of failing to succeed academically relative to their peers. Many of them had some positive recollections about their social relations and activities in public school, and some had positive memories of a teacher or principal who treated them well, or a course in which they believed they had learned the material well. However, they mostly remembered school as an unpleasant place, where they didn't "fit" or where they

couldn't reconcile the demands of classes against the demands in their personal life outside of school.

Lori, a forty-year-old divorced mother of three young adults, remembered, for example, that she aborted her education early because she couldn't do both school and work. "I worked at a sardine factory. I was going to high school at the time. I left high school to go to work, because I had to. That's what I was told by my family. I was stupid. They didn't want me to work at school. It was too much, going to school, then working." Lori left school at fifteen as a sophomore despite attempted intervention by the principal, because her parents told her she should. Similarly, Jana remembered that she left high school to go to work: "My mother gave me seven days to get a job or I would have to go back to school and I said, 'I'll have a job today.' It wasn't that I didn't like learning. It was because they kept telling me how dumb I was."

Of the fourteen women I met in the initial interview, eight of them gained their academic credentials by testing for the GED, one within the year she quit school and another forty-five years later. One woman with a GED passed the test only two weeks before entrance into the program. Of those graduating from high school, one remembers being at the bottom of her class, another who was always in special education classes remembers reading at the third grade level when she was "passed through" and allowed to graduate in three years, and another was never required to have any academic subjects throughout her schooling because she was enrolled in a vocational program. They all reported that their grades were average or below average in school, and other than Trudy, they did not see continuing their education as a possibility, though some inwardly dreamed about going to college someday. Hal Beder (1991) found that adults' resistance to attending literacy programs was most often a reflection, not of their resistance to learning, but to their resistance to reliving prior negative schooling experiences (p. 87).

The agency workers who recruited my interviewees into the Workplace Skills program seemed to understand this potential for resistance by their clients and, from what I

have been able to determine from the interviewees' testimony, were encouraging and positive about the program being a good choice for them. Lori said, "I had gotten laid off and was going to a workers' assistance center. The ladies there kept talking about school. I didn't think I was college material, so they convinced me to take some tests, and I passed them. They told me that I definitely would be college material if I put the effort into it. I was surprised. They kept talking to me about it. I was going to go out and get a job and they said, 'Don't be foolish.'"

Though some of my participants, such as we have seen in the testimony of Trudy and Theresa, were more interested in getting a job than in going back to school, most of them were presented with the Workplace Skills program as an attractive option, an opportunity that they could choose to accept or not within a field of other options like on-the-job-training, job search support, or skills specific training. Mona, for example, said, "They had me in for an interview and asked me what I wanted to do. I said I think I want to go to school." When they told her about the various programs, she remembered thinking, "Fine and dandy, they'll get me a job at this place, a six-week training program, and then you have hopes that you'll get hired but you're kind of stuck. You have no training behind you for later on if anything should happen."

My interviewees were also advised that Workplace Skills was a first step to other options, including the potential for their continuing their education in college degree programs. Jane believed that this information made a difference in her decisions about her choices: "Education is the key. If I hadn't had this opportunity, I wouldn't have known that, I would have thought education is for somebody else. If this program hadn't come along, I might not have gone."

It is this notion of choosing, I believe, that propelled most participants forward into the program with some anxiety but also with a sense of possibility that is revealed in their words: "I was excited"; "I was scared, I didn't think I could do it, but they insisted [I could], so I went"; "I was gonna do it no matter how hard it was, because this was my

opportunity." Lana distinguished in her own mind between the program and other options when she said the following: "This was something I always wanted to do, and I felt this was my opportunity to do it. I just didn't want to be that trained person again." Like Mona, she had been trained before; when she lost her job, she had no place to go.

The above evidence from my interviewees confirms, I believe, that a viable program must first of all exist and the framing of it must be in the form of an opportunity. The recruitment of adults who are willing to overcome fundamental memories of embarrassment or humiliation within the institution of schooling to attend a literacy program must be implemented in a manner that allows the participants to perceive the decision to be their own and for their own good. Trudy's opposing viewpoint that we have seen in her portrait was an unusual one: she did not believe she had any other options and remained resistant to many of the possibilities that the program offered throughout her participation. Far more reflective of the attitude of the interviewees was the statement of Lydia when she said, "How many times in a lifetime will you have a chance to go to school? It was laying right at my feet, and I felt that if I didn't take it, it was a lost opportunity."

Institutional Environment and Structure

Under the category of institutional environment and structure lie such diverse characteristics as the name of the program, its setting and climate, the daily schedule, and its management. Although administrators tend to examine the effects of adult literacy programs by evaluating academic content and test results, the atmosphere and ethos of an educational facility emerged as a critically important characteristic of the Workplace Skills program.

The decision to call this program Workplace Skills was made as a result of some initial resistance that agency people disclosed that they had heard from clients about the original name of the program, which was Workplace Literacy. The discomfort that the term "literacy" evoked in clients seemed to be related to a value that the general public

places on being educated and the perception of a stigma attached to being labeled an illiterate. The clients were reluctant to enter a program in which they would be identified by the program's name with having educational deficiencies. The most prevalent programs in basic literacy are preparation programs for the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and are offered under the title "Adult Basic Education" (ABE). However, this program was recruiting primarily those people who had already achieved their GED. The name of the program was altered early on as a response to this revealed self-consciousness about the title of the program.

As important as getting the name right is getting the setting right. Adult literacy programs throughout the country are housed in libraries, churches, public high schools, and homes, as well in community and technical colleges and some universities. One of the most positive characteristics that my interviewees repeatedly endorsed about Workplace Skills was its location in a college setting. Germaine's sense that at least she had gotten to college for the summer was similarly voiced by others. Lana, for example, said, "I definitely think it should be done in a college. I mean, when I talked, I'd say college, I was going to college. I would not say workplace skills development program. Being in my late twenties and saying 'I'm in college,' you know, it was a big kick for me. It really was because of the fact that I had gone back." It appears that participants, by attending the program in a college, saw themselves as going to college. This testimony confirmed my belief that adult literacy programs should not be provided in local high schools where adults who are self-conscious about their educational backgrounds are often faced with going back to the same school they had dropped out of or going to the same school as their children.

The climate was also important to the participants. The classes, the schedule, and the timetable were different from the regular college courses and calendar which was structured in a traditional Fall/Spring semester format. Even though Workplace Skills was provided within a college setting, the program was a distinct group of courses that were

attended only by the admitted participants and significantly different in schedule and course names from those of the "regular" students surrounding them in the halls, the cafeteria, and the library. To ameliorate their possible sense of separateness, they were given a college orientation that duplicated the regular one at the college. They were provided college identification cards, they had access to the computer labs and the learning center, they were introduced to all the support service personnel, and they were asked to elect a representative to the student senate and to participate in all college after class activities. In this climate of inclusion, my interviewees saw themselves as members of the entire college, as well as members of the program community. Jane, pregnant through the whole program, reported that "Being in a college was different than high school. It did feel like being in college. The fact that we were in the workplace study program is not like we had a lot of other students from the college come in and participate in the same classes that we were in. We were like a school within a school. I never felt isolated because of the fact that I was able to make acquaintances through the student senate, so I could go over to a group of people, knowing only one, and be introduced to the rest of them and feel comfortable with it."

The structure of the schedule also was identified as a positive characteristic of the program. Separate from the academic content itself, my interviewees liked the requirement that they be on campus every day with open time between classes for peer group studies, relaxation, and support conferences with teachers and tutors. Their biographical memories of public school included classes back-to-back and rigid daily schedules with little time to relax unless they skipped school or classes. Also, in their recent employment, most of the participants had worked at jobs that provided little time for social interaction. We have already heard Germaine's enthusiasm for the opportunity to spend time together and become friends with classmates between classes.

Others revealed similar memories about the informal opportunity to take cigarette breaks between classes, to study together for a test, or to just sit outside in the sun and

chat. Time to talk was very important. Ramona said, "That is where I met my girlfriends. They basically had the same problems I was going through, and they were very supportive. I mean the whole program was very supportive to me, because there were other people in my same situation that I could talk to. We all went together, we studied together, we hung out together. Basically, we all worked together." Jana also saw the importance of time to have conversation: "When school actually started and we all got together and kind of became a group together, we blended. Something one student did, we kind of talked it over at lunch time, and [could say], 'See, you know what the answer was and how to do this.' I was good in something, I was good in math. The kids were all great about helping everybody."

The participants were traveling up to an hour's commute to get to the college from many communities in the region and when they left the college for the day, most of them had family obligations. Those who had young children were provided with child care subsidy, and in many ways they saw the daily schedule as an opportunity to do some of their homework without family interruptions and to do it with people who could help them and whom they could help. Theresa, whose world was described in her portrait as so small, was able to develop her social identity again because of the time she had to be with her new friends while her young children were being cared for by competent providers.

Even though students' primary contact during a program is with their faculty and peers, the administrators of programs can establish an open or distant stance regarding their accessibility to students. My interviewees were clear that a program must have someone who is there to support them when they need support regarding academics, personal troubles, or economic crises. Many of the interviewees were traveling in unreliable cars and were dependent upon gas and child care subsidies to get to class every day. Acknowledgment of their private troubles and a willingness to advocate for them in times of crisis were qualities that participants saw as essential in a program director. In this program, my interviewees saw the director as a mediator with agencies, a simplifier of

bureaucratic paper-work, and a person who was always there, was willing to listen, and was genuinely caring. Jane spoke for many of my interviewees when she said that the director " had every contact, sound advice, the ability to make you think about your problem and find the solution for it. She was wonderful." In Theresa's first interview with the director, Theresa was extremely resistant to the offer to come into the program and said that she hated the director's "energy and enthusiasm." After she entered the program, she realized that it was the director's "outgoing" nature that she succumbed to, a submission that positively changed her life.

The support services available to the interviewees were also important to them such as having daily access to the library, the tutoring services, and the college deans and counselors, along with their own faculty and program director. Mona used the college tutor regularly: "He was excellent. If we had problems, he would go through them with us." Susan remembered that the problems that some of her peers had were more personal than academic, and she said, "The support we received was really good. I mean for any type of problems at home, or anything." Because of the financial problems most participants were having, a fund was available to temporarily loan gas money, for example, and a buddy system was established to link students when one student's car failed her.

It is apparent to me that the ethos of an educational institution is visible to its participants. Germaine was articulate about her feelings upon entering the Workplace Skills program. Since it was free to the participants, she fully expected that the program would be second rate, created to support "second-class citizens." The structural and environmental characteristics of the program that my interviewees identified were ones that helped them to gain some self-respect about the work they were engaged in, because they were going to college and because they had time both to learn academic material and to learn about themselves. The social relations they developed were viewed as an important part of their growth. This growth, however, was clearly linked to their belief in the

significance of the academic environment in which they were engaged --the curriculum, the standards, and the faculty.

Curriculum and Academic Standards

The curriculum in Workplace Skills was constructed to provide undereducated adults with academic foundations. The program offered a review of the basic skills and knowledges deemed important to gaining access to and doing well in regular college courses and also to gaining functional literacy in the work environment. The curriculum included a review and practice in the fundamental skills that are tested in the most commonly used assessment of basic skills, the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) which produces a grade level equivalent of competencies in math and language arts. It also included a course in keyboarding and a course in study and life management skills. This curriculum balanced academic and competency-based foundations that most literacy educators consider essential to gain and keep jobs in today's technology-based employment market (Hayes, 1992; Beder, 1991).

Underlying all of the stories about Workplace Skills that my interviewees shared was a consistent belief among them that the academic work that they did during the program was "real" academic work that helped them to clarify their future choices as students. Though they were all at different stages of academic readiness and had tested at varying levels of competency, the participants revealed a serious appreciation for the opportunity to review the fundamental subjects of math, reading, and writing and to learn anew skills that they believed that they had missed or forgotten from their previous schooling. More than half of my interviewees had aborted their education by the time they were sixteen. Foundational curricula were very important to them. Ramona said, for example, "The actual courses--English and math--were helpful for getting me back into the learning process, for opening the doorway to my mind, for being able to concentrate, to be learning. From the first time we took the test, I gained."

When the participants enrolled in this program, they were advised by social welfare agencies that they would be financially supported for up to a year following the program in some educational plan that they, together with their faculty, would define based upon their academic preferences and competencies. As we have already heard in the evaluative statements of the portrait women, the self-discoveries of the participants in regard to their ability to do academic work were intricately tied to the demands placed upon them to do homework, to complete assignments, and to keep trying when the work was hard to grasp. Eve, for example said, "It was pretty scary going into it. It was very hard, pretty grueling. A lot of homework was given in all those classes. I felt bad for anybody in there who had a family and children in conjunction with the amount of homework. Anybody that didn't have aptitudes in English or math, they cried daily. I had to shut down everything else, I mean everything. No socializing, because most nights I was up until 10 or 11 doing homework. I had to get organized very quickly, just keeping the assignments for classes straight, the dates that they were due, dates they were given. I immediately set myself up to make charts, which I would mimeograph for everybody, because I knew that they were having those kinds of problems. "

Many of the interviewees described their lives as totally devoted to attendance and preparation for attendance. The fact that participants were advised that their future choices to train for a job, to go to work, or to continue in school would be based upon mutual assessment of their strengths and weaknesses seemed to enable them to engage in the learning environment as an "uncovering" of their lost or hidden abilities. Susan, who is still completing an follow up program in dental hygiene, said, " I would have to say that yes it was hard, but I think it really prepared people for college, for what it was going to be. Basically I think in some ways it was harder than college, because it was so combined and so many classes, and having that all combined into a small time bracket. So I think it really did prepare people for when they were ready to go on, how to get their life in order so they could study or whatever way they went about doing it. "

My interviewees reported that very quickly they knew who were stronger in math or English and could tutor or be tutored by others. Each interviewee, in remembering her previous schooling experiences, knew where her weakness in learning needed a strong curriculum. Lori, for example, assessed herself in regard to language arts as vulnerable: "English is my weak spot, but the more I do, the more I can do it. There's always extenuating circumstances in the English language, contradictions. It's difficult for me because I need something to be black and white." And Ramona, like the portrait women and other interviewees we have heard from, was afraid of math from her high school experience: "My least favorite class was math, and I am an accountant now. I had a teacher who didn't care. He was a brilliant man, but he turned me off. He didn't push things, he didn't try to help you when you asked questions or for help. And I just blew it off."

It is clear from my interviews that participants in the program believed that the curriculum was based upon fundamental standards of competency and that their mastery of the material was important to their futures. Because they were told at the beginning of the program what their testing had revealed about their competency against national standards, they were able to understand what they needed to learn to gain access to college classes. Because they were in a group of adults who, like themselves, had academic weaknesses, they were able to voice their inadequacies and ask for help. For most of the interviewees, the potential for continuing in a funded college program became a primary motivator for committing themselves to the academic work. The post-test results for most of the interviewees revealed that both the standards of the curriculum and their commitment to learning had worked well for them. Only two of the fourteen women I interviewed did not continue on to a college program at some two-year college in New Hampshire.

Faculty and Teaching Style

Despite the importance my interviewees attributed to their belief that they were engaged in a rigorous curriculum with rigorous standards and the recognition they shared about the value of an institutional ethos and a lot of support, their most repeated

characteristic of value in the program was its faculty. They verified Sarton's claim that "teaching is more than just a subject, you know" (1961, p.212). Though participants in adult literacy programs must believe that what they are learning is important and valuable to their futures, they must have teachers who are engrossed in fostering their development, acknowledging their achievements, pushing them when they are vulnerable, and encouraging them to try again when they don't understand a concept. Theresa described one such teacher: "She looked, she noticed you."

A profile of the perfect teacher for undereducated adults could be developed from the characteristics my interviewees identified in their reflections on what worked and didn't work for them in the program. It was perfectly clear that as students they believed that their academic gains were made because of the faculty they had in the program. As Germaine already pointed out in her portrait reflections, her discovery that the faculty in Workplace Skills were also the regular permanent faculty in the college elevated their value as "real teachers" and not "just people off the street."

Germaine's assumption that the faculty in her program would be temporary adjunct is justified in light of the increasing use of part-time non-permanent faculty as an economic efficiency in public education or more typically in adult literacy programs the use of volunteers to provide training in community literacy programs. One research study (Chall, Heron, & Hilferty, 1987) argued that an "enduring problem" in literacy programs is located in their "inadequately trained teachers" (p. 196). Some of the comfort that my interviewees gained in the classroom setting came from seeing the "logic of [their] error" (Rose, 1989, p.171) because of the efforts of their faculty to explain a concept or step one more time in a different way. Eve claimed, for example, that they not only "knew all the phobias of adults going back to school, but they were great communicators, very compassionate, understanding, inspiring, and committed." Because Ramona had "blown" math in high school, she was intimidated about getting into algebra. She said, "I realized once I got into this math class that I didn't hate math; it was the teacher I didn't like in high

school." Similarly Mona's vulnerability in English was linked to a previous experience: "I remember an English class in junior high. God, this is probably why I hate English so much! I remember being humiliated. The teacher just didn't care for me. I really believe she didn't like me, and I don't know why. The English teacher in Workplace Skills was wonderful, she made me feel a lot better. I knew more than I thought I knew."

Jane also spoke for more than half of my interviewees when she talked about her experiences in math class with an exceptional math teacher, whom Germaine and Theresa have already mentioned: "She is one of those true teachers, one of those people that ought to be a teacher, and I am very glad she is. There were a lot of math phobic students, and she had the ability to get them by this phobia. If we said, 'We can't do this,' she would say, 'Well, why don't you hold off, think about what you know, relax with it.' It was very nice. She put pressure on us, but not stress. She pressured us into letting us think that we could do it." Jane, the interviewee who was never required to have an academic subject in high school, scored 13% in the math pretest, and when she completed Workplace Skills ten weeks later, she scored 92% and decided to major in an associate degree program in accounting.

It appears that the students found their faculty to be attentive to both their potential and their confusions. Rose (1989) saw that in remedial programs, the more tutors were skilled in "listening and waiting, the better they got at catching the clue that would reveal . . . the intelligence of the student's mistake" (p. 172). When Jana became confused in a class, she would let the teacher know: "If I didn't get it, I would say, 'You just stop. You've got to explain it to me better.'" Jana said that the teacher would stop and would ask "'How many don't get it?' A lot of them were afraid to speak up and then they'd raise their hands. She'd start again, and then we would all be set with the way she was doing it." Eve also clarified what made the difference in math classes. "She never assumed anything. She never left steps out, never took things for granted, and she never expected

the class to all be on one level. In high school, I thought I was very poor in math. I had had bad experiences. The teacher assumed a whole lot."

My interviewees offered negative critique of their Workplace Skills faculty also. Many found that if a teacher focused too much on his/her personal life rather than the subject area within the class that many students were uncomfortable with the disclosures. One of the courses was structured to share personal stories as part of its focus on life management skills. Though some of the interviewees appreciated the teacher's willingness to share her own stories, others felt that her stories were not authentic and disbelieved her. There was some disagreement, however, about the value of the life management course. Ramona, for example, thought that "the teacher kind of opened the door with all of us by asking us to write a personal paper and present it to the class. She helped us open up, and then we knew a lot about each other." And Jane said, "She was good. She would listen to us, she would give us the work to do in the book, and we'd just talk about things in life and how you think you would do it or how you did do it. She did a little bit of everything to make people recognize themselves."

Lydia discussed a teacher who became defensive when the students did not understand his explanations and complained about his teaching methods. She said, "I mean he had it difficult. There were students in the class that didn't understand anything. They set him up as the bad guy." However, she also remarked upon his approachability, his sense of humor, and his flexibility. He asked her to teach a concept that she understood and others were confused about, and when she succeeded in making the material clear, he suggested that she might think about teaching, that she was a natural. Her response was reflective of the way students perceive their teachers in the classroom: "You say that to me because I was able to help them out in one particular situation. How do you know I won't get like you and lose my cool?" Being a teacher in Lydia's view is sustaining the ability to get the material down to the basics, day after day, and finding a method of making the

details clear. She was letting her teacher know that losing one's "cool" doesn't work if the goal is to help the students to understand.

In the midst of very positive testimony about their faculty, my interviewees were able to offer criticism that could be considered a statement of personal taste or teacher ineffectiveness. For example, Lori said, "One teacher wore high heels, and the click of her heels used to make me crazy." Was this statement an idiosyncratic response of Lori or does a condition of clicking heels distract many students in the class? On the other hand, the following statement revealed a more evidential assessment of teaching practice: "One teacher seemed to be lost all of the time. She would come into class late all the time by ten or fifteen minutes and be very disorganized. 'I am sorry I'm late,' shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. 'Does anyone remember where we left off yesterday?' We all had a hard time with that."

Despite these few statements of disappointment, however, in the viewpoint of my interviewees, the faculty in Workplace Skills were the most important reason for their growth in the program. They were both knowledgeable and caring. They were accessible, encouraging, and most important they knew how to teach—they were experienced teachers who could look beyond the records of their students' educational histories and beyond the faces in the classroom to uncover and strengthen the capacities that their students didn't know they had.

Characteristics of "Self-Sufficiency"

The notion of publicly funding an educational program for the purposes of helping undereducated adults to become "self-sufficient" presumes that a state of self-sufficiency is an entity that can be operationalized and measured by the program providers by looking at quantifiable results. I have already explored the problems of the language of the law in regard to this primary goal of JOBS programs, namely that few administrators of programs can agree to a common definition of the term "self-sufficiency" as it relates to the outcomes

of participants. "There is no official definition of what that term means that is serviceable, and its operational meaning is not self-evident" (Chisman & Woodworth, 1992, p. 71).

What is clear both in the policy and in the implementation of it by administrators is that the primary goal of providing educational opportunities is to correct recipients' condition of dependency on public assistance to survive economically. The opposition of the terms "self-sufficiency" and "dependency" in regard to work seems to establish that the terms are mutually exclusive: either the recipient is self-sufficient or the recipient is dependent. The outcome of getting a job or not is the measurable, observable behavior that delineates which label is appropriate. It also presumes that the quality or state of being self-sufficient, which is equated with "being able to maintain oneself without outside aid" (Merriam-Webster, 1964), is a valid goal of public policy. Clearly policy makers have defined "outside aid" as economic subsidy. The problem with the policy is in its presumption that public officials can define an individual's needs in as simplistic a frame as earning enough money to live without outside aid. It seemed to me that the basis of the policy was to have its recipients achieve a form of "public-sufficiency," and that the "self" of recipients of public assistance was not really an instrumental element of the goal.

I am not disputing the importance of public policy being established that provides the opportunity for individuals to pursue economic stability. Surely the fundamental needs of sustenance, shelter, and security require financial resources. I am suggesting that the conceptual basis of dependency and self-sufficiency needs to be examined in a fuller way, within the contextual frame of the recipients' complex experiences both in regard to work and in regard to self.

This section of my thesis is intended to examine "self-sufficiency" in a different frame, one which focuses on my interviewees' viewpoints about changes in their views of themselves. I asked them to clarify their sense of "self" after attending the program and whether it was different from their previous perception of "self." What did the program accomplish in enabling its participants to have a sense of self-sufficiency, and what does

self-sufficiency mean to my interviewees? By asking them to talk about their changes in their views of themselves, both in relation to other significant people in their lives and in relation to their self-concept, I hoped to establish some justification for using the second definition of a state of self-sufficiency, namely, having "confidence in one's own ability and worth" (Merriam-Webster). This definition comes closer to a concept of "self-efficacy" because it locates the notion of self-sufficiency within a person's self-value rather than her public-value.

Not all of my interviewees were able to achieve a confidence in their capacity to control all of their life circumstances. As previously mentioned, two of my interviewees are currently being supported by public funds because they are on permanent disability for clinical depression. Their ability to function on a daily basis is dependent upon a drug therapy program that limits their reliability in a regular job. Despite their need to continue to receive "outside aid," however, they, along with the rest of my interviewees, were articulate about a change in their personal sense of agency, in regard to their relationships, their daily choices, and their futures.

At the beginning of Workplace Skills, my interviewees saw themselves as "stuck." Their biographical histories revealed an incapacity to control their life events, other than in acts of self-preservation in their homes and work lives. When the relational conditions of their daily lives caused them to feel completely unsafe with respect to themselves or their children, they reacted by removing their physical selves from the circumstances, whether these unsafe conditions were related to school, parents, spouses, or other significant people in their lives. Maslow (1968) argues that after physiological needs are met, that a growth toward self-esteem and self-actualization can be accomplished only in an atmosphere of "assured safety. . . . Safety needs are prepotent over growth needs" (p. 49). The descriptions of my interviewees regarding their view of themselves as they entered the Workplace Skills program were consistently articulated by explaining the qualities they felt they were missing: confidence, self-esteem, a sense of identity, a sense of worth, prestige,

an ability to make good choices about their futures. We have seen some of this testimony in the portraits and in the discussion of the characteristics of Workplace Skills the interviewees deemed important.

Although the gain of stable employment was an element of my interviewees' perceptions about self-sufficiency, even their ability to get jobs was subsumed under their changed belief system about their value because of their competencies and accomplishments. In their view, their improved self-concept has affected their ability to be self-accepting in regard to their decisions, their relationships with their families, their roles as women, and their futures. All of these changes in their view were grounded in their changes in their views of themselves as students and women.

Education: "All of a sudden, I'm intelligent" (Theresa)

As the testimony in the portrait chapters and in the discussion above about Workplace Skills reveals, a primary characteristic of self-sufficiency for my interviewees came from "succeeding" in academic work when they didn't believe they could. Jane, for example, did not see herself as a student: "My view of learning now has probably gone 360 degrees because before I was like, 'School, oh yuck, I can't do that.' I didn't have the confidence. I went through that program, and I was able to realize that education can be good, you can have positive things come from it."

Bandura (1989) claims that a sense of self-efficacy is context-specific but that the development of a personal sense of agency in one context can strengthen one's capacity in other contexts as well. When my interviewees discussed the changes in themselves in regard to being students, they always framed their transformations as students as instrumental to their capacities to make other changes in their lives. Some examples of their changed perceptions reveal how their personal value as students was connected to how they were seen by others.

Ramona, for example, illustrated a mental recording of her abusive spouse's words that had consistently interfered with her capacity to take control of her circumstances : "I

was confused, lost, not sure if I was going to be able to do it. I had a lot of doubts. I wanted to do it, but I had this thing inside of me that said you're not going to make it. That voice came from my ex-husband. I had it within me, and I had to get it out. It wasn't until I was really in the program that I started letting go of that and started letting myself come out, someone who wanted to learn. The program helped me to understand that I want more, I want to be more. It helped me to realize that I wasn't everything my ex-husband said I was. He tried to come back into my life, he was trying to be supportive, and I had grown, the courses helped me to see that, 'No I can see your games now.' It opened my eyes to a lot of stuff, my inner self, things that had happened in my past, and I was able to deal with them."

As with so much of the testimony, the acceptance among my interviewees of being "stupid" fell away as they became aware of their competence. Jana said, "The program made me realize I'm not stupid. It really made me feel good. I came to see that life could be better. You didn't have to sit around and say 'What am I going to do?' Things are better. I think a lot of it has to do with school and new people and just having this program made me realize I can do things I didn't think I could do by myself."

Susan, as well, came to see that "going back to school" meant "figuring out what I was going to do with my life when it was all up to me. At that point, I didn't have [my husband]. I didn't have to be scared and wonder what he would think." This disclosure exemplified a changed viewpoint about assuming the responsibility to decide what she had the capacity to do. Just as we have seen in the stories of Theresa, Germaine, and Lydia, the verification of their competence as students raised my interviewees' self-expectations about other aspects of their lives. They had moved from passivity to self-agency: "I came to see that life could be better," "I can do things. . . by myself," "It was all up to me."

Society: "It made my world bigger" (Lori)

As my interviewees discovered their self-sufficiency in regard to academic work, they also found that the dimensions of their worlds had changed as an important quality of

their self-regard. Because most of them had expanded their world-view, they saw themselves as having expanded within it. Though each of the interviewees had particular shifts in their self-regard, their individual reflections revealed a previous viewpoint about themselves that had changed. Theresa, for example, described herself as not having a self at all and as being a social isolate, incapable of entering malls or public places without anxiety attacks. Her returning to school gave her a social identity. Lori also described her former world as "this small piece of reality." She said, "I feel much better about myself. I can succeed at just about everything, not everything, but at least I can try something. A lot of things I can do I didn't think I could do. I learned that there's a whole big world out there. . . . I'm very comfortable. It made my world bigger."

Susan saw that she never felt that she had fit in the world in which she had moved: "When I was younger, there was always something missing. I just didn't feel like I fit appropriately. I've always tended to be friends with people who had a lot going for them, who knew where they were going. Now that I am doing something with my life, I feel more secure in that area. One friend, in particular, did everything I did when we were younger. I mean we'd party together, but she still maintained her goals in life, the direction she was going in, and I didn't." For Susan, the maintenance of goals means doing something with her life, a notion of self-sufficiency that accepts personal responsibility for her future.

Some of the testimony also correlated a limited world view with the labels that the interviewees had used to define themselves. Jane, for example, was able to see that she had substituted the label of what she did for who she was, and that view changed to a new kind of label related to self-value. She said, "Being in the program has changed the way I think about myself. Before I thought, well, I am a cook. I realized, yeah, I was a cook, but then again, 'the cook' is what I made. Now, I am a good person and I am smart."

Eve recognized that she had adapted her behavior socially to be accepted. For her, learning to say "No" was a significant change in her self-acceptance: "Changes have

definitely taken place. One of the biggest is that before this program, I would have a hard time saying no to anyone about anything. Somewhere along the line of Workplace Skills, it really clicked to a conscious level, it happened very subtly, I got the okay, that it was okay to say "No" with no guilt attached. One teacher made me realize that I am a good person even if I use the word "No." That's one of my major big changes and probably one of the most appreciable that I have respect for myself for. I just never said no. I guess it was partly to be accepted from people. If you say no, then they are going to think badly of you. Something shifted, it didn't matter if somebody thought badly, I needed to preserve myself so that I could be there for everybody."

In sorting out the changes in their views of themselves, my interviewees repeatedly saw that learning about and meeting their own needs was centrally important rather than adapting to the needs of others in their lives. Mona had accrued a list of labels within which she felt self-satisfied--homeowner, worker, mother: "I was confident as far as being able to handle a job, being able to be there. It was a big accomplishment to finally get a home, but that wore off. I brought up the children, but that's part of life." The distinction that Mona valued in completing Workplace Skills and then an associate degree program, was grounded in her confidence, not in the daily tasks, but in herself: "I became more confident, knowing that I could do what I wanted to do, be somebody and feel the accomplishment, where I didn't finish high school. I finally feel that I was able to finish something from start to finish. This was something above and beyond. It was for me. I didn't need to go to college. I can get a job, and I can work in a factory, and I can make money. So that was not an accomplishment for me. That is life: you have to have a job, you have to have a place to live, you have to have a vehicle. Above and beyond is doing something for yourself, and this is something I wanted to do for me. And I did."

Work: "Even management will note what we do downstairs (Trudy)

No place in the discussion of my interviewees' biographical viewpoints about their self-sufficiency did they evidence more self-value than in regard to their work identities.

Other than Theresa, all of my interviewees had related a consistent employment history. For most of them, their work sustained them through their teenage years, through bad marriages, and through their surviving with their children as single parents.

The main difference in their changes in self-sufficiency was grounded in their belief that they were now able to do important work instead of to have a job. As we have already seen, they didn't want to be "trained" again in jobs that could leave them nothing to fall back on. Even though some of my interviewees were not working in the field they studied, they were confident that their education had provided them with important skills in the employment market and that these skills gave them the flexibility to make changes. Their new sense of efficacy in regard to work was based upon a belief that they had now acquired the background to get jobs that they wanted in the future and that they could change jobs of their own volition if they were dissatisfied with the conditions of their work. They were not going to be "stuck" again."

Lana, for example, graduated as an administrative assistant and immediately went to work as a teller in a bank. Even though she "loved it," she was working forty to fifty hours as a part-time employee. The banking industry limited the number of permanent staff to reduce the overhead in regard to benefits. After nine months in this position, Lana assessed that she was being exploited. Although she was working as many hours as the full-time employees, she was not receiving the medical benefits and vacation days that others were getting. She moved on to a position in retail sales in which she quickly became an associate. She believes that she competed successfully for this job because of her education and that her skills have helped her to advance: "I can communicate with people from all walks of life. English communication taught me to be an open-minded person, and I think that helps me to do my job better."

Jane has decided to be a waitperson right now instead of working in her associate degree field of accounting. She finds that she and her husband can manage the care of their children better if she works evenings. However, her occupational label is not defining her

view of herself: "Yes, I am a waitress, but I also have an education." Jane feels that her education gave her the potential to be happy in her work, an important characteristic of self-sufficiency to her: "I want eventually to have a career that makes a difference, not just worrying about whether the food gets out hot or cold. I want to be able to make a difference in what I am doing to help people." Jane also wants to get involved in her community and its town politics. Her role in the student senate allowed her to recognize her own ability to talk in front of a large group and to influence people.

Lori's view of herself as a worker has changed significantly from her memories of working in a sardine factory, as well as in other factory jobs. She sees self-sufficiency as linked to self-esteem and self-worth. Because her work has given her a sense of prestige within her personal community, she not only believes she is doing an important job, but her success has given her the courage to volunteer in other settings: "I work with clients with disabilities. People say, 'You've got clients, you're kidding me!' My bosses, they love me. 'I want to tell you I'm not in this for the money,' and they say, 'We know!' Building up my confidence to volunteer at the shelter is an example. I've been wanting to do that for two years. Basically it's people who end up drunk and then they end up homeless. I try to let them know that they're not the only ones, that anyone can get into trouble once."

Lori also has learned to take her newfound courage one step at a time. She knows her limits and is willing to admit them both to herself and to others whom she is helping: "I could get hired there once I get my degree. I can't do everything at once. I've tried that, and I ended up falling flat. I've always had certain values in life, they've just become stronger, more prominent. Self-esteem, self-worth. I like helping other people, not caretaking, but helping."

Prestige: "That's my mother graduating!" (Lydia)

The interviewees linked their changes in self-sufficiency with a belief that they could claim prestige within their work community because of their skills, their confidence,

and their education. They also discovered that they were elevated in the eyes of their friends and their families because of their accomplishments. Because parents, close friends, spouses, and children had observed my interviewees' struggles to complete their academic work, their accomplishments raised the pride of family members by association. Lydia shared the story that her own daughter was the first member of her family in thirty-five years to graduate from high school and that Lydia was the first person to graduate from college. Lydia remembered her daughter's pleasure as she proudly announced, "That's my mother graduating." Some of my interviewees had no parents, siblings, or children who had completed public school. Consequently, they had entered the community of educated people in the eyes of their significant others. Suddenly, my interviewees found themselves being asked for advice about going back to school and for help in making decisions.

Jane knows that her accomplishments have thus far changed the course of at least one of her sisters: "My sisters were pretty impressed that I took the leap and went back to school. None of them had gone to school so they thought of it as a large challenge. My little sister came to graduation, and she thought it was very good. She is very low in self confidence. She had bad experiences in high school too, and she didn't feel that she was able to do it. And it was like, 'If I can do it and I had bad experiences in high school, you can do it.' I was a positive role model. She is going to college now." Ramona's graduation also enabled another member of her family to have the courage to try: "Since I got my degree, my sister-in-law is now going back to school. My other sister is very proud, she's after me to go on."

Becoming self-sufficient through educational accomplishments appears to have had an important intergenerational effect as well. My interviewees revealed that their own educational experiences helped to change their children's attitude about school and work. As I have previously stated, parental support for educational endeavors was missing from most of my interviewees' biographical histories. Most of their parents didn't care about education. Because the children of my interviewees saw their mothers caring about

successful accomplishments in school, they apparently came to see their own education as important.

Susan has seen a change in her two sons because of her own academic work. They are able to identify with her struggles in some classes and feel better about their own: "They think it's great. Well, it's easier with them, because they're going through the same thing. Actually, in a small scale they are. We talk because I know how they feel if they don't pass a test or they don't get as many right as they thought they would. It's the same thing that I have. My youngest knows first hand because he came to school with me one day and they gave back one of my math tests. It was a terrible feeling. He was sitting behind me and said, 'Hey what did you get?' and I said, '60. I didn't really do that well.' And he said, 'It's all right. You just have to study harder, and the next test will be better.' He knows because that's what I say to him."

Lori, whose daughter is a single parent, believes that her accomplishments have helped her daughter to get off welfare: "My daughter is going back to work. She's very independent. She's been on welfare, and she's going to work full-time." Mona, also, has seen a change in the attitude of her son and daughter: "My oldest boy now wishes that he had done something. He saw how hard I worked. He quit school and he had to move. He wasn't gone very long, and he said, 'Ma, if I go to night school and get my GED, can I come back and live at home?' My daughter saw how hard I had to work in school. She said, 'I don't think I'll go to college. It seems awfully hard.' I kept telling her, 'It's hard for me because I've been away from it so long.'" Because Mona asked her high-school-aged daughter to help her with her English, her daughter began to see the importance of preparation and homework. "So it's changed the kids too. She saw how hard I worked for finals and mid-terms, and this is her first year of mid-terms and finals. And she's realized that you have to take the time and study for them. She saw, you know, the work. I think it's changed them."

Gender: "I don't let myself get walked over by a man" (Germaine)

Only one interviewee out of fourteen had a stable first marriage, which is still intact and strong, before entrance into the program. Eight women revealed that they ended unhealthy relationships as a direct result of participating in the Workplace Skills program and that their sense of efficacy as women had dramatically altered as a part of their self-discoveries about their abilities to choose better conditions in which to live. Three other women had already ended physically and verbally abusive marriages before they entered the program. The biographical histories of most of my interviewees revealed that their lack of self-esteem was grounded in the absence of feeling safe and feeling loved. In Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, a growth in self-esteem is predicated on an atmosphere of safety and love. Susan, for example, had a series of sexual relationships before she was sixteen. She ascribed her behavior to her desire for closeness: "I know the difference between love and sex, and I always did at a young age. I think it was closeness. I think it gave me a false sense of closeness to boys back then. It was the closest thing I could do to care about somebody, to show them love and affection."

The relationships revealed by the portrait women about their subservience to the men in their lives were consistent with most of the stories my interviewees told about their acceptance of the condition of gender objectification, abuse, and humiliation as young adult women. Their passivity in regard to the physical and verbal abuse that they experienced appears to have been developed at young ages from similar experiences as children in families where they tacitly and directly learned to view their gender as an obligation. Ramona remembered her upbringing this way: "When I was married, I had to do this dutiful wife thing and follow and stand by my husband. I felt this way, because that was the way I was brought up, that was the way I was raised." They also were taught to use it as a tool, as a way of gaining some limited personal power. Susan reflected, "I knew that there were things I could get and couldn't get just for being a girl. My mother would act a certain way to get things." Theresa remembered her first sexual experience at

age fifteen: "All of a sudden you gained a little bit of power when you started to have sex, recognizing your sexuality and what you can do with it, to attract who you are after and stuff. It is a tool."

Susan voiced the normative upbringing that reflects many of my interviewees' stories: "In my household growing up the way I did, I didn't feel women were capable of a lot. Whatever life gave you, you took it type of thing. You just didn't go out and do a whole lot of things that weren't expected of you. In my whole family, basically women had babies, and men took care of them or they went . . . , well, one part of my family was on welfare." Not only were the women raised to believe that they weren't "capable of a lot," but their dependency on men was an instrumental part of their tutelage and training to be wives and mothers. Most remember that as girl children in their families their responsibilities started young in the child care of their siblings, as well as the cooks and cleaners of the household. Jana's memories reflect a similar view of her future possibilities: "I really never had to make any choices as a younger person. I mean the only choice I had to make was who I was going to marry. I mean that was the big thing in my life, getting married, having children, and a husband, house, home, raising my children, and husband going off to work every morning, and you know, what choice did I have to make?" This statement of Jana reflects the viewpoint of most of my interviewees in that the presence of choice was only in relation to whom they were going to marry and not if they were going to marry.

Germaine and Lydia, as well as Mona, Lana, Susan, Ramona, Lorraine, and Tessie, all saw marriage as a way out of an abusive family environment and an entrance into a better condition of love and safety. Germaine remembered that her father would never have allowed her to go out on her own without marriage. Ramona revealed a similar family circumstance: "Marriage was a way out from [my mother's] yelling and screaming, throwing things, hollering. I think that's why I got married. The idea of moving out and living on my own never occurred to me."

Although Rawls (1971) has argued that self-esteem is an entitlement of personhood, my interviewees were never imbued with that belief as females either in their childhoods or their marriages. Being controlled by their husbands was as conventionally acceptable as being controlled by their parents. Ramona, in describing the atmosphere in which she endured her husband's abuse, spoke for many of my interviewees: " It took me eight years to get out of a marriage that I didn't want to be in after knowing it three years. He would basically tell me I was stupid. He would sabotage my job. He would call my work constantly and I would end up getting fired or asked to leave. This was a control issue, he wanted to control me. He wanted to dominate me to the point where I did nothing on my own." Twelve of the women I interviewed were abused so harshly that they became "public issues" because hospitals and police were involved in their care and protection. Most of them began their history of abuse with one or more cruel parents. Eight of the women were regularly beaten by their mothers.

My interviewees, without exception, link their sense of self-sufficiency with their ability to sustain a life without a man rather than tolerate any abuse in theirs or their children's lives. Many of them have formed healthy relationships with partners that are willing to share the decision-making and obligations of the family. Many of them have chosen, like Lydia, to be alone for awhile. Tessie began her divorce proceedings after she graduated from college. She said, "It made me realize who I was and how strong I am. I didn't need to be told what to do anymore. I am going through a divorce. I'm lazy around him. He sits and eats ice cream every night and watches TV. Since I left him, I've lost forty-four pounds." Jana's husband left her for a younger woman: "My husband always said, 'You're smarter than I am, and you never graduated from high school.' Then after he met this woman, I was the dummy, he was the smart one. I don't want him back, I really don't. I could never go back."

My interviewees place significant value on their self-efficacy in regard to relationships and see that the changes in their views of themselves have provided them with

a power "to go it alone" rather than be in controlling relationships in their futures. Their entrance into marriage came about because they had accepted the prescribed role of mother and housewife that they learned as children, and for many the decision to marry was an escape from a terrible family environment and a belief that they had no other options. Most found themselves in marriages where their treatment by spouses confirmed their lack of efficacy. It appears that their accrued power as educated women has transformed their sense of personal power as women as well. The evidence is found in their statements about their futures.

Future: "Change. That's exactly what changed, a sense of change" (Lydia)

The changes in self-sufficiency that my interviewees shared with me reflect changes in their belief system about their value as human beings and their value as women. They believe they have the power to choose and control the events that they engage in. They also believe that the relationships they maintain in the future will be healthy ones with their children, their parents, their siblings, and their friends. Their biographical acceptance of dependency on men has been altered because they have found through Workplace Skills a more healthy and reciprocal support system with people who care about them. Lori's reflections on the importance of community revealed a fundamental change in the way my interviewees have come to see themselves in the world: "In the program everybody was willing to give you the extra help. Now I can ask for extra help with anything. To be a really successful person in society, you need a big huge circle of people to communicate with on a daily basis. The more people you have, the healthier you are, the more you learn. You can succeed better than by saying, 'I have to do this all by myself.'"

As we have already seen in the portrait chapters, the women in my study have a lilt to their voices as they talk about what they are doing today and what they may do in the future. The Workplace Skills program was indeed a launching pad (Trudy) for most of my interviewees to a fuller, more self-accepting future. It was a new beginning for them to care about themselves and to give them the confidence to move forward in their lives and to

accept both the responsibility and the respect for what they accomplish. Where their change is most evident is in their view of themselves as intelligent and capable human beings. What the future holds for most of them is reflected in the following final testimony:

Eve: What I wouldn't give to be back in those classes again, even taking them over. It isn't just the material. It's people in a classroom with a common goal and different frames of reference and what they bring to the classroom. I can never get enough, I'll definitely go back.

Mona: I can't believe this is coming out of my mouth, but I'd like to go back to school. It's not a burn like it was before, before it was a burn. I just feel like I need something else, I need to be doing something else.

Susan: The only time I have a crisis now is when I create one in my mind, but it's nothing to do with anything around here [home, children, significant other]. Going to school made me feel that I was able to do something about my life and that I can, that sometime in the future, I won't need to be dependent on AFDC. Basically it's just that I realize now that I can do anything I set my mind to.

Lori: I want to go back to school. I'm going to take one course at a time. I'm trying to get my bills straightened out, and they are clearing up a lot faster than I thought. I didn't want to go back to school with the bills. The financial mess was my own making. Being in school, if you are used to having a lot of money coming in, it takes a lot of time to adjust, and I was used to spending. I just overspent, bought things I shouldn't have, and now I'm straightening out. I'm close to the end of my debt.

Ramona: I would say the whole process that I went through and the changes that I made by getting my degree helped me, because I want to go on. I want to get my bachelor's. It made me aware that it is exactly what I want. I just want to go back to school and learn some more. I guess that is what this change has done. It has made me yearn for knowledge.

The interviewees described the tentative steps they made as they walked through the college door to engage in the Workplace Skills program. The final testimony reveals solid strides forward as their fears have been transformed into certainties about the open doors available to them in their futures.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LAUNCHING PAD

If you put a space shuttle on sand and try to have a lift off, you've got an awful mess. You've got to have the launching pad first, and that in essence was exactly what the program was--a launching pad. It gave people a little footing and a clean footing, a place where they could start and feel secure on the land.

Trudy
Chapter Four

Introduction

Trudy's image of the Workplace Skills program as a launching pad provides a picture of literacy education that clarifies some of the essential characteristics that publicly-funded remediation programs need to incorporate: "a clean footing" and a place to "start and feel secure on the land." Attention to this start, to this need for feelings of security amongst the participants, was a crucial element of my interviewees' sense that they were given the foundations to have a clean lift-off in their pursuit of independence. By examining the histories of my interviewees, I came to see that their lives had been built upon unsteady and shifting ground, that their footings were unstable, and that their previous decisions had gotten them into an "awful mess."

I also came to see by doing this follow-up study that a sense of self-sufficiency for women requires more than an academic lift-off. A literacy program is located on a time line that differs with each participant: where she has been and how she is founded as she enters her pursuit of self-sufficiency are significant elements of the orbits available to her as she travels in her shuttle. The continuum that represents the details and events of each participant's life as to age, parents, parenting, marriage, schooling, gender identity and work is one that doesn't end or begin with a literacy program. To provide the complex foundation that may imbue individuals with a sense of self-sufficiency is to be attentive to the complexity of their individual lives, their private troubles, their places of dependency, and the kinds of negation and affirmation they have experienced in their individual worlds.

Attention must be paid to their personhood as well as to their occupational and academic competencies if participants are going to be enabled to expand their narrow world view and to believe in the possibility of negotiating new orbits in which to move. I believe that attention to the complex persons behind the faces in our classes has been revealed as an essential requirement of adult literacy programs, one which my interviewees revealed through their stories about participating in the Workplace Skills program.

Discussion

In conducting this feminist research project, I as researcher asked a group of women for permission to enter into the domain of their private lives and to hear their stories, woman to woman, as a shared investigation of the value of an educational experience. My purpose was simple. As an educator of adults for most of my professional life, I had constructed a belief system of what were valuable and important qualities of educational practice that would make a difference in my students' ability to grow intellectually and morally and to achieve a sense of their personal value as thinkers and as human beings. I believed that this growth could occur in a community of shared learning experiences.

In my classes I had assumed an ethic of care toward my students long before Nel Noddings began to challenge educators to consider its principles as an alternative to an education based upon instructional outcomes and classroom management. I came from a tradition in which the essential characteristic by which teachers were defined was their ability to care. I believed that educational experiences can be transformational for both teachers and students in a relational atmosphere of respect and honesty. I also believed that most of the adults in my classes were both vulnerable and courageous because their decision to return to school was an enormous risk to face their academic competence or incompetence once more. Their personal investment in taking that risk needed to be acknowledged tenderly.

I wanted to know whether my personal beliefs as an educator had merit and whether the characteristics that the participants in Workplace Skills valued could be categorized in a way that could help adult educators to improve their practice and thus could help adult learners to feel valuable about their educational experiences. I decided to frame their reflections on Workplace Skills within the context of their life events because I wanted to understand who they believe they have become within the context of who they believed they were.

What emerged in hearing about the significant events in my interviewees' lives was that they had little personal identity and little sense of their own agency to make choices. And what also emerged was that their readiness to formulate a better future than their past was instrumentally affected by the opportunity to return to school. Though reluctantly, with some of the interviewees almost resistantly, their acceptance of the offer to enter the Workplace Skills program emerged as the first significant decision they had made to do something for themselves, within an everyday context where their obligations were defined by what they should do for others. They had given up personal striving somewhere in their histories.

The themes that emerged were themes in contrast: childhood abuse and suffering against an unwillingness to abuse and cause suffering in others; gender oppression and dependency against an excitement about being alone; a muted invisibility against an expressive resilient voice; a sense of being stupid against a certainty of being intelligent; and most importantly a disregard for their value against a regard for their capacity to act in their own behalf and to control the conditions of their lives.

Only one of the fourteen women I interviewed, Theresa in Chapter Five, did not have a long and committed work history. The women I interviewed know how to work hard. Their private troubles were not founded upon an incapacity to work. Since their participation in the Workplace Skills program, three out of the fourteen women I have interviewed are not currently working. Two of them, Jane and Lana, are on permanent

disability for clinical depression and one, Susan, is completing her final year in an associate degree in dental hygiene. The rest of them completed Workplace Skills, pursued further education in either certificate or associate degree programs, graduated with prestige, and became "self-sufficient" in regard to the political definition of their employment status.

The women in this study have defined the characteristics in the Workplace Skills program that made a difference in their self-value and self-acceptance. It seems to me that all of the characteristics they identified as important to them were ones that allowed them to believe that they had a right to claim prestige within their particular worlds and that they had the capacity to change the conditions of their lives. The personnel in social service agencies and at the college provided them with choices rather than mandates. The faculty believed in their capacity to learn. The academic program seriously addressed the skills necessary for them to achieve a sense of academic competence, and the setting gave them a sense of identification and presence with other college students. The labels that they came to accept as identifiers of their value were less related to the roles they performed and more related to the persons they were uncovering within themselves.

I came to see that women who have become public issues have had little control over the conditions that cause the publics to label them as either "victim" or "user." These labels appear to be based upon whether the woman is receiving unemployment or AFDC support, is the inhabitant of low income housing, and/or is the receiver of food stamps, medical benefits or other support incentives. The amount of time the woman receives one or more of the benefits seems to be the primary factor in determining which label she is assigned. A secondary factor is which political group is assigning the label.

Economic development, welfare reform, and the restoration of family values are the politicians' continuing debate platforms that affect the women on public assistance. The "welfare mom" is centrally located in the debate and is often described by conservatives as an abuser of the system, as lazy, as ineffectual, as inter-generationally affixed to dependency, as helpless. There is a public belief that many women intentionally induce

repeated pregnancies to remain on public assistance. This "welfare mom" is publicly drawn as an abhorrence to the democratic values of individualism, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency.

When liberal politicians counter with the picture of the "welfare mom" as a victim, their opposing picture, though intended to evoke empathy and generosity, does little to enable the recipients of public assistance to feel any self-value. Being publicly named a victim is perhaps less self-damaging because it seems to imbue the condition of dependency with a blame factor that is outside of one's personal volition. However this label is still publicly defining publicly assisted women as dependent and incapable of managing their life circumstances. The distinction in the label of "victims" is that the cause of their troubles is relegated to their systematic denigration by circumstances beyond their control, such as spousal desertion, children or family members with health problems, personality disorders, academic and occupational under preparedness, employment opportunities.

While policy makers admit that our country needs to build a better economic climate that provides real opportunity for people to gain and keep jobs, they continue to presume that people on welfare are deviant and need to be resocialized to accept personal responsibility for their self-sufficiency. Welfare reform in this country continues to mean getting people to go to work.

This study has expanded the meaning of self-sufficiency to locate its characteristics within the viewpoints of the women who participated in the Workplace Skills program. They have revealed that economic self-sufficiency is a natural consequence of other kinds of self-sufficiency and that administrators of adult literacy programs must be attentive to acknowledging the self within their goals of sufficiency. Attention must be paid to the self-belief systems of people who have been marginalized, not by controlling the outcomes of their engagement in educational experiences but by nurturing their sense of personal value and endorsing their right to expect and control the conditions of their lives. Expectancy and

efficacy must be acknowledged as the fundamental rights of personhood, and with an improved sense of self-efficacy, financial self-sufficiency and independence will surely follow.

I believe that this research project has made visible and real the capacity for the recipients of public assistance to change their visions about their life possibilities through educational experiences that locate achievement within the the participants' particular needs. I also believe that my interviewees have revealed a capacity to offer meaningful evaluation of their own educational experiences. As they shared the details of what they valued and why particular characteristics of the Workplace Skills program worked for them, they also revealed what hadn't worked for them in their previous schooling experiences. Within the context of their history as students, their current sense of self-sufficiency is grounded in their belief that they are intelligent and capable human beings. Their evaluation of the Workplace Skills program has offered makers and administrators of public policy, as well as educators in both public schools and adult programs, an important rationale for designing and implementing educational experiences that will be valued by participants.

Recommendations

I want to make some recommendations about future research studies and future program evaluations because I believe that the results of this research project have implications for policy makers and educators in the United States today. Most of the implications have been set forth in the theoretical frame of this study in which the issues of the values, attitudes, and ideologies of people in privileged positions are central to whether the policies and practices of human service professionals are going to foster self-sufficiency or public-sufficiency. As I have previously stated in this study, the fundamental stance of people in powerful positions will make a difference in the results of public programs. If human service agencies are indeed dedicated to serve the needs of human beings, then a shift in power is necessary to achieve the goals of service. If the primary goal of public programs is to make disadvantaged human beings a more effective economic and material

resource, then public policy has lost the opportunity to foster the potential and the capacity of program participants to become human resources for their families, their communities, and the society as a whole.

I believe that the creators of public policy and the administrators of public programs need to develop a more comprehensive and less self-supporting evaluation plan for examining their work. I believe that meaningful evaluation must begin by asking the right questions to the people who have been the recipients of both policy decisions and programs. I have centered my evaluation of a particular program in the responses of a particular group of women. I have already disclaimed generalizability of my results. However, I believe that the authenticity with which my interviewees offered their stories and their evaluations of the program is apparent in their testimony and provides strong evidence of what they came to value as important. I have no doubt that if I had been able to talk to one hundred or one thousand women who had participated in a similar program in New Hampshire or elsewhere in the United States, and had been able to converse in the same depth with all of them, that I would have been able to generalize to a larger population what I learned in this project.

I believe that more feminist interview research projects need to be conducted where the participants of public programs are invited to talk about their experiences.

I believe that people in public positions need to look within their hearts at their fundamental values about human service. They must begin to examine the moral basis of their viewpoints and to understand the implications of their actions on the people they represent in their work.

Teachers need to be attentive to the personal conditions that may be creating the silent child in the back of the classroom and the belligerent child who starts a fight on the playground. Teachers need to care about their students. They need to understand that getting an answer on a test wrong is not the worst thing that can happen to a child, but that their response to that incorrect answer will affect the child's willingness to continue to try.

Teachers need to know that humiliation and embarrassment are not acceptable teaching practices. Teachers need to believe that their students are valuable.

Legislators need to examine their conflicting normative beliefs about the place of women in our society as they vote on national policies that effect the future security and well-being of American families. They need to understand that people in trouble are not enemies of the government and its goals, but that they as legislators can become enemies of people in trouble by assuming a judgmental stance about their value as human beings. Legislators must reorient their knowledge about people living in poverty by understanding what it is like to live today on minimum wage salaries in an atmosphere where the American dream is a reality for less and less American citizens. Legislators must be attentive to the appropriate mistrust many Americans feel about the laws that policy makers are establishing for the good of the people. Programs that are built in the spirit of true generosity must make the participants of these programs of central interest to the success of them.

Several recommendations can be made to further the possibilities of providing programs and policies that are valuable to their recipients:

1. Educational programs must provide an atmosphere where individual empowerment and the opportunity to define desirable outcomes is located within the people who participate in them.
2. The curricula in educational programs must be based upon academic skills and knowledges that the students engaged in them perceive as valuable to their future academic and personal pursuits.
3. A primary goal of an educational program must be to nourish the potential of the students who have agreed to participate in them.
4. Teachers need to examine their biases and assumptions about their status and the status of the students in their classes and to generate a personal inventory of their own

particular qualities that may foster community or alienation among and between their students.

5. Teachers need to balance their interest in academic subjects with an interest in the people in their classes.

6. Administrators of public education need to establish ways of balancing their budgets that do not impinge upon the potential growth of their students.

7. Administrators need to promote a collaborative and flexible learning environment in which teachers and students are less focused on the outcomes of learning and more on the process of learning.

I believe that the characteristics of the Workplace Skills program that were valuable became so because the participants were given some power to choose. A central element of public program evaluation is that traditionally the people in power have evaluated themselves. I believe that this study is ultimately a study of the politics of power and the politics of self-esteem, about privilege and dominance and about oppression and subordination. People in privileged positions need to relinquish the powerful control they have over people who don't have any power at all. People in privileged positions need to listen to what the underprivileged have to say. How dangerous can the bird that is contained within Marilyn Frye's birdcage be?

Notes from Chapter Two

1. In What Work Requires of Schools: A Scans Report for America 2000 (June 1991), published by the Department of Labor, The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills defined a three-part foundation as essential: Basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities, xviii.
2. In the Appendix of Women's Ways of Knowing, the authors reveal the main categories of questions they used in their interviews with women. The alternative examples provide the researcher with the opportunity to ask the same question differently if the dialogue requires more questions with different interviewees.
3. Reinharz cites Condor's study as follows: Susan Condor: "Sex Role Beliefs and 'Traditional' Women: Feminist and Intergroup Perspectives". Feminist Social Psychology, edited by Sue Wilkinson. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1986.) pp. 99-118, 102-103, 110.
4. See Marjory Devault, "Women's Talk: Feminist Strategies for Analyzing Research Interviews," Women and Language, 1987, 10(2): 33-36; and "Talking and Listening from Women's Standpoint: Feminist Strategies for Interviewing and Analysis," Social Problems, 1990, 37(1), 701-721.]
5. Feminist interview projects that were particularly helpful in providing sample questions include Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986), Women's Ways of Knowing; Gilligan (1982), In a Different Voice; Oakley (1976), Women's Work; Oakley (1992), Social Support and Motherhood. The style and type of questions I developed both in the survey and in the interview scripts were strengthened by examining these works.
6. See Seidman's study, Interviewing as Qualitative Research, for a discussion of a three-stage interview process. Though aspects of his recommendations, for example, conducting all of the interviews in a span of three to seven days, was impossible in this research project, his arguments to conduct multiple interviews was supported fully as well in Reinharz's Feminist Methods in Social Research. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
7. Oakley (1992) offered a similar observation in her study of pregnant women in Britain. Most women interviewed said "how good it was to take part in the research, and to have a chance to talk about the things that concerned or delighted them. . . . Nearly three-quarters said their experiences had been altered by the research most commonly because they had thought about these more, or found it reassuring or a positive relief to unburden themselves of critical feelings and experiences" (14)
8. Researcher self-disclosure is identified as "good feminist practice" "Self-disclosure initiates 'true dialogue' by allowing participants to become 'co-researchers' (Reinharz cites Ann R. Bristow and Jody A. Esper, "A Feminist Research Ethos," in Nebraska Sociological Feminist Collective (ed.) A Feminist Ethic for Social Science Research, Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988, pp. 67-81. An alternate view claims that too much of self may put off respondent: if interviewee is cautious about interaction with a "stranger", it might silence her if the interviewer becomes too intimate in talking about self.
9. Reinharz calls this connection a "temporary affiliation" (1992, p. 25).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NHTC/NHJTC Workplace Skills Program Survey

Soc Sec Number: _____

Date of Birth: _____

A. Program Participation

1. I first heard about the program from
- _____ Division of Employment Security
 - _____ Welfare Office
 - _____ Advertisements
 - _____ Friend (s)
 - _____ Other _____
 - _____ Other

5. During the program I received personal support from (Check all that apply)
- _____ Social Service agencies
 - _____ Friends
 - _____ Family
 - _____ College personnel
 - _____ Other program participants

2. The following best describes my previous schooling when I began the program
- _____ High school diploma
 - _____ GED
 - _____ Needed a GED
 - _____ High school graduate and some college

6. During the program I received academic support from (Check all that apply)
- _____ Family _____ Friends
 - _____ Faculty _____ Tutors
 - _____ Other program participants
 - _____ Program director

3. During the program I received financial assistance from (Check all that apply):
- _____ AFDC
 - _____ Vocational Rehabilitation
 - _____ Division of Employment Security
 - _____ Educational grants (Pell, Scholarship)
 - _____ Extended family
 - _____ Other _____

7. Rank the value you placed in the following aspects of the program from high(1) to low(7)
- _____ College setting
 - _____ Peer study groups
 - _____ Academic Program
 - _____ Faculty assistance
 - _____ Classroom instruction
 - _____ Program director
 - _____ Tutorial support

4. Financial supports included the following: (Check all that apply)
- _____ Tuition
 - _____ Child care
 - _____ Living expenses
 - _____ Transportation
 - _____ Health care
 - _____ Other _____

8. Rank the value of the following courses in the curriculum from high(1) to low(7)
- _____ Language Skills
 - _____ Math Review
 - _____ Keyboarding/Computers
 - _____ Life Management Seminar

B. Program Follow-up 9. Program Completion (a) or (b)

- (a) I left after _____ weeks because of
- _____ Personal/family illness
 - _____ A job
 - _____ Financial difficulties
 - _____ Academic difficulties
 - _____ Other _____

- (b) I completed the program and
- _____ entered a training program
 - _____ entered a college degree program
 - _____ went to work
 - _____ stayed at home
 - _____ Other _____

10. If you continued your education, please complete the following:
- Name of program: _____
- Length of program: _____
- Location of program: _____
- Completion of program: (yes/no/still attending): _____

11. If you are presently employed, what do you do? _____

NARRATIVE RESPONSE: (Please continue on the back of these pages as needed)

Reflecting on your childhood and public school years:

What events, memories, and/or people stand out as important?

How would you describe yourself as a student at that time?

What did you care about, think about, dream about back then?

Reflecting on your participation in the Workplace Skills program:

What do you think will stay with you about your experiences in the program?

Did the program change the way you think about yourself in the public world and in your home?

Did the program change your relationships with significant people in your life? (spouse, children, friends, parents, others)? How?

Reflecting on yourself:

Tell me something about what your life is like right now?

If you were to tell yourself who you really are, how would you describe yourself?

Do you see yourself differently from the way you saw yourself in the past? In what ways?

Reflecting on your future: What do you think you and your life will be like in five years?

Concluding questions:

Which of the above is the most important question I have asked you?

Are there other questions I should have asked you about your past, present, and future that would have helped me to understand you better?

APPENDIX B

Interview I
Life History Script
Date:

Name:
Age:

1. Begin with the following explanation:

The purpose of this research is to come to an understanding of the particular events and experiences you have had in your history that led you to enter and complete a workplace skills program. I hope to have at least three conversations with you this summer about the problems and pleasures of your everyday life from the time you were a child until now. I have worked with adult learners for almost twenty years and have become critically interested in what kinds of educational support are necessary to bring about positive change in adult women's lives. By documenting your memories of your experiences as a girl and a woman, I hope to be able to use your stories (and others') to clarify the important events that led you to where you are today. The first interview is intended to hear about your experiences and relationships before your entry into the program. Basically I'm planning on three interviews over the summer, the first a life history which I'm going to work on with you today, and then the next what happened in the program and since the program in your life, and then the third one is going to be asking you to reflect upon what's happened to you and to come to some understanding of yourself in regard to your experiences. So I want to start with the growing up years because in the survey, I divided it into your growing up years, your experiences in the program, and what's happening to you now and in the future.

2. Collect/verify important factual data:

- a. Educational history:
 - completion of high school/GED: where and when
 - Previous attendance at college/training before Workplace Skills
- b. Family History:
 - 1. Parents:
 - Age when you were born
 - Married/divorced
 - Educational history
 - Work history
 - 2. Siblings: sex/ages
 - 3. Residence history:
- c. Financial support during the program:
- d. Work history
- e. Relationship history: marriage/children/

3. Growing up years: interview questions

1. How do you remember seeing yourself as a member of your family when you were young (before 16 years old)

- a. examples: what role did you play
 - what jobs did you do
 - what expectations were placed on you
 - were there differences between expectations of you and others in the family, i.e., siblings, mother, father)
- b. tell me one descriptive statement that summarizes your view of your
 - mother
 - father
- c. Tell me the story that you most often remember when thinking about your childhood years and your family.

2. Describe yourself as a teenager

- a. Draw a picture of yourself in your favorite class: describe the subject, the teacher, your peers, what it felt like, why it was your favorite.
- b. Draw a picture of your least favorite class: (subject, teacher, peers, what made it least favorite)
- c. Tell me about your friendships when you were a teenager? Did you have a best friend? A group of friends? Describe them?
- d. Tell me about other kinds of activities were you involved in when you were in school besides school? (work, sports, church, etc.)
- e. Tell me the most memorable story you have about your teen years (a precipitating event?)
- f. When you think about your teen-age years, how would you describe how you felt about yourself, who you were, what you liked and didn't like, what you could do and couldn't do.

3. Relationships

- a. Looking back over your life, what relationships have been really important to you? Why? How would you describe those relationships?
- b. Describe what you think was the most important relationship you had growing up? Tell me a story/ event that represents in your mind the importance of the relationship?
- c. How do you think he/she/they would describe the relationship?
- d. Have you had a relationship with a person who has helped you to shape the person you have become? Who and how?
- e. Whom did you consider to be experts or "the important authorities" growing up?
- f. Whom did you see as a hero?

4. Gender

1. How much of your experiences during your growing up years do you think is related to your being female?
2. Do you think that being female was a positive, negative or unimportant (neutral) aspect of your teen-age years?
3. When and how did you first come to see yourself as a female? Can you tell me a story that represents a moment of awareness that your gender might be significant in defining your life possibilities?

5. After school years until you entered the program

1. What did you do after you left or finished school? Summarize what you have been doing and how you felt about it?
2. Can you pinpoint a moment in time when you began to think about your independence as a person? What was it and how did it make you feel?
3. I believe in turning points in one's life, episodes around which you feel that you know that you are making irreversible choices? Robert Frost has written a poem called "the Road not Taken" in which he draws an image of branch in the road; he claims he took the road less travelled and that has made all the difference. Can you identify any of those branches in your life? Have you had any such significant turning points in your life?
4. When did you begin to feel that you were in charge of your life circumstances? What event stands out as a turning point in your becoming an adult?

Interview II
Date:

Name:

1. Entrance into the program: what happened to you in regard to your sense of yourself:
 - a. Draw a picture of yourself as a person when you were first admitted to the program:
 - b. Think about the first week of attending school and try to reconstruct what you were feeling, doing, on a daily basis: (how did you manage your daily life-- cooking, cleaning, travelling, studying)

2. The Workplace Skills Program

- a. What do you think will stay with you about your experiences in this program
(I want to know everything you can remember about the program and your involvement in it:
specific academic and nonacademic experiences;
good and bad teachers
good and bad assignments
good and bad courses
classmates
relationships outside of school)
- b. Did being in this program change the way you think about yourself in the world?
- c. In your learning, did you come across an idea that made you see things differently . . or think about things differently??
- d. What was been most helpful to you about Workplace Skills?
- e. Were there things the program didn't provide that were/are important to you?
Were there things you would like to learn that you were unable to learn there?

3. Your personal life during the program:

- a. Did the daily patterns change while you were attending the program? If so, how did they change?
- b. Describe the changes that took place in yourself by the end of the program?

View of self
View of school
View of learning

Interview II (Page 2)

c. Describe the changes that took place in your relationships during and by the end of the program?

a. family members:

b. friendships

c. intimate partners

d. financial circumstances

4. Life after the program:

a. What has happened since (school, family, friendships, work)

b. What stands out for you in your life over the past few years?
What kinds of things have been important?
What stays with you?

c. Tell me something about what your life is like right now.

d. What do you care about, think about? Is this caring and thinking different?

APPENDIX C

November 28, 1995

Hi -- It was great to reconnect with you by phone and to find out what has been happening to you since our last interview.

Enclosed is a transcript of our two interviews, the first regarding your life history up to entering the program and the second on the program itself and what has occurred in your life since entering the Workplace Skills Program. As you will see upon reading your own autobiographical material, the interviews rarely followed a direct question and answer format. The stimulus of a question on family might have yielded a conversation about your personal sense of value or your relationship with a boy friend or spouse, a parent or your own child.

As we have discussed in our conversations, my research on women who participated in an adult workplace literacy program has intended to serve the purpose of discovering what kinds of support academically and personally are needed to enable women to achieve change in their lives and what that change means in regard to everyday living. Many of you have revealed a background in public schooling and family life that caused you to discontinue your education in your teens, yet you accepted the opportunity to enter a publicly funded educational program recently. Though the primary reason we have explored for your entering the program was your financial eligibility because of low income or unemployment, you did choose an educational option rather than other options available to you. My primary interests are in the following:

why you chose the option of furthering your education at this time

whether the workplace skills program (WSP) has made a practical difference in your everyday living, and

whether the workplace skills program (WSP) has changed your view of yourself as a student, as a woman, as a family member, and as a worker.

Though your perspective about these interests has been revealed in our conversations about change, perhaps in reading and reflecting upon your own responses, you may discover further insights about where you have come to as a result of participating in the program. I hope you are willing to share those insights with me.

Also, in reading over your narratives, I hope you will note any inaccuracies, errors, or omissions that might have occurred because of a memory or a transcription confusion. You are welcome to use the page numbers to locate changes that you think are important and write the changes on the provided sheet of paper.

I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope. The following page is directing specific areas that I hope you will respond to. Please use the back or extra sheets of paper for your responses if you need more space. You can also reach me by leaving a message at my UNH voice mail 888-8888 or at 999-9999, and I'll get back to you as soon as possible.

Thanks,

Marcia Makris

(Though my envelopes have been addressed with Merrick, I have recently officially changes my name back to my family name--MAKRIS, and I'm beginning to use this name more often.)

Interview Reflections

Name: _____

1. I chose the option of furthering my education through WSP because
2. The funding of WSP by the federal government has as its primary purpose to enable participants to achieve self-sufficiency.
 - a. I would define self-sufficiency as the ability to
 - b. The WSP served this purpose for me in the following ways:
3. The WSP made a practical difference in my everyday living in the following ways:
4. WSP changed my view of myself in the following ways:
 - as a student:
 - as a woman:
 - as a family member:
 - as a worker:
5. Being a participant in this research has altered my personal sense of self in the following ways: