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KNOWING WHAT WE KNOW:
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S SELF-DEFINED EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE

by

GAIL GARFIELD

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2000

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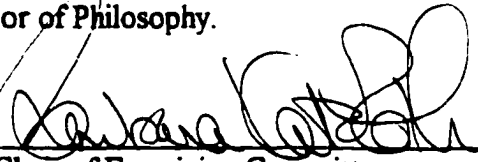
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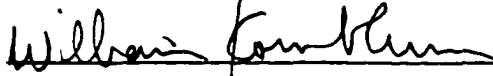
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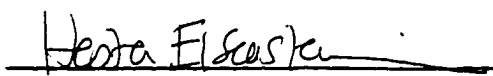

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Abstract

Knowing What We Know:

African American Women's Self-Defined Experiences of Violence

by

Gail Garfield

Adviser: Professor Barbara Katz Rothman

This dissertation explores the issue of violence in the lives of African American women by using life histories. It is a qualitative study that raises important issues about the prevailing interpretations of violence against women by presenting data that suggests the following: first, abusive acts against women are a socially constructed phenomenon that arises out of a multiplicity of historical circumstances that are inextricably linked to constantly shifting relations of power that is not limited to a single characteristic, such as physical abuse or to a particular location, such as the home. Next, abusive acts are precipitating events that can infringe upon or breach women's sense of self. This infringement on or rupture to their sense of self is the violation; it comprises women's experiences of violence. Finally, women experience violations as subjects who act, who act in different ways depending upon various social and cultural circumstances, and who sometimes act within and against their interests in the face of conflicting and contradictory choices.

Preface

In the fall of 1981, I was approached by a group of women who asked if I would work with them to establish the first battered woman's shelter for Latina women in Minnesota. The idea of working cross-culturally with women appealed to me. I was also interested in providing technical support that could help develop and strengthen community-based organizations. This was an interest wholly consistent with my understanding that one avenue toward community empowerment is the creation of self-sustaining organizations which can effectively respond to the unmet needs of community members. So, over many dishes of red beans and rice, we defined a plan of action that laid out what needed to be done to make Casa de Esperanza a reality.

I busied myself with the mechanics of the project: with identifying potential sites, negotiating financial arrangements, and setting up administrative protocols for operating a battered women's shelter. I intentionally stayed away from policy and programmatic decisions: these were areas I thought could best be handled by other team members who were battered women and advocates, who knew what they wanted, and who seemed to have much more knowledge of the issues involved. My understanding of domestic violence, spousal abuse, family violence, battering, and violence against women was quite limited. At the time, these were all new terms to me, and it appeared that they had their own particular set of meaning within the anti-violence movement.

One day, several members of the team were on their way to the hospital to visit a woman who had been assaulted by her husband, and they asked me to join them. The woman had received an order of protection against her husband for prior assaultive acts,

but he broke into her house and beat her up anyway. I was not prepared for what I saw when I entered her hospital room. I had never seen a person so thoroughly battered and brutalized. There was an immediate disconnect. I could not grasp how someone who would probably profess some form of affection for this woman could be so brutal toward her. In offering an explanation, the advocates dealt with broad issues like male power, control, and domination that seemed abstract and inadequate to explain the deeply personal level of brutality that this woman was experiencing.

My experience with the women of Casa de Esperanza marked an important professional and political turning point in my life. Even though I was far from being an advocate, the issue of violence and its particular significance for women began to take shape in my consciousness. I started attending conferences, forums, and workshops and I listened to testimonials of women's experiences. Slowly, I began to accept the explanations offered by advocates and victims for the disruption that could force some women to flee their homes in fear of losing their lives and the destruction that left some women physically and emotionally scarred for life. The victims and advocates were convincing in arguing that violence against women is a manifestation of male dominance. Accordingly, violence represents an attempt by men to exercise some form of power and control over women's lives, and to assert their will over women in ways that could result in intentional harm, injury, and death. In its most basic form, this type of violence arises in private or intimate relationships.

As a fundamental premise, this explanation finally made sense to me, but I began to remember and encounter situations that did not fit neatly within its boundaries:

situations where the complexities and contradictions of women's lives included this understanding while also revealing broader experiences of violence. My ever evolving understanding of the role of violence in women's lives generated new issues for me to ponder and posed important questions for which I did not have answers. My experience with the women of Casa de Esperanza forced me to reflect upon situations that I had long ago dismissed as interesting but not necessarily insightful, important, or connected to anything in particular. To me, such situations were just mere occurrences in my life that I had not bothered to name.

Growing up in rural Georgia in an all female household, male violence was simply not an issue for me as a child, or so I thought until I recalled a cousin, who seemingly every weekend would have a fight with his wife and he would always end up at our house either on Saturday or Sunday morning because his wife would chase him away with a gun. Their actions were expected and accepted as part of the community lore. Influenced by my family opinions, my cousin was seen as hard working and his wife as mean spirited. So, as a child, I understood that whatever my cousin did to his wife, she deserved it because she was an evil woman and disliked. But upon reflection, I thought that surely, if I was physically threatened, would I not attempt to defend myself? My cousin's wife's reaction did not seem unusual to me, and somehow it did not seem to fit the paradigm that was beginning to shape my understanding. It seemed contrary to the experiences of the other women I had been listening to, who were situated as victims, who took no self-assertive action, and who were often the ones who were forced to leave their homes out of fear, in search of the safety of a battered women's shelter.

I also remembered a fight between two high school girls, one of whom was popularly known as a bully. As we stood and watched this fight, the bully was slashed in the face with a razor blade. Blood was everywhere, and she needed 64 stitches to close her wounds. But none of us who watched the fight had any compassion for her pain because, after all, she was an intimidating bully whom we feared. This situation too seemed far removed from the experience of the woman I had met in the hospital. This fight was a public spectacle that was not played out in the privacy of a home. There was no male to blame this violence on. So what role did notions about male dominance and violence play in this particular situation? Was this considered an act of violence against women when two females actively participated in a fight against each other? It was unclear to me how to position this incident, but somehow it seems relevant to any discussion of women's experience of violence.

My guilt and shame will never allow me to forget another situation that did fit quite neatly into my fledgling understanding of violence against women at the time. While I was in graduate school, there was a woman who was an undergraduate, an acquaintance who had married a Nigerian student. It was rumored that they had gotten married so quickly because he wanted to become an American citizen. Maybe three months after their marriage, her husband threw battery acid in her face while she was taking a shower. The burns were so severe that her facial tissue was destroyed and doctors could not perform plastic surgery, so she would forever live with her scars. Her husband was convicted of criminal charges and jailed. At the beginning of my last semester in college, I was sitting with other students in the grill and to my surprise she

walked in wearing a full faced clear plastic mask designed to protect her damaged skin from the harsh cold of the Minnesota winter. It was a surreal sight and everybody stared. She came over and sat at our table, and it was the first real conversation that I can recall ever having with her. Her enormous courage and the strength it took for her to show her deeply scarred body day after day, as she was determined to get her college degree, will forever remain a part of my memories. I will also never forget that I did not visit her as she laid for months recovering in the hospital or provide her with any meaningful support as she struggled to reclaim her sense of self.

Along with reflecting on the past, I also encountered situations in the 80s and 90s which introduced new issues and questions for me to consider in attempting to understand the role that violence can play in women's lives. I began to realize that broad social arrangements, such as class and economic status, even though they are not necessarily predicated on notions of male dominance, could complicate in important ways some women's experience of violence. I also begin to see the convergence of race, gender and class as important considerations and how they too can be linked to other issues shaping some women's experiences.

My first professional job, after moving to New York City in the early eighties, was working as a researcher in the area of child welfare with one of the oldest not-for-profit organizations in the city. I was asked to examine the unexpected and rapid increases of children entering the city's foster care system and how the city was responding to this growth. I entered the bizarre world of an entrenched city bureaucracy in the form of the Child Welfare Administration, as it faced the world of drug addiction

that was stimulated in large part by the crack epidemic of the mid-eighties. These worlds are linked together by the presence of poor, often black, mothers and their children. I found that the controlling institutional arrangements could question the parental adequacy of poor mothers and legally separate some of them from their children forever. I witnessed the effects of physical and emotional abuse and sometimes the total abandonment rendered by mothers on their children due in part to drug addiction. I also observed the effects of physical and sexual abuse, the criminal activities and the exploitation of women involved in the drug culture. From my growing perspective, these were all social arrangements that are largely dependent upon what interpretation is given to some women's experiences of violence.

In 1984, I participated in my first protest march against police brutality. It was over the killing of a 67-year-old black grandmother, Mrs. Eleanor Bumpers, who was to be evicted from her apartment because she was one month behind in her rent. Three police officers alleged that an arthritic and overweight Mrs. Bumpers lunged at them with a knife and the only way that they could protect themselves was to shoot her. Speaker after speaker at the City Hall protest framed Mrs. Bumper's murder as another incident of police brutality. Although I refused to believe that I was the only person in that crowd of thousands who saw what I thought to be an obvious connection. Not one speaker ever drew the connections between police brutality and issues of violence against women. I cannot say that it was intentionally excluded from the analysis of what happened to Mrs. Bumpers. Instead I think that it was not seen as an important consideration.

For me, the issues of race, gender, and violence collided around Tawana Brawley

four years later and I could not privilege one of these issues as more significant than the other; they were all so tightly knotted together. But the issue of her silence resonated for me. The 15-year-old high school student's advisers and supporters told of her kidnaping, rape and physical assault by several white men who were believed to be cops. It was obvious to me that something terrible had happened to this child, but the political circus that was played out between her largely black male advisors and the largely white male politicians and government officials made a public mockery out of her experience. And Tawana refused to speak. I wondered why. Was her silence generated by fear and the additional burden of not being taken seriously if she spoke? Was it an intentional act of defiance? Or, was it based on the belief that others could best give voice to her unspeakable experience?

Certainly, black cultural sentiments that I grew up with also seem to complicate any discussion of the issue of violence against women for me. I know, from experience, that you are not supposed to wash your dirty laundry in public for white folks to see. For me, I also know that my old fashioned "race woman" tendencies will easily surface when I perceive white folks acting in blatantly unjust ways to black folks. Both realities impacted my understanding of Tawana Brawley's story as well as the overlapping stories surrounding the Rodney King incident. Members of the Los Angeles police force, their brutality captured on video and shown on every major news network around the country, were acquitted of criminal charges for beating Rodney King. A riot that some called a rebellion broke out all over Los Angeles County, after which Rodney King made a pathetic plea before the national news cameras asking "can we all just get along?" Also

during the aftermath of the police acquittal and riot, his wife made an emergency telephone call to the police, and Rodney King was once again arrested for beating her up. Many in the black community who had been so vocal about the injustice Rodney King suffered at the hands of white cops, were silent at the injustice that his wife had suffered at the hands of Rodney King. I waited for comments, but the silence was deafening, and then I realized that this was simply not a topic for public discussion.

Male dominance, institutional arrangements, white democracy, black cultural sentiments, popular culture, public voice, private suffering, race, gender, and class, all unexpectedly burst into my consciousness during a three day period in 1991. And violence against women was simultaneously positioned as a backdrop and a central issue in a televised public hearing. The Senate Judiciary Committee interrupted its confirmation hearing on Clarence Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court to hold a special hearing on allegations of sexual harassment made against the nominee by Anita Hill. It was high drama, worthy of popcorn, and I was glued to my television set. I had never witnessed such a spectacle before, and at the heart of this drama was a lone middle-class black woman attempting to convey to a national audience her experiences at the hands of a middle-class black man who used his positional power to abuse her. A friend called me from London to ask if we in this country had lost our collective minds.

I watched as scores of white men, white women and black men sat as analysts before television cameras claiming and disclaiming Anita Hill's experience. I was both amazed and amused at their attempts to frame and interpret for me this drama that I was watching, and I also wondered on what television channel the black women analysts were

because I could not seem to find it. Even though I recognized what was unique about this situation, I saw what can happen to a black woman who dared to speak publicly about her private pain and the attacks upon her personhood as a result of her experiences of violence, particularly at the hands of a black man. I learned that there are important implications to a public fight, and that a lone woman, regardless of the validity of her claim, is extremely vulnerable to additional abuse.

A variation on this theme became real for me in the summer of 1995. I was at a conference on violence against women in Washington, D.C., and when I returned to my hotel room I had telephone messages from friends telling me that the front page story in the New York Amsterdam News was the welcome home celebration to be held in Harlem in honor of Mike Tyson, the former heavyweight boxing champion who was being released from prison. Many well-known male activists, business leaders, politicians and church leaders comprised the welcoming home committee. The only woman on the committee was Roberta Flack, who was scheduled to provide entertainment for the affair at the historic Apollo Theater, following Tyson's parade down 125th street. A hero's welcome was planned, but it was unacceptable to me that the black community would publicly embrace and give accolades to a convicted rapist.

Mike Tyson was convicted of raping Desiree Washington, a black beauty queen contestant. His defense attorney conceded that Tyson was a brute and acknowledged that there was a long history of reported accounts where Tyson had abused women in the past. His defense was that Desiree Washington should have known not to go to Mike Tyson's hotel room alone, especially in the early morning hours. Many in the black community,

particularly women, supported Mike Tyson and professed his innocence while vilifying Desiree Washington. Tyson was portrayed as the victim of Washington's greedy intentions. His generosity was exemplified by a Rolex watch he had given Twana Brawley and Christmas turkeys he distributed to the needy in Harlem. I had watched the evening news and read in the newspapers as celebrities such as Whitney Huston and public figures like Betty Shabazz had gone to visit Mike Tyson in prison.

Rushing back to New York City, I found that a coalition had already been formed to try to stop the Tyson celebration. Our position was clearly articulated: we believed that Mike Tyson deserved a second chance, but he did not deserve to be welcomed as a hero in the black community. Hero status should be awarded to the black women who had died at the hands of men and those who survived male violence. So, we decided to hold a candlelight vigil on 125th Street in Harlem for victims of violence the day before the welcoming parade to call attention to what we considered to be misplaced sympathies. We created quite a ruckus. We protested the city awarding a parade permit to the welcoming committee in order to get it withdrawn; we lobbied members of the welcoming committee, particularly politicians, who were more receptive to listening to our concerns and understood the political consequences; we organized people for the vigil; and we wrote editorials and appeared on television and radio, voicing our concerns. Members of our coalition were harassed, some received death threats from Tyson's supporters. As we stood with our candles lit in support of women who were victims of violence, an organized group of black women stood across the street in front of the Apollo Theater with their placards, heckling, harassing and threatening us. Some of them

I felt, would have surely approached us if the police and their barricades were not there to "protect" us from harm.

So, with all of the complexities, conflicts, contradictions, commotion, and at times just plain ugliness I have engaged in my attempts to understand the impact and implications that violence can have on women's lives, two fundamental questions continue to linger for me. What meaning do I give to the role of violence in women's lives, especially given the different levels of experiences that women encounter? And, how do I begin to situate black women's as well as my own experiences of violence in this understanding?

During the early 1990s, I decided to work full-time as an advocate and activist around black women's experiences of violence. A small group of about 15 women that I knew began to talk about and to assess what we thought was happening to black women. Anecdotally, from news accounts and personal knowledge, we concluded that not only did it seem that incidences of violence against black women were increasing and they seemed to be particularly vicious, but no public voicing of concern was being offered by anyone. Yet, at the same time that more black women were being raped and killed, it seemed that we were being bombarded with accounts, analysis, and proposals to deal with "black-on-black crime" and the "endangered black male."

I received two telephone calls from women that I knew who both had been raped, one by her husband and the other by a stranger who broke into her apartment. Also, during this period an acquaintance was murdered on the street: she was shot for her purse. Beyond the anecdotal, we could not locate any substantive information or data that could

help us figure out if what we assumed to be true was really happening. Police, health care, and social services data proved to be inadequate to tell us what we wanted to know because it was often aggregated by gender but not broken down by race. In the absence of any documented information, we decided to hold focus group discussions with a diverse group of African American women and ask them for their experience, opinions and perceptions.

With small grants from some of the local foundations we were able to conduct a series of focus group discussions with 65 women participating. Based upon findings, our practical knowledge, and the lessons we had learned, we decided to develop an organization that spoke to our particular understanding of the needs, interests, and concerns of black women on the issue of violence. Never before has there been an organization that focused exclusively on black women's experiences of violence. In our attempts to establish such an organization, we had to involve ourselves in the landscape upon which we would be operating. This meant finding financial support, forming alliances, and developing an agenda. We have had some success in getting financial support because our efforts are often seen as a novelty: funders have never given money to black women for the expressed purpose of offering a self-defined response to violence in their lives.

This new organization is not attached to the more established organizations. It presents some differing views about how violence is constructed in women lives and what should be done about it. It makes some different kinds of demands on the victim services system. It focuses exclusively on black women's experiences. And it therefore

seemingly introduces new tensions onto the political landscape of violence against women. But upon closer examination, they are really old and consistent tensions that have existed in the anti-violence movement since its inception. These tensions emanate largely from issues of race, culture and class, and they speak to the old struggle of giving voice to experiences that may be similar while different, due in part to the social and cultural contexts from which they evolve.

The political landscape was and continues to be difficult to navigate. It is largely composed of white women who, through their long years of experience and hard work on the issue of violence against women, are now recognized as authoritative figures, key decision-makers and, in some instances, gatekeepers. Violence against women continues to be an important item on the agendas of most white-women-led political and feminist not-for-profit organizations. This is far from being the case for most black-women-led organizations, political or otherwise. For almost 30 years, white women through their political and academic activism, have been influential in determining how violence against women is defined, who is impacted by this problem, what should be done to address it, and how resources should be allocated in response. Yet, there are few, if any, support services for black women within the communities in which they live. Often they must travel outside of their communities for basic assistance. Most of the black women in the field are professional advocates who are employed by large predominately white-women-led organizations, where they are program directors or frontline service providers for battered women's shelters and other social service programs for female victims of violence. Many of them reference women's experience according to the more established

discourse that has shaped their own understanding of violence, often to the exclusion of some obvious contradictions and critical assessments.

As one of the founding members and the director of the Institute on Violence for the past seven years, I am constantly asked to speak at conferences, sit on panels, facilitate working sessions and attend meetings, where it is assumed that I have a particular understanding or can speak in an authoritative way on black women's experiences of violence. I recognize that such invitations are gestures of inclusion, but I will not speak for all black women, nor will I personally, professionally and politically *assume the responsibility of fulfilling the black woman's niche role of inclusion at such gatherings*. I am often dumbfounded when in a city such as New York, where there is an estimated one million black women and girls, I am the only black woman sitting at a meeting table. Often I am told that no other black women could be found. I am not impressed. From painful experience, I have learned that my behavior at such meetings and gathering can quickly become predictable. I am placed in the position of either having to raise the significance of race and culture for inclusion into the discussion, or I am arguing against racism and other related issues because I have been insulted.

My commitment, as I see it, along with that of the other black women with whom I work, is to try and create spaces and opportunities that allow black women in all of our diversity to interpret, give meaning, and speak to our own experiences of violence. It is my hope that maybe our different voices will not only challenge those within our communities to think about the value of black women's lives, but that our voices will resonate in ways that will get black folks to alter their behavior accordingly. Such an

endeavor, I recognize, is not all about the politics of interpretation and voice, but it is a good starting point, especially when the struggle is so complex.

As I sit here trying to interpret what I know and find my own voice to say it, I am interrupted by the loud buzzing of a helicopter circling overhead and the incessant wailing of sirens. Looking out my window, trying to figure out what is happening, I do not see any smoke, but I do see too many police officers to count, and news vans have begun to gather. In Central Park, directly across the street from where I live, a woman has been found murdered and raped. For Susan Fuchs, who was identified in the newspaper as a 37- year-old, white, homeless, mentally disabled woman with a college degree, violence took its ultimate toll on August 6, 1999.

Acknowledgments

The inspiration for this dissertation is rooted in the lives of women, especially blacks women for whom I have had the privilege of knowing. I wish to thank the women who made this study possible. In speaking so openly of their life histories they taught me about what is essential in dealing with challenges that jeopardize our humanity, and that is self respect. In giving of themselves, they bestowed a special privilege for which I will forever be grateful .

I also gratefully acknowledge Professor William Kornblum and Hester Eisenstein contributions that helped to enrich the final draft and completion of this dissertation. And to the Chairperson of my dissertation committee, Professor Barbara Katz Rothman, who guided my intellectual interests and offered tremendous support for my work. Additionally, I would like to thank my outside reviewers Catherine Pierce, Alana Bowman, and Donna Edwards who gave of time amidst their busy schedules to offer critical comments.

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Introduction

This dissertation explores the issue of violence in the lives of African American women by using life histories. It is a qualitative study that raises important issues about the prevailing interpretations of violence against women by presenting data that suggests the following: first, abusive acts against women are a socially constructed phenomenon that arises out of a multiplicity of historical circumstances that are inextricably linked to constantly shifting relations of power that is not limited to a single characteristic such as physical abuse or to a particular location such as the home; next, abusive acts are precipitating events that can infringe upon or breach women's sense of self. This infringement on or rupture to their sense of self constitutes the violation; it comprises women's experience of violence. Finally, women experience violation as subjects who act, who act in different ways depending upon various social and cultural circumstances, and who sometimes act within and against their interests in the face of conflicting and contradictory choices.

This is an inquiry into the politics of interpretation. It asks the question: how do African American women interpret their experiences of violence? In an attempt to provide answers to this question, African American women are positioned as agents of knowledge who use their own experiences as critical resources for understanding themselves and interpreting the world around them. This study focuses on the lives of a small and selective group of African American women who have not relied upon the referential domain of the victim services system to shape a response or give meaning to their experiences of violence. It represents a shift from the more traditional approach

upon which violence against women has been examined.

Violence Against Women

An abundance of anecdotal and documented evidence of female victimization, both historical and contemporary, lends credibility to the belief that violence against women is not an aberration, but a universal phenomenon resulting from male dominance. This belief is premised on the notion that women are subordinate to male privilege, authority, and power in ways that constrain their ability to take self-asserted action on their own behalf. Given this understanding, female subordination is presumed to cross divisions of race, class, and national boundaries to construct a shared women's reality. As such, violence against women is viewed by many as a cultural pattern that affects the lives of different groups of women in similar ways, regardless of their particular social distinctions or the specific historical circumstances influencing their experiences. Implicit in this perspective is the understanding that women are fundamentally victims, and only victims, who are rendered powerless in the face of male control and violence. The universal appeal of this point of view provides an ideological, structural and political backdrop for constructing violence against women as a social problem in need of an organized response.

No longer is violence against women an unrecognized form of victimization in our society. The severity of this problem was introduced into the public discourse by the contemporary women's movement. The needs, concerns, and interests of female victims of violence were interpreted and politicized, and, as a consequence of activism, a network

of victim services evolved in every state, that includes battered women's shelters, safe homes and other sanctuaries for battered and abused women. Other supportive services aimed at addressing needs, raising consciousness and empowering women have emerged as well, and services have expanded to include: referral hot lines, mediation and violence intervention programs, rape crisis intervention, legal and health advocacy. But along with these progressive trends are significant regressive tendencies that continue to plague and even undermine the well-intentioned efforts to protect and keep women safe.

Over the last three decades, the combined efforts of women activists and feminists have yielded impressive accomplishments that have altered the social climate by which the issue of violence against women is raised, understood and the ways victims' needs are addressed. Activists and feminists have firmly established an authoritative presence by shaping the theoretical, policy, and political debates that have come to define what we now consider to be women's experiences of violence. Helping to contextualize victims' experiences and to articulate the complex dimensions of the problem they face, professional advocates and academic feminists have played an essential role in shaping the discourse on violence against women for a broader audience. However, the way in which a problem is defined influences the manner it is responded to. So, because what is thought to be women's universal reality has received the attention, the service delivery system homogenizes and systematizes what is seen as common among female victims, to the omission of divergent experiences that are broadly shaped by significant social influences. This desire for uniformity has generated marginalization, divisions, and even exclusions. And the majority of female victims of violence rarely come into contact with

or seek assistance from this network of services that was established to meet their specific needs.

This is due in large part to the contradictory relationship between the ideological discourse guiding our understanding of the problem and the structural imperatives shaping our response. Ideologically, violence against women as a form of female subordination is conceptualized as a systemic manifestation of male dominance that is ideologically inscribed and institutionally reproduced by a shared agenda among men to assert their will over women. Presumably, the political interests of men in subordinating the interests of women situate the problem of violence against women in the public domain.

In practice, though, violence against women is repositioned as a private matter, where it is set apart from other systemic patterns of female subordination, thus narrowing the landscape upon which violence against women can take place. Female victimization appears to occur more often in isolated situations, primarily in the home, by men who are known to the victim, and where the traumatic effects are experienced as a private matter that is separated from its broader social context. To verify that victimization has actually occurred, physical injury is often a defining feature and the most significant marker. Abusive or assaultive acts, such as battering and rape, and sometimes the resulting emotional or psychological consequences of these acts, provide tangible and concrete evidence that injury has occurred and that a woman is, indeed, a victim of male violence. But, if social legitimacy is to be evoked, and if a woman is to acquire the status of victim, others must validate her individual claim to victimization. The problem of violence

against women then returns to the public sphere, and the victim services system plays a critical role in helping to draw the social boundaries and facilitate this process of legitimation.

This process of legitimation raises a critical question: what of the claims of the majority of female victims who do not come into contact with or seek assistance from this service system? Women of color claim that this system is insensitive to racial and cultural differences and social distinctions that give particular meaning to some women's experiences of violence. And claims have repeatedly been made against the system as well that it is unable to respond to the complex needs of women who live in poverty, those who are substance abusers, prostitutes, newly arrived and undocumented immigrants, lesbians, and those who have physical or mental disabilities, and criminal histories. These complaints reflect a fundamental problem: the victim services system is simply not equipped to handle the issue of female victimization in the context of race, culture and class considerations that help to shape divergent needs, concerns and interests. Calls for greater inclusion get narrowly defined as expanding service delivery within the system to reach more of the "under-served populations," but programmatic "add-ons" do not address the more complicated dynamics that are occurring within the victim services system.

While there appears to be no conscious effort to marginalize, divide or exclude diverse groups of women from this system, the processes, actions and effects suggest that this is exactly what is occurring. And the hegemonic beliefs, presumptions, images, and practices advanced primarily by the privileged perspectives and activities of white and

largely middle-class women have created barriers for broader participation, thereby helping to depoliticize and invalidate the individual claims of the majority of women. What is at stake is, who has the authority to give meaning to women's experiences of violence? The conflict is not over whose experiences and understanding is more authentic, or over supplanting the needs, concerns and interests of one particular group of women with that of another. Rather, the conflict is over the power of interpretation. The power to interpret one's own reality, amidst others' realities, is itself a political stake.

Yet the ways in which violence against women has been framed as an issue and how the victim services system has responded accordingly, provides a comparative backdrop but not a focus for this inquiry. This is not a study on black female victimization. It does not extrapolate, from the women whose lives are explored here, their experiences of violence from the overall context of their lives in order to emphasize the gravity of their victimization. Nor is violence presented as a deterministic feature of their day-to-day experiences where women are constantly reacting to, thinking about, and defining themselves as victims of violence. Rather, in this inquiry violence is presented in context. It is presented as one important dimension, among others, in the complex nexus of experiences that form women's ever-evolving social and cultural selves. To avoid narrowing or distorting their lives violence is presented as it unfolds. As such, there are time in the womens' lives when violence intersects with other experiences; when it stands alone as a featured moment; when it stays in the background; and when it is completely absent from their daily life.

This study examines how the women's own self-directed actions and self-

knowledge have given meaning to their experiences over time. It is an approach that explores the fluidity of experiences and how consciousness has been formed within and against structures of dominance to shape particular understandings. This requires that we direct our attention to how the women of this study have developed a sense of themselves, that has both changed and sustained them as they negotiated their everyday lives. And within this context, it explores the ways violence has insinuated itself into their experiences and contributed to their understanding of self. While identifying social and cultural similarities that make them African American women, this study also focuses on experiences that evolve from different contexts, which distinguish them as individuals. The value, affect, and understanding they give to their experiences will be differentiated by the various social and cultural spaces that they have come to occupy in society. This approach gives texture to but not necessarily a uniformity in their understanding of the events, circumstances, situations and processes shaping their interpretations.

This study positions African American women as individuals who can tell their own story of how violence has insinuated itself into their lived experiences. But as Hortense J. Spiller discusses in *"All the Things You Could Be by Now, If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother,"* there are challenges that are embedded in the simple act of speaking for oneself:

To speak is to occupy a place in social economy, and in the case of the racialized subject, history has dictated that this linguistic right to use is never easily granted with human and social legacy but must be earned, over and over again, on the level of a personal and collective struggle that requires in some way a confrontation with the principle of language as prohibition, as the withheld. (Spillers, 1997, p.145)

The Politics of Interpretation

For African American women the process of understanding their own reality requires that they make a critical distinction between the interpretations that claim them and those they claim for themselves. This is a difficult process to unravel because they are simultaneously positioned between the two. In exploring some of the power relations in the current positioning of African American women in academia, for example, Ann duCille contextualizes this difficulty in *"The Occult of True Black Womanhood"*:

Within and around the modern academy, racial and gender alterity has become a hot commodity that has claimed black women as its principal signifier. I am alternately pleased, puzzled, and perturbed--bewitched, bothered, and bewildered--by this, by the alterity that is perpetually thrust upon African American women, by the production of black women as infinitely deconstructable "othered" matter. Why are black women always already Other? I wonder. To myself, of course, I am not Other: to me it is the white women and men so intent on theorizing my difference who are the Other. Why are they so interested in me and people who look like me (metaphorically speaking)? Why have we--black women--become the subjected subjects of so much contemporary scholarly investigation, the peasants under glass of intellectual inquiry in the 1990s? (DuCille, 1994, p.591)

As the other, and as the object of the gaze of others, African American women are vulnerable to having their reality defined by others, their identity created by others, and their history named only in relationship to others. (Hooks, 1989, p. 43) Accordingly, as the other, especially within dominant society, their lives have been and continue to be in many instances interpreted as that of an objectified being. They are looked upon as "Matriarch, Emasculator and Hot Mamma. Sometimes Sister, Pretty Baby, Auntie, Mammy and Girl. Called Unwed Mother, Welfare Queen and Inter City Consumer. The Black American Woman has to admit that while nobody knew the troubles she saw, everybody, his brother and his dog, felt qualified to explain her, even to herself." (Harris, 1982, p.16)

Audre Lorde in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984) argues that "it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others--for their use and to our detriment." (Lorde, 1984, p.45) Yet, amidst the more privileged and often troubling definitions and identities placed on them, African American women have provided interpretations of their own experiences both within and against the dominant discourse. and in many ways they have come to validate their own perceptions of reality for themselves. In so doing, they have created their own spaces for self-expression and meaning. In *Surviving the Silence: Black Women's Stories of Rape* (1998), Charlotte Pierce-Baker discusses the importance of "the mapping of a new space." It is for her: "A space in which black women can learn to trust and speak to 'one other' and then to 'one another' in a sharing recovery of memory, of sanity." (Pierce-Baker, 1998, p.18) In recounting the self-defined stories of black women's experiences of rape, she discusses their struggle to speak, to give their "voices" to that which will never again be silent.

Patricia Hill Collins in *Fighting Words: Black Women and The Search for Justice* (1998) contends that the breaking of this silence by African American women has enabled them to "reclaim humanity in a system that gains part of its strength by objectifying Black women." (Collins, 1998, p.47) For her, this is not merely an attempt to insert black women's experiences into a prevailing wisdom by giving voice to their experiences. Rather, it is about claiming authority over their experiences to effectively challenge what is considered as legitimate knowledge. (Collins, 1998, p. 48) Implicit in Collins' contentions are critical issues of subjectivity and epistemology, that provide a

useful foundation for understanding African American women's interpretive practices and positing African American women as agents of knowledge.

Self-Interpretation

The issue of subjectivity is a major theoretical concern for many feminist scholars and a focus of this inquiry. It is within the realm of subjective, of the development of a reflective self, that the issue of violence is placed in this study. But how should we look at issues of subjectivity? And what are important considerations that must be included in an understanding of self?

Judith Butler contends that we must begin by taking apart the notion of identity. By rejecting a totalizing concept of a woman as a defining identity, her arguments in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) has helped to provoke much of the discussion and debate among feminists on the issue. Butler explores what possibilities could emerge if identity no longer constrains the theoretical and political discourse of feminist practice. In deconstructing the notion of a "primary identity," she argues that women are simultaneously positioned in multiple and intersecting discourses where identities are not unitary but are contradictory and shifting. For Butler, identity is ever fluid; there is no subjectivity or no single self. Subjectivity is seen as a function of discourse or relations of power that denies the relevance of self-conscious experience. Identity then is seen by her as socially constructed where the self is mediated by forces beyond an individual's control, thereby inhibiting the ability to challenge social arrangements that are oppressive.

Butler's post-structuralist/post-modernist analysis pushes the issue of subjectivity beyond the theoretical boundaries that many feminists are willing to tread.

Contextualizing the problems feminists face if they cross certain boundaries, Linda Alcoff in "*Cultural Feminism Versus Post-Structuralism: Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory*" (1983) asks:

How can we ground a feminist politics that deconstructs the female subject? What can we demand in the name of women if 'women' do not exist and demands in their name simply reinforce the myth that they do? How can we speak out against sexism as detrimental to the interests of women if the category is a fiction? How can we demand legal abortions, adequate child care, or wages based on comparable worth without invoking a concept of 'woman'? (Alcoff, 1988, pp. 419-420)

Many feminists agree, at least in part, with Butler's assertion that subjectivity is socially constructed, but differ sharply in their views on what constitutes a social subject. Teresa de Lauretis in *Alice Doesn't* (1984) argues that subjectivity "is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, affect) to the events of the world." (de Lauretis, 1984, p.159) She introduces agency, which describes the subject's capacity to make meanings in her interaction with others, as an important factor in discussing subjectivity. In "*Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (1986), de Lauretis situates agency in the context of lived experiences, of habits and practices that allows for the "continuous engagement of a self or subject in social reality." This reality is manifested through our social interactions and is seen as a historical process whereby consciousness:

is interpreted or reconstructed by each of us within the horizon of

meanings and knowledges available in the culture at given historical moments, a horizon that also includes modes of political commitment and struggle...Consciousness, therefore, is never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions. (de Lauretis, 1986, p. 8)

For de Lauretis, women can assert agency and give meaning to their experiences based on their interactions with other, but this meaning can and does change over time given changes in circumstances and events. Building upon de Lauretis framework, Linda Alcoff examines the issue of "positionality" or social location as shaped by distinctions such as race, gender and class. She argues that it is the different position women come to occupy within ever-changing social situations that provides the context for the construction of meaning. Specifically, this concept of "positionality" involves for her two related theoretical premises: first, women are viewed in relational terms that are identifiable with a constantly shifting social context; and second, the position that women occupy in any given context can be used as a location for the construction of meaning. Based on these perspectives, Alcoff contends that women are positioned within a moving historical context from which they can choose what to make of their ever-changing positions and how to alter the social arrangements influencing their lives.

Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) agrees that subordinate groups can provide a "standpoint" or perspective from their particular social position, but the lack of control over the ideological and economic apparatuses of society makes expressing a self-defined perspective by black women difficult, but not impossible. To the contrary, according to Hill Collins, black women have developed alternative ways for asserting self-expression

and self-knowledge. For her, self-expression centers around what black women do in their day-to-day lives, and their ways of knowing are revealed through the act of living. To capture their interpretive practices, Hill Collins constructs an "Afrocentric feminist epistemology." (Hill Collins, 1990, pp.201-219) This paradigm situates African American women as agents of knowledge and recognizes the significance of gender and race oppression in the formation of that knowledge. The elements of this model are centered around "concrete experiences as a criterion of meaning" and include such considerations as the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethic of caring and personal accountability.

These epistemic considerations do differ from the more traditional approaches for assessing meaning and validating claims of knowledge. But as Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham points out in *"African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race"* (1992) such an alternative model does not "permit sufficient exploration of ideological spaces of differences among black women themselves." (Higginbotham, 1992, pp.270-271) African American women's experiences are not monolithic. The different social positions that they come to occupy create differences in their individual experiences and differences in how experiences are perceived, assessed, and responded to. As such, African American women can find themselves in conflict even among themselves. Supporting this contention, Higginbotham notes that "Black women of different economic and regional backgrounds, of different skin tones and sexual orientation have found themselves in conflict over interpretation of symbols and norms, public behavior, coping strategies, and a variety of micro political acts of resistance to

structures of domination." (Higginbotham, 1992, p.274)

The women of this study experience the self as subjects who interact with themselves and others to engage their world. They are subjects who always act, but who act in different ways depending on their specific social position, and, over the course of their lives, they sometimes act against their interests in the face of conflicting and contradictory choices, given a particular set of circumstances or events. As historical subjects, they have actively participated in violence situations. They have acquiesced, accommodated, resisted, challenged, and they have even been complicit as well as initiated incidences of violence at some point in their lives. Such actions have manifested themselves as individual acts, or, given certain situations, these acts have occurred in relation to one another. African American women's experiences and understanding of those experiences encompass a host of interactions, images, forms and expressions where the meaning can differ widely among them. In using their different voices to speak for themselves, they interpret a range of expressions that have come to shape what they consider and do not consider as their experience of violence.

Telling Their Stories: Theoretical Perspectives

To position the women in this study as interpreters of their own realities, this research draws upon the methodological tradition of social interaction theory. This theory consists of several distinct but related perspectives that are rooted in a variety of conceptual frameworks. However, there are some important common dimensions. In general, interactionists focus on the relationship between meaning and experience by

examining the importance of human interactions from the viewpoint of social actors. Their theoretical contributions rest on the notion that society does not act; people do. Action has meaning. What is being done, by whom and with what purpose are all matters that people, social actors, interpret to produce their own actions and respond to the actions of others. In other words, it is the subjective understanding actors give to their circumstances that are critical to any explanation of why they act as they do. Meaning is not seen as incidental to social life. To the contrary, for the interactionists the meaning that people give to their interactions create their social reality.

This attempt to understand how African American women interpret their experiences of violence fits within this sociological tradition. This study begins with the premise that forms of knowledge represent different ways of knowing the world. The "sociology of knowledge," as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann tells us in *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise In The Sociology of Knowledge* (1966):

must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'. And insofar as all human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street [sic]. In other words, we contend that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality. (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.3)

Berger and Luckmann's theorizing would suggest that we look at black women's everyday lives to understand the processes African American women use in constructing their knowledge of the world. They are less concerned with asking whether actors' understanding of reality is correct or justified, and more interested in trying to appreciate

how and *why* people perceive situations in the ways they do. It is the meaning actors give to their circumstances, Berger and Luckmann contend, that is central to any explanation of why people act as they do. These meanings may seem arbitrary or biased if viewed from the outside. But if they are looked at in relation to the particular circumstances in which actors find themselves, such meaning can often be seen to fit with those circumstances in previously unsuspected ways.

This conceptual focus on everyday life, where people are seen as shaping their own social reality, represents a sharp departure from the more traditional sociological perspectives, in which social actors are depicted as either:

a tabula rasa, internalizing the norms and values of society out of a desire for group membership, or as a *homo economicus*, developing social, political, and ideological characteristics as a result of his/her class membership. (Adler, Adler, and Fontana, 1994, p.407)

These perspectives provide an overly deterministic portrayal, where people are seen as passive and constrained in the face of ideological and economic influences. In contrast, George Herbert Mead in *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (1962) saw people as taking a more active and self-determining role in living their lives. In recognizing the complexities of human beings, Mead suggests that we focus on the fluidity of self-consciousness and the ways that it is altered to reveal not one, but multiple selves. He claims that different selves are disclosed through "different relationships to different people and are one thing to one person and another thing to someone else. There are different selves for different kinds of social relationships and some parts of the self that exist only subjectively in relationship to oneself ." (Collins,

1985, p.257) Drawing upon his work would help to situate African American women as self-conscious beings, as social actors who are reflexive and can be both subject and object of their experiences.

Many notable interactionists (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1971; Garfinkel, 1967; Strauss, 1979; Berger and Luckmann, 1966) have drawn on Mead's contributions in shaping their perspectives and methodological approaches. Herbert Blumer in *Symbolic Interaction* (1969) views social life as comprising processes of interaction, rather than as structures or systems. As such, interactionists do not emphasize the role of broad and often abstract social structures. Instead they focus on approaches that would allow them to capture the meaning people give to the reality of everyday life.

Using Erving Goffman's work in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1971), we can view African American women as self-conscious beings who continuously communicate (giving and giving off) self-impressions in all they do. By focusing on the communicative process, Goffman regards social behavior as essentially involving the ability to project and interpret socially defined attitudes and actions. For Goffman, socially communicative actors display their character as people in one way or another, and much that goes on in face-to-face interaction is relatively independent of the wider social structures within which the interaction can be located.

Another related approach to looking at how people achieve their perceptions of their circumstances and how these perceptions inform their actions is offered by Harold Garfinkel in *Studies In Ethnomethodology* (1967). By concentrating on the "knowledge that guides conduct in everyday life," Garfinkel's work would suggest that African

American women's actions must be analyzed in context. By this, he means examining actors' "use of concerted everyday activities as methods with which to recognize and demonstrate the isolatable, typical, uniform, potential repetition, connected appearance, consistency, equivalence, substitutability, directionality, anonymously describable . . ."

(Garfinkel, 1967, p.10)

In short, Garfinkel argues that we should look at the common-sense knowledge of social structures that people use to categorize and name the things they experience in order to make the world understandable. This common-sense perspective is essentially a practical approach, where individuals are thought to focus primarily on their immediate situations. The work of Garfinkel suggests that in the ordinary concerns of life, African American women can be seen as people who cope with everyday situations as they occur. How they do so, however, would depend in part upon what features of their circumstances are most immediately relevant. For many the realities of living day-to-day involve practical experiences such as working, going to school, being unemployed, receiving government benefits, or engaging in non-traditional work situations. And they are ones who determine their own interests and purposes in such situations.

Like other interactionists, Garfinkel conceives of "social order" as participant-produced, that is, created in and through the ways the activity is being done by those engaged in it. But "social order" is not free of tensions, conflicts, and contradictions. Garfinkel claims that people perceive and treat their social world as constraining in a variety of ways. Individuals may believe, for example, that they have little control over circumstance which can affect the outcomes of a given situation. They may also believe

that they lack sufficient understanding to decide how to act, in a circumstance that necessitates action and where a non-action comes to represent an action nevertheless.

For interactionists, social life takes place in time and any social situation is a continually unfolding process. Events occur at some point along a course and may not be fully understood unless they are viewed in relation to the events which precede and succeed them. Social situations or events have histories and the interactions that take place do not simply occur in isolation from that history. Anselm Strauss builds upon this notion in *Negotiations: Varieties, Contexts, Processes, and Social Order* (1979). His concept of "negotiated order" emphasizes the notion that social life is fluid and revisable, even those situations that may be perceived as constraining. Social situations for Strauss are rarely fixed and static. They are continually worked at by those who live within them: modified, rearranged, sustained, defended and undermined. In this context, it is possible to see African American women as people who are constantly involved in a process of negotiation with others as they reaffirm, revise, replace and cope with the arrangements under which they act. Strauss is not suggesting that individuals are at all times engaged in explicit negotiation of their relative positions. Sometimes they are. But usually they are involved in more implicit, unspoken, mutual adjustment of actions, feelings, attitudes and interests. He suggests that the process of negotiation may be similar across different kinds of social settings.

But the process of negotiation can also be uneven. And, although interactionists focus on the dynamics of social relationships and recognize social constraints, they have not contextualized the role of power relations. Power is an integral consideration in any

discussion of how people interpret their experiences. To look at the ways power is manifested in social interactions, it is important to turn to Michel Foucault. As Nancy Fraser explains in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, even though Foucault would reject claims of consciousness as advanced by the interactionists, he does embrace the notion of the "politics of everyday life." (Fraser, 1989, p.18) For him, power is not centered only in the hands of the "state" or exercised only through its apparatuses. Rather, power operates in people's lives in more fundamental ways. It exists through the social practices, and social interactions which constitute everyday life itself.

Modern power, as conceived by Foucault, is more efficacious than concentrated state power because it is "capillary." This means that power "does not emanate from some central source but circulates throughout the entire social body down to even the tiniest and apparently most trivial extremities." (Fraser, 1989, 24) Accordingly, power is seen everywhere and in everyone. Foucault's contribution to our understanding of power makes it possible to see African American women as individuals who are capable of asserting their class capacity, cultural patterns, race and gender identities, and dignity as they struggle with the contradictions embedded within these distinctions in the face of uneven relations of power. As such, they are not viewed as passive victims and only victims, who are completely powerless in their experiences of violence.

The methodological perspectives offered by interactionists provide a frame of reference for guiding this study into African American women's self-defined experiences of violence. It also provides an important reference for how to approach this inquiry. A

prominent methodological feature is the actor's point of view. People react to situations as they perceive them. And to understand their reactions, it is important to appreciate those situations as they appear to the people who act in them. So an integral part of this research is not simply providing descriptions of situations, circumstances, and events, but also describing African American women's perceptions of the conditions that make up their experiences.

Finding Out What They Know: The Interpretative Framework

This study uses life history interview methods to place African American women's self-defined experiences of violence at the center of this inquiry. The underlying premise of the life history research is wholly consistent with the methodological focus of social interaction theory, in that both place an emphasis on understanding the various events of a person's life as she perceives them. Life history interviews are based on a first-person account. The women of this study provide such a subjective perspective: they define what is essential to them; articulate their own perceptions; and, through interpretations of their personal histories, tell us what they know and what they want us to know.

The process of data analysis is based on the grounded theory approach. This approach does not rely on developing a theory and proceeding to prove or disprove its validity. Rather, it relies on establishing a conceptual framework that results from patterns that are revealed in the research findings which relate to the phenomenon under investigation. This study relies upon data that is based on the participants' own

interpretations of their experiences. In the context of their life histories the analysis focuses on the question: how has violence intersected the lives of these African American women over time?

To provide answers to this question, it was important to determine how the participants in this study defined violence for themselves. Several related definitions are offered. It is important to note that in all of the various definitions offered by the women ideas about self, self-integrity and self-worth are pivotal concepts in attempting to understand how they view and position their own experiences. One participant defined violence against women as "any act that attacks her inner core and leaves her dehumanized." Another participant said, "anything that interferes or restricts a girl or a child or a woman of any age and breaks their self-confidence in themselves as a human being is violence." In both interpretations, it is not necessarily the act that is significant to the participants' understanding of violence, although the act itself is recognized as an important precipitating event. Rather, it is their notion of the breaking of the "inner core" and of "self-confidence" that represent a sense of an infringement that results in a breach to one's personhood that constitutes the violation, that constitutes, for them, the violence itself. It is the unraveling of self that becomes the defining moment.

Two other related interpretations that further contextualize the nature of this violation and its effect on one's sense of self are offered. Focusing more on the interpersonal context of this violation, another participant contends that "violence holds you emotionally and physically hostage." For her it is manifested by such acts as "emotional badgering, belittling, or physical beatings until the person is at the point that

she's afraid to think an independent thought on her own without someone's permission, or make a move without asking someone else's permission, or being simply afraid that she may do the wrong thing, and she's afraid that she will be punished." Within this understanding, the violation of self constitutes the loss of "free thought, free moment, and free choice by a woman or a girl." Incorporating a more overtly political perspective, for another participant, a violation occurs to one's sense of self when "some people or structures have the wherewithal to impose limitations on other people's lives, for their own interests, their own gains." And a sense of self requires that a woman realizes her own power: "where you feel strong enough to be an independent thinker and actor," even amidst difficult and contradictory choices.

From some of the participants' perspectives, one's sense of self can be both destructed and constructed by their sense of violation. On the one hand, one's sense of violation can compromise, damage or even destroy a sense of self-integrity and self-worth. On the other hand, the absence of a sense of violation can allow for a more fluid and determined sense of personhood and value to be placed on one's own life. Given this understanding, acts that may appear on the surface to be assaultive do not necessarily mean a violation has occurred to one's sense of self. To the extent that the participants perceive that a violation has infringed upon the integrity of self, then and only then, is violence a useful label with which to describe their experiences.

Several of the women cite experiences of a physical assault, which do not necessarily result in damaging, dismantling, or diminishing of their sense of personhood, even if physical harm and injury has occurred. They may have experienced physical pain

or injury, and as a result become angry, mad, or even insulted by the incident, but this does not necessarily mean that their self-integrity was infringed upon or breached, or that a sense of violation occurred. In contrast, there are other experiences that the women cite that may appear on the surface to be banal, but are interpreted as an assault upon their self-dignity and, thereby, are termed violence. So, within the context of their understanding, the women are able to offer a multi-layered perspective and account for a range of experiences that in their views are considered acts of violence, even though those experiences may not be acknowledged as such by others.

In this study, each participant's sense of self is ever changing. Their lives are positioned against a backdrop of constantly shifting social and cultural relationships where tensions and contradictions are apparent. References to the self do not stand alone. The women are not isolated from race, gender and class relations which influence their experiences and consciousness to varying degrees at given periods in their lives. And within their relationships they do assert agency. As such, they experience the self as one who acts: who sometimes acts in defense of her personhood, who sometimes acts against her own interests, and who sometimes acts in contradictory ways that infringe on and attack the personal dignity of others.

The analysis of data utilizes the interpretive framework that the women themselves have revealed in describing the trajectory of their life experiences. In so doing, it uses the articulated presence or absence of violations to self-integrity as a gauge to identify the participants' self-defined experiences of violence. It examines those experiences that the women exclude as forms of violation as well as those that they

identify as such, in order to delineate the distinction they make. A range of interactions are documented that may be categorized as personal, political, symbolic and structural in nature, and the shifting social and cultural context in which these relations evolve are presented in order to capture the participants' particular understanding of the ways violence has intersected their lives over time.

Methodology

To elicit the participants' perspectives the following research methods were implemented.

Recruitment and Selection

The "word" went out to many different and informal networks that I was seeking African American women as participants for this research. Women who were interested in participating were required to complete a screening questionnaire. The selection of participants was intentional, rather than based on a random process. Three criteria were used in selecting the participants.

The first, women were chosen based on their lack of participation or involvement in the victim services system (i.e., employees, advocates, or clients of services). The intent was to select women who do not necessarily reference or categorize their life experiences, including their experiences of violence, according to the institutional definitions and standards established by this system. Often, to access services, obtaining employment, or participate on an advocacy agenda within the victim services system one must accept the notion that female victimization is largely a result of male dominance.

Women who are seeking assistance must assert their status as a victim of male violence in order to be eligible for services. Need does not automatically qualify one for assistance in the absence of such assertion. As a result, labels such as "domestic violence victim" or "rape survivor" takes on an added dimension in a woman's life. Within this context, the victimization paradigm provides currency for the individual woman because she is placed in a position to receive assistance and resources that otherwise may be denied to her. But what is often given up, or what a woman surrenders in the process is a degree of agency. The ability to make subjective decisions regarding her needs, interests, aspirations regarding her experiences of violence are largely pre-determined within the system. So this study deliberately selected women who have not relied upon the victim services system to give meaning to or respond to their particular experiences of violence.

Next, to ensure diversity among the participants, selection was also based on characteristics (i.e., education, religion, income, cultural identity, and skin complexion) that would allow for the identification of significant social distinctions and experiences as well as differences in perceptions and opinions among African American women.

And third, women selected for the study were required to be 40 years of age or older. This criterion was aimed at selecting women who had sufficient life experiences to offer reflections upon their lives. Over the course of their lives they have developed, altered, or changed their beliefs, values, and perspectives in response to events and circumstances that have impacted their individual and collective lives. The uniqueness of this particular age cohort is that they were witnesses to or participants in some of the most life altering political, social, and cultural struggles in contemporary history.

The Participants

Thirteen women were selected to participate in this study. Based upon self-identified social characteristics generated from a questionnaire, a general profile of the selected participants reveals the following socio-demographic descriptions. The participants range in age from 48 to 58 years, and, although all of the women are longtime residents (20 years or more) of New York City, three were born and raised in the city, while the others migrated from various parts of the country. Only one of the participants was currently married, but has been separated from her husband for 30 years. Six of the participants were married but are now divorced, one is a widow, and six have never been married. Also, five of the participants have adult children. Six of the women are in intimate relationships with men, and seven have not been involved in an intimate relationship for at least two years. All of the women identified themselves as heterosexual.

In terms of education, one participant holds a Master of Arts degree, one has completed a grade school education, five received a Bachelor of Arts degree, and six have high school diplomas or an equivalent. Their employment histories represent an array of occupations over the years, including journalist, community organizer, writer, tool and dye maker, delicatessen owner, secretary, graphic artist, clothing designer, actor, social worker, banker, singer, magazine editor, stage manager, teacher, and product manager. Only three participants have been at the same job for seven years or longer, and one has taken an early retirement due to physical injuries. The majority of the women described their economic status as either lower middle class, middle class, or upper middle class,

and only one described her status as working class.

Culturally, all of the participants defined themselves as black, African-American, or both. The majority of the women identified their cultural community as African American, but five women saw their community as multi-cultural. Four of the participants identified their skin complexion as brown-skinned, four as dark brown-skinned, and five saw themselves as light-skinned. Regarding religious and/or spiritual orientation, the majority of women identified themselves as Christians. One identified as Buddhist, one professed a faith rooted in African spirituality, and two expressed more eclectic orientations blending beliefs from several different faith-based perspectives.

Data Gathering

Of the 13 women selected for participation in this study, nine actually completed the life history interviewing process. Over a six-month period, one woman decided not to continue to participate, and three others had scheduling conflicts that prevented their full participation. Involvement in the study was strictly voluntary. Each woman was required to sign a consent form that identified the purposes of the research, confidentiality protections, and the responsibilities of the researcher. Interviews were generally scheduled for five, two-hour sessions, for a total of ten hours with each participant. But upon mutual agreement the interview could be, and often was, extended. In general, the interview questions were open-ended and designed to facilitate discussion of the participants' personal histories over the span of their lives. All formal interview sessions were tape recorded and as a result more than 12,000 pages of raw data were transcribed

for analysis.

Presentation of Data

This study follows the social, cultural and personal development of the participants from early childhood to middle adulthood. Their life histories are treated as text and as such they are open to a variety of readings that include brief narratives, accounts of history, conversations, and facts related to specific events and circumstances. Their stories are a source of information that reveal both their individual and collective memories covering almost six decades of personal histories which constitute the body of each of the chapters to follow. At the beginning of each chapter a brief and selected historical accounting is offered to provide a general overview of social and cultural forces that are an active backdrop to the women's specific experiences. The first two chapters cover the early part of the women's lives, when identities are forged and basic life strategies were conceived. They describe emerging environments in which the participants were socialized to both informal and formal rules and social and cultural codes of conduct. And the women remember how as children they negotiated, accommodated, and made choices about their young lives. The next two chapters follow the participants into adulthood as they negotiate a series of relationships and develop a new sense of themselves as adult women attempting to create their own place in an every changing world with changing expectations. The last two chapters focus on both the participants' attempts to realize their personal and professional goals and the social and cultural conflicts encountered as they moved toward a new sense of self.

Prelude: Who We Are

The following are biographical sketches that provide an overview of the lives of the nine women whose stories form the basis for this study. It is a selective introduction to the different social and cultural environments within which each woman has developed her own distinct sense of self. Their names and some of the places have been altered to protect their identities.

Amanda

Amanda was born in 1947 and raised in a predominantly black community in New York City. Both parents migrated from the South, where her mother was one of a family of 16 and her father and his two sisters were orphaned at an early age. They met at a Harlem night club. Her father, who was 30 years older than her mother, worked as a porter for the railroad, and her mother was a community activist. Amanda was discouraged from pursuing college and told by her only black high school counselor that, "if she insisted on going to college, she should go at night." In 1964, she enrolled at a predominantly black college in the South, where she was introduced to black "bourgeoisie culture" and what was considered to be proper behavior for a young black woman of the time. She was also introduced to student protest, racial segregation, skin color and hair preferences, and sexual politics. In 1968, Amanda decided to go to graduate school on the West Coast, where she experienced her "first adult relationship" and a life style that included radical politics, drugs, interracial sex, and physical abuse. Returning to an East Coast city in 1978 with a Masters degree, Amanda became even more involved in radical political movements, community activism and union organizing. After the birth of her only child, Amanda moved back to New York City, where she maintained her political activism until she was "purged" from her leadership position with her base organization. The trauma of this experience took its toll. She had not lived as an "independent" person, free of political commitments, for years. She said, "choices were supposed to be in the interest of the whole group. So when you get kicked out of a group like that, then you're like, well what do I do now?" Amanda regrouped and returned to a socially committed life that includes her daughter, work, close familial and intimate relationships, and political activism.

Barbara

Barbara was born in 1945 and raised in a large industrial city in the Midwest. Her parents were married in the South and migrated "up North" during the war years, where her father worked in a steel factory, and her mother worked as a domestic worker. When she was a young child Barbara's father lost his eyesight in an accident at work. But he was also a jazz musician, and the family lived on income generated by his music, social security benefits and her mother's income from cleaning houses. Growing up, Barbara was acutely aware of poverty and not having. She also hated who she was as a person. "I was dark, I didn't have hair flowing down my back, and I just didn't represent what was attractive. I had none of the things that would help you to excel." She graduated from high school in 1962 and immediately moved to New York City. To support herself she worked different clerical jobs that eventually lead her to an advertising firm. "I think that's when my life started." She had her first adult relationship that lasted until she was told "Barbara, you're too dark." After that break up, she began to "totally change" who she was, and through a series of job promotions, her social status changed, particularly in relation to whites and particularly white males, whom she dated exclusively. She describes it as a "phoney world" which she readily embraced in order to "create" the person she wanted to be. During the latter part of the 1960s, Barbara became addicted to alcohol and prescription drugs. Her marriage to an African lasted for a week. With assistance from a faith-based substance abuse program, she became sober and drug-free in 1979, and for the past 19 years she has attempted to rebuild her life and recover the things she thinks were lost during her years of addiction.

Sara

Sara was born in 1947 in a small college town in the Midwest. Her father was in the Army, and the family frequently moved around the country, living in military housing. The oldest of the five children, she recalls a "very protected childhood." But constantly moving from one place to another because of her father's military career, she felt different, as if she was a stranger every place she went. And often her family was the only, or one of a very small group of black families, living on the base or in small military-dominated towns in the south. But if she ever forgot she was a Negro living with segregation while growing up, "my parents, my peers, white folks would re-educate me. White folks will re-educate you the quickest." In 1961, while she was in high school, her family moved to Germany. There she traveled a lot, formed important friendships with

other black military kids, and was introduced to beer. In 1965, over her parents' objections, she enrolled at a predominantly black Northern college. She fell in love and soon became pregnant. She decided to have an abortion, and a month later her boyfriend, on his way to Vietnam, was killed. "I felt like I was going crazy." The campus was consumed with Martin Luther King's assassination, the antiwar movement and the tensions between rival black political groups. Although functioning she remembers, "I was doing as much drugs and alcohol as I could." She graduated and moved to New York City, enrolling in a local college to become a journalist. She worked a series of jobs as a writer with major newspapers and magazines, and she got married. The marriage ended in divorce. Recognizing that she had become an alcoholic and addicted to drugs, she became sober in 1980. "It's been 18 years since I've had a drink." Sara believes that because she was self-medicating, alcohol and drugs robbed her of her life. But the things that she defined early on as crucial to her identity continue to be a significant part of her life: family, friends, and intimate relations as well as writing.

Mary

Mary was born in 1939 and raised in the rural South. During her early years, Mary grew up as a part of her grandparents' large family, which included their thirteen children. Mary's father was away in the military, and she saw her mother, who was a live-in domestic worker, "maybe once or twice a year." Mary called her grandmother "mama," and it was from her that she learned "stuff like ethics, morals, religion, spirituality in terms of my development." She also learned to keep her distance from her grandfather, who had gotten his 14-year-old daughter, Mary's aunt, pregnant. At age 12, Mary went to live with her mother, and by that time she had six brothers and sisters. Due to her mother's job, Mary became the primary caretaker for her siblings. After graduating from high school, Mary had dreams of attending college. But her mother and father had migrated to New York City with the younger children, and Mary followed them to help take care of the family. Her boyfriend followed her to the city, and they decided to get married. "I married David because I wanted to get away from my parents. I was tired of taking care of everything, you know." Mary enrolled in secretarial classes and held a series of jobs before she was hired at the telephone company. After two years, she left to give birth to her first child, and she didn't return because they would not give her part-time work. Eight months later, she became pregnant with her second and last child, her relationship with her husband began to deteriorate, and she took a job on the night shift at

a commercial bank in order to make ends meet and to be at home with her young sons during the day. Her boss was hired at another bank and asked Mary to join him, which she did. This was the beginning of her long career in banking. As her children grew, she took an active role in their education, and she eventually became a member of the school board in 1972. Also during this time, she divorced her husband who had become abusive to her. For the last 25 years Mary's life has been dominated by her sons, community and citywide politics, her work in banking, her friends and intimate relationships.

Anne

Anne was born in 1945 and grew up in a small Eastern town. Both of her parents had college degrees and her father was a school principal, while her mother held several different professional jobs. Her family lived in a black community that she calls a "ghetto." Educational achievement was stressed in her family. Her younger sister had skipped a grade, and from the time that she was in the second grade until she graduated from high school, Anne and her sister were in the same grade and often shared the same classroom. A competitiveness evolved between the two that would continue into adulthood. When Anne compared herself, she felt different "because of left-handedness and physical size." To deal with being a large-sized girl, she started sewing her own clothes when she was eight years old. But she said, "my mother didn't want her friends to know that I made clothes; that wasn't acceptable." She graduated from high school in 1961 and immediately moved to New York City to attend college, but "didn't get good grades." After her first year she was placed on academic probation, and decided to work full time. "My parents were very unhappy because I was not continuing the family tradition of advanced education." Anne also decided that if she was not going back to school, she still had to get an education, and so, through a series of full-time jobs, she managed to travel extensively abroad. She got married in 1969, but it did not last because she discovered that her husband was gay. After hitting what she called a "glass ceiling" at a major magazine, Anne attempted to operate her own clothing design company. It failed. But sewing and designing clothes continue to be a significant part of her life. They are creative outlets that she hopes will, be income-generating as well.

Patricia

Patricia was born in 1950 and grew up in a predominately black community in New York City. Her parents migrated from the delta region of the rural south. They were

married in New York City, three years after Patricia was born. Patricia's father worked as a presser and tailor for a local cleaner, while her mother worked for a long time in various factories as a piece worker. Patricia's father was "not only an alcoholic, he also had a gambling problem." She describes him as a "functional alcoholic" because he was able to maintain his job until he retired. But he was also extremely physically and psychologically abusive, especially to her mother. Her father's brutality dominated her family life and terrorized her throughout her childhood and even into adulthood. "I think these early years were the beginning of my ulcer. I would scream. I would holler. I used to beg my mother to divorce my father." She went to predominantly black public schools, but her teachers were mostly white. Disenchanted with school, Patricia dropped out, but she went to night school where she received her high school diploma. She became a secretary and worked a series of clerical jobs. Patricia met her husband at work, but three months after they were married they had a "physical fight," and she left him. "I said, oh God, I've married my father." They tried to make the marriage work, but "alcohol became a part of our relationship." Patricia got pregnant and had her only child, but her husband left before her son was born. She struggled to raise her son and found "courage" when she began to write. She self-published two books of poetry and is "proud of the fact that I'm not the kind of woman that I could've ended up being because certain things intervened at certain times in my life for a reason. I have no doubt about that."

Faith

Faith was born in 1951 and, although she was born in New York City, she grew up in an urban city in the South. "When I was eight months old, my mother left my dad and she went home." Her mother was a public school art teacher. In 1963 Faith's mother sent her "up North" to a Quaker co-educational preparatory school for her high school years. When she got on campus "there were four black students--three boys and me--and there were 450 students all together. I remember looking around and saying, well, who is going to be my boyfriend?" She found the school academically challenging but managed to hold her own, even though she felt a sense of isolation and loneliness. She began to become more interested in the arts. "I thought that theater was probably the most powerful thing in the world." After she graduated in 1967, her mother persuaded her to go to college, and she moved to New York City. After graduating from college she went on the road with a theater production company as a member of the choir. But it "was a

mess." Faith returned to her hometown and worked in a series of acting jobs with local companies, before returning to New York City where she took theater classes and whatever acting jobs she could find. She had several significant and long-term relationships, but she never married or had children. To make ends meet she worked at a variety of jobs that would facilitate her acting career. But Faith began to assess the "politics of the business" and the kinds of roles that were available to her. After her mother died, she created a one woman's performance piece based on the life of a controversial black female historical figure. Although she continues to be interested in the arts, and the theater particularly, Faith is attempting to define herself outside of the profession.

Jackie

Jackie was born in 1949 and grew up in a predominantly black community in New York City. Part of Jackie's early years was spent with her paternal grandmother, but she was raised primarily by her maternal grandmother who lived with her mother in a public housing complex. She was the only child until the age of 11, when her mother had three boys and another girl. She describes herself as a mischievous child: "Like the day I tried to burn the school down." She grew up in a large extended family, where many of the members lived in the same housing project. "Even today if we go to a funeral, my family takes up one whole side of the church and then some. She "hung out" with her male cousins where she did all of the "boy stuff and I was just as good as they were." But she went to an all-female high school. Fighting was a part of Jackie's life, and when she was 14-years old she joined a street gang that was run by her cousins. She was the negotiator: the gangs "let us do the negotiating for them in fights, either how the fights were going to happen, where they were going to happen, or if they were going to happen." Jackie met her first "real" boyfriend at church, and they became engaged, but he got drafted and was sent to Vietnam where he was injured. He was in the hospital for a year, and their relationship dissolved. In the meantime she had taken a job on Wall Street where she was the only black working in the department. Also during this period she reconnected with a childhood boyfriend, and they got married in 1968. By January 1969, she had her first child. Immediately after the birth of her third child, she separated from her husband. She left her job because she was on the "verge of having a breakdown." During this period she went into a depression: "I literally went to bed." But by the end of the 70s, "I was looking for something else to do." From that period on, Jackie has worked as a full-time

activist in the community in which she lives.

Sharon

Sharon was born in 1949 and grew up in a small, overwhelmingly white, Midwestern town. Her parents met while attending separate predominantly black colleges in the South. They both had Masters degrees when they migrated North where her father worked for the federal government and as a part-time jazz pianist, and her mother stayed home. She grew up in a "very strict" household, and "punishment was mean. It was bang, bang, bang. We got beat up." As a very young child she had to take piano lessons and practice classical music on a daily basis. When she decided to play jazz like her father, "he screamed and hollered me out of all of my creativity." She was an average student and did not have a black teacher until she went to a predominantly black college in the south. By her senior year, she was a fraternity pledge queen, had witnessed Martin Luther King's funeral, and was losing high school and college friends to the Vietnam war. Sharon received a degree in music, and she moved to New York City to get into "show business." She consciously sought out people involved in the business. She met and fell "madly in love" with an entertainer, but the relationship didn't last because he was married and had children. During the 1970s and 80s, Sharon devoted most of her time to establishing a career in show business. As a member of several "girl singing groups," she did backup singing for the studio and on stage. But at some point she reflected: "after you've had so many disappointments you come to grips with the fact that hey, I'm not meant to be a big star," and felt it was time for her "to move onto that other part" of her life. She has been working professionally with computers, but she still sings "every now and then."

Chapter One:

Becoming

The women interviewed for this study are shaped by life experiences that continue to place them in a process of becoming. They were born between 1939 and 1951, during a time of social transformation and change in black life. Their parents migrated from the South to various parts of the Northeast, Midwest, and Southwest relocating with other family members when they were young single adults, or husbands and wives. They were working men and women of various skills, talents and education who were seeking better job opportunities. They were black men and women whose blackness affirmed their cultural identity while also signifying their social oppression. The daughters were born at the dawn of the modern civil rights movement that would, in the course of their lives, crystallize into a full-fledged struggle for racial and gender justice. It was a movement that represented a continuation of the black struggle in America, but that also introduced different sociopolitical questions, offered different choices, and posed different challenges to the generation of black women participating in this study.

Their families attempted to lay a cultural and social foundation that would provide their daughters with the necessary understanding and skills to enable them to engage their worlds. Culturally, codes of conduct for family and community interactions placed value on language, customs, creativity and improvisation. It was hoped that the cultural knowledge gained from these affirmations would provide a rootedness that would guide their daughters into the future. Socially, it was hoped that their great and small

challenges to injustice would stand as personal testaments to the possibility that their daughters' lives would be more self-determined and more self-fulfilled than their own.

Sometimes the families were successful in passing on their knowledge of the world to this next generation, but sometimes the knowledge was simply inadequate. Yet, these mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles gave to the daughters what they had to give. Their hopes stood side-by-side with their disappointments, their love with their hatred, their sacrifices with their selfishness, their daring with their insecurities, and their encouragements with their resentment. Drawing upon childhood memories, this chapter examines the cultural and social environments in which the women of this study were born, grew up and begin to develop their sense of self.

Becoming A Northerner

Most of the women in this study represent the first generation of their family to be born outside of the South. Their parents migrated up North during World War II and the postwar years. They had different reasons for leaving the South. Some simply wanted to find a good-paying job, others were looking to gain access to non-traditional employment opportunities where they could apply their skills and training. What their parents did to earn a living in their new lives up North would significantly influence how their families would function in this period of transition. But they were also seeking release from the racist culture and customs that prevailed in the South during this period and a chance to explore their human potential in the absence of rigid social restrictions. Their daughters recalled their childhoods in the 40s and 50s as working class or middle class and either

they lived in segregated all-black neighborhoods, or, if integrated, they maintained an awareness of being significantly different or separate. They recall mixed messages about those communities and the conditions under which they lived.

Barbara's parents moved to Michigan during the war years, where her father "worked in the steel factory" and her mother earned a living as "a day worker, a domestic worker." Through a work-related accident, her father lost his eyesight when she was a very young child, so her family's income was based primarily on her mother's earnings and the social security benefits her father received as a result of his accident as well as his earnings as a jazz musician. This created financial difficulties that at times impeded her parents' ability to provide for their children's material well being, and it also shaped how Barbara would come to view her social circumstances while growing up. As she said:

I hated poverty. Not having. Poverty was material for me. I just didn't have the clothes that I wanted. We always had to depend on other people giving us stuff, and I really didn't like that. And then, when we did shop, my mother would go to the thrift shops, and we never got new stuff. I hated not having the food that I wanted to eat, not having the room that I wanted, not being able to go where I wanted to go. At the time I thought that we were the poorest family in the neighborhood.

It was completely different economically for Sharon and her family. When Sharon's parents migrated from the South in 1943, they both had received Master of Arts degrees in non-traditional areas for blacks during that period. Her mother's degree was in zoology and her father's was in business administration. Sharon saw her family as middle class. They lived in a racially integrated community in a small midwestern town where her father worked for the federal government and was the primary provider of the family, while her mother took care of the household. Sharon recalls:

My mother stayed home, and she doted on me. Even though she had all of this education, she had time to slip-cover the sofa and go into the basement and develop pictures, and grow all sorts of plants and know what they all were. I guess you were used to your mother always being there, because when you came home from school she was always home taking care of things.

Patricia's father moved up North in search of a "good job," but her mother, who had two small sons, migrated because she "didn't want them lynched." Patricia's parents met in New York City and got married in 1951. Neither had a high school diploma, so they took whatever jobs they could find. She describes her family as working class. Her father was employed as a presser and a tailor for a neighborhood cleaners, and her mother earned a living working in a factory as a piece worker.

A piece worker is an assembly line kind of thing, you get paid so much for how many pieces you sew. like the piece could be a sleeve and you sew that sleeve on, and then you go on to the next piece that needed a sleeve. You get paid by the amount of pieces you sew on within a certain amount of time. She went from different factories at the time because she didn't have a diploma so that's all she could get.

Although burdened with the demands of a full-time factory job, her mother made sure that Patricia and her brothers were taken care of. As Patricia recalls:

She was putting in an 8-hour day in the factory, but she wanted to make certain that she was home during a reasonable time after we got out of school to be there to make sure that we were okay, check our homework, to make sure that she got the food together for dinner, to make certain we were ready to go to school the next day. I guess you could say that we were one of the early latchkey children. But obviously we never saw ourselves as that. I do remember wearing the key around my neck inside my dress.

Faith's parents had migrated to New York City, but in 1951 her mother and father separated and, unlike the other women in this study, she returned with her mother to the

South. They lived with her maternal grandparents but had separate living quarters in the attic of her grandparents' home. Faith's mother taught art classes at a segregated high school. But as a single parent she still had a hard time making ends meet. However, Faith viewed her family as a part of the black middle class:

One of the things that I understood about being middle class in the South, is that it has as much to do with education as much as money. One of the biggest things that made us middle class was the fact that my grand daddy had sent all four of his kids to college. There was a junkyard that had bought property across the street from us, so I used to always be trying to figure out how it was that I could live across the street from a junk yard, where we never had any money, and yet still I knew that we were considered bourgeois.

After moving up North, many of the women's parents settled with their young families into predominantly black communities, which allowed them to retain family, friendship and cultural ties. Describing her family's living arrangements, Amanda recalls:

At the time we didn't realize how small the apartment was, but it was really two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen and a bath. My father used to be a cook, so he didn't mind cooking. We called my mother the holiday cook. She would cook for Easter and Christmas and for people's birthdays. So we tried to eat together on this little table that we had in this little kitchen. When we had Thanksgiving, that table would be moved out into the living room. We had relatives--a lot of aunts and uncles--that would come to eat in that little tiny apartment. We lived in a tenement; it was a walk-up fifth floor tenement.

Jackie recalls a dual living arrangement. At times she would stay at her paternal grandmother's house, and at other times she would live with her mother in an apartment in the projects:

At my grandmother's house on my father's side there was only my grandmother. My grandmother's house had four bedrooms, and her house

was a transitional house. As people came up from the South, they would come and stay until they got themselves together, and then they would move on. So in her house there was always somebody--a lot of my cousins on my father's side--because that was a transitional point. I was born and raised in public housing. I'm a projectite for real. In my mom's house there was my uncle, my grandmother and myself.

With the exception of Sharon and Sara, all of the women grew up in predominantly black neighborhoods. However, even though many of Sharon's neighbors who lived on the same street were white, she "didn't really go into the white neighbors' houses." Her family chose to socialize with other blacks in the town. They "went to a black church, and most of our social stuff was black stuff." For some of the women who grew up in black neighborhoods, their parents had reservations about living there because they were uncomfortable with the surrounding environment. Anne grew up in a small town on the east coast and describes her community as a "ghetto." Her parents placed restrictions on her movements and interactions:

We couldn't go out after a certain time. You couldn't play with certain people. I don't know if it was because of class and economics, which I always feel was a piece of it. My parents were striving to make life better for themselves and for their children. They were trying to figure out how to do this.

Barbara's father used to tell her that "everybody in the community was an idiot."

And she hated the house that she grew up in and where it was located. As she said:

I didn't like the people in my neighborhood. I never had too much to do with them. To me they were like the downtrodden. No one had any ambition or desires. They were sort of like tough. It was a tough kind of neighborhood.

The participants' communities represented more than a sense of place; they represented a sense of connection and belonging to the people who lived there. At times,

their community placed its own set of social and cultural demands on some of the families. Yet, their communities were places of familiarity and sometimes places of refuge against the challenges imposed by the larger society. Several women expressed being uncomfortable and feeling different when they left their communities. As Amanda explains:

When you went downtown, you always felt like you were in a totally different world. Your clothes and everything always seemed so much shabbier. You would think that you had your best stuff on, and then you would get downtown in the stores, and you would always feel like you were not equal to the other people in terms of your appearance--that you didn't really belong there.

Although Amanda felt a sense of belonging to her community, she also recognized that even up North she lived in a segregated community. But she saw some advantages to this. As she said, "people are always surprised when I say we lived in a segregated community. You saw white people in the stores or selling you something, or teaching, or the social worker, but you didn't see them just walking down your street causally. The white people were like there; they were part of your world but not part of your world. You didn't have to deal with them on a regular basis."

Becoming a Girl

Most of the women in this study grew up in family environments where members assumed conventional gender roles. Their fathers, when present, were often seen as the providers of the family. But an important commonality among these daughters from varying family structures, social classes, and geographic regions is the centrality of women in the shaping of their family life. It was their mothers or other mothers, usually

the maternal grandmother, who were seen as the glue holding the family together. They made the household rules, and they punished infractions. Most of the participants remembered close relationships with the women in their families, but these were not unproblematic relationships. There were tensions and conflicts that sometimes created barriers between mothers and daughters. Nevertheless their daughters relied upon the adult women of the household for their immediate material and emotional support, and they were largely responsible for the guidance and motivation their daughters received to achieve socially and culturally acceptable role expectations.

Within the household, their mothers and other mothers could assert a degree of personal power when it came to their daughters. As Amanda said, "my mother was the one who established the rules, and my father said very little." Some of the rules, of course, dealt with household chores and who would be responsible for doing what. But most of the rules dealt with regulating their daughters' behavior and conduct. In her family, Amanda recalls:

You weren't supposed to eat at other people's houses, although people could always eat at our house. You weren't supposed to beg and ask for things. You weren't supposed to take things from people that we didn't know. You weren't supposed to fight, but we would fight anyway. We wouldn't curse. My mother didn't like slang, even things like, Oh Lordy Miss Claudey. She said that was stupid, and you weren't supposed to talk like that. We had to talk to people a certain way. We had to call adults Mr. or Mrs. You never called people by their first names. Or, if they were like close family friends but not relatives, you had to call them aunt or uncle. You had to do your homework before you went out to play. You had to change your clothes; you couldn't be going out with your school clothes on. You couldn't go out unless you did your chores first. And you couldn't stay out past a certain time. And don't come back with your hair wild. We used to tussle and play with a lot of the fellas in the block, and if you came back with your hair wild, my mother thought that we were doing

things. That was a real sign that something was wrong.

Implicit in some of the household rules were gender considerations--distinctions between male tasks and female tasks. Barbara said that she "found out right away that if you were a girl you had to do domestic chores, and if you were a boy you just didn't have to do anything at all." Sara also saw the boys in her family as occupying a more privileged position than herself. As she said, "the boys were big deals, so there was a thing about girls waiting on boys:"

Even as a little girl, when my grandmother would have a big dinner, she would give me the stuff to set the table. It was like teaching me how to be a girl, teaching me how to serve people. That was an early part of my training from the time I was a little, little girl: where to put the knives and forks, and to take some kind of pride in the way a table looked and to clean the bathroom. My job was to clean the sink and the bathtub and stuff, whereas my brothers had to sweep up the porch--a nice kind of outside job; I had to do this little inside nasty job. At the time that's what you did as a girl.

What being a girl meant to the participants was ever-shifting throughout their childhood, and they struggled with the tension that this created. As a child, Sara wanted to become a writer when she grew up, and she also wanted to be a mother, but she saw these two aspirations in conflict with each other. Confused, she said, "at first, I thought that I wanted to have kids and be married. Often I didn't see a man as much as I saw a kid. But I wanted to write and have a life. I wanted to travel too. And if anybody had of asked me how are you going to do both? How's that going to work? I probably would've turned into a pile of dust. So I had different images that did not go together." By carefully observing her mother and grandmother she attempted to sort through this conflict. As she explains:

My parents seemed to have a really good relationship. They stayed together forever. They had sex all the time. Every time you turned the corner they seemed to be kissing. But I didn't translate that necessarily to my own life. I wanted to be a writer, I didn't think I wouldn't be able to do it. I liked telling stories, I loved to read, and I thought it would be wonderful to be able to do that. I wanted freedom too. I think part of it, all along, was a reaction against my mother's life. She said she was happy, but that wasn't the message I was getting. And then my grandmother before her was married to this guy, and she took care of everybody. She was like a big maid to me. She cooked, and she seemed to be happy. She was an old farm woman, and she could do everything. She could kill a chicken, and pluck it, and cook it, and make soup out of the bone, and take the marrow out of the bone. She was like an amazing old lady. But I remembered that I didn't want to be her.

The rules were not only aimed at gender conformity, at teaching the daughters how to be girls, they were also aimed at controlling sexual activities and sexuality.

Barbara describes her mother as "very strict" and she recalls a favorite saying her mother used to repeat to her. "The 3 Bs don't match--books, boys and babies. That was one of the first things that she must have told me, it was always something that she constantly talked about. From my earliest recollection I knew that I was a girl and what that meant."

Initially, Mary rebelled against her grandmother and mother imposing a gender-specific role on her. "The girls always had to do the dishes, so I used to always challenge that. I would say, well you know he eats too. The reply was, but he goes to work. I'd say, well, I work too, so how come I have to do the dishes? I would challenge sexist statements like that." Mary also challenged the way girls had to dress, and she started wearing "dungarees" all the time. She did not like how "girls had to dress a certain way, and the boys could just be causal." She felt that dressing differently from the boys was a "handicap because I thought that I was one of the boys. I was their running buddy." But

things changed for Mary:

I realized that I was growing up when I started playing with boys across town. It wasn't the same group of boys. These boys were fondlers. That's when I realized that I was a girl. And my mother used to say, well, you don't have nothing. Are you a girl or a boy? Like if she would come home, and she would catch me in the bathroom, and I'd be flat-chested and stuff, and she would say, well don't you have no breasts yet? What are you doing. Are you binding yourself? You know, cause I would be so flat. But I didn't blossom until I was like 15, then I just became a nice young lady. That's when I grew in and became a girl.

Patricia liked wearing pants too, and her sexuality was also questioned by her mother. She recalls, "my mother told me one time that she was kind of nervous because she thought--she didn't say the word homosexual--that that was probably what was going to happen to me. Oh my God, when is my child going to act like a girl? Doesn't she know that's what she is? I said, Ma you don't have anything to worry about. I was so glad when they said that you could wear pants to school. I could have thrown a party."

As children, the women of this study were acutely aware of the consequences of breaking major household rules, of being disobedient, or bad, because it meant that they would be punished. Barbara's mother "was never the type that would beat you, but she would just curse you out. She never believed in hitting you, but she could be mean. She could be really really mean." And Faith's mother did not beat her either. But as she explains, "my mother was not a person who believed that you weren't supposed to hit children. She just said that when she got mad at me, she was so mad that she was scared that she would kill me. That's why she didn't hit me. It wasn't because of anything other than that she didn't want me dead."

For most of the women corporal punishment, beatings, was the form of

punishment they received for major violations of the rules. Amanda said that her mother was like a "hell-raiser. We would always get into things, and she would always be the one that wanted to hit somebody or pick up something and throw it at you. My mother didn't waste too much time with discipline. You got hit." Sharon shared similar experiences. For her, "punishment was mean. It was bang, bang, bang." Sometimes the beatings were designed to teach a lesson, and Mary made choices about how she would respond, even while she was getting beat. As she recalls:

My grandmother always talked to me. But if I did something really bad she would beat me. Like the one time I stole a cigarette from my mother, and I went to the outhouse to smoke it cause I knew not to go into the bathroom in the house. The outhouse was a toilet, and she could see the smoke coming out from the thing. I had to go and cut down a switch for her. But see, there was always a way, but they didn't know it. You go and stand in a corner so that they're hitting the wall. They're not really hitting you if you stand at the right angle. I would just pretend I would be crying.

Sometimes the beatings would be given in anger. As Jackie describes:

For me it was the screaming at me at the same time you're beating me. I can't concentrate on both because they are both very painful. My mother used to get hysterical, and if I got her mad, then I really had to watch out. She didn't have much patience, and so if I really got on her nerves and had to be beaten, then I was really pushing it. I knew about where her limits were.

The beatings were also given out in a variety of ways, using different techniques and tools. For Amanda, "you got beat and by any means necessary. With her hands, as you got older, I think that my mother would just punch us. She had belts. I don't remember her using an ironing cord. I remember my mother beating me with my brother's toy rifle. I never fought her back, or I wouldn't be here talking to you." Although Patricia's father was physically abusive to her mother, her mother forbid her

father to beat any of the children. But her mother would take Patricia into the bathroom, and she did use the ironing cord:

She used different things and, depending on your age, you graduated. There was a little thin belt if you were a certain age, and when you got older you graduated to the ironing cord--not that long thin extension cord thing, but from the old iron--that thick black and white cord. My mother did not get us a lot, but she got us, and you knew when you were got.

Most of the participants in this study found ways to either adjust or get around many of the gender-specific rules that were imposed on them as children, but they did not necessarily escape the subtle and more blatant messages they received regarding gender and what it meant to be a girl. As children, some of the women struggled with the perceptions that they did not fit the popular image of a girl. Patricia struggled with her self-esteem and had a hard time coping with her perceptions of self:

During the time when I was growing up, I was not considered an attractive female. I was told this one way or another, on a constant basis, from my brothers or from the neighborhood. I was considered ugly. After a time I considered myself ugly. You know like when you tell a child they're stupid, and you tell them enough, they begin to internalize it and say, well I'm stupid. I grew up with that. I was self-conscious about myself, extremely so.

And Patricia was particularly uncomfortable with the texture of her hair and the complexion of her skin. As she explains:

I guess I did a lot of what black girls did. I never actually wanted to be white, but I was affected by that whole thing of wanting the long hair. I didn't necessarily want to have long silky white hair; I just wanted long hair. I would put a slip over my head and let it hang down over my shoulders and look in the mirror and talk to myself. Of course my mother thought that I was absolutely crazy. I would envision myself beautiful, but not in the sense of with white skin. I did envision myself in the sense of having a lighter complexion. I guess I did what a lot of young females do when they really begin to pay attention to themselves. I would sit in front

of the mirror and try to pull my eyes to a slant. I figured that maybe if I had slanted eyes I would look better. Or maybe if I had longer hair I would look better and people would like me.

Patricia's brother was particularly harsh to her. He would call her "moosey or liver lips," and sometimes she could laugh with him, but most times it was a "truly painful" experience:

Anytime he would see a moose on tv, I would have to leave the room. There he goes, moosey. He told me that when I got older, I was going to have these two tubes of lipstick--one for the top lip and one for the bottom lip. Sometimes I would try to ignore him; other times I would cry. It would hurt, it would sting, and I would cry. Other times I would go and talk to my mother. My mother would say, fool look in the mirror, do you see that? But when you have somebody telling you this, that's literally what you see when you look in a mirror. She did her best, but what can I tell you? You get this out-of-wack image that women are supposed to have small dainty feet. You are supposed to have small dainty hands. You are supposed to look a certain way, if you're a woman. So I caught hell from all corners. I had the big feet. I was tall for my age at the time. I never looked like anybody on tv because for the most part they were white. I knew that I didn't look like them in magazines. So I'm saying, my God what's going to happen to me? My mother was a beautiful woman, and I would say why can't I look like her? Why do I have to look like my father? She always told me, you walk with your head up, you walk with your shoulders erect, and you walk like you are somebody.

Barbara was also self-conscious about the way she looked as a child. "I had the idea that I was not an attractive person because I didn't have what was supposed to be attractive for blacks. I was dark, I didn't have hair flowing down my back, and I just didn't represent what was attractive."

Anne's self-image issues were not related to hair texture and skin complexion. She felt uncomfortable because of her physical size. She recalls:

I knew that there were differences between me and my sister in terms of size. I'm not talking about height. I'm talking about physical size. I'm

talking about bust, waist. I'm talking about butt. I'm talking about legs. I'm talking about hands. I'm talking about physical body size.

To deal with being a large-sized girl, Anne started making her own clothes from the time that she was eight years old. As she said, "I loved clothes and I figured out a way of getting some of my own needs met." She started off by:

making my doll clothes. And my aunt and grandmother made doll clothes for me. My baby sitting money went to buy fabric. After many trials and many errors, I would come out with these clothes. So I understood that clothes did something to attract interest from other people. You were able to have clothes. Clothing was a very important social status. They were used to judge people. So I learned that nonverbal communication was associated with clothes. It was a personal self-expression that was treated with mixed signals. I came up in an era when making your own clothes had a stigma attached to it--at least from my Northern background experience. It was said to me over and over again, your family is not financially able to go to the store and buy you clothes? My mother didn't want her friends to know that I made my clothes. That weren't acceptable.

Sara also was self-conscious about how she looked because of her weight and skin complexion. "I was too skinny. My hair wouldn't do right. And at that point it was trying to do the white kind of thing. My hair wouldn't comb down. At that point I was out of the curling thing, so I couldn't like roll it. I wasn't comfortable with the way I looked. I wanted to be either darker or I wanted to be prettier. I figured if I was going to be light, I needed to look more like my mother or be darker and have some character about myself. I was definitely too skinny. I was probably too tall too. It doesn't feel like that now, but I'm sure I was too tall."

Contrary to the other women's experiences, Amanda "really didn't pay that much attention to being a girl" or have self-esteem issues while growing up. She thinks that it was because gender distinctions were not a big deal in her family:

My family really wasn't into it. Even among my grandparents I don't remember any big distinction. Most of my aunts, they were attractive women, but they never were like these little ultra-feminine women, and they did everything. I guess because their father and brothers were into construction, they all knew how to make things and repair things, and they all cooked, they all sewed, they knew how to do hair. So whatever had to be done was done.

During their childhood years, playing with other children was the center of most of the women's community relationships and culture. Recalling the types of games they played. Patricia said: "we played skellies and marbles; we did a lot of running races; and the guys played a lot of stick ball; the girls and the guys played punch ball, which was sort of like baseball; we played handball; red light green light; double Dutch jump rope." Several participants' "best friends" were boys, and they spent a lot of time playing sports together. For a period of time, Faith's "best buddy" was a boy, and "he used to make all the boys let me play on the teams. I know that I wasn't any good at football, and I know in baseball I flung the bat farther than I hit the ball. I was not good at all. But Bobby used to make me play." Mary described herself as a "tomboy" and as a child could hold her own with the boys in playing football, basketball, pitching horse shoes and bowling.

Patricia made a conscious choice to "hang out" with the guys rather than the girls in her community. She preferred playing with the boys "because at that time, not knowing that guys gossip just as much as females, it appeared that there was some stress taken off competition. You didn't have to deal with a female thinking that she was more attractive than you." Patricia goes on to describe the distinctions she made between the behaviors of the boys in comparison to that of girls and how fighting was an intricate part of the street culture in her community:

I didn't have to deal with any of that kind of nonsense with the males. We could sit and talk about anything, and I enjoyed just listening to them. Because that kind of helped me understand males and the way they acted. The females frightened me because they are deadly, and they are deceptive, and you never know where they were coming from. Not that I perceived males as all that wonderful. To me it was almost like the better of two evils. I think I got into one or two fights with the guys, and of course at that age, physically we were all equal. But if we got into a fight, it was never like we never spoke again. We were still friends. Whereas if you were a female and you got into a fight, there were some serious repercussions. You would be literally ostracized.

As the participants began to bond with other neighborhood children, the ebb and flow of these early relationships provided important lessons and introduced new sets of norms and codes of conduct that would help them to negotiate their day-to-day lives. Sometimes they would succumb to peer pressures, and the kind of activities that they would engage in with other children would get them into trouble. One of the things that Sara will never forget was when she got into trouble because she did what her girlfriend told her to do:

I remember getting picked up by the police because I had broken these people's windows. There was this little bad girl who was a friend of mine. She told me, lets go break some windows, so I went to break the windows too. We heard the police coming, and we ran home. It was horrible. My father gave me one of those lectures, and I kept saying beat me, oh please, beat me. He was saying, you're my first born, my dear heart. I thought that I was going to be proud of you. I expected so much from you, and now you've got this record. You're a convict. Nobody is going to ever want to marry you or employ you. You're never going to have children. He had to keep from laughing, but he was really trying to make his point. It was horrible. I felt so bad. And I had to work, some kind of work, to pay for those windows. Bad company, child, bad company: that's the story of my life, bad company.

Several of the participants were not immediately accepted into their neighborhood by the other children and had to be initiated into the childhood culture through a kind of

rite of passage that took the form of accepting dares or fighting. For Jackie, a "challenge could be over anything," and one of the dares that she accepted was "walking the beam":

You know tenements. And say there's a house missing in the middle of two tenements. Then they would lay a beam over the missing tenement. For me not to get beat-up, I had to walk the beam. I'm a maniac about heights right now. I remember having to walk this beam, and all of my fears and things I had to deal with. This was something I had to do so that folks wouldn't bother me no more about it because otherwise I would have to fight about it all the time.

Patricia's initiation into her community was to fight the neighborhood bully and her sister. As she recalls:

In my neighborhood there was one set of sisters, and the oldest sister was an extreme bully. I think she fought every young girl in my neighborhood. She had this thing where she loved to fight. I fought her almost every day, she and her sister. It was like this was a ritual, especially if you were new to the block. It didn't matter your age. I will never forget, when I moved to the block, it was the younger sister, she and I were the same age, and she comes and sits on the stoop next to me, and she said, oh I hear that you're from the Bronx. I heard y'all are bad. For some reason this conversation stayed in my mind. Everybody beat the younger sister up. The older sister was very strong, and there were days she would beat my butt, and beat it good, and there were other days, as luck would have it, I would turn around and beat her butt good. I never got like seriously hurt--other than lumps, bumps and bruises--never got a black eye or anything like that. We always fought over some inconsequential nonsensical something.

In fact, at some point during their childhood most of the women experienced a childhood fight. But for several of the participants fighting was a more common occurrence, especially for those who grew up in urban areas. Patricia described some of the nuances of her childhood culture and how important it was for her to be able to read the different meanings offered in a given situation.

I would hate for my mother to send me to the store. Sometimes the females would gather in a group around the store. You knew that you

couldn't say, Ma I can't go to the store because the girls are out there. She would say, look you better go to the store and go and get me what I want. I don't want to hear this nonsense. So you had to walk past them. That's truly knowing what aloneness is like. There would be maybe 3 or 4 girls gathered in a group, and they would be watching you. You never knew if anything was going to happen. They would be talking about you, and they would wait for you to come close and always one would signify, and there were the followers who would go along with it. It was like walking the last mile. And you didn't have to deal with that with the guys. If you got past them and you went into the store, it was like, I've made it this far. But then you had to make the trek back, and you never knew what was going to happen. Most often, I guess, for whatever reason, if you were going to the store for your parents, they pretty much didn't bother you because they knew they were going to have to deal with the parents if that food didn't get back to the house. If they could perceive that you were just going to the store for yourself, all hell could break loose right then and there, and a fight would break out. You had the ripping of the clothes and the tearing out of the hair and the scratching of the face and all that kind of madness.

Jackie got into a lot of fights with community children too, but the code of conduct that she adopted was, "I didn't fight nobody unless I was threatened. That I do know. I never went to pick no fights. But if somebody said that they are going to bodily hurt me, then we're going to have to do this. I had a lot of fights with boys and girls. But more with boys. I won most of them. I don't remember losing a fight really." Jackie did fight to protect her younger siblings, and in recalling two incidents she said:

I had to fight for my brother because they used to smack him on the head because his hair was cut bald when he was little. So when he would walk by someone they would smack him on the head. There was this older guy outside, and he would just smack my brother on the head. And I told him not to do that. He smacked my brother on the head and started laughing, and he smacked him again. So, of course, I had to get a brick and hit him in the head. Did I seriously hurt him? Oh yeah. He needed medical attention. There was another one who I threw into a brick wall in the back of the projects and busted his head wide open. You know, I mean I don't like to fight, but if I'm going to fight, we're going to remember this. You know we're not just wasting energy.

Jackie developed her attitudes about fighting from her male cousins and uncles. As she said, "I knew how to fight." Her philosophy was, "if you're going to come after me, lets get this on, and then we'll find out later why this had to happen." This attitude was influenced "I guess from listening to my uncles. They used to say, if you are going to have a fight just go ahead and get it over with. Even to this day, Jackie believes in this approach. "All that arguing and fussing, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to hit you. We are going to hit each other, and get it over with."

Becoming A Negro Girl

As children, the women in this study made a sharp distinction between what it meant to be a girl and what it meant to be a Negro girl. The gender expectations associated with being a girl were often imposed early on from within their families, but the expectations of role behavior attached to race as embodied by a Negro girl's persona were imposed from outside of their home environment. Many of the participants accepted this dual identity. Growing up, some women at an early age understood what that difference meant, while others were confused about the differences that were associated with being a Negro girl. Having been born and raised as Northerners, many of the women would venture South to visit relatives and the confusion would take on an added dimension.

This was not the case for Faith who grew up in the South. Being a Negro girl was unambiguous for her. Even though she did not realize that she was a girl until she got her period, Faith was aware that she was considered a Negro girl "immediately." As she

recalls:

I don't remember not being aware that I was a Negro girl. I don't think that you cannot have that awareness in the South. I mean, not then, because everything was segregated. I guess by the time I was four or five, I knew what segregation meant. When you went to town to shop, there was just stuff you couldn't use. So I was real clear that once you went outside of our communities that there were things that you could not use. That you had to be concerned about the Colored water fountains, or the Colored bathrooms. You learned by your mother stopping you from doing certain things. Now the water fountain thing I remember because that was a big deal. Evidently that made white folks crazy to drink behind us. I remember being pulled back from a water fountain. But now the bus. She wouldn't make me sit in the back of the bus. She would go and sit in the back, but she wouldn't ever tell me to do that. I remembered that I liked sitting in the front on those long seats and looking out of the window. When I was older, my mother said she had always assumed that they weren't going to say anything to a small child as long as she went to where she was supposed to be. But the water fountain was something else.

Jackie realized that she was a Negro girl when she first went down South with her grandmother to visit her father's relatives. She recalls:

My grandmother and I went to the five and dime store, and I was getting ready to walk through the door, and my grandmother like yanked my hair out of my head because you couldn't go through that door. I'm like, why can't we go through the door? We had to go around to some little window on the side of the store. That kind of freaked me out because my mother was working at the five and dime store in New York, and I was used to going in there and picking over the ribbons. She had a very hard time explaining why we couldn't go into the door, when I was watching people go into the store. And even though it was white people going into the store, it didn't trigger anything because I'm used to seeing white people. I'm from the north. She was really trying to explain that we couldn't do this. That like troubled me for the longest time.

Barbara's first awareness of being a Negro girl also came when as a child she visited her grandparents in the South. "I first noticed it when I would go down South to my grandparent's house, and I was really young":

My grandmother used to iron shirts for the white people in the area, and I was told by my aunt, Barbara when these people come I want you to stay out of that room when those white folks come here. And then I would always go in there. My sister said to me, you have to be stupid. I would get beat. My great-aunt would beat me. She would give me a beating because I wasn't supposed to be in the room. Then my grandmother would give me food or something. I would get a beating every day because I never was told why I shouldn't go into the room. It was like, when the white folks come, stay away. So I wanted to see who they were. And even when I was in there, they would be so furious because I would go right in the middle. Like they would be there talking, and I would just go right up there near them. My grandmother was cool, but my great-aunt would be mad. She really hated whites. She used to call them crackers, and she was another one who could curse like a sailor.

Mary, like Faith, grew up in the South, and she too "had always known that she was a Negro girl." But her large family dealt with the racism they encountered in a more self-determining way.

If we wanted something uptown, they would tell us we would have to go to the back door to get it, like some ice cream or something. We would go home and make our own ice cream. Or if we wanted some barbecue or some fried chicken or something, we wouldn't cater to those places. We would buy the fresh fish and take it home, or go home and kill one of our chickens and eat it. So we had that independence all the time.

Amanda first realized that she was considered a Negro girl when, as child, she and her sister went away to summer camp in upstate New York, as she recalls.

I think that we were the only black kids at this camp. I think I was about seven, and my sister was probably five. We went together. I remember a lot of hostility. They called us blackie and darkie, and we called them white ghosts. I remember going to this ugly bungalow, the cabin, and it just seemed so cold and ugly. And we had these bunk beds. I didn't feel like I was welcome there. I felt strange. Right away nobody seemed like they wanted to be my friend. I do remember nobody knowing what to do with our hair. One of the women cried because she couldn't figure out what to do with our hair as we went swimming every day. Our hair would get bigger and more entwined, and so I think we just wound up having puffs. This was before the afro-puffs were in style. I don't think that these

were like well-off white kids--they were probably working class or middle income kids--but they were very snobbish.

One year we went and there were twins that were black. They didn't like us. We thought, oh we have friends, and they didn't really want to be with us. While I remember the counselors for the most part were not mean and nasty to us. They were like your surrogate parents, and I never remember any hostility coming from them. It came from the other kids. It was mainly the sense of isolation. That's the only period I remember actual name calling and then the fights in the water, but that was mainly like splash fighting and not really hitting anybody. But you didn't feel that you were really part of everything else that was going on. Even when you were sitting, and everybody was singing, I felt like all these people are around in a crowd, but I was still very much alone.

Being light-skinned, Sara had to make adjustments in her thinking to grasp what being a Negro girl meant to the larger society, and this was a struggle for her. She recalls a childhood incident while living with her family in a small town in the Northwest:

There was this man who showed movies on an outside wall of a building, but he wouldn't start the movie and nobody knew why. And then he said he wasn't going to start the movie until the other people left. I was light enough and sometimes they wouldn't know, but my brother was very brown skinned. What the man said was when the Colored people left. But I really don't think that I heard him say that. And when the movie was over, I looked around for my brother because I was supposed to be taking care of him, but he wasn't there, and I didn't know where he was. When I got home, I got a beating, because they had sent him home because he was black. I didn't know, and I had stayed there and watched the movie.

Sara recalls a similar incident while living in the Southwest:

Once we were going ice skating with some people from church, and they wouldn't let us go ice skating because this black guy and I were there. And the same thing that happened with my brother happened. They didn't know that I was black. The people that I was riding back with didn't know, but the minister did. What he said was if they can't go none of us are going to go. So we all piled back into the cars and were heading to go have some pizzas or something. And I was in this car with this guy who said, I don't see why we didn't let Richard go home because he is the only one here. And so, I didn't say anything. I remembered telling my mom,

and my father yelled at me, and I carried that. How did I know that I was a Negro child? It was that kind of stuff, and it came out of the blue, and it never would have occurred to me.

But if Sara forgot she was a Negro living with segregation while growing up, "parents, peers, white folks would re-educate me. White folks will re-educate you the quickest."

Barbara did not forget, because she realized that she was considered a "Negro girl from the very beginning almost." Her awareness came on her visits South, but it also came about in her own living room as she watched television:

I remember watching television, and they would have Miss America on, and I said, I want to be that. I want to be Miss America. My sister said, oh you could never be Miss America. And I said why? Why can't I be Miss America?

Amanda recalls her reactions to seeing black people on television for the first time:

One of the first times we saw a black person on television, my sister and I sat there crying. We said, what's wrong with those people? And we started crying. I don't remember who they were. They just looked dark, like they had been burnt or something, and their eyes seemed real big and white. And we thought something had happened to them. My mother said, how ugly the lighting was for black people. Everybody else looked normal because everybody else was white. I remembered watching these shows like Howdy Doody and all those other little stupid shows and never saw black people except for these little funny black people. This had to have been in the 50's. There was no restriction, like you can't watch tv, but mainly we used to listen to records. My mother used to play a lot of music.

As a child, Jackie was actually on a television program, and she recalls:

It was in the 50's, and I remember that freckled-face puppet Howdy Doody. We were on his show. I remember coming home and looking at myself on Howdy Doody because I had been in the audience. I was the

darkest kid there. Even though there were other black kids, all the others were light-skinned. I realized how much lighter they were from me. I was another color. I asked my grandmother, where am I? My grandmother said, there. There you are. There's grandma's baby. But I couldn't figure out who the hell I was. But it was me. I was just sitting over there. I never looked at Howdy Doody again. I was mad at Howdy Doody. I didn't like the way he talked to the kids. He was just not the same kind of person I saw on tv. I was just angry and didn't understand.

Anne's consciousness about being a Negro girl was influenced by books and magazines. And one of the most indelible images that remained with her, as with many of the women, was the photograph on the Jet magazine cover of 15-year-old Emmett Till, who had been lynched in 1955. "I was very conscious about Emmett Till being lynched. I remember seeing pictures of Emmett Till's body in Jet and thinking just how could anybody do that to someone? I didn't get it. And my parents didn't talk about it."

Amanda also saw the same pictures of Emmett Till in Jet magazine, and recalls:

The most poignant memory, that I have never forgotten and probably never will, was the thing with Emmett Till. I remember the Jet magazine pictures of him. On one hand I was just fascinated with the picture. That someone could just be so brutalized and look like that. I mean you couldn't even separate him from the thing that they had attached him to. I remember the picture of his mother and the funeral. I probably didn't have a clear view of all that happened. I was angry. And I remember knowing that Emmett Till was killed by white people.

Jackie also recalled the pictures of Emmett Till in Jet magazine:

Jet would really have pictures of people being killed, of lynchings. I think what really did it for me was when they had Emmett Till's funeral pictures. I knew about him from pictures and what people told us. Jet magazine. I mean the horror of them taking the pictures. I can just see the picture right now, and my grandmother explaining why he looked the way he did.

Patricia just knew that "at that time in my life I was considered a Negro." And she

also knew that it was not an identity that she had given herself:

I can't say that something just came to me one day or that I was looking in the mirror and said, oh I'm a Negro girl. I just knew simply because of hearing it said, seeing it on the news or reading in the paper the word Negro. But I can't say that I ever thought of myself as a Negro girl. I don't ever remember my mother saying to any of us that we were Negroes. I find it hard to believe that I don't ever remember thinking of myself as a Negro. And I didn't think of others as Negroes. It's funny. I would see my friends and they were just my friends. It wasn't, I'm a Negro and these are my Negro friends. They were just my girlfriends or my guyfriends. One of the things I do remember was the way--especially at that time--the way to upset someone if you wanted to hurt their feelings, or if you were spoiling for a fight, was to call someone a nigger, or add the word black onto it. Then you could get into some trouble. Obviously at that time being black was not the greatest thing in the world that you wanted to be called. The word nigger for black people in my neighborhood was used on so many different levels. But you knew when the term was used to hurt. It was the term that white people reserved for themselves to throw at us, to hurt us, to make us feel less than. Somehow you knew that when a black person used it in anger, they were using it for the very same reason. And I guess that's why you would get into a fight. I was called nigger. That had something to do with the fights with me and the one I call the neighborhood bully.

Chapter Two:

Lessons To Learn

Most of the women in this study graduated from high school between 1957 and 1966. This was a time of social unrest and instability that challenged the very legitimacy of America's social and cultural institutions. Across the country ordinary black women, men, and children stepped up their self-asserted action against longstanding racial indignities and injustices. Boycotts, mass demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, voter registration drives, and legal challenges blended organized action with individual protest. Emblematic of this period, on December 1, 1955, six months after the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) successfully challenged the "separate but equal" doctrine in the case of *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka*, Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in defiance of Montgomery, Alabama segregation laws. Mrs. Parks, a 43-year-old seamstress, explained why she refused to move:

Well, in the first place, I had been working all day on the job. I was quite tired after spending a full day working. I handle and work on clothing that white people wear. That didn't come in my mind, but this is what I wanted to know: when and how would we ever determine our rights as human beings?...It just happened that the driver made a demand and I just didn't feel like obeying his demand. He called a policeman, and I was arrested and placed in jail. (Zinn, 1995, p. 442)

Folks would say that Rosa Parks sat down and the world turned around. Whether the women in this study participated in organized or individual acts of protest or not, like all Americans they too could not help but be profoundly influenced by the big and small lessons that this time of change produced. As they became more independent and began

to move beyond their home environments, they found worlds that were filled with other children, other authoritative adults and cultural institutions that all held important lessons to be learned. This chapter examines their ever-emerging identities as they engaged new relationships and the accompanying expectations, demands, and judgments that would shape the lessons they learned. How did they negotiate these new relationships?

Lesson Number 1: School Can Be Hostile Territory

Formal education was a priority in many of the participants' homes. Whether or not it was explicitly stated, they understood that they were expected to obtain at least a high school diploma. Education was seen by their parents as a way of mitigating some of the harsh realities of racial oppression, and black cultural life was deeply influenced by educational achievement. Social status was often ascribed accordingly. Even though segregation was abolished under law in public schools in 1954, most of the participants attended predominately black schools throughout the 50s and well into the 60s. Several women did, however, attend integrated public schools, but they were often a small minority among the student population. Whether they attended segregated or more integrated schools largely depended on the geographic area in which they lived, and most of the women in this study went to public schools in their immediate communities.

One of the rules in the households of all of the women was that they must attend school on a regular basis. As Sara explains, "you had to go to school. There was no, no you're not going to school today." The participants also all initially enjoyed going to school and learning new things. Sara describes why she liked school so much: "I liked

the victory of being good in school, and I liked being better than the other kids." And for Patricia, school "was exciting and scary at the same time, and I actually loved school at that time."

Starting school meant that the women had to learn a new role: that of student. And they had to conform to new codes of conduct that emphasized order and control and where immediate authority was vested largely in the hands of teachers. This structured learning environment proved to be difficult for some of the women to negotiate, and some had problems adjusting to the elaborate and often rigid rules for conformity. As a result, a few of the participants gradually began to lose some of their enthusiasm for required learning, even at an early age. Barbara talks about how painful it was for her to conform to the established preference for right handedness. As she recalls:

The first school that I went to was a predominately black school. At that school they had the meanest teachers in the world. I was left-handed, and at that particular time they forced you to write with your right hand, and that was a horrible experience. I had this teacher who was horrible, and if you didn't write right she would make you sit under her desk. I would have to sit under her desk all the time.

Anne, too was left-handed and "in the beginning I thought it was bad to be left-handed. She had a teacher who would send her to the blackboard where:

She would put the chalk in my right hand, and I spent all of my time in the penmanship exercises at the blackboard being the focal point for all the class to see, and as somebody who wanted to evaporate into the woodwork. I didn't want to be on view, I didn't want to be observed. I didn't want to be out there. It was breath-taking. It was overwhelming. I didn't want to be on view. I didn't want to be observed. I didn't want to be out there.

Amanda recalls a teacher who she had in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades who she called "an abuser":

He used to have a wad of keys, and he would throw them at you as hard as he could. If you were talking, he would take an eraser and throw it and hit you so hard that you would have like these impressions on your face from the eraser. He was white, and he was always making racial remarks and insulting people. One time we had to do something about Native Americans, and my mother had told me about my father's mother being Shinnecock. So I was sharing with the students that they were part of the underground railroad. After that, every time he came past me, he would put his hands up and do like some make-believe Indian war dance stuff. He was awful, and he eventually became the principal of the school.

Patricia describes an early incident in school that had a profound effect on her as a child :

I enjoyed school. I enjoyed the reading, absolutely loved reading. But this brings me to my second grade teacher. I loved reading, and I will never forget, we were all supposed to read a certain page. And she said, don't go past that page. She said, read it silently, and when everybody is done we will discuss that page and move on to the next one. Well, I read the page, and I was already done, and I just got tired of reading the same page over and over again. So what I did, I turned the page, but I kept my hand on the page where we were supposed to be at, and I'm reading the rest of the book. The teacher was walking around the class to see how we were getting along, and if you were having difficulties she would help you. The next thing I knew she was standing next to me. And at six years old all adults looked like giants, especially when I was sitting down. She was a black woman. She said to me, why are you not on that page? And I said, I'm keeping the page, I just read it, and I've read it so many times that I just started reading the other pages. Then she said aloud to the class, class didn't I tell you to read only this page? And the next thing I knew that woman slapped me so hard I couldn't see. She slapped me in my face. All I remember was crying. I don't remember anything else other than that. Right after that I got very ill, and I broke out into this rash, and I couldn't go to school. I knew that I didn't want to go back to school after that.

Sometimes the participants' mothers did not know what was going on in the school. Patricia believes that "kids were aware that the teachers would talk to you a certain way and treat you a certain way, but when your parent got to school it was a totally different story." But even though most of the women as children received beatings

at home, their mothers in particular had little tolerance for their daughters getting beat at school. Barbara called a girl a "dirty dog" and she had to go to the principal's office where:

He took me to the auditorium, and he beat me in front of all these kids. They would hit you in your hands, especially in my early days. My mother came to the school and threatened the teacher, and that made it even worse because my mother was a curser, and she came and cursed out the teacher.

Usually it was their mother or other mothers who monitored their daughters' progress in school. Some were active in their children's education. Patricia said that her "mother was involved in the school, always. Whatever she could do, she was there encouraging and being involved." Sharon's mother was very active in the Parent/Teacher Association (PTA), as a way of not only monitoring her children's educational progress, but also as a way of keeping an eye on what was going on in the school itself. Sharon attended an overwhelmingly white public school where she was often the only black student in her class, and she remembers her sense of feeling different:

The week that I should have won the prize for spelling in the grade, the teacher canceled the prize. I guess she didn't want to give it to a black child. Of course my mother causes a stink about that. I know some of the teachers didn't like having little black kids in their class in the middle 50s. I didn't have a black teacher until I went to college. There were no black teachers in our school. I did feel different. I felt that I wanted to fit in, and maybe white is better.

Early on, Jackie said she tried to conform, but she said she was "basically a rebel" in school and had difficulties adjusting to the rules. Her mother was often asked to come to school because of her disciplinary problems. Describing an incident, Jackie said:

In school I tried to excel, and I wanted to be on the honor roll and things like that. But sometimes I was so bad. My mother and grandmother were proud of me until they would get those phone calls. Like the day I tried to burn the school down. We had a lot of fire drills, and my class was on the

top floor, like the 6th floor. I was tired of running down the stairs for those fire drills when there really wasn't a fire. So my logic was, if we had a real fire we would not have to keep doing this. So I set the window shades on fire. Every body at school told on me, but it didn't make no difference because I told too. I don't even know who I got the matches from. I did a lot of little mischievous stuff, and my mother wanted to kill me.

One of the reasons that parents were called to the school was because their daughters got into fights. In school. Patricia said, "there was always a fight." Sometimes the participants were spectators if they did not know the children involved, and at other times they played the role of back-up if a friend needed help in a fight. Patricia recalled weighting her options and navigating through the complicated dynamics of her childhood culture to figure out if she would get involved in a friend's fight or not. She decided that:

If it's one girl, I'm not going to jump into this fight, but I'm going to make sure that no-body else touches you. She said, you're sure you are going to be there? I said, I will be there with you don't worry about it. So I'm there, and I'm watching. The girl that she was going to fight recognized me, and she said, I don't have a problem with you. I'm going to fight your girlfriend. I said, I don't have a problem with you either, as long as it's just you. When my girlfriend realized that no one else was going to jump into it, she was still scared to death. And this girl hit her. My girlfriend went absolutely crazy. Somehow my girlfriend knocked this child down some stairs, and the girl is bleeding and carrying on, and the fight is over. I take my friend home. But I saw first hand what can happen if you are bullying someone and they are afraid of you. She was so fearful that this girl was going to kill her, so she reacted like she had to save her own life.

Some of the women did fight in school. Jackie was a fighter, and she was aware of the impact her temper could have on other people if she lost control:

I realized this when I probably was in elementary school, when I had a fight with a girl in the 5th grade. I remember by the time I finished the kid was bloodied. I had bit her all in her face, punched her all up, and just dogged her. When I looked at her I just saw blood. I had no feelings,

none at all. I didn't feel sorry. I was this kid that bit this girl and didn't fight fair. The teacher told my mother. My mother was not a happy camper. The kid had to get stitches in her face. I really went after her. All I remembered is her jumping up into my face. That was it. It was all over. I go for the blood.

Lesson Number 2: It's Not Fair

The women described themselves as either average or good students. But some, like Sharon, acknowledged that she "could have been a better student." As they progressed through school, several participants became more affected by the social hierarchy, as girls and as Negro girls, and the unevenness of rewards and punishments within their schools. Gradually they began to develop resentment and anger that would eventually have an impact on their grades and future aspirations. Patricia's attitude towards school started to change when she entered junior high school. She said, "what I viewed as the unfairness of being a girl hit me when I started the 7th grade, in terms of the can dos and the can't dos because you're a female." Patricia remembers a cooking class that was only required for girls:

While I had no problem with the cooking class, we had problems with a specific teacher. She was an elderly black woman, and the woman was crazy. She could cook like nobody's business, but she was totally out of her mind. I guess she was coming from some good place somewhere within her because she was bound and determined that we had to know how to set a table properly. Being a youngster at the time, you figure that using a fork, a spoon, and a knife, you know, lets sit down and eat. She would go through this whole ritual using all of these different forks and knives. She would also teach you how to cook. But if you did not set the table properly, she took your food and threw it in the garbage, and you got a failing mark for the day. I was totally bored with the whole situation, so it was like torture in this woman's class. She viewed me as defiant. Well I guess there was some truth to that. I said, I've had it. I can't take it anymore. And she told me to get out of her class.

Some women felt that boys' behaviors towards girls were tolerated even if they were seen as abusive. Amanda was among the first girls to attend a previously all-boys' junior high school, but she was not prepared for the harassment the girls received from the boys. As she said, "we were being felt on in the hallways and molested." Amanda also thought that the school administrators tolerated the boys' abusive behavior towards the girls. She recalls a time when it was snowing and the boys made snow balls. And some of them would be mean and put rocks in them, and they would pelt us." For reasons she did not understand, during this particular recess period the outside school doors were locked, and, as a result, the girls were "clinging to the door while the boys are just beating us with all of these ice balls." She concludes that her "whole three-year experience was awful."

The social hierarchy also ranked class status and skin color. Faith recalls an incident in 8th grade in her all-black junior high school:

I liked school well enough, and it wasn't challenging, so it was easy to be a decent student. Then the other thing that I'm relatively certain about is that when you came from what was considered a middle-class background and you were fair-skinned, that as far as grades were concerned, you got the benefit of the doubt. I think that happened to me. When I was in the 8th grade, a girlfriend of mine, a buddy of mine, we did something one night and didn't study for a test. So the next day when we took the test we didn't do well. Both of us had always done well, and the teacher let me take the test again. I remember my girl friend just being livid. Part of it was because I was fair; part of it was because my mother was a teacher. Up until that point we both had the same A in that class, so if you were going to let the people take the test over, we both should have been allowed. I felt sorry for my friend, but not sorry enough to say that if we were not both taking the test, I'm not taking it. I knew that it wasn't right. I didn't have the kind of loyalty to people then that I probably do now, or the sense that it just needs to be more fair all the way around.

The issue of fairness grew increasingly complex for Barbara when, because of her father's interest in and love of music, she and her sister attended a private predominantly white music school. "I went to the music school in addition to going to school. I went from the time I was 12 until I got out of high school. I went for years. It was a part of my life. I always did that." Describing this experience, she said:

I had stopped playing the piano, and then I started playing the clarinet. It just so happened that the only instrument that they had available was a clarinet, so I started playing it. The instrument that I really wanted to play was the violin, but my parents couldn't get that. I was left-handed, and it was so expensive to get a left-handed violin. I used to be angry about that. Again it was the poverty. So I had to settle to play clarinet, but that wasn't the instrument that I wanted to play.

Barbara believes that in addition to her father's love of music, he also enrolled them in the music school because of the "discipline he felt that we needed, and something to keep us from the environment that we were in." She said that her music school experience "truly affected my life because I was put around totally different kinds of people that I wouldn't have been around if I would have just stayed in the ghetto area that I lived in." She was in a position to compare her experiences of attending a predominantly black public school while at the same time going to a predominantly white music school. This dual experience would later influence some of the major decisions in her life. In her public school Barbara felt that:

The teachers wouldn't encourage me to excel. They just assumed, especially in my time, that you would get out of school, get married and have kids. It was never about career. I had racial stuff from black teachers who were very judgmental, and there were racial lines. I had a lot of bitterness about that, and I've worked really hard to get rid of it. But they were mainly judgmental because of the fact that I was poor.

At the private music school, Barbara's experiences were different:

My teachers at the music school were different. I guess they were what you call liberals. The white teachers I had were nicer; they were more receptive to me; I was more accepted. At the music school a lot of the people were Polish. I was like in two different worlds. I would go from one extreme to another. I would be around black folks, and I was like not good enough, and I would get around whites, and it was like she's this and she's that. The first time that I was even told that I was attractive, it came from a white person at the school.

Even though Barbara perceived her experiences at the white private music school as much better than her day-to-day experiences in the black public school, it was not unproblematic. Because her family was poor and could not afford the private tuition, she had to work to compensate for her free studies at the music:

I worked outside the home in a sense that I worked at the music school. I had to clean the toilets, like cleaning all of the bathrooms. That's when I knew I was different. I was treated differently than the other students. My sister didn't have to do that; she was like a receptionist. But all the black students had to do those jobs. I started to notice that all blacks had menial jobs, and of course at that particular time I knew I was black too. I kind of resented that. After you finished your job, the headmistress of the school would give you your carfare, and you would have to go and ask her for it. I didn't want charity. I couldn't ask for it. I just hated it. It represented poverty to me. I couldn't go and ask her for carfare. So I used to walk home. I would say, oh God I got to walk all the way home. But I just couldn't ask, so I walked home.

In fact, by the time they reached junior high school, many of the women began to involve themselves in more outside and extra-curricular activities, and several women were introduced to the arts. They were often required by their families to take some form of training, either theater or music lessons. Faith "liked to sing" when she was a child and remembered "always being in the choir." She would also go with her mother to the theater, where her mother "used to build sets." And if the play called for children's roles,

she "would be one of the children." She thinks this is what "spurred [her] life-long interest in the theater." Sharon started taking piano lessons as a small child, and as she said, "I think I probably knew how to read notes before I knew how to read too many words." Her father demanded that she practice the piano every day, but:

I don't know what I was practicing for. I just had to practice the piano. When I was like 12, I was given the sheet music to Lift Every Voice and Sing, and at some of these black events here was Little Miss playing Lift Every Voice and Sing. I never learned the words because I was too busy playing the music on the piano. But beyond that, I was just practicing the piano. But I really wasn't practicing for anything.

By the time they reached junior high school the women were more attuned to their world and their interactions within it. As Patricia said, "in the beginning I just saw the teachers as teachers, that's like in elementary school. In junior high school I began to see them as white people, and I began to interact with them differently. They were still sort of like background people to me, but they were white people. I think in junior high school, I began to realize-- something began to become aware in me--that these were white people that were teachers, that they had power over me other than being a teacher because they were white people." Patricia went on to say:

This was rooted in the images I was beginning to see the demonstrations and marches and news reports. Things began to take on a whole new outlook for me. I saw them as individuals who had authority in terms of being a teacher. But then because of the color of their skin and the texture of their hair, I began to really see them as a part of another that was not connected with me and mine. Because of that, whatever they said or did not say, could in fact affect my life on some level.

But their experiences and perceptions were diverse. For Anne, "there was no need for me to go outside of the model that was already created for me. The school

environment was so competitive and so much fun that the fact that I may have been the only black in my class besides my sister, never stopped me from doing things." For others, although they attempted to mask it, a simmering anger was slowly building up inside of them. Barbara describes her anger at the time and the ways she attempted to deal with it:

I must have been about 12 or 13 years old at the time. I was enraged. I would go in the basement, and I would just clean all night long. That was the only way I could get rid of the anger. I would be up all night, and if I didn't clean in the basement, I would go in the attic, and I would clean. I had to get rid of the rage. At that time I was angry at the fact that I was poor. I just didn't sit there and be angry. Something would trigger it off. Even as a child, when I was 12, I tried to work on it then. I joined a church. I said, well maybe if I join a church that would help the anger. I was going to church, and I had this dress, it was like a red dress, and my mother said, every time she wears that red dress she's evil. They would call me Evil May. I would put on that dress, and I was furious, and I was going to church.

Lesson Number 3: Facts of Life

As they entered their pre and early teen years, the women in this study began to rely more and more upon their friends to share information and their understandings of life with them. This was a time where their close companions were beginning to be of the same gender, and the role of sex was becoming more of a focus in their lives. Some of the women felt that as children they could talk with their mothers about anything, but often this did not include discussions about sex. They relied upon their girlfriends for information about the facts of life. And many of the women found out about the connection between menstruation and procreation from their girlfriends. Amanda recalls that her mother did not make a big thing out of the start of her menstrual cycle. "She just said that you're going to get this every month. It's part of being a young woman, and you

have to wear something so that you don't soil your clothes. My mother never said anything about being careful with boys."

Barbara's mother constantly talked to her about books, boys and babies, but "she never told me about the period. That was something that was never discussed. It was like so secretive. It wasn't explained to you." Recalling her experience, Barbara said:

I got my period when I was like 10 years old. I knew about periods vaguely. I kind of knew, but I didn't know what it was. I got my period, and I had such horrible cramps. My mother's friend was over, and my mother was saying, Barbara is just getting so much better; she's washing her own clothes. Every 15 minutes I was washing my panties because I didn't know. I said, I must be dying. I would go and wash them, and I would hang them up, and then I would go back and wash them again. Finally, I told my mother, and it must have been the next day. I hear people say they were so happy when they got their period. I was very upset when I got mine. I was sick all the time. My mother would say, oh she's in there having her kittens because I would be sick. It wasn't a joyous experience for me.

Faith was only eight years old when she got her period:

I remembered getting my period. It was in the summer when I was eight, and I had been playing touch football. My mother had not told me anything because she was definitely not expecting any period at eight. I thought that getting a period was a pain in the ass. It was a long time before I had any sense of the sexual ramifications of it: that I could have babies. In fact, I may not have gotten straight about sex for a really long time because nobody talked about it. My mother gave me a book with the sanitary napkin and the belt. But it wasn't like other shit my mother had done, where she might give you a book to read, and the next time she saw you, she would be like, well what did you think? There was none of the follow up that went with this book. So you got sort of clear that this was something that they didn't want to talk about. You know, there's only so much understanding you get out of a goddamn book, which was probably in 1958, oblique anyway.

Amanda remembers a friend who "used to talk about people doing the nasty, but we didn't have a very clear view about what that was. As a matter of fact, I remembered

her saying something about sex, and I said my mother and father would never do anything like that. She said, well how do you think you got here? But I was kind of naive at one point." Barbara also found out about sex from her girlfriends:

I had three friends who had babies before they were like 13 years old, so they would sit down and talk to me about sex. My mother never just sat down and talked about having babies and having sex, and you might have a desire. She never discussed that at all. I really got that mainly from my friends who had slept with these guys. In certain ways I was so up on things, and in other ways I was just so totally out of it. In Michigan at that time, social status for blacks was very important. They had like different groups. You had the low group, which was my group, then you had the middle-class and those were who we called the bourgeois. I was supposed to be in that group that had a bunch of babies and all that stuff, but I was getting out of Michigan.

Sara is the only participant in the study who said she found out about the meaning of sex from her parents and particularly her mother:

My mom told me about sex. She told me some of it. She always said it was wonderful and don't do it in the backseat of cars, and have some responsibility about yourself. She was very open. She embarrassed me the way she talked about it sometimes. She was very straightforward about it. And friends, most of my friends had had sex and I hadn't. I thought it was really interesting, but I really wasn't ready. I was afraid of it. I was afraid to have sex. I always got the feeling from my dad, and to a lesser extent from my mom, that you would be unsuccessful if you had someone's baby. If some guy got you pregnant then he wouldn't respect you. The bad girl thing.

A few of the women understood that having sex could mean getting pregnant, even before they understood about menstruation. Mary found out about sex when she was eight years old. This was when her grandfather molested his youngest daughter, and she became pregnant. This had a traumatic effect on Mary's life, as she recalls:

I guess my aunt was 14 when she got pregnant. She got pregnant by my grandfather. He used to take her down to the basement and molest her.

She tried to say that this baby was by this real dark boy from across town that used to like her. But when the baby was born it looked just like my grandfather. So we all knew that it was his then. That's when my grandmother put her out. I think they shipped my aunt off to Texas. This placed a tremendous strain on the family because of the exposure and the lies. My aunt was never right after that. It's hard to talk about. We were real close. I started to stutter more; that's how it affected me. I didn't understand having to ship her away. I started to stutter worse than I did before.

Several of the women were threatened by strangers during their pre-teen years and learned that sex could be used to harm them. Amanda recalls an experience where she and her girlfriend almost got raped by a "strange white man" that followed them home from school one day:

I remember this white man. We were walking down the street, and he came up on me and my girlfriend. He showed us a little tiny picture and kept asking each of us what did we think it was. It was a penis but we didn't know that, and then it became like a game. He followed us all the way home, and we were so stupid we were laughing. When we got to our house, there was a little entry way, and there was a locked door in the vestibule. He comes in there, and he tries to rape us. He didn't rape us, but he was physically molesting us and pulling on our clothes and lifting up our dresses and trying to put his hands in our underwear. The man who lived on the first floor came, and the man ran away.

Patricia recalls an incident where she and her cousin were walking down a country road to her aunt's house, and they were approached by a man carrying a log of baloney. "He looked at us and smiled and said, how would you like to have this shoved up you? We just hauled ass. There was no question in my mind about what he wanted to do. I remembered hearing him laughing as we ran."

Lesson Number 4: Responsibility

Seven of the nine women participating in this study were the first-born children in their family. Faith was an only child, Patricia was the youngest in her family and the only girl, and Barbara was the second-born in her family. Depending upon their age, the oldest child usually had some care-taking responsibilities for their younger brothers and sisters. Four of the participants' parents had what Barbara called a "second set of children" during their preteen years, and it altered the usual sibling relationship. Mary's relationship with her sisters and brothers was more maternal than most of the other women's, and for a period of time she was their primary caretaker. Four years after her aunt was sent away, she moved from her maternal grandparents' house to live full-time with her mother, who worked as a live-in domestic worker and for long periods of time she would be away from home. During this time Mary did not know where her father was, and by the age of 12, Mary had six brothers and sisters for whom she was responsible. In recalling this period in her life, she said:

We moved into this house. My mother called herself living there until it was time for her to go on her job. Certain times of the year she would be at home and stay for about three months, and certain times she would have to go other places and stay. That's when my mother would have the kids and then disappear. She would just like have them, deposit them, and off she would go. So it was like a lot of responsibility on me. At 12 is when I moved across town to be in charge of the house. I just thought that the kids had to be taken care of. My favorite uncle on my father's side would be there at night when my mother was away. Only three of us are by my father, and the other four or not by him. So my father had a son and another daughter by my mother, but in between my mother would have other kids.

Mary learned how to take care of the younger children, and she also figured out

how to provide for their well-being and for the household:

I watched how my grandmother dealt with my sisters and brothers. I would watch how she did things, so that's how I knew what to do. I would be responsible for breakfast, lunch and dinner. We took our lunch to school and ate our sandwiches there. If the kids weren't school age by that time, which they were not, they would be shoveled off to my grandmother. I was responsible for the cleaning of the house. I would also be responsible for the cooking, and if we didn't have what I needed, I would also have to go out and pull some corn from somebody's garden. And anything I needed I could get right there at my fingertips if I didn't have it in the house. I also did babysitting for the white folks. I was babysitting and ironing their clothes. See you get one set of fees for ironing and another set for babysitting. I got used to taking care of the kids, changing their diapers, and feeding them, and doing whatever had to be done. I developed a resentment only when I got older. I didn't know that I was supposed to resent it when I was a child.

Jackie also started to have brothers and sisters during her pre-adolescent years.

"around about age 11. First there were three brothers and then one sister. My youngest brother, we might be six years difference in age." But unlike Mary, Jackie did not have any specific caretaker responsibilities for her younger siblings, and she played the role of a big sister while her maternal grandmother and mother took care of the children.

Recalling her early relationship with her younger siblings, she was happy when her:

first brother came along. I remember peeling him off in his little cradle. My mother ate a lot of ARGO starch and he came out with an extra coat of skin on him, and I would peel him and oil him down. It seemed like he would never stop shedding. So I thought all babies shed. After him was another brother. He was fine. By this time I guess I was about 13, and I wasn't home much. Then there was another boy, and after that there was my sister. My sister, I knew was deranged from the time she was born. I can't remember my sister doing too much stuff that was normal. They called her Little Lulu after the cartoon. If you know that cartoon, Little Lulu was always getting into shit. My relatives had a way of naming kids, giving them nicknames, and you never knew as a kid how you got that name. They called her Little Lulu, and she was evil and was always into stuff. I liked her, and I liked all of my sisters and brothers. We never had

fights. I used to take them everywhere I used to go. I was giving my mom a break by taking them out. But she was not like, oh you have to take care of these kids. She wasn't like that at all.

Barbara was 12 years old when her parents started to have their "second set of children." And like Jackie, she too was happy when her baby brother came along:

I was very excited about him. He was like my kid, and he was born on my birthday too. I used to take him everywhere I went. He was like my child. My mother had said, this is your birthday present, and I took it literally, that he was my present. I took him every-where, and he was so adorable, and everybody loved him. And this guy that I had a real crush on loved him, so I would go over to his house and talk to his mother, but he was way older than I was. Because I had my brother, they would all talk to him, and I could sit and just look at Joe. But one day, I was pushing his stroller and these people said, oh isn't it a shame. Look at that little girl with that little baby, and then I stopped taking my brother out. It ended right there. I never took him any place again. I didn't want people to think that he was my kid. I was always concerned about what people thought.

After her brother was born, Barbara's mother had two more children. So there were eight people in her immediate family and because they were a poor family, Barbara resented her mother having the additional children:

I said Ma, you got to stop having these babies. When she had the second one I said, wait a minute, you can't afford another child. I said this is too expensive. I told her that. She will say now, Barbara told me not to have these last two. When she had the last girl, she had the baby at home, and my oldest sister and I delivered the baby. That was one of the worst experiences of my life. I was like, I know I don't want to have no baby. I couldn't eat for months. I kept telling her, you'd better go to the hospital. I told her this all day long. I said, I'm going to have a nervous breakdown. I was like a nervous wreck. I got angry at her because she didn't go to the hospital, and then all of a sudden you heard this loud pop. It was like disgusting. She had the baby, and then after the baby was born, you had to cut the cord and then all of the afterbirth. We dumped the afterbirth in the furnace. My mother relied on us. We took care of the kids. She didn't really take care of them that much.

Sara's parents also had two sets of children, and she describes it as two families. She was 15 years old, when the "little family" started to arrive on the scene. "There's me and my two older brothers with two years between us, and then there's a 12-year gap." Because of the difference in age, Sara describes her relationship with her siblings in two different ways. With her older brothers, they were "annoying but I felt and still feel very responsible for them. Growing up, the three of us were tight; we had a special relation; we were friends." For the "little family," she felt a particular affection for her younger brother:

I was 15 when Daniel was born. He was like a special person. Part of it was timing, cause he was at that age where he was like a little toy, like a little doll baby. My sister was born, but she was more competition in a way, although I was much older than she was. Because she was the newest baby, she got a lot of attention from my mother and father. Daniel was in the middle, so I was like making it up to him. He was such a hoot. I was always really fond of him. It's interesting too, I mean my sister is interesting now. Because he was such a strong personality, I didn't know a lot about her until she got older.

Lesson Number 5: Stepping Out--Expectations and Disappointments

Faith returned up North to attend a private high school run by the Quakers. Amanda had to go outside of her community to attend a predominantly white public high school. Jackie went to a racially mixed all-girls public high school. Patricia attended one of the first integrated high schools in New York City. And Sara moved with her family to Germany and attended high school there. For the other women the transition from junior high school to high school was fairly smooth; there was a sense of familiarity because they continued to attend public schools in their local community.

In 1963, Faith's hometown started the process of integrating the public school system. "The white schools were supposed to be much better than our schools, but my mother didn't want me to go somewhere where people didn't speak to me all day." Two of her mother's former students, who had recently integrated the local university would call and talk to her about their experiences. So she decided to send Faith away to a Quaker school because of their "liberal reputation in terms of race, and she felt that I would be welcome." Faith recalls when she first got to her new school:

I remember that they had said that the school was integrated. And I remembered getting there and looking around, and there were four of us, and that just really did not seem like integrated to me. There were four black students--three boys and me-- and there were 450 students all together. Three of us were freshmen and one was a sophomore. One was a day student. He did not live there. He was the one who was sort of wild and his mom worked at the school. I don't think that she was a professional; I think that she may have worked in the cafeteria. There was this other one. He was brown and pretty-boy kind of fine. I think that his family had a little money. And then there was the sophomore. He was a real book worm, you know, he was bookish, he looked bookish.

Having come from a largely all-black social and cultural environment, Faith, at 15 years of age, had to adjust both her thinking and behavior to interact in her new all-white environment, and it proved to be difficult for her to negotiate:

The first year I had two roommates, and I didn't get along with them my freshman year. One of them had had mononucleosis the summer before, and she wasn't completely well when she came to school. The other one was a really rich kind of farm girl from Texas. But neither one of them was anything at all like me. The first year I had to get used to not being able to use everything that was in my room, cause it wasn't mine. I had never had any sense of that. I mean anything that was in my house, I could use. It took me awhile to learn that if I was out of something that I needed to ask you if I could use it. That was a big complaint that the farm girl had about me. We didn't argue, which was another thing that I didn't understand. Rather than saying something to me, she would go and talk to

the dean. That was a whole new experience for me. So the dean of women and I did not get along at all. She would call me in to talk to me about it. She was telling me about this girl and saying I didn't ask to use her things. I don't know why I was so offended by that, but I know that I really was offended. She told me that I might be better off if I would be willing to bend over, to extend myself more because so many of these people had never met any Negroes before and that they were going to form their whole impression of Negroes from me. I remember telling her that that was really stupid because I was not forming my whole impression of white people from her because if I did I wouldn't like any of them.

Faith was challenged by what she did not know and realized that she had a lot to learn.

The biggest adjustment that I had to make was living in the dorm--dorm life and different kinds of people. I didn't know that there were any more Jews. I thought that Hitler had killed them all. What I did know was that Hitler had killed six million Jews, and six million seemed like all to me. So in my mind all Jews were dead. I remember calling my mother and saying, Ma there are Jews here. I said, I didn't know that there were any more Jews. And she said, why would you think that? I remember her telling me, Faith please don't tell anybody that, because all of the Jews weren't dead. I remember her saying, please don't let anybody know that.

Academically, Faith gradually began to focus her attention on the arts. For her, the Quaker school "was the first place that I had ever been where the teachers seemed to put as much weight on your taking your music class or your drama class or your ceramics class as they did your English class. The classes were really small. I mean 13 or 14 kids. I really liked that." She gradually began to articulate for herself the significance of the arts in her life. As she said:

Art meant that it was just what I liked to do. It was fun. I thought that theater was probably the most powerful thing in the world. If you were good at what you were doing you got people to suspend their reality for the period of time that you were doing it and take yours. Beside the fact that I liked it, it was just such a sense of power and control to be able to make you suspend your belief and come on this trip with me. I was always in

plays, from my freshman year on.

Amanda was a "pretty good student until I got to high school. But then that's when I got angry." One of the reasons she got angry was because she felt that the black and Latino students were being treated differently from the white students, and this difference was played out in the academic hierarchy at her school and the ways students were placed into different "tracking systems." She describes this hierarchy and some of the attitudes she encountered:

At that time they used to track you. And they had an academic track for those who were supposed to be going to college, a general studies and a commercial track for those who were like going to be secretaries or go into business. I was supposed to be in the academic track, and the general population was divided into these other two tracks. And, of course, most of the blacks and Latinos were in the general studies and the commercial tracks. There was a general resentment that those of us who were black should not have been at the school. We got this even from this woman who was supposed to be our guidance counselor and our English teacher who was black, and one of the few black teachers in the school.

The academic track at Amanda's high school was "mainly all white." She was in the academic track during her freshman, sophomore and part of her junior years of high school. "Then my grades did not stay up to a 3.0 average. You had to be in the honor society, so your grade point had to be 3.0. And when I went into the general studies track I sort of had the attitude that I didn't care. I just wanted to get out of school. By that time, I'm like, I will just go to school I'm just doing what I have to do. I just sort of lost my enthusiasm." Yet, Amanda still wanted to go to college. But her black guidance counselor attempted to persuade her against it. She told her that if she insisted upon going to college that she should go at night. She encouraged Amanda to think about

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working for an insurance company after graduation where she could make as much as 40 dollars a week.

Jackie's dream was to become a nurse, but she abandoned this idea when she got caught running what she calls a "small racket" at her high school. Jackie worked in the attendance office at her school where she was responsible for giving out late slips to students who were tardy: "What you need? What you want? What you got to offer?" She started charging "\$3, \$2, and \$1" for the various slips, and as she said, "that was a lot of money during that time." Jackie got caught and was suspended for her activities, and as a result she "didn't take no tests," so she failed. She was in a pre-nursing program at her high school, and "once you fail any subject in the nursing program you're automatically disqualified from the program. I got left back." Her curriculum changed: she was placed in the commercial track. Describing her feelings, Jackie said that she "felt like such a horrible person, that I had messed up my whole life." But she was determined to get her high school diploma and graduate with her class, so she went to summer school every year and took "nine classes instead of six" during the academic year in order to graduate on time.

Patricia did not know exactly what she wanted to be when she entered high school, and, although she had "pretty decent grades at the time," she too was placed in the commercial track. She went to a newly integrated high school where "they made you feel that you were not going to be able to be college material. They gave you the impression that they were caring and wanted to see you succeed, but at the same time, without you realizing it, they were telling you that you were not good enough." Patricia

admits that she began to accept this perception of herself:

There were obviously many black kids in there that this didn't work on, and there were some that it did work on. It worked on me, I'm ashamed to say. But at that point in time it did. When I got to high school, I was doing well in my classes, I had at least a B average. And I kept getting the feeling, the energy, that somehow I just wasn't good enough. Some part of me I guess began to accept it. So then I began to look around at what kind of jobs I could do. I was into reality here. I'm black; I got to deal with this. What kind of a job would I be able to get when I got out of school? When I looked around, I knew that I didn't want to be a nurse. Even at that time they weren't hiring many black receptionists, so even that was out for me. The typical jobs that black females could get was teaching, and I didn't want to be a teacher. Didn't want to be a nurse. So then there was secretarial left. So I put it in my head, well, if I get the proper training to get secretarial skills, that's a job I can always get. Somebody, somewhere will always need a secretary. That's how I rationalized it in my head.

Sara's family moved to Germany because her father, a military man, was stationed there. She attended an American school, and her teachers "were these people whose husbands had died on the Russian front, but they didn't know nothing about no Nazis: all the Nazis were gone and dead. Some of the teachers were young Americans who had come over to teach there, which was a great gig. But we also had these German women who were widows. This was in 1960." Sara viewed some of her German teachers as blatantly racist, and recalling one teacher in particular she said:

My German teacher was really a racist. I knew that she didn't like me because I was black, and she didn't like the other black kids because they were black. It played itself out in grades, and ignoring you, and denigrating your input. If you didn't know an answer to something, you would be the stupidest person she ever heard, whereas a white student would be a student needing teaching.

To deal with their disappointments, some of the women gradually began to channel their frustrations into other activities. Amanda became more interested in "Latin

music and parties and stuff." At first, Amanda and her friends "started going to the church on Friday to party, and we sort of graduated to these clubs. At the time when we were kids there were Latin bands who played live music at dances for young people. I always wanted to go to the dances, and I wanted to have something new to wear." Her mother told her that if she wanted something new to wear every weekend "she needed to start working." Amanda did find a retail job where she worked after school hours, but she also found another way of getting what she wanted. She and her girlfriend went to a department store and "we decided we were going to be slick and steal stuff." As she explains:

First we started out stealing virgin pins. We would buy one and then we would take one. Then they had these nice little leather clutch purses you could take with you to the dance. We would buy one, and then we would take one. One time we got real bold. I got a whole outfit, and then I got afraid. I said, oh if I come home my mother is going to say where did you get this from? So, I'm so dumb, so I get on the phone, and I call my mother and say, guess what? I found this bag on the floor, and it has all these clothes that fit me. My mother said she knew I had stolen the clothes. But she said if she dealt with it she would have murdered me. So she didn't say anything. One of my girlfriends got caught. My mother used that as a lesson for me to talk about what could happen. My girlfriend got real crazy with it, I think she went to the store every day taking stuff.

Sara took the opportunity to explore Europe with her family while living in Germany. "We traveled a lot. We went camping in Italy, and we went to Rome and Paris and Holland and to different places." She also began to drink alcohol and experiment with drugs. As she said, "I was about 16. We used to drink a lot of German beer in town and steal somebody's parents' liquor and get drunk. There was a lot of opium and stuff around. We would have opium and beer. That was my favorite thing." Jackie too, began

to drink in high school. As she said she would get "pissy drunk." But she and her "crew" were also running another "scam" at her high school. As she explains:

We used to have a scam in the lunchroom. We would all line up. We would make sure that we would all eat at the same time. We would line up trays of food and run them out the back door. So by the time we got to the cashier everybody would only have milk, but we would have enough food that our whole crew could eat. Of course we would have a table at the back of the lunchroom, and we would be playing cards and radios.

But Jackie was still getting into fights while in high school. She remembers an incident: "this girl wanted to fight, and I'm like I don't want to fight nobody. She was just breaking on me, so I went and stepped up into her face, and me and her were throwing down. I busted her ass, really." And Jackie was still hanging out with the street gangs. She recalls a gang retaliation against her cousin that she witnessed during this period:

I was hanging out of the window talking to him. We were getting ready to go to the movies. I told him don't wear that big ugly leather jacket. We were going to go to a nice place. While he was talking to me, somebody came up and stabbed him in his back, and I saw it. I'm on the 4th floor, and he's talking to me, and and I'm watching him fall, and I'm going out and telling my mother to call his mom because something just happened. As I run downstairs, I see this guy running with my cousin. He had picked him up and started running. He ran with him to the hospital. When I got to the hospital they had brought the clothes out, and we had thought that he was dead because his clothes were just bloody, just horrible. He got like a 100-some odd stitches that day. He survived, but he was never well after that.

Several of the women were becoming increasingly aware of the racial politics that were being played out on the evening news and of the reports in the newspaper. As they entered high school they were forming their own political perspectives about what was happening on the broader political landscape, and they were also beginning to see a

connection to their own individual lives. Attending her newly integrated public school, Patricia felt that "on the surface the teachers and everybody else would try to give you the impression that they wanted you to be involved." But she did not feel that she was a part of the school culture. "We were in a school in a neighborhood where there was nothing but white folks. And you knew that you came to school, and you got on the bus and went home. That way you wouldn't have too much trouble." But Patricia, along with some of the other black girls at her school, wanted some changes to occur in that culture. So, by her junior year, when there were more black students attending her school, they began to organize and press for changes. She describes some of her experiences and some of the contradictions that were very much a part of those experiences:

They had all these silly competitions. It was for the year book. They had the prettiest girl, and the most this and the most that. We got tired of just seeing white girls chosen, and we knew that there were just as many attractive black girls. We knew, we understood, it was sad but true, that if the black girl was of a darker hue, no matter how pretty, no matter how attractive, she was not going to get voted for, especially by white kids, and she was not going to get voted for by even some of the black kids. So we knew that we had to find a lighter complexioned female. And we found a couple of them, and we did a campaign for them. We did a huge campaign, and we got two sisters voted in. We felt a real sense of accomplishment.

Patricia also recalls their efforts to integrate the all-white cheerleading squad:

I have never been interested in cheerleading in my life. But we all said that we were going to try out for cheerleading. You would do all of these stupid routines. Anybody could have done them. But the inference was that we really don't want you here because you're black, but we know that we just can't come out and tell you that. So they would say, oh she wasn't able to do the split or she couldn't do the jump properly. We said, oh no, we're not having that. So a whole crew of us went out, and we kept going until they accepted two girls. The woman who was over the cheerleading squad decided to delegate the rest of us. All of a sudden we were the

booster squad, they had never had one before. Guess what the complexion was of all of those girls on the booster squad? The sisters on the cheerleading squad were very fair skinned, very light skinned.

Sharon had a similar high school experience to that of Patricia's, although she had gone to a predominantly white public school ever since grade school. By the time she reached high school, the few blacks at her school wanted to see a black prom queen. Finally one was selected. But "there was never a picture in the yearbook of the whole court and queen because the white girls would not pose with her."

Faith, on the other hand, did not recall having any overtly "racist experiences" at the Quaker school "because everybody was too civilized." This is not to say that she did not have a sense of feeling different, as she explains:

There was that sense that you were really cool with some people and really not cool with others, but the ones that you weren't cool with weren't necessarily going to tell you. I think a real sense of what I had coming out of school was a feeling that I preferred the way that it was in the South, where if people hated you, they just said it. Where in the north, they might hate you and say they like you, which was hard to figure out. I experienced for the first time people who didn't necessarily mean what they said. So the impact that that had on me was just sort of not to trust people after that, to always take a step back and sort of observe before I decide whether I was crossing over there, or whether or not I was letting you in. Ever since then I have really been very aware of the fact that I can choose. I can choose who comes up in my personal space. You don't get to choose.

Lesson Number 6: Decisions and Implications

As high school graduation neared, there were important decisions that had to be made by the women. Some had the guidance of and relied upon the decision-making of their parents, while others relied upon their own judgement or sought guidance elsewhere.

Sharon graduated from high school in 1966: " I marched. I wore a cap and gown. My parents felt that my graduation was what was expected of me, and I was told where I was going to college." She was told that she would go to an all-black women's college in the South, and Sharon describes how she felt about their decision:

My parents had determined that with our right upbringing, I was going to a black school, which is the way it ended up. I didn't want to go down south because of all of the stuff that was going on down there. And you would read about it, and you would see it on tv. Here you are a young girl, and you think that's what you're going to be surrounded with. all of this demonstration and everything else. I had never been on a demonstration before, but you would see the fire hoses and the dogs and the churches blowing up. And I really didn't want to go down South. I thought every place you walked down south, this is what happens. I didn't know a soul down there. I cried and cried. A week later you couldn't have gotten me out of the place.

Amanda graduated from high school in 1963. "I did have a sense of pride and accomplishment. The only thing that sort of stood out was when we sat there and looked at who got the awards, and that was the only unpleasant part of the ceremony." Her mother wanted her to attend an all black college in the South. "I didn't want to go. I thought that it was too bourgeois, and I didn't want to go to a black college. I probably was influenced. We all thought that black colleges were not good, and there was like this distinction in high school." Amanda made the decision to:

continue to work, and I went to a city college at night. I worked at a city agency. It was a clerical job. And I spent almost most of my time partying. I didn't really concentrate on school. It was almost like a wasted year. I was frustrated because I didn't get accepted into the schools that I wanted to go to. They all turned me down. They weren't really interested in black students, I think, at that time. I just partied and went to work and school, but I didn't really do too well. So I decided that if I was going to finish school, I'd better go away. I went to the black college my mother wanted me to go to in the South.

Barbara graduated from high school in 1962, but as she said, "I graduated. I had this high school diploma and no skills." She explains:

I never was a good student in high school, I always found a way to get over there. I was terrible. I would write book reports, and I would create my own story. I never was a good student because I never applied myself. I failed math, and I had to take that in summer school. I failed typing, and then I became an excellent typist. I never liked school. My mother said, I went to school to be popular. She never pushed me at all. I would always make it. I would slide under the door. I never applied myself. To me I just wasn't interested. I wasn't going to sit like my sister, who studied night and day. That's all she did.

Barbara wanted to get out of Michigan and "start my life." She had to go to her graduation because she played in the band. But she was angry because "I didn't get my high school pictures." That was a "major anger when they couldn't afford those pictures."

So:

the next day I went and joined the Navy. I was so angry that I walked. And I was walking all around, and I saw this Navy thing, so I said I'm going to join the Navy. I joined the Navy, and on my way back home, I said to myself, I'll show them. Then I was like scared, and then I forgot about it, and then the man came to my house. My mother said, take her if she wants to go. I didn't go. My mother said, look, I have taught you what I know. I've done the best that I can. Now you got to go out there and make your way. I came to New York when I was 17.

Mary, the oldest participant in the study, went to a small rural segregated school where there were "26 kids in my high school class." She graduated from high school in 1957, and she "had a sense of pride. I did because it was the first stage of real accomplishment for me in life." Mary was looking forward to going to college, and "I had in mind that I wanted to be a coach: come back and teach physical education, teach kids about hygiene, and all the things that I was really involved in. That was my plan in

life. That was the first stage, the graduation was part of my goal." But things did not go as planned for Mary. She had received a basketball scholarship to a predominantly black college, and during the summer she had worked and saved money for college. But her parents had other plans. Her mother, father and the other children had all moved to New York City, and Mary was living with her uncle until the start of the school term. Her family came down with the "Hong Kung Flu," and her mother demanded that she come to New York to help take care of family members. Describing this period in her life, Mary said:

I never wanted to come to New York because I knew that there would be problems. Wherever they were, I knew that it would be problems. But I didn't have any say in this. I was offended when I found out. Remember what I said about her having the kids and dropping them on me. I always felt that she should take care of her own kids. So I resented her keeping having kids and just dropping them--like the one she gave away, one of my sisters. I resented that. She tried to give away another one, and I said no, let her stay with us. I had an obedient relationship to my mother. I was always taught to do what you are told. I never wanted to come to New York, so when I had to do it, I just kept my mouth shut.

Sara graduated from high school in 1965, and although she graduated in Germany, "they tried to make it as easy as possible for American families, so you almost felt as if you were in the United States; it was your basic American graduation." Her parents wanted her to attend the predominantly white Midwestern college that they had graduated from, where she could also live with her grandmother while going to school: "they had it all planned out." But Sara had plans of her own and applied to a predominantly black Northern college. Her mother and her aunt had attended black colleges for short periods of time, and "they were clear that I could not go to one." But Sara insisted on going:

I don't think that I ever really stood up to them that much, but I was really clear that that was what I was going to do. It was cheap; it was like \$200 a class. My grandfather gave me some money, and I got a thousand dollar scholarship from some women's organization. But basically they and my grandfather paid for it.

Patricia had "wanted to go to college," but she admits that "outside influences" made her doubt if she could achieve a degree. As she said, "I had been around males and females who had gone to college. They had a superiority attitude and made you feel that you had to be some sort of a genius to go to college, and therefore you were not good enough to go. Like, look at me. I'm this wonderful person, but you're not. I figured that I couldn't cut it." Patricia did not graduate from high school. "I thought that I had taken all of the classes necessary for my diploma, and I found out they wanted me to go to school for another year. That just was not going to happen." She did not graduate with her class, but she did go to night school and received her diploma the following year.

Expressing her regrets about not graduating from high school, Patricia said:

I think that my mother was disappointed that I did not graduate from high school. She didn't express it that way, but I know that I had frustrated her to no end. But I did it--at least I got a diploma. She felt that even if I didn't go to college, she wanted all of her kids to have a high school diploma. That's because she had never gotten hers at that point. I went on and started working. I was disappointed with myself that I didn't graduate with my class. I just wanted to be able to walk down that aisle, cap and gown, with my diploma. Didn't do it. I was disappointed in myself because I also couldn't let my mother take part in it. I could have gone and walked down the thing, but it would have been a farce. My school picture was not in the yearbook. I have my high school yearbook from the year I was supposed to graduate, but I'm not in it. Not graduating has always been a sore point with me. That I didn't just go ahead when I might have been able to have gone to college. That has always bothered me.

Jackie graduated from high school in 1965, and her "whole crew didn't stand for

the pledging of allegiance during the ceremony." When she graduated, her "dream was to make money. I didn't know how, but that's what I wanted to do." So, she enrolled in a community college to try and find out how she could make money.

Faith graduated from high school in 1967, and "Ma was in the audience in a hat. That was really significant Ma in a hat at my graduation. I had never seen my mother so sharp. My mother had just never, she really didn't, she was just gorgeous. I felt a sense of pride, not just that I had graduated, but I really was aware that for the most part I probably knew a whole lot more than my friends. And that my mother had managed to accomplish this thing for me." After graduating, Faith was preparing to move to New York to take acting classes and pursue a career in acting. But her mother decided that she was going to college, and Faith was admitted to a college in New York City.

Chapter Three:

The World Of Men

By 1966, all of the women in this study were either going to college or working full-time jobs. A bomb had already exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four little black girls who were attending a Sunday school class. Fannie Lou Hamer had challenged the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic National Convention demanding that the delegates of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party be seated. Medgar Evers and Malcolm X were assassinated. Freedom Summer and the March on Washington were a memory. In 1965, the Voters Rights Bill was passed. And many young blacks were beginning to lose patience with what they viewed as the gradualism of integrationist ideology and the passiveness of nonviolent protest against social injustice. Rebellions or riots were beginning to break out in urban areas across the country. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was formed in 1966, and in June of that same year, Stokely Carmichael became chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), where he coined the phrase "Black Power" and declared that "Every Negro is a Potential Black man."

The struggle for black social justice took on a decisively different tenor and tone, both in objectives and in strategies. Economic self-sufficiency and a new sense of pride in the beauty of blackness were envisioned. A re-ordering of social relations was called for and new gender-based cultural expectations were being constructed. The women in this study had reached young adulthood and wanted to explore what that meant as they began to establish an adult identity and life for themselves. They remembered:

alcoholism and drug abuse; marriage; pregnancies; student protests and the Vietnam war; Afro puffs; mini skirts; and James Brown's *Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud*; Nikki's Giovanni's poem *Nigger/ Can You Kill*; and Sonia Sanchez's play *The Bronx Is Next*. They recalled engaging the world of adult men for the first time as adult women.

Men and Daughters

The first significant males in the lives of most of the women in this study had been their fathers or other fathers, often their grandfathers. But they did not rely upon the adult men in their families for emotional support while growing up. Many saw their fathers as the major provider, as the bread winner, of the family in the more conventional sense. With the noted exception of Jackie, Faith and, for a period of time, Mary, they grew up with fathers in the household. However, the women did not talk extensively about their relationships with their fathers. Instead they talked about what the men in their families did for a living and the activities they were involved in outside of the home. There was interaction between fathers and daughters, but mostly the women saw their relationships to their fathers as detached. A few of the women perceived this detachment as rooted in the adult males' anger which often evoked a sense of fear in them as children. But as children, they were often unclear as to the specific nature or source of their father's anger.

Barbara was the only participant who described her relationship with her father as "close," but this closeness was not consistent over time. It occurred during different periods in her childhood. Unlike the other women in the study, she was clear about the

source of his anger: for her it was rooted in his blindness, which was caused by a work-related accident in the steel mill. She recalls her father being "very bright," but after he lost his eyesight "he was very angry because of that, and I think that kind of messed him up." Barbara saw her father as:

A strong guy, but he was very, very angry. He taught me how to read. He was an accomplished musician, so I studied music. He taught me how to tell time. He was a very smart man. I liked the fact that he was really smart, and he was really handsome. My father had to be about 35 or 40 when he lost his sight. He worked periodically. He went back and learned how to read braille and all that stuff, and then he got jobs working at the Braille Institute. I was always nervous because he was so independent and he would go to work, and he would go by himself, and I would be like petrified that something would happen to him, but it never did. I felt loved by my father, and I liked him until he got angry. He would have fits of anger. There was always a lot of tension. He was extremely jealous of my mother, and I knew that once a year there was going to be a major fight.

Sharon describes herself as a "daddy's girl" when she was a very small child, and she recalls following him around all the time. But as she grew older her relationship with her father changed when he became more and more "demanding" and "strict," and their relationship grew even more distant. She attributes his demeanor and behavior to the fact that he was "highly educated for a black person of the time." He had been the valedictorian of his undergraduate college class and was a part of the first MBA graduating class at the college. Her father worked throughout his professional career with the federal government, but his real love was music. He was a jazz musician, and sometimes he would take Sharon "on piano gigs." And "he would take me to fashion shows and places where he played." He held Sharon to a "higher standard about the piano lessons," because she was the oldest child, and she remembers him as a "perfectionist"

who would "terrorize" her and would "scream" at her a lot. Sharon said:

I don't know why my father was angry. I never understood it. I guess maybe being a black man who was very intelligent and never getting anywhere made him angry. I didn't find out until after he died that people would call him nigger at work. I think maybe he took his anger out on us.

Sara describes her relationship with her father as "distant," but as a child she did feel loved by him and recalls vivid memories of him:

There was something about the way his face changed. He would come in and he would be all dragged out, and he would see all of us, and he would see me and be happy to see me. The way he talked to me, he seemed to like me. He thought I was funny. I think he was proud of me when I did well. And that was something I worked at, trying to make him proud of me. I felt like I was his favorite for a little while, and then I lost that. I don't know where that went. He took me to a theme park where they had roller coasters and things, and we had a good ole time. But those are the rare moments, and the times I had special time with him were very special. But he was very distant.

Jackie's father and mother were never married, so she only came in contact with him when she visited her paternal grandmother's house, or during the times when she would visit him at his house. As she said:

He had another family, and I got along great with those kids. So I wasn't traumatized that my mother and father weren't together. I know why my mother wasn't with him--I know as an older person why--because he's a pain in the ass. My father is just a pain in the ass. He's the kind of man I know I would never have in my life, ever, never, ever. My father is evil. He's just an evil man. He wasn't evil to me when I was growing up. He was evil and nice at the same time. He would give you everything in his house, but don't let him get mad.

Patricia describes her relationship with her father as one of outright fear: "When I was younger, I was afraid of my father. I was very afraid. And my mother even let us know that yeah, it was necessary to fear him." Patricia's father was an alcoholic and he

had a gambling problem. Her earliest memories as a child is of the physical and emotional confrontations between her father and her mother. She said her mother would not let him hit her, but her father's behavior had an indelible impact on the functioning of her family:

My father was somebody that you had to learn to gauge his moods. At the outset you have to understand that he was an alcoholic, but he was a functional alcoholic. I didn't realize what an alcoholic meant until I was grown, really. Because I never thought of him as an alcoholic; he just drank. You know, like a lot of the folks in the neighborhood, he just drank, and when he drank he would get stupid. My impression of him is that he was an extremely unhappy human being. He used to threaten to kill everybody in the house big enough to die and the dog too. He used to tell me that I wasn't his child. He would swear up and down that some other man was my father, and he would go out of his way to make me and my brothers think that my mother was the lowest human being on the face of the earth. I witnessed him miss my mother by a hair's breath with a butcher knife, cause he was literally trying to kill her. From the age of 10. I have been called so many sluts and whores by him. If he had a named me, I guess that would have been on my birth certificate.

Faith did not grow up with her father. As she said, "I didn't have a relationship with my father during those early years, never did. I saw my father three times in my life." Instead, she lived with her maternal grandfather, but she too was afraid of him:

I have a lot of respect for my grandfather now that I'm an adult. But what I had for him when I was a kid was fear. He was very stern, and I think by the time that I came up my grandfather was miserable. He couldn't work anymore, and he had not managed to save any money, and social security was really small. So essentially his daughters were supporting him by the time I came along. I think that he was just really miserable. He wasn't mean; I don't know why I was so scared of him. His voice was loud, and he didn't have much patience for children, but he wasn't mean. But I stayed out of his way. I remember once when I was eight years old, and I had gotten this little record player, and I had the record player outside some kind of way and I was playing this music and doing the twist. Well first of all my granddaddy told me to lighten up on the noise, and I didn't pay him any mind. So then he came, and he just picked my record player

up and threw it down on the ground. He walked with a cane, and I was furious with him, and so I took his cane in the backyard and chopped it up. Like I said, I was just afraid of him, and I really stayed out of his way.

Mary too describes her father as distant, as "sort of an estranged father." She goes on to say, "my father grew up to be a very selfish man. That's the way I categorized him, selfish and self-centered, which made him not think about other people needs." On the other hand, Mary describes her relationship with her grandfather as "close." As she recalls:

He got put out of the house. I'm not laughing because he got put out, but I'm the one who had to go and wash his dirty clothes because nobody else would go around him. I would walk across town, and I would do his wash with his snotty handkerchiefs--I will never forget that--and hang his stuff up and then walk back home. I missed him when he left. He had gotten my aunt pregnant. Before he moved, he would call me Mary Red and when he would tell me to sit on his lap, I knew not to. I didn't spend a lot of time with him except on Sunday. I remember on Sunday sitting on the porch and talking to him a lot.

Men and Politics

By the early 1960s, the political climate of their time was making an impact on how the participants saw their futures, their options, their place in society. And their memories of political events are often male-focused. One of the first political incidents that they all remembered was the assassination of the president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Faith said, "the first thing I remember of political significance while at the Quaker school was when Kennedy died. I remembered everybody being in tears. I was in tears too." Jackie recalls a similar experience: "people on the train, people were crying all in the streets, everywhere you went people were just crying and sobbing. It was a horrible, horrible day." She remembers how she interpreted this event at the time:

We watched tv; we saw the parts that they wanted us to see. We knew already that there was more than one person involved, and no one person killed him. Everybody immediately said that it was Hoover who wanted him out. It was like, there was no more hope at all. That if there was going to be a time of a little bit of relaxation, that was over. Relaxation as far as you could breathe and say okay you're black, but you don't have to constantly be on your Ps and Qs. That was a term that my relatives always used, meaning that you always got to be on point, don't ever think that you can relax, that it's okay, that somebody is not out to get you, cause they are always out to get you.

Anne was in New York City, enrolled in her first year of college, and she "went to Kennedy's funeral in DC with a group of my friends. We did a day trip turn-around."

Anne had a similar reading of this event as Jackie, where she saw the assassination as the "beginning of the unraveling":

When he was assassinated, I felt like if they could kill the president, then nobody was safe. Blacks were going to catch hell from then on. I just felt that in my gut. I felt that we were living in a country that was supported by lies and guns. It was very depressing, and going to Washington was like the straw that broke the camel's back. People were just broken. It was despair. I was distraught seeing the casket pulled in the horse-drawn carriage with the boots backwards, and all the people that were there. DC was the farthest South that I had ever been. There were more black people than I ever encountered. The accents. I kept hearing the voices.

Sara was living on a military base in Germany at the time of Kennedy's assassination and "that was a big deal." She said:

Kennedy was significant because he was the president, and he had just come to Germany, and the Germans were freaked out. He had just said he was a Berliner, so it was like a big deal. I was surrounded by it. Plus if you're in the Army and that's the commander-in-chief, there's like a direct connection in terms of where I was. I remember we were playing basketball and our coaches were Army guys so everybody got sent back to their barracks. They were afraid; they didn't know what was going to happen. There were different levels of alert that Army guys go on, and as soon as he died they all went on alert. They all had to go back and prepare to be shipped out, but they didn't know what was going to happen. I

remember more than anything else, my dad had to leave because he was in charge of all these men, he was in command of a battalion at that point, which is a lot of people. He had to pack all his guns and stuff, and he left. So that's what I remember, all the men leaving. They were all going off because they were getting ready for war.

While in Germany, Sara was beginning to learn about what was happening to blacks in the United States from some black lieutenants who were stationed there. "They thought it was really sad about how uneducated we all were, so they wanted to educate us about what was going on with black people." Through them Sara was introduced to the teaching of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. But when Malcolm "got killed, I don't think that my family even related to it."

During this period, Amanda and her girlfriend went to meet Malcolm X at his office in Harlem, and she found out years later that her "mother had been in regular conversation with Malcolm; I was kind of shocked." Jackie was also beginning to "pay some attention to Malcolm." She saw him as "a rebel. "He was the guy who talked back and did what he wanted to do." She was "at the same time making the transition from Negro to black." She was influenced by the "street talk" that was going on during the time:

There was always like street talk. Street talk to me was like the newspaper. If you wanted to know anything that was going on in the community, you would go up on the avenue. You could hear anything that was going on. Of course besides people selling stuff, someone was always teaching somebody something. I thought that was a big deal. You could listen to people get into dialogue, and it used to be who could talk the slickest while they were talking. I guess it's almost like how kids look at rap to an extent. I was always very excited, so much energy going on. And that's where I used to hear the Muslims a lot too, on the street corner. I think that all of this translated into our different households on different levels.

Jackie was interested in the Black Muslims. As she said, "I used to always sit down and talk with them because we did have some in our neighborhood, and whenever I noticed wherever they were, I would kind of go there and get involved in the conversation. I'm thinking about what I like about the Muslims, and I probably would have been one, if not for other things." She does remember the day Malcolm was killed, but it did not have an emotional effect on her. The reason is because "my girlfriend had also died when Malcolm died, my best friend. she got hit by a car. Describing what happened to her friend. Jackie said:

We used to have a lot of fun; she was my partner; I was like her little sister kind of thing. We were supposed to go to a party up in the projects, and her boyfriend helped her to decide that she wasn't going to this party. she was going somewhere else. And she got hit by a car that morning running from him because evidently they told me that he was hitting her and stuff. and she ran out into the street and got hit by a car. That was like overly traumatizing to me. I couldn't turn my light off at night time. I knew her boyfriend, and I couldn't talk to him anymore. Nobody talked to him.

Jackie's girlfriend and Malcolm X "were in the same funeral parlor, so my mom wouldn't let me go to her funeral."

Some of the women witnessed the movement from the South. Unlike Jackie, Faith did not have "an awareness of Malcolm when he was alive." But being from the south, she was very much aware of Martin Luther King, and she tried to follow what was happening in the civil rights movement. Describing the evolution of her awareness Faith said:

The civil rights thing was a big deal in my house. The moment King started being news, at whatever point that was in my life, it was discussed in my house. That I was aware of. The sit-ins were always discussed in my house, the kids getting beat up on, and people pouring milk over their

heads, I mean all of that was always talked about in my house. My mother and my granddaddy primarily talked about it. They would argue about what was going on. My mother was really one of these people who wanted to believe that whites were becoming more humane, and my granddaddy was like, don't count on it. I think the thing that was most horrifying for me was to see these images of how ugly people acted. I know the Little Rock thing just really made me shake: that people could taunt children like that and the water hoses, them turning the hoses on. So it was the images of what were going on that I was most aware of. I think that had a lot to do with why I was willing to believe what the Muslims said: that white people must've come from the devil, cause I couldn't understand how anybody who had come from God could treat any of God's creatures the way these people were acting.

Amanda left New York City and went South in 1963 to attend a predominantly black college, where the "Klan was still marching down the main street" and there were for "colored" or "white" only signs hanging in store windows around town. She describes the college as a "black finishing school," where there was a dress code, and she remembers having to get "a black dress, pearls, and little white gloves and all this other stuff." It was a conservative college, but "the campus was beautiful," and it had a strict code of conduct for its students. Initially, Amanda really liked the school, but she began to have some doubts when "they got rid of my favorite history professor during my freshman year." He was a young white professor who taught American history, and he talked about "what black folks were doing in that history, and this is where you can get the sources. We were never taught that before, and they had an excellent library on black history and culture." She explains why the administration wanted to get rid of this particular teacher, and what the students did in response:

What happened was that he was trying to form an NAACP chapter on campus. They used some trumped-up bullshit to get rid of him, so we took over the administration building. I was more on the periphery, but I

participated in the takeover. But some people got thrown out because of that. The fellow who led it, he got thrown out. My mother heard about it and immediately told me that I wasn't sent down there to land-in, sit-in, crawl-in, or any other kind of in. I better just pay attention to my studies. She called me, and she sent messages. Well, I listened to her, but I knew I was still probably going to participate in some way.

Amanda recalls that there were several student protests on campus while she was there, and she viewed them as efforts to "reject the plantation kind of mentality" at the college. But she did not see them as "connected to any outside issues," although she thought that the protests produced some changes on campus:

We on the struggle with the college. We got the hours changed, we got the library opened later, restrictions dropped about where we could go in town. We also changed things around: we made them get rid of the policy that we were supposed to sit in the back when white folks came on campus for stuff. The college was the only cultural center in that whole area; there was no civic center or opera house, so the college would bring ballets, plays and all kinds of entertainment, all different cultures and everything there. And when white folks would come to the school, we were told that we were supposed to sit in the back. Of course we did not do that, we did not listen. They would get mad at us.

In the fall of 1968, Amanda was a college senior when "Martin Luther King got killed." She remembers that "everybody was very sad," but there was no response by the administration or the students to his assassination. "I don't remember anything particular that happened on campus. There was no major disruption," she said. But she did take note when she heard about the response in Harlem. As she said, "shortly after the rebellion broke out up in Harlem, I remembered thinking that people had run down to Wall Street; I couldn't image that people had just stayed in Harlem burning down stuff."

In 1965, Sara also attended a conservative all-back college, but it was up North. She describes it as, "so backward. You couldn't have boys in your dorm room, you

couldn't have company after a certain time, you had to be home at 9:00 p.m., and you had to go to church. It was a very traditional college at that point." When she arrived on campus, like all freshmen, she had to take a speech test and take a speech class unless "you sounded white. If there was anything about you that sounded black you had to take speech." Sara thought that this was ironic, especially after she heard the college president welcome the incoming freshmen class. She said all of her "worst shit kicked in. It was like, oh my God, am I ever going to learn anything here? This bad-talking motherfucker. I'm in deep shit here. This is going to be a fun place, but I'm going to have to go to graduate school to learn something." She was "pissed off" because she "had to take the speech class. That there was something wrong with my people, they had to keep fixing them."

The students at Sara's college wanted change not only on their campus, but also in the city in which it was located and the country as a whole. Although they both attended conservative black colleges, the political climate at Sara's college was different from that of Amanda's. SNCC was on her campus and she went to meetings "a couple of times, but I felt uncomfortable." But while working at the school newspaper she got a chance to meet notable figures and do interviews. "So that was one way that I got to know people and got to know a little bit about the city." Sara got caught up into the political climate at her college, and in some ways she was quite active. There was a national "black university conference" sponsored by her college, and one of the organizers asked her to be in charge of security. She describes this experience and what happened:

I was in charge of security, if you can imagine, me. So what I did, because

I knew that I couldn't do it, was asked a friend to help me. I got these guys who came back from Vietnam who were kung-fu and karate people. It was really a big deal because we were supposed to be protecting Mulani Ron Karenga because everybody wanted to kill him, including me. These guys from the Revolutionary Action Movement were ready to kill him. They had already said they were going to kill him, they had already sold wolf tickets to people. In some cases they had shot at each other. Somebody called Ron Karenga a squeaky-voiced faggot, and so his boys were going to shoot this one and shoot that one. And I was in charge of security. It was a really good conference; black students from all over the United States came. The Panthers were there; SNCC was there; the Revolutionary Action Movement; and West Us, Karenga's people. Somebody got shot, and I never did find out who shot him.

Sara also recalls when Martin Luther King was assassinated and how the city she was living in "blew up. "James Brown was on tv telling people to stay in their houses, and so I watched James for a while, and then I went out into the streets. The National Guard was already there, so they just started gassing people. I got gassed. I don't remember who I was with. I wasn't with anyone at the time when the actual tear gas happened. I got separated from the people I was with. There was a lot going on."

Sharon was attending an all-black college in the south. She said the "biggest thing that happened during my second year there was that Martin Luther King was killed." Sharon's college was located in Martin Luther King's hometown, and she recalls that someone started "screaming and hollering: King has been shot. Everybody was very upset. It was a Thursday. By Friday we had heard that his body was going to lie in state on the campus where he went to school." Sharon describes the experiences surrounding this event:

The dean said that anybody who can go home, go home. That meant that we weren't going anywhere. On Saturday afternoon they brought his body on campus, but I wouldn't go in there. I never went in there. I never saw

his body. I had never been to a funeral before; I was a little sheltered child. I have seen pictures of it. There was glass over the top of the casket to keep people from touching him. By early Sunday afternoon, the reviewing lines were snaked all around every building on campus. His funeral was on Monday, and we got out there early and got a good spot in front of the church. We saw everybody there was to see. They said that there were 200,000 people out there that day. I had never been in the presence of so many people at one time. We saw the wagon coming through the gate. Mrs. King, Bobby Kennedy were there, Jackie Kennedy was there, every politician. The crowd was very orderly, very quiet. And when Mahalia Jackson sang Precious Lord Take My Hand, the crowd went wild. People started bursting into tears and passing out, the whole routine, she was just so fabulous.

Faith was attending college in New York City when Martin Luther King was assassinated. She remembers being on the subway. Faith recalls that "I had been uptown on my way downtown because people went nuts. I had never seen masses of black people out of control. They were throwing things. The energy on the train was just so volatile to the point that I just really wanted to get home. I really wanted to get back in the dorm because I didn't feel safe. You could just feel it. It was like a balloon getting ready to burst--the tension. The open hostility was immediately apparent to me after his death between blacks and whites." Describing how she felt at the time, Faith recalls:

I don't remember feeling angry when King got killed, as much as disappointment. I was really disappointed with white people. This was the best chance at moderation that they had. If you will kill somebody who is a man of God, I don't know how to explain it any better than that. King's politics was his politics, and he was absolutely right about the fact that you have to include all of your citizens in the growth of your country or you don't survive. I think that America is finding out that once again you just can't decide that there's a whole group of people that I'm just not going to deal with, I'm not going to include them in this world. Folks aren't just going to lie down and die: they're going to survive, they're going to live, they're going to take care of their children. And if you don't find a way for them to be included, then they will put upon you. King was really trying to make America understand how it was that it

could function better as a whole society. And when he was killed I just felt that anybody who was trying to see that this country became integrated without any serious conflict. Nonviolent resistance is one thing, but now it seems that it was going to be about a much more physical kind of fight. But ultimately that didn't happen either.

Similarly, Jackie was in New York City when Martin Luther King was assassinated and a riot broke out in Harlem. She said "that's when people burned up everything." Jackie describes what she saw and how she felt when she visited the riot area:

After that riot, that's when people started getting roll-down gates on their stores. It became a whole new look in the community. When I walked through the community after the riot all I saw was garbage, garbage, garbage. People were sweeping the sidewalks, the fire hydrant was on, and people were washing the streets, and they were trying to wash away the garbage. They weren't even boarding things up. There was so much stuff that was just abandoned. I felt that we were in the belly of the ghetto for real, cause we just never envisioned a ghetto the way people talked about it. But after the riot we were truly in the ghetto. The community started to change. That's when we said, yeah they are turning it into a prison. Heroin was a big deal. People were nodding all in the street, too strung out to know what was going on.

Anne was in New York City when she heard that Martin Luther King had been killed. It was during her freshman year, but she had been placed on academic "probation because I had to do something about my grades in order to be able to continue" in school. She was "fascinated with the city and the energy, and I realized that academic pursuits at that particular time were not of real interest to me." So Anne started working a full-time job. She was at work in midtown Manhattan when she heard of King's death, so she told her supervisor, "I'm sorry, but I'm leaving." As she said, "I was angry, pissed and feeling a combination of rage and disgust over King's assassination. I recognized that two cars in

every garage, a chicken in every pot, and everybody with the same rights, that was not happening in America." The riot in Harlem was breaking out and Anne realized that she would have trouble getting home if she took the subway. So she remembered "taking a bus home because I knew if there was any rioting going on the subways would be affected."

Mary was also living in New York when Martin Luther King was assassinated, but she was also paying attention to the rioting that was going on across the country. She had to. "because I had uncles that were arrested in Detroit, and I had to go and get them out of jail." Explaining further, Mary said:

I went from New York to Detroit to help assist with the uncles getting out of jail. They stole a lot of stuff during the riot. Detroit was one of the worst riots in terms of the damage. Instead of remembering King, they were just taking this route as a means to steal from people. That's the way I felt about it. It was one of my uncles that was close to me, so I went. I had to spend a weekend out there, and we had to collect some money through our family to get him out of jail. We did, and then he was bragging to others about all the stuff they took. I said, well look at how much problems it created. When King was killed a rage came over me and a sadness. I remember internalizing a lot and trying not to hate whites. But I could never do something like they did in the riots. I felt sad and dismayed about stuff, but I don't think that's the right course to take.

Men and War

By the mid-sixties, some of the women were beginning to focus more on the war in Vietnam. Sara's father was an Army officer and stationed in Vietnam at the time, and they would write to each other. He would write to her "like he writes his military reports." And sometimes she would write to him explaining how she felt about what he was doing. In talking about one such letter, Sara said:

He was riding around in helicopters, and he didn't need to, he could sit in Saigon at a desk at that point. He was an artillery officer, so he would get in helicopters and fly around. My mother was hysterical. So I remember writing him a letter and telling him he could play like a little boy if he wanted too but not to tell my mother because it was unfair. He had five children, and he needed to sit his black ass down at the desk like he had good sense. I also sent him a card with a picture of a rifle with a daisy in it, and I sent him all this anti-war stuff. Jumping forward, when he died, he never really understood that my brothers and I, who were against the war, were not against him. He left all his medals to someone else, all his medals. He said that we were never interested in what he did, that we were always ashamed of him. It really hurt that he didn't know that we were proud of him, but we were very much against the war.

Patricia's oldest brother went to Vietnam. He was not drafted but enlisted with the Marines. Prior to his enlistment, her father had accused her mother of having an "affair with my brother." Patricia "thought that was the most lowest, degrading, disgusting thing a man could say to his wife." So her brother decided to get away from his stepfather by joining the Marines. But he needed his mother to sign his enlistment papers because he was under age at the time. Describing this incident, Patricia recalls:

My oldest brother told my mother if you don't sign the papers, in a couple of months I will be of age, and I'm going anyway because if I stay here I'm going to kill your husband: it's as simple as that. He said, I can't see him abuse you anymore. Ironically, the night my brother had come in to talk to my mother about signing the papers, my father got upset because my brother did not come and talk to him about going into the service. He wanted to know why my brother didn't talk to him. He got into words with my brother and wanted to attack him, but my mother got into the middle of it. That's when my brother said, ma I got to get out of this house. My mother realized that she might as well sign the papers.

Patricia's brother spent four years in the Marines, and he was 21 years old when he returned. She thought that he had changed a lot. As she said, "he was always quiet. He seemed to be even more quiet, but he needed to be around a lot of laughter, and he

began to drink. When he came back he was drinking and drinking heavily." Explaining further, Patricia said:

He was more intense when he came back. I used to write him a lot, and I would tell him about how some people felt about the war in Vietnam and especially about black men being over in Vietnam and on the front line. We lost a lot of people we knew personally to that war. I did try to talk to my brother about his experiences in Vietnam. He just explained one incident to me, and I guess because he saw the expression on my face he never talked about it again. I don't know if his drinking was tied to Vietnam or whether living under my father had anything to do with it. When he came back, he stayed at home for a while and then he got married and moved out. There was no way that he was going to stay in that house with my father still there.

Patricia's youngest brother was drafted into the Army, but he went absent without leave (AWOL): "hiding out from the government, people looking for him because he was afraid that they were going to send him to Vietnam." She said, "we had heard stories that if you got two sons, only one son would go to war. But we had also heard the story of more than one brother being sent over there." Her brother would come home often and her family "thought that he was home on a regular pass, but he would be AWOL, coming home to do whatever he was doing." Describing some of her youngest brother's activities, Patricia said:

He was stationed in some part of the South. With him it seems frivolous, like a game to him. He was in New York most of the time. All we know is that he had a ball in playing pool tournaments. It was like he was on a vacation somewhere; it wasn't like he was in the armed services. He was selling drugs. That's another reason that I learned to stay away from certain kind of men. I guess he served a purpose in his own way, but I definitely didn't want to have any dealing with drugs. He only stayed in the Army for two years. He got three different kinds of discharges: one said general discharge, one said dishonorable discharge, and one said honorable discharge. I think that they just wanted to get rid of him. He didn't want any part of them, and I don't think they wanted any part of

him.

Anne said that she "didn't understand how we got sucked into the war." To avoid the Army, her brother enlisted in the Air Force, and he "was trained as a special type of reconnaissance mission specialist, so he would fly around the world." But she didn't know anyone who personally went into the Army and to Vietnam. However, she did meet "several brothers who had come back, and they were vegetables, social vegetables."

Amanda's boyfriend was in the Army, but he said "he was not trained to go into combat." At some point, she recalls, he did go to Vietnam and when he returned he wanted to get married. But Amanda saw him as "trifling" and broke off the relationship.

As she explains:

He said he had an engagement ring for me, but he didn't have the ring. He just had the guaranteed paper or something for the ring, which I never to this day saw. I remember he wanted to take me out. He took me to this hotel--we called it the wayside hotel--it was the most awful, horrible little place. So we went there and everything. But by that time I had sort of like gotten turned off by him; I really wasn't interested. I think this is when he said I had sent this Dear John letter, and he was trying to rekindle the relationship. I just wasn't interested in marriage, that's for sure. Plus I was just turned off because our whole relationship was always filled with big promises that never got delivered. This whole idea about the ring and it was coming, yeah. I think that he was just getting out of the Army. He had gone over there, and he claimed that he was not prepared for combat, and he was working in an office, and the building got bombed. And he wound up in a chopper that got shot down. The rest of the time I heard him talk about supposedly living in a villa, and he had this Vietnamese girlfriend. So who knows.

Jackie was engaged to a guy who actually fought in the Vietnam war. She had met him at church and then he got drafted. She never wrote to him while he was in Vietnam, but "he would write me a letter a day," and her friends would write to him. He

got injured in combat, and Jackie talks about how she found out:

I heard that he had gotten injured from the television. He was in this battalion, and it was blown-up, and there were only two survivors. My girlfriend came and told me she had just heard on the news, so we waited until it came out in the newspaper. And there it was. I had called his mom, and she would not talk to me. She just thought that it was my fault that he went into the service. She was buggy like that. She was stupid. But nobody knew nothing. We didn't hear anything for a long time. I'm like, oh God he's dead, and we just lost another one.

But her fiance was not killed; he was one of the two men who had survived the conflict, but he did not have his "tags and stuff because they had lost all of that." and it took a long time to identify him and let his family know what had happened. When he was finally returned to the States, he was sent to a veteran's hospital in New York City for rehabilitation. He had been physically injured in the attack and was not found for days. Meanwhile he developed malaria. Describing her experiences as her fiance tried to regain his health, Jackie said:

He had malaria so bad, it would be almost equivalent to a seizure. He would snap just like that and go into convulsions. There was no cure for it; the doctor said there was nothing they could do about that. I was there one time when he kind of flipped out. I said okay, it was nothing you could control. He stayed in the hospital a year. I would go out to the hospital every day, except for when he would come home for visits. He was glad to see me all the time. I got to know the other people while he was there. But our relationship started to dissolve before he got out of the hospital. I already knew that I was not going to marry him. That was because of his injuries. He didn't even want to get married at that point. I agreed with him. He didn't know what was going to happen to him. His seizures were uncontrollable. We hung out for a while, but then I started dating my children's father.

Men and Sex and Drugs and Alcohol

By 1965, many of the women were into what Jackie called "serious partying."

She was attending a local community college where she said, "I found myself in the land of partyville; all that people did was party." Partying meant hanging out with friends and playing cards, and "bid whist was the game of the year, and I played cards for two years too long." Partying also meant taking drugs and drinking alcohol, Jackie describes this period in her life:

I used drugs. But the stuff you knew not to bother was acid or any of the real hallucinating drugs. Basically I just smoked reefer; I didn't do any of that other stuff. I couldn't take Darvon, which was a simple little pill. They made me hallucinate. I almost go out of my mind taking medicine, so some pills I just couldn't take. I said, if it was anything like that, I didn't want to feel that way, cause it didn't make me feel good. People would describe what different things would do to you. I was like, well no. I don't want to do that. Touch me and tingle, no I don't want to tingle, what the fuck I want to tingle for? I used to drink. We used to drink hard, Wild Turkey. We were winos. We would drink Thunderbird and Ripple too. We did that hard core drinking, let-me-tear-our-gut-open kind of drinking. Gin and Vodka--I knew that I couldn't drink that because I didn't like the feeling. I could hear everything and saw nothing, so they made me like a blind person. I left that stuff alone. I didn't have to learn hard lessons in order to know; I wasn't about learning hard lessons.

In 1966, Faith was in her first year of college in New York City, and she describes it as "just a big party." During her first semester the college had hired a black dean, and the administration fired him because he had "written articles that were very critical of Jews in the New York City public education system." The black students protested this firing and formed a daily picket line around the administration building. Faith used this opportunity to meet the other black students, particularly the "brothers." As she said, "for me, who had been at a school that was primarily white, just to find all of these brothers on the picket line, that's what it was for me. The rest of the girls were falling out there looking rough on the picket line, and I was there in full make up and false eyelashes. I

hadn't seen any brothers to speak of for four years, except in the summertime." After that experience, Faith "knew everybody, because the protest was such an icebreaker."

Faith began experimenting with drugs early in her college career, and one of her roommates' boyfriend "was one of the drug dealers on campus, a huge one. We didn't even buy any drugs. Like on Friday I would just show up, and he would tell you what he had, and you could get your supply for the week. Her drug of choice was acid, as she explains:

The college was nuts then. Any night you would walk in the lobby, and there would be kids tripping. I think I was maybe a sophomore the first time I took some acid. But I really loved LSD, and so I would take that as many weekends as I could afford to. It was such a long high, and then there was such a long repair from it that you really had to be able to lose a weekend. I think that in college that was my drug of choice. I did lots of drugs. I don't think any more than anybody else, so I didn't think of it as lots of drugs then. But I probably would think of it as lots of drugs now. I can't imagine that there was any day that we didn't at least smoke a joint.

Faith was attending a predominantly white college in New York City, and she recalls that during freshmen orientation "one of the first things they told you was where Planned Parenthood was. And so almost every girl in that class was at Planned Parenthood the next day." She went on to say:

I wasn't fucking anybody but I was getting ready cause I knew it was coming. I had had sex, but I was just getting to school, and there was nobody that I was seeing. By the time I started seeing someone, I was already on the pill. You had things to do with your life. At that time abortion was illegal.

During this period Faith had her first adult relationship with a man which lasted through her college years. She met him at a party and she "looked at him and said, I'm going home with him tonight." Upon reflection Faith said, "this man was just too old for

me. He was a Vietnam vet who was going to school. He was maybe 25 or 26, and he was born and raised in Harlem, so he was slick. I don't think it now, but basically then I was a country hick. I was 18 and had gone to a Quaker school." Although she was seeing him on a steady basis, she found out later that "he was actually living with some girl who was sending him to school all the while we were together." So Faith told him that he had to make a choice; he chose her, and she found out that "was really just the biggest mistake." Recalling this experience, Faith said:

I knew from the moment that he left her, that's when shit with us really started to fall apart. He was too possessive. I remember one summer we were going to some barbeque, it was hot, it was New York in August, and so I had on some dress that had no back in it at all, and he told me to go and change my clothes. I remember looking at him and saying, I ain't never had no daddy, and I ain't looking for one. The idea that somebody thought that they could tell me what to wear was just sort of amazing to me. I really didn't have any clue that that was something that men thought that they could do with women that they were with. He was pissed, but I didn't change my clothes. He was evil and was not speaking all day. I felt that the biggest drawback of not having brothers, and not growing up with my dad, was not knowing the kind of bullshit that men had, until I was out in the world. I understood women's bullshit, but I just didn't know the kind of shit that made men crazy. By the middle of my senior year, I really had realized this was not something that I was going to be able to handle. So I decided to go on the road with a play. I'm telling him about it, and he said I couldn't go. All hell broke loose about me taking this job. I told you before, I don't have a daddy. He really went nuts and started breaking things in my house. He didn't hit me; he knew better than that. I'm not sure if I was in love with him. I thought I was then. Love for me then was probably danger and excitement. I was with him for three years.

Patricia had started "hanging-out" at bars with her girlfriend during this period.

"We would start Thursday night, and we would go Friday and Saturday," she said.

Sometimes Patricia and her girlfriend would even hang out with the neighborhood girl

who had bullied her as a child. Even though Patricia was "doing all this partying, there were times when I would just be in the house listening to music. For some reason it had a calming effect on me." She thought that she was "in control, but I wasn't really." She was still living at home but working, and she had to face a dilemma. As she said, "I didn't like being in the house with my father there, but also I didn't like not being there because I didn't know what was going to happen if I wasn't there." Patricia tried to avoid her father, but he was "still trying to tear away at how I felt about myself." They would argue. "He would talk about me, say I was going out drinking and doing God knows what. I told him that it was none of his business. I'm not asking for your money." Patricia admits that "at one point, I became very, very promiscuous":

I didn't understand where it was coming from. I was 18, and I just didn't care. I was also using alcohol and a little pot, but I was scared of pot. I was paranoid about pot because you never knew if somebody was going to put something in it. So I would just drink alcohol. But I was more of a beer drinker, but when I did drink alcohol it was to give the appearance of sophistication. But I would make certain to never ever drink anything that my father drank. That was my way of just shutting him out of my life. My mother knew that I was drinking, and she hated it, it bothered her tremendously. But she would be more concerned for my safety than anything else. I would just come back to the house at whatever hour I felt like coming back. It would never be like two or three days at a time. I didn't do that until much later on. At that time I was on birth control. I definitely wasn't bringing any babies home. I swore that I was never going to have children. I don't know why, but at that point I just didn't like children at all. They all annoyed me.

When Sara arrived on campus in 1965, one of the first things that she noticed during the freshman orientation week was "so many gorgeous men," and all she wanted to do was "just look at them." But she felt "out of touch" because she had "missed the last few years of American culture" by living in Germany for three years. So she was not

prepared for the new environment that she entered. As she said: "there were a lot of people from New York and Philly and Chicago and DC that came to college to catch somebody, and they came to party, and they came in Cadillacs and fur coats, and I didn't have any of that, I didn't come from any of that, I wasn't prepared for that. I put my jeans on and never took them off." She did develop friendships with some of the other female students, but the social expectations on campus continued to be a challenge for her. Sara, like her girlfriends, was a virgin, and she explains what this meant in that environment:

It was a big joke that we were all virgins. All three of us were like virgins. It was completely ridiculous. Everybody was trying to get laid. We were trying to get laid and get it over with because it was clear that we needed to get that out of the way. I was like one of the last ones. I don't think I was afraid of sex, I was afraid of losing respect, I was afraid of the consequences of what the relation of this man was going to be about. I was afraid of losing power. I don't think that I was afraid of the sex itself. I was ready for that, but I was afraid of the consequences of sex.

A major consequence of having sex was the possibility of getting pregnant. As Sara said, "pregnancy was one of the big fears" for women on campus, and "somehow or another we would all get pregnant." She became resentful of what she called the "bourgeois" climate on campus and how "traditional" the college was. She was particularly resentful about the way women were treated. "I felt like they treated us like we didn't have good sense there was something wrong with us, and they had to make us okay." In this context, Sara recalls two horrible experiences that involved women that she knew getting pregnant:

The dean of women cried about a baby being born in the dorm. She didn't cry because this girl had this baby by herself, which was a frightening idea, but because of the shame of it. The baby and the mother both lived and were sent home, and they were a big joke on campus. They had

nicknamed the baby Diploma because the mother came to college to get a diploma but that's what she went home with. It was horrible, horrible, horrible. There was a girl that died my freshman year, a white girl. There were a couple of white people I knew. There were several white people on campus, two that I knew well, and the one that died was one of them. She had an abortion and died. She bled to death. It was very shocking. It was shocking that somebody young could die. It was shocking that she bled to death, and we didn't know. All of her friends felt like I wasn't a good friend. Most of the women who even knew her felt like somehow we should've been able to help. We were all kids, but it seems like she should've said I need help here.

Sara still thought the guys on campus "looked good" but soon realized that many of them were "jive." But she did meet "this man who was a basketball player, who I eventually became engaged to." She describes him as "very straight. He didn't get high. He was kind of conservative." Recalling her relationship with him, Sara said:

He liked me. Pitiful child. If they liked me, I'm like okay, let me see if it will work. He was tall, he had a Volkswagen, and he was a nice guy, a very nice guy. Actually I slept with him, finally. He got it. And I got pregnant almost immediately, probably the first or second time I think I slept with this fool I got pregnant. I got pregnant, and he wanted to have the baby, and he was pretty conventional too. I was going to drop out and become this mother, and it was like no way I was going to do that. It was no way that I was going to drop out and be somebody's mother, no way.

So, Sara decided to get an abortion and in her search, because abortions were illegal at the time, she ended up going to two doctors. "I went to this black doctor, who was a horrible person. He gave me this shot, and it was supposed to make me abort, and he told me to go and carry stuff up and down the stairs, and on the way out he kicked me in my stomach. This was a very sophisticated method of abortion that we have here. I threw up, but I didn't lose the baby. After that experience I decided that I would keep the baby. My boyfriend said, no way, after you had that shot, and the fool kicked you in the

stomach, and now you're going to have this crooked ass baby. You should've thought of that before you took this drug." Two weeks later, Sara went to another abortionist, and she describes this experience:

I went to this old white man with this heavy German accent. There was like a whole room full of tables--this was completely illegal obviously then--and it felt like there were 10 or 20 people in there waiting. I wasn't in there by myself. There was a bunch of us in there having an abortion at the same time. It wasn't sterile, but it wasn't like a coat closet; it was a relatively clean place. He was doing the woman before me, and I was like watching and then he got to me. He got to me, and he hurt me, and I told him that he hurt me, and he was like, did it hurt when it went in? He just kept saying shit like that, I bet you were smiling then. I already felt like a horrible person. In a way it was kind of a relief because he made it so horrible, and he said all of the things out loud that I was thinking to myself. So it was sort of cathartic, I guess in a way. I went home in a cab, and my boyfriend was playing basketball some place. So he was gone and he was mad at me because I was having this abortion. That's when I was going to call my mom that night. I was like, why am I going to call her now and tell her I just killed your grandkid? I had to forgive myself on some level for that because I do feel like that was a baby.

Sara thought that she was going to die after this experience because she remembered her girlfriend who had bleed to death. As she said, "I didn't know how much blood was too much blood, so I remembered being afraid. I was cramping. The thing was to figure out how much blood is this, and is this enough blood to call somebody and let them know I've had this abortion, or can I wait it out? Because it was illegal, there was just nothing you could do really, but I seem to be okay." A month following the abortion, her boyfriend left for the Army. "He was on his way to Vietnam, the day of the Poor People's March on Washington, and he drove his Volkswagen to basic training. He came by, and I kissed him goodbye, and he drove off. I called him the next morning, and he had drowned. That's like maybe a month after I had killed his child, his only child,

so that was fucked up." Her boyfriend was given a military burial at Arlington National Cemetery with a gun salute, and Sara recalls that there was a funeral immediately before her boyfriend's and one immediately following his. "It was an amazing time. People were burying boys all over that motherfucker, it was horrible."

To deal with her grief and pain, Sara said that "drugs became much more a part of my life." Describing how she attempted to cope with her grief during this period, she recalls:

Once this guy gave me a big purple pill, and I just dropped it. I never asked what the shit was, and I hallucinated the whole day. It was great. I was a head then; I really wasn't a head before that. I just started hanging out with a whole different crowd of people, and we had a good time. I went to a party and ended upstairs on the coats in the bedroom with this guy. I don't know what people thought. Here I was supposed to be grieving over this loss of this man, and I'm screwing this man on the coats at a party. That's how I dealt with his death to a certain extent. I think what I did was a lot of sex, a lot of drugs, a lot of rock and roll, and politics.

At the more conservative black Southern college that Amanda attended, "there was a lot of partying where there was a lot of drinking, but if there were people who were like really into drugs, I wasn't like a part of that." Rather than politics, campus life for Amanda was dominated by the activities of sororities and fraternities. And "the whole color thing was big on campus." She joined the AKA sorority and went over "in the spring of my sophomore year." But she was uncomfortable with the color hierarchy of the sorority and fraternity culture. Explaining this hierarchy and its implications, Amanda said:

It was clear in the sororities that color was a big thing. Like the Deltas, for the most part, were all very light-skinned. The AKAs were brown. And

the Zetas were very dark and supposedly very studious-looking, or I guess they would call them nerds now. The Kappas were sort of mixed, light and brown. The Alphas were mainly brown to dark, and the Omegas were all light. And their queens, if you look at a picture of the queens, they were all light. It was a color thing in terms of how men chose women; it wasn't that big a thing between the sisters themselves. There was only one person I remember who made a tremendous issue out of it. She was very fair and had straight hair, and she thought that she was better than everybody else. I don't remember that tension because I had a mixture of friends, brown, black, whatever. As a matter of fact, I remember one sister that they used to call her black beauty. She was very very pretty. She was black, and very beautiful. But there was this historical thing about who would be a queen, they wouldn't even think of picking a brown-skinned queen. These were like homecoming queens, and the different fraternities would pick queens to represent their fraternity. It really stood out in terms of how men would pick, and who they thought were attractive.

Amanda said that her college administration "pretended" that there was no sex occurring on campus. "It was like one of these typical hypocritical situations where you could trip over sex, but everybody pretended that it was not happening. It was going on everywhere all the time with everybody. It was like rampant." During her freshman year, she vaguely recalls a young woman getting pregnant, but "toward the end of my senior year, it was almost like a fetish. Women were getting pregnant to get married." Amanda viewed many of the men on campus as "dogs." As she said, "they would start reputations about women if they just walked passed you. The next day it was like a bulletin. They were awful. And if you did sleep with them forget about it, everybody and his mother knew about it. You had to really be very careful." But Amanda did become involved with this "brother who was an Omega man," and at the end of the semester when she returned to New York City to work a summer job, found out that she was pregnant. Explaining how she dealt with this situation, she said:

I was using foam which did not work, and I got pregnant. I went to the family doctor who didn't tell me that I was pregnant. Of course abortions were illegal then. He told me that I had some kind of blood clot, and he was going to help me bring it down. He gave me some injection. I bled and bled and bled, practically that whole summer. I went back to him. He keeps on giving me shots, and they weren't working, and eventually he did a D&C. I didn't realize that I was pregnant. I bought into his story. I felt that I had used protection, and maybe there was something wrong.

In addition to having to deal with the pregnancy and the abortion, Amanda also had to deal with the family doctor's abuse:

He tried to sexually abuse me, and then I found out later from some other people how he used to do women. I remember one time that I went there and he was supposed to be examining me, and then he kept on making comments about my breasts. Then he started fondling them, and then he bent down and actually started sucking. And I was like what are you doing? And I pushed him away. But I didn't know any better then. He was a black doctor, and as a matter of fact, my mother used to go to him. I just took it in stride. I didn't get sick or anything other than the bleeding.

On the other hand, Faith recalls a friend, during this period, who got pregnant and went to Canada to get an abortion:

I remember the first woman who got an abortion, the suction kind. She had to go to Canada for it. It was somebody I was in school with; it was a white girl. But she went to Canada because they weren't doing it in the States yet. She and her boyfriend had gone to Canada, and they stayed overnight, and then they came back to New York. I remember asking her how she felt, and she said, Faith if anything, it's too easy. She said, you know maybe it ought to be a little harder than that. Two hours after it was done, I could have come home. We spent the night because that's what we planned to do.

Barbara was living in New York City too, and working a series of clerical jobs. She eventually found one at an advertising firm that she liked. She said, "I think that's when my life started." It was a "whole other life" and "there were parties all the time." Barbara met her "first love" at a dance and he held out his hand, and I never let go."

Recalling how she felt about this relationship, she said:

I loved him. He was the first person I ever slept with. I just loved him. It was heaven, and he was it. He was going to college. I loved him, but I was with him, and he said Barbara you're too dark. That's what he said. But it didn't matter what he said. I didn't care. He was sort of like upward mobile. He wanted this really high yellow girl with straight hair. That's what he wanted. He was in school and I was a worker. I wasn't in college and he was, and I didn't represent to him what success was. He was like this from the very beginning. I knew it when I met him, I knew what he wanted, he wanted the black American dream. Again, I was put into another situation where I had to prove myself, to say that, hey I'm a person and I'm worthy. I knew that at that particular time any person that I met, I was going to have that same problem. I had enough reality to understand that blacks have a tendency to want to marry up; they don't want to marry down. So I just said, I will try everything, every way possible to get this man. When he was in school, he had other girlfriends. So I started doing more socializing with my advertising friends. We were together for three years.

After the breakup with her boyfriend, Barbara made a conscious effort to change herself. She had started out working in an advertising firm "as a secretary, and then I worked up to a producer, producing jingles and stuff." She was meeting "all kinds of people. We would go to Andy Warhol's studio. I would sit in places and say I can't believe that I'm here because I was this poor girl from Michigan, and here I am in the midst of all these people. I totally erased my early part of life." Describing how she went about changing herself, Barbara said:

I became a clone; I said, I'm going to walk like this person, I'm going to talk like that person, I'm going to eat like this person, I'm going to dress like that person. I had no identity. I totally changed who I was. I became a plastic person. I only shopped at Saks. I had to have only this kind of stuff. I was just a real phony person. I became a notorious liar in terms of who I was. I was erasing poverty and adopting class and sophistication. I remember once going out to dinner and it was like this real posh place and they had so many forks on the table that I didn't even know what to pick up. So I said, you better sit here and watch and when somebody picks up

something, do that. When they ordered food, I was like mesmerized. Then I said, you better order the same thing that other person is ordering so when they start eating you will know which fork to pick up. All of that kind of stuff was really important to me. It was so important.

Gradually, Barbara "started not liking the person" she was creating because of "all of the lies." She became embarrassed by her family, particularly her mother who came to visit her, and she "didn't want people to know anything." But she introduced her mother to her friends, and "it wasn't as drastic as I thought that it would be because I really wasn't around that many black people by then." After being frustrated and disappointed by several relationships with black men, Barbara made another important decision about her life: she would "never see another black man again, never. Then I got involved in one relationship after another with white men." Recalling her first date with a white guy, she said he was:

a young guy around my age. He took me to lunch at the Museum of Modern Art, and I was so uncomfortable, really uncomfortable. It was a whole cultural thing. Most of the white people I had dealt with prior to that had been at the music conservatory, but other than that my whole life was just like totally black, and everything I did was black, and I wasn't attracted to white men. I don't think that I saw the guy any more, but what I liked was the fact that this guy was introducing me to things that I had never thought of doing myself. And then from there on, as I was more involved in the agency's business, I would meet other white guys, and it was the same kind of thing. It was like I was always being introduced to things, and I always liked real smart men. It was really funny: it wasn't like I loved them, it was just the fact that they were showing me something that I had never been exposed to, and most of the black guys that I knew had not shown me these kinds of things.

Barbara also started to hang out with a friend who had a house in East Hampton, where she would attend big parties and go to Sunday brunches. As she said, "I really didn't know who these people were," but this experience began to change her life even

more, and she was having conflicts within herself because "I was like this little poor girl, and what is she doing here? That whole thing used to always bother me." Barbara explains how she attempted to cope with the changes in her life:

This was in the late 60's. What I had started doing was, in order to deal with this, I started drinking. When I drank that's when I had the personality: I could talk and communicate and I was fun. But I felt myself losing myself because of what I had done. It totally changed my whole life. I turned it upside down, and I just created who I wanted to be. This new person was very insecure. I was a performer, that's exactly what it was. In any given situation, it was sort of like, okay, it's just before it's time to go on stage. now let me get ready, and then I would change into this fun, witty person. The low self-esteem was still there because I would meet people and they would say, you're so bright, why aren't you doing this and why aren't you doing that? I couldn't do it because I didn't trust myself, and I was so fearful. The drinking kind of helped because if I didn't drink then I wouldn't have been able to communicate with these people. I wasn't drinking a lot at that time. I knew that I was very uncomfortable, and so I picked up the drink, and then when I picked up the drink, I was very comfortable.

Anne said that "alcohol was the only drug that I had taken on a regular basis. It was mixed drinks, and actually, I started drinking when I was in college." She describes herself as a "scotch drinker," but then she went to San Francisco in 1965, where "there was a serious drug scene." It was there that she first "ever did coke." She had met some friends, and they would have "cocaine and champagne parties." But she discovered that she did not like the "Chatty Cathy personality that I developed." Anne returned to New York City more "conscious of cocaine and more conscious of heroin and certainly more conscious of marijuana." But basically she drank, "maybe five or six drinks a night." Although she had several short-term relationships with men, during this period in her life she was "much more interested in hanging out and having fun. Hanging out meant that

on the weekends you entertained yourself." And she "adopted this personality called Mary Brown":

Mary was the name that I made up. I created this personality for me to be out with these older girlfriends on the weekend. Mary had red hair and her last name was Brown. I had a whole rap. I had her phone number down; it was my phone number but a digit changed at the end. Mary was confident, Mary was very funny, Mary was very well dressed, and she was educated. But she was also very congenial, and she was principled, and she was out with her girlfriends; she came with her girlfriends and she left with her girlfriends. She didn't go out to be picked up. She was a full-time employed person. I would turn her on sometime in the course of the evening, probably after we ate. Some stranger would come over and start talking, and I would develop this Mary persona to facilitate the conversation and make me feel safe without divulging who I really was. The red hair helped me make the fantasy work. So that's how she got created: she was a safety valve; she was a support. It was a big joke with my girlfriends. It wasn't done to hurt anybody, but they knew that if I had turned Mary on it was mainly because I wasn't interested in doing anything with this guy other than have a conversation. Mary was a defense mechanism.

Jackie also changed her appearance during this period, but it was largely in response to the black cultural climate of the time. As she said, "I had an Afro, very long, blowing in the wind Afro. I even had a braid coming out of my Afro. Platform shoes, definitely. Walking suit, with bell bottom pants. Dungarees, I wore lots of dungarees. It was a time that I was relaxing."

Amanda also remember this period and recalls a time when she attended the funeral of a cousin who had been killed.

[I had] this huge Angela Davis natural. And had on this little tiny dress that was knit. I thought that this dress was so beautiful. It was a knit dress, but it was crocheted, so you could see through it, and I didn't have a bra on. I also had on these big ugly pink shoes that went with the dress. Plus, when I came back for the funeral, I came back with this fella. I came back with this professor, with this white professor. He was supposed to be

dressed mind you. He had on these shoes that were too big for him, and this oversized jacket, and he looked all wild and everything. Much later my mother told me that my father thought that I had lost my mind.

Patricia said the "late 60s was my time. All of a sudden I'm hearing that black is beautiful, and I'm not even questioning it when I hear it." She had struggled for most of her life with issues of self-esteem and self-image so she welcomed the changing cultural climate that celebrated black women. Her decision to wear an Afro was, indeed, a big decision because Patricia had "worn a wig for years." She talks about the reason why she started wearing a wig: a girlfriend had put "this hair straightener in my hair, and when she rinsed my hair out all of my hair is coming out in the sink. I'm screaming and hollering and my mother runs in the bathroom and put this big towel on my head. I take the towel off my head and my hair is like in the towel, it came out in big patches. I wasn't completely bald, but my hair had come out in such big spots that you couldn't even comb any hair over it. I had to end up wearing a wig." Elaborating further, Patricia said:

I had to constantly wear a wig. To make it worse, my hair had been dyed red. I had to go and buy a red wig. So I found this shop where they made wigs out of human hair. I must say that it was a pretty good wig because I could straighten that wig with a hot comb, and do all kinds of stuff with it. It lasted me a good number of years. But I didn't have to wear it for that long. This is how when you got a problem with your self-esteem and your image, how you can get trapped into things. The wig did look nice. It did look human, and I combed it and kept it like it was my hair. I had gotten so accustomed to it like it was a part of me, and I said Lord if I take this thing off my head now a whole other person is going to be showing up, and she no longer is going to be attractive. That was the first thing I thought, and people are going to be saying, oh my God what happened to you?. So I just kept it on for a number of years.

Patricia felt that the time was right for her to take her wig off, and when she decided to wear an Afro "ironically my mother was the first one who questioned it. I

remember my mother looking at me and just shaking her head and me telling her I'm going to wear my hair the way I was born with it. She looked at me and said, darling when you were born your hair did not look like that." Patricia had decided to wear an Afro "for a number of reasons":

I looked around and I saw so many of my brothers and my sisters with these Afros, and to me they looked absolutely beautiful. Then the consciousness, being made aware of the whole thing about straightening your hair and why many of us did it. I remember Sonya Sanchez stating the absolute insanity of trying to physically look like the other when it is physically impossible. By doing that you were telling yourself that you don't like yourself, and you're denying all that came before you. I said to myself, it's about time that I accept me and my hair for what it is. I said, I got to start going around liking what I was born with, as opposed to detesting it and hiding it all the time. I wore that natural for a long time.

Men and Love and Marriage and Other Men

Of the nine women participating in this study, three were married during the 1960s. In 1960 Mary married her "childhood sweetheart," who followed her to New York. "because I wanted to get away from my parents. I was tired of taking care of everything, you know." She was 20 years old and felt that "if I didn't make the move then, I would probably get stuck in a rut, and never do anything with my life." But Mary said, she "always knew from the time that I was eight that I was going to get married, who I was going to marry, and how many kids I was going to have, and they were going to be two boys. I had a revelation in church one time, and I could see all of this stuff." So she busied herself with wedding plans and describing what happened during the preparations, she said her boyfriend:

had followed me to New York and he was waiting for me to tell him yes. I

said, well let me think about it because I knew that I had to have money for a wedding, and I was working in the cleaners by then. I decided to get married. We were both working. My mother and father didn't contribute one penny toward my wedding. My parents weren't unhappy with me getting married. I think my mother was happy cause she still couldn't tell which way I was swaying sexually, and I didn't discuss stuff like that with her. The night before I got married, I heard him on the telephone talking to his girlfriend. He was apologizing for not being able to get away because we were upstairs doing wedding plans. I confronted him with it, and I went home. and I told my mother that I wasn't getting married after we had invested all of that money. I said, my mind tells me this is not the right thing to do. I said, I can just wait, I said, because I have somebody else that I like in the South better anyway. I was very matter of fact about things. My mother and my father listened, and then we finally decided that I would go ahead with the wedding.

Jackie also married a childhood friend in 1968. She said, "I knew that a wedding in my household would have been too problematic, because I had controlling people in my family, so it wouldn't have been my wedding anyway. We just went downtown and did it." Jackie decided to get married "because that was a part of the American dream. I felt obligated, and I was getting old--I was 19 or 20." She wasn't sure as to whether or not she "was in love." But she was sure that he was "a friend and we got along well together. But love, I don't know if I would categorize it that way." In January 1969 Jackie had her first daughter, but she said "I don't know if I was pregnant when I got married. I don't think so; it must have been a couple of weeks in between."

Jackie was "basically responsible for paying the bills, and she "worked the whole time I was pregnant with my daughter." She described a "fairly easy labor" and said her "husband was ecstatic; he was very happy about this." But she felt that having a baby "was just something that you were supposed to do." Her best girlfriend told her that "she didn't know why I ever became a mother because I just wasn't the mother type of

person."

Anne got married in 1969. She was 27 years old. She said, "I guess that it was time to get married." As the oldest child in her family, "there was the pressure" about her marrying. "My mother and different relatives would hammer home, when are you going to get married?" Anne met her future husband, and he possessed for her an "interesting balance" for her life. "This was a guy who had a job, who was nice, he dressed well, he had a college degree which I didn't have, and he was going to graduate school to become a hospital administrator. So I thought, okay." She had a traditional church wedding. She "spent a whole year organizing, reading, and working this whole thing out," and her "parents were very happy that I was getting married." After she got married, Anne quit her job:

It was too much to juggle a 6-day work week. I literally had one day to myself and then I would have to do the housework and all that. My husband came from one of those squeaky clean southern grandmother oriented matriarchal homes. His mother never married his father, and his father had died. His mother had a lot of personal principles and I was a northerner. They were very concerned about appearances, presentation, status. They had more money than my family did, but they didn't have the education. They didn't have what might be considered middle-class values. I think that was a struggle for me. The struggle became more intense as the relationship began to be problematic. I stopped working, and that changed the economics of the house: there was less money; there had been two salaries. I felt financially dependent on him at the time, and I hated it.

Anne's marriage gradually started to unravel during the first year. After quitting her job, her life started to change in ways that she had not anticipated:

When I decided to quit my job, I think that he was appreciative of the fact that I did leave because that meant I would have more time to be the wife. That was the first time I remembered reacting to the label of wife as a

thing. It became an issue in our relationship because he had expectations of his wife ironing his shirts and cooking the meals. I used to get a report card for dust left on the dresser top or a ring around a glass. If I just dusted around the edges and he would pick up this bud vase and see this ring, he would come back and say, Anne look at this and there would be my F. I tried to do those things that were expected of me, I seriously tried during the first year, and I finally said this is not me.

Patricia met the man she would marry on her job. Her first impressions of him were: "he was arrogant, boisterous, and he just knew that every woman in the universe, not the job, but the universe, was madly in love with him." He was from the south and "he just broke down the barriers." Patricia said, "I just knew that I was in love," and she was attracted to "his arrogance. He had this air of I know who I am, and I don't care if you don't like who I am, I like me, and I'm important. I was attracted to that I'm-sure-of-myself kind of attitude and I'm not afraid of the world." Patricia discovered that they had some experiences in common. "His father tried to flush his mother's head down the toilet, and when he came in to stop him, his father ran into the back room and got the shotgun and was going to kill him. But his mother prevented that. His mother died when he was 15." They dated for a year and Patricia asked him to marry her. As she explains:

I have to be honest, I think a part of me got married because I didn't think that anyone would want to marry me. I got to be honest here. I asked him what he thought about getting married, and he said, sure. I wanted to be married, but I had this whole fairy tale idea of what my marriage would be like, as opposed to what my mother's was like. I was bound and determined to make it happen, but I didn't think that anybody would ever want to marry me. So when he was receptive, I hopped to it.

Patricia also had a traditional church wedding and her father "gave me away and I didn't want that to happen, but he was there dragging me down the aisle like he was in a hurry to get rid of me." She said that at the ceremony there were signs that she did not

pay attention to. "The groom was late for the wedding, and the preacher couldn't even remember my name. But of course I was determined to go on and do this." Patricia's wedding reception was not unproblematic either. She said that her "father just showed his natural ass" at her reception because he was jealous of her mother. But she settled down to married life, and they made a pact, an agreement. They talked about the kind of marriage they wanted for themselves:

We wanted a marriage that was not violent because we both grew up under that. We were going to sit down and talk over our problems. We knew that there might be a little screaming and hollering, but there would be no hitting. We agreed that we would not think about having any children until we were married at least three years.

Their agreement lasted for about three months and things changed:

Three months after I was married, we had this huge fight. I mean a physical fight, not an argument. People tickle me when they say we had a fight, and I'm thinking physical and they're talking words: two totally different things to me. It started because I was standing outside talking to some friends. It was hot. It was August. Our apartment was so tiny, it was like you couldn't breathe. It was just one room. My husband had come out of the building and just looked. I waved and kept on talking. They said he came out again and he looked. And he came out again and said very loud, I think that you better get in the house. Now that was the worst thing that he could have ever done, the absolute worst thing. So I deliberately stayed there 10 more minutes. I'm not a child. I go into the apartment, and he's just carrying on like a crazy man. I'm giving as good as I'm getting. The bed was one of those metal frames with sharp edges. When he pushed me, my mouth hit the edge of the bed, and it broke my tooth. Of course there's blood everywhere, and this is a full out war now. I'm grabbing butcher knives. I'm trying to cut people's heart out and all of this kind of nonsense. We ended up out in the streets. Either he was chasing me, or I was chasing him. I forget at this point. The people outside were trying to split us up because neither one of us was willing to give any ground. I was embarrassed and outraged over the nonsense he was talking, and I guess he was on some kind of macho trip. I called my brother to come and help me remove my belongings to go to his house. I said, oh God, I've married my father. I always swore that I would never marry a man like my father, and first try, bingo, I married my father.

Chapter Four:

The World Of Women

During the 1970s most of the women in this study began to settle into a way of life. For some this meant trying to figure out how to balance the day-to-day demands of raising a young family with that of making a living. Others were attempting to enter avenues of non-traditional employment in an attempt to establish professional careers. By the early 1970s, many of the civil rights organizations were engaged in legal, legislative, and electoral struggles to protect the hard-won political gains that were starting to be chipped away by conservative groups across the country. The Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO), sponsored by the federal government to disrupt radical black organizations, along with self-sabotage had taken a tremendous toll on the struggle for black social justice as envisioned by many young black militants and in the process destroyed the lives of many who championed its cause. The United State undeclared war against Vietnam was nearing an end. And women with diverse and sometimes divergent political agendas were stepping up organized efforts in their campaigns for social equality.

What did women want? There were different answers to this question depending upon how different groups of women interpreted their needs, interests and aspirations at the time. The women's movement, as it was popularly known, was composed of broad-based national campaigns such as efforts to get three-fourths of the states to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), advocacy to legalize abortion, and attempts to end gender-based discrimination in the work place. And there were also important women-led efforts during this period that were not necessarily associated with the women's movement. These campaigns were more locally based but had national implications. They included efforts to reform the welfare system, attempts to gain community control over local school districts, and demands for more child care services. This chapter examines how the women negotiated and renegotiated the various social constructions of the role of women in their attempts to "map out a space" for themselves.

Women As Daughters

For many of the women in this study, their mothers continued to be an important influence in their adult lives during the 1970s. But this relationship was in a constant state of negotiation. As children, the women had engaged in the often painful process of dealing with their mothers' expectations for them; as adults they had to deal with their own expectations of themselves.

Anne described her mother as "a brilliant and manipulative and talented woman, who had many talents, expressed and unexpressed." She felt that her mother wanted her "to be something that she wanted me to be, not necessarily the person that I wanted to be." And neither of them saw her life as a model for Anne:

I began to hear her. I begin to listen to some of the things that she had to say. She was not a happy woman. She was unhappy living a life of repression as a wife and as a mother. I, of course, was stunned. I tried to listen, and I also tried to be honest. She would ask me, did I understand what she was talking about? And I told her no, I don't know. I'm trying to, but I don't understand. Your choices would not be the choices that I would be making. I felt that it was important for me to keep this identity that I had worked so hard at sharpening and feeling good about. I didn't want to say that I understood something that I didn't understand. She wanted me to be the daughter that she wanted me to be, whatever that was. And she said so. But I still haven't figured it out yet.

Anne realized that she had made some different choices about her life:

I was not involved in a marriage; I didn't have any children; I had the opportunity to move; I had the opportunity to look upon my life and attempt to make changes and get rid of the negative driftwood and build a new foundation, whatever it may be. I thought that as an African American woman, I was very fortunate to have the space to be able to do that because a lot of people never get the opportunity regardless of race, regardless of gender.

Amanda was also making different choices--choices her mother thought were

nonsense or worse. One of the issues they disagreed on was politics, and their different views played an important role in their relationship. Politics influenced some of the significant decisions that Amanda made about how she would live her life. Amanda recalls a relationship she developed with a guy who was in a political organization with her, and, based upon mutual political considerations, they decided to get married. She took him home to meet her mother and:

My mother sat there very calmly, and she listened to all of our nonsense. We were telling her what we were involved in and how we were committed to this and that, and how our relationship fit into this politics. My mother said, I'm not going to stand in your way, but I'm not going to be involved in this nonsense. I don't want to have anything to do with it. As a matter of fact, if I had a choice and someone asked me, I would probably do everything I could to destroy it because I don't believe in anything you all have done. I don't believe in communism. We were like really furious with her. But we had done our little do. He knew that our relationship was supposedly based on politics, but we split politically, and that was the end of our relationship. My mother, of course, thought that I was a total lunatic. We were getting into disagreements. She couldn't understand why I was doing all this. She didn't agree that she was anti-communist; she just didn't agree with that. We could analyze this society and we were in total agreement, but when we started talking about solutions, that's when we parted ways. And that's what she basically said.

Some of the women in discussing their relationships dealt with the expectations and disappointments they had of their mothers. Given her father's abusive relationship toward her mother, Patricia struggled to understand why her mother did not leave her father. As a child, she thought that her mother stayed with her father because of her. "She had told me this on a number of occasions, well that is your father and I don't want to bring another man in here. I'm not going to be comfortable because he's not your father, and I don't know what he might or might not try to do. I told her repeatedly, ma

you know I don't care. I just don't want to be around him anymore. Leave the man."

After she had gotten married and moved out of her parents' apartment, Patricia only wanted to visit her mother when her father was not around. For her, things were "just always hectic in my mother's house because he would still try to fight her." Patricia recalls an incident when she was forced to intervene in one of her parents' fights:

My mother would call the police on him. Yeah, they would come and walk him around the block and tell him to calm down, and then they would send him back home. They never arrested him. I remember at one point he attacked her, and I had called the police, and they didn't even bother to come. That's the time when I jumped in the fight, and he literally almost killed me. Later my mother said to me, that's why I didn't want you children getting involved because I'm used to him, and I know what he will do, you don't, and you're not used to fighting with a man. All I know is that he was trying to do some damage to my mother.

As an adult, Patricia resigned herself to the possibility that her mother was not going to leave her father:

Obviously she stayed with the man because she loved him. I don't know what other reasons there were. I know she said she didn't want any other man raising her children. I think now, as a woman, she just loved him. She knew him before he got this crazy, so there was something that she was holding onto, and there's that whole abuse syndrome. It's ironic because I never, ever saw my mother as an abused wife until I got much older. That word, abused wife, and my mother just didn't seem to fit. I never associated it with her, simply because, whenever he would physically attack her, she seemed to always be able to handle it. She could always put him in his place. And on one level she seemed to psychologically have the upper hand.

Some of the women's relationships with their mothers developed into friendships.

However, although Faith said, "my relationship with my mother was great," she continued to jockey around her mother's expectations. She discusses why she believes some of the friction developed in their relationship:

My relationship with my mother was fine, it was always okay. It was just that we began to have some friction, and we never had had friction. It wasn't anything that either of us knew how to handle with each other. Ours was the relationship that all my friends envied. Although now that I'm older, I really do realize that there were some great things about our relationship, but my mother, like most black women of her generation, did not know how to talk about sex. Once that got in the game things got tense. I don't know if she was trying to tell herself that at that age I was some virgin or what. My mother was much more straight-laced than I am, sexually, much more straight-laced. I never knew any boyfriends that my mother had. This is when you get to be 30, and you look back on it. When my mother left my dad, she was 29. They got married when she was 26. I was born when she was 27. So you know when you start to get to be 29, and you realize that your mother was not an old woman; she's a young attractive woman. But I never knew who her boyfriends were, never saw them. But I'm sure she had them. My mother's whole sexual activity as a woman did not happen where I could see it.

Her mother did support her passion for acting, but Faith also recognized the limits in their relationship:

One of the things about my mom that I was always clear about was her feelings about things. If you thought that you were old enough to do something then be able to do it. Don't call your mama to clean up your shit and get you out of it. So if you think you're grown and you old enough to do this, then be old enough to be responsible. That was always my primary concern too. Am I doing something where this may blow up, and I'm going to have to call my mom? When I call her she is really going to be evil, you know. She was very encouraging about my acting. I think my mother had had some ideas about being a visual artist when she got out of school. So she didn't think the arts wasn't a valid career. And I think she started to see that people could make a living at it. I never got any job shit from her.

Sara believes that she could have benefitted from her mother's insights and support, but her mother died in the early parts of the 70s. Upon reflection, Sara felt that during a time in her adult life she was somehow in "competition" with her mother. She saw her mother as "perfect, and "she did everything right." Sara said, "I really missed

her." But she said, "I don't remember a lot of things about her because she died when she was young; it's like mythical to me." But what she does remember is how she felt when her mother died:

It just left a big old hole. I didn't realize what it would feel like to lose her. She had a stroke. My sister found her on the floor. She had been mopping the floor when she had the stroke. I tried to get caught-up with my life, and my father kept saying your mother wouldn't want you to give up your life. We want you to do what you need to do, and he really pushed me to get married. I just didn't know what to do. I couldn't make up my mind what to do. I heard later that a lot of people get married after they lose, especially their mothers. I wrote to her, I have a suitcase of writings in it, and I think I wrote to her in a journal. I felt horrible, and I thought about her everyday. And then there came a day that I didn't think about her at all. And it felt horrible.

On the other hand, Sharon said, she "didn't feel as close to her mother as some people feel to theirs." After she moved to New York City, Sharon had limited contact with her mother. She "might go home for Christmas, write her letters, or talk on the phone to her." but although her father came for visits, her mother "never came to New York."

Jackie also did not go around her mother as much as she used to because she did not particularly care for her stepfather. And sometimes when she did visit, it was to intervene in conflict. Jackie recalls one such incident:

Him and my mom must have gotten into an argument, and folks were calling around for me to come home. I didn't live there. I was already married and had kids. This was about 1974. He was acting up, and they said come home, your stepfather is acting-up. I think about it now and say, this is what they really must've thought of me. I was the only one who could control this man that was in the house. And so I go home, and my grandmother hands me a machete, and in my mind I'm like, oh it's like that. So when I confronted him, he pulls out his gun on me, and I pull out my gun on him. I knew he wasn't going to shoot me, and he pulled

the gun out because he had one. He didn't know that I had one too. If he would have shot me, I would have shot him too. I was like, you got a gun, so. Big shit. I do too--plus a machete and a couple of switchblades.

In describing her relationship with her mother, Jackie said, it "was probably the same as it is now. My mother is my mother. She will always be my mother. I will never know more than my mother, and pretty much what my mother says goes."

Women and Children

Four of the nine women in this study had children. Although three were married when their children were born, all would eventually raise their children as single mothers.

Mary was excited at the birth of her first child. It was a boy and she named him after his father: "he was a junior." She had taken a maternity leave from her job, but after the birth of her son she "only wanted to work part-time," so that she could be at home with him. But soon after she returned to work, she "got pregnant again with her second son." And after the birth of her second child, she had to return to work sooner than she wanted to because her "son needed some shoes, and I didn't have money to buy them, so I said to my husband, I'm going to get a job today, and when he came back home that evening I had a job." Even though they both worked, Mary and her husband both took responsibility for the child care arrangements, as she said:

I worked from 6:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. My husband worked from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; he would get home around a quarter to five. He worked for transit in the maintenance department. When he would come in I would leave, so we didn't have to pay a baby sitter. But I missed my kids, especially the baby, when I went to work. I didn't breast feed either one.

Mary would also get active in school, community and child care politics and they

would struggle against the threats of gang violence, drugs and her children rebellion. As her sons began to grow to school age, she became very active in "everything that my sons were involved in." In the early 1970s, she became president of the parent/teacher's association (PTA) at her sons' school. As she said:

I did very militant things. We were meeting about the conditions of the schools, the input of the parents, and the safety and security and the plant situation of the schools. We had about eight different big committees and then subcommittees. We were closing off the streets and marching around the district superintendent's office when he would disagree with something that we wanted done at our school. We would have demonstrations. I remember one day I hadn't slept, and I think that I had worked overtime that night, and the cop was giving me a hard time. I cursed him out so bad. The principal came out and said, oh officer you have to excuse Mary, she didn't mean that. I said, yes I did. I said, he has no right putting his hands on me. He was trying to make somebody leave the marching area. You know, when I say curse. I don't mean M...F...and all of that, but I probably used some shit and damn and that kind of stuff. We did a lot of things that had to be done so the parents would get involved and we could change things.

When her sons reached their pre and early adolescent years. Mary found out that her husband had "abused my youngest son." Explaining what this meant, Mary said:

I left him with his father very early because I was working nights. I learned later that my husband would tell him that he wasn't his father cause he didn't look like his brother. He was more verbally than physically abusive. They would have told me if their father had hit them. My youngest son developed a complex; he was introverted, he was extremely introverted, like a hermit. He internalized a lot of stuff. I wasn't aware of the damage that was being created.

Mary discovered that her sons had started to use drugs during this period:

They started to experiment with drugs when they got to junior high school. I moved from the area, thinking that I was taking them out of whatever environment they were getting involved in. But by then drugs were in the schools also. They were close as brothers, close enough to keep secrets. By the time they reached high school, my oldest son was on track to

become a lawyer, but he stopped going to class. I got him re-instated three times. Then after that, he said he was going to just get his GED. He was courting this girl quite actively; they were into sex and everything. I saw a letter that this girl had written to him that said, if you don't give me a baby I will find somebody that will. I was shocked, so I called the girl's mother to tell her, but the girl was already pregnant. So they got married when he was 17. Her mother signed off on something, and they had a civil ceremony. I wasn't even aware that they were married; he sort of did it without my consent. I was hoping that he was going to college at the time. My youngest son followed in his brother's footsteps. He was devastated when his brother left. He started hanging out with, I guess it was a gang, but they would not go to school. I would ask him why he did drugs. He said, why do you care? My daddy didn't want me and you don't want me either. I tried to get help, taking them to counselors, trying every avenue to circumvent what was happening. I felt guilty about the early damage, that I wasn't aware, that I didn't detect it. I dealt with this pain by getting an ulcer.

Jackie, like Mary, had two children who were close in age. She had her first child, a girl, because "it was what you were supposed to do." She worked the whole time she was pregnant, and she returned to work soon after the baby was born. But she did not work for long. She quit her job because she thought that she was on the "verge of having a break down." As she said, "I mentally couldn't take it and maybe it was cause I had the responsibility now of another person." She stayed home, and her husband took financial responsibility for the family. But within a year she was "pregnant again," and shortly after she gave birth to her son, Jackie decided to go back to work because "now I needed to buy a washing machine and dryer and all that other stuff."

Her daughter was two years old when she decided to look for employment, but she also had to "look for day care." That is when Jackie "got into community work":

That's when I got politically involved. My husband's aunt told me that they were fighting for day care and for parent-controlled day care. Since I didn't know what day care was anyway, parent controlled daycare was

something totally different. So when I got involved with them, I realized that they were fighting for parents to have some say so over what children were doing in their schools, and the fact that they could be there if they chose to or not. That parents could hire teachers and all that kind of stuff. I said, yeah that's good. That's when I got involved in day care and the sit ins that they did at ACD [Agency for Child Development], to make sure that the kids had food and the books were there. And they didn't want to fund us. We made sure that the school stayed opened, coordinated parents cooking and bringing in food, and just making sure that things ran as smoothly as possible. I didn't play a leadership role; I was in a learning role. I was trying to learn what was going on; what was the politics; why certain things were a certain way. So I just wanted to learn, and then try and find where my place was going to be at. I knew that I was going to stay in that kind of work. This was around 1971.

Jackie describes her relationship with her first two children as close, but she was clear about expressing who was in control of her household:

My relationship with my children was: they were children and I was the mother. They had to just really understand that there was no equal stuff in the house. So if you don't like my style, then you can go and live somewhere else. I would punish them, and if their behavior got really out of hand you got a beating. Basically when my kids got older, I couldn't give them beatings; you had to give them a beat down, so that they could remember the difference. The difference is: a beating is like you can't do that no more; a beat down be like you be trying to kill them. Look, I'm going to kill you. And you take anything--a pipe, broom, fist, anything. My thing would be like, don't make me act crazy. And they understood that. Understanding of don't make your mother act crazy, means don't make your mother act up, even say yes, if you mean no.

Jackie viewed herself as "very family orientated," and she and the children "did a lot of traveling" together. But she admits that she could not think of herself "as being a good mother." She said, "she was writing the script as she went along. I didn't pay that much attention to anybody raising me or what they were doing, so I couldn't remember what was supposed to be going on." As she looked back, she said, "I think a lot of times a lot of decisions I made, I didn't think that they were anybody else's decisions or take

into consideration anybody else's feelings but my own. So I basically raised my kids in ways that were right for me."

Patricia said, although there were major tensions in their relationship, that she "intentionally got pregnant" because she loved her husband and wanted his child. She said when her husband found out that she was pregnant "he made all of these promises to me. I should have known better than to listen to him. Part of me didn't believe him, but part of me wanted to believe him." Based on his promises, Patricia decided to quit her job. "I stopped working early on during my pregnancy." But her husband did not keep his promises. He did not pay the bills and he was "hanging out, partying, seeing women." And he started to sell drugs. This was something that Patricia said. "I was not going to allow," so she told him to leave. Describing what happened, she said:

He went absolutely off, so I had to go and get the butcher knife. He was screaming and hollering all up in my face. He was too big for me to allow him to put his hands on me. I was pregnant. Obviously I knew I couldn't beat a man, but I knew that if I didn't jump and act like I was crazier than he was, he might very well have hurt me. He actually had to leave the house because I was acting like I had totally lost my mind and that I was going to kill him that very night. So he left. He had to go. On top of him running around with whoever he was running around with, then having the nerve to think that you was going to come home and sleep with me, knowing that that was not going to happen, then you want to bring drugs into my house. No.

Patricia's husband did returned to the house and "he made the pronouncement that he wasn't going anywhere, and there was nothing I could do about it." But she was determined that he would leave:

I had packed up all of his clothes in big garbage bags and had them sitting in the hallway of the apartment for him to take out. He said, he wasn't going anywhere. I said I tell you what I will do, I will run smack into this

wall and knock my fool self out, and when I do come around, I will call the police and swear to God that you did it. And when they find out that I'm pregnant, you're going to have a problem. At this point I no longer cared. He had to go. At that point I saw it as self-preservation. I saw it as if I didn't do something, I was going to be in the position of a truly abused woman, and there was no way I could live my life that way. I had just gotten myself so worked up that I probably would have done just what I told him I was going to do.

Depressed, Patricia was not working, and "I didn't know what I was going to do, so I sat for months." The rental office of her apartment building "kept sending eviction notices," and her mother tried to help her out with the rent, but she was falling further behind in payments. As she said, "I finally realized that nothing was going to get done with me just sitting in the house." Patricia was six-months pregnant, so she decided to go to the Department of Social Services for help. She describes this experiences as "hell":

I'm feeling horrendous. I'm in there with a lot of screaming babies, people demanding all sorts of things, you waiting forever. You're scared to get up and go pee for fear somebody will call your name and you won't hear them and when you come back you have to go to the end of the line again. And people being talked to as if they are lower than dirt. They make you feel as if you are begging for the money personally out of their pockets. I said to myself that I was not going to succumb to this. I said, I have worked all of my life since the age of 14. I paid taxes. I'm in a bind right now; I need help. This is what I'm here for. My rent was like \$342 a month, and this woman tells me that I have to move because they are not going to pay my rent. I told her if I could move, why would I be here in your office asking for assistance? Obviously I need help. You go in there and you tell the truth and you catch hell. If you go in and you lie, and can make that lie sound convincing, you seem to get help quicker. I realize now why they have guards in welfare centers, simply because of the way the workers talk to the people who need help. They talk to you as if you are the scum of the earth: how dare you need help. You used to work and now you're here, and now you got to beg me for assistance. I went through all of that.

But Patricia did experience enjoyment during this difficult period. Her son was

born in 1974 and she describes this as the "most beautiful experience that I have ever had in my life." She relied upon her mother's advice and decided on natural labor: "no medication, no stuff to mask the pain." She said, "I talked to my mother a lot about child birth because none of her children were born with the aid of any drugs, and I was the only one who was born in the hospital; she had a midwife for my brothers. So I paid a lot of attention to her." Describing the experience of giving birth to her son, she said:

I instinctively knew that it was going to be a boy. When he was delivered I didn't hear a sound; the doctor said that the baby was in distress, and I didn't hear a sound coming from him and I got nervous. But finally I heard his mouth, and I was relieved. When they brought him to me, the nurse was saying he was beautiful. I turned my head around and looked at him, and I said oh my God, will you get that ugly thing away from me. Even my mother said, it looked like the rats had been sucking on his hair. I don't know why that child came out so little because it was a full-term nine-month baby. I was determined that I was going to breast feed him. But my girlfriends said, no way. I found out that they didn't want to do it basically because of their men. They said, oh it makes your breasts smaller. No it makes the breast flatter, and they don't stand up anymore. My response was always, look, they are mammary glands, every warm-blooded animal has them, and yeah they are necessary for intimacy and sexuality, but they are also for another reason--that's the baby's nourishment, plus it's good for the mother, it helps the uterus to contract, and you don't have to worry about menstruation until you stop breast feeding, and it protect the child from certain things for at least the first 3 months of life.

Patricia stayed on welfare for three years. She was placed in a dilemma: she had wanted to go back to work right after her son was born, but her caseworker told her that "we're not going to help you find a job until he is at least 6 years old." So she waited until he was 3-years-old and then "pounded the pavement looking for a job." Her mother helped with child care arrangements, and as she said, she didn't "have any major disappointments with her son when he was young." But as he got older his grades began

to slip, particularly in math, and although she made numerous attempts to get him assistance, his grades did not improve in that area. One of her biggest disappointments is that her son "never graduated from high school."

When Amanda completed her graduate studies in California, she returned to the East coast where she met her baby's father. She was working full-time at a Model Cities program, but her political commitment led her to also take a part-time job on the weekends at a hospital, so she could help unionize the workers. She met her baby's father at a "police brutality meeting," and they "became friends." He was interested in her, but "I wasn't interested in him in that way." He gave her an ultimatum, that if they were not going to get together as a couple, then he was going to marry another woman he was seeing. He did, but that marriage did not last, and Amanda renewed her relationship with him. She got pregnant, but decided not to tell him because she knew that their relationship was over. Amanda talks about what she decided to do during this period:

A friend of mine who was very supportive during that period said that I had a responsibility to allow him the opportunity to be a man, so that he has the opportunity to either do what he is supposed to do, or show that he's not going to do. But if he doesn't know, then I'm not affording him a choice. Initially, I wasn't going to have the child and actually went to the abortion clinic with the full intention of getting an abortion. I had already made up my mind that with my life style, I didn't want to be a single parent. I couldn't fit that in, and I didn't want to be with him because he was a lunatic. So I go to the clinic--I will never forget it--and the woman confirmed what I already knew. I was really going to make an appointment for an abortion, and when she said okay when do you want to come in? Something made me hesitate. I said, well let me think about it. I went outside and, instead of me being sad and depressed and everything, I really felt kind of good. It was a sunny day. I talked to a very good friend who I worked with in the hospital, a Trinidadian sister who was a nurse. She was a single parent, and her whole thing was, you don't want to grow old and not have anybody. You can make it; you're a strong

woman. Look at me and there are other women.

Amanda decided to have the baby, and she also decided to tell the father that she was pregnant. "He was kind of cool, surprisingly." But a few days after she had told him, he called her and "started ranting and raving about how I was ruining his life, and he was going on like a crazy person, so I hung up on him." As she said:

I can't remember exactly all that he said, but it was so humiliating and it was insulting. He was basically putting me down and criticizing me. I felt so bad. I decided I was going to struggle and have this baby. I said, maybe this will make me a better person. I won't be so self-consumed, and I will have somebody else to be responsible to, and even though this isn't the way I wanted it, I'll make it. I have a job, and I have a place to live. I didn't see my baby's father until after she was born.

Amanda, like Patricia, decided upon natural childbirth and she describes the birth of her daughter as "a real miracle," and she gave her an African-inspired name. She had taken maternity leave from her jobs, but when she tried to return to her part-time hospital position, "they didn't want me to come back because of the political stuff we were doing there." During this period, both of Amanda's parents started to have "failing health." So she decided to return with her baby daughter to New York City. She said, "I kind of felt guilty because I had been away the longest; my sister and brother had stayed in New York. I felt, being the oldest, I should probably help out and try and see if I could get things stabilized and be supportive." Her mother was helpful to Amanda with her newborn, but old political tensions soon developed. "My mother didn't like my politics, and she didn't like the literature that I had in her house, and she didn't like the people who were coming there, and she basically inferred that I was being like a whore." Describing the incident that led her to move from her mother's house, Amanda said:

I had this African fertility doll in my room, and one day my mother came up, and she made some comments about the doll, that I was trying to get pregnant again. I was dating this guy, and sometimes, very rarely, he would come over, and he would spend the night and he would leave the next day. I was on another floor from my mother. My mother thought that this was horrendous, that I had somebody come there and stay in her house, and my daughter was there. This was the most immoral thing for me to do. Between that and my politics, eventually I said, I think the best thing for me to do is to move. I was kind of hurt when my mother said these things, sort of characterizing me almost like a whore because I had this man there in front of my daughter. I just said, I'm grown; this is my life style, and if she doesn't like it she has a right; that's her house, and I'm not going to be there anymore, and I'm not changing my politics for her.

Amanda said. "I think part of it was me not accepting that I really had to make fundamental changes in my life style because she existed. So I still tried to do what I was doing before, and still tried to be a good mother." Describing how she did make adjustments to accommodate her daughter's needs, Amanda said:

I felt very close to my daughter, and I never felt that she was a burden. At points I sort of took it in stride that I had responsibility for her. The only time that it would really come to the forefront in my mind is when we were having a struggle inside of this political group and people started talking about the differences of the women in the group. Some women who were married and had husbands who were making decent money, verses the women in the group who were single parents. Separate and apart from this, I didn't belabor the fact that I'm a single mother. I just sort of went about doing what I had to do. I wasn't that much in contact with her father. For the most part he was very antagonistic to what I was doing politically and even threatened at different points that he would take legal action to get her from me because I was being irresponsible. But he never moved on that. To compensate for her being a single child, I always tried to put her in group settings. I believed in day care and I put her in a family day care home. She was always in a family or group setting. I had friends who would always help out. To me I thought that that was a good thing; it wasn't like I was abandoning her or that I was too involved in my political work and not paying attention to her. When she started school I became active in that too. I didn't feel, probably some other people did-- that I was not being a good mother.

Amanda saw her daughter as a "model child up until about the age of 14." She describes her daughter as "amazing." She "did exactly what she was supposed to do. She had a key to the house. She would come home from school or she would go to my mother's house, and she would check in with everybody." But Amanda admits that her daughter was allowed a "lot of freedom because I wasn't around a lot." And around the age of 14, her daughter "started getting really crazy. She started being a lunatic. She was hanging out, I found out much later that she was going out with somebody who was 24. And she was just a wild child." Amanda believes that this was the worst period in their mother-daughter relationship, and describing this time in her life she said:

I was outraged in terms of this older man abusing a child. The fact that he was involved in drugs and who knows where that would have led. I was furious with her disrespecting the advice that she had been given. I can't remember the exact breaking point. But all of this sort of came to a boiling point, and one day I found out that she had been with him. I came home, and I was ready to murder her. Her attitude was just so arrogant too. So I literally dressed as we used to dress when we were ready to go to a fight. I put on my street clothes, like jeans and stuff, and I tied my hair back, and the only thing I didn't do was put Vaseline on my face. I was ready to beat her up. And something stopped me. I called a friend who used to be the director of a foster care program. I wanted to know what kind of program I could get her in. I said, I'm going to kill her if she and I stay in the same space, and if she continues to behave like this. She's really out of control.

Amanda got her daughter enrolled in a program that had a national reputation for working with troubled youth. But her daughter did not want to participate in the program because she said, "the other children were juvenile delinquents." She was placed in a small private school that has a progressive reputation, where "she seemed to calm down and seemed to get more focused." She graduated and went to college. Reflecting upon

her experiences with her daughter during this period, Amanda said:

I think that from the time my daughter was born, part of me recognized the fact that priority had to be given to her. I think from all practical standpoints, taking care of her basic nurturing, I did that. But I think another part of me always tried to fit her into what I was doing. I did not want to relinquish basically who I was and what I wanted to do. I felt that she had to adjust to my life style. I don't know if that was correct or fair to her. But I recognized that that's sort of what happened. I wouldn't neglect her, although some people might say emotionally I might have not always been there for her. I always tried to never stand in the way of friendships that she developed with other adults--males and females--because I thought that she needed that being an only child. So I always wanted her to be in groups. If other people wanted to take her places and do things with her, I always encouraged that. But I don't know if part of that was a substitute for, well I don't want to give up this, and so there is somebody else that could take her places and do things with her. I was feeling guilty because all my involvements weren't leaving too much space for her at an age when, even though she was getting older and could be independent, it was an age where there was a lot of confusion and craziness. At one point I started going to counseling, when I felt like I needed something so I wouldn't go off the deep end in terms of all the changes that were going on in my life, and she went with me.

Women, Husbands, and Men

Six of the women in this study were married, five of them got divorced and one has a long-term separation. All of the women, except Sharon, at some point in their lives have had long-term intimate relationships with a man. Mary said that she learned from her grandma "that you're supposed to get to know a person, become their friend, and then you're supposed to get married and have babies." Mary seemingly followed her grandmother's advice and married her childhood boyfriend in 1960. She was married to her husband for 12 years, but she describes it as a "rocky relationship, because he was always with other women, and because he would also try and keep track on my every

move." Amidst the tensions and conflicts, Mary said she was trying to keep the marriage together, "trying to work it out, because of the boys and because I came from a semi-broken home myself. I wanted to keep the family intact." But by 1967, Mary realized that she would eventually have to make changes in her life:

I knew mentally that I had to make a change cause I could see that it was going downhill. He began to bring card games and reefer into the house around the boys. I didn't like that, so we began to fight over stuff like that. I don't like fighting, and I don't like arguing, and I don't like liquor. It got so bad that when we started fighting my sons would come in the room with bats, and I knew that they would kill him. They were young, but they wouldn't let him touch me. They didn't know that I could defend myself; they would just hear the arguing. One time I found some rollers under my pillow that didn't belong to me. We were living in the projects then, and he had contracted some kind of disease, but he was trying to make me make love to him. I put my feet up and pushed them in the air, and I knocked him through the television set. That woke up my sons, so they came in with the bats and they were getting ready to beat him, and I just took them and left the apartment.

During their marriage, Mary was largely responsible for the household. She said, "rarely would he share the household expenses. He would buy food sometimes." She could get money from him on his payday "before he used it all on liquor." She says her husband was an "alcoholic," but she did not know "that he drank that much" before they got married. "There were no signs." And after they were married he drank, "and then he started with reefer, and then he started experimenting with other drugs which made his behavior impulsive and unpredictable." Mary said that she got tired of the "bickering and fighting," and she could see that it was taking a toll on her sons. "So it didn't make sense to try and struggle and stay in a marriage after that. He was seeing other women, and I remember going out with a fella at work. He was just serving a need then, a sexual

need. I wouldn't bring him around my kids or anything like that, we would always go to a hotel."

After her divorce in 1979 Mary kept active by involving herself in her sons' activities, volunteering at a "poverty program", the PTA and work. But she met a man who she "really loved during that time." He became for her, the kind of father she wanted her sons to have. Describing her relationship with him, Mary said:

At that time love meant that I would get excited when I would see him coming. I would smile inwardly and outwardly, and just to hear his voice made me feel good because I knew that we had a mutual situation, and he was just the opposite of my husband. He didn't drink to excess. He was a church man. He was not the best looking man but he had beautiful eyes. We could talk about everything. I met him because he was a principal of one of the schools, and he was looking for someone. We went together for about 13 years. But the only thing was, he would confuse me with his teachers or students in terms of trying to control me. He was dogmatic and controlling. He would like to know where you were every minute. I said, who set up these rules? I made him look at himself and see why it's not practical to expect somebody to go along with your agenda all the time. He was a good lover, a good provider, and a good friend, and that's what I loved about him. But I wouldn't marry him because of his dogmatic personality.

Anne got married in 1969, but by 1974 she was separated from her husband. She describes the first year of marriage as "easy because I knew who the person was that I had married. I figured that a sense of love was something that I was going to learn." During the second year of her marriage, Anne's husband decided to go to graduate school in another state, and she "encouraged him to do it." Upon mutual agreement, "he would come home at least once a month, and hopefully I would go down there once a month. So that twice a month we would see each other." But the distance put a strain on their relationship. Anne thought "that the marriage was disintegrating because of distance,

because of incompatibility, separate interests. And I also think that I was more mature than he was." But she also thought that the "marriage was fixable," so when her husband completed his 2 years of study and moved back to New York City, they decided to go into marriage counseling. During therapy, Anne found out that her husband was "gay."

Describing her reactions, Anne said:

When I realized that he was gay I was shocked and surprised. I was shocked and surprised that I didn't know it, that I couldn't see it, that I didn't understand it, that I wasn't able to define it. I wasn't angry. I was more concerned about wasting time being with the wrong person. That's what I was upset about. I recognized that I had spent time trying to make something work. I was upset over the fact that I could never get that time back. I can't say that I felt deceived, because I was pretty clear in my own mind that he didn't know who he was as a person. I couldn't be angry; it would have been unfair for me to be angry at him for something that he was not aware of. At least aware enough to be honest about it. In retrospect as we move along with our lives, I think he knew something, but I think he was not comfortable with addressing it.

While her husband had been away at school Anne admits that she was "involved in other relationships" with men. As she said, "that's when I knew that there was another kind of attentiveness that was not stifling. It was more open, it was more intense, and the sex was great. It was interesting because at one point it was two men at the same time." This was a period in her life where she was beginning to define for herself who she was becoming. As she said, "I was becoming clear about my interests and what turned me on and how I responded to people." Explaining further, she said:

In the early 70s, I saw myself as a very very lucky black woman. Professionally, I knew that I wanted to be somebody. What that somebody was, I didn't know in particular, but I knew that I could hold my own. I knew that I was going to have to work hard. Personally I was on very shaky territory, I saw myself as somebody who was struggling to make it. I was trying to figure out what kind of female I was that had been in an

unsuccessful marriage. I knew that marriage meant a great deal in the work place at that time, because I was safe, I was already spoken for.

In the early 70s, Barbara made some decisions because she was unemployed and she wondered "how am I going to take care of myself." During this period she received a telephone call from a friend asking her "to come to London to see him." She had no money, but she decided to go anyway, and she "stayed there with him for about three maybe four months." Although she had known him briefly in New York City, Barbara really did not know who he was, and when she found out it was "traumatic." She had thought that he was "English, but it turned out that he was a white South African." She had never been politically active, but she did have political feelings about apartheid and what was happening to blacks in the south, so "I was really upset." Discussing this experience, Barbara said:

I was miserable, miserable, miserable. I told him that I wanted to go home. He was married, but he was separated from his wife, and he couldn't get a divorce. My visa was running out, and he wanted me to marry someone so I could stay in London. I said, oh no, I can't stay here. I said, if I stay here I will lose my mind for real because I was slowly feeling that I was losing my mind.

So Barbara returned to New York City, but "I was out of a job." Shortly after she returned, a friend told her, "I have a perfect person I want to introduce you to. You're going to love him. He's a tennis pro and he's fabulous." She met him. He was an African from Nigeria, and Barbara was thinking "survival." She said, "it was a crucial period in my life: I didn't have a job and was wondering what am I going to do, and how am I going to function?" When she met him, she said, "this is for me. This is a black man. He's really black because he is African. He was cultural, and I liked the way he

looked in tennis shorts. That was one of the key things." Describing what happened in this relationship, Barbara said:

He kept pressuring me. He wanted to get married. I had dated him for about a year, but I was a little leery about marrying him. At the time, I was still drinking, and I was taking Valiums. I was very depressed, and I said, well, you know, I might as well marry him. I guess I decided to marry him because I felt like I had to marry because I needed a job, and at that time I was 29 years old. I figured at 29, you know this might be my last chance, and this was a black man that was a successful black man, and that kind of stuff was important to me. I wasn't in love with him at all. He was just pressuring me. So I was at my girlfriend's house, and I said to her, are you doing something tomorrow? And she said no, and I said well can you come with me because I'm going to get married. She went to the window and said, I don't believe this. You didn't tell a soul. I didn't tell anyone else.

Their wedding was held at a country club, and Barbara said, "the whole time I was getting married was the worst experience of my life." As she was walking down the aisle, she kept remembering the movie "The Graduate" and "thinking you can say no right now. I said you can't say no; look at all of these people here. But you didn't tell your parents so you can still get out of it." But Barbara said "I do," and, "needless to say, the marriage didn't work. I was only married to him for a week. I really sabotaged it." The night before her wedding she had picked up a stranger at a bar and taken him home with her, and she told her husband what she had done:

I told him that I was out with another guy before we got married. He went berserk, he went totally berserk, and at the time I didn't understand why he was going berserk. I think he was destroyed after that. I don't think that he loved me; I really thought that he wanted his citizenship. I do know that he was very nice to me. I couldn't really think straight because I was taking Valiums and drinking, and I had no touch with emotions or feelings or anything like that at the time. My justification for that was, this is what you get when you're trying to marry somebody for citizenship. Right after that, I said, I'm going to have to have this annulled. So I gave

this big annulment party, and everybody came with all kinds of booze and were saying congratulations for this whole thing. Of course he had all of the power because he was a tennis pro, and he said he wasn't going to annul the marriage. It turned into this huge thing. So I said, well I'll fix him: I'm not going to get a divorce. It was logical to me at the time to stay married because I might make the mistake again of marrying someone else because of some crazy thing. I stayed married for 7 years.

Jackie said that she "never loved" her husband, but she "liked him a lot. After I have grown older, I understood that there is a real difference between loving somebody and liking somebody." Early on in her marriage. Jackie could not tolerate her husband's lying. "My husband used to lie so much. Lying really used to get on my nerves. It's just something that I can't tolerate. I think that my relationship with my husband had fallen off a long time ago because of it." Around the middle of the 1970s. Jackie decided to separate from her husband, but she unexpectedly found out that she was pregnant with her third child:

I just thought that I was tired because I was whipped, just dog tired. I said let me go to the doctor and see what's going on here, maybe I have high blood pressure. So I go to the doctor and take all of these tests: everything's fine. He said, let me take a pregnancy test. I was still having my period, so pregnancy was the furthestest thing from my mind. He said the test came back and I was pregnant. I passed out. I probably was on the table for about 20 minutes unconscious. I couldn't move from the shock of him saying, baby. I said I was going to have an abortion, later for a baby, I'm not having no more kids.

Jackie decided to have the baby, and during this period she also decided that her husband had to leave the house. "Besides the lying, he had gotten tangled up with this guy, and he started taking cocaine. So when he decided he wasn't going to pay any bills, he didn't need to be there. I could pay my own bills anyway." Jackie allowed him to have visitation with the children. As she said, "I was not the type of person that said you

can't come over. Take them whenever you want to; you can come and hang out with them. We just don't have nothing going on, period. He was probably the best father that he could probably be and the children were crazy about him, so this is how it's been every since then."

There were a lot of "adjustments" Jackie had to make in her life with a new born baby and raising her family as a single mother. Jackie said that her youngest child was not an "unwanted baby, but the fact that I just wasn't prepared to have any more children threw me off." Although she got support from her mother and grandmother and her girlfriend, Jackie had problems dealing with the stress and became depressed. "During this period I literally went to bed":

It was real hard to just get up out of bed at the time. I could hear the baby crying, and if my girlfriend wasn't there, I don't know if I could have gotten up to see about her. It went on for a little while, and then I got it together, and I got up out of the bed.

Patricia like Jackie, separated from her husband during the middle 1970s, but she would divorce her husband in 1977. Unlike the other married women in this study, Patricia said that one of the main reasons that she married her husband was because she loved him. But over the course of their three-year marriage they lived more apart than together as husband and wife. There were many reasons for tensions in their relationships, and Patricia said that she has to take some of the "blame for their failed marriage. I do have to admit that there was a time when I begin to be extremely possessive, an extremely jealous individual. I don't know what came over me. I began to become what I didn't like in others." Patricia said:

I just made his life miserable in terms of arguing. He would get angry. Of course if someone is constantly screaming at you that you're fooling around, you get tired of it, and you walk out. I carried on like that for a year until like something within me took hold and said, you know you're being an absolute fool. The best way to chase anybody away is to constantly be accusing them. Maybe something in me just got tired. I figured if he was fooling around there was nothing that I could do about it. The more I let up, I could see the more relaxed he became, which meant that our marriage got better.

Patricia and her husband started having "money problems," and "after a while he just wasn't bringing any money home. He would go to work, and there were times that I wouldn't see him from Friday morning until Sunday night." To address the problem, Patricia said that she "did something which was stupid. All of a sudden, I was going to be defiant, and I said well if he can go out and party, I can go out and party too." In explaining, she said:

You know that two wrongs don't make it right. I was going to make it right by doing just what he was doing. So I went out partying, and I would stay out for weekends. I was involved with other men. Not like a lot of other men, but there would be one or two guys that I knew, and I would just go and hang out and party with them. Then my husband and I would get into a lot of arguing, a lot of accusing, a lot of name calling. There was no physical violence, but we separated for a while.

Patricia stayed with another man until she discovered that she was pregnant by her husband. But she "ended up not having the baby, I ended up aborting it." She said that she "did not feel emotionally ready to bring a child into the world, especially in the kind of relationship I was in." Although she told her husband that she was pregnant, she "lied to him, and I did it deliberately. It wasn't nice, but I was under a lot of stress:

I told him that, because of everything that he took me through, that I had lost the baby. I know that it was wrong, but I was striking back. I was striking out. I went to the hospital and had an abortion. I went by myself.

After I did it, I kept telling myself this is the right thing to do. I didn't talk about it to anybody. But I have dealt with that every day since then.

Patricia also admits that "alcohol was a part of our relationship." She would drink a lot of beer, but she would not drink "during the week because I knew that I had to get up and go to work, and I had certain responsibilities." Patricia started to gain weight, and her husband told her "jokingly, but apparently he meant it, that if I gained weight, I was going to be in trouble because he would end up leaving. He did leave in his own way, he didn't physically leave." But Patricia also describes this as a "fun and intimate" time in their relationship:

Sometimes on the weekends we would just drink and pig out. Oh this sound so disgusting to me now. We would get one of those pounds of slab bacon and fry it up, and we would make all of this toast, and we would get big bowls of popcorn and potato chips, put it all in the bed, and we'd be sitting there either listening to music or looking at tv and talking and laughing. Me, not realizing what this was doing to me physically. Those were some really fun and intimate times because we were really close. We could sit and easily laugh and talk about anything, any subject, and I really felt close to him. I went up to about 182 pounds. I didn't see myself in a negative way until I had on a pair of pants one day, and somebody thought that I was pregnant. But I would still drink and eat, drink my beer and eat up all the junk.

Before getting married, Sara spent a lot of time with her future husband "trying to figure out if we were going to be a couple and if we were going to get married or something." They moved in together and in 1973, they got married when her mother died. This proved to be a significant time in her life. Unsure of herself, she started to drink heavily. She describes the "emotional bottom" she felt at the time:

Some of the stuff that happened with my husband was a bottom. I wrecked my car when I was drunk. I rode down the highway and hit the back of a car with some kids in it. Actually I was lucky nothing happened

to them. I hit my head on the steering wheel, and knocked my teeth out, and bit my lip off, and it had to be sewn back on. What I did, two days later, I was all sewn up and I went to the bar and drank my martini through a straw cause I couldn't drink it the regular way. I didn't see that as a problem. That was a very big emotional bottom. I really was unhappy with my husband. I thought that something was wrong with me, clearly, and I would be found out and the drinking helped that.

Eventually, she made the decision to go south and help her father take care of her younger brother and sister. As she said, "my relationship with my brother and sister was kind of maternal, except that I drank with them. My brother bought a keg for a party and I was like drunk, so it was kind of fucked-up. I'm sure the kids were, like, who the hell is that?" After a year Sara returned to New York City, but her marriage was strained. Sara's husband "filed for a divorce" on the grounds that she had abandoned him, and she did not contest his claim. He filed for divorce during her "first year of sobriety," and as a result of legal action her husband "got the house." Years later, Sara was able to explain to her husband why she left him. As she said, "I told him I couldn't make a commitment. I thought I was going crazy, and I didn't love him the way that I needed to love him."

Amanda did not get married, but during the early 1970s, she lived with her boyfriend. She was going to graduate school and becoming increasingly active in campus politics, while he was teaching, writing for a newspaper and also involving himself in the politics of the time. Describing some of the dynamics of this relationship, Amanda said:

As it turned out he was like a real womanizer. But when he was with you he made you think that you were the only person in the entire world. At one point, he started going out and staying out overnight. I wouldn't know where he was or anything like that, and we got into a whole confrontation around that. Also the more I became more politically involved, the more I felt more confident to argue on my point of view about things. Before I was like enamored of him: he wrote for this paper, he was involved in all

this political stuff, he knew everything, and I knew nothing. And then as I got more confident, I would challenge him around things, and he didn't like that.

In challenging his opinions, there were consequences that Amanda did not anticipate, as she said:

One time we were talking--I remember we were sitting on the floor--and he told me to shut-up, and I was like, oh, no you don't tell me to shut-up. The next thing I knew he back-handed me. I was hysterical. I was like furious. That was the first time that any man had ever hit me. I was screaming. He was so apologetic. He went and got ice. He was coddling me. I guess I was hurt cause I just couldn't believe that someone who cared about you would hit you like that. My face and mouth and everything was swollen and stuff.

After this incident, Amanda decided that he was not going to hit her again. but another incident did arise, and she describes how she responded to it:

He had this whole thing about how his eggs had to be prepared. You had to fry them with butter, and you had to move the pan back and forth. It couldn't be like any crust on the bottom, he wanted his eggs to be perfect. I tried to do the eggs like that, and something happened, and they didn't turn out exactly the way he wanted. So I just put them on his plate. He started getting real crazy about his eggs. I said, oh I'm very sorry, and I took the plate and I turned it upside down so like the eggs were on his head. He was so angry. He was furious, so he acted like he was going to hit me again. He used to be into hunting and in the kitchen he had this big Bowie knife there and all this other stuff. So I grab the Bowie knife cause I was like, after he had hit me the first time it was both anger and fear, I had made up my mind that he would never ever hit me again. I don't know what I thought I was going to do with this knife, cause I had never held a knife before with any sense of trying to attack anybody. He thought that I had totally lost my mind. I decided that after that I didn't want to be in the house with him anymore. So then I decided I was going to leave, and I packed my stuff, and I had no place to go. I put all of my belongings and put them in the Volkswagon, and then I slept in the car. I was embarrassed. I slept in the car just overnight, and then I went to my girlfriend's house.

Faith was involved in a relationship for three years, and then she and her

boyfriend decided to live together and "we lived together for about five years." During this period Faith's mother died, and she had "a piece of money" that enabled her to purchase a house. Things were "really getting along fine" between them until "I got ready to move into the house," and that is when "he really nutted-up on me. He really nutted-up to the point that maybe about a week before I moved into the house he left." She describe this as her "first real experience with a boy's insanity. It was just interesting to me because, since I didn't have brothers, and I didn't have a dad, this nutting-up that men seem to do whenever it's time to take responsibility was completely and totally foreign to me." This became a source of tension in their relationship. They were both working actors, although Faith would take non-acting jobs, but her boyfriend worked regularly on the stage in New York and in regional theater. But another source of tension developed because he "really wanted to have some kids." Explaining this particular tension, Faith said:

I was like, I'm not having any kids after 40, not any first baby after 40. It was getting toward that time and he was getting scared because he wasn't making enough money to feel comfortable about affording this family. I was adamant about two things: I wasn't having a first baby after 40, and that my ass was old now, and that if I had a first baby nobody could be expecting me to contribute to the household for a minimum of nine months. Kids were a major issue for him, but kids have never been a major issue for me. I never not wanted them or wanted them. If I had them, my only prerequisite was a husband. He worked pretty regularly as an actor, he worked as a stage actor and that's never much money, and especially if what you're doing is a lot of regional theater. He just really wasn't making the kind of money to make having a baby possible, and I also was trying to do some things that I wanted to do .

Other tensions influenced Faith's relationship with her boyfriend as well. Faith wanted to travel and experience living in other parts of the world. As she said, "I had

never been anywhere out of the country except for the Caribbean, so I decided that I was going to go to Europe and spend a month there and try and go to more than one place."

And when she returned she found that her boyfriend "had just really gone left somewhere.

I wasn't quite sure whether he was having some kind of a breakdown. I feel that maybe the drugs had been let out of the box while I was out of here." Describing what happened during this period and what ultimately happened to their relationship, Faith said:

I knew that he was really way left, not making a lot of sense and having hallucinations. He was having some kind of a psychotic episode, and he had to go to the hospital. He said that he could hear somebody threatening him through the wall and that he was going to shoot him. This was just really really bizarre. He didn't stay in the hospital because he wasn't dangerous. I had a job where I used to teach for four days a month. So I just really said a prayer that he wouldn't burn my house down. I called his mom, because I was like, I really don't know what to do about this. Finally she talked to him one day when he wasn't making any sense. She said, it's probably best that he come home for a little while. I was like, yeah. I suggested that she come and get him. He went to Florida, but sometimes he would call me 35 times during the day. He was really having some kind of a breakdown. This was somebody that I've been at this point living with for almost five years and seeing three years before we were living together. But I also knew that if he wasn't going to get some help, I could not live with this. After a month he said he was ready to come back. So I was like, I really don't think that I am equipped to do this, so I told him that I really thought that he should stay at home and get a therapist. He said he was coming. I said, I don't think I want you to come here right now. I want you to stay somewhere else. He said, if I don't come back to your house now, I'm never coming back. I said, I want you to remember that you said this to me. And I sort of dug my heels in.

Women, Substance Abuse and Alcohol Addiction

Seven of the nine women participating in this study abused drugs and alcohol at various periods of time during the late 1960s through the middle 1970s. The abuse occurred after they had left their parents' home and while they were living as young

adults working or going to college. Towards the end of 1970s, all of the women had either moderated their intake or stopped taking drugs and drinking alcohol, and two sought drug and alcohol treatment primarily through faith-based treatment programs. In some instances their struggle with addiction was made more painful because, upon reflection, they would have made different choices if they had been drug and alcohol free. For others, they abused substances but did not become addicted, and they saw their drug and/or alcohol use as a sign of the times they were living in, and they simply tried to move on with their lives. But, even though some women had stopped using drugs and drinking or had never abused substances of any kind, they too were impacted by the experience of others, especially by family members.

Mary indicated that she had never abused drugs or alcohol, but she had to deal with an alcoholic husband and later with drug-addicted sons. Mary believes that her two sons "started experimenting with drugs" when they were in junior high school and in response she moved her family to a new neighborhood, "thinking that I was taking them out of whatever environment they were getting involved in." After her oldest son got married, she became increasingly concerned about her youngest son and his activities. As she said, "I tried to get him help, taking him to counselors, trying every avenue to circumvent what was happening." Mary recalls a conversation she had with her youngest son about "why he was doing drugs." He asked her, "why do you care? My daddy didn't want me and you don't want me either." She had to deal with the fact that her son "almost died right here on my sofa." Recalling the incident, Mary said:

My son was beat up by drug pushers. I was downstairs in my apartment

building at a tenant meeting. Somebody came and got me, and a friend of mine went with me to my apartment. The drug pushers were there to collect money, and I just passed right by them and called an ambulance. It was startling to see him in so much pain. He was just dripping blood. You know how they break your elbows and the bones were all sticking out, and he was beaten real bad. While we were waiting on the ambulance, I was trying to stop his bleeding cause he was in such pain. I was trying to make him comfortable.

In addition to dealing with her sons' drug addictions, Mary also tried to deal with the drug and alcohol abuse that was occurring in her parents' household. She had to deal with the death of her younger brother, and she partially blames her parents for his death.

As she said:

I sort of blamed my mother and my father because they knew he was having problems with not going to school and stuff. Once I got married nobody else took an interest in what he was doing. So he died. Somebody had shot him in the back of his hand with a needle five times. They shot him up with heroin. They found him on the stairwell in an apartment building. See if they stopped him from the activity, like when he was in high school. He was into drugs then; he was using; I don't know if he was selling drugs I blamed them for my brother's death, and I told them that. He came to me one night after he died, and he told me not to worry because he was alright.

Following the death of her brother, Mary's relationship with her parents became even "more estranged," and her parents soon separated from one another. As a result, Mary believes her sisters and brothers, who were living with her mother at the time, became increasingly exposed to drugs and alcohol:

My mother started hanging out with a lot of gay people and using a lot of drugs, and all of that would be part of her normal environment. So the kids were exposed to that. Who ever was in the house would experiment with stuff, including my mother. She was experimenting with drugs, and she started to drink real bad after my brother died. The remaining kids, my four sisters and now one brother, all of them were exposed to drugs and alcohol. I was afraid that my mother's apartment would be busted at any

time, not that anybody was selling out of there, but there was an acceleration of the drug activity in the family, and it was volatile for me in terms of the activities. So I didn't go around my mother a lot.

Amanda started to experiment with drugs in graduate school. As she said, "I remembered the first party I went to and there was like all these drugs. It was in California, and we went to a party and there was every kind of person there. I mean professors, working people, students artists, and all this stuff. Instead of like having snacks, they had every imaginable drug in this big ceramic thing on the table in the middle of the floor, and it was like anything that you wanted to get high off of was in that thing. It seemrd like a lot of fun. I tried drugs, and I thought that it didn't have any effect on me, but I would get real giddy and laugh and stuff like that." But Amanda said that she really did not take her drug use too seriously because "I grew up with people who were using heroin and saw them die and stuff, and I was never really interested." And the reality of its impact hit home for Amanda when she returned to New York to attend her cousin's funeral:

My cousin and I were like just a few months apart in age, and we were more like brother and sister. After he came back from Vietnam, he had opened up a little store in the neighborhood. He had saved up money from when he was in Vietnam to open the store, and that was his dream. What he was into was that he had been approached by organized crime to use his store as a drug place. At some point he decided that he didn't want to do that anymore. So he gets set up by his friends that he grew up with, and he was murdered. It was right after I had just graduated. My cousin's death was very very painful. To this day, even when I go up in that area, I think about him. It seemed like such a waste. I ran into this fella, for the longest he was into drugs, now he's recovered and everything, and he confirmed a lot of the things that I thought had happened to my cousin.

Sara said, "a lot of my stories are about getting high and what drugs and alcohol

did for me. I drank a lot. I was one of the people who did both. Most people I know drank or they would do drugs. And there was a crew of us that did both. I was always impaired, I was always not completely there, and not remembering what happened, being apologetic, being a big mess, tearing my dress, my hair coming down. You know how you dress up to go out and you come home, and you're a big ugly mess because you were in a blackout." When Sara had gone south for a year to take care of her younger brother and sister several years after the death of her mother, she received a telephone call from a good friend:

She had called me and said that she had gone to AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). I said, thank God because you are a terrible drunk. We used to drink together. It was horrible. So I was so glad that she stopped drinking, cause child she couldn't drink no liquor. So when I went back to New York, I went with her to AA. But I didn't stop drinking right away. I just sort of listened. I wasn't committed to it. I was just like, I'll go and see what this is about. I started going in the beginning of January, and I stopped drinking in February. I stopped getting high the following August. And I began to see how scared I was.

Initially, staying sober was a tremendous struggle for Sara. As she said, "there's a lot of grief with giving up drinking." In describing some of her experiences, Sara recalls:

I remember once walking by a liquor store, and they were having a sale, and I was just paralyzed outside this door looking at this big old bottle of vodka for eight dollars. I felt like, you're probably going to drink again, you're not going to do this for the rest of your life, you're going to drink again, so why don't you just go on and do it now, why don't you go and buy this bottle. It's a good price. I went and called somebody, and then I went to a meeting, but I didn't drink.

I remember that I got angry when I got sober. I was in a rage for at least two or three weeks. The rage was like, I just can't explain it. I would walk into people in the sidewalk cafes because it was in the summertime, and I would want to turn tables over. I was like a complete lunatic. I was yelling at everybody. One morning I woke up and it was gone. I had not

done anything. Nothing had changed--I didn't have a boyfriend, job, money--everything was exactly the same as it was, and the rage was gone. I kind of understood something I never knew, that you didn't have to fix everything. Sometimes it's just about pendulum. That things change. Everyday is a different day. And that I wasn't responsible for bringing the sun up.

In getting sober, you're giving up the old self. And in looking at what I had done with my life, a lot of that rage had to do with looking at what had happened. I woke up and I said I'm 34 or 35, what the hell happened? I couldn't believe it. I drank a career away, married some fool and stayed with him forever. On a given day, if I let myself, I can just wallow in that stuff: a fine mess you've gotten yourself into.

Sara has been sober and drug free for nineteen years and Barbara also has nineteen years of sobriety. Barbara "would drink everyday." She was working in advertising and saw drinking as a part of that particular work culture. But she didn't think that she had a problem "because I didn't drink in the morning. But I would drink after work." Also, she had Valium prescribed to her for a medical condition and became addicted to them. During this period, Barbara describes herself "as such a phony person living in a phony world too. And I performed, and performing made me look like I was an outgoing person. I was like in a totally white world, and I still was fighting to be this black person. I had no idea who I was. It just got to a point that I felt like I was slowly, slowly, slowly losing my mind." Barbara became very angry, and "that's when I started drinking heavily" and started doing what she describes as "unbelievable things." She had a friend and "anytime that I performed or did something or acted crazy, she would kind of put up with it." Except one time when:

I was at her house, and she was having a big dinner party for the Christmas holidays. At the time I could be the most loving and sweet person and then the next time I could be pissed off, and I would curse everybody out.

Usually she could put up with me, but I was cursing her friends out because I thought that they were just bourgeoisie, and I hated that. Coming from me to hate this kind of stuff, that was like unbelievable. So she was sitting there, and she just said, get out of my house. Get out of my house. I can still see her face saying that. I left, and I was saying to myself, they must have said something to me. Why would I just go and start cursing people out? They had to have said something. The anger, the rage, that I had then when I was drinking, was the same kind of rage that I had when I was a child when I couldn't get what I wanted or something didn't go the way I wanted. I couldn't drink then, but what I would do was to go into the basement, and I would stay up all night, and I would just clean, and I would go into the attic and clean. So when I left the party, a very close friend of mine said to me, I'm an alcoholic and you're one too. I looked at him, and I almost choked. It was how dare this man say this to me. But that's when I made the conscious decision, when I said maybe something is wrong with me, and I wanted to stop drinking.

Barbara believes that "getting sober was the hardest thing that I have ever done in my life." She used to go to a Catholic cathedral and "pray, oh please don't let me go crazy today, please don't let me lose my mind today." Barbara also turned to AA for help and describing her efforts to become sober, she said:

What I had to do was get honest. I had to be who I was. I had to tell the truth. It was so hard. When I started going to AA there was hardly any blacks going, and it was like, oh here I go again. But I knew at the time I had to go. I knew I couldn't play games anymore. In other words, I couldn't go in there and perform. I knew something was really wrong with me. I got sober, and all of my emotions were out there. My life became a living hell, and I didn't have the crutches. I was this person that needed a crutch in order to communicate with people. Then all of a sudden I was out there by myself with nothing to protect me.

I coped by going to AA it just sort of opened my eyes. I didn't trust AA, even when I first went there. I'm not an organizational kind of person. Even when I first went--it was right after the Jim Jones massacre--I was saying I refuse to drink the Kool Aid. I wasn't going to sit there and spill everything. I like my freedom, and I don't want any kind of thing changing that.

I would cry every morning; every morning my eyes would be swollen out to here. I looked like a monster. And I would put those pads on my face

to try and get my eyes down, and I would cry in the shower, and I would be on the subway crying and saying my life is totally over. It's a disaster, everything is horrible. But I realized my true self the second year of sobriety. I can even say that I always knew that it was there, but I just didn't know how to get to it. That second year I saw that there was hope, that there was a possibility that I could be who I am and be accepted, that I didn't have all of these hurdles in front of me. I could just be me. But I still had low self-esteem.

Patricia said that alcohol was a part of her relationship with her husband and she was "drinking sometimes heavily, most time not" especially after they separated. She said, "I knew that I didn't feel really good about myself at the time, and if I was drinking I really didn't have to think that hard about myself, I could just be somebody else." One of the reasons she started to drink more was to deal with her loneliness. "When you're looking at certain men that you're interested in, and you're under a certain influence, they tend to look better than they would if you're not slightly impaired. I know at one point. I just wanted somebody to want me. I was trying to retrieve something." Patricia too, had a lot of pent up anger and sometimes it would reveal itself when she drank. And one time in particular she ended up in a "physical confrontation with a woman" for reasons she could not explain:

I was hanging out with some friends and for whatever reasons we stopped by a woman's house, and I fell asleep in the chair because it was very early in the morning. I was talking to this woman who was sitting across from me, and the next thing I knew my eyes were closed. This woman jumped up and was attacking me. God only knows why she did it. Yes we had all been drinking but not to the point where anybody should've been stupid. When she did this, I yelled because I didn't know what was wrong with her and I got up, and I grabbed her, and I commenced to beat her. I did kind of lose it. I got stupid. I don't drink and drive, but I had my car that night, and I got in the car getting ready to leave, and this guy came out and said something about me attacking this woman. And then she comes out again with foolishness coming out of her mouth. And God only knows

why I did this, but before I knew it, I don't know how it happened, the next thing I knew my car was up on the sidewalk. I was trying to run her over. Everybody was saying, she's crazy. I honestly don't know why I did that. I was literally trying to kill this woman, and I had never done anything like that in my life. They kept saying, I'm crazy. At that point I was out of the car, and I lost my temper again. But out of nowhere I saw some white cops show up and they kind of calmed me down. I scared myself because I had never tried to take anyone's life. I don't know where any or all of that anger came from. All I knew was that the woman was trying to hurt me, and I couldn't allow her to do that.

To deal with her pain, Patricia began to write. As she said, "I just had this need. I guess to express myself in some way." She would write poetry and she admits that "actually I wasn't very good, but I was writing it anyway." Patricia joined a writer's workshop and began to gain confidence in herself and in her abilities as a writer, and she even began to give public readings of her poetry. But it appears that it was her relationship to the other women in the workshop that began to impact her life, as she said:

I began to look at the women that I was beginning to come into contact with. I saw that they didn't have any problems with who and what they looked like. I said, you know the more sisters that I'm around and brothers too, but in particularly the sisters, I was getting a lot of good energy. There was some negative stuff out there, but the positive energy far and above outweighed the negative. I've never been a huggy kissy person. I always kind of stood back and surveyed the surrounding to get a feed on things. These sisters would just come up spontaneously and just embrace you. I was like real tense for a while because I was not used to people I didn't know touching me. It took a while for me to get used to that, but I saw that it was genuine, so I kind of relaxed a little with that. They were very encouraging and that meant a lot to me, because growing up, even with the females that I would hang out with, there was more competition than encouragement. I saw that they genuinely encouraged each other's work no matter what it was. I was searching. Here I am, and I've found this wonderful thing that I didn't know that I could do, and now I'm a little timid because I don't know what to do with it.

Chapter Five:

She Works

By the late 1970s all of the women in this study were working full-time jobs: some had started working immediately following their graduation from high school, while others did not work full-time until they graduated from college. Largely as a result of the civil unrest and political activism of the 1960s and 1970s, the United States government had implemented a series of legislative policies designed to improve employment opportunities for blacks, both within their local communities and in the society at large. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited hiring discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, and to monitor compliance the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established. Other affirmative efforts targeted toward training and employment were implemented such as the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962, and the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. As a result of these acts, programs such as Neighborhood Youth Corps, Job Corps, and the Work Incentive Program (WIN) were developed. Some of these programs were replaced by the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) of 1973. Many black women, like some of the participants in this study, took advantage of the opportunities these training and employment initiatives offered.

Several of the women in this study worked in their communities with various government sponsored programs, while others entered the private sector under Affirmative Action hiring policies, and some worked in both areas. Regardless, work enabled the participants to make an independent living for themselves and, for those who

had children, to provide for their families as well. But working was not unproblematic. Many of the women faced the challenge of responding to conventional patterns of sexism and racism even though they did not work in traditionally held jobs by black women, like many of their mothers. This chapter focuses on some of the paid work as well as the unpaid community and political work experiences of the women and their determination to provide for themselves and their families, even against odds that at times appeared insurmountable.

Working Affirmatively

Even though many of the women in this study had worked in some capacity as children and received pay for their labor, they did not work a full-time job until they were in their late teens or early twenties. Jackie, for instance, had worked a part-time job in her community after school at Woolworth's, as a sales clerk. After graduating from high school, Jackie said, "I got one of those everybody got to hire a black person jobs at the stock exchange. I was probably the third black person that was hired in the whole building." Describing how she got the job, Jackie said:

One of my friends said they're looking for black people at this firm. Just go and fill out an application and take the test. I went and I took the test, and they told me I was over qualified, and that scared me. I said, how could you be over qualified for something you know nothing about? I didn't know what that meant, and I was kind of upset behind that. But then, the next day, it was pouring rain, snowing, sleeting; it was doing everything. I had on a kelly green coat, and I had my hood on, and I was soaking wet. I was walking up the hallway of the stock exchange and I heard this squishing and dripping all over the place. And these white people were sitting there, and they were looking at me, and there was nothing but big puddles of water. They interviewed me, and I got hired. I went straight to the research department. I made 18 thousand dollars a year, which was a lot of money in 1965, and I was just 18.

Jackie loved her job, and she worked in the research department where she had to keep detailed records on the movement of particular stocks that were being bought and sold. She said, "I knew what the stock opened and closed at. There were no computers. I learned everything. I had a memory. Even if I looked at the paper during the morning, I knew what the stock opened and closed at." Even though she loved her job, Jackie had difficulties adjusting to the corporate culture. Recalling her experience, she said:

I was almost too stupid to know how I was treated. I was pretty much a blazer and pleated skirt kind of person. I should have gone to a prep school because I was dressing that way. But when I got there, I had to change my style of dress because they wanted you to dress a certain way in that office. You couldn't come there in skirts and blouses. You had to wear dresses with the heels, which was a whole different attire from what I had. I had to wear my hair back, so I had this long ponytail in the back of my head. I would wear it back or put it up, but basically that was it. They taught me how to speak, so they thought. If I would use any slang language, I would have to pay the pot five cents. I used to hate that. That was for everyone, but it was only me who was using the slang language, so it was for me. I got tired of them going out for lunch on my money because I did have a small slang problem. But I did know the English language as well. My boss hated me because he would call me by my first name, and I would call him by his first name too.

Jackie encountered some racial tension on the job. She recalls an incident where she had worked closely for three years over the telephone with a co-worker, who was working at the firm's Chicago office site. "She was coming to New York, and we were going to have lunch and the whole thing. When she walked into the office I heard her, but I was in the back and this other girl told her I was back there. When she walked back and saw me, she stood there and looked at me and then kept on walking. Never spoke or nothing. She had to pass me to get by; it just looked like I was invisible. Never spoke to me again on the phone, nothing. That was like the deepest part of racism that I had felt at

that job." Jackie worked at this job for about five years, and she worked there until she was "on the verge of having a breakdown." Describing the nature of this experience, she said:

The breakdown was with the job because my computer was on overload. It got to a point that everything I looked at, I computed. Everything in the world belongs to some kind of stock; a cab goes by, a bus goes by, anything on television, everything made the computer replay. What happens during that day, that week, that year, what was sold and what was bought. I'm talking about the computer in my head. It was on total overload. I didn't know any other way to unload it other than to leave the job, which was upsetting me. But I mentally couldn't take it anymore.

In contrast, Patricia's first full-time job was in the public sector: she worked at a "welfare center" in a predominately black community. She worked in a clerical position where she took short hand and did filing. It was during the period when "investigators would go out to people's homes who were receiving public assistance." She said, "it let me see first hand how people were treated who needed assistance." This job did not pay enough for her so she quit and found another secretarial position working at a bank.

Similarly, Barbara first full-time adult job was also clerical and when she moved to New York City. "The only thing that I could do was type; I was a good typist." But as she said, "of course every place I went I couldn't get a job. I finally got a job working at a company out in Long Island somewhere. I had to sit there and type all day. I think I was making fifty dollars a week." Barbara stayed at this job for six months and then got a job at a television station. Recalling this experience, she recalls:

I was working in the law department. That was really a trip because I had never typed on an electric typewriter, and I got the job. And when I started working there they gave me an electric typewriter, and I touched the thing, and it started typing. So I had to think real fast. I told them that I couldn't

see well, so I had to start wearing glasses. I went through this whole thing until I learned how to really type on this typewriter because I couldn't do it at first. I worked there for two years.

After graduation from college Faith worked a series of short-term acting jobs, and then she returned to her hometown in the South where "there was an active black theater scene happening." She started to work with a black theater company, and she also took a full-time job working at a television station as a floor director. She describes this as a "really hip job to have, if you had to have a job. I did the morning news, so I worked from 6:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. That was great because after 2:30 you were free. I remember during that time, going to work in the morning, doing a little bit of hanging out in the afternoon, going to a movie or something, going to rehearsal, and then going to bed."

Sharon, like Faith, wanted to work full-time as an artist. She had majored in music and after graduating from college wanted to pursue a singing career in New York City. But upon moving to New York, she entered a training program to become a manager at a major department store in the city. However, as she said:

I totally hated it. I had to do all of the paperwork for transferring merchandise. The store was unionized so you couldn't do stuff like dress the mannequins. And the sales people, who were unionized, had to move the merchandize around the store. So all I did was paperwork. I realized that I didn't like the job probably a month after I was there.

Mary's first full-time job in New York was working at a small hotel. "I was cleaning bathrooms, making beds, vacumming and doing whatever had to be done in the hotel." She kept the job until the "hotel got robbed."

The hotel got robbed on the first of the month. I guess that's when everybody paid their bill. I was in the office when the robbery occurred. I recognized one of the guys cause I pulled the thing off his face. They took

this cord and cut it up and tied my hands behind my back. They tied up the old man too. But they beat the old man in the head with a gun. The guy said, you didn't tell me that she looked so good. We ought to take her with us. And then the guy I recognized said, na don't bother her. We don't want to get involved in no kidnapping. So after about a month, the old man wouldn't give me a gun. So I wouldn't work for him any longer. I went and got a job in the cleaners.

After college, Sara decided to enroll in a special journalism program that had been established at a college in New York City. She decided to go into journalism for two reasons. First, "I wanted to come to New York, and I knew my parents would have a problem with it, and I was sort of afraid to come here without a hook." And second, "I decided to go to J school right after the Kerner Commission Report." She said, "the Kerner Commission had decided that more black journalists were needed," and this college established a special summer program, that was different from its degree program, to train minority journalists. Sara struggled through the program because she "would get high and get drunk and hang out, and then I would miss my morning appointments." And by doing this, she got caught in "a big fat lie." On one occasion, she "wrote the story as if I had been there," and got caught by her professor. She did not get put out of the program, but she was more attuned to "ethics in journalism and in life." After completing the program, Sara said "you didn't end up with a degree, you ended up with a job, which was what I liked about the program." She worked her first full-time job as journalist for a New York City newspaper in 1969. Describing this experience, Sara said:

First I started out on the women's section, and I was doing campus stuff, and I was trying to get the straight news, and they really weren't interested in that. So I did a lot of feature writing, and that was like a plum, but I didn't really want it. I really wanted to chase fires.

Sara said she took her job seriously, and she "felt that she was on a mission":

It was a mission for me to keep these white folks from running these stereotypes on black folks. My first commitment was being a black person. I took all that stuff very seriously. At the time I did have a goal: the goal was to sort of start my own paper or to work with people who were starting their own paper. I didn't feel like I could really tell the truth in the system. I wanted to write about the TRUTH. I wanted to tell the truth. I was there standing guard on keeping these white people in check. There were some fights. The minority journalists, the black journalists, had a big meeting. There were a lot of activities. A lot of it was trying to make some kind of difference because it was obvious that we needed to do something about the way the news was reported on black folks. I believed in all that stuff. But the fact that I was getting high meant that I couldn't be counted on. I didn't feel authentic somehow. I worked there for a year. I felt like I was writing about other people's lives; I felt like a voyeur; I felt like I wasn't actually living my own life; I felt like I had to distance myself from things.

While in college, Amanda worked a series of summer jobs and one of the jobs she describes as "really an eye opener" was with a major company that published various women's fashion magazines. One of the fashion magazines would put out an annual college edition that would showcase female college students. It was decided that a special black colleges edition would be published as well. And the magazine held a contest at various predominantly black college to find women for this special edition. Amanda's friends talked her into entering the contest, and she won as a finalist at her college, and her prize was to work at the magazine company during the summer. Of this experience, Amanda said:

I was supposed to be a model, but it was more like a go for. You were sent around to work with the different magazines. It was interesting, but I didn't get paid very much. And then I had to model in the showroom. It's the kind of modeling you do in a showroom for buyers who come from the various stores to decide what they were going to buy for the fall season. Everybody was really into this real thin stuff. I saw that you could

become very neurotic, so preoccupied with every little thing about your body. Then there was this cosmetics firm which was going to show for the first time black make-up. So I was sent on this shoot, and I thought that I was in another world. I eventually ended up sitting on the side talking to this white photographer because the women were like barracudas. These were all black women. They were very catty and insulting to each other, and they were trying to seduce the photographer to get selected. I just felt that this was real stupid. I never even mentioned it to my daughter, and somebody told her about it, and she wanted to hear all about this experience because somebody approached her about doing modeling. I said, well it's your choice, but I didn't find it a good experience.

Corporate Work

By the 1970s some of the women in this study began to focus their energy on establishing a professional career in the private sector, where they entered the world of white corporate America. Often in this hierarchical culture, they entered on the ground floor through entry-level clerical positions, and at the time they were usually one of a selected few "minorities" working at the company. Some progressed to one of a few "minorities" in management. Two participants in this study established long-term careers: one in fashion publishing and the other in banking, while others pursued a series of jobs with different companies, often in search of better pay. However, whether they were pursuing a profession or simply better working conditions, they all believed that they made important personal compromises and concessions and had to face their own contradictions in order to work within the corporate culture they found themselves in.

After getting married Anne quit her job to become a housewife, but she soon realized that she wanted as well as needed to work. So she went to the Urban League looking for assistance, and they referred her to the same company for which Amanda had

worked some years earlier as a model during the summer. "At the time that I came there, the Urban League was the major referral route for black people to get hired there." It was a company that published a variety of women's fashion magazines. Anne said, "I was told that I had been hired because I seemed to be the kind of individual that they were looking for. I didn't realize that there had to be criteria for brown anybody to be in that environment. I was ignorant of that. But I also knew that there wasn't much I could do about the corporate structure. They didn't have an affirmative action policy when I was hired." She was hired as a temporary secretary, but she "thought that it was a full-time job." And when the woman whom she was temporarily replacing returned, the company offered her a permanent clerical position. Anne worked at what she called "the Tiffany of the magazine publishing world" for nine years. In discussing the different phases of her employment at that company and what led to her resignation, Anne recalls:

In my first job there I reported to the Senior Fashion Editor. My responsibility was to do her clerical work which required the typing of some reports and her expense account. I was the only black woman in the fashion department. From her, I went to work with the Shoe and Accessory Editor. She was the terror of the office. I worked for her like 7 or 8 years. It was great. I got promoted to an Associate Fashion Editor, whereby my name went on the masthead. Eighteen months after I was there my salary increased but magazine publishing paid paltry sums for salary. I had learned the art of asking for more money, after 6 month-intervals. I would tell them I wanted a raise. I'm sure I was so naive that it was pennies and peanuts I guess, to a certain degree, I was humored, and I didn't exceed the boundaries.

With her promotion to Associate Fashion Editor, Anne had to "maintain the shoe closet. The shoe closet was a room with floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with shoes on three walls. I had to know all of the manufacturers; I had to know all of the sizes; I had to

know what was there, because you had photography shoots coming and going."

Technically, being promoted to Associate Editor, Anne was no longer clerical support.

However, she was "still doing the clerical work for the Shoe and Accessory Editor."

Gradually, Anne began to assume more and more responsibility because she loved her job, and she began taking on some of the responsibility for the shoes and accessory aspects for photography shoots. She describes herself as a "natural fit into this environment, both in terms of personality and the ability to execute the job." Seeing what she viewed as opportunities within the company, she eagerly performed her job and was aware of the contradictions that were a part of the environment in which she worked:

Lots of time we did location shoots. As opposed to photographing in hotels or building lobbies, we could be in Central Park or anywhere. I did a lot of traveling within the city. I fit in the work environment during the confines of the day. But I was very clear that I was living a schizophrenic existence. Schizophrenic is my way of describing the split. I was aware of the fact that I worked in a much more plush environment than the one I lived in. I was very aware of the fact that I had to keep a balance between the two. I could not buy into the luxury of the magazine business without suffering the consequences of alienation from my own private life style. There were compromises. The compromises was one of time, of association with friends being curtailed, there was a compromise in terms of life style, and there was a compromise economically.

Along with the compromises, Anne was also aware of the unique benefits she received from the job. As she said, "I got exposure to do more and more and more. I would do fashion shows, I would travel around the country, I would do television, I would do radio, and I would do commercials. I wouldn't ask for it, but if an opportunity presented itself I wouldn't turn it down. I'm a firm believer in the value of experience as a support mechanism for me. I was very aware of that because I didn't have the diploma

that said okay we know that she can count beyond five." Anne saw herself as a "spokesperson representing the magazine. I was a novelty." But as Anne concedes, "there was always a white female counterpart." She enjoyed the visibility that her job afforded her, as she said:

My job was in a sense for everybody the world at large I mean being a fashion editor at a major magazine was a big deal. It was a big deal to white people. It was definitely a big deal for black people. Publishing across the board doesn't have the same cache now that it used to have. But it still is suffering from that elite perspective, that elitist attitude that you are part of some chosen group of people to be here. My parents were very impressed. I encouraged model editors to see black women who were beginning to model at the time. I was the one who introduced my sister to fashion modeling and got her into an interview situation at the magazine. She was one of the first black models at a major modeling agency. I made myself accessible to young people who were trying to figure out a way to get into the business of publishing. I knew that there was no other way they would get the information. My mother was proud of me. She used to tell everybody that my daughter worked at the magazine. I'm not sure that I ever heard my sister say that she was proud of me or that she took an overt pride in my accomplishments.

During this period, Anne saw herself "as a very fortunate black woman. I saw myself as fortunate because I knew I had somebody's job that had studied to be this, and I just fell into it. I understood that I recognized opportunity when it knocked. I understood that there were other black women who had worked at this magazine and who, for whatever reason, did not survive it." Giving her growing body of experiences at the magazine, Anne began to apply for positions with the company that were of "higher status and pay." But she found that she:

was being constantly let down indirectly. I was allowed to interview for these positions, so seemingly it was equitable, it was fair. But I would find after the fact that these jobs that I had applied for were being given to other people. They would be people with less experience, people who

belonged to very important families, people who had another piece of education, or not necessarily education but had money. These were still the days when magazine employment was a rite of privilege, a right of class. The few blacks may have been around in other departments, working at other company magazines, had now dwindled. I'm the highest ranking black fashion editor, the highest ranking editor that's black, who had her name on the masthead, whose name has been on the masthead for close to 9 years.

Anne said that she attributes "not being promoted primarily to racism. I didn't fit. I didn't fit the mold that was acceptable. I think that I was too brown. I'm aware that I hit that proverbial glass ceiling." She submitted her letter of resignation, and "they were stunned that I would have gall enough to resign from this great and wonderful job." She described her last day on the job as "exciting" and remembered that she "had a great time. they gave me a great party, and everybody came":

I was having a series of out of body experiences because you hear people talk about you as though you're dead. People were coming up and giving me some kind of special or personal commemoration for my efforts at the magazine. I heard people's descriptions about me personally, and it was almost like I was standing outside of myself asking myself who is she. It was funny, but at the same time it was very powerful because I didn't understand the power that I had. They were very sad, but I knew that I had to do it. I knew also, based on some of these little one-on-one conversation, that if things didn't work out I probably could go back. Not necessarily to that particular magazine, but to the corporate family. That was one of the motivating factors that they sort of gave me, the kind of support I needed for going forward. I knew that I was the kind of person that they would take back. That was part of my own personal pride, my own personal integrity, which I was very very driven to maintain.

In 1968, Mary was hired at a bank where she worked until she retired. Her former boss, at another bank, asked her to come and work with him at what she describes as a "union bank." She was, "in charge of the night shift of the operations division of the computer room. The computer room was a big old cold icy place, where you had people

using an IBM key punch machine. I would have to train them or show them how to do the work. You know how they encoded the bottom of checks and then of course reconcile that and send your work out to the federal reserve bank." Mary had taken advantage of night classes offered by the American Institute for Banking to develop her understanding of the banking industry, and this experience helped her in her new position at the union bank. Recalling her experiences and some of the major challenges she faced at the bank and in the industry, Mary said:

When I moved over to the union bank, I was the only black that was in a supervisory position, because that was a new department. Whites ruled all the other areas. The day shift supervisor would always leave all the work for us to do on the night shift. I would complain and try to explain to them why it wasn't fair. What were they doing during the day if they were leaving everything for the night shift? You could see how much work had come in, and you could see how much work had been done. I don't know what they were doing during the day, but they certainly weren't working. I had to keep going in and proving that they were not completing their jobs.

Mary described herself as "straightforward and outspoken" at the job. "People always knew that I was fair and I knew what I was talking about." She believed herself to be a "fair supervisor," but admits that she "was a little prejudiced." As she said, "I'm being prejudiced with whites cause some of them would try and tell me what to do or try to intimidate me." Mary continued to work the night shift, but she was to be promoted and that is when she found out that "you had to be at the bank for ten years before you got promoted." But she could see other people getting promoted: "the guys but not the women." She transferred to the day shift, and finally she received her first promotion. Discussing this experience, Mary said:

Once I got on the day shift and I excelled and I made them promise that I

could go to every department and learn every crook and cranny of banking. Eventually I got promoted. I went there in 1968, in 1978 that was my first promotion: ten years after I started. I think that there was one other black person that was an officer before me. My first promotion was to Assistant Manager. That's the first introduction to I guess what you would call the administrative level. I had to come out of the union. I was the union representative from the time I got there in 1968 until 1978. They wanted to get me out of the union because I was too strong for them with negotiations. They couldn't intimidate me. They would try to harass me, and I would just bring them up on charges all the time. I was a shop steward which means I represented all of the unionized workers. They had asked me earlier to come out of the union, but I didn't. I knew why they wanted me to come out. They asked me to vote their way on a contract. They promised me all of this stuff that I could get if I did it, and I didn't do it, so they saw that they were wasting their time.

But then they offered me \$7,500 to become an officer, at that time if they gave you a promotion it didn't mean money. They thought that the promotion was going to do so much for your ego, but I didn't see the reason for changing a title for no money, so I said, okay, for \$7,500, yes I will become an officer. But I saw that as just a salary adjustment probably that I was deserving of anyway for all the hard work that I was doing. So yeah, I came out of the union then. I had trained some people very well, and I taught them about how to get around in the politics. But they didn't listen, they were more vulnerable. Whatever management would ask them to do, they would do it. The union went down after I left.

Mary felt "sad" about the union not being as "productive as when I had managed it." but she felt that it was time for her to move on. As she said, "once you made a choice to move on then you can't really feel bad." With her promotion, Mary became the Business Development Officer for minority groups. "I started bringing in unions and different accounts. I recruited all of the major black organizations, cause I was a member of all of those organizations: the National Urban League, United Negro College Fund, the NAACP and many of its branches. I recruited them to open up accounts at the bank." In addition to bringing in new accounts to the bank, Mary also started a chapter of the

National Association for Banking Women at the bank in an attempt to "strengthen and empower" the women she was working with. They would have monthly meetings to "get caught up with every change in banking and to discuss in-house problems, so this was a way of my having continuity with helping people." Mary said that she was known as a "trouble maker," and she had to deal with the implications of being labeled as such:

If racism or discrimination was blatant, I would be confrontational with management about that. The bank was afraid to really mess with me, but they would do things to other people, and other people would bring it to my attention, and I would still go to management and try to rectify the problem. I knew that I was in a unique position. So what they would do in contrast to me was to keep me from progressively making adjustments with my promotions. As long as I was getting bonuses for the work that I was bringing into them, that helped me personally to be able to take care of my household, and take care of all my basic needs, I didn't need a title. I wasn't the highest ranking black in title, but in action and in responsibility I was. Sometimes you can be a clerk and be more powerful than a vice president, and that was always my contention. I didn't need a title in order to be empowered. I would do things based on what was right or what was needed.

Mary believed that "even without realizing it," she had "created a power base," and this was important because management was constantly trying to find ways to get rid of her. Increasingly, "life at work was hectic and busy" for her and in 1981 she developed a "bleeding ulcer." She found out about the ulcer when she "fell out going to lunch one day. My stomach just burst I had two holes, and I was bleeding. They rushed me to the hospital and I stayed there for seventeen days. They thought that I was going to die, and when you have a bleeding ulcer it doesn't heal as fast as the other kind." Mary took off six weeks from work to try and heal herself. "I got into yoga, and I got into meditation as a way to begin to heal myself, but mainly prayer and calmness, trying to see how I could

slow my life down, because you got to remember everything else was still going on around me." But the pressures of the job continued and in 1988, Mary had worked at the bank for 20 years, and she decided to retire because of a back injury. In reflecting upon her banking experiences and her contributions, Mary said:

By 1988, I was pretty well known in the banking community. I had like maybe 1,300 clients when I left, that I had recruited on my own. I brought in 33 million dollars in business to that bank. This was supposed to mean that I would get at least \$7,500 if not \$10,000 in bonuses each year. But they would give me like half of that, maybe \$3,500 as a bonus. When I left the bank, I was making \$1,300 a week, and when I started there I was making \$137 a week. In all fairness I didn't do bad. But on a scale of male verse female, I should have been doing maybe \$2,000 a week, instead of \$1,300. Since I retired early, that's what my retirement is, one fourth of what I was making, so I now get \$1,300 a month. Women usually get about 65% of what the men were getting paid. But I liked what I was doing, so that was the compromise--a mental compromise to offset not getting paid what I should be getting. I tried to get other women to complain.

I decided to sue for discrimination, and I had itemized about 25 different incidents where it was so obvious. My case is still pending. I've gone through four lawyers, and the last one is making tiny bits of progress, but it takes a long time. I'm not in it for the money, you see I don't live high on the hog. I don't have high aspirations for material things. I had been in numerous car accidents and hurt my back and neck, so as soon as I turned 55, I was out of there. I had five retirement parties. All the unions, everybody wanted to give me a party, and it was good to be able to say goodbye to everybody. I had no regrets about retiring. I could tell when I made it. It was a good decision.

Patricia also worked in banking, but unlike Mary, she would work a series of clerical jobs with different banks throughout the city. "I started working at banks in 1968," she said, "and I stayed at one bank for a number of years; I worked at a variety of branches." She got the job "by just walking into the bank and asking them who do I see

about getting a job here?" She was sent to the main office branch in downtown Manhattan where she went through "testing and the taking of your fingerprint." She was hired and worked in one of the branch offices in the Bronx. Because of the community the branch was located in, there were "other blacks working at the bank, but they were mostly tellers and there were a few whites and all of them were in decision-making positions." Describing what she did, Patricia said:

I was working what they called the platform: you know, when you come into a bank and you see certain individuals who are sitting at desks. I was the manager's secretary. Actually I was doing more than I was supposed to do, and they knew it, but they didn't care. I was opening up bank accounts, I was ordering checks for folks, I could do pretty much everything. But I didn't have a degree or anything. Obviously I wasn't doing bank loans or stuff like that, but I knew how to prepare all of the paperwork and get things together. When the bank closed, I would go behind the teller cage and help the tellers count their money; help them clear-up for the day. I would just do some of everything.

Patricia felt "totally unappreciated." As she said, "one thing that angered me, but kept me very aware of stuff, was that they would send secretary trainees to me to train."

Patricia went on to discuss this experience:

I would train them, and I would teach them, and then they would be sent downtown to make more money than I was. Often time they were white. Once in a while they would send a black girl, but the majority of them were white. After a while I didn't care. You know I would come in when I felt like it. I didn't care if I was late, it just didn't matter to me. I knew that wasn't the mature thing to do. I know that now. But I had begun to see that I wasn't going nowhere there, and I wasn't making that much money. I remember I was making \$110 a week, which to me was an insult especially when I was training people and when I got through training them, they knew what they were doing.

Patricia knew that she did not necessarily fit within the banking culture, and this became most evident to her around her decision to change her hair style--where she

stopped wearing a wig and got an Afro. Recalling how she was perceived at work,

Patricia said:

When I went to work, they were so used to seeing me with the wig on, and I came in with my natural hair, and the manager looked at me and said, oh no, no, no, no, no I like your hair the other way. He happened to be white of course. I told him, you like my hair the other way, well when I come in here tomorrow I will give it to you, you can have it because it's not mine. This is mine. I'm one of those people who's not talkative at work. I do what I got to do, and if you talk to me I will talk to you, but if you don't that's fine too. So he was always kind of watchful of me. I find a lot of white folks are that way if you're black. If you're not very talkative, telling them your entire life history, they become very leery, watchful and distrustful. I was automatically a black militant because I choose not to straighten my hair and then again because I wasn't that talkative.

Patricia discovered that "the manager apparently decided that he no longer wanted me there. They were pushing me out." So she decided to leave before they fired her. She had worked at that bank for three years and of that time, she said:

I didn't get not one promotion, nothing. I got raises, where they find everything that they find wrong with me and give the smallest raise possible. And that's what they were doing to me. They never actually did not give me a raise, but they would find something wrong in order not to give me the raises that I should have been getting. But I stayed working in a variety of banks. I bounced all over the place.

Sara, like Patricia, "bounced all over the place." After leaving the newspaper, Sara did temporary work, and she decided that she "hated working for other people," that she was "not disciplined enough to handle it," so she took freelance writing assignments. But out of economic necessity, Sara went to work at a major magazine and book publishing company, where she worked initially as a researcher, and later as a writer. She tripled her salary in the company by "doing text blocks, and how to instructions, and stuff like that for the book division." But she admits that during this period, "I really started

drinking." Later, when she struggled to get sober, she also worked a series of jobs. At one point, she remembers:

I was cleaning houses for a living. Then I couldn't do that anymore. Somebody called me their cleaning lady. They had left the keys downstairs in an envelop marked cleaning lady. I had a relationship with the doorman, who knew me by name and I talked to him. I asked him if there were keys left for me, and he said I don't see anything, this says cleaning lady. I could never go back after that. And I was the cleaning lady, so it was my problem.

After leaving that job, Sara got a CETA job and worked in a video studio.

Describing this experience Sara said:

I went in as a reporter and then I decided that was too subjective, and I wanted to learn something technical, so I became a camera person, and I was a video editor. But I never really paid attention. I didn't know how to light well, and I went to do a commercial for one of those furniture companies, and there were shadows everywhere. I was thinking the other day that I really had opportunities to learn things that people spend their lives doing, and I have a very surface, hit and run attitude about things. I worked there for a while, and then it folded.

Initially, Barbara too bounced around in a series of jobs in the private sector. She had initially started as a secretary and gradually worked in various other positions in advertising where she began to develop a body of expertise and became a publicist. As she said, the culture of the advertising business was such that "you go from agency to agency. So I moved around to different agencies." This was in the 1960s, and for Barbara "if racism was around, I didn't see it at all." But she also admits that she was in a process of trying to recreate herself, and she was drinking. Of that time, she said, "I had no idea who I was. There was upheaval and stuff going on, and a lot of that I lost because I had already lost myself, so I wasn't really in tune with a lot of the political stuff that was

happening." But at her last job at an advertising agency she was laid off. After returning from Europe and after her failed marriage, Barbara struggled to get sober, and in doing so she went into partnership with a friend and they started a publicity firm.

Working My Own Job

Like Barbara, several women in this study were entrepreneurial and started their own business after they left the corporate sector. Unable to find a job, Barbara decided "I'll create a job. I'll make my own job." Her last position in an advertising agency was that of a publicist where she "worked promoting artists," so she decided that was what she could do on her own. She describes the eight years that she worked for herself as "the best time of my life. It was so rewarding, and that's when I got my self-esteem." She had a partner, "who was like my mentor. He's like eighty years old." Although Barbara looked to him for guidance, she was "the one who really went out and got the business."

Recalling this experience, she said:

That's when I had more courage than I ever had in my life. I learned how to trust myself, trust my instincts. It gave me the courage to say, you know I can do things that I didn't think that I was capable of doing. I did publicity. I did major campaigns. I did a campaign for the first East Europeans who came into to the country to play different basketball teams. I did a campaign for a major black pop singer. I had this one artist, this woman who was a therapist, and she had this thing Therapy To Go, and I got her on all of these television shows. She was like in a limousine, and these were busy people, so you just called her and she would go to where you were. I did a television station's 50th anniversary. Whatever it was I figured out a way to do it. But you're constantly looking for business, and it just got to a point that it was difficult. You had to fight to get paid from clients. Also, I had about 15 accounts. It was a lot, because you had to try and get them something, because if you had like a no-name person, you had to get them publicity, you had to get them something to show them,

hey this is warranted money. Then you could work like crazy, and they would come to you and say I have to pay my rent. My thing was, I have to pay mine too. So it got to the point where it was too difficult.

To make ends meet, Barbara started doing freelance work two days a week with a major music company in New York City. Impressed by her work, they said, "why don't you come and work with us?" Barbara was the first black professional woman to work there. She continues to work there and in her seven years with the company, she has "only been promoted once, just a step above a coordinator." Describing her frustrations and her dilemma, Barbara said:

My instinct told me that I shouldn't go to work there because I knew that I would lose a part of myself. but then again my bank book said yes. take it. I thought that I could cope with it. In my first year there I wasn't doing nothing, just doing like little press releases. No major stuff. Nothing where I was using my brain, not going to work and saying I've accomplished something, I've done something good. My first year, my second year, my third year and my fourth year. My position is coordinator. and in a sense a coordinator is a glorified step above a secretary. It's not something that is challenging. That's the thing that's a real problem for me. And then of course being 55, it's like a cut off point for women. It's like okay, you're 55 years old, so you can't do anything anymore. I feel just the opposite because I'm a person where the first years, I was just floating around. In a sense I'm ready mentally and physically to do the things I could not do years prior. And it's like a cut off point that says, oh you can't do it. I gave a major presentation and they said, thanks for being creative. But they just ignored it. People say, well you're limiting yourself. If I could find something to leave there for, I would be gone. But I don't have anything to take to go somewhere else with. You got to have something to show if you go somewhere else, but I don't have anything to take.

After resigning from the women's fashion magazine where she had worked for nine years, Anne drew upon contacts that she had established while working in the industry and became a freelance consultant. It allowed her to "stash some money aside

for investing in my own business." Even as a child, Anne had been interested in designing and making clothes. So she teamed up with a designer, an attorney, and a Chinese manufacturer in Hong Kong to start a business in 1981. She wanted to move into the "plus-size clothing market," and she focused on this area of the market because she "had now become a mini expert on it." She thought that there was "a trend that was not starting then, but people were mumbling about." Recalling her experience, Anne said:

All of the team members had a fashion background. The designer illustrated my concepts and would buy the fabric, and I would stitch the design. Some friends of mine would also sew. It was a mom and pop operation. We wore as many hats as it took to do what we had to do. It was long hours. Some days we wouldn't sleep for two days. We shared the showroom with the manufacturer. We sold 300 thousand dollars worth of confirmed paper orders to Macy's, Harrods and a bunch of other stores. I got all kinds of publicity. I got national publicity. When the samples came out people were stunned. They were clothes that they wanted to wear. We knew that we had a good product. But the backer gave us no warning and pulled the rug from underneath us. We were expecting our shipments, some stores got their clothes, so we are calling trying to find out where's the rest of the shipment. That's when we found out that nothing had been made.

In an attempt to avoid humiliation and to save the company, Anne got a design contract with a "very big manufacturer: it was separates and accessories." Her team developed the designs, but the manufacturer decided that "they weren't going to spend the money to develop the line." So they gave her a "big check" for her work, and she, in turn, "paid off everybody" that she owed. This experience left Anne "stunned." She said, I was just stunned that they could pay me for the designs and then just treat them like old Kleenex." During this period, Anne was in her "late thirties," and she realized that she

was in a depression." As she said, "I had to reshape how I was going to move forward, and I saw myself doing it as a depressed person. So she decided to go to a Caribbean island and "try to figure out how I'm going to get myself together." Using her savings, she "woke up the next day, on my birthday, by myself, in Saint Martin, in a house that I had never been in, rented from a guy that I had only met over the phone, and I began my version of life begins at forty." Anne had planned to stay in Saint Martin for a month, and to keep herself busy she had brought with her fabric and two sewing machines. Anne setup house. "It was an unfinished house, so there was no running water, and there was no electricity. I lived by candle light and I walked a mile to the road to catch the bus. I ate in town, and I just had a ball."

Anne stayed in Saint Martin longer than she had anticipated, and she stayed for four years. Initially, she had taken a job managing a small boutique, but she also began to sew clothing for some of the "very wealthy white Americans who lived on the island." She left the boutique and began to focus exclusively on "making one of a kind evening and daytime clothes." Describing the nature of this experience, Anne said:

Now I'm independent, earning my living, making money solely on my ability to make clothes. I was doing this out of my apartment. I did it all myself. I was charging them anywhere from \$350 to \$500 a garment. A dress would take anywhere from two days to five days, depending on how involved it was. One of the things that I discovered was that people's clothes got ruined by the dry cleaners there, so I developed evening wear that could be hand washed, and they loved my stuff. I was doing good, and I moved back here, not by choice. I came back because my dad died in 1986. Following his death, I went back to Saint Martin thinking I could live there, but the economy changed and my mother needed help, so I came back home.

After she left her job at the stock exchange, Jackie decided to go back to college.

So in 1974 she enrolled in an "alternative learning program" at one of the local colleges that focused on early childhood education and was geared toward women who wanted to work in day care. Jackie said, "it was a four-year program, for some people it was six, but I got out of the program in three years, and I came out with a BA in business communication in education, some stupid stuff." Recalling this experience, Jackie said:

When I went to college, I didn't find myself any more ready to go to school than when I went to the community college. But what I did do that I didn't do in the community college, I participated in helping to develop comfortable classroom situations. I was able to help choose teachers that would come and teach. I was on the steering committee, so we had a lot of input on the activities that went on in school. So helping with programs and activities made me much more involved in the school, but not necessarily more ready for even some of the teachers we hired. I was not a good student. I have a poor attention span. It's like sitting here now. I would want to be doing something else, while I'm sitting here. That's how I was always in school. I just can't focus on one thing at a time. I have to be doing something else, which might lead to me not doing anything good. But I was a good student when I had to be a good student, when I had to apply myself to go and take tests, I could do that.

While going to school and working a part-time job, Jackie also opened a small delicatessen with her brother. It had a "Happy Days kind of atmosphere, cause it had like a bench, and kids would sit at the bench. We had pinball games, sandwiches, candy, and soda." The store was located "between a junior high and an elementary school," and children were the primary clientele, but "no child was allowed in the store during school hours." Jackie knew each of the principals at the schools and many of the teachers, and "all the kids every morning would pass the store, so you got to know the kids, and you got to know their parents too." She also hired "kids to work in the store," and it seems everybody in the community had the telephone number because "parents would call up

after 3:00 for their kids to come home." But running the store was time-consuming for

Jackie:

Initially, I started out with my brother, and then he went to do something else. And so my husband and I started doing it, and then that worked until I got mad at him and totally put him out. Then I hired my husband's cousin to work the store. Four o'clock in the morning, I would go shopping at the Hunts Point Market, and open up the deli at 7:00 a.m. I would stay there to 9:00 a.m. Then I would go to my other job, come home at 2:00 p.m., and I would go to my class, and we closed the store every night at 10:00 p.m. It was like between going to school, working, the children, I did the store. This went on for about four years or maybe longer.

The Art of Working

Three of the participants, Sharon, Faith and Patricia, worked as working artists, and in their own ways, they too were entrepreneurial. Sharon had practiced the piano for most of her childhood and later she would receive a Bachelor of Arts in music. She wanted to come to New York and pursue a singing career. After leaving the job that she hated at the department store, Sharon worked a series of temporary jobs, and she joined a rather large black choral group of about thirty people that focused on Negro Spirituals. "Almost every weekend we had jobs. It was just like being in a glee club," she said. With this experience, she began "hanging out and meeting people on the musical scene." Along with two other women, she decided to start a singing group in 1974, and although she had been trained as a classical singer, the group was "doing the girl group thing-- rhythm and blues and pop sort of thing." Through connections, they got two people to manage them, and "they would introduce us to other people. But things never quite jelled, so we signed them to be our songwriters. Their whole thing was, they were older

guys--they had to be in their fifties and sixties at that point--and what they really wanted to do was make money on their songs." Describing her attempts to make a career out of singing, Sharon said:

We were being paid for some things and for other things not. But we were determined. I had this job as an office manager, and the executive director was trying to hit on me, and he called me a fucking dyke bitch, and he fired me. So I collected unemployment for a year and a half. I was still singing in the choral group. I was going to the vocal coach. The group would go and audition for anything and everything. I knew I wasn't an actress, but I would go in and read just in case I got a part. It was an exciting time. This was like the middle 70s, and I was singing all over the place. They was the best years of my life. But my mother died. She just dropped dead in 1977.

Sharon was "devastated, totally devastated" by her mother's sudden death, and she returned to her midwestern home to make funeral arrangements, "I was 28, and I had to handle everything." She came back to New York, but she discovered that the "singing had died." For her, "a lot of things had gone wrong, a lot of disappointments." As she said:

If you are not in it, it's hard to understand how many auditions you go on, how many people you meet, how many people who tell you stories. All the things that happen are really just incredible. The group sort of broke up. The songwriters let us out of the contract because they couldn't fulfill their end of it. Me and another girl in the group did backup on stage and in the studio. We got a record contract, and six months into the deal we were working on our own album, and we found out that this was a whole mafia sort of thing. We were under contract for about a year, and then they put our project on the shelf, and the whole deal sort of died, and we got out of the contract. We have a whole album that we did with them. We did background with their other artists. The gigs we got after that weren't paying the rent: we were doing background stuff here and there, and studio stuff. I was working temporary clerical jobs to make ends meet. It's not necessarily the thing that you work really hard for that you get. But things have a way of evening themselves out. So that's what happened to my singing career.

When she stopped singing, Sharon said "it wasn't painful because by then I was totally fed-up." Upon reflection, she said:

You know how you work really hard, and it still doesn't mean anything. You may or may not succeed. By that time I was nearly forty years old, and I noticed that the girls coming behind me were much skinnier and younger. You would be dense not to notice that your time is over. That if you haven't become a star by a certain age, that you can pretty much wrap it up. And my other friends who were models and opera singers that didn't make it big, we were all seeing the same thing, and it was time to move onto something else. After a while you get tired of the bullshit. You're putting out money, and you're getting nowhere, you're putting out money for your pictures, you're putting out money for postage. You're putting out money for tapes. It's like having your own business. It's a lot of stuff that you have to put into it and you're getting no returns on it, so what's the point? After you've had so many disappointments you come to grips with the fact that hey, I'm not meant to be a big star. Always in my mind, I said, I came from a small town in the Midwest and I got to run with the sharks. I did get a chance to really try. I had enough nerves to try. So it was time for me to move onto that other part of my life.

While working at the television in her hometown, Faith was working with a theater company and still pursuing other acting jobs. During the early 1970s, companies started to do filming in Faith's home state because "it was a right-to-work state," which meant that the film industry wasn't required to hire unionized workers in that state. What started to become available for actors "was commercial stuff, local and regional, and every now and then a national commercial." Black actors were being cast in some of the commercials, but Faith discovered that "you needed to be browner than I was cause they wanted to be sure that there was no confusion that they had cast somebody black." In the fall of 1973, she decided to return to New York to pursue her acting career. As she said, "when I moved back, I was really planning on being an actress. I don't know what attracted me to acting. It was just the only thing that I like to do. At that point there was

no question in my mind about what I was going to do." And so Faith went about the business of being an actor:

For a very long time I didn't have jobs. I was doing off Broadway stuff. I was working showcases. Equity, the union, will allow you to do a certain number of performances where you pay people damn little so you can try and see if you can get backers for a show. I was doing the showcases. If I had my SAG card, then I was probably doing some extra work. But nothing really substantial. I was trying to find an agent. What I was doing to put food on the table, I might have been doing temp work. I was not by any means a great typist. I was taking classes. During this period I was trying to sharpen my skills, but I didn't realize that wasn't important. Somewhere along the line it's probably better to have a craft, but initially it's better to have a look. It's better to be a type, especially for film. I wasn't interested in developing a look. I was trying to be a craftsman.

Not only did Faith realize that a certain look was a part of acting, but she also realized that it was "definitely important to develop contacts, who you know is probably more important than what you know." And she admits that she "never could quite figure out the agent thing." As she said, "all the agents' offices said, don't come in, but the whole thing was that you went in anyway hoping that the moment that you came in the door there was going to be a low in the business, or somebody was going to be coming out of their office, or casting for something where you had the right look, and that they would take a minute to talk to you. Well ninety-five percent of the time that didn't happen, and what they did was curse you out." But Faith could get stage work: "it's not hard to get stage work without an agent." She joined a black theater company that was a part of the black arts' movement of the period, and stayed with the company for two years, and then she returned to her hometown in the South. Recalling this experience, she said:

I went home for Christmas one year and stayed. I got this job teaching drama in a high school for \$25 a day. This was in the mid-seventies. A woman I knew decided that she was going to open a theater company, and she was going to open it downtown. She rented a building downtown and the rent was astronomical, \$5000 a month. I don't know where she had gotten her money from. Us actors didn't worry about that. We had a month of paid rehearsals before any money started coming in from the shows. We had classes everyday beside rehearsals. One of the things I remember is that we took fencing, and I loved that. But we weren't doing Shakespear, so why was that necessary? We took tap, but we weren't doing musicals. Like everything that black people in the arts were probably trying to do then, the company was far too ambitious a beginning.

Early on, the theater company started to have money problems, and it did receive from the city some CETA job slots and the company's director was able to pay some of the actors. But the company "fell apart" and once again Faith moved back to New York. But by the end of 1970s, professionally she was "really questioning" whether she wanted to do theater. So she decided to develop a character that she could possibly sell in the educational market as a one woman performance. Faith thought that this would give her some independence and still allow her to do what she loved--acting. The character that she decided to develop for her performance was Sally Hemmings, the slave mistress of Thomas Jefferson. But in the early 80s, "it never crossed Faith's mind that "Sally would be controversial." Describing her attempts to bring Sally Hemmings to the stage, Faith said:

I don't think there was anything controversial about it, but for most people just the fact that I was saying Jefferson had this 38-year relationship with this black woman was enough. She was hardly black. She was a quadroon. In fact, I'm too dark to be Sally. People thought that I was denigrating one of their founding fathers. The booking agents would ask me if I could prove the relationship, I said, yeah the oral history. They said, oral history is not proof. I said depends upon what culture you're

from. I said, white people write things down. Booking agents find you jobs to perform, so they have to accept the piece, and then they would try and find gigs for you. I could not get anybody to accept the piece and during that time I wasn't even saying slave wife. Later on I just really decided to call it what I thought it was: the story of Jefferson Slave Wife, not mistress. Like I said, I couldn't find a booking agent, and that's definitely not anything that I do well. So I just chalked it all up to experience and put Sally in the corner.

Patricia had participated in a number of writers' workshops to develop her voice as a poet and she also was giving, along with other poets, public readings. By the middle 1980s, Patricia was feeling comfortable with her progress as a poet, so she decided to publish her first book of poetry. Initially, Patricia tried to get a company to publish her work, and she sent her work "out to a variety of places, and the majority of those places were white-owned publishing concerns, and what people had told me proved true--if you are not already a name, your work wasn't going to be considered by them." There was one publisher who accepted her work: "a small press, but they wanted to edit my work: change it. I said, that's totally unacceptable, thanks but not thanks." Given her experience with white publishers, Patricia came to the realization that:

The large publishing concerns could care less about publishing you, in particular African American poetry, or African American writers who write poetry because it relates to their experience. To me it's like a mind set, that the work is too black, whatever that means, or it's too ethnic, whatever that means. It was always too something when it came to black folks work. I decided that this almost struck me like begging; please publish my work. So I decided that I would look into publishing my own work. I said, well you know, on the one hand, I would have control over what goes in the book, I would have control over what the book looks like, I would have control over the book in its entirety. So whatever positive or negative comes out of it, it's on me if I publish my book myself.

Patricia did research on how to self-publish and discovered that "it wasn't as

difficult as I thought that it would be." She learned what "camera ready and type setting fonts and all that kind of stuff was." To pay for the publishing of her first book, she said "my mother loaned me some of the money, I had saved up some on my own, and part of it came out of my income tax return." She wanted to work with "people of color in putting the book together," so she hired a Hispanic association to do her type setting, and she "found a brother who would do the printing, and he didn't charge me an arm and a leg." Patricia was pleased with her accomplishment, but after she had published her first book of poetry, she realized that it had to be marketed to audiences in order for her to sell it.

Speaking of this experience, she said:

That was my biggest drawback. I'm always very good at pushing and singing the praises of other folks, but when it comes to me, I'm not very good at that. All of a sudden I'm very self-conscious. I had helped to give book parties for writers in the workshops and encouraged them, and let people know about their work, and set-up readings. But that wasn't done for me. I did expect that somebody would have a party for me. But it didn't happen that way. I was of the mind that, with all the work that I had done with those other writers, and they knew that I was doing this, I was thinking of the law of reciprocity. You know, well one hand washing the other, and both hands washing the face. It was just another learning lesson. I was a little let down, but I said that's okay. I gave myself my own book party. I gave a number of book parties for myself.

Patricia said that she was "actually feeling really good during this period." She was still a very active member in a writer's workshop, but she was growing increasingly frustrated with how the programming for poetry readings was handled. She realized that the majority of people selected to read their poetry were men, and that the women were the ones who would actually organize the program. She brought this observation to the male facilitator of the workshop and he responded by saying:

You know I've been doing this for a number of years, but I haven't been able to find any women writers. I thought that I would just drop right there. I said, excuse me, do you realize what you sound like? I said you know white folks in the 50s had a habit of saying we can't find any qualified black folks. I said, you sound exactly like that.

In addition to including women writers on the program, Patricia was also interested in organizing programs "other than straight poetry readings or book parties." She wanted to "do programs around a theme that dealt with something the community wanted to deal with, or what the community might be interested in." And she also wanted to do "programs around sisterhood." So she decided to start her own writer's workshop and it was called Ngoma's Gourd. Ngoma, Patricia said, "means one. And the gourd to my way of thinking--the writer and the poet have this story to tell-- the gourd I think of as the people, and we get out of the people whatever it is we put into the people. So I just kind of threw that together, and I liked the feel and the sound of it." Patricia knew what kind of program she wanted to organize, but she didn't know if she could pull it off, but drawing upon of years of experience at that, she said, "I'm going to try:"

So what I would do is call on people whenever I wanted to do a program. There's one girlfriend that I knew no matter when I call on her if she was capable of helping, she would be there for me. I knew that there were a couple of other women writers and singers who told me that they felt the spirit and the energy was right in what I want to do, and they didn't mind helping me out. I was fortunate in that because I had worked with the other writers groups. I knew how to get money from Poets and Writers, a small funding source for artists. I would make up the programs, you know, get out the flyers and mail them out. My girlfriends would help me with the mailings. I always made certain that I did some programs specifically around women. I'm not saying that there weren't a lot of programs for women, but there weren't enough of them around for me, so I figured I would try and add some. I didn't think that enough was being said or looked at around African American women in particular: discussing our problems, discussing our standards of beauty, discussing

sisterhood. There simply weren't enough of that for me. I felt that it was important for me as a woman to do that kind of stuff. I was fortunate that the programs did go off pretty well, but it was also my way of bringing other women together so that they could interact and network together, and something could jump off from that.

Work and Community Work

Several of the participants in this study while working full-time jobs, also worked within communities in which they lived as a way of expressing their social and political commitments. This was largely unpaid work that was demanding of their time and required many hours of active involvement that was often positioned alongside more structured employment and the raising of a family. But their commitments to social and political change was not viewed as separate and apart from other aspects of their working lives, instead it was seen as an integral part of the essential work that they had to. For Amanda, there was often a very thin line between her paid employment and her unpaid political and community work. After completing her graduate degree in social work, her first full-time job was at a Model Cities program in California, where she became the director for a "comprehensive day care program."

Amanda was excited about the possibilities the job held: "it was like doing something from scratch and creating a whole child care network that included a day care center, family day care homes, infant care and training women." She thought, "it was really a good experience and liked the job" but discovered that "Model Cities was so full of shit." She believed that the director of the Model Cities Program was "owned, brought and sold by Standard Oil." Additionally, she thought that "he was taking money that was

supposed to go for youth programs, and was building a shopping mall out in the white suburbs." Amanda completed the project for which she was hired at Model Cities and decided to move back to the East Coast and take a similar job in Washington, D.C. in 1971. She worked for a black consulting firm which had received some federal contracts for day care that needed to be implemented. Describing this experience, Amanda said:

The first contract that I worked on was to look at different day care systems around the country and see how they worked, and then look at the possibility of training women who were on public assistance, who wanted to be family day care providers, either in centers or in their homes. So I had to go around DC and around the country to different places to interview people and find out what kind of training they needed and which system seemed to work well. That was interesting in and of itself--getting around to different cities I had never been to. At first it seemed like fun, and then it became a real drag living out of a suitcase.

Amanda knew a lot of people in DC who she had gone to undergraduate school with, so her transition to the city was not a difficult one. And through friends, she became very active in community and political causes. Describing some of these experiences, Amanda said:

During the early part of my stay in DC, I worked with several political organizations. In the beginning my work was very peripheral. I worked with the Black People United for Prison Reform. We went to the prisons. We hooked up with this group called the Lifers and they had a newspaper. I got sort of turned off at one point because all these white women started getting involved, and their thing was just screwing the brothers. Anyway, we were doing a lot of stuff in the community. It was going crazy with the police brutality. The cops were killing people in the precincts and everywhere else. One night we were coming home late from a meeting, there was a group of us, and we saw this cop take this brother and slam him up against the car. This might have been right after another brother had just gotten shot, handcuffed, walking up the steps to the precinct, and the cops said that he was trying to get away. That's why they shot him in the back. So when we got out of the car and went over to try and find out what was going on, the cops didn't want to talk to us, so we just stood

there and watched them.

From this incident, the group "setup a whole network," to monitor the police making arrests on the streets. As Amanda said, "it became known by the police that if they stopped somebody we were going to be there, and we were going to bring the press, and we were going to bring lawyers. This sort of cut down on some of their craziness." The group not only focused on prison reform, but it became a "community-based group where whenever there was anything going on we would be represented. We got pretty immersed in a lot of things in community housing issues. We got the first rent control bill passed." Amanda left her job at the consultant firm and went to work at one of the Model Cities programs in the city. She worked as a "community developer," and this job allowed more flexibility, where she could continue her community and political involvements. The "African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) was like the main group that I was involved with." As part of her involvement with this organization Amanda took a weekend job with a local hospital where she would later leave her Model Cities job to work full-time to help organize a successful union drive.

In 1978, Amanda gave birth to her only child, and the "ALSC had pretty much fallen apart by then," so she decided to return to New York City. During this period the ALSC had "evolved into the Revolutionary Workers League, for the most part." It had more of a Marxists/ Leninist focus, and Amanda describes herself as "sort of like a functionary" in the group. She was still working with this group in New York, until she "got purged because I belittled security." This had a devastating effect on Amanda because her involvement had been consuming, and she now found herself without a

political base in which to continue her work. So she decided to look for employment, and she also decided that she "was going to still work in working class jobs and not go back and use my Master Degree." She enrolled in a training program that was designed to "train women as UPS (United Postal Services) drivers." Upon passing the test, UPS "didn't want to hire" the women. So she enrolled in another training program for women. It was a "tool and dye program." Recalling her work experience in this area, Amanda said:

This was right up my alley, because then I could get a job being a steel worker and really be a proletariat. My mother of course, thought that I was a total lunatic, she just couldn't understand why I was doing all of this. I started working at this factory where they made pumps and parts for pumps for all across the world. It was me and one other woman, an older white woman. All of the other people were young boys or kids that had dropped out of high school. And here we are these two old biddies. But both of us had some kind of aptitude for it, and I enjoyed doing it. There was this whole thing at the factory when we started because it was being sued by former women workers in a class action lawsuit. It was being charged with sexual discrimination, and they saw the handwriting on the wall.

I went through a lot of craziness when I first got there. I worked in the evening so I would follow the man who had been there during the day. You had to use a blueprint, and you had to set the tools up a certain way. If you're following somebody everything is all set when you come in. You just have to run the job. But they would change the set-up, so I would end up scraping pieces because they wouldn't have the right dimensions. Then I would have to spend all this time resetting everything myself. So I had that kind of harassment, and then there was the sexual harassment. They would put up pictures and stuff. Progressive politics is quite complicated. I stayed there for about two years, but I got fired for something. I filed charges against them and also raised the issue of racial and sexual discrimination against management. I went to the union to get support and the union gave me no support because they saw us in that particular shop as being in opposition to the union leadership. So I filed charges against the union with EEOC because the company had all these government contracts.

After she was fired from the tool and dye factory, Amanda "filed for unemployment. And when my unemployment ran out I applied for welfare. I didn't get it." So out of "desperation," Amanda "applied for this job as a social worker in a day care center," and she got the job. The day care focused on children with mental and physical disabilities, and Amanda was responsible for doing home visits with the parents. "I really enjoyed the job, going to people houses and stuff, sort of helping them deal with the issues around their kids." She was interested in trying to figure out how to "empower the parents"--in trying to increase the parental involvement at the day care center. But the director at the center saw Amanda's efforts as a way of "trying to undermine her authority," so she quit the job. As she said, "that was the last social work job that I had for a while. I knew I shouldn't have gone back into social work." For a period of time Amanda was not working at all, but gradually she began to increase her community and political involvements.

Around the middle 1970s, Jackie had completed her college program. She "felt a sense of accomplishment" and decided to remain on the steering committee for another year to monitor the progress of the other students, many of whom were women she had helped to recruit into the early childhood education program. The college had received government grants that enabled the student in this special child care program to attend free of charge. By sitting on the steering committee, Jackie "found out that when money came into play, because a lot of money came into play, the more control the school wanted to have over the program." So she decided that as her "mission," she "wanted to make sure at least my whole crew graduated and didn't get jammed with no money

problems." In the meantime, Jackie had "planned with my degree to work in television."

She applied for a job to work on an all-black network comedy program but during the interview, "this guy said to me, shouldn't you be home somewhere in a kitchen cooking?"

I said to myself, I can't do this again. And what I meant by doing this again was I didn't feel like the racism fight again. I did it when I was in high school, immediately when I came out of high school and worked at Wall Street where I was the token, where everybody had to hire a black, and I had walked into that kind of situation. I went through it with the college cause they had their stuff about them too. But they were willing to bend. You get tired of saying yessum, yessum, yessum, you know. So I said, wait a minute, I can't do this again. I didn't have the energy for it. I was already burnt out, chewed up, knocked down already because of all of the other things that I was doing.

By the early 1980s, Jackie was looking around trying to find "something different to do," and a parent invited her to a housing conference with me. "I said sure, why not. And she was one of the white parents in the school." So she went to this "housing conference at a monastery in Queens," and she "started to listen to other things that were going on out in the world." She was becoming more aware of her housing environment and the community she lived in. Jackie had always lived in the projects, but as she said, "I've always loved the projects, so it wasn't like I felt like a deprived child." But "at this conference I was impressed: they were showcasing a lot of black women who were doing things in their particular communities, and they were from all over the country." Jackie wanted to learn more about the training that was being offered at the conference. Jackie was a member of her housing project's tenant association, and she particularly wanted to learn how to run a meeting and just talk with people, because as she said:

I was especially interested in getting people to respect each other when somebody is talking, and letting people complete sentences. Because,

honey, we used to have some knocked out, dragged out battles. And if we would have had a process in which people could be able to talk to one another, a lot of stuff would have probably been accomplished much sooner and better without so much bad feelings. People get real sensitive when you criticize their shit. I get sensitive too, but I get over it. Some folks never get over it. So I just wanted to learn the process they were using.

When she left the conference, Jackie began to think about what she could do at her own housing project. The director of the youth program at the project said, "there is going to be some money available to do an inter-generational program in public housing. Do you want to try and develop some stuff?" And Jackie wanted to try, and this was in 1986. She began to look at her project "in a different kind of way from just being a resident there." Jackie said, "you don't think about what it takes to run a place: where does the water come from and how it is getting to your apartment? What makes the heat come up when it do come. Why is that noise in the pipe. So you get to learn how the daily operations of the places go. And then you start to run into, well why don't we have programs here? Where's the money for programs? And you just try to figure out how to make things happen." So Jackie tried to figure out how to make things happen for elders and youth at her public housing site. But first she had to establish an identity:

In the very beginning it was hard living and working in the same place because now you have to build a different relationship with people. I was my grandmother's granddaughter. I was my mother's daughter. So I had no identity of my own. I was seen as somebody's child. And my first task was to work with folks who knew my grandmother and knew my mom. My name is Jackie. Just getting that point across to them, that was kind of hard with folks whose children I hung out with. You just had to walk softly around some areas. And then the folks that I didn't know, it was okay to be as direct as I wanted to be. But there were always some folks that I tipped around. The first thing that I did was get the confidence of the elders that lived there.

Jackie won over the trust of the seniors, and the youth trusted her as well because she was the mother of two adolescent children that they all knew. People started to come around the center which was located at the public housing site. She got a food program going at the center, and the "elders and teenagers became almost a working group. "We would go on trips together-- weekend trips, to the movies, to plays." Jackie was finding ways of making things happen at her projects. But the most disturbing aspect about her job, she had no control over. Some of the elders and youth were dying:

Some of the folks that I had grown up with were starting to die because they were elderly. That was the hard part for me. There's a lot of things that I learned from them, and when they started to die, that was the most painful thing for me. I just couldn't believe that I was making friends with these people and really enjoying their friendship, and we were getting stuff done. They were like really supportive, and then they started dying. So for me this was really a terrible time because not only were they dying, but the young people that I had known through my children were also dying. They were being killed. So the drug wars were killing them off, and old age was killing off the seniors. It was really a bad time. I was going to so many funerals, I couldn't stand it.

During the middle 1980s, Jackie's public housing development was in the midst of the drug wars. Describing what this meant, she said:

The folks that are selling the drugs lived with us. They're in our own home. You know their parents, their uncles, aunts and their cousins. The drug war started playing out because of territory. Territory meant who was whose corner, cause nobody didn't own nothing that was in the projects. Fighting to be top dog--who was going to be top dog on the corner--and there were just senseless shootings that were going on. Different from when we were running around in the 50s with guns. It got so here, I know at least three kids who got killed because they looked at somebody. Each one of the young men that got killed were all going away to school on scholarships. A lot of these kids were kids that I was working with. What I tried to do was address their problem, and their problem was economic.

One of Jackie's strategies was to get the Housing Authority to hire young people

to work the grounds of the project. "My thought was, if you get young people to work the grounds where they lived, they would prevent 80 percent of the vandalism, because they're not stupid. So if they got to clean these grounds in the morning, these are the guys who are out there at night, they're going to stop people from cracking that bottle all over the place or tearing stuff up. So hiring them cut down on vandalism a lot." But the drug wars continued in the projects, and Jackie said, "there was a six-months period where every weekend I was going to a funeral." And even she could not avoid the threatening aspects of this war:

Every week I was going to a funeral, every single week. I saw families die off. I'm talking about the middle 1980s when crack hit the streets. But the people that I'm watching getting killed are not because they are users. I haven't been to no users' funerals, to this day. I saw whole families getting killed who were living in my projects or the surrounding developments. When I say family, I mean the brothers, the cousins, the nephews or the uncles. People in my projects were very concerned. And we almost had a riot at my projects. It was the first time I probably came face to face with a shot gun. One of our young people, over the drug thing, killed another young person. And he went to jail, and he had left two young ladies pregnant. They had gotten into a street fight. And the fight escalated because their brothers got into it. So one called the cops, and the cops came, and all the kids watching got real wild and crazy. One of the mothers came over to ask what was going on, and the cops threw her down on the ground and handcuffed her. Everybody was like are you crazy?

All I could hear were clicks going on. The cops called for backup. All I heard was all this roaring, and the next thing I know the place was flooded with cops. But right at that particular time there were more guns in the streets than there were cops. The only thing that I could do was stand in front of one cop that I could focus on and say, y'all need to put your guns away. Tell your sergeant to call these guys back. Lets not have a war here. Let this woman up, and let her go. He was talking about her mouth. How do you arrest people because of their mouth? And there was this other cop, this one little Puerto Rican cop. She was going off. She was calling us all kind of fat black bitches. We got it calmed down. The cops pulled off. They took away who they needed to take away at the time, and

we all went down to the precinct too.

As a result of this incident, the community police officers were removed from Jackie's housing project, and she said the police precinct "reduced the protection." At the time Jackie thought that her development "was under siege," and when someone would call the police for assistance, "not one cop car would come; ten or fifteen vans would arrive; they would come like storm troopers." Prior to this incident, Jackie had attempted to work with the police in her community because "we wanted to break up that hate that the kids had for police officers."

Gradually, Jackie began to change her programmatic focus. She wanted to "address some of the living conditions in public housing. She became connected with a national organization that had local affiliates around the country. Through this organization she became more aware of what other black women from around the country were doing to organize and address issues in their public housing developments. While continuing to administer the elders and youth program, she became more active with the tenants' association in her project and agreed to become its president. From that position, she started to make demands upon the Housing Authority to institute some structural changes in her development. So Jackie submitted a "wish list" to the Housing Authority:

I was basically thinking about this utopian kind of thing in my mind. I really wanted to change the quality of life. I was really convinced that people wanted change; that stuff really could happen if we all worked at it together. I was really on that American dream thing. What burst my bubble was, we developed a plan, got the right kind of information, put it into the right kind of package, and took it to the people down at the Housing Authority, and they laughed at it. It was like, what are you doing? Why did you bring this stuff to the Housing Authority? Your plans are just impossible. You're not going to get none of this stuff done.

Jackie did not believe that the plan they had submitted was unreasonable, and she was not willing to "let the Housing Authority say no. It's going to have to be a bit more to it than no." So she became a public housing activist. Jackie realized that "everybody got a boss. And we went through all the channels. Couldn't get to meet with the main person at the Housing Authority. He wouldn't even talk to me." But from her contacts she had made from working with a national organization, Jackie was able to get a meeting with the secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which funds and monitors public housing in this country. After getting support from HUD officials for her development's plan, Jackie said, "the local Housing Authority is like what the hell is going on here?" As a consequence of her action, she was able to get some important renovations done at her housing site. She said, "we got about 33 million dollars to redesign the bathrooms, and interior and exterior renovation was done to the buildings. The grounds were redesigned. We got a six foot fence all around the place. We were building our own prison but trying to make it look as nice as possible. The Housing Authority had just never really dealt with residents and residents' ideas and residents' participation. They would use the words, but they didn't really implement any of that stuff."

In being active with the tenant association and continuing to administer the elders and youth program, Jackie gave up her privacy. Describing what this meant, she said:

There came a point when there really wasn't a distinction between home and work no more. Because living and working in the same place is real hard to separate. Your house becomes accessible to anybody, anytime, whenever they wanted you. If you're not home then you're at the center. So it didn't stop people from calling my home phone if the elevator was

broken. They thought that I was the manager. That's where it got to. No I don't manage here. That dependency kind of thing. Because people got real familiar and comfortable and thought that we were making accomplishments, so maybe we can make everything happen. Working in the community meant that you were going to be giving up a whole lot of privacy.

Once again Jackie changed the focus of her activism. She decided to help organize the other tenant's associations in her community into a more cohesive group and they formed a coalition. She believed that the other tenant associations "figured if I was starting to make changes, everybody else was going to want to make changes as well." They would hold big tenant meeting at Jackie's project. The tenant coalition that she helped to organized was not a part of the citywide tenant group that was sanctioned by the Housing Authority, and they were asked to "disband." Jackie was beginning to be perceived as a "trouble maker," and pressure was placed on the coalition to disband the groups; Jackie said, whatever they told those other TA presidents, not only did they back the fuck up; they even stopped talking to me." At that point, Jackie didn't feel threatened in any way, but upon reflection she admits, "I was too stupid at the time to feel threatened because I was feeling empowered, cause things were moving. I was like, you all are dummies; you better ride this." Later Jackie realized that she should have been more guarded in her efforts. Housing Authority officials along with the police came into her center and closed down all of the programs she had established. Describing what happened and the toll this experience took on her, Jackie said:

They tried to discredit me. There was this whole thing in the paper about I had stolen money from the Housing Authority. Well you can't steal money that you got to sign for, and you can't get no more until you turn in all your receipts. So it was just a whole thing of them trying to get rid of

me. They shut all of the programs down in just about one day. They figured if I was cut down, then everybody else would stop functioning. The first thing that I had to do was process emotionally what was happening. I got extremely depressed. My credibility was at stake. This is my neighborhood. I don't come here to work and go home; I work and live here. I had to get attorneys. It took me about five months before I got out of the hysteria. I was hysterical too. I said, God, if I knew hit people, I would have all of them bumped off; they would have been just killed. I felt like I was being assaulted. After I had gotten to a peace of mind, I said, okay, I really see what this is all about; it was about power. The Housing Authority thought that I had too much power; they thought that I had so much power that I wanted their power. But I didn't want that kind of power. That wasn't what I was about. I was trying to do one little area-- my little area. I said, understand whatever you all do, it's not going to stop me from organizing, and I got involved with a national public housing group.

Mary, like Jackie devoted a lot of time and energy into working in her community, but she was doing this while working a full-time job at a bank. Initially, Mary limited her community involvement to school-related activities where she was the president of the Parents/Teacher's Association (PTA) at both her sons' elementary and later at their junior high schools. Gradually she volunteered at the youth center, became president of the board of directors for a settlement house in her community, was active in the tenant's association in the building in which she lived, and she was "always involved in politics." Through the union, not-for-organizations, and community contacts she developed while working at the bank, Mary could summon "a posse of volunteers" to help her work on electoral campaigns, getting out the vote and raising funds for candidates. Mary has been "asked to run for office several times," but she has declined the offers because she basically thinks that "it's a dishonest profession." Elaborating on this belief and the lessons she has learned, Mary said;

People go into politics for ulterior motives; it's not usually always constructive motives; it's for kickbacks and bribes. I don't mind helping somebody become a politician if I believe in their program. But I don't personally want to be a politician cause they won't let you maintain your integrity. They, meaning the society, because everybody wants you to do what they need you to do, and they will influence you with whatever means necessary to get you to do it. People eventually give in. I joined the Democratic Party, and I have always been involved politically ever since I first voted. But see, I don't think that you have to be a politician to get changes made. It's what you do locally and how you work with your block association, your church group, the kids here on this stoop, and all the kids on the block, teaching them something meaningful, making sure that they have access to the park, that they have good schools. Being that I have five grandsons, there has been a continuity of my interests in programs for youth. Yeah, I would say that I'm an involved person.

Chapter Six:

Violence in Their Lives

In 2000, the women of this study are no longer girls, adolescents, or young adults. Instead they are mature women, whose pasts have given meaning to their current lives. They are black, and racial distinctions continue to linger in the shadows of the landscape upon which they interact. Like the participants themselves, this category of difference has grown more sophisticated over time. Gender, race, and class differences have imposed their own structure on the women's experiences. But as the participants' lives attest, their experiences have not followed a fixed pattern of behaviors and they do not project stereotypical images or caricatures that can easily be reduced to false dichotomies.

As a group, they are not permanently oppressed and dependent victims nor are they warrior women who have spent their entire lives fighting against injustices. As individuals their experiences are too dynamic and complex to be reduced to simple and misleading images. In actively engaging the world, there were times when they were victimized and in their own ways have acted on principles of fair play. But these experiences have occurred within the context of their overall lives, and even if they may have provided a defining moment, the experiences were not, in and of themselves, deterministic of a life history.

This study is about women's lives: who they have been, who they have become, and the choices they have made as they developed an ever-changing sense of self. It is also about the ways violence insinuated itself into their lives at given periods. At different stages of their lives, acts of abuse have played at least a memorable and in some

instances a defining role in how the women perceived themselves. The meaning they have given to those experiences converges and differs across social and cultural divisions, thereby allowing for individual interpretations. All of the women made decisions about their lives. They asserted agency even in the most dire of circumstances. But nowhere in this study did, the participants suggest that they were or give themselves the label of "victim." What is reflected in their stories are their resilient spirits which not only helped them to survive against seemingly insurmountable odds, but also allowed them to thrive in their own ways as they made lives for themselves and in some cases for their children as well.

The more established ideological, political and structural references for understanding the role of violence in the lives of women as advanced by mainstream scholars, activists, advocates and feminists do not necessarily embrace the interpretations or the experiences of the women in this study. To the contrary, the participants' understanding of what constitutes acts of abuse and what constitutes violence itself falls largely outside of that referential domain which is predicated on notions of female victimization by individual "bad males" in isolated situations. A major finding of this study is that abusive acts can take many forms and can occur in many different social and cultural locations. The different levels of experience and the various contexts in which abuse has occurred in the women's lives are discussed in greater detail in the body of this chapter.

The Home, Community, and Society

Beatings

At some point in their early lives the women received punishment to varying degrees from their parents mostly from their mothers. All of them received corporal punishment as children, most of the participants did not perceive this as a form of abuse--as a violation of their sense of self--and they did not think that the beatings had any major or lasting impact on their lives. Later, however, as students, several women would interpret the corporal punishment and other abusive acts they received at the hands of their teachers as intrusive acts that infringed upon their sense of selfhood.

In general, corporal punishment, imposed by their parents or other adult caretakers, was seen as a form of discipline that was administered in an effort to make the participants obey and conform to established rules. Yet, a beating was not necessarily viewed as an attack or interpreted as an assault. For instance, Patricia described a beating that she received from an elderly aunt and concluded, "I never even thought of it in terms of some kind of violent behavior toward me cause she was basically warm, giving, and loving."

Amanda said, "I would be the one who got the most beatings. I didn't like them and there was some anger there, but I never felt like I was the outcast and I wasn't loved or anything. I just felt that I was the big-mouthed person who always got into trouble."

Jackie remembered "hanging out all the time" at her girlfriend's house who had "eight sisters and brothers." She said, "I didn't have nobody to play with, so I would stay at her house until her father would get mad and beat everybody in the house. He was like,

everybody in the house gets a beating. He didn't care whose child it was. I loved it because there were more people, and it was fun."

And Sara said, "we used to get spanked on a regular basis." But she saw those experiences as "basic stuff." And she concludes that, "they were trying to teach this wild woman how to be a civilized child."

Of the participants, only Sharon expressed any anger about her parents hitting her. Sharon said that she and her brothers, "got beat up. We got beat with the belt by my mother and father. We got beat with the tree limbs. We had to toe the line. We had to be good. You didn't want to get beat. If I had little kids, I wouldn't do that to them." But Sharon's sentiments are an exception among the participants. In fact, those who are mothers drew upon their own experiences in punishing their children.

Like their mothers, the participants imposed rules of social and cultural conformity on their children. And they, too, were the primary disciplinarians and used corporal punishment to varying degrees. Mary said she "very rarely hit" her sons as children, but she did use corporal punishment. When Jackie's three children were small she "beat" them, but when they got older she said she gave them a "beat down" where she would use a "pipe, broom, fist, or anything."

Patricia tried to discipline her son "the same way that my mother did us." For her, "there is no back talk allowed; we can sit down and discuss stuff, but you will not raise your voice to me; you will not storm off and walk away when I'm talking to you; and you will not talk to me in a disrespectful manner because I will not allow it." Patricia tried to give her son the necessary space for him to express himself, but there were times

when she did use corporal punishment. Describing herself as from "the old school," Patricia said, "this timeout business does not work. I know it does not work, this you sit down and think about what you did. No. After I whip your tail, and I talk to you, now you go in the room and think about it. That's what I believe in."

Parental Fights

Several of the women witnessed physical and verbal confrontations between their parents and it had a definable impact on them, even though they viewed such incidents as sporadic. But two of the participants, Barbara and Patricia, dealt with their parents' abusive behavior toward each other on a more consistent basis. Although they were not the immediate targets of such confrontations, they could not help but be drawn into the dispute. Barbara believes her parents' fights had a significant emotional impact on her that lasted well into her adult years. She said:

Violence was a part of my upbringing. My parents early on used to really fight a lot, and that was devastating to me. It was mostly verbal, not physical. I used to run away, and I figured that what I would do to stop them from fighting was to run away. They would stop and worry about where I was. It kept me jumpy all the time because I never knew when they were going to have an argument, so I was really nervous. I remember once I went on a trip, and I couldn't enjoy the trip because I was worried that I had to be there to take control. Their fighting really affected me throughout my whole entire life. It created the way that I was--confused and fearful. You learn how to deal with it, but you never do.

As a child, Patricia, too, tried various strategies in her attempts to cope with the violence between her parents and to mediate its emotional impact. She tried not interfering in their altercations, and for a while she stopped speaking to her father and

tried to ignore him. She even had recurring thoughts of killing him, and there was a period of time during her childhood when Patricia started to have "nightmares" that she attributed to the impact her parents' fighting had on her:

I used to always have nightmares of somebody beating me up and always chasing me, or trying to do some kind of harm to me. There were times when I was trying to scream for help, but no sound would come out of my voice. Or I would be running, and I would always wake up just before he caught me. It was always a male. I would never ever clearly see the individual's face, but it was always a male figure chasing or trying to do some kind of harm to me.

Even as adult women, several of the participants dealt with the fact that their mothers were still being physically abused, and their response to this varied. When Jackie tried to stop an altercation between her mother and stepfather, she said her stepfather "pulled out his gun on me and I pulled a gun out on him." Sharon discovered that after she left home her parents had started to have physical fights. There was a time when her mother pulled a knife on her father, and "her brother had to jump in the middle of it." And she also learned that her "parents had had this fight, and my father broke her arm." Sharon encouraged her mother to leave her father, which she did.

Patricia, too, endured the constant pressure of knowing that her parents were continuing to have physical altercations and that eventually someone would get seriously injured or be killed. Not only was she drawn into her parents' physical altercations, but her son was also. There were two incidents involving her father that would leave a lasting impression. In the first incident, Patricia's father made sexual advances toward her. She was "insulted, disgusted, outraged," and she stopped talking to him. But although she was angry, she felt protective of her mother, so she decided never to

mention the incident to her. The other incident occurred when her parents "got into a scuffle in the kitchen" :

My father pulled a knife out on my mother, and my son was in the living room, but he apparently came and stood by the kitchen doorway and watched what was going on. He saw the scuffle with the knife, and my mother had somehow gotten the knife from my father and broke it. But he always kept more than one knife on him. They were still scuffling, and somehow he either slipped or my mother knocked him down. My mother said that before she realized it, my son had somehow gotten underneath my father and had his arm around his neck. The child had a death grip on him: he was literally choking my father to death, or trying hard to. My mother was trying to get my son off of my father. At the same time my father was struggling to get his hand in his pocket to get his other knife. My mother knew that if he did, he would have stabbed my son.

This was the last physical altercation between Patricia's parents after years of abusive behavior in their relationship. As Patricia said, "my mother finally, finally, finally, told my father that he had to leave." In assessing her mother's action, Patricia said, "as far as my mother was concerned I think what happened to my son got to her. I think she just was tired of it all. I think she said, my kids grew up under this, and I can't have my grandchild growing up under this too. He's not going to change. He will never stop drinking. He will never stop fighting. He's got to go."

Childhood Fights

Most of the participants who got into fights with other children in their communities often considered those fights matter of factly, as part of growing up. In some instances the issue that would precipitate a fight was around victimization: a bully would not be allowed to make victims of them or friends and family. In their view, their

participation in such altercations was largely defensive in nature; they were physically protecting either themselves or someone they cared about. Mary recalls an incident where a "bully was beating up on my cousin out on the sidewalk. I just walked out there, and I beat that girl's ass so bad that they had to pull me off of her. She knew not to bother none of my people from West End. We all protected each other like that."

Through their interaction with other children, some of the women recognized their anger as it first revealed itself at an early age and found the presence of anger very significant to fighting. Jackie admits that she "had a little bit of a temper." Although she did not know its source, she could describe how it manifested itself early on in her life: d:

I managed my temper until I felt threatened and then I had no control. I used to black out, like, if I was fighting somebody that person wouldn't even be a person no more. It's like you could be hitting somebody and you could hear them saying stop, stop, stop. I wouldn't see them as a person, just something trying to harm me. I would really try and kill you. And no, we're not going to do anything fair because nothing is fair.

Anne also knew that she "could be brutal." In recalling an incident with her younger sister, she said:

She made me so angry that I looked around for anything that I could pick up and hit her with. I threw a toy cash register at her. She wears this scar over her eye to this day where this cash register hit her. I really remembered that if I could have killed her I would have. I know that I felt satisfied, and I know that I didn't feel upset. She provoked me and I lit out after her. I intended to do her bodily harm and I did it, and I didn't have any particular remorse over hurting her either.

Fights as Adults

All of the participants admitted to having at least one fight during their childhood.

But for several of the women fighting did not end with childhood. As adults, some women had fights with other women. Essentially these altercations centered around their notions of disrespect. Amanda recalls two incidents. In the first, she subletted her apartment with all of her furnishings to a young couple. They did not pay the rent and destroyed her furnishings. "I remember calling the woman and asking her what was happening, and she got real arrogant and nasty on the phone and called me a bitch. She made me snap. I was ready to kick her ass. I found her at her mother's house. She said, bitch what do you want? I took my hands and I put them in her hair and I dragged her down the steps. I was getting ready to stomp her and my brother stopped me. I was so angry. I had been so violated."

The other incident occurred late at night when a white woman was creating a disturbance because her boyfriend would not open his door to her. As Amanda recalls:

I was in my bed trying to sleep after a long night. I came in late. This white woman was trying to get entrance into the house next door to see this white man who had recently moved into the block. He wasn't going to let her in and she started yelling and screaming and calling him all kind of names. She was banging on the door and going on. I looked out of the window and said, would you please stop? The next thing I knew he took a big rubber trash can and poured water on her. She still wouldn't leave. So finally I got dressed and went outside and I said, you know, enough of this. he's not going to let you in. She's standing there, and she said, you black nigger bitch. It was like I had taken four or five steps at a time. I took my hand and wrapped it in her hair and I yanked her body to the ground. I was so enraged. When the police came I had my foot over her face. I was going to smash her. The police came just in time. I said to them, oh, no, you're not touching me. I said, if I was a black woman in a white block ranting and raving, I would be handcuffed. So they did arrest her. And then she used the word nigger again. I said, now you understand why my foot was over your face. I said, the only nigger is the one who is handcuffed, and they are getting ready to take her in the paddy wagon.

Faith recalls beating an elderly black woman who was her mother's friend. She had gone home for Christmas and discovered that her mother was "at death's door." In addition to dealing with the stress of her mother dying, as an only child in a family where most of the members were older, she had to assume added responsibility. Faith had to drive her aunt and her mother's friend back and forth to the hospital where they, along with herself, would take shifts in staying at the hospital with her mother. At one point, the tension between Faith and her mother's friend became overwhelming. And one day, while taking the friend home, they got into an argument:

I don't know what she said to me. But when I pulled up to her house I said, get out of the car because you're not going to talk to me like that. I don't know what she said when she was getting out of the car. But I lost it. I jumped on this old woman's back, and I just started beating her physically. I had knocked her down in the flower bed, and I was just picking up a rock when this [neighbor] came outside. He literally came behind me and just picked me up and pulled me away from her. I'm screaming. I'm saying let me go. It was just a mess. I remember the Christmas before, I had been home and [my mother's friend] had said something to me then about she was the only one who had taken care of my mother. But I really didn't know that Ma was sick.

Most, but not all, of the fights that the women had were with other adult women.

But Jackie recalls a fight with "a guy who took my pocketbook. I ran him down and beat him down and took my pocketbook back because my mom had given me some money to buy some shoes and I really wanted these shoes." By that time Jackie had "stopped carrying a gun," after she discovered her son playing with it. "My thing was that if he had pulled the trigger, him or both of my kids could've been dead." So she started "to carry a hook. A meat hook. Not a knife." She said, "hooks were cool. I always wore bracelets, so at night time when you were coming home, you could put a hook on your bracelet and

it was real close to your hand. But I never used it." What she did use on the purse snatcher was a "blackjack":

My husband's uncle was a policeman, so he gave me a little blackjack. The one with the metal in it. When I caught this guy, I tried to beat him to death, but I only had the blackjack. I guess maybe because of the era I grew up in, I always walked around with weapons. It wasn't until I have gotten older that I don't walk around with a weapon of some kind.

Mary, the oldest of the participants, is the only one who continues to carry a weapon. As she said, "I walk in the streets with a stun gun and I walk with mace, especially during the full moon. I know people will try and rob your ass when it's the full moon. Basically I don't bother people, cause I don't think that you are supposed to, but I know how to protect myself if somebody tries to harm me."

Scarring

Acts of nonphysical abuse during the participants' childhoods, whether they occurred in the home, community, or in society at large, appear in some instances to have had a more lasting impact on the women's sense of self and self-worth than physical abuse. This also seems to be a consistent theme that would reoccur in different contexts over the course of the women's lives.

Sara described her father as "very sarcastic." And she preferred that he would "spank" her instead of giving her a scolding. "He said some really mean and terrible things to me," she said. But in her attempt to maintain her dignity she said "I wouldn't let him see me cry. I would cry when he spanked me, but I don't think I cried when he was being sarcastic to me. There was something about that. I acted like I could take it, but I

couldn't."

In reflecting on her childhood, Patricia recalls this "thing that females would do called reading, where they would literally tell you about yourself. But it was very violent in its context, even though it was not a physical thing. It was literally a dressing down meant to humiliate. They looked at it like, I'm just telling it like it is, and I'm telling you this for your own good. No. You are enjoying humiliating another human being." And she concludes that, "violence, especially when it's verbal, is extremely detrimental because you don't see physical marks; it goes on the inside and scars you up."

Amanda talks about the impact of the inside scarring she received as a result of racism:

It's something that attacks your being, and it eats away at you every day. And it's amazing that more of us are not completely and totally dysfunctional. I think that all of us have some insanity because you can't live in an insane society and not be touched by racism.

All of the women agreed with Barbara's claim that "racism is violence" and that it can have a significant impact on how you view yourself. Visiting the segregated South as children the women had experiences that confirmed this contention. In associating racism with violence, they began to understand early on that racist violence could be produced by physical as well as nonphysical acts. And given a particular situation, those acts could infringe upon their being and breach their sense of selfhood, even if they were nowhere near such incidents but merely heard about them or saw representations. The ideological messages that racist acts provoked were at some level of consciousness interpreted by the participants as children, and generally perceived as a threat to their personhood. They

saw the many acts of Southerners fighting integration as violent. But nowhere did this threat become more real to them than with the murder of Emmett Till. All of the women discussed his death. And the pictures of his lynching encapsulated their fears. Recalling how she felt when she saw his picture, Barbara said:

What really affected me--it really, really affected me--was Emmett Till. That frightened me so. I became aware of it because it was on the cover of Jet magazine, and we always got Jet and Ebony. They had a whole picture there, and that was a scary thing. Everybody was talking about it. Then you would hear stories. Like when your family would come over and they would all talk about what was happening in the South and how people had gotten killed. I stopped going down South. I was afraid to go there. I was like really frightened. I was just petrified. But the pictures of Emmett Till scared me the most. I had never been as frightened, and at the time he was still a child. I never could understand why blacks were so hated. I just didn't understand that.

School

Institutionalized Racism: Difference, Unfairness and Humiliation

For several of the participants, beatings or some other abusive act by authority figures at school evoked feelings of doubt that caused them to question their own sense of self worth. This heightened their perception of being different, of not belonging, and of being self conscious about who they were as human beings. It also contributed to a growing sense of anger that centered around notions of fundamental fairness and fair play. In this context, the abusive acts that they encountered early on at the hands of teachers were often perceptible to young children, but they attributed such acts to a teacher's individual bias and prejudices, or--unlike parental punishment--to meanness.

As a second grader, Patricia was slapped so hard by her black teacher that she could not see. For her this experience was "one of my first early lessons" in dealing with

an authority figure outside of the home. And her sense of powerlessness was evident when she asked, "what chance did I have against her?" As a result of this experience Patricia said, "I've grown to strongly detest people who try to take advantage of people who are weaker than they are."

Barbara and Anne had to deal with the effects of being violated simply because they were born left-handed, which was contrary to the conventions of the time. Anne said she learned early on that to be left-handed was "derogatory and close to evil spirits." Barbara perceived her teachers, who were mostly black, as "mean and cruel." She said, "I still can't write today because of the way they treated me."

But as they grew older and attended more integrated public schools where they encountered more white teachers, several of the participants began to look at their teachers in some different ways. Patricia said, "in the beginning I just saw the teachers as teachers in elementary school. After elementary school, I began to see them as white people. I began to interact with them differently. They were still sort of like background people to me. But they were white people. I began to realize, to become aware, that these were white people that were teachers, and they had power over me. They had this power where it concerned my life." The teachers had positional power in a hierarchical educational structure where black students in general were placed on the lowest tier of that structure, especially during the 50s and 60s. As a result, several of the women encountered institutional practices that not only limited fair play but produced discriminatory treatment against them.

Some of the women expressed a sense of violation resulting from the systematic

exclusion from day-to-day school activities just because they were black. And they reacted. Their actions were not interpreted as simply acts of teenage rebellion. They were seeking recognition and inclusion, whether they were attempting to get black girls elected as the homecoming queen and placed on the cheerleading squad, or to get blacks elected to student government and placed on the staff of the student newspaper. For those who challenged discriminatory practices at their schools, their participation was a form of social protest that was consistent with and related to the struggle for social justice occurring in the larger society at the time.

They expressed a sense of accomplishment when they challenged some of the structural barriers at their schools. But some women also expressed a sense of powerlessness, particularly those who were placed in the commercial track at their high schools where it was assumed that their mental abilities and future aspirations were lower than the white students'. These particular students could no longer point to individual teachers, whether black or white, as the only source of their academic frustration and disappointment. They began to realize that the educational system's patterns and practices were inherently discriminatory. And given the uneven power relations, the women were affected differently and offered different responses in the face of "constant pressure" under such a system. Amanda began to emotionally withdraw from school, although she graduated; Jackie became determined to fulfill the academic requirements of the commercial track in order to graduate from high school with her class; and Patricia eventually dropped out of school, but later received her high school equivalency diploma by going to night school.

Politics

Male dominance: Sexism, Gender Violence and Misogyny

During the 1960s, the participants were witnesses to some of the most troubling episodes of systemic violence in our contemporary time: the assassinations of political figures; the maiming and killing of black men, women and children as they struggled for civil rights; the destruction of black communities as a result of riots or rebellions; the calculated annihilation of black political groups and organizations by law enforcement; and the protracted and bloody undeclared war in Vietnam.

A common theme for many of the women during this period, amidst this social and cultural turmoil, was that they were trying to figure out who they were as women in a male-centered world. They were confronted with definitions of womanhood held by both the black community and the larger society, which were hierarchical and not necessarily mutually exclusive. The women struggled to create their own self-identity and their own sense of place within and against images and spaces that had already been carved out for them in a rigid race, gender and class-conscious society.

The black political climate of the 1960s introduced a seemingly new ideology and political rhetoric that influenced some of the ways gender relationships were perceived between women and men. In some instances women were thought to occupy a lower social status than men, and male dominance in political, cultural, and personal matters was seen by some as an essential element for black liberation. Within the context of this political rhetoric, some men took the opportunity to assert authority over women, and sometimes this authority turned to abuse.

Three of the participants experienced physical and/or emotional abuse by men they were intimate with during this period. The abuse occurred when the men attempted to treat the women as children over whom they could exercise control.

Patricia's husband demanded that she come into the apartment before she was through talking to her neighbors outside. As a result, they fought, and Patricia was prepared to kill him with a "butcher knife."

Faith's live-in boyfriend told her to change clothes. They got into a verbal confrontation because she simply could not believe that "somebody thought that they could tell [her] what to wear."

Mary said her husband "had contacted some kind of disease and he was trying to make me make love to him." She knew that she could best her husband in a fight, and she "knocked him through a television set" during this particular altercation.

None of the women "obeyed" their husbands, and their actions suggest that they also refused to be victimized by them. In each of their accounts they asserted agency, and although they made a conscious decision to stay in their relationships, they point to this time as a turning point in eventually moving away from those relationships.

For several of the women, the seemingly new black political rhetoric of the 60s appeared to share similar traits to the older and conservative black views about the role of women. There was an ideological connection that was most evident in the experiences of the participants who entered predominantly black colleges where they were immediately confronted with rigid rules of social etiquette that included such things as dress codes, curfews and religious requirements. Such rules were aimed at social and cultural

conformity, and unlike the childhood rules which had taught them how to be girls and how to be Negro girls, these rules were aimed at teaching the women how to be proper black ladies. They were conservative educational climates: Amanda saw her college as a "black finishing school," while Sharon thought that her school was in the business of "preparing women to be good wives," and Sara was just "pissed off" about the ways her college treated women.

Also, in these largely all-black social and cultural environments, gender and male privilege began to take on a more visible role in their experiences. Some of the more stringent college rules and the ones that carried the most severe penalties were those focusing on campus vice, especially those prohibiting drug and alcohol use and restricting sexual activities. Of course the rules were broken, but the potential implications of violating rules, if caught, could threaten one's future livelihood, and also threaten one's sense of self. As Amanda said students grew increasingly frustrated with the administration's "hypocrisy and paternalism." In this climate of protest and change, many colleges made concessions to some of the students' demands, but they maintained their more conventional attitude toward women's roles and behavior. Sex, for instance, was plentiful. "It was going on everywhere all the time, with everybody," Amanda said. Yet, women were often held to a higher standard of responsibility for perceived sexual transgressions. Amanda recalls an incident where a fellow coed was caught having sex in the campus chapel by the dean of women. When the student returned to the dorm, Amanda said, "the dean had already packed her bags." But she did not mention what, if anything, happened to the male student.

Defying the rules of sexual conduct was not itself something that placed the women beyond the pale of respectability. It was expected, and if pregnancy resulted some women also expected to get married to legitimize their status. But to be pregnant and have a child outside of wedlock while enrolled at an all-black college was looked upon by most as beyond the pale of respectability. For women who got pregnant, who did not want to get married, and who did not want to be pregnant, they faced difficult decisions prior to the United States Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion. Two of the participants had abortions while attending college in the 60s. And both, under different circumstances, experienced a sense of violation from the illegal process.

When she got pregnant during her sophomore year, Sara decided that she was "not going to drop out and become this mother." So she decided to get an abortion. This was not an easy decision. Attached to it were important legal, moral and emotional implications that at the time Sara did not fully consider. First, abortion was an illegal act so if caught Sara could have been subjected to criminal sanctions and public humiliation. Second, given the illegal status, she could not be certain about the qualifications or ability of the doctor who would perform such a medical procedure. Next, if something went wrong, her health and life would be jeopardized, and she would be vulnerable to detection if she sought help. And finally, she had not considered that her actions would conflict with her own sense of moral judgment.

At the end of her sophomore year in college Amanda got pregnant too, but she did not realize that she was pregnant. Her family doctor largely took decision-making out of Amanda's hands by not telling her that she was pregnant and giving her "some injection,"

where she almost "bled to death." In addition to this abuse, her doctor started to molest her during the physical examinations. Amanda felt abused and violated by the process of the experience. However, she did not think that having an abortion, in and of itself, compromised her sense of self-integrity. In fact, she did not think about it at all. As she said, "I just took it in stride because I didn't want to deal with any of it."

Sara's reaction was different. She too felt a sense of violation from the process but the act of taking a life that she had produced carried an emotional weight for her. It wasn't until years later that Sara would find a sense of peace with herself about her decision. In explaining, she said:

At the time I had the language, which is one of the things that I got from the women's movement when they talked about abortion. I know why you use it, but it does a disservice to turn that fetus completely into a nonentity, because you've got to make it human again. I'm not forcing anybody to call it a human being, but you have to force yourself to deal with that other spirit. By pretending that it wasn't a spirit, I had to go through a whole process, to come back and give that baby his spirit, and then send him on. The first time I sent him on was a lie. Nothing happened to anybody else, so it was easy not to acknowledge his spirit, but you can't get away with that shit.

Home

Domestic Tensions: Substance Abuse, Infidelities, and Battering

While in their twenties, most of the participants were married and, with the exception of Jackie, they all got divorced in their thirties. Upon reflection, several of the women said that they were not in love with their husbands when they got married. It appears that most of the women decided to get married because of the influences of social and cultural convention. As Jackie said, "it was part of the American dream, you know

getting married." But she said, "I don't know if I was in love. I don't know if I would categorize it that way."

Most of the women soon realized that marriage meant hard work, not only work inside of the household, particularly for those who had children, but also work outside the home. All of the women worked outside of the home during their marriages and, except for Sara and Barbara, all of the married participants eventually assumed sole financial responsibility for the household during their relationships with their husbands. Eventually this would be a major source of tension in some of their marriages. In addition to the financial stresses, there were other sources of tension that developed in the participants' relationships with their husbands. Substance abuse, either drug or alcohol use, was a part of all their relationships, except for Anne's marriage. This source of tension was often exacerbated by their husbands' infidelities and sometimes their own. And this tension led, in some cases, to physical confrontations.

Mary realized soon after their marriage that her husband was an alcoholic, and later she discovered that he was seeing other women as well. The drinking and womanizing not only led to frequent arguments, but also to physical fights. However, Mary was confident in her ability to defend herself. As a child, her uncles had taught her how to box, so she felt that her husband was not a significant physical threat to her because she "knew how to protect" herself. And, just in case, Mary kept guns in the house for protection and knew that if he went too far that she would have "shot him. As she said, "I know my temper."

Alcohol and later drug use was a part of Patricia's relationship with her husband,

but substance abuse was not the most significant source of the tension that existed between them. Constant money problems, jealousy and infidelities, broken promises, and distrust led to arguments and physical altercations between them. Her own continued participation in a self-destructive relationship with a man--"who had ways just like my father"-- began to take a toll. As she said, "I'm feeling horrendous and there's no way that you can describe it." She was struggling to hold herself together emotionally. She said, "I was floundering." But Patricia's life was further complicated when she left him and found herself pregnant, broke, alone, and having to go on welfare. She expressed a sense of being violated by the series of events that had begun to shape her married life. It was a period in her life she said, "when I tried to take myself off the planet. I actually tried to kill myself when I was around twenty-five."

In her marriage, Sara was the one who was addicted to drugs and alcohol. She saw herself as more aggressive than her husband. Even though they did not have physical fights, Sara said she did "throw things, and I found it to be a very freeing experience. There was a real freedom in the act of throwing things at him. The feeling was a release of frustration."

Amanda, by contrast, did not get married, but she experienced substance abuse, and infidelity from her first live-in boyfriend. She also experienced physical abuse and in one incident she was forced to defend herself against him with a knife. She was "furious," and during the immediacy of the confrontation she was afraid of him. Although Amanda decided that "he would never hit" her again, in another incident with a different live-in boyfriend Amanda was also physically attacked. While they were

arguing one day, she said she was "going up the steps to the bedroom, and he takes his fist and pounds me in my back. I fall flat down on the steps. I thought that I was going to kill him. I was just so angry. I felt that he violated our relationship to abuse me like that. I was just so mad. We broke up shortly thereafter." In both of these incidents, and other confrontations she had with men in her life Amanda's actions suggest that the violations did not compromised how she viewed herself. She described herself as being hurt. "I guess I was hurt cause I just couldn't believe that someone who cared about you would hit you like that."

Work

Institutional Discrimination: Patterns and Practices

Work was one of the major settings in the women's lives that allowed them to see themselves in ways that others viewed them. They entered the labor force at a time when racial and sexual discrimination was a common feature of the workplace environment and many of the women encountered traditional barriers which penalized them for being who they were--black and female. As a result institutional violations occurred and they occurred primarily in two areas. First, in a more structural way, through the implementation of stated and arbitrary policies and practices that resulted in lower-status jobs that were usually at the low-end of the pay scale. And second, in a more interpersonal way through direct verbal and physical contacts resulting in insulting, humiliating and demeaning job interactions.

In the first area, the women offered several examples of violations that resulted in

a denial of equal opportunities. Early on in their work histories, the participants who worked particularly in corporate America fully understood that they were hired as a "showcase," and that they were in Mary's words "a token hire." So their perceptions of racist and/or sexist treatment were not totally unanticipated. However it was not acceptable to them. This was especially the case for those who perceived inequities in status and pay due to discriminatory practices in the predominately white and often male work environments that they found themselves.

Anne and Mary expressed a sense of violation due to the differential treatment they experienced with job promotions and salary increases. In the nine years that Anne worked at the magazine company, she received only one job promotion, although she did receive small periodic pay raises. Mary too expressed resentment at having received only two job promotions in the more than twenty years she worked at the bank, and she also resented not having received the type of bonus she felt she merited because of her job performance. But they responded to their perceptions of discriminatory practices in different ways. Anne simply left the company to pursue other avenues of work. Mary's longstanding grievances concerning pay discrimination, due largely to the fact that she is black and female, led her to file a lawsuit claiming discriminatory practices against her by the bank. The lawsuit was the underlying cause for her retirement although problems with her health precipitated her decision to take an early retirement.

Amanda also filed a lawsuit charging racial and sexual harassment against the tool and dye company and against the union that was supposed to represent her claim. She was fired from her job. Sharon was also fired from her job after she was sexually

harassed. "I had this job as an office manager, and the executive director was trying to hit on me. I rejected him and he called me a fucking dyke bitch and fired me."

Sometimes abusive treatment can be masked within the corporate culture where it may be difficult to discern whether differential practices are actually taking place or whether the business environment is functioning normally, and whether what is normal is similar for all employees. Corporate culture requires at least a degree of assimilation and the adoption of some of its established norms and role behavior. Patricia found this predominantly white cultural environment as sometimes oppressive and humiliating. As she said:

The white folks generally don't see you as a human being. They know that you're there to perform a job, but women in my position are as dispensable as a paper clip. I've never gotten the sense that they see you as a full-fledged human being. They see you simply as a servant and they treat you as a servant. I have a problem with that. I have a problem when they speak to you in a very disrespectful manner. I have a problem when they expect you to call someone Mr. or Mrs. so and so, yet they feel that it's all right to call me by my first name. I have a problem that if I'm sick and I call in and I tell you I'm sick, you want me to bring a doctor's note like I'm some child in school. You work hard and it's not appreciated. And you get paid less simply because you're not white. That's why I would stay on a job for about three years.

Working in corporate America for Jackie meant that she had to reinvent herself to adhere to the different dress, language and behavioral codes of conduct in this environment in order to keep her job, and in this process she thought that she was "losing a part of herself." After five years of working in corporate America Jackie thought that she was "on the verge of having a breakdown." So she quit. Thereafter, she worked primarily for not-for-profit organizations, but it was in this work sector that she

experienced a period of being "assaulted." This assault, from Jackie's perspective, came at the hands of the local housing authority who sent officials and the police one day to close all of the programs that she had established over a 10-year period and charge her with stealing public monies. For five months Jackie was "extremely depressed and acting like a crazy person." She was unable to function because she was "having a hard time processing emotionally what was happening."

In doing community and political work Amanda too was assaulted, but she was physically assaulted by a fellow activist and ex-lover. She was raped. In describing what happened Amanda said:

He insisted upon trying to be intimate with me, and I kept saying no, I don't want to have a relationship with you. He was not a little person, and we got into a whole big tussle, and he would not heed anything that I said. So as far as I was concerned, I was raped. As a result of that I got pregnant again. I made the mistake of calling him to tell him. I said, I'm going to pay for the abortion myself; I'm not having your child. He called me everything in the book because he was Catholic and this was murder, and I was crazy. So I just hung up on him.

Knowing What Is Acceptable

Now, as mature women, most of the participants believe that they have reached a point where they can assert some degree of control over their lives. They can define what is and what is no longer acceptable to them. All of the women see abusive behavior as unacceptable. They believe this even as the compromises, contradictions, tensions and challenges they continue to face may force them to modify or alter their decisions and behaviors in ways that they may not intend to.

The women do not see having control over one's own life the ability to assert total

authority over or determine the outcome of all the circumstance and events that fill their lives. Instead, control for most of the participants is rooted in self knowledge that arises from their day-to-day experiences. It is the knowledge that they now rely upon to validate who they are as black women. This knowledge guides them as they asserting their interests in ways that will not only enable them to endure but prevail against seemingly insurmountable odds. As Barbara said, "it is so important to know yourself. If you really know yourself, it's a lot of power. If you really know yourself, you can pretty much do whatever you want to do. If you're a black woman and you know yourself, that's phenomenal."

With self-knowledge the participants have become acceptable to themselves and appreciate the women they have become. Barbara, who is 55-years old, said, "I like the way I look. I like everything about myself." And she views this period in her life as an "interesting time" and feels "sort of like a kid again trying to figure out what it all means."

At 48-years of age, Faith sees herself as a "person who is moving, growing and changing." For the most part, she said, "I am very satisfied with the places life has taken me and even where I am at this moment."

Anne at 54-years of age sees this period in her life as a "new chapter" and believes that she is taking more responsibility for her life "than I've done up too now. I feel, in many ways, I've been in a fog, and that fog has lifted."

While Sara thinks that "being 50 is kind of fabulous. Now I just feel like this is who I am and a lot of the bullshit is not important anymore."

And Amanda said, "I like who I am. I feel like I'm comfortable with myself, and

by that I mean I'm accepting who I am in all of its entirety."

Like Barbara, most of the participants have accepted mid-life as another form of passage, and they are attempting to accommodate changes within their physical selves as well as changes within their social and cultural selves. Barbara recognizes that she "can't go out and dance all night long." But she said, "I don't have a desire to do that anyway. I don't try to act like I'm a young person. I wouldn't want to go back to any other age or segment of my life because I've already done that. It's sort of like an adventure now trying to figure out what this is. What is this story? It's exciting." A part of this story is about change. Barbara is going through menopause, and she thinks that "going through the passage of menopause is not so great."

When I turned 50, I started going through menopause. But there was no information. Nobody knew anything. And everybody was scared. This one friend of mine said, Barbara you shouldn't really tell people you're going through menopause. I said, well why not? It was like a secret. It was like women didn't go through it, including my mother. I said to her, what was it like? She said, oh I didn't go through it. She said she didn't. I went out and got books. Then there was a whole bunch of women doing all this talking on television. None of these things related to me. Oh you're going to have emotional things. Hell, I've been having emotional things all of my life. So I already had that. And, you need to take this, and you need to take that. What I found out with menopause, what I needed to do was keep myself comfortable. Not have these giant highs and these giant lows. But to keep myself as even as possible. I can now do that.

Sara too has accepted the fact that she must make some adjustments to her physical and mental life at turning 50-years old. She knows that "some options are just closed to [her] now":

I can't go to law school. My brain doesn't work that way anymore. I'm too old. I can't go to medical school. I'm too old for that process. I physically can't have a baby. I still have eggs and stuff, but I can't have a

baby. So some of those options are closed to me. Which means that broader options in other ways are opened because I know that some things are not an option anymore. I don't have to spend time worrying about them.

An acceptance of self, for several of the women, means assuming responsibility for not only who they were in the past but for who they are now. In so doing, some of the participants struggle with lingering issues that continue to shape their lives. Barbara continues to work on her "anger." She realizes that, "it's something I'm always going to have but eventually, I think, I will be able to take control of it." And she accepts the fact that "some days you got to feel bad. I call it my Picasso period. I say, okay, fuck it. I'm going to feel bad and I'm going to just feel bad. But I try not to affect other people."

And Amanda is attempting to find a balance between her past and present self. As she said:

The concept of being a warrior type person can be trying and difficult. But I've sort of accepted that's why I'm here. At the same time, I have to balance myself out and try and do other things that keep me whole. Because if you go into battle all the time, whether it's verbal or otherwise, you have to have a place to kind of get yourself back together. I need to take care of my health. I need to deal with my stomach, a little bit of weight, and my thighs. But not from a beauty standpoint. I just feel uncomfortable in clothes. I don't want to try and get down to a smaller size, like I was when I was 21. I don't feel the need to do that. I can't think of anything negative about the way I feel about being 52 and middle aged.

Along with self knowledge comes self respect. And along with self respect comes a sense of one's own self worth. Sharon believes that the value placed on one's own life is reflected in the ways "you treat yourself." As she said, "I think that you have to treat yourself with respect." On the one hand, she thinks about self respect in some

very practical ways. "It's how you carry yourself. It's taking a bath every day. Combing your hair. Putting make up on. And ironing your clothes." And on the other hand, she thinks self respect is how you "treat others and how you allow others to treat you." In discussing this broader perspective, Sharon said:

It's about not allowing myself to be treated in certain ways. I feel that I deserve better. Not allowing yourself to be treated badly. Not allowing yourself to be stepped all over. Standing up for a cause or whatever you believe in. Being in touch with the world. So self respect is basically how you treat yourself, and how you allow others to treat you, and what you will stand up for, and what you will do.

But as a black woman, Barbara finds that respect from others can be difficult because oftentimes "you are not accepted for being the person you are," but perceived as who others see you as being. She concludes that "being a black woman is hard. So hard."

The notion that being a black woman in America is difficult is an important theme that many of the participants would reiterate. For Patricia, being a black woman means constantly dealing with the perceptions and images that others have of her.

Black women are still seen as a kind of earth mother who have all the answers and we are going to nurse everybody. I've been thinking about this for a while. On every job that I have had since I've become an adult, there has always been some white woman who wants to tell her problems to me. Like I got the answers. You know, I'm trying to find the answers to my own life. I can't help you. And on some other levels black women are still seen as mammy. We are still seen as hot to trot. Like we got this twenty-four-seven getting laid thing going on. I still see black women being used as a scape goat for all the ills in this country. I am so tired of hearing black women being blamed for everything but the black plague, and we probably were blamed for that somewhere in history. The black woman in this country is still perceived as the hard cold bitch of a woman. Sometimes we got to be hard and cold to survive.

Most of the time, the perceptions and images of others are contrary to how the

women view themselves. Again, for Patricia being a black woman means:

Constantly redefining to me who I am. We're never seen as being vulnerable, soft, needy, or loving. None of that. To me being a black woman means being proud. It means being loving. It means someone who is out here trying to make it in the world like everybody else. It means coming from a long line of struggle and surviving on whatever level we survive. It can be fun sometimes, especially when sisters get together on a real positive level and you can sit back and just be yourself. Just sit back and be real and enjoy each other for who each other is.

Even though most of the women would agree with Faith's contention that being a black woman is "really hard sometimes," they would also agree with Sara's assertion that:

To be a black woman is a good thing. I'm glad I'm a black woman. I like the other black women. I like the world I'm connected to. I feel like I have freedom to express myself. I feel like I have really good images of black women to compare myself to; to aspire to. White women get on my nerves for the most part. I wouldn't want to be a white woman. I wouldn't want to be one of them. I'm glad I'm a black woman. I think it's a good thing. We're bad.

For most of the participants, at this particular stage in their lives, a lack of respect is "totally unacceptable." Disrespect is seen as transcending social, cultural and personal boundaries and it makes little difference where it may come from. Amanda believes that the "best safe guard" against disrespect is how you feel about yourself. In discussing some of her encounters on the job, Amanda explains why she finds a lack of respect abhorrent and how she uses her personal power to struggle against it in her efforts to retain her sense of self respect.

It's hard to guard against the constant racist and sexist viewpoints, attitudes, images, and symbols because it's all around you. So the best safe guard is how I feel about myself. You can't define me. I said this to my supervisor and other people on the job. You don't have the standard. So you ain't creating the standard about how I'm supposed to act as a woman, how I'm supposed to act as a social worker, or anything else. I

came here with my standards and I'm leaving with my standards. It's like an attitude--it's the tude. It's the attitude that you're not going to push past me. You're not going to act like I'm a nonperson. I'm not going to say excuse me to you a thousand times, without eventually letting you know physically that I'm here. I'm just not going to let you disrespect me-- if you're black, if you're Latino, or whatever. But particularly with white people. I just find that you almost have to have like a shield around you when you go around them because they're going too inevitably, it seems, do something wittingly or unwittingly that is going to be insulting.

For Patricia, disrespect is most evident in abusive behavior. At this point in her life she said, "abuse of any kind is unacceptable." She believes that "violence has bent" her life. That it has "tainted" the ways she "views men in particular and some women in general." So she is ever-conscious in her attempts to guard against potentially abusive situations. As she said:

I am fearful of men with explosive tempers. It has made me cautious around men who are aggressive. In my mind, there is a very very thin line between being aggressive and being violent. It has made me cautious around women who have explosive tempers too. I've seen the violence that women can visit upon other women. More so than I've seen them visited upon men. I don't want to have anything to do with all of them. I will not put up with it. There are no explanations where I would allow myself to be treated in an abusive way again. Violence has really played havoc with me and I no longer tolerate it in my life. No way.

Rethinking Violence Against Women

This study is an attempt to explore some of the various ways a selected group of African American women has interpreted for themselves their experiences of violence. As such, it draws attention to several important methodological and sociological issues that speak to some of the current discussions and concerns regarding the discourse on violence against women.

This study places women's lives at the center of inquiry. It represents a significant methodological departure from the more established scientific approaches to the study of violence against women, particularly those that focus on female victimization. In such studies, whether they are empirical or analytical, by concentrating on the extent to which women are victims of male aggression, gender becomes a privileged category that supersedes all others, while the full content of women's lives becomes obscured and rendered marginal or invisible. By limiting the focus of inquiry to a presumed common feature of women's lives a paradox arises. On the one hand, the minimizing or denying of women's experiences establishes a theoretical grounding for reproducing dominant and subordinate relations because the acceptable parameters in which women can define their experiences are narrowed. While on the other hand, documenting female victimization within a restricted framework tends to lend political, policy, and programmatic credibility for determining and addressing women's needs.

In an attempt to move away from this contradiction, this study relied upon women's historically, socially and culturally-based experiences as a foundation for understanding the nature and role violence has played in their lives. In drawing upon their perceptions and opinions a broader point of reference is revealed that not only identifies the ways violence has insinuated itself into their lives, but also exposes the meaning that is given to their experiences. The collective and individual experiences of the women in this study may provide some clues and an opening for exploring several issues that are relevant to a discussion of violence against women.

Through the participants' continuous struggles to understand and give meaning to

their experiences, the issue of subjectivity is a critical marker in their lives. Over the course of their life histories abuse had, in one form or another, played a role in their lives at different points in time under different social, cultural and personal circumstances. But only in specific situations, from their perspectives, did such abuse constituted a violation, and rarely did it command a steady presence or influence to the extent that it became a defining part of their identity. This raises a critical question: why were such distinctions made and on what basis? What has been consistent is how the women have interpreted their experiences by determining whether abusive acts led to an infringement on or breach to their sense of self. Within this context, another obvious question is raised: why is an infringement on or a breach to one's sense of self significant?

Social and cultural relationships and our interactions within those relationships are essential to a definition of self. One's sense of self integrity is highly dependent on the approval of others. When interactions become threatening, insulting, degrading, or disrespectful one's definition of self can be dislodged and fractured. Such interactions may corrupt or even collapse a positive understanding of who one believe themselves to be. The dynamic tensions and contradictions between one's sense of integrity and the disrespect of others lie at the heart of how the participants conceptualize violence. How they experience the self during abusive situations is telling: acts of physical abuse that not only compromised the integrity of the body but also evoked a sense of social shame or a loss of some degree of self-confidence were viewed as violations. Structural exclusion from certain rights or privileges bestowed by society when it evoked a sense of inferiority or deficiency was also seen as a violation. And acts that deny acceptance or recognition

and evoke a sense of social denigration were also part of their concept of violence.

On the surface, some of the women's reflections of abusive incidents may appear consistent with the more established definitions shaping the discourse on violence against women. Yet the participants did not necessarily privilege physical abuse or acts of abusive behavior perpetrated by male partners over other violations they experienced. This is not to suggest that their encounters with male aggression and the physical abuse they received as a result were insignificant. Rather, it is to acknowledge that their life histories speak to broader social and cultural interactions that include but also extend beyond their intimate relationships with men. Abuse for the women in this study was not contained within the bounds of male dominance or restricted to intimate partner behavior. Their lives, like the lives of all women, are not one-dimensional and cannot be systemically fragmented to accommodate preconceived experiences.

A critical finding of this study is that by asserting agency the women have established parameters for themselves in defining what constitutes violence. Violence is not necessarily an abusive act, instead it is the impact that such an act can have on one's sense of self integrity. Why is this finding significant to the discourse on violence against women? What would be revealed if issues of violence against women are theorized through the lens of female subjectivity, rather than male dominance? Would women's needs be articulated in different ways? Would an alternative system of services be constructed? And, would issues of power, control, and domination be refocused to include rather than ignore women's relationships to each other as well as other social and cultural relationships? These questions speak to the realities of a small and selected

group of black women's experiences. But, they also present a fundamental challenge to future research on violence against women.

Violence Against Women

The experiences of the women in this study fall largely outside of the ideological and structural domain of the anti-violence movement and its accompanying victim services system. Over the last 30 years, this movement and this system have been both necessary and inadequate in responding to women's needs. Activists, advocates and feminists all have politicized the physical and emotional abuse experienced by women as a result of their subordinate relationship to men. Their efforts broadened the public discourse on the issue and created new social spaces for not only elevating the needs of abused women but also securing public resources to meet those needs. And through the services and assistance they received many women have come to adopt a new understanding of self that they find empowering. The question I raise is: what of the claims of the majority of women who are abused but do not come into contact with or seek assistance for this service system?

In the absence of concerted efforts by activist, advocates, feminists and others to reassess and rethink the ideological and structural underpinning of the anti-violence movement, the experiences and needs of many women, particularly women of color, will continue to be marginal or simply omitted from this discourse. These are women who do not necessarily fit within the more normative pattern of female victimization and whose lives speak to the influences of race and class and other social and cultural distinctions

that give particular meaning to their experiences of violence. The always popular and often politically correct notions of inclusion are insufficient to address concerns of marginality and omission, because the terms and conditions for involvement appear to be preestablished: women of color are invited to join in, rather than help create the agenda. Inclusion for the sake of physical appearance is simply not enough. The ongoing struggles in the anti-violence movement around issues of inclusion divert attention away from and conceal and distort the very real problems regarding uneven power relations. It is precisely the issue of power and relations of power that lies at the heart of the persistent complaints and criticisms of the anti-violence movement and its system of services.

The power hierarchy is revealed through the ideologically laden decisions over such issues as: how does violence against women get defined as a problem in need of an explanation? Whose problem is this? What is to be done in responding to the problem? And what resources should be allocated to whom to address the problem? This more systemic use of power is often combined with positional and personal power where the privileges, interests, and concerns of a selected group of women have prevailed in assuming decision-making authority. But there are growing efforts lead by socially and culturally diverse women, both nationally and internationally, that have begun the process of interpreting and responding to their experiences of violence for themselves. It is my hope that these efforts will not replicate some of the more regressive ideological and structural tendencies of the anti-violence movement, but will seek to place the meaning women give to their experiences of violence at the center of their work.

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