ARTS OF EXISTENCE: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SUBJECTIVITY IN OLDER WHITE SOUTHERN WOMEN

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by

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* * * * *

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CHAPTER I

ORIGINS: SELF AND TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Any act must assume unified terms to get started. The implicit mechanics by which these assumptions are established or taken for granted spell out, if examined, a structure of repetition, which yet overtly posits self-evidence . . . something that looks like an absent presence.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1993, pp. 130-131

Introduction

This researcher has found the poststructural critique of language, the subject, and knowledge to be most helpful in thinking about ways to displace binaries, categories, hierarchies, and totalities which have long been sacrosanct and untroubled in Western philosophy -- grids that have been particularly restrictive and harmful to women. In particular, women over a certain age have been lumped carelessly into the category "old woman" and dismissed. These women are on the wrong side of several binaries: young/old, male/female, subject/object, strong/weak, and, often, healthy/unhealthy and rich/poor. They are assuredly too close for comfort to the wrong side of that most material of binaries, life/death.

The poststructural critique, however, offers methods which can be deployed in order to liberate ourselves from whatever binaries entrap us -- "from something our history misled us into thinking was real" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 56). Certain feminists
have found that a poststructural analysis of the category "woman" allows for a significant and promising shift in political thinking. How might poststructural theories assist in a displacement of the humanist category "older woman"? To begin with, we can rethink the language of theory using some lively images and break the drill of practice with some impertinent capers thereby interrupting the identity of the category into difference. Rather than ask the standard humanist questions that center on what older women are or think or know, we might change the focus entirely by asking different questions. What are the practices with which, in which, women constitute themselves? What arts of existence do they find in their culture or invent as they struggle in the ethical practice of freedom that is self-formation? What kinds of experiences are possible as a result of these practices? What, if any, resistance to self-formation do they practice within the normalizing discourses of their culture? What is their aesthetics of existence, their ethos? And what are the effects of their praxis as their own forces fold upon the world?

These questions derive from the deconstructive analyses enabled by the poststructural critique. Contrary to some beliefs, poststructuralism is not a rude and trouble-making scalawag of a newcomer to philosophy. It has been here all along, at least since the Stoics had the first shot at deconstructing Plato's ontology. The pleats in time have always encouraged nomads and nomadic thought that disrupt the monadic positivities with which humanism has laboriously ordered language and social practice. What statements can be made if we try to step outside humanism and have a go at the deterritorialized spaces in language and lives? Granted that humanism and its attendant obsession with its own reality have often had devastating psychic and material effects, particularly for women, what theoretical and political positions might be produced if we name humanism a simulacrum?
Finally, what are the methodological implications for researchers if we pursue the possibilities enabled by poststructuralism with some measure of vigor, i.e., as rigorously as our imaginations allow? What might we become and what might we produce? Lyotard (1984/1979) explains a complication of poststructuralism as follows:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an event; hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization (mise en œuvre) always begin too soon. *Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*) (p. 81).

Even though she has no desire to establish new rules or categories, this nomadic and journey-proud author aims to keep Lyotard's (1984/1979) comment on the paradox of the future in mind and to remember as well Derrida's (1970) musing about becoming: "But you were asking a question. I was wondering myself if I know where I am going. So I would answer you by saying, first, that I am trying, precisely, to put myself at a point so that I do not know any longer where I am going" (p. 267).

The poststructural critique, then, frames this research study which looks at one group of older white southern women in one small, rural community in order to examine how they constitute themselves as ethical subjects of their actions and to study their self-formation produced within local and particular patterns of existence.
Employment

The purpose of writing is to "know to what extent the exercise of thinking of one's own history can free thought from what it thinks silently and to allow it to think otherwise."

Michel Foucault, quoted in Racevskis, 1987, p. 22

* * * *[Aside: I am uneasy about beginning. The Beginning promises the End, with the evidentiary warrant strategically propping up the weighty, tidy essay in the middle. I am suspicious of straight lines.

Dissertations are about backgrounds, problems, positionings, literature reviews, methodologies, validities, conclusions, and even implications, for Heaven's sake -- all constituting a carefully staged academic *fictio*, a construction approved by the authorities, a rite of passage into citationality, and a normalizing function of the gaze of the institution. I would rather speak for a time about the book I wanted to write when I returned to Ohio after I interviewed all those southern women and studied their place but didn't because I had to save my energies for this overcoded dissertation. That book is lost forever. I cannot speak of it.

But I dream smidgens of it in the early dark interiority of winter mornings. I see my old and new friends -- my participants, my subjects -- posed in their exquisite satin wedding gowns, smiling around the years at their daughters who smile back at them wearing the same gowns as they pose regally in pictures hung side-by-side on living room walls. I eavesdrop on the conversations between the lovely young women of the wedding photographs who tell each other stories of their lovers, who praise each other's children, who cross their ankles properly as they sit in the Sunday School circle of
chairs, who stand beside each other in their good suits and sing the Clubwoman's Song at every Woman's Club meeting, who hold their sick husbands' hands as they die, who wear widows' weeds for a time and then are reborn into selves that are a bit shaky, more careful, and increasingly fragile and strong and even more lovely. The bones of their faces have sucked in time and exude it in whispers through delicately fragile skin. They say 'I think,' "I suppose," and "I guess," more often now. They qualify their new-found knowledge for your sake.

In my dreams -- that excess of consciousness -- I am the outside folded inside. I can feel and hear on my legs the real silk stockings I wore during the war; I know exactly how much shortening to add to flour to make very short biscuits for strawberries or country ham; I can smell Essex County's red clay tobacco fields with my eyes closed; I doze with my husband on the river bank, sleepily eyeing the float on the fishing line he baited for me; I know how to do a jivey jitterbug on Saturday nights at the Service Club; I rise by my school desk on demand and conjugate verbs in Latin or French or English. And as I stand in front of the mirror, rolling my hair back from my forehead and securing it just so, I see my mother's picture above my bed in my room at the teacherage at Hickory Hill where I live now and teach school. This story never begins but has always been, and I slip into it over and over again in different places, and it is as if I too have always been there.

As I dream, I am shattered that the taped voices talk only with each other and not with me. I am outside and abandoned, and then someone asks, "And what do you think about that, Bettie?" I sigh, feeling folded inside, and I reply, "Well, I think that's wonderful. I think you're right, of course." And then I am shattered again as I am outside once more and know that they don't
care what I think after all. I listen eagerly for the snag, the loose thread in the conversation, that I can grab hold of and use for entry. But their southern voices are as fluid and vertiginous as time. I hear them laughing delightedly at some old story whose moral will answer my main research question, and I can't quite make it out. In my dream I begin to understand that I will never hear that answer, that I will hear only a phrase, a syllable, the beginning of a tune. That is all I can know.

That is why these enforced Beginnings leading to Ends give me the willies, the heebie jeebies, and make my head hurt with plot promises I don't particularly care to keep. I am pretty jumpy about all this orderliness. Do you understand?

(Lordy, Lord. Was that my dream or someone else's?)

If the genres have indeed blurred (Geertz, 1983), if writing is considered a method of inquiry (Richardson, 1994), and if textual representations of research are recognized as stagings or performances of the research process, then the poststructural researcher may find it fruitful to employ alternative writing spaces that enhance the description, analysis, and interpretation of the research process. Stretching the boundaries of the dissertation format may be a particularly seductive practice for a writer with a poststructural bent who does not see "the task at hand as locating the unruly meanings of a text in a single coherent intention" (Clifford, 1988, p. 40).

This writer has decided to employ the *aside* as a strategy of sensemaking in this dissertation, to deploy the *aside* as a textual method of discovery. The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* (Flexner, Ed., 1987) defines an *aside* as "a part of an actor's lines supposedly not heard by others on the stage and intended only for the
audience." In the space of the aside, perhaps I might speak to you without the text's hearing me. Perhaps.

I see the space of the aside in this performance as a pleat in the text where the outside and inside fold upon each other, a space for "what Blanchot called 'the passion of the outside', a force that tends towards the outside only because the outside itself has become 'intimacy', 'intrusion'" (Deleuze, 1988/1986, p. 120). // The space of the aside might be a "movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin . . . a supplementarity" (Derrida, 1970, p. 260). It is the excess, the overflow. // The space of the aside toys with the "rage for unity" (Spivak, 1974, p. xvi) demanded by a leveled humanist construct such as the dissertation. It encourages "subversive repetition" (Butler, 1990, p. 147) and interrupts form for meaning's sake. // The space of the aside is a parergon -- an embellishment, an accessory to confusion, a space for play and fancy. // The space of the aside is post-history, a ruin where "the events of history shrivel up and become absorbed in the setting" (Benjamin, 1977/1963, p. 179). // The aside is a space of "sheer happenings" (Arendt, 1968, p. 104) which might present "those unassimiliable fragments of experience that refuse to be woven into a neat tale, the unspeakable, what literally cannot be talked about" (Linden, 1993, p. 17). // The space of the aside might create a "new form of reflexive and transgressive verisimilitude" where the text's authority becomes self-referential (Denzin, 1994, p. 304). // In the space of the aside, one textual space might incite another textual space to discourse (Lather, 1993a, p. 673) in a collision of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 428). Text intrudes upon text in an "enabling disruption" (Butler, 1993, p. 23). // The aside is a space for nomads, "those emigrant thinkers who deterritorialize accepted notions of space" (Deleuze, 1993a, p. xv). // The aside is a space "to be other and to move toward the other" (De Certeau, 1984, p.
110. It is a "space-off" (de Lauretis, 1987, p. 25), a spatial practice. // The space of the aside is a place, a pause in textual space (Tuan, 1977, p. 6).

And so on.

The space of the aside contains more data, if you will; but data that may escape the violent coercion of manipulation, narration, and interpretation -- but only if you wish it to.

The aside is the field.

Backgrounds and Origins

We need a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin to reassure us as to our ends, since ultimately we have never believed in them.


Poststructural critique is suspicious of the search for origins, since that search marks the desire to locate true knowledge and to capture unique identity and thus to disclose the perfect essence of each that existed before the point of rupture into irreducible difference which has always been (Derrida, 1974; Foucault, 1984/1971). Foucault (1984/971) speculates that our fondness for origins may be because "The origin lies at a place of inevitable loss, the point where the truth of things corresponded to a truthful discourse, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost" (p. 79). Spivak (1992) forgives our search for origins to some extent by explaining that "it belongs to that group of grounding mistakes that enables us to make sense of our lives" (p. 781). This research study examines the self-forming arts of existence used by a group of older white southern women by considering the women's words as well as the texture of the small southern town in
which they live. With Spivak's (1992) permission in hand, I would like to commit a "grounding mistake" and tell the following origin-story about this research project.

Postpositivist researchers explain that their research topics often emerge from their biographies and that one of the reasons for their choice of topics is the desire to make sense of their own lives (Middleton, 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Hastrup, 1992). "Personal experience can be the very starting point of a study," explains Reinharz (1992), "the material from which the researcher develops questions, and the source of finding people to study." Foucault (quoted in Rajchman, 1985) elaborates as follows:

Each time I have attempted to do theoretical work, it has been on the basis of elements from my experience -- always in relation to processes that I saw taking place around me. It is in fact because I thought I recognized something cracked, dully jarring, or disfunctioning in things I saw, in the institutions with which I dealt, in my relations with others, that I undertook a particular piece of work, several fragments of an autobiography (pp. 35-36).

I began this research because I wanted to think about how poststructural issues of identity and knowledge -- those two old philosophical mates, ontology and epistemology -- intersect in women's lives. This desire grew out of my studies in poststructuralism and feminism in education. My choice of participants, older white women in the town in which I grew up, was influenced by my own history with an eye to visions of my own future. Even though I am growing older in Yankee country, I believe that the social practices and discourses of these women have been part of my own subjectivization and have sedimented out in my theory and praxis. My research agenda has surely been much like that of Myerhoff (1978) who says, "But I would be a little old Jewish lady one day; thus it was essential for me to learn what that condition was like, in all its particulars" (p. 19). Because one of the goals of critical theory is to learn to conceive of ourselves in terms of theory rather than just to learn about theory (Fay, 1987, p. 114), I have attempted to theorize my own identity as well
as that of my participants as I have explored poststructural critiques of the subject and subjectivity.

Since the postmodern turn and the crisis of representation (Jameson, 1984/1979; Marcus & Fischer, 1986) insist that investigators acknowledge their agendas, researchers are more likely to come clean about their desires, which often include the desire to study themselves and their cultures through their research. Clough (1992), however, warns of transforming our "homeland to the site of the hunt, the location of research, the space of fieldwork," since this scientific inscription does indeed serve the researcher's identity and authority (p. 58). On the other hand, Smith (1990) wonders how to escape the dilemma of studying ourselves and our homelands, since "as thinking heads -- as social scientists -- we are always inside what we are thinking about; we know it in the first place as insiders" (p. 51). I have been positioned, in several senses of the word, as both an insider and an outsider in this research project and have found that conflict both paralyzing and fruitful.

My positioning has surely given me trouble. I have been troubled by the necessity of rhetorically and textually inscribing even a partial analysis and interpretation of the community I still refer to as home and of its women, my old and new friends. Baudrillard (1993/1983) says "Never again will the real have to be produced" (p. 343-344), and yet my inscription is already, if not the real thing, surely a material effect producing other effects whose consequences I may never know, since "texts necessarily exceed their own unitary projects" (Belsey, 1993/1989, p. 559). But if "textualization is a prerequisite to interpretation" (Clifford, 1988, p. 3), then this text, whether I like it or not, will become a synecdoche with which I constitute lives and culture. The ethical implications of my study have seemed almost overwhelming at times as I have struggled to find a sense-making position that was not too violent. I
imagine there will always be discomfort in studying others, but I am not at ease with my gaze.

I have been troubled by the need to recognize my conflicting subjectivities and, at the same time, to avoid subjectivism and a "phenomenological or subjectivist analysis which unproblematically privileges the individual's constitutive experience" (McNay, 1994, p. 156). Butler (1992) states, "No subject is its own point of departure" but exists in relation to the difference of the other (p. 9). "I is the transfer point of that replay," she says, where the "I" is constituted and "embedded in material practices and institutional arrangements" (Butler, 1992, p. 9). Working in the tension of subjectivities in process, I hope to be able to redeploy subjectivity in order to dehisce identity, to de-identify.

Following on the troubled heels of subjectivism is a closely related issue which McNay (1994) mentions, the valorization of experience of which poststructural feminists are wary. Fuss (1989) warns that experience is a shaky basis for epistemology (p. 17), and Scott (1992) says that experience can no longer be a "subjective witness" which is the ground for the most authentic truth, the starting point for "all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis" (p. 27). Instead of thinking of experience as foundational, Scott (1992) encourages us to think of experience as that which we have to explain, that which needs to be problematized, or "a window onto the complicated workings of ideology," (p. 118), as Althusser (1971) would insist. "Experience would itself then become 'evidence' of a sort for the production of ideology," according to Fuss (1989), "but evidence which is obviously constructed and clearly knowledge-dependent" (p. 118). I must remember to investigate and not merely valorize experience.

I have been troubled by nostalgia, a cultural practice of redemption, and a reaction formation to poststructuralism and its shattering of foundations and origins.
"In a world of loss and unreality, nostalgia rises to importance as 'the phantasmal, parodic rehabilitation of all lost frames of reference'" (Foster, quoted in Stewart, 1988, p. 228). In fact, Baudrillard (1993/1983) explains, "When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning" (p. 347). However, the longing for places, perhaps for those "growing-up places" (Pratt, 1984, p. 17) which we all carry around with us, should not necessarily be seen as reactionary (Massey, 1994, p. 151); nor should homelessness be valorized over home (Game, 1991, p. 148). Further, it seems irresponsible to insert those in cultures we inscribe as ruins in the double bind of being both "romanticized as those who can (still) speak and on the other hand coldly judged and dismissed because they speak 'incorrectly' and 'inefficiently'" (Stewart, 1988, p. 228). Nostalgia may not appear very useful, but a "politiciation of memory" which can "illuminate and transform the present" (Hooks, 1990, p. 147) can be. So too might be the examination of what is enabled by our attachment to places and cultures which we have left behind, as well as the examination of why we conflate longing for a place with nostalgia. (There is a troubling sense of teleology in the opposition to nostalgia, as if being attached to the past and whatever we value in it is automatically suspect, whereas being attached to wherever we are going and what we might become is valorized.)

I have also been troubled by Nietzsche's (quoted in Spivak, 1974) warning, "One seeks a picture of the world in that philosophy in which we feel freest; i.e., in which our most powerful drive feels free to function" (p. xxvii). Butler (1995) elaborates this warning as follows: "For the question of whether or not a position is right, coherent, or interesting is, in this case, less informative than why it is we come to occupy and defend the territory that we do, what it promises us, from what it promises to protect us" (pp. 127-128). I, one who thrives on the persistent critique which poststructuralism urges -- a critique even of itself, have gazed upon a
community coded by humanist values but riddled more and more often by postmodern disruptions and resulting discomfort. It has been difficult, but necessary, to critique my attachment to poststructuralism as well as my participants' to humanism. I have had to turn my gaze upon my own practices and attachments and have not particularly enjoyed that exercise. What does poststructuralism promise me and protect me from? What are the effects of my privileging of poststructuralism?

In spite of all these troubles, however, my curiosity won out; my need to make sense won out; my desire to write about this community and its women won out. As I found myself in the playful disquiet lurking between weakness, frustration, and despair and joy, delight, and celebration, I wondered whether existence without interpretation was possible. Foucault says we "are condemned to meaning" (quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 88) and Spivak (1994) says that the "phantom of subjectivity (sic) cannot be warded off" (p. 27). So in search of relief from suspicions of my own desire, I, a teacher who teaches a course in reader-response theory, remembered that the text I write is only one aspect of the transaction between the reader and the text, this figuration of mine which becomes a figuration of yours (Rosenblatt, 1978). Spivak (1993), rather than think of the audience as a blank, people she cannot imagine, has come to think of the audience as follows:

When an audience is responsible, responding, invited, in other words to coinvestigate, then positionality is shared with it. Audience and investigator: it's not just a binary opposition when an audience really is an audience. It now seems to me that many of the changes I've made in my position are because the audience has become a coinvestigator and I have realized what it is to have an audience. An audience is part of one. An audience shows one something. That may indeed be the transaction. It's a responsibility to the other taking on faces. It is not deessentializing, but attempting to deconstruct the binary opposition between investigator and audience. Radically, then, one works not for a future present, but imagining the blank certitude of the future anterior. And the audience is
the unimaginable . . . responding, responsible, and invited to be co-investigator [and] one starts owning the right to have one's invitation accepted, given that the invitation is, like all letters, open letters intercepted and that people turn up in other places for other occasions with that invitation, so that we begin to deconstruct that binary opposition bit by bit (pp. 22-23).

I now formally extend to you an invitation to join this investigation, even though you have been there all along, since I have been imagining from the beginning the textualization of my research process and your response to it, as well as the responses of some of my participants who have said they want to read this text. After all, we know when we begin our research that we must finally write about it. I believe, along with Rose (1990), that the anticipated text controls to some extent the researcher's work.

Though I cling to any qualifications which bound my authorial authority and complicity, I understand that I am not off the hook. Nielsen (1995) explains that the author must assume some responsibility for meaning-making and interpretation, else "The author's fear of taking on the responsibility for his text will dominate the text's construction, and thus the researcher in fact remains as the principal character in the research -- at the expense of both the case and the relevance for the reader" (p. 10). Instead of forgoing responsibility, I have chosen another route by taking very seriously Richardson's (1994) view that writing is a method of inquiry.

As a result, I believe it is important to discuss this methodological complication early in this piece, since I am already writing/inquiring. Richardson (1994) points out that we write to understand something we didn't understand before (p. 517). It is in the writing of the text, as well as in the data collection and analysis, that research occurs. Representation too is data collection and analysis and ought to be examined as such in poststructural research. Richardson (1994) explains that
"Poststructuralism, then, permits -- nay, invites -- no, incites us to reflect upon our method and explore new ways of knowing" (p. 518). With Richardson (1994), I believe that I cannot go back to where I was before I was captivated by the poststructural critique of language and practice. I can no longer easily write unreflectively as I was trained to write -- to be a perfectly clear and disembodied author from nowhere. I am concerned about the "politics of textuality" (Clough, 1992, p. 133) and the effects of its power, and I no longer subscribe to the "humanist faith that representation can deliver what it promises: unmediated access to the real" (Britzman, 1993, p. 16). To complicate matters further, Trinh (1989) points out that "to write 'clearly,' one must incessantly prune, eliminate, forbid, purge, purify" (p. 17). If I prune too heavily, I will surely miss something. I will miss enough as it is, since, as Spivak (1993) cautions, "what I cannot imagine stands guard over everything that I must/can do, think, live" (p. 22). Since I cannot completely escape language any more than I can subjectivity, I hope to use both in an effort to imagine more, to de-identity my self, to de-frame my frames.

In the field, in my home in Essex County, I accumulated several kinds of data with which to construct a text: I collected interview data by talking with thirty-six older women, and I gathered a variety of ethnographic data in order to provide a setting from which the women speak. In another kind of field, this textual space, I use writing as a method of inquiry. Thus, I consider the words of this text to be data and will treat this writing experience as ongoing data collection. The research continues.
CHAPTER II

CITATIONALITY: A PERFORMANCE OF POWER

Let it finally be said that, within this framework, counting the proper names of predecessors must be recognized as a convenient fiction. Each proper name establishes a sovereign self against the anonymity of textuality. Each proper name pretends that it is the origin and end of a certain collocation of thoughts that may be unified: "The names of authors or of doctrines have here no substantial value. They indicate neither identities nor causes."

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, quoting Jacques Derrida, 1974, p. liv

Introduction

Several bodies of literature have informed this study of a group of older white southern women and the culture in which they live. Some of this literature will be discussed at this point in order to provide a frame of reference for what follows. Other literature will be introduced throughout the remaining chapters.

The poststructural critique of language, the subject, and knowledge has been the point of departure for this study, and I will survey briefly some of the literature that informs this critique. I will also respond to several of the ordinary objections to poststructuralism before moving into a discussion of the literature that informs the case at hand. This is a selective literature review that provides a sense of the information which I have found helpful in formulating and contextualizing the theoretical framework of my research problem.
The Poststructural Critique

Introduction

A variety of theories have emerged during the last thirty years from a variety of disciplines including philosophy, sociology, psychology, linguistics, literature, history, economics, art, and architecture which have been colonized and domesticated under the terms postmodernism and poststructuralism. Lather (1993a) differentiates these two terms as follows: postmodernism "raises issues of chronology, economics (e.g., post-Fordism) and aesthetics whereas poststructural[ism] is used more often in relation to academic theorizing 'after structuralism'" (p. 688). Both postmodernism and poststructuralism confound and transgress the limits imposed by liberal humanism. The two terms are often conflated, however, and theorists who are at odds with each other may be lumped together under one or the other of them, perhaps as Butler (1992) suspects, in order to be more easily dismissed (p. 5). I mostly use the term poststructuralism throughout this piece since its theoretical critique of humanism best serves my purpose in this academic enterprise.

To continue to distinguish between the two terms then, postmodernism is an American term which refers to "the new stage of multinational, multiconglomerate consumer capitalism, and to all the technologies it has spawned" (Kaplan, 1988, p. 4) as well as to the avant garde in the arts, "the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture" (Jameson, 1988/1983 & 1984, p. 14). Jameson (1984) sees postmodernism as a "cultural dominant" (p. 56) that began to emerge after World War II with late consumer capitalism.

Poststructuralism is a French term which represents the continental avant garde in critical theory (Huysen, 1990/1984, p. 258). During the 1960's, the political struggles of those marginalized by dominant discourses emerged within and were produced by critical theories of language, knowledge, and the subject as traditional
liberal humanist thought experienced a "legitimation crisis" (Habermas, 1975). Hutcheon (1993/1987) points out that "There is a long history of many such skeptical sieges to positivism and humanism, and today's footsoldiers of theory -- Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, Rorty, Baudrillard -- follow in the footsteps of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx and Freud, to name but a few, in their challenges to the empiricist, rationalist, humanist assumptions of our cultural systems, including those of science" (p. 247). Poststructuralism is thus a continuation of an ongoing skepticism about liberal humanism and its effects.

At mid-century, the legitimacy of the Western colonial enterprise was challenged, and analyses like Said's (1978) Orientalism began to have a profound influence on the West's evaluation of its intentions. Said (1978), the literary and cultural critic, examined how the West had created Others during its imperial and colonial periods during which "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (p. 3). Said (1993) has more recently examined the Other's "response to Western dominance which culminated in the great movement of decolonization all across the Third World" (p. xii). The creation of the Other by the West and the dissatisfaction of the Other with its imposed inscription has fueled the poststructural critique.

Also significant is the work of historians like White (1978a) who have questioned the traditional purpose of history to construct a seamless continuity between the past and the present and who believe that history must "educate us to discontinuity more than ever before; for discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot" (p. 50).

Spivak (1993) explains that the French critique of humanism emerged from World War II, followed by the Algerian revolution, and was "related to the perceived
failure of the European ethical subject" (p. 274). Spivak's (1993) description of this critique follows:

The participants [of various disciplines] felt that their practice was not merely a disinterested pursuit of knowledge, but productive in the making of human beings. It was because of this that they did not accept unexamined human experience as the source of meaning and the making of meaning as an unproblematic thing. And each one of them offered a method that would challenge the outlines of a discipline: archaeology, genealogy, power/knowledge reading, schizo-analysis, rhizo-analysis, nonsubjective psychoanalysis, affirmative deconstruction, paralogic legitimation (p. 274).

I will not attempt to describe all of these methods which Spivak has identified; however, in common among them is the deconstructive stance, the persistent critique of "a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit" (Spivak, 1993, p. 284). Flax (1990a) says that "Postmodern discourses are all deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from and make us skeptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture" (p. 41).

These critiques of humanism -- where critique is understood as "an investigation of the enabling conditions" (Zavarzadeh & Morton, 1991, p. 7) of a discourse -- have, according to Flax (1993), resulted in the "end of innocence" (p. 131). Flax (1993) explains that "The modern Western sense of self-certainty has been undermined by political and intellectual events. The meanings -- or even the existence of concepts essential to all forms of Enlightenment metanarrative (reason, history, science, self, knowledge, power, gender, and the inherent superiority of Western culture) have been subjected to increasingly corrosive attacks" (p. 136).

Reason, the first and last resort in humanism, may be seen as a pharmakon in poststructuralism; and "rather than lament reason," Spivak (1993) suggests, we might "put it in a useful place" (p. 240). Foucault (quoted in Miller, 1993) says the
following about "a [type of] rationality that has been historically and geographically elaborated in the West since the sixteenth century" (p. 336):

Now, how are we to separate this rationality from the mechanisms, procedures, techniques, and effects of power that define it, and that we no longer accept? ... Couldn't we conclude that the promise of enlightenment, of realizing freedom through the exercise of reason, has been, on the contrary, subverted through the domination of reason itself, which increasingly usurps the place of freedom (p. 336)?

Foucault (quoted in Miller, 1993) does not espouse irrationality but believes that the rationality of Kant may have been too rigidly interpreted and asks the following questions:

I think that the central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century, has been, still is, and will, I hope, remain the question, *What* is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers? How can we exist as rational beings, fortunately committed to practicing a rationality that is unfortunately crisscrossed by intrinsic dangers? One should remain as close to this question as possible, keeping in mind that it is extremely difficult to resolve (p. 337).

If rationality is no longer a transcendental signified, then the very foundations of humanism are in doubt.

In this regard, Butler (1992) reminds us that "theory posits foundations incessantly" (p. 7), but that "A social theory committed to democratic contestation within a postcolonial horizon needs to find a way to bring into question the foundations it is compelled to lay down" (p. 8). Philosophy, in particular, has long posited foundations which philosophers now critique. Butler (1995) addresses the seduction and limits of philosophical foundations as follows:

The lure of a transcendental guarantee, the promise of philosophy to "correct existence," in the sense that Nietzsche ironically imagined, is one which seduces us away from the lived difficulty of political life. This urge to have philosophy supply the vision that will redeem life, that will make life worth living, this urge is the very sign that
the sphere of the political has already been abandoned. For this sphere will be the one in which those very theoretical constructions --those without which we imagine we cannot take a step -- are in the very process of being lived as ungrounded, unmoored, in tatters, but also, as recontextualized, reworked, in translation, as the very resources from which a postfoundational politics is wrought. Indeed, it is their very ungroundedness which is the condition of our contemporary agency, the very condition for the question: which way should we go (p. 131)?

Thus, the critique of foundational issues enables within "the sphere of the political" (Butler, 1995, p.131) the production through language and social practice -- through "subversive citationality" (Butler, 1995, p. 135) perhaps -- of subjects and knowledge that have not yet been imagined. Once the foundation has split asunder, possibilities emerge. Reinventing rather than abandoning philosophy after poststructuralism becomes an option since we cannot reverse history: we cannot go back to a time before the poststructural critique. Nor is there a safe place in the present in which to land. There are no secure alternatives, since every alternative is also suspect. Foucault (1984/1983), however, finds this position energizing, "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism" (p. 343). An initial pessimism, and caution, may be early conditions of poststructuralism, as is a willingness to be suspicious of Truth wherever it rears its head. However, that discomfort doesn't have to be paralyzing, since, when one is no longer cemented in the blocks of a foundation, flight is possible. In other words, "The critic must make room for 'the irruptive emergence of a new concept,' a concept which no longer allows itself to be understood in terms of the previous regime" (Spivak, 1974, p. lxxvii). Culler (1982), in the following rather gleeful image presents the poststructural critique, "If 'sawing off the branch on which one is sitting' seems foolhardy to men of common
sense, it is not so for Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Derrida; for they suspect that if they fall there is no 'ground' to hit and that the most clear-sighted act may be a certain reckless sawing, a calculated dismemberment or deconstruction of the great cathedral-like trees in which Man has taken shelter for millennia" (p. 149). Persistent critique of all games of truth is the task of poststructuralism. And even though there is no Nirvana at the end, since each game of truth brings its own dangers, the effects of some games may be less dominating, regulating, normalizing, and impositional than others.

In summary, several ideas which recur in the variety of poststructural analyses, identified earlier by Spivak (1993), are the following: the doubt that philosophy can provide reliable and secure foundations; the rejection of the notion that language is transparent, that a word corresponds to a thing; the doubt that rationality transcends context; a suspicion of a binary logic; a suspicion of absolutes and totalities and metanarratives; a focus on difference rather than identity; an analysis of truth claims; an analysis of knowledge claims; and an analysis of power relations. Problematizing these issues and others, in turn, requires a rethinking of the subject. Several of these ideas emerge from Derrida's (1974) deconstructive analysis of the language of humanism in Of Grammatology, which will be discussed at length directly since it serves as a point of departure for other analyses.

However, before discussing Derrida's work and that of others who have informed this particular research project, it may be helpful to discuss several other concepts common to poststructural thought, beginning with the concept of difference, mentioned above. Hutcheon (1993/1987) believes that the homogenizing tendency of the modern consumer society encouraged the challenging discourses of postmodernism to promote difference which "unlike 'otherness' has no exact opposite against which to define itself" (p. 246). West (quoted in Stephanson, 1988) explains
that "Deleuze was the first to think through the notion of difference independent of Hegelian ideas of opposition, and that was the start of the radical anti-Hegelianism which has characterized French intellectual life in the last few decades" (p. 175). The emergence of an enabling concept such as difference illustrates the fruitful tension in poststructural critique between theory and cultural practice, a tension described by Gramsci (1971) as follows: "one can construct, on a specific practice, a theory which, by coinciding and identifying itself with the decisive elements of the practice itself, can accelerate the historical process that is going on" (p. 365). Thus, poststructural practice feeds poststructural theory which continues to theorize its practice.

Another poststructural concept, the metanarrative, is introduced by Lyotard (1984/1979) in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. Lyotard (1984/1979) engages the two great metanarratives, or master narratives, or narrative archetypes, that have served as "alternate justifications for institutional scientific research up to our own period -- that of the liberation of humanity and that of the speculative unity of all knowledge" (Jameson, 1984/1979, p. ix). Fraser and Nicholson (1988) explain that the problem with a metanarrative is that it "purports to be a privileged discourse capable of situating, characterizing, and evaluating all other discourses, but [is] not itself infected by the historicity and contingency that render first-order discourses potentially distorted and in need of legitimation" (p. 87). Thus begun, the task of identifying and critiquing other metadiscourses which seek to represent as transparent remnants of "'totalizing' philosophical tradition[s] [and] the valorization of conformist, when not 'terrorist,' ideals of consensus" (Jameson, 1984/1979, p. ix) has continued in many disciplines.

The focus on the relation between knowledge and truth emerges chiefly from the archaeological analysis used by Foucault in his early works: Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (1965/1961) The Birth of the
Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception (1973/1963), The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences (1970/1966), and last, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language (1972/1969), in which he describes and explains this analysis which had emerged through his previous examinations of what Descartes called the "immature" or human sciences. Foucault's archaeological analysis takes issue with a kind of history that "was concerned with the already given, commonly recognized 'facts' or dated events, and whose task was to define the relations, or causality, antagonism, or expression, between these facts or events" (Davidson, 1986, p. 222). Rather, Foucault sought to describe the "systems of rules, and their transformations, which make different kinds of statements possible" (Davidson, 1986, p. 222). These epistemic domains "do not succeed each other dialectically, nor do they aggregate. They simply appear alongside one another -- catastrophically, as it were, without rhyme or reason. Thus, the appearance of a new 'human science' does not represent a 'revolution' in thought or consciousness" (White, 1978b, p. 234). The new discourse simply moves into spaces left empty by other discourses. Such an analysis disrupts the practice of grouping ideas and events around particular writers and their books or into well-defined categories and disciplines. Therefore, the archaeologist takes issue with the notion of a unified historical period or a unified domain of knowledge or a "continuity of consciousness in general" (White, 1978b, p. 235). The metanarrative of progress in the human sciences, what Descartes called the immature sciences, becomes a myth. Archaeology defines the domain of knowledge as it relates to people and disciplines. However, archaeology "may also question knowledge in a different direction and describe it in a different set of relations. The orientation towards the episteme has been the only one to be explored so far" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 195). Foucault uses archaeology to illustrate that knowledge is a discursive formation, to release it from the finite domain of the
positivities of the sciences, and to investigate it wherever it may be discursively deployed.

The focus on the relation between power and truth emerges from Foucault's genealogy, an analysis which, though broader than his earlier archaeological analysis, does not displace it. Foucault's archaeological analysis is often considered semi-structuralist and much more theoretical than his genealogical analysis which focuses on practice. "Foucault introduces genealogy as a method of diagnosing and grasping the significance of social practices from within them. . . . Using this new method, theory is not only subordinated to practice but is shown to be one of the essential components through which the organizing practices operate" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). Foucault's genealogical analysis, derived from Nietzsche, is evident in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977/1975), in his three-volume series on the history of sexuality, and is discussed at length in an essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1984/1971). In place of history's search for origins, genealogy "operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (Foucault, 1984/1971, p. 76). Patient and careful study of these palimpsests illustrates the partial and inadequate nature of the truth. Genealogy allows the analyst to trace the ways in which discourses constitute objects that can be examined as either true or false according to the codes of the discourse. "Not unless a statement is about an 'object' and can be judged in its truthfulness does it enter into a discourse; but once it does, it furthers the dispersal of that discourse and enlarges the realm of objects and statements which produce knowledge that can be judged legitimate or illegitimate" (Bové, 1990, p. 58).

Foucault's genealogical analysis locates power, a multiplicity of forces, within and across discourses as certain kinds of knowledge are rendered true or untrue. Genealogy's focus on the relation between truth and power led Foucault to examine
the origin of claims to truth, especially in the human sciences, and to conclude that "there is no essence or original unity to be discovered. When genealogy looks to beginnings, it looks for accidents, chance, passion, petty malice, surprises, feverish agitation, unsteady victories, and power" (Davidson, 1986, p. 224). Foucault (1984/1971) explains the pursuit of origins as follows:

It is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession. . . . However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, [if he examines] the history of reason, he learns that it was born . . . from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition -- the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason. . . . What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity (pp. 78-79).

And about truth Foucault (quoted in Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984) asks "After all, why truth? . . . I think that we are touching on a question which is very fundamental and which is, I would say, the question of the Western world. What caused all Western culture to begin to turn around this obligation of truth, which has taken on a variety of different forms" (p. 15)?

Foucault's archaeology of the finitude of knowledge and his genealogy of the politics of truth emerge from an ongoing engagement with self-evidence which limits freedom. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) explain that "There is no pre- and post-archaeology or genealogy in Foucault. However, the weighting and conception of these approaches changed during the development of his work. Clearly, after May 1968 Foucault's interests began to shift away from discourse" (p. 104). In any case, Foucault's archaeological and genealogical analyses maintain that the metaphysician's
greatest fears have materialized: accident rather than truth and passion rather than reason are at the beginning of things, and the foundations are shaky indeed.

The shattering of the truth of humanism's categories, binaries, hierarchies, and totalities is enriched by the startling thought of Deleuze, and I have found several of his images useful in thinking about my research project. Deleuze, sometimes with Guattari, has introduced new images and figurations and extended others derived from Foucault's and others' thought which render thinking as "living at a higher degree, at a faster pace, in a multidirectional manner" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 167). Introducing the figuration of the rhizome, Deleuze (1993b) disrupts binary logic by describing the principles of a rhizomatic analysis as follows: principles of connection and heterogeneity which imply that "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be" (p. 29); a principle of multiplicity which implies that "there is no unity to serve as a pivot in the object, or to divide in the subject" and therefore a rhizome cannot be overcoded (p. 30); a principle of asignifying rupture which implies that "a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines" (p. 32) and is thus antigenealogy; and principles of cartography and decalcomania which imply that "the rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model. It is a stranger to any idea of genetic axis or deep structure" (p. 34). The rhizome disrupts unity and linearity.

Another of Deleuze's concepts, the fold, derived from Foucault, implies a "figure of interiority (or of the subject) that is neither reflection (or the cogito), nor the relation-to, the focus (or intentionality), nor the pure empty point (or eclipse)"
(Badiou, 1994, p. 61). The fold envisions the "inside as an operation of the outside" (Deleuze, 1988/1986, p. 97). In speaking of the fold, Deleuze (1993a) says "We are discovering new ways of folding, akin to new envelopments, but we all remain Leibnizan because what always matters is folding, unfolding, refolding" (p. 137). The
fold shatters a string of binaries: inside/outside, interiority/exteriority, 
objectivity/subjectivity, self/other, etc.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) give us the figuration of the nomad, who "can be 
called Deterritorialized par excellence [since] it is precisely because there is no 
reterritorialization afterward as with the migrant, or upon something else as with the 
sedentary . . . the nomad reterritorializes on deterritorialization itself" (p. 381).

Massumi (1987) explains that the space of the nomad is

qualitatively different from State space. Air against earth. 
State space is "striated," or gridded. Movement in it is 
confined as by gravity to a horizontal plane, and limited 
by the order of that place to present paths between fixed 
and identifiable points. Nomad space is "smooth," or 
open-ended. One can rise up at any point and move to 
any other. Its mode of distribution is the nomos: arraying 
one self in an open space (hold the street), as opposed to 
the logos of entrenching oneself in a closed space (hold 
the fort) (p. xiii).

These three images -- the rhizome, the fold, and the nomad -- barely riff the surface of 
Deleuze's complex theories but enrich the hybrid, makeshift analysis -- a bricolage -- 
used in the case at hand.

Spivak, Flax, Butler, Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, Deleuze and other 
poststructural thinkers have given us new analyses to use in our theory and practice in 
order to disrupt the foundations of humanism which retain a firm hold on Western life 
in spite of the poststructural critique.
Language Without Presence. Signs *Sous Rature*

All of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange.

Baudrillard, 1993/1983, p. 346

Where to begin to speak of the most powerful point of disruption in poststructural analyses, the critique of language? Perhaps with Flax, who (1990a) points out that poststructuralism throws into radical doubt many tenets of humanism, one of which is that "language is in some sense transparent...[that] There is some correspondence between a word and thing (as between a correct truth claim and the real). Objects are not linguistically (or socially) constructed; they are merely made present to consciousness by naming and the right use of language" (p. 42). The poststructural understanding of language is derived, with significant changes by Derrida (1974), from de Saussure (1959), a structural linguist. Weedon (1987) explains that de Saussure's theory of the sign includes the following ideas.

Saussure theorized language as an abstract system, consisting of chains of signs. Each sign is made up of a *signifier* (sound or written image) and a *signified* (meaning). The two components of the sign are related to each other in an arbitrary way and there is therefore no natural connection between the sound image and the concept it identifies. The meaning of signs is not intrinsic but relational. Each sign derives its meaning from its difference from all the other signs in the language. It is not anything intrinsic to the signifier 'whore', for example, that gives it its meaning, but rather its difference from other signifiers of womanhood such as 'virgin' and 'mother' (p. 23).

Eagleton (1983) explains further that de Saussure was not concerned with actual speech, or *parole*, but with the structure of speech, *langue* (p. 97). Nor did the referents of the signs matter in structuralism, since the things signs actually denoted
had to be put in brackets. In explanation, Jameson (1972) says that structuralism is an attempt "to rethink everything through once again in terms of linguistics" (p. vii). What de Saussure did was to "problematize language, stripping what was formerly conceptualized as a medium of self-expression of its transparency, its mimetic privileges. No longer does the subject employ language to its own purposes. For the subject is now more spoken by language than speaker of language, more product of discursive regimes than explorer of any reified self-essence" (Smith, 1993, pp. 55-56). Structuralism thus fractured the correspondence theory of reality.

Poststructural thought accepts de Saussure's idea that there is no correspondence between a word and a thing, that signs have no intrinsic meaning but obtain meaning because of their difference from other signs in the language chain. As such, meaning is generated through difference rather than through identity. However, de Saussure's theory does not account for different meanings of the same signifier, but is logocentric in that "signs have an already fixed meaning recognized by the self-consciousness of the rational speaking subject" (Weedon, 1987, p. 25). Meaning in poststructuralism must be always be deferred, since it cannot be fixed once and for all in a sign. Once this idea takes hold, neither language nor philosophy can ever be the same.

The poststructural critique of language is discussed most thoroughly in Derrida's (1974) Of Grammatology, where he "demonstrates the system of ideas which from ancient to modern times has regulated the notion of the sign" and radically deconstructs what that system, the history of philosophy, has "hidden, forbidden, or repressed" (Bass, 1978, p. x). Spivak (1974) explains Derrida's task in her "Preface" to Of Grammatology as follows:

Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger. . . . All three proto-grammatologues. Nietzsche a philosopher who cut away the grounds of knowing. Freud a psychologist
who put the psyche in question. Heidegger an ontologist who put Being under erasure. It was for Derrida to "produce" their intrinsic power and "discover" grammatology, the science of the "sous rature." That sleight of hand is contained in the name itself, "the logos of the grammē." The grammē is the written mark, the name of the sign 'sous rature.' 'Logos' is at one extreme "law" and at the other "phonē" -- the voice. As we have seen, the grammē would question the authority of the law, deconstruct the privilege of the spoken word. The word "Grammatology" thus appropriately keeps alive an unresolved contradiction (p. 1).

Derrida (1974) is concerned with the notion of presence as deconstructed by Heidegger. Bass (1978) explains, "From Plato to Heidegger himself, Derrida demonstrates, there is a persistent exclusion of the notion of writing from the philosophical definition of the sign. Since this exclusion can always be shown to be made in the name of presence -- the sign allegedly being most present in spoken discourse -- Derrida uses it as a 'symptom' which reveals the workings of the 'repressive' logic of presence, which determines Western philosophy as such" (p. xi). Presence is the culprit, representing transcendental order and permanence, as is manifested in Western philosophical ideas such as essence, logos, the unified subject, consciousness, and so on. All of these ideas represent the "thing itself," absolute knowledge, which is transcendental and outside time. Heidegger (1962) challenges the primacy of Being which he posits functions within Time, not apart from it. For Heidegger, the center is not elsewhere, apart from Time. There is no center and there is no "thing itself" which refers to and partakes of a center elsewhere. Derrida (1974) continues Heidegger's thought, explaining that "the notion of the sign . . . remains constant within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning . . . We already have a foreboding that phonocentrism merges with the historical determination of the meaning of being in general as presence" (p. 11-12). "It is this longing for a center, an authorizing pressure," Spivak
(1974) explains, "that spawns hierarchized oppositions. The superior term belongs to presence and the logos; the inferior serves to define its status and mark a fall" (p. lxix). With presence come the binary oppositions: self/other, identity/difference, male/female, rational/irrational, culture/nature, subject/object, and so on. "Heidegger laments the loss for philosophy when the lone Latin 'presence' was pressed into service to translate the many nuanced Greek words signifying philosophical shadings of the idea of presence" (Spivak, 1974, p. lxxxvii). We possess language, but language also possesses us.

If humankind's desire is for presence or a stable center or logos, then the history of Western philosophy has been to describe and define that presence. Spivak (1974) reminds us, however, that Derrida pointed out that a "certain view of the world, of consciousness, and of language has been accepted as the correct one, and, if the minute particulars of that view are examined, a rather different picture (that is also a no-picture) emerges" (p. xiii). Derrida's (1974) grammatological analysis illustrates that language works not because there is an identity between a sign and a thing, not because of presence, but because there is a difference, an absence: "The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent" (Spivak, 1974, p. xvii). Again, it is absence, not presence that makes language work. Derrida names the "part played by the radically other within the structure of difference that is the sign" (Spivak, 1974, xvii) trace or track or differance. Thus, his trace is the "mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience" (Spivak, 1974, p. xvii). Derrida (1974) thus deconstructs the transcendental signified in whatever garb it assumes, in whatever sign it masks itself.

However, it seems that the function of transcendental signifieds is indispensable (Derrida, 1974, p. 271). Therefore, "the value of the transcendental
arche [origin] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased . . . The trace is not only the disappearance of origin, . . . it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin" (Derrida, 1974, p. 61). Derrida's strategy here is to work within the limits of the "only available language while not subscribing to its premises" (Spivak, 1974, xviii). Derrida calls this gesture sous rature, and "the name of this gesture effacing the presence of a thing and yet keeping it legible is 'writing' -- the gesture that both frees us from and guards us within, the metaphysical enclosure" (Spivak, 1974, p. xli). More specifically, sous rature means to "write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. (Since the word in inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.)" (Spivak, 1974, p. xiv). The sign cannot be completely erased since it appears that there are some ideas which we must have, even though we must, in turn, situate them and submit them to critique.

Deconstruction is a critical practice which aims to "dismantle [déconstruire] the metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work, not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way" (Derrida, quoted in Spivak, 1974, p. lxxv). Thus deconstruction is not about tearing down but about rebuilding. As already mentioned, it is also about critiquing something very useful which we cannot imagine doing without. Spivak (1974) describes deconstruction as follows:

How to dismantle these structures? By using a signifier not as a transcendental that will unlock the way to truth but as a bricoleur's or tinker's tool -- a "positive lever." If in the process of deciphering a text in the traditional way we come across a word that seems to harbor an unresolvable contradiction, and by virtue of being one word is made sometimes to work in one way and sometimes in another and thus is made to point away from the absence of a unified meaning, we shall catch at that word. If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor. We shall follow its adventures through the text and see the text coming undone as a structure
of concealment, revealing its self-transgression, its undecidability. It must be emphasized that I am not speaking simply of locating a moment of ambiguity or irony ultimately incorporated into the text's system of unified meaning but rather a moment that genuinely threatens to collapse that system (p. lxxv).

The deconstructive method is the point of departure for many of the poststructural analyses which have critiqued the texts of liberal humanism. "To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed" is Spivak's (1974) version of deconstruction in a nutshell (p. lxxvii). With deconstruction, knowledge is not closed, and the myth of finitude explodes, since the critic must always make room for a new concept, the reconstitution, which, in turn, must be deconstructed.

The lure of deconstruction -- of endless play -- the lure of the pleasurable abyss, is based on our desire, "itself a deconstructive and grammatological structure that forever differs from (we only desire what is not ourselves) and defers (desire is never fulfilled) the text of ourselves" (Spivak, 1974, p. lxxviii). And this is the "Derridean double bind, deconstruction under erasure, the abyss placed in the abyss, active forgetfulness" (Spivak, 1974, p. lxxviii). Even so, Derrida (1974) encourages us to risk beginning "Wherever we are; in a text where we already believe ourselves to be" (p. 162).

In response to those who believe Derrida argues that there is nothing outside the text, West (quoted in Stephanson, 1988) explains that Derrida argues instead that "there is nothing outside social practices: intertextuality is a differential web of relations shot through with traces, shot through with activity. For a pragmatist, that activity is always linked to human agency and the context in which that agency is enacted" (p. 270). Deconstruction allows us to place sous rature those signifiers that
limit praxis and presents us with a tool, a practice of freedom, that can help us rewrite the world and ourselves again and again and again. Once we begin to understand that language is not transparent, that the thing itself always escapes, the adventure begins.

The profound effect of grammatology on writing and, by extension, on other texts is that "The text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end. Each act of reading the 'text' is a preface to the next" (Spivak, 1974, p. xii). This understanding of the lack of presence in language and thus in philosophy makes possible the variety of deconstructive analyses put forward by poststructural theorists.

Hence, language leads us, after a brief detour through discourse, to the subject, another text, inscribed by language, a "subject that can never be fully present to itself or to anyone else, since as an effect of language it is constantly shifting, flickering in absence and presence like the constant movement along the signifying chain" (Martusewicz, 1992, p. 140).

Discourse, Leading to Subjects

Though much has been written about the nature of discourse, this discussion is based on Foucault's work, since it informs his ethical analysis which is the focus of this study. Bové (1990) explains that the term discourse provides "a privileged entry into the poststructuralist mode of analysis precisely because it is the organized and regulated, as well as the regulating and constituting, functions of language that it studies: its aim is to describe the surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of systems of thought" (pp. 54-55). The term discourse, therefore, has social and historical implications. Discourse is productive; it allows certain questions to be asked, thus controlling what counts as knowledge and produces
"practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 49).

With Derrida (1974), Foucault (1972/1969) says that language "always seems to be inhabited by the other, the elsewhere, the distant: it is hollowed out by absence" (p. 111) and thus cannot be either "transcendental nor anthropological" (p. 113). Foucault (1972/1969) begins his discussion of discourse by explaining that the area between consciousness and unconsciousness is the domain of the énoncé, what is worded. It is possible to say anything, yet some things are not said. Foucault (1972/1969) is interested in "the area of experience that the linguistic act itself cuts off from representation in language" (White, 1978b, p. 239), in what it means for certain statements to have come into existence "when and where they did" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 109), and in what it means for statements "to have left traces, and perhaps to remain there, awaiting the moment when they might be of use once more" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 109).

Continuing in his explanation of the concept of discourse, Foucault (1972/1969) describes a discursive formation, which is composed of groups of statements, which influence the "formation of objects, formation of the subjective positions, formation of concepts, formation of strategic choices" (p. 116). He describes discourse as "from beginning to end, historical -- a fragment of history, a unity and discontinuity in history itself, posing the problem of its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality rather than its sudden irruption in the midst of the complicities of time" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 117). Finally, he describes a discursive practice as the "body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of the
operation of the enunciative function" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 117). Discourse, working through relations of power, constitutes subjects and objects.

Using two of the analyses he theorized, archaeology and genealogy, Foucault attempts to discover how discourses produce objects available for study, "how an image of humanity has been produced and crystallized as truth in the so-called human sciences" (Martusewicz, 1992, p. 147). In this regard, Foucault surmises that power functions within and among discourses and the institutions they constitute. Power in this sense is not evil, but exists in all relations and shifts according to various actions, thus opening up possibilities for other actions. Power, then, "constitutes entire domains of action, knowledge, and social being by shaping the institutions and disciplines in which, for the most part, we largely make ourselves. In these domains we become the individuals, the subjects, that they make us" (Bové, 1990, p. 58). Power exists in relations and is never static as it shifts from position to position.

Poststructural analysis, therefore, based on a poststructural understanding of language, posits that discourse as well as social practice constitutes subjects. "'Power' through its discursive and institutional relays 'subjects' us: that is, it makes us into 'subjects' and it 'subjects' us to the rule of the dominant disciplines which are empowered in our society and which regulate its possibilities for human freedom -- that is, it 'subjugates' us" (Bové, 1990, p. 58). Through the materiality of discourse, which works through social institutions by controlling both the actions and bodies of people, language becomes the site of contestation and of politics. Foucault's theory of discourse is important because it argues that shifts in historical thought occur because of what people are able to say, what statements are possible. "He thus gives us a way to analyze any discursive formation for the kind of power/knowledge nexus that characterizes it" (Hekman, 1990, p. 18).
This theory of discourse does not eliminate political action, since a discourse, even a dominant discourse with its accompanying power relations, is not a closed unity. "The silences and ambiguities of discourse provide the possibility of refashioning them, the discovery of other conceptualizations, the revision of accepted truth." (Hekman, 1990, p. 187). The poststructural theory of discourse, like the poststructural theory of language, allows us to understand how knowledge and subjects are produced as well as how they might be reconfigured. Foucault's increasing interest in the subject eventually produces a movement beyond the play of language and discourse into the more concrete play of practice: "For individualization is not a 'literary' matter of representation in language, but a complex political reality no linguistic play can dispel" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 35). After taking to task our commonsense and self-evident notions of language and existence, we may begin to rethink subjectivity.

*** [Aside: Identity is in question here. Identities are up for grabs, are out of reach, are glimmers of irksome thoughts and unreliable desires and are being formed with these very words. The stakes are high, for we will make selves here, and we will be different at the end.

We speak from many subject positions. The identity-talkers have labeled, described, and categorized some of our subjectivities. Others are as yet undifferentiated, and stray identify bits silt into our conversations, defy containment, are out-of-category, excessive, wordless, and a bit out-of-hand.

We play in this rhizomatic subversion of essences, this leaky unity of subjectivity. Our practice of freedom is the essence we choose not to repeat.

Agency, that serious bit of leftover logos, sputters and crashes and shatters into practices which disrupt our relations with those others we both
love and are leery of and the codes we both embrace and resist. We practice
de-identification, disidentification, and negative self-identity when we have to.
We change a bit. We stay the same. We are both energetic and hopeful and
weary and hopeless in our struggles to constitute, constitute, constitute
ourselves. We warily tend the slow elaboration of ourselves in spaces and
places and pauses and such.

Identity. Agency. Words sparkling with relays of relays spiraling into
the abyss of liberty, folding inside into exquisite interiority and absolute
memory -- spiraling, spiraling.

All we want is to make sense of these decades of living and how it has
all turned out. Indeed, what does it finally mean? Did we do the right things?
*There were so many things you never told us.*

We will do what we can here to understand. *Bricoleurs* we will be, and
*flâneurs.* We will examine the random, savor discontinuity, and heap meaning
upon meaning as we care for these selves we construct. We will visit places
and people and we will listen. And as we wander, we will sometimes pause to
hunker down and try to think this thing through.*

The Self, *Sous Rature* and Reconfigured -- The Subject

The self of humanism is generally understood to be a conscious, stable,
unified, rational, coherent, knowing, ahistoric, and autonomous individual who is
"endowed with a will, a freedom, an intentionality which is then subsequently
'expressed' in language, in action, in the public domain" (Butler, 1995, p. 136). As
Green (1988) explains, humanism requires a subject of knowledge, the "production of
an integral identity ahead of words and actions so that the latter are encountered as
indexical expressions of the former" (p. 33). This humanist self has presence,
Derrida's bane. "It suggests the certitudes of well-defined, stable, impermeable boundaries around a singular, unified, and atomic core, the unequivocal delineation of inside and outside" (Smith, 1993, p. 5). Because of its separation and distance from the outside, this humanist self can study the outside, observe it, know it, make predictions about what the outside will do, and try to control it. The self can thus produce knowledge and has the power to effect change. In addition, the self's center, its internal integrity, is elsewhere; it is not part of the outside, of the known, of social practice, of change, of time; it is uncontaminated by the outside, by the Other. As Smith (1993) says, "Unique, unitary, unencumbered, the self escapes all forms of embodiment" (p. 6).

As the centered center of his world, the Cartesian ego founded modern philosophy, and the humanist self became the origin of truth and knowledge. By defining himself as the all-knowing subject, Descartes defined everything that is not subject as object. By defining his self as identity, he defined everything else as difference: ipseity vs. alterity. This fundamental opposition of self/other, subject/object, and identity/difference -- this notion of presence as discussed by Derrida (1974) and Foucault (1972/1969) -- sets up the possibility for other oppositions or binaries, and this binary logic is a fundamental statement of the discourse of the classic Western episteme. To elaborate, Ragland-Sullivan (1986) describes this humanist cogito, "the philosophy of the supremacy of mind and consciousness over the whole of the phenomena of human experience," (p. 10) as follows: "the Occidental subject is still a mixture of the medieval 'I' believe; the Cartesian 'I' think; the Romantic 'I' feel; as well as the existential 'I' choose; the Freudian 'I' dream" (p. 10) and the "I" of empirical science.

The humanist self clearly has an inherent agency. "Neither powerless nor passive, it assumes and celebrates agency. Its movement through time/history is
purposeful, consistent, coherent, hence teleological" (Smith, 1993, p. 8). It participates in Lyotard's (1984/1979) metanarrative of the "liberation of humanity" (p. ix), since its goal is emancipatory. All people have access to agency and can escape to freedom from oppression by exercising their innate wills. Man, through careful exercise of his rational intellect and his will, can free mankind from confusion and error, and those who manage to confront and overcome overwhelming odds become heroes and models for the rest of humanity. In progressing toward an inevitable goal of utopia, "The subject," Lyotard (1984/1979) explains, "is concrete, or supposedly so, and its epic is the story of its emancipation from everything that prevents it from governing itself" (p. 37). This lengthy description of the humanist self is necessary since we must be able to recognize this liberal individual who, in spite of much deconstructive attention, remains the dominant fiction of Western philosophy.

This powerful and long-standing construct eventually took a heavy blow from Marxist ideology which critiques the liberal individual who has control over his fate through rational action. Marx's decentering of the subject "by the historical analysis of the relations of production, economic determinations, and the class struggle" (Foucault, 1972/1969, p. 13) was a strong challenge to the autonomous individual, even though identity in Marxism is subsumed under the totality of class and therefore does not escape the totalizing metanarratives of humanism.

Deconstructive analyses, such as the grammatology of Derrida and the archaeology and genealogy of Foucault, put the autonomous, present individual of humanism sous rature by positing that the subject does not exist ahead of or outside language but is an effect of language/discourse and social practice. In fact, any "coherence of identity [has been] imagined in order to disavow and supplement the failure of identity" (Clough, 1992, p. 4), the identity of the humanist subject that is increasingly ineffective, inadequate, and in doubt. The subject of poststructuralism is
certainly not dead; rather, the category of the subject has been opened up to the possibility of continual reconstruction and reconfiguration. "The critique of the subject is not a negation or repudiation of the subject, but, rather, a way of interrogating its construction as a pregiven or foundationalist premise" (Butler, 1992, p. 9). In poststructural theories, the subject is considered a construction, and identity is presumed to be created in the ongoing effects of relations and in response to society's codes. In poststructuralism, "all categories are unstable, all experiences are constructed, all reality is imagined, all identities are produced, and all knowledge provokes uncertainties, misrecognitions, ignorances, and silences" (Britzman, 1993, p. 22). Britzman (1993) sees identity variously as "a place of vertigo" (p. 15), "more than the repetition of sameness" (p. 20), "never identical to itself" (p. 22), and "a state of emergency" (p. 24).

Deconstructive analyses point out that there are no stable referents, even for the speaking subject, the "I." The presence of the self is in question, since "The present of the subject is not adequate to itself. The agent in its constitution both effaces and discloses it" (Spivak, 1993, p. 284). Lacan (1977/1966) deconstructs the subject psychoanalytically by theorizing that it is produced and split as it enters language, and he posits a subject constituted in language. It is a being "that can only conceptualize itself when it is mirrored back to itself from the position of another's desire" (Mitchell, 1982, p. 5). He further rejects consciousness as an attribute of the subject as follows: "The promotion of consciousness as being essential to the subject in the historical aftereffects of the Cartesian cogito is for me the deceptive accentuation of the transparency of the I in action at the expense of the opacity of the signifier that determines the I." (Lacan, 1977/1966, p. 307). If consciousness cannot create a unified, coherent self, then the unconscious certainly cannot. "For Lacan, the unconscious undermines the subject from any position of certainty, from any relation
of knowledge to his or her psychic processes" (Rose, 1982, p. 29). Lacan (1977/1966) argues that the coherent self of humanism is simply a trope for the bewildering complexity of subjectivities that constitute the subject. "The enabling condition of the vast network of connections established by metaphors is, in Lacan's view, a state of loss; he names this state 'desire' and says it must be distinguished from 'need' and 'demand.' Thus, the 'identity' and 'cohesion' of the subject . . . are effects of signification, absence, and non-rationality" (Zavarzadeh & Morton, 1991, pp. 5-6). For Lacan, the purpose of psychoanalysis is not to reveal a hidden psyche but to understand how the subject was linguaged; thus, psychoanalysis also deconstructs the humanist self. At any rate, the conscious/unconscious binary becomes suspect in poststructuralism, since it is unable to describe functions that escape those categories.

Althusser's (1971) Marxist analysis supports the premise of the deconstructed subject as well by theorizing that subjects are constructed as they are recruited by the dominant ideology to be used and inserted into the social economy wherever the state desires. He calls this operation "interpellation or hailing which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (Althusser, 1971, p. 174). By answering the hail, the subject is categorized as a subject. In fact, ideology and the interpellation of individuals as subjects are the same thing, and this statement leads to Athusser's (1971) final proposition in this regard: *individuals are always-already subjects*" (p. 176), even before they are born, since they are born into ideology.

Weedon (1987) defines subjectivity in poststructuralism as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to her world" (p. 32). Subjectivity is produced socially, through language in relations. Weedon (1987) further explains subjectivity and the subject as follows:
The individual is both a site for a range of possible forms of subjectivity and, at any particular moment of thought or speech, a subject, subjected to the regime of meaning of a particular discourse and enabled to act accordingly... Language and the range of subject positions which it offers always exists [sic] in historically specific discourses which inhere in social institutions and practices and can be organized analytically in discursive fields (pp. 34-35).

According to Foucault's archaeological analysis (where he defines the subject as a function of the statement) and his genealogical analysis (where he begins to define the subject as an effect of practice), power exists within and among discourse and practice, and the subject is subjected to the effects of that power. In this regard, Walkerdine (1990) explains that "inherent in the discursive positionings are different positions of power. Individuals, constituted as subjects and objects within a particular framework, are produced by that process into relations of power. An individual can become powerful or powerless depending on the terms in which her/his subjectivity is constituted" (p. 5). A significant question in poststructuralism then is who gets to be a subject in a particular discourse, in a particular set of practices? Who is allowed a subject position and who is not? And to ask the other part of that question, who is subjected? "You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said" (Trinh, 1989, p. 80). Categories created by discourse and social practice "function to create and justify social organization and exclusion" (Flax, 1993, p. 96). Though they are regulated and inscribed by discourse and social practice, subjects can resist those normalizing inscriptions and their material effects by moving from a discourse where only certain statements can be made to another where different statements are possible.

There is play within discourse and practice, since as Foucault (1972/1969) points out, anything can be said; and as Butler (1990) maintains, subjects can choose
not to repeat a practice. Butler (1992) explains that power does not inhere in the subject position itself. "My position is mine to the extent that 'I' -- and I do not shirk from the pronoun -- replay and resignify the theoretical positions that have constituted me, working the possibilities of their convergence, and trying to take account of the possibilities they systematically exclude" (p. 9). This activity is complex, however, because, as Butler (1992) says, the

"I" who would select between them is always already constituted by them . . . these "positions" are not merely theoretical products, but fully embedded organizing principles of material practices and institutional arrangements, those matrices of power and discourse that produce me as a viable "subject." Indeed, this "I" would not be a thinking, speaking "I" if it were not for the very positions that I oppose, for those positions, the ones that claim that the subject must be given in advance, that discourse is an instrument or reflection of that subject, are already part of what constitutes me (p. 9).

Identity in poststructuralism is thus a "heterogeneous and incomplete process" (Flax, 1993, p. 93), an ongoing activity, an "innovation" (Foucault, quoted in Miller, 1993, p. 336), "our running self-identikit" (Spivak, 1993, p. 4). Any "temporary coherence into seemingly solid characteristics or structures is only one of subjectivity's many possible expressions . . . What felt solid and real may subsequently separate and reform" (Flax, 1993, p. 94). Subjects are "incessant fields of recoding that secure identities" (Spivak, 1993, p. 211) which overlap and sediment and which are, in fact, palimpsests, erased yet partially visible identities still in play.

Deleuze extends and replays these notions of the subject by developing a complex theory throughout his work which posits a subject-becoming and the constitution of the subject as a task. Portions of his theory emerge from a reading of the third axis of Foucault's thought, his ethical analysis, care of the self, which will be discussed at length directly. Using Foucault's term fold, and his own notion of the
outside, Deleuze returns to the subject described by the ancient Greeks who used outside forces to invent the subject. Boundas (1994) explains that "when the Greeks decided that the mastery of others must go through the mastery of oneself, the folding of outside forces by means of a series of practical exercises was already on its way" (p. 115). It is the "affect of self upon self" (Deleuze, quoted in Boundas, 1994, p. 114), what Foucault (1988/1982) calls the "technologies of the self," that facilitate the task of the constitution of the subject. "It is the individual who causes the outside to fold, thereby endowing itself with subjectivity, as it bends and folds the outside" (Boundas, 1994, p. 114). Deleuze (1988/1986) describes the fold as "the inside as an operation of the outside" (p. 97). Deleuze's outside is similar to Derrida's supplementarity, in that it is endless and inexhaustible, without referent. Deleuze's subject is a resistant subject, as is Foucault's: "There will always be a relation to oneself which resists codes and powers; the relation to oneself is even one of the origins of these points of resistance" (Deleuze, quoted in Boundas, 1994, p. 115).

Boundas (1994) sums up this portion of Deleuze's theory of the subject as follows: "To the extent that the subject, for Deleuze, is the result of the folding of the outside, that is, of bending forces and making them relate to one another, the subject is the individual who, through practice and discipline, has become the site of a bent force, that is, the folded inside of an outside" (p. 115). Deleuze's (1988/1986) subject begins to move in the direction of the unnamed and "unthought... that impossibility of thinking which doubles or hollows out the outside" (p. 97). The possibilities of the poststructural subject are greatly enlarged with Deleuze's theory.

The agency of the subject in its poststructural multiplicity is up for grabs, continually reconfigured and re-named as is the subject itself. However, agency seems to lie in the subject's ability to decode and recode its identity within discursive formations and social practices. Butler (1995) doubts that agency is possible in
humanism where it "always and already knows its transcendental ground, and speaks only and always from that ground. To be so grounded is nearly to be buried: it is to refuse alterity, to reject contestation, to decline that risk of self-transformation perpetually posed by democratic life" (pp. 131-132). A subject that is given in advance can have no agency, no freedom. "That the subject is that which must be constituted again and again implies that it is open to formations that are not fully constrained in advance" (Butler, 1995, p. 135).

Identity is constructed in the desire to make sense of the world, the desire for meaning (Lacan, 1981/1973; Spivak, 1993). Yet meaning can be strategically reinterpreted, reworked, and deferred since there is no referent for the subject. If this is the case, we are complicit in the production of ourselves. We refigure ourselves through "deidentification" (Spivak, 1993, p. 6), "disidentification" (Butler, 1993, p. 4), and "negative self-identity" (Pratt, 1984, p. 46). "Our lesson is to act in the fractures of identities in struggle" (Spivak, 1992, p. 803) and in the "struggle-filled passage from one position to another" (Felman, 1987, p. 89). Butler (1995) believes agency lies in "subversive citation" and explains this notion as follows:

To be constituted by language is to be produced within a given network of power/discourse which is open to resignification, redeployment, subversive citation from within, and interruption and inadvertent convergences with other such networks. "Agency" is to be found precisely at such junctures where discourse is renewed. That an "I" is founded through reciting the anonymous linguistic site of the "I" (Benveniste) implies that citation is not performed by a subject, but is rather the invocation by which a subject comes into linguistic being. That this is a repeated process, an iterable procedure, is precisely the condition of agency within discourse (p. 135).

Spivak (1992) situates this metaphor of citationality within the pain of deidentification: "There is none of that confident absolute citation where what is cited
is emptied of its own historical texting or weaving. This is a citing that invokes the
wound of the cutting from the staged origin" (p. 795).

The subject is at odds not only with language but with practice. Moving one
step further, Butler (1995) asks, "How is it that we become available to a
transformation of who we are, a contestation which compels us to rethink ourselves"
(p. 131)? What makes us open to refiguration? What enables these tiny explosions of
the self that refuse to repeat the same "I?" Answers seem to emerge not within an
essential self, of course, but in relations among a multiplicity of forces, both linguistic
and material, as we struggle with desire, politics, and the plethora of codes inscribed
by regulating discourse and practice. Spivak (1993) urges us to break open the codes
and argues for an "agenda of agency [that will] wrench these political signifiers out of
their represented field of reference" (p. 144-145). In any event, trying to locate and
name agency seems a humanist project rather than a task of the poststructural critique,
a variation of the search for origins. The meaning of agency is unknowable and must
be deferred, as is the meaning of the subject. Our ability to rest in ambiguity and
possibility -- in Deleuze's (1988/1986) "unthought" (p. 97) -- is a poststructural
practice of freedom as is the critique of the signifiers that limit our imaginations.
Spivak (1993) reminds us that "language is not everything. It is only a vital clue to
where the self loses its boundaries" (p. 180). Language regularly falls apart, is
inadequate, and subverts itself, indicating that there is the "always possible menace of
a space outside language" (Spivak, 1993, p. 181). Perhaps it is in that space that
agency plays. No matter where it festers, our desire is surely to keep agency alive.
Care of the Self: Another Subject

I don't feel it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning.

Michel Foucault, 1988/1982, p. 9

Introduction

Delaying a discussion of Foucault's third axis of analysis, his ethical analysis, care of the self, until the end of this discussion of the subject after poststructuralism has been deliberate for two reasons. First, since a variation of this analysis will be used later in this piece to examine the arts of existence of the older white southern women who are the focus of this study, the topic deserves careful attention. Second, Foucault's ethical analysis involves a practice of constituting the self which is strikingly different from the psychological humanist practice of uncovering the hidden uniqueness of the self. In addition, Foucault's own theory of the subject changed considerably as the focus of his analyses shifted from archaeology to genealogy to ethics. Poster (1993) explains as follows: "From the dispersal of the subject in discourse he moved to the issue of the 'constitution of the self' in discourse," (p. 64) and then to the constitution of the self through practice. Simply put, Foucault's (1984/1983) third and final analysis, his ethical analysis, in part explores the ancient Greek concept that, since the self is not given, it must be created as a work of art (p. 351).

Prior to his series of books on the history of sexuality, Foucault's archaeological and genealogical analyses had examined the problems of truth and power, what he called technologies of sign systems "which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification," as well as technologies of power "which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination,
an objectivizing of the subject" (Foucault, quoted in Martin, 1988/1982, p.18). He had also identified technologies of production "which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things" (Foucault, quoted in Martin, 1988/1982, p.18). As he worked on his genealogy of sexuality, he decided to foreground a third domain of existence, the problem of individual conduct, or technologies of the self "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, quoted in Martin, 1982/1988, p.18). He thus revised his domains or axes of genealogy to include the following: (1) "a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge"; (2) a "historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others"; and (3) "a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents" (Foucault, 1984/1983, pp. 351). In conjunction with this new focus, his interest in governmentality, which previously had focused on how individuals are governed, regulated, and normalized by institutions, shifted to how individuals govern themselves.

Foucault became more and more absorbed with the third domain and its technologies of the self as he researched his history of sexuality. Throughout his lifelong work he "stresses the sheer variety of the ways in which we are constituted. No theory of language can contain or explain it . . . Foucault not only expands the range and variety of the practices that constitute us. By analyzing them, he introduces them into ethical reflection" (Rajchman, 1986, p. 189). Since he recognized that the subject has not always been constituted in the same way -- through language (Lacan), by the Other (Sartre), etc. -- Foucault examined what he had discovered during his
research on the history of sexuality about how the self had been constituted in ancient Greece. Care of the self, ethics, is his final analysis of the constitution of the subject. Where he might have gone with this analysis we will never know, of course, since he died as he was publishing the series.

Rethinking the Enlightenment

The first volume of his history of sexuality begins a genealogy whose purpose is to "define the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure that sustains the discourse on human sexuality in our part of the world" (Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 11). Miller (1993) believes the main English title of this first volume, The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction is "perfectly anodyne" (p. 389) and prefers Foucault's title La Volonté de savoir or The Will to Know, which I will use henceforth. In this introductory volume, Foucault (1978/1976) explains that rather than suppress sexuality, Western discourse has, since the end of the sixteenth century, incited the dissemination of sexualities -- produced and multiplied them, in fact -- constituting a "science of sexuality" (p. 12) aimed at normalization. La volonté de savoir thus explores how the experience of sexuality has been defined, limited, and produced by discourse.

Davidson (1994) reports that the back cover of that first volume identified forthcoming volumes of Foucault's genealogy as follows: Volume 2, The Flesh and the Body, problematizing sex in early Christianity; Volume 3, The Children's Crusade, focusing on the sexuality of children; Volume 4, Woman, Mother, Hysteric, examining the sexuality of women; Volume 5, Perverts, looking at the construction of perversion; and Volume 6, Population and Races, illustrating the way "topics of population and race were linked to the history of what Foucault had called 'biopolitics'" (p. 65). About this series Foucault (quoted in Fontana, 1988/1984) says,
I very nearly died of boredom writing those books: they were too much like the earlier ones. . . . When you know in advance where you're going to end up there's a whole dimension of experience lacking, namely, the risk attached to writing a book that may not come off. So I changed the general plan: instead of studying sexuality on the borders of knowledge and power, I have tried to go further back, to find out how, for the subject himself, the experience of his sexuality as desire had been constituted" (p. 47-48).

When the second volume of Foucault's (1985/1984) history was published eight years later, it was titled *The History of Sexuality. Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure (L'Usage des plaisirs)*, and it did not continue the genealogical analysis he had earlier described. He explained in his introduction that "it seemed to me that a whole recentering was called for" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 23). "I had to choose: either stick to the plan I had set, supplementing it with a brief historical survey of the theme of desire, or reorganize the whole study around the slow formation, in antiquity, of a hermeneutics of the self" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 6). He chose the former, and his new project "is not like the disciplinary constitution of individuals. It is not like the normalizing control of populations. It is our constitution as ethical or moral sorts of persons within a long tradition which Foucault calls, borrowing a term from Plutarch, our 'etho-poetic' tradition" (Rajchman, 1986, p. 169). The shift in his thinking during those eight years between Volume 1 and Volume 2 is evident in the transcription of a seminar he gave in Vermont in the fall of 1982 which appears in a volume titled *Technologies of the Self* (Foucault, 1988/1982).

It is also evident in his essay, "What is Enlightenment?" (Foucault, 1984) in which he comes to realize that he cannot escape history, i.e., he cannot escape the Enlightenment, but must instead confront his present by accepting his past, which indeed includes the Enlightenment. Foucault (1972/1969) had, in the past, constructed himself as an absent author: "I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to
have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order" (p. 17). He did not want to be made into a case to be studied, a subject to be subjected to the panoptic gaze. Absent authors, however, give up their epistemological and political positions, and this condition began to be unacceptable, especially after the events of May 1968. The Enlightenment "presents a historically unique standpoint in which the development of the individual self is associated with a confrontation with the present" (Poster, 1993, pp. 70-71). The humanist variation of the Enlightenment, however, is only one of its sedimented relays, one which Foucault rejects while retaining the Enlightenment's principal of "critical self awareness and self overcoming" (McNay, 1994, p. 144). Once the humanist moment of the Enlightenment with its centered, essential self was set aside, Foucault was in the position of being able to use the Enlightenment moment to rethink a subject with a history who must confront the present. "We must try to proceed with the analysis of ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment" (Foucault, 1984, p. 43). His new ethos was based on his understanding that he was connected to history and committed to the world, that he was not an absent author at all, and his focus turned from discourse to the subject.

"In the eight years that separated Volume I from Volume II, Foucault had shifted emphasis: from a concern with the power effects of discursive practices he moved on to look at the way the subject responds to them" (Poster, 1993, p. 76). How does the subject create itself in response to the forces of the outside? There are a variety of forces at work on the subject; however, the basis of Foucault's discussion of the constitution of the self is the moral question of sexuality, the topic he had begun to explore in the first volume of his history. His focus changed, however, and he substituted a "history of ethical problematizations based on practices of the self, for a
history of systems of morality based, hypothetically, on interdictions" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 13).

His question in the second volume, the first of his new series, becomes "how, why, and in what forms was sexuality constituted as a moral domain? Why this ethical concern that was so persistent despite its varying forms and intensity? Why this 'problematization'?" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 10). And we might also ask why Foucault shifted his focus? The explanation lies in the following lines from the beginning of the second volume of the series, lines which Deleuze read after Foucault's death as his friend's body was taken from the morgue to be buried (Eribon, 1991, p. 329):

As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity -- the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying asfield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all . . . But, then, what is philosophy today -- philosophical activity. I mean -- if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known (Foucault, 1985/1984, pp. 8-9)?

Even as he begins to examine a practice of self-invention, it is evident that Foucault continues to value self-disengagement in the ongoing formation of the subject. One must always critique the self one has invented. Foucault's project is "not the attempt to find an authenticity of self-experience in which to anchor one's choices, projects, or artistic work, but the attempt to constantly question the 'truth' of one's thought and oneself" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 124).
His new project not only explores a different method of self-constitution but also surveys a much longer time period. His previous archaeological and genealogical analyses had focused on the periods between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries; his new genealogy was to survey the period from ancient Greece through the present day. His third domain of analysis focuses on the practice, care of the self, which is the study of the self’s relation to itself. Foucault hopes to learn how the individual recognizes himself not only as a subject but also as a subject of desire. He begins by describing the everyday activities of the ancient Greeks with which they practiced care of the self. "The domain I will be analyzing is made up of texts written for the purpose of offering rules, opinions, and advice on how to behave as one should . . . [which] served as functional devices that would enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over it and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects: in short, their function was 'etho-poetic'" (Foucault, 1985/1984, pp. 12-13). In the second volume, then, he explores the moral/ethical dimension of the Greeks and three major techniques of the self which they practiced: dietetics, economics, and erotics.

In the third volume of the history, The History of Sexuality. Volume 3: The Care of the Self (Le Souci de soi), Foucault (1986/1985) describes the elaboration of the self made possible by the Greek techniques of the self just mentioned as well as the manner in which sexual activity was problematized "in the Greek and Latin texts of the first two centuries of our era" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 12). This volume includes a detailed description of some specific practices for the cultivation of the self, which will be discussed later, as well as a discussion of the relationship of the self to others, including wives and boys. Foucault illustrates how constituting oneself as the ethical subject of one's actions changed in Greek culture through the centuries as ethics was redefined in light of different familial and political relations. "A very long
time had passed during which concern for the body and for health, the relation to wives and to marriage, and the relationship with boys had been motifs for the elaboration of a severe ethics" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 237), an ethics concerned with self-mastery and governmentality. As these motifs were redefined because of the changing nature of the roles of men in relationships, the focus shifted from a practice of the self that involves mastering the self in order to have ethical relations with oneself and others to a re-elaboration of oneself "in the complex and shifting interplay of relations of command and subordination" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 94). The apogee of the "principle of superiority over the self as the ethical core" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 95) that existed during the Hellenistic period occurred at the beginning of the Empire. This re-elaboration had not yet become the Christian self that is required to renounce itself.

Unfortunately, the projected fourth volume of the new series, Confessions of the Flesh (Les Aveux de la chair) was never published. Foucault (1985/1984) mentions in the introduction to the second volume of the series that it "deals with the formation of the doctrine and ministry concerning the flesh" (p. 12). Actually, this was the first book he had written of the new series, although it was never completed. At one point he had thought of publishing his history in a single long volume but decided to publish separate volumes in the chronological order of their content. Thus, he put Les Aveux de la chair aside and completed L'Usage des plaisirs and Le Souci de soi for publication. Macey (1993) says "it is improbable that the fourth will ever be published" (p. 466).

As was his practice, Foucault discusses his genealogy of ethics in several shorter works, particularly in several interviews. Four of those that have especially informed this research are the following: "Technologies of the Self," (mentioned above) a transcription of a seminar presentation at the University of Vermont in 1982

Morality

Foucault begins his genealogy by discussing the aspects of morality. By morality he means the following:

A set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches, and so forth. It is sometimes the case that these rules and values are plainly set forth in a coherent doctrine and an explicit teaching. But it also happens that they are transmitted in a diffuse manner, so that, far from constituting a systematic ensemble, they form a complex interplay of elements that counterbalance and correct one another, and cancel each other out on certain points, thus providing for compromises or loopholes. With these qualifications taken into account, we can call this prescriptive ensemble a "moral code" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 25).

There is, however, more to morality than the code. There is also the "real behavior of individuals" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 25), how they respond to the code, whether they
support its values and abide by its rules or whether they transgress its prescriptions. Foucault (1985/1984) calls this element "the morality of behaviors" (p. 26). And a third element of morality, given that there are different ways of responding to the code, is "the manner in which one ought to 'conduct oneself . . . as an ethical subject of this action" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 26). Foucault calls this third element ethics. So the three elements of morality are the codes, actual behavior, and ethics. "There are thus 'moral' problems about the code, its principles, and its applications: and then there are 'ethical' problems about how to turn oneself into the right kind of person" (Rajchman, 1986, p. 172).

Foucault does not discuss the codes in any detail, since he believes most moral codes focus on general principles which have not changed very much throughout history. Nor does he dwell on people's actual behavior in relation to the codes, to their accommodation or resistance. His interest has shifted to the third element, ethics, which becomes the focus of his work.

As already mentioned, Foucault (1984/1983) was taken with a concept that appeared in the "Greco-Roman culture, starting from about the third century B.C. and continuing until the second or third century after Christ" (p. 359) called epimeleia heautou, or care of the self. This concept had appeared very early in Greek culture as a widespread imperative which, "consecrated by Socrates, philosophy took up again and ultimately placed at the center of that 'art of existence' which philosophy claimed to be" (Foucault, 1986/1985, pp. 43-44). This theme of the art of existence broke loose of philosophy to some extent and "gradually acquired the dimensions and forms of a veritable 'cultivation of the self'" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 44), with attendant attitudes, modes of behavior, activities, a way of living, and an entire social practice. Foucault (1986/1985) explains as follows:
It thus came to constitute a social practice, giving rise to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times, even to institutions. And it gave rise, finally, to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science. In the slow development of the art of living under the theme of the care of oneself, the first two centuries of the imperial epoch can be seen as the summit of a curve: a kind of golden age in the cultivation of the self -- it being understood, of course, that this phenomenon concerned only the social groups, very limited in number, that were bearers of culture and for whose members a technē tou biou could have a meaning and a reality (p. 45).

As could be expected, there have been objections to such an elite practice. On the one hand, the morality of the ancient Greeks was available at first only to free men; on the other hand, it was never a requirement of anyone. Practicing care of the self was a choice and was not juridical or prescribed by any institution or disciplining authority. Ethics was not used to normalize society but involved choosing the practices through which one constituted oneself. This ethics is "based neither in science nor religion nor in Kantian moral duties: [it is] an ethic that is a matter of choice of life rather than abstract obligation" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 37) The principle of this ethics is a radical freedom which operates not only as choice but also as resistance to self-forming practices whether they are forces of the inside or the outside. Parenthetically, for those who find the Greek version of this ethics elitist, it might be useful to keep in mind during this discussion that Foucault (In Barbadette, 1985/1984) comments that he did not find the Greeks either admirable or exemplary (p. 2). Macey (1993) elaborates, quoting Foucault, as follows:

Foucault's now considerable knowledge of the classics did not lead him to see antiquity as a golden age. It did not offer an alternative ethics of pleasure because it was linked to a virile society, to 'dissymmetry, exclusion of the other, an obsession with penetration, and a kind of threat of being dispossessed of your own energy, and so on. All that is quite disgusting!' There was, however, something of a parallel between Greek ethics and contemporary
problems... Foucault had little time for the 'Californian cult of the self,' in which 'one is supposed to discover one's true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth from that which is supposed to be able to tell you what your true self is' (p. 458).

Foucault believed, rather, that ethics involved the creation of the self.

**Ethics: Care of the Self**

Failing the real, it is here that we must aim at order.

Jean Baudrillard, 1993/1983, p. 359

Continuing, then, Foucault (1984/1983) stresses that the Greek word *heautou* implies significant labor; thus, *epimeleia heautou*, care of the self, involves more than self-absorption or self-attachment or preoccupation with the self, but implies "a sort of work, an activity; it implies attention, knowledge, technique" (p. 360) in everyday activities. One treats one's life as an object for a certain kind of knowledge, "for a *techne* -- for an art" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 362), and Greek ethics is centered on the "aesthetics of existence" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 348). Styles of existence, a stylization of everyday life, was important, though Veyne (quoted in Davidson, 1994) points out that "*Style does not mean distinction here; the word is to be taken in the sense of the Greeks, for whom an artist was first of all an artisan and a work of art was first of all a work" (p. 67). Stylization is a job of work, a practice, a choice, not an elite technique reserved for artists.

An ethics thus grounded in practice becomes an ontological matter. It is not aimed at transcendence. Since the Greeks were not particularly concerned with the existence of God or with life after death, their focus was on the aesthetic creation of an existence on earth that gave "the maximum possible brilliance to their lives" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 362). "The individual who has finally succeeded in gaining
access to himself is, for himself, an object of pleasure. Not only is one satisfied with what one is and accepting of one's limits, but one 'pleases oneself'" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 66). Pleasure is a goal of care of the self.

Foucault explains that care of the self or ethics, which, along with the moral code and people's actual behavior, makes up morality, has four major aspects: (1) the ethical substance -- the part of oneself that will be worked on by ethics: "for Christians it was desire, for Kant is was intentions, and for us now it's feelings"; (2) the mode of subjection -- the way in which one is invited to become ethical, e.g., divine law, the Greeks' desire to "give your existence the most beautiful form possible"; (3) the self-forming activity or elaboration -- all the activities that elaborate the self, that one performs on oneself in order "to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 27); and (4) the telos -- the goal of this exercise, to "become pure, immortal, or free, or masters of ourselves" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 355).

The kind of relationship one ought to have with oneself, rapport à soi, was not just self-awareness, but self-formation in which "the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act on himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 28). Since it is ontological and not psychological, ethics involves activities and social practices rather than contemplation. Indeed, care of the self is "not a rest cure" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 51) -- there are things to be done if one wishes to be ethical. "So it is not enough to say that the subject is constituted in a symbolic system. It is not just in the play of symbols that the subject is constituted. It is constituted in real practices -- historically analyzeable
practices. There is a technology of the constitution of the self which cuts across symbolic systems while using them" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 369).

"A demanding, prudent, 'experimental' attitude is necessary; at every moment, step by step, one must confront what one is thinking and saying with what one is doing, with what one is.' For Foucault in 1983, the key to appraising the values held dear by any philosopher was therefore 'not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos'" (Foucault, quoted in Miller, 1993, p. 339). In fact, each culture produces patterns, practices, conventions, and events that may be used in the constitution of the self; the individual doesn't necessarily invent them (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984, p.11). In addition, though Foucault chooses sexuality as the focus of his ethics, one might also examine other arenas of relations and attendant codes such as those of the workplace, the classroom, the family, and friendship in considering ethical self-formation.

**Arts of Existence**

As far as the technologies of the self were concerned, Foucault (1986/1985) notes that care of the self involved a series of activities, a regimen, a program that became well-defined in Greek culture, that gave rise "to relationships between individuals, to exchanges and communications, and at times even to institutions . . . and finally to a certain mode of knowledge and to the elaboration of a science" (p. 45). Working on oneself required austerity, diligence, and attention. Taking care of the body -- exercising without overexerting, eating properly, satisfying sexual needs in a measured fashion -- was important. In fact, the Greeks wrote a great deal more about dietetics than about sex. Talking with a confidant, a counsellor or a guide, one perhaps older and more knowledgeable, was desirable. Studying with a
teacher was an option; in fact, wealthy Greeks often hired a philosopher to help them with their training. The Greeks believed that the ills of the body and the ills of the soul influenced each other, and a whole series of medical metaphors was employed to describe how one should approach the self. Periodic administrative reviews were encouraged to determine progress toward a specific virtue. Abstinence was employed so that one might become familiar with minimum requirements: "One does not deprive oneself for a moment in order to sharpen one's taste for future refinements but to convince oneself that the worst misfortune will not deprive one of the things one absolutely needs, and that one will always be able to tolerate what one is capable of enduring at times" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 60). This ascetic rationale supports self-mastery, which was the initial goal of care of the self.

In addition, a whole range of communicative activities emerged, and writing, which was a new technology at this time, became very important in ethics. The Greeks carried notebooks with them, hypomnemata, and "their use as books of life, guides for conduct, seems to have become a current thing among a whole cultivated public" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 364). In these notebooks, the Greeks entered quotations, fragments of works, examples, and actions to which one had been witness or of which one had read the account, reflections or reasonings which one had heard or which had come to mind. They constituted a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation. They also formed a raw material for the writing of more systematic treatises in which were given arguments and means by which to struggle against some defect (such as anger, envy, gossip, flattery) or to overcome some difficult circumstance (a mourning, an exile, downfall, disgrace) (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 364).

They were not diaries, nor were they used to bring to light the inner depth of one's being, which was the purpose of later Christian journals. "The point is not to pursue the indescribable, not to reveal the hidden, not to say the non-said, but, on the
contrary, to collect the already-said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less than the constitution of oneself" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 365). This practice, in fact, involves citation, using others' words in self-formation: "to make of the recollection of the fragmentary logos transmitted by teaching, listening, or reading a means to establish as adequate and as perfect a relationship of oneself to oneself as possible" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 365). In this fashion, writing, which was a new technology, was immediately put to use by the Greeks in their chief activity, ethics, "the perfect government of the self -- a sort of permanent political relationship between self and self" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 363).

To illustrate the relation between writing and vigilance, Foucault (1988/1982) reproduces one of Marcus Aurelius' letters from 144-45 A.D. in which Aurelius describes to his friend, not what he had thought, but what he had done during the day -- reading, writing, eating, gathering grapes, tending his sore throat, chatting with his mother, bathing, examining his conscience at the end of the day, etc. He gives an account of the day's activities. "This letter presents a description of everyday life. All the details of taking care of oneself are here, all the unimportant things he has done. Cicero tells only important things, but in Aurelius' letter these details are important because they are you" (Foucault, 1988/1982, p. 29). Aurelius also mentions at the end of his letter that, before going to sleep, he intended to look at his notebook to see whether he had done the things he had set out to accomplish for the day. Writing, which had become important to the political bureaucracy of this largely oral culture, thus became a personal political activity, and the "self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity" (Foucault, 1988/1982, p. 27). It was, however, an activity of choice, used to "invent forms of experience other than the ones previously prescribed" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 37).
This work on oneself should produce a transformation such that one’s attention shifts from an absorption with other people and everyday problems to the relation of oneself to oneself. One belongs to oneself and is answerable only to oneself. The final relation to oneself achieved as a result of the practices of the self is an “ethics of control” (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 65) which hinges on self mastery and temperance in all matters. "But apart from this rather political and juridical form, the relation to self is also defined as a concrete relationship enabling one to delight in oneself, as in a thing one both possesses and has before one’s eyes" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 65). As mentioned earlier, in this formulation we find the ethics of pleasure.

However, care of the self was not aimed solely at individual perfection but also at preparing one to participate in society. If one knows oneself and has mastered oneself ontologically through proper care of the self, one should not fear dominating others. The abuse of power occurs when one does not have control over one’s appetites, when one has not practiced care of the self and has not learned one’s limits. When asked “Then it is a care of the self which, thinking of itself, thinks of others?” (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984, p. 8), Foucault (In Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984) responds, “Yes, absolutely” (p. 9) and elaborates as follows:

But if you care for yourself correctly, i.e., if you know ontologically what you are, if you also know of what you are capable, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen in a city, to be the head of a household in an oikos, if you know what things you must fear and those that you should not fear, if you know what is suitable to hope for and what are the things on the contrary which should be completely indifferent for you, if you know, finally that you should not fear death, well, then, you cannot abuse your power over others (p. 8).

Governmentality is involved here, and Foucault (quoted in Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984) says, “I say governmentality implies the relationship of self to self, which means exactly that, in the idea of governmentality, I am aiming at the totality of
practices, by which one can constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other. It is free individuals who try to control, to determine, to delimit the liberty of others” (p. 19). "Like Kant, Foucault regards free will as 'the ontological condition of ethics'; ethics in turn he treats as 'the deliberate form assumed by freedom'" (Foucault, quoted in Miller, 1993, p. 333). So we might think of the ethical arena as one that moves from the practice of freedom that is the governmentality of self to the practice of liberty which is the governmentality of others.

Care of the self was very much a social practice in that one's relations with others mattered. Others, friends, were important in practicing the arts of existence even though a more formal system of support, through schooling and lectures and trained professionals, existed in their culture to assist the Greeks. There were certain obligations to the others one encountered in life. Approaching a friend for assistance was a right; however, it was the duty of the friend to respond. In turn, the advice should be received gratefully. There was "a ready support in the whole bundle of customary relations of kinship, friendship, and obligation" and "the care of the self appears as intrinsically linked to a 'soul service,' which includes the possibility of a round of exchanges with the other and a system of reciprocal obligations" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 54). By attending to himself through the whole elaboration of the self, by establishing his own ethos, the individual was able to regulate his authority over himself, his household, and others. At issue is giving "one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination" (Foucault in Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984, p. 18). The Greeks elaborated an ethics that was a choice of free men, was independent of transcendence, and was
aimed at an ethical governance of oneself which prepared one for an ethical governance of others.

**Transformation of Care of the Self**

Thus Foucault recovers the systematic description of the arts of existence to which the Greeks applied the three great techniques of the self, dietetics, economics, and erotics. The relationship with boys was the most delicate point of the Greeks' sexual ethics and "the most active focus of reflection and elaboration" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 253), since the pursuit of boys "might compromise the capacity of a young man to form himself into the masterful sort of person, commensurate with his birth" (Rajchman, 1986, p. 173). In later centuries, the focus of sexual ethics shifted to women, in the theme of virginity and in the relationship of marriage and then shifted later to the body in about the "seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the sexuality of children, and generally speaking, in the relationship between sexual behavior, normality, and health" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 253).

St. Augustine, and others, brought about a shift that "recentered the different arts of existence around the decipherment of the self . . . so that what was at the core of the problematization of sexual conduct was no longer pleasure and the aesthetics of its use, but desire and its purifying hermeneutics" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 254). At the very end of the third volume of the series, the last that was published, Foucault (1986/1985) says that a very different ethics and ethical subject eventually emerged (p. 240). The moral system it reflected defines "other modalities of the relation to self: a characterization of the ethical substance based on finitude, the Fall, and evil; a mode of subjection in the form of obedience to a general law that is at the same time the will of a personal god; a type of work on oneself that implies a decipherment of the soul and purificatory hermeneutics of the desires; and a mode of ethical fulfillment that
tends toward self-renunciation" (Foucault, 1986/1985, pp. 239-240). We are familiar with the moral system just described since it is common in the West today. The telos is purity and immortality, the mode of subjection is divine law, the self-forming activity is self-decipherment, and the ethical substance is an always already imperfect being. The focus is on desire and its eradication. Even though Foucault (quoted in Barbadette, 1985/1984) says that contemporary morality and that of the ancient Greeks have nothing in common philosophically, "if one considers these respective moralities in terms of what they prescribe, intimate, and advise, they are extraordinarily close. It is important to point out the proximity and the difference, and through their interplay, to show how the same advice given by ancient morality can function differently in a contemporary style of morality" (p. 6). Issues involved in enacting care of the self in contemporary society will be discussed later.

Be that as it may, Foucault (1984/1983) points out that the classical culture of the self was overturned when "Christianity substituted the idea of a self which one had to renounce, because clinging to the self was opposed to God's will" (p. 362). What has survived from that culture is the Delphic maxim, "Know Yourself," which accompanied the idea of self-formation as an ethical subject in ancient Greece. "To summarize: There has been an inversion between the hierarchy of the two principles of antiquity: 'Take care of yourself' and 'Know thyself.' In Greco-Roman culture knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of taking care of yourself. In the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle" and taking care of oneself often seems selfish and immoral, a "means of escape from all possible rules" (Foucault, 1988/1982, p. 22). Foucault (1984/1983) recognizes that elements of the culture of the self have been "integrated, displaced, reutilized in Christianity" (p. 370). Even though it has never completely disappeared, care of the self has been silent, being worded only occasionally. For instance, even though the culture of the
self was foreign to the Middle Ages, it did surface during the Renaissance; and Foucault (1985/1984) points out specific examples of its use: that Burckhardt attended to the aesthetics of existence in his study of the Renaissance, as did Benjamin in his study of Baudelaire (p. 11).

In considering Descartes' influence on the cultivation of the self, Foucault (1984/1983) explains that Descartes substituted "a subject as founder of practices of knowledge" for "a subject constituted through practices of the self" (p. 371). This substitution seems ironic to Foucault (1984/1983), since Western rationality as theorized by the ancient Greeks required a subject who had practiced care of the self and thus was able to know the truth. "In Foucault's history, Plato introduces the principle that we must control our pleasure in order to find out who we really are, to attain our ontological nature" (Rajchman, 1986, p. 174). In fact, until the sixteenth century, the European understood that "truth has a price" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 371) and that asceticism was required before one could know the truth. Foucault (1984/1983) explains that Descartes, however,

broke with this when he said, 'To accede to truth, it suffices that I be any subject which can see what is evident.' Evidence is substituted for ascetic at the point where the relationship to the self intersects the relationship to others and the world. The relationship to the self no longer needs to be ascetic to get into relation to the truth. It suffices that the relationship to the self reveals to me the obvious truth of what I see for me to apprehend that truth definitively. Thus, I can be immoral and know the truth. I believe that this is an idea which, more or less explicitly, was rejected by all previous culture. Before Descartes, one could not be impure, immoral, and know the truth. With Descartes, direct evidence is enough. After Descartes, we have a nonascetic subject of knowledge. This change makes possible the institutionalization of modern science (pp. 371-372).

Foucault (1984/1983) explains that Descartes' position has not remained untroubled, and that Kant reintroduced in A Critique of Pure Reason, first published in 1781, "one
more way in our tradition whereby the self is not merely given but is constituted in relationship to itself" by finding a "universal subject, which, to the extent that it was universal, could be the subject of knowledge, but which demanded, nonetheless, an ethical attitude" (p. 372). Poststructuralism's skepticism about subjectivity as defined by humanism is not a recent phenomenon.

Posthumanist Possibilities

How can care of the self work for everyman? In considering how the ancient care of the self might be useful today in thinking about subjectivity, Foucault (1985/84) explains that the purpose of philosophy is "the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself" (p. 9) in order, not merely to legitimate what is known, but to think differently. His attention is thus directed at the arts of existence or techniques of the self by which "men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria" (Foucault, 1985/1984, pp. 10-11). Therefore, care of the self once again becomes a philosophical activity, art is no longer the sole domain of the artist, and "everyone's life become[s] a work of art" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 350). Foucault, as a philosopher-intellectual, feels that philosophy should be of value to the non-philosopher. He believes that "The point of doing philosophy is to occasion new ways of thinking about the forms of experience around which there exist controversy and protest" (Rajchman, 1985, pp. 97-98). He sees care of the self, not just as a philosophical theory, but as an ethical practice that might inform people's everyday lives in some useful way as it had the ancient Greeks as they constituted themselves as ethical subjects.
However, we cannot simply overlay the Greek ethical system of care of the self on contemporary society. Foucault always urges us to accept our historicity while at the same time being skeptical of nostalgia, in this case, for the life of the ancient Greeks. "It's a good thing to have nostalgia toward some periods on the condition that it's a way to have a thoughtful and positive relation to your own present. But if nostalgia is a reason to be aggressive and uncomprehending toward the present, it has to be excluded" (Foucault, 1988/1982, p. 12). Nostalgia can be useful but should not prevent us from acting in the present.

Foucault (in Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984) does not believe contemporary politics is much concerned with an ethical subject (p. 14). Perhaps for this reason, when asked if we "should actualize this notion of the care of the self, in the classical sense, against this modern thought" (Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984, p. 14), he replies, "Absolutely, but I am not doing that in order to say, 'Unfortunately we have forgotten the care for self. Here is the care for self. It is the key to everything.' Nothing is more foreign to me than the idea that philosophy strayed at a certain moment of time, and that it has forgotten something and that somewhere in her history there exists a principle, a basis that must be rediscovered" (quoted in Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984, p. 14). Deleuze (1988/1986) explains that the Greek view of the body and its pleasures which Foucault describes in his genealogy "was related to the agonistic relations between free men, and hence to a 'virile society' that was unisexual and excluded women; while we are obviously looking here for a different type of relations [sic] that is unique to our own social field" (p. 148). The concept of ethical self-formation through technologies of the self could be reconfigured based on the moral codes and self-forming activities available in posthumanist culture.
In any case, Foucault's genealogy of sexuality describes an ethics that was different from modern-day morality in that it was not prescribed by the Church or the government or philosophy. Foucault says that "From Antiquity to Christianity, we pass from a morality that was essentially the search for a personal ethics to a morality as obedience to a system of rules" (quoted in Fontana, 1988/1984, p. 49). The poststructural critique in a post-Christian world produces many people who have labored under the oppression of those rules and resisted them who are in the same position as the ancient Greeks who also had no higher authority to guide them in living their lives. Given such a condition, the Greeks created an ethics which, with some adaptations, served some of them, at any rate, for about 600 years.

What becomes very attractive about care of the self is that it is a practice of freedom, a style of liberty, which is not constrained by any prior knowledge or truth about ourselves or by any essential self with a deep interior. This self is not a psychological or phenomenological self; the self is not given. Care of the self is an "ethic of who we are said to be, and, what, therefore, it is possible for us to become" (Rajchman, 1986, p. 166). Foucault (In Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984) says, "Liberty is the ontological condition of ethics" (p. 4). Thus, we can choose the forms of experience through which we constitute ourselves, constrained to some degree, of course, by the patterns of our culture, our own historicity, and our own imaginations. Included in self-formation is an examination of how we have already been constituted in order to strategize deidentification and continuing self-formation toward our telos. Freedom is thus also "resistance to self-constituting practices rather than a state of being within a society" (Rajchman, 1986, p. 168). Ethics becomes a local, personal, specific, historical practice in a poststructural world.

Deleuze (1988/1986) says the following about the extension of Foucault's work into the present day: "The struggle for a modern subjectivity passes through a
resistance to the two present forms of subjection, the one consisting of individualizing ourselves on the basis of constraints of power, the other of attracting each individual to a known and recognized identity, fixed once and for all. The struggle for subjectivity presents itself, therefore, as the right to difference, variation, and metamorphosis" (p.106). And this struggle for the right to difference might be enabled by a practice such as care of the self, an ethical practice of freedom defined by each individual within cultural patterns.

Foucault's genealogical and archaeological analyses are about liberty and agency, since their purpose is to allow us to see how ruptures and shifts have silenced some statements and privileged others. Looking once more at silenced statements, such as care of the self, might be an enabling practice for the present. Foucault (1988/1982) explains as follows:

The political and social processes by which the Western European societies were put in order are not very apparent, have been forgotten, or have become habitual. They are a part of our most familiar landscape, and we don't perceive them anymore. But most of them once scandalized people. It is one of my targets to show people that a lot of things that are part of their landscape -- that people think are universal -- are the result of some very precise historical changes. All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities of human existence. They show the arbitrariness of institutions and show which space of freedom we can still enjoy and how many changes can still be made (p. 11).

Sexuality is the focus of Foucault's genealogy of morals. We might consider other relations such as friendship, which has been much valued in our history, as another ethical arena in a poststructural world. Foucaultian questions leading to a different ethics might be the following: what are the loopholes, where is the play, in the juridical model of morality that has been elaborated since the time of Saint Augustine and funneled through Enlightenment humanism? What variations of ethics might we enact given the discourses and practices of this morality? Too, are people
resisting that morality to some extent, constructing themselves as ethical subjects of their actions on the sly? If so, how? If care of the self is still in play, what other practices does it enable? Closing this discussion of care of the self with Foucault's (1988/1982) political charge to pursue difference seems appropriate: "I think that there are more secrets, more possible freedoms, and more inventions in our future than we can imagine in humanism as it is dogmatically represented on every side of the political rainbow: the Left, the Center, the Right" (p. 15).

Responses to Care of the Self

Critics have, of course, taken issue with Foucault's care of the self. One of the most serious objections developed as gossip that, during the last years of his life when he had AIDS, Foucault "had gone to the gay bathhouses in America, and deliberately tried to infect other people with the disease" (Miller, 1993, p. 375). If this were the case, all Foucault's talk of ethics would indeed be ironic. Miller (1993), however, in his biographical research, found no evidence to support this gossip and states, "My research began with a rumor -- one that I now believe to be essentially false" (p. 375).

Some feminists object to the fact that care of the self was clearly a masculine practice in ancient Greece and are suspicious that the self who would be elaborated in modern society would be the privileged universal male. McNay (1994) finds fault with the "Baudelairean notion of the heroization of the self" as well as the "virile self-mastery" required and says that "By failing to problematize these themes of heroization and self-mastery, Foucault's theory of an ethics implicitly relies on a conventional notion of the sovereign self, which in turn rests on an unexamined fantasy of male agency" (p. 20). I do not find in any of Foucault's writing any notion of a sovereign self. Foucault's subject is always in the process of self-formation, which includes the process of self-disengagement, so how can it be sovereign?
Also, I am not sure that self-mastery through technologies of the self as Foucault has described it is necessarily a negative component of ethics. The preoccupation with uncovering the truth of the self, which seems to be the humanist, psychological version of self-mastery present in modern society, has not enabled a particularly useful ethics. In any case, much of Foucault's discussion is descriptive. He focuses on males because his purpose in his genealogy is to describe the Greek practice that he discovered and to trace its transformation to the morality of modern culture. Since women were not subjects who practiced care of the self, he can hardly include them in his description. Furthermore, Foucault admits that he had no fondness for the Greeks but still finds their method of constituting the self appealing, perhaps because it was a very active and political practice of freedom. Clearly, he does not intend to overlay the ancient Greeks' ethics on modern society. Foucault is not prescriptive; he does not instruct in his analyses but rather illustrates how certain truths have become self-evident in order that we might think about them differently. "Foucault refuses to draw up a blueprint for contemporary ethics," explain Diamond and Quinby (1988), "and, indeed assaults the notion of a single ethic. As he puts it, 'The search for a form of morality acceptable to everybody in the sense that everyone should submit to it strikes me as catastrophic'" (p. xiii).

Another objection is that Foucault substitutes a focus on practice for a critique of theory and, more specifically, that he ignores "any sustained descriptive and normative social analysis" (McNay, 1994, p. 162) in his ethical analysis. Besides sustaining the theory/practice hierarchy, this charge seems to completely ignore the entire body of Foucault's philosophical and political work which represents an ongoing and thorough commitment to an analysis of descriptive, normative, and regulatory discourse and practice. What prompts the self-formation of an ethical subject are the effects of practice and discourse in relations within a social world. I do
not believe that Foucault argues "against the analytical moment" (McNay, 1994, p. 161) in his ethics. According to Bernauer and Mahon (1994), "His ethics invites a series of critiques in the context of one's concrete historical circumstances and experimental transgressions of the self as these circumstances present it" (p. 153). What Foucault does in his ethics is illustrate that we cannot be separate from our world and, in fact, that the critique of ourselves as we examine our formation is also a critique of our world. Social analysis necessarily accompanies self-formation.

Foucault does not satisfy some feminists. Perhaps one reason for this discomfort is that most feminisms are based on liberal feminism, which, like all essentialist humanist narratives, envisions a telos of equality and freedom through some kind of rational emancipation, even revolution. Sawicki (1991) explains that Foucault focuses "our attention on how traditional emancipatory theories and strategies have been blind to their own dominating tendencies" (p. 97). His analyses have actually supported feminist efforts to move beyond the limits of liberalism based solely on gender and Marxism based solely on class. Rajchman (1985) believes that Foucault is a "philosopher of freedom in a post-revolutionary time" in that "he disclaimed any attempt to articulate the consciousness or voice of a people, a class, or a society" (p. 50). For Foucault freedom is not about revolution but is about the practical, everyday practice of self-formation.

Foucault did not suggest that he spoke for everyone; however, his analyses are available to anyone who would like to adapt and use them. His deconstructive methods illustrate that there are no overarching answers, theories, or analyses that can be applied to all causes; there are only specific analyses for specific struggles. In an early conversation between Foucault and Deleuze (1977/1972), Foucault comments that "In this sense theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice," and Deleuze elaborates as follows: "A theory is exactly like a box of tools.
It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function . . . A theory does not totalize; it is an instrument for multiplication and it also multiplies itself" (p. 208). Poststructural feminists are more comfortable than liberal feminists with the tensions and possibilities of uncertainty and tend to adopt a bricolage of theoretical analyses to suit the task at hand, erasing portions of theories which are not useful and elaborating portions of others as they create different strategies for political action. They find Foucault's ethical analysis useful in certain situations, as they do his archaeological and genealogical analyses.

Sawicki (1991) speaks of the "ironic tension" of Foucault's work as follows:

He refused the roll of visionary, but introduced his genealogies of modern power/knowledge in order to free up the possibilities for new forms of life. He undermined Enlightenment humanism in order to prepare the way for new forms of experience. He was a pessimist committed to political activism. That he has been labeled structural determinist and voluntarist, activist and fatalist, leftist and neoconservative suggests either that his own discourse was incoherent and confused or that his interpreters have been unwilling to suspend traditional assumptions and categories when judging it (pp. 96-97).

Both of these possibilities may exist. Another possibility might be that his critics are unable to move with Foucault as he shifts his thinking, theorizes new analyses, and deploys new strategies in his ongoing attempt to engage the self-evidence of the position in which he finds himself. His critics often seem to be exasperated that he has changed his mind once again. Those who want to know something once and for all will not like deconstruction. Yet the enabling of an irruption, a different take on the issue at hand, is the purpose of deconstruction. Deconstructive methods are risky and do not produce stable identity but continuous play and difference. I fear that Foucault's critics, and many critics of poststructural thought in general, insist on
knowing the truth of the matter, are unwilling to resist totalizing moves, and are unable to accept the ambiguity and irony of play.

In conclusion, Sawicki (1991) reminds us that Foucault's discourse is characterized by its "continual resistance to efforts to turn it into a political orthodoxy. Foucault's discourse invites its own critique" (p. 8). In addition, Foucault admits that he continually elaborated his theories based on his biography, theorizing his own life and the play of practice and discourse in which he was a subject. His work is not static, but rhizomatic. Forces in his life enabled folds in his theory.

Of interest in his ethical analysis is the kinds of experience that care of the self might enable. How might women's lives be different through care of the self?

Knowledge: Finitude into Strategy

It must be evident, after the preceding overview of the poststructural critique and its understanding of language and the subject, that for one who has made the poststructural turn, "the epistemological point of departure in philosophy is inadequate" (Butler, 1992, p. 8). The poststructural critique’s concern with issues surrounding knowledge as defined by humanism -- binary logic, a transcendent rationality whose method is science, the correspondence theory of reality, truth as the goal of philosophy, a self-contained unified knower, etc. -- will not be repeated since these topics have been discussed throughout the previous overview. However, certain general comments about knowledge in poststructuralism might be helpful in summation.

Foucault's description and deployment of his archaeological and genealogical analyses engage an array of theoretical and practical issues and illustrate that there is no hidden knowledge (Truth) to be found, no intrinsic meaning (Logos) to be uncovered in history and social practice. Knowledge is not some reality or truth to be
discovered through rational methodology but involves interpretation based on politics and power relations, on accident and emotion. Deleuze (1988/1986) expresses this displacement with the following comment: "From epistemology to strategy" (Deleuze, 1988/1986, p. 112).

Derrida's affirmative deconstruction is about the "limits of epistemology" (Spivak, 1993, p.125) and illustrates that we can never count on language as the basis of knowledge, since meaning is endlessly deferred. Language in poststructuralism is about "coping, making do, good enough for now, patches, band-aids, and baling wire (the farmer's friend), or recycled refuse, bricolage" (Tyler, 1991, p. 82). Language can produce no originary meaning, no logos, no transcendental presence to which all meaning bits refer. There is nothing behind language to legitimate it.

Following this discussion, can a non-unified, non-essential subject who is continuously being constructed by language and practice, who is never present even to itself, be stable enough to know as humanism defines knowing? "Foucault makes the distinctive assumption that the subject is not the condition of knowledge, but that knowledge about the subject is one of the historical forms through which subjective experience is constituted" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 101). How then can the subject, the knower, be separated from the known? Why this will to knowledge anyway? Why the will to truth? How, then, does the poststructural critique define knowledge?

Poststructuralists do not offer a successor episteme, an alternate regime of truth. Flax (1990b) explains that "the deconstructionists do not intend to counterpose an alternative philosophy that would more 'adequately' 'solve' the problems of being, truth, or subjectivity. Rather they wish to persuade us not to ask the old questions anymore, to change the subject of the conversation entirely" (p. 193). As Foucault constantly reminds us, each alternative carries its own benefits and dangers, and our
selection of epistemes as well as the order in which we select them is random, not rational or intentional.

The poststructuralists ask why we continue to place the modern Western episteme and its subject at the center of the conversation. In the classical episteme (Cousins & Hussain, 1984) which preceded the shift to humanism, for instance, the creator and knower is God, and man is not separate from the world as a knower but simply the orderer of the world; he does not supply meaning.

With Descartes comes the shift to the modern episteme in which man can uncover meaning by using the rational method as defined by science. The Cartesian idea of epistemology is that culture can be divided into the hard or mature sciences in which knowledge can be confirmed through rationality and objectivity and into softer disciplines, the human or immature sciences, whose knowledge claims are doubtful since they cannot be proved through rational methods. Thought is separate from the world; the real can be known and represented. Man, not God, is the measure of all things and tries to know, not only the world, but himself. At this point man becomes the subject and object of knowledge. Enmeshed in the world and its relations, he nevertheless is expected to be able to separate himself from it and know it, organize it, predict events, and control them. "Man becomes at once empirical and transcendental, ontic and ontological. In this 'doubling' there is a basic problem: empirical 'forms of existence' are being used to provide the grounds of all knowledge" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 111).

With Kant, in a desperate move to make this inconsistency work, comes what Foucault calls the analytic of finitude, the idea that "the limits of knowledge provide a positive foundation for the philosophy of knowing" (Foucault, 1970/1966). With Hegel comes a historisist approach that privileges each new theory of knowledge as yet another step in the metanarrative of progress toward the ultimate synthesis. "For
the Hegelian, the satisfaction the Cartesian takes in correspondence and accurate representation is replaced by the thrill of being up-to-date" (Rorty, 1986, p. 44).

That these various theories, effects of the modern episteme, have produced skepticism is evident in ongoing assaults on their assumptions which converge at this time in theories subsumed under the poststructural critique. Once one has begun to understand, with the aid of deconstructive analyses, that the modern episteme is simply one more alternative in our attempt to rectify being in the world, to rise above our own situatedness in the messiness of living by appealing to some version of an ideal, one can begin to question modernism, and any other alternative. The focus changes, and, rather than accept or reject a totalizing philosophy based on some kind of transcendence, poststructural critics become skeptical of the self-evidence of the case at hand, whatever it might be. They do not reject rationality but instead use reason within analyses such as archaeology, genealogy, and affirmative deconstruction, to examine the accidental effects of history which we take to be self-evident. Poststructural critics do not believe that there is any true knowledge which will set us free; we cannot escape living. There is no certainty or closure; we live in tension and must make do with that condition and find agency in ambiguity. The job of work for poststructural critics is to keep the ball in play and not be seduced into valorizing a doctrine that relieves us of anxiety, tension, frustration, and bewilderment. However, "we ought scrupulously to risk the use of any concept that seems propitious or helpful in getting over gaps. Only the use should be consciously provisional, speculative, and dramatic. The end-virtue of humility comes only after a long train of humiliations; and the chief labor of humbling is the constant, resourceful restoration of ignorance" (Blackmur, 1935, pp. 373-374).

The epistemological questions of humanism then, "What can I know?" and "How do I know it?" are simply not the questions of poststructuralism. For one thing,
both of these questions assume the correspondence theory of reality. The first
assumes that there is a stable referent for the word knowledge, that there is something
real out there to be discovered and known. The second assumes that there is a stable
referent for the word I, that there is a unified, coherent self who knows. The questions
also imply a binary relationship between the knower and the known; the knower in not
implicated in the knowledge.

The poststructuralist, making the shift, the turn, and continuing to use that
concept knowledge since it is part of the language anyway, would ask rather, "What
counts as knowledge in this particular instance?" "How was it produced?" "What are
its effects?" Too, the poststructuralist understands that we are produced by knowledge
even as we produce it. Then to what effect? Perhaps to examine ourselves as well as
knowledge claims, to scrutinize subjectivity, to de-identify and reconstitute in an
ongoing practice of self-formation.

When the truth of the matter no longer matters, when the issue is no longer
what knowledge is but how it has been constructed and to what effect on subjects and
practices, there is a chance that different strategies for dealing with local, specific,
contextual situations become available in the interstices of discourse and practice.
Otherwise, we are always locked into the finite categories and truth of humanism, and
there is no play. Poststructural thought improvises new images and tries to "open up
an area of inquiry that had been thought to be completely exhausted and long since
abandoned by philosophy or, at least, by any novel inquiry" (Boundas & Olkowski,
1994, p. 2).

As can be expected, poststructural thinkers view the task of the persistent
critique of the self-evidence of themselves and their worlds differently. Some are
more positive than others about the possibilities for change. Foucault's critique, based
on his rereading of the Enlightenment project, makes him suspicious of liberatory
doctrines which encourage the idea that we can make things any better than they are. His task is a "pessimistic activism" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 343). There is always, for example, "Benjamin's reminder that every monument of civilization is also a marker of barbarism" (Bové, 1986, p. xxv). Bové (1986) believes Deleuze "has read Foucault's ironic style with great care and tried to find a way to resist its own constant refusal of the 'positive proposition,' and of the form of desire that leaves its trace in such a 'positive proposition'" (p. xxxiii), that Deleuze resists Foucault's "critical maturity," "anxious pathos," and "loving despair" (p. xxxiv). Even as Butler (1995) warns us not "to elect 'poststructuralism' as that sure ground" for a "quasi-transcendental pragmatics," she theorizes transformation now that we "live politically in media res" (p. 131). West (1995) speaks of "self-critique as a democratic practice" and encourages an "audacious sense of hope" not grounded in optimism. Spivak (1993) reminds us that even when "nothing seems displaced or cracked, what 'really happens' remains radically uncertain" (p. 145). Of importance is a practice aimed not at closure, but at discovering cracks, fissures, interstices, recovered/discovered spaces for the effects of difference.

Responses to Poststructuralism

This discussion has touched on only a few deconstructive analyses which either have particularly informed this study or which seem crucial in understanding the flavor of poststructuralism. There are, of course, other analyses such as schizoanalysis, power/knowledge reading, and rhizo-analysis that warrant careful attention. Adventitious rhizomes of these named analyses, are also undoubtedly being deployed from time to time in local, strategic subversions of self-evidence.

I indicated at the beginning of the discussion of the poststructural critique that these very different analyses are often labeled "poststructural" and then dismissed. The task of categorizing, labeling, and making poststructuralism an object of easy
refusal continues. Theorists such as Foucault and Butler who seem to work in a
deconstructive fashion have excused themselves from a poststructural label for this
reason.

It seems to me that much of the discontent with poststructuralism lies either in
an unwillingness to consider any alternative to liberal humanism which might produce
uncomfortable "moments of bafflement" (Spivak, 1993, p. 248) or in superficial
readings of poststructural literature, or in some combination of the two. On days when
I am particularly querulous with sweeping dismissals of poststructuralism because it is
nihilistic, relativistic, downright dangerous, the cause of the general decline in
morality, and the reason for all those illegitimate children, I remember Spivak's similar
annoyance and find some comfort. She groused that she doesn't think that "people
who do not have the time to learn should organize the construction of the rest of the
world" (Spivak, 1993, p. 187). In a similar vein, Trinh (1989) asks, "What is true and
what is not, and who decides so if we wish not to have this decision made for us" (p.
134)?

Those who find discomfort in poststructuralism often ignore how
uncomfortable humanism has made many of the rest of us. West (1995) speaks of the
"psychic scars and existential bruises of the vicious pernicious ideology of white
supremacy." Women speak of the brutal effects of patriarchy; the poor speak of the
punishing effects of capitalism. Those on the wrong side of the humanist binaries
have certainly been uncomfortable for a long while.

The following discussion is an attempt to pose some of the common objections
to poststructuralism as well as to respond to those objections. It will not include
particular critics objections to particular theorists, e.g., Habermas' objections to
Foucault. One difficulty with this enterprise is that the objections to poststructuralism
are always posed within the discourse of humanism, and therefore a certain
nimbleness in responding is required so as not to be co-opted by the ground rules of the humanist conversation. The task becomes to engage the issues "in a certain way" (Derrida, 1970, p. 259). Derrida (1970) says, "There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to attack metaphysics. We have no language -- no syntax and no lexicon -- which is alien to this history; we cannot utter a single destructive proposition which has not already slipped into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest" (p. 250). Another difficulty is that a response to the critics of poststructuralism may seem to be a sweeping rejection of humanism. However, a total skepticism is not the mark of the poststructural critique since it is skeptical of totality, since it "proceeds case by case" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 4). However, since this research project employs poststructuralism in its analysis, it seems important to risk addressing these issues before moving on.

One of the key complaints is that poststructuralism has no foundations: "On a field of conflicting forces whose balance of power shifts endlessly, we have no fixed reference points, nothing to guide us but the knowledge of our own errors" (Montag, 1988, p. 102). The poststructuralist might respond, "Of course, that is all we have ever had." Foundations have subjugated and brutalized many people even as they have shored up the privilege of others. There are several foundation-questions that bear asking of those who are so enchanted with them. Whose foundations are they? How were they produced? What are their effects? Who was in the room when the foundations were being laid, when knowledge was being closed, when bodies were being trapped in categories? "Are these 'foundations,' that is, those premises that function as authorizing grounds, are they themselves not constituted through exclusions which, taken into account, expose the foundational premise as a contingent
and contestable presumption" (Butler, 1992, p. 6). Butler (1992) supposes that foundations are always contingent and shaky.

On the heels of the foundation complaint comes the knowledge complaint -- that it is impossible to know anything in poststructuralism. Belsey (1993/1989) points out that "the discourse of a non-empiricist knowledge barely exists as yet" (p. 561), but that recognizing that knowledge is partial, local, specific, and cultural does not automatically imply relativism, subjectivism, or expediency. "The proposition is that we cannot know that any existing language maps the world adequately, that there can be no certainty of a fit between the symbolic and the real. This is not the same as encouraging people to subscribe to whatever conviction happens to come into their head, or inciting them to make things up" (Belsey, 1993/1989, p. 555). Without referents there is the freedom of the abyss, the Derridean double bind, the pleasure of continuous play, a disruption of the closure of knowledge, another shot at difference. Instead of looking for true knowledge, we can look "for the many changing practices of knowledge" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 3). Belsey (1993/1989) explains, "You can tell it like you know it, in accordance with the rules of the discourse, without having to claim that you're telling it like it (absolutely, metaphysically, incontrovertibly) is" (p. 556). Contingent knowledge accompanies contingent foundations.

Still another complaint is that poststructuralism is nihilistic. The loss of certainty and universal totalities, however, doesn't imply nihilism. Certainty may be more nihilistic for some people than the fear -- and possibilities -- of the abyss. West (quoted in Stephanson, 1988) writes of the "walking nihilism" of some African-Americans living in humanist categories: "It is the imposing of closure on the human organism, intentionally, by that organism itself" (p. 286). Deconstruction is about displacement, not rejection, and is not negative. It involves "being alert to the implications of the historical sedimentation of language which we use -- and that is not
destruction" (Derrida, 1970, p. 271). Totalities can be a refuge for those who do not wish to confront their specificity, the local space in which their everyday politics is enacted. In speaking of Foucault who is often labeled a poststructuralist even though he denied all labels, Rajchman (1985) says, "To question the self-evidence of a form of experience, knowledge, or power, is to free it for our purposes, to open new possibilities for thought or action. Such freedom is the ethical principle of Foucault's skepticism; it is what has been misunderstood as irrationalism, anarchism, or nihilism" (p. 4). Poststructuralism is about skepticism, displacement, and freedom rather than negativism and nihilism.

The loss of universal objectivity and rationality produces great stress in humanists. If we lose our reason, what can we hold on to? In this conversation, objectivity is opposed to subjectivity which is supposed to contaminate rationality. Claims of objectivity, however, have often been "ideological covers" masking the bias of "shortcomings, incompleteness, and exclusiveness of 'mainstream' history" (Scott, 1992, p. 30). Rationality has been opposed to irrationality which includes emotions, feelings, intuition, and other suspect forms of knowledge that cannot be validated by the rationality of the scientific method. But why must rationality be the method that uncovers truth? And why are science and rationality the only gauges of knowledge? "Gadamer, Foucault and Derrida all argue . . . for a plural definition of truth to replace the Enlightenment's unitary definition" (Hekman, 1990, p. 12). Reason has its place within specificity. And truth? Foucault (quoted in Fontana, 1988/1984) says, "I believe too much in truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of speaking the truth" (p. 50).

Another concern is that there is no place for politics in poststructuralism. This objection derives, I believe, from the poststructural critique of both language and the subject in humanism. A response to the language objection -- if all is created through
language then politics is impossible -- might be, after revising that statement to read that all is created through language and social practice, that deconstruction interrogates the transparency of language so that we can use language differently to rethink the way we have worded the world and framed our politics. Poststructuralism calls for a more complex politics. "We only know the world and ourselves under a description" and perhaps "we just happened on that description;" it was "not the description which nature evolved us to apply, or that which best unified the manifold of previous descriptions, but just the one which we have now chanced to latch onto" (Rorty, 1986, p. 48). In recognition of the possibility that all is not what we've been led to believe, poststructuralism offers opportunities to investigate other descriptions, which in turn must be submitted to the poststructural critique, by opening up language for redeployment in revitalized political agendas.

Language is a starting point for changing the questions of political conversations and has enormous constitutive power, but the poststructural conversation also engages relations of power in practice. West (in Stephanson, 1988) points out that language is inseparable from practice and that all relations are shot through with power. He reminds us that "Gramsci's notion of hegemony is an attempt to keep track of these operative levels of power, so one does not fall into the trap of thinking that class relations somehow can be understood through linguistic models; so one does not fall into the trap of thinking that state repression that scars human bodies can be understood in terms of linguistic models. Power operates very differently in nondiscursive than in discursive ways" (West, In Stephanson, 1988, p. 271). Understanding the constitutive nature of language is an important goal of the poststructural critique which does not, however, ignore practice.

Critics of poststructuralism believe that it has destroyed the subject. Derrida (1970) responds "The subject is absolutely indispensable. I don't destroy the subject; I
situate it . . . It is a question of knowing where it comes from and how it functions” (p. 271). The non-essential subject of poststructuralism is of particular concern to feminists and other marginal subjects who work within the discourse and practices of humanism. Many of these feminists believe that in order to represent the interests of women, they must place gender at the center of their politics. Hartsock (1990) asks the question for these groups, "Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic" (p. 163)? Fuss (1989) explains that "essentialism is classically defined as a belief in true essence -- that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing . . . In feminist theory, essentialism articulates itself in appeals to a pure or original femininity, a female essence, outside the boundaries of the social and thereby untainted (though perhaps repressed) by a patriarchal order" (p. 2). Some feminists and other oppressed groups base their politics on their definition of the essence of their difference.

Liberal feminism, which defines itself through the essence of gender, has been challenged by feminists who believe that other aspects of their identities, such as race, class, sexual orientation, age, wellness, and that "illimitable et cetera" (Butler, 1990, p. 143) have a great impact on their lives as well and prefer to develop both identity and political strategies based on the intersection of these identity categories rather than on gender alone. Some women feel that they have been erased from feminism because their identity papers did not meet the standards of other feminists. "The nets of identity politics can become too tight as rigorous tests are administered to determine if a member truly belongs with the special identity of a group" (Wicke, 1992, p. 31). Even intersections of identity become "stingy subject positions" (Britzman, 1993, p. 11), categories of oppression, as privilege becomes more and more subtle. Patai and
Koertge (1994) point out that "Feminists regularly get themselves tied in knots dealing with such questions. In order to resolve them, it seems that one should have a clear hierarchy of oppressions so that the most oppressed always gets the nod" (p. 75). Poststructuralism offers a way out of this very serious political problem.

Butler (1992) explains that "the critique of the subject is not a negation or repudiation of the subject, but, rather, a way of interrogating its construction as a pregiven or foundationalist premise" (p. 9). Hooks (1990), in support of this view, says, "There is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black 'essence' and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the experience of exile and struggle" (p. 29). If identity categories such as gender and race are seen as "regulatory regimes" (Butler, 1993, p. 18) produced through the effects of power that "works through the foreclosure of effects, the production of an 'outside,' a domain of unlivability and unintelligibility that bounds the domain of intelligible effects" (Butler, 1993, p. 22), then such categories need to be critiqued, interrogated, and disrupted. The word "woman" is not lost to politics but is too dense to be described by a simple string of referents. Spivak (1993) has even reconsidered her use of a strategic essentialism. She explains that she is not sure that people really understand that the word "strategic" in strategic essentialism implies the "unavoidable usefulness of something that is dangerous" (Spivak, 1993, p. 5). Even a strategic essentialism must be deployed with great care, since everything is political and everything is dangerous. Thus, the poststructural critique which pushes against the essential limits of essential categories is a very political practice.

Accompanying the essentialism debate is the debate concerning the place of the body in poststructuralism. Some feminists feel that the body has been lost in poststructuralism's concern with discourse and language. In response, it should be noted that throughout his work, Foucault (1973/1963, 1977/1975, 1985/1984), at any
rate, looked at the way bodies were constituted and constrained by practice as well as by discourse. Butler (1993) has recently problematized the matter of bodies by doubling the ante once more and calling into question the idea that matter is, in fact, prior to discourse. She warns that "to invoke matter [the body] is to invoke a sedimented history of sexual hierarchy and sexual erasures which should be the object of feminist inquiry, not a ground of feminist theory" (p. 49). By basing our politics on self-evident and received notions of bodies which may have been violently constituted, we "run the risk of reproducing the very injury for which we seek redress" (Butler, 1993, p. 54). It is important to free the body from the mind/body binary of humanism and see the body as a "surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed; it is a linguistic construction that capitalizes on energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous, and unconscious nature" (Braidotti, 1994, p. 169). The poststructural focus on language attempts to dislodge bodies as well as ideas. The poststructural critique would strategically employ an analysis of both language and practice to examine the construction of bodies.

Poststructural feminists are concerned about accepting any of the essential categories of humanism as political points of departure, whether they be gender, race, sexuality, or the female body itself. All have been constituted by language and social practice and all must be interrogated. Butler's (1992) comments on the debate about the necessity of an essential subject for feminist politics is as follows:

I would argue that any effort to give universal or specific content to the category of women, presuming that that guarantee of solidarity is required in advance, will necessarily produce factionalization, and that "identity" as a point of departure can never hold the solidifying ground of a feminist political movement. Identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary. This is not to say that the term "women" ought not to be used, or that we ought to announce the death of the category. . . . I would argue that the rifts among women over the content of the
term ought to be safeguarded and prized, indeed, that this constant rifting ought to be affirmed as the ungrounded ground of feminist theory (p. 16).

Butler wishes to keep the signifier "woman" in deconstructive play.

In conclusion, Flax (1990b) reminds us that "the philosophy postmodernists seek to displace is a fiction, chosen (in some sense) as a maximally effective rhetorical device" (p. 195). All political narratives must be interrogated in light of the effects they produce and the play that is possible in their plot lines. The role of the poststructural critic in politics is "rather a constant 'civil disobedience' within our constituted experience" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 6). Deleuze (1988/1986) comments on the ongoing political constitution of the subject in relation to power as follows:

What is our light and what is our language, that is to say, our "truth" today? What powers must we confront, and what is our capacity for resistance, today when we can no longer be content to say that old struggles are no longer worth anything? And do we not perhaps above all bear witness to and even participate in the "production of a new subjectivity"? Do not the changes in capitalism find an unexpected "encounter" in the slow emergence of a new Self as a centre of resistance? Each time there is a social change [in Capitalism], is there not a movement of subjective reconversion, with its ambiguities but also its potential? These questions may be considered more important than a reference to man's universal rights, including in the realm of pure law (p. 115)

Along the same lines, Foucault (quoted in Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984) explains that there is always resistance to power and force; the "problem is in fact to find out where resistance is going to organize" (p. 12).

Rather than embrace totalities and essences in which all is violently constrained by the will to truth, the poststructural critique might help us engage specific issues on a case-by-case basis in order to examine "new modes of subjectivation, which tend to have no identity. This is the present triple root of the questions: What can I do, What do I know, What am I?" (Deleuze, 1988/1986, p. 115).
In poststructuralism, we are always working with a limited sample "because of one's own inclinations and capacities to learn enough to take a larger sample" (Spivak, 1993, p. 19). In addition to evoking a certain "pessimistic activism" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 343) and "an audacious sense of hope" (West, 1995), poststructuralism also produces a certain humility which accompanies our political struggle to escape the distorting, constraining, powerful, and pervasive fictions of liberal humanism even as we work within it confines. In this struggle, the suggestion that philosophy should matter to non-philosophers becomes an imperative.

Summary

This partial and limited review of language, knowledge, and the subject in poststructuralism, along with a rather sweeping response to the sweeping objections to poststructuralism can only begin to address the complexity of analyses and theories and images and figurations that are being imagined outside the limits of humanism in order to provide different ways of thinking about being in the world. As I have stated throughout this review, once one has begun to interrogate humanism as simply an alternative narrative which has failed to explain existence for many, many people, one must move on to imagine, interrogate and produce other strategies. Rather than closure, one finds an ongoing job of work.

In this endeavor one must be suspicious of the transparency of language, of the truth of knowledge claims, and of a conscious, ahistorical, rational, knowing, and autonomous subject. These words burdened with simple humanist values must be made complex in order to function in nuanced evocations of complex subjectivity and knowledge. And, of course, as Sawicki (1991) reminds us, as poststructuralist discourses "become increasingly legitimate," we must be willing to move "beyond them insofar as they become constraining, disabling, or compromising" (p. 7). Once
we learn the lesson of persistent critique, we must, of course, critique our fondest attachments, what we cannot imagine doing without.

The Case at Hand

Introduction

The poststructural critique of language, knowledge, and subjectivity provides the frame for the "discrete problematization" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 99) which this research topic addresses: an examination of the technologies of the self employed by one group of older white southern women in their ethical self-formation.

There is a long, long accumulation of words and stories and essays and research and bodies of literature -- justifications, normalizations, simple syntheses, authoritative codings -- that overlook or belittle older women. Researchers, particularly feminists as they grow older themselves, have begun to interrogate this category, to try to displace it in order to enable an irruption of difference. As I have said before, older women are on the wrong side of too many humanist binaries and are too close to death to warrant much attention. Many of us, however, will be inserted into this disciplined and regulated category, perhaps for quite a while, before we die.

The category of older white southern women is burdened with additional stigmas: the image of the southern belle, the plantation mistress, the slaveowner, the wife of a lynchcr, and so forth. Fighting our way through these received and self-evident labels requires an intense and complex analysis, and the literature that addresses this category is only beginning to make use of deconstructive methods.

For the purpose of this study, I examined this literature in order to learn what arts of existence older white southern women employ to form a self which can negotiate marriage, children, a career, the death of loved ones, sickness, codes, codes, and more codes. I was interested in learning what traces of identity improvisation
have been studied and reported in the literature using the poststructural critique. I found, however, no study of older white southern women that engages this issue to any degree. Research does exist in two separate areas, research on older women and research on southern women, and the following survey provides a broad overview of the work in these fields.

Research about Older Women

Rodeheaver and Stohs (1991) sum up a common view of older women in our society when they say that women are born into one socially devalued group, that of the female, and then age into another, that of the old person (p. 142). Cool and McCabe (1983) found conflicting attitudes about older women. Some people believe that once women have lost their ability to bear children, they are no longer valuable and have no authority. On the other hand, others believe old age is the great leveler of sex-role differences and believe older women become dominant in the family. Coyle's (1989) work points out that women are more penalized by age than men, since their value is often based on their physical attractiveness. Thus, "Society's image of the older woman, as well as her own self-image, often presents the older woman as socially devalued, sick, sexless, uninvolved and alone" (Coyle, 1989, p. xviii). Harrison (1991) takes a Marxist position and blames our materialist society for devaluing all those who don't earn money. She points out that women's production processes -- having children, keeping house, etc. -- are not valued as real labor. She also found that older women are often associated with death, since they are the ones who have historically been responsible for caring for the dying and preparing the body for burial.

Harrison (1991) explains that patriarchal bias and ageism contribute to the invisibility of the older woman in our society and are reflected in research practices.
Research on older women is scarce, as is research on women at any age, since the male is considered the norm in our society and the female, the deviant or the Other. Lopata's (1979) major study of widows looked at a variety of issues in their lives, including education. She found that "There are definite and positive associations between the number of years of a woman's schooling and her social integration in widowhood, as measured by membership in voluntary associations, participation in social activities and the number and involvement of friends in the support system" (p. 289). Widows who had the least education tended not to seek support outside the home. Ten years after Lopata's study, a survey of 178 women by Metha, Kinnier, and McWhirter (1989) found that their subjects' chief regrets in life were missed educational opportunities. The least satisfied women regretted that they had not worked harder on their education and that they had not taken more risks in their lives. O'Brien (1991) has recently studied never-married older women and found that they often achieved the highest education possible in their communities. Some reported that they regretted having no children, though they felt that having to give up their independence would not have been worth it. A final study by Schiamberg, Chin and Spell (1984) which looked at education as a variable in older women's life satisfaction found that "a lack of formal schooling for many widows has obvious implications for their employability, income level, and, to some extent, their overall adaptation" (p. 6). In these studies, education is an important contributor to well-being in older women.

Bearon's (1989) research found that among the things that matter to older women are material well-being, family life, and health. Older women strive to maintain the status quo in the face of often declining material well-being and health. In separate studies, Kivett (1990), as well as Lamberts and Robin (1982), found that women benefit most from a network of friendships. Kivett (1990) found that rural women in general report high levels of optimism and life satisfaction, chiefly because
of close friendships maintained over a long period of time. Fengler and Danigelis (1982) also found that elderly widows who live in rural areas perceive their condition in all areas in a more positive manner than those who live in urban areas. They speculate that friendship relations, the sense of community in small towns, and less fear of crime may affect these widows' perceptions. In their research, Wagnild and Young (1988) identified five dimensions of hardiness among elderly women: equanimity, self-efficacy, perseverance, meaningfulness, and existential aloneness. The participants in this study said that continuing to be involved with friends, family, work, and other activities after the loss of a husband is critical. Spiritual faith and the acceptance that loss is a part of life are also important. In a recent study, O'Bryant (1991) found that our society's emphasis on independence may do older women more harm than good, since they are expected to remain independent for as long as possible when support might contribute to their well-being. It appears that friendships, material security, family relationships, and living in a rural area contribute to satisfaction in older women's lives.

A study by Rae (1990) found that, since the identities of the older women she studied were generally tied to the informal relationships and social networks of the private sphere rather than to formal public roles, they were able to maintain their identities with age. Most were very clear about who they were and did not think of themselves as old except in certain circumstances -- when they were sick or around young people who made them feel old or when a loved one died, for example. They seemed to avoid identity crises, maintaining continuity within discontinuity as they grew older, by "building their identities, not on precarious formal roles and statuses, but around meaningful relationships to others within the interpersonal world" (Rae, 1990, p. 265).
Labouvie-Vief (1994) reports that older women tend to reclaim the creativity they surrendered earlier in life to the demands of family and career and to other restrictions of sex-roles (p. 160). Gutmann (1987) argues that there seems to be a pattern of movement from a narrow existence to an engagement with the larger world as women age. The success of this engagement depends on many factors, not the least of which is the dominance of the cultural patterns in which women live. "The degree to which a woman can move to creative freedom and to wisdom in late life hinges on her ability to change the narrative pattern on which her life is based" (Labouvie-Vief, 1994, p. 165).

In this research, the single study that focuses on older women's identities, that by Rae (1990), approaches identity from a humanist point of view in that it equates identity with role. The concept of role assumes that there is a stable identity that takes on a role. Poststructuralism does not posit a stable, essential self but an identity that is constructed through discourse and social practice. Thus, none of these studies of older women directly address the topic of this inquiry. Rae's (1990) study, however, is informative in that it recognizes that identity is created in relations.

**Research about Southern Women.**

A body of literature focusing on Southern women is emerging at the same time that the complexity of identity politics is being addressed by feminists. Women of the South are a prime group to study if one is interested in looking at the intersection of race, class, and gender as well as other identity categories. If women's subjectivities are indeed historical, the women of the South share the complexities of the identity politics that have influenced that region for several centuries. Here, Black and white women have lived together under the domination of a patriarchal culture in uneasy tension for several centuries; moreover, resistance to that culture's discourses, to men,
and to each other is evident in their history. Men have been the public authors of the culture, and only after the second wave of the women's movement in the early 1970's did women begin to write about southern women. Much of that early literature is historical in nature; and feminist historians continue to recover the lives and words of southern women from personal documents, letters, diaries, records of Women's Clubs, plantation records, interviews, and so on. A vigorous attempt at revisioning the history of the South to include its women is in progress.

Scott's (1970) early work, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930 was one of the first books in the new wave of scholarship to examine the southern woman. In her book, she disrupts the myth of the southern lady, keeping in mind that "The social role of women was unusually confining there, and the sanctions used to enforce obedience peculiarly effective" (Scott, 1970, p. xi). She believes that efforts to free themselves from cultural expectations were particularly difficult for southern women. Focusing on those privileged white women who left a historical mark, she searches for their attempts at self-determination in a culture that silenced them by putting them on a pedestal.

Prior to Scott's (1970) book, which began a new wave of scholarship, were two autobiographical works, Newman's (1980/1926) The Hard-Boiled Virgin and Lumpkin's (1974/1946) The Making of a Southerner. Privileged white women are the subjects of both books. In addition to these two early works which focused on individuals were two classics published in the late 1930's which Scott (1984) mentions, Spruill's (1972/1938) Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies and Johnson's (1937) Antebellum North Carolina. Scott (1984) says "The woman who emerges from Spruill's and Johnson's pages is a hard-working farm wife or plantation mistress, one who could, if occasion demanded, help to clear land, contrive ways of bringing in some cash to the family economy, raise a garden and chickens, manage a
dairy, help an artisan husband in his shop, or run an inn, a tavern, a newspaper, or even a ferry" (p. 247). Another text that existed in the 1970's is Hagood's (1977/1939) Mothers of the South: Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman, which is about poor, rural southern women. Hagood (1977/1939) says "As a group for a unit of study in the broad research program on all the resources and wastes of the South, the tenant farm mothers embody many of the causes, processes, and effects of the general regional problems of an exploiting agriculture, overpopulation, general cultural retardation, chronological and technological lag" (p. 4).

In 1949 Smith published Killers of the Dream, which describes her culture's socialization process that normalizes and regulates race and sexuality. Two later sociohistorical works that describe southern women through the 1940's are Clinton's (1982) The Plantation Mistress and Abbott's (1983) Womenfolks: Growing Up Down South. Clinton (1982) points out that women's studies has traditionally focused on northern women, and she, among others, intends to challenge the "New Englandization" of women's studies" (p. xv). Her comprehensive study of the lives of 750 women of the planter class "offers us some notion of the average life of the anteellum plantation mistress, as well as information on the women who did not fit the model -- the fallen women, the laudanum addicts, and the invalids" (p. xvi). Abbott's (1983) work, on the other hand, offers a personal reflection on her own southernness that engages the literature as well and deals with issues such as religion, country people, servants, and the importance of dissimulation for the southern belle.

In 1979 Hall's Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching was published and was then released in a revised edition in 1993. Hall (1993/1979) examines Ames' life as well as her leadership of a group of southern white women who "proposed to use the moral and social leverage of organized women to prevent lynchings in the rural and small-town South" (p. 159).
The activists themselves were "an absolutely inaccessible sexual property, white women [who were] the most potent symbol of white male supremacy" (Hall, 1993/1979, p. 155). Hall (1993/1979) describes the perversity of the position of southern women as follows:

The inability of black men to protect their women from sexual assault and the threat of death by lynching against black men who had sexual relations with white women were complementary aspects of a system of repression... The illicit relationships between white men and black women could never be openly acknowledged. White women had to be compensated, "the revolting suspicion in the male that he might be slipping into bestiality got rid of, by glorifying her" (p. 156).

Hall's (1993/1979), Clinton's (1982), and Abbott's (1983) work ushered in a new wave of scholarship on southern women. Much of this material continues to have a historical focus, though some work is beginning to examine issues that affect modern women. The next several texts by Scott (1984), Blesser (1991), Bernhard et al. (1992), Tucker (1988), and Fox-Genovese (1988) fall in the historical category.

In 1984, Scott published Making the Invisible Woman Visible, a general social history of women that also focuses on the construction of the southern woman. Scott (1993) continued her task of recovering the scholarly work of southern women by editing Unheard Voices: The First Historians of Southern Women, a collection of early historical writings never before published.

Blesser (1991) edits a collection of essays that examines the complex role of the family in the South in In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900, which stresses the importance of kin in southern relations.

A collection of essays titled Southern Women: Histories and Identities edited by Bernhard et al. (1992), examines how southern women's identities have been fashioned by their communities. The authors point out that the myth of the southern
lady was chiefly subscribed to by "southern men of all classes and races" and upheld by "southern churches, customs and laws" (Bernhard et al., 1992, p. 3). Most of the narratives that exist are those of privileged white southern women, since black slave and poor white women had no time or education for a frill such as writing. The authors of these essays examine how southern women have reconstructed their identities on the basis of a "reinterpretation of their separate and common histories" (Bernhard et al., 1992, p. 5). They point out that the "legacy of slavery and a distinct form of racism bind southern women together in what Hall calls an 'explosive intimacy' even as it divides them by an intimate antagonism" (Bernhard et al., 1992, p. 10).

Two books which examine the relationships between Black and white women are Tucker's (1988) *Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South* and Fox-Genovese's (1988) *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*. Tucker's (1988) book, based on ninety-two oral histories gathered over a period of five years, presents a picture of the relationship between Black domestics and the white women who employed them. Tucker (1988) emphasizes the importance of the inherited discourses of the women with whom she talked, a knowledge base that "shaped their understanding of life" and "consisted of accounts of self and the other -- the other, more often than not, being defined by race" (p. 2). Fox-Genovese (1988) looks at the lives of both Black and white women on the plantation, at their jobs, their families, their relations, and the gender conventions that constructed them.

Two books highlight the conflicts and inconsistencies that fueled the women's suffrage movement in the South. That southern women's limited autonomy stalled the southern reform movement in the late nineteenth century is the topic of Friedman's (1985) *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South*. 
1930-1900. The southern woman's network of relations typically centered on kin rather than on class, and this pattern was upheld by the discipline of the southern church. Without regular forums for discussion outside the church, southern women found it difficult to organize until the traditional rural culture was disrupted by technology. In her book, New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States, Wheeler (1993) says that "these Southern women were at once devotees of the South and rebels against it, that they were proud to be both 'Southern Ladies' and 'New Women,' adds to the fascination of the story" (p. xiii). The leaders of the suffrage movement in the South were often members of the social and political elite and, because of their status, were not as easily dismissed as some of the less privileged suffragettes of the North.

Dillman (1988) edits Southern Women, a collection of essays, some of which report research results, that address historical and modern-day issues of interest to both Black and white southern women. Included in several of the essays are engaging discussions of the methodological problems that arise in studying southern women.

A collection of essays written from an anthropological point of view and edited by Matthews (1989) is Women in the South: An Anthropological Perspective. These essays address the questions: "To what extent, then, do the seemingly outmoded ideas of southerners toward gender still hold in today's world? And more importantly, to what extent does a belief in a unique southern identity affect the kinds of relationships, roles, and activities assumed by women in the South" (p. 3)?

The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education edited by Fraser et al. (1985) includes several essays that focus on the history of women's education in the South. One essay examines the role of southern women in the progressive movement in educational reform and points out that, in order to pursue
independence through education while appearing non-threatening to males, many 
women studied home economics.

Quite a bit of literature has been published which deals with women during the 
Civil War, and that literature will not be reviewed here.

In summary, I have found no studies of older white southern women which use 
a poststructural analyses in examining subjectivity, though there must be some 
undiscovered, unpublished, or in process. Interestingly, Hall (1993/1979) wrote a new 
introduction to her book on Jessie Daniel Ames and revisited her text in the light of 
poststructural thought about language and representation. Acknowledging the 
intersection of race and gender in her work, she says that in all areas of study, scholars 
are attempting to "recognize and celebrate the differences that situate individuals in 
particular cultures" (Hall, 1993/1979, p. xxxv). Viewing the effectiveness of identity 
politics as limited, Hall (1993/1979) neatly sums up some of the issues as follows:

To be sure, we cannot remake ourselves each morning; we 
cannot opt out of the matrix of privilege or oppression into 
which we are born. At the same time, we are always coming 
into being; we become who we are in dialogue, in interaction 
with the world. The challenge and the anxiety of this intellectual 
moment lie precisely in the tension between these two realities. 
In practice we are learning to adopt what some have called 
"strategic identities" -- identities that "allow opposition to one 
form of domination without being complicit in another (p. xxxv).

Southern women, shaped by the particular conventions and culture of their 
region, have been much influenced by the historical discourses of the South, including 
race, slavery, the myth of the southern lady, patriarchy, lynching, war, and so on. And 
as Hall (1993/1979) argues, southern women, like women everywhere, find the 
politics of identity increasingly insubstantial and ineffective.
Summary

In addition to reviewing literature specific to the case at hand, older white southern women in a small rural community, this literature review has surveyed some of the theory that describes the poststructural critique of language, the subject, and knowledge which frames that singularity. The poststructural understanding of the subject and the subject’s relation to knowledge which has been enabled through the deconstruction of humanist language and described in this review will be employed in the analysis of data gathered and represented during the ongoing process of this research project.

In this study, subjectivity or self-formation is understood to include at least two variations: the constitution of the self as the ethical subject of one’s actions by employing technologies of the self which are available within the culture and the constitution of the self in de-identification through the ongoing critique of that subjectivity.

Knowledge is understood to produce the subject as well as to be produced by the subject. Of interest will be what the participants of the study count as knowledge, how they believe this knowledge has been produced, and what effects it has had on their subjectivities, i.e., what experiences have been made possible.

Poststructuralism is skeptical of a pure analysis or a pure theory and encourages a complex engagement with the topic under consideration. Thus, in addition to analyzing the topic using poststructural critiques of the subject and knowledge, this author will employ an ethnographic analysis. To this end, a partial and singular representation of the place in which these women have practiced self-formation, an ethnography troubled by the poststructural critique, will be presented. This author will move back into this community for a time, will re-member herself as one of these women, will remember the womanly arts of existence sanctioned by these
very women, arts which she learned from them and which she herself practiced as a child, a girl, a young woman, and which she still practices as a middle-aged woman in order to constitute herself as an ethical subject of her actions, in this case, as researcher in this community. This author will rely on some fancy footwork as she assumes Trinh's (quoted in Ellsworth, 1989) positioning: "She is this Inappropriate/d Other who moves about with always at least two/four gestures: That of affirming 'I am like you' while pointing insistently to the difference; and that of reminding 'I am different' while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at" (p. 321). Distance and objectivity cannot be guarantors of truth in poststructural representation. We will have to go to this community perched in the middle of the sunny tobacco fields of the Piedmont together, observe the women's everyday lives as they care for themselves, as they care for others, as their forces fold upon their community in resistance and engagement. We will have to see what we can make of the task of making sense of their lives.

And I hope you will pay attention to the writing, since this inquiry takes place not only in the field of Essex County but also in the field of these pages. If I am lucky, I will be able to bring to bear on these women, who deserve our most rigorous and careful efforts, a sense of the capricious and consistent forces in their lives as I write those lives. I suggest, therefore, that we invoke a concentration quick with energy, a delight in the ruin of clarity, and a trim eloquence fitting to the cadence of this lovely southern abyss as we move into the joy of leggy writing days.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY IN THE FOLD

Everywhere the subject swirls in the midst of forces they exert stress that defines the individual body, its elasticity, and its bending motions in volumes that produce movement in and of extension. The subject lives and reinacts its own embryonic development as a play of folds . . . rather than as a battleground pitting the self against the world.

Conley, 1993, p. xvii

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infinity of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field -- that is, language and a finite language -- excludes totalization. The field is in fact that of freeplay, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble. This field permits these infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and founds the freeplay of substitutions.

Derrida, 1970, p. 260

Fieldwork -- A Visit to Essex County

Here are some poststructural questions to consider -- what restrictions has thought imposed on itself in advance of this chapter? What have I pruned away.

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suspended? What has receded into the future? What has been forgotten, hidden by a pleat in time-space? Can I forget enough to think differently? To wit, where am I now in this dissertation?

Well, I have been fairly docile so far, haven't I? I have followed the proper format, led you through about a hundred odd pages of others' words, set you up so that you will be prepared for oddity, unpredictability, confusion, randomness, accidents, incoherence -- more asides -- and I suppose you are still reading this, hoping, perhaps, that it might yet become a good read. So far, it all seems pretty tame. What are you thinking? What are you expecting now in Chapter III?

To tell you the truth, I find I am missing the women of Essex County whose subjectivities prompted this study. They seem like the Little Red Hen in Scieszka & Smith's (1992) The Stinky Cheese Man & Other Fairly Stupid Tales who keeps trying to get in the story but appears on only three pages. The Hen finally asks in frustration "Now do I get to tell my story" (Scieszka & Smith, 1992, no page number)? The Essex County women appeared early on in a dream and then they were lost in the citationality of Chapter II -- shunted aside as if they could appear again only after they had been propped up by pillars of legitimacy. And they still can't take the stage; now they have to wait for the methodology to be established. Even though poststructuralism doubts that methodology can guarantee the truth, I can play the methodological game, just as I played the citational game -- all these games of truth required by the dissertation that stall the action. I'll get to that methodology soon enough.

In the meantime, I've decided to throw off linearity in good poststructural fashion in order to check in with my research site, to see what's going on in Milton today, to collect more data, if you will. Milton is the town in which I grew up, the largest of several small towns in Essex County, and the county seat. A few minutes
ago I called my mother who, since this is the third Sunday of March, will be teaching the Sunday School lesson this morning in the senior adult class at the Milton Baptist Church -- an elegant, traditional, 150-year old brick house of worship with a soaring white steeple which stands on the downtown corner of Main and High Streets across from the boring, flat, modern U.S. Post Office and the fairly new and more inviting public library. My mother and I had a bit of a chat about what's up for the day, then I wrote the beginning of Chapter III, and right about now she's parking her new Buick across the street from the church, carrying her Bible and Sunday School Book and her study notes with her as she greets friends and family on the sidewalk in front of the lovely old building.

She's been up early, as have many of her friends, some of the participants in this study. They have read one or both of the morning papers from the nearby state capital and another large town, have had a bite of breakfast, have put on their walking shoes and burned up the pavement of their neighborhood streets in an effort to stave off all those ailments that will get them sooner or later. They have bathed and showered and powdered and put on their spring suits (my mother is wearing her pink suit today), dressing for a gorgeous, promising spring day in Essex County. I expect these women lingered over their collection of spring Sunday clothes this morning as they pulled them to the front of their guestroom closets, thinking about what they might wear on Easter Sunday, wondering whether they could make do with what they have or whether they need a new suit, a new blouse, new pumps, or perhaps just some new earrings.

Now at the church, they slowly move from the front sidewalk around the corner to the side entrance and walk down the basement steps to their Sunday School classroom. Along the way, they pause to share information about friends and family -- who has died during the week, who is sick, who is on vacation, whose daughter or son
is visiting from out of town. After a time, they enter the neatly arranged and freshly painted bright basement room and take their seats in the circle of about thirty gray metal foldup chairs that faces the teacher's little desk. They settle down and pray together. There are some announcements about missions and the lunch the youth of the church are serving after the church service today to make money for a retreat. They pass cards around for all to sign to send to those who need a cheery note of remembrance -- those in sorrow, the shut-ins, those devastated by life. Mother begins the lesson and carefully explains the context of this tiny portion of the Lord's word which they study today. Sometimes she has to sidestep the lesson if she doesn't agree with the Southern Baptist party line it legitimates. When that happens, she says nothing about her conflict but finds an informative and less polemical tangent to pursue.

When I am home, I go with her to Sunday School and sit there with the women who taught me how to be a woman and watch them and see myself. Before or after the lesson, several of them will whisper in my ear, so as not to hurt the other teachers' feelings, that mother is the best Sunday School teacher they have ever had. They say they make a point of being there on the third Sunday of the month in order to hear her teach.

After Sunday School, they stop at the restroom to freshen their powder and lipstick, to touch up their hair, and then walk up the basement steps and into the sanctuary. Since everyone sits in the same pew each Sunday, it's easy to see who's missing. Folks take note of who's absent and worry about those known to be fragile. The choir sings, everyone prays, the Deacons pass the gold collection plates, the little children are asked to come to the front of the church to hear the Children's Sermon, everyone sings a hymn, the adults get their sermon, and after more prayer, they all stand to sing the Doxology: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him
all creatures here below." Praising the Lord on such a spring Sunday morning as the
sun shines through the beautiful stained glass windows, its rays bouncing off the
robust chords of this powerful and joyous hymn, seems fitting. All is well.
Generations of my family and other Milton families have risen from these same pews
at 11:55 on hundreds of Sunday mornings to sing this song praising the Lord for his
blessings as they share their lives in this ritual of celebration and thanks. More
greetings are given with contented smiles as the congregation leisurely walks down
the aisles and shakes hands with the preacher at the front door who ushers them
outside into the sunshine. They pause on the portico and check to see who's going
where for lunch, who might need a ride to the Milton Inn where they usually
congregate after church.

Today, however, mother and most of her Sunday School class will go back to
the church basement to eat the lunch the youth have prepared. They will be joined by
a few husbands perhaps -- those who are still alive -- as well as by some of their
Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal widow friends, more of my participants, with
whom they usually eat lunch at the Inn. These women join them since they prefer not
to disrupt their routines too much and count on seeing each other at particular times
each week.

Some families in Milton still have large Sunday dinners at home after church
(dinner is at noon and supper is in the evening); however, many of these women are
widows and have necessarily established routines different from those they practiced
as young women with families at home.

On most Sundays a group of these women gather at the Milton Inn and sit at
the large round table in the far corner of the dining room by the windows which they
reserve ahead of time, though only strangers from out of town would be so rude as to
take that table. The widows sit there. The Inn serves a buffet lunch which always
includes fried chicken, and perhaps baked fish, beef roast, fried pork chops, a variety of overcooked vegetables -- snap beans cooked in fatback, tiny buttered boiled potatoes, collard or turnip greens, sliced carrots, succotash, sweet potato casserole with raisins and marshmallows on top -- rolls, and maybe cornbread. The salad bar is a fairly new addition, and the dessert bar always offers homemade banana pudding heaped with golden puffy meringue. This is the favorite place in town to eat, just about the only place to eat, and these women have been loyal through many changes of management which introduced strange food, bad food, and food that was too expensive. The waitresses know them well and bring their sweetened iced tea or black coffee without being asked. Coming to lunch here on Sundays is a common practice, as is commenting on the quality and quantity of the food, pointing out who was well enough to come to lunch today even if she couldn't get a ride to church, making plans for the week, asking a friend if she would mind riding with you to the neighboring town for your doctor's appointment or to the airport 45 miles away to pick up your daughter who doesn't come home often enough. This is where business is done, information is disseminated, and lives are organized. If someone is expected for lunch but is absent, she will receive several phone calls later in the day -- "Just checking to see if you're all right. We missed you at lunch."

After lunch, they will probably go home to change clothes and take a nap and have a quiet afternoon. Many will watch the NCAA basketball tournament today, since the universities in the neighboring towns have exceptional teams and encourage intense rivalries. Or, they might take advantage of being so spiffed up and go visiting, dropping in on family, stopping to take a little something to a shut-in, or visiting someone in the hospital. Sunday is a day of rest, and most of these women will not work, though the gardeners might unobtrusively pull a few weeds from their azaleas.
Essex County is still there, in spite of Chapter II, and my participants practice care of the self even as I write and you read. This story has no beginning but has always been, and I slip into it over and over again in different places, and it is as if I too have always been there.

Introduction

The named and legitimate frame for this research project is the poststructural critique informed by feminism, a combination which in itself produces troubling and unresolved conflict. If one adds to that theoretical tension the transgression of practice and questions the self-evidence of each, the research project escapes its description. This study has evolved, has emerged, has shifted, has been redefined and reimagined, has been squashed by various restrictions, has ballooned into new spaces, and continues to seethe and erupt into possibilities beyond the limits of the time and space allotted to this dissertation. The entropy of the time-space compression of this system, which is called a research project, has dispersed any coherency it assumed before it began.

"The outside is not another site, but rather an off-site that erodes and dissolves all other sites . . . Like the structure of supplementarity whose logic it follows, the outside is never exhausted; every attempt to capture it generates an excess or supplement, which in turn feeds anew the flows of deterritorialization and releases new lines of flight” (Boundas, 1994, pp. 114-115). Essex County and the women of this study represent an off-site, an outside, a force that folds upon itself and doubles, producing a dazzling, dizzying subject, a line of flight which is beyond the reach of the catch-all term "ethnography." This subject is cranked up into a transition running around and ahead of methodology.
This project has transgressed its legitimate bounds into the realm of the
unnamed, and the requirement of this format to represent a clear, linear process of
research which can be judged as worthy becomes violent, coercive, and distortive.
Even though I have journaled ceaselessly during this research process, I can hardly
remember what I thought on many working days or why I woke up one morning
knowing I must next do this or that. This text appears to represent the real, but this
inscription is a simulacrum, today's story, and the following attempt to unfold the
methodological processes of this project is limited and partial and a bit absurd, like all
attempts to capture the real.

In the end, you must take me at my word, and whether and how you do that is
undoubtedly beyond my control. I will give it my best, since I care immeasurably for
the women of this study. I find my own validity when I write and cry and then write
some more. As the bones of my soul break ground for my intellect, I push through
into spaces of understanding I did not particularly want to occupy. Why do the tears
come? My posture as academic researcher and writer is jolted and deflated and
displaced by connections and thoughts and folds erased from awareness until they are
worded. As I write and theorize the lives of my participants, I theorize my own as Fay
(1987) says we must. The outside folds inside and I am formed anew.

My writing disturbs the fear which skulks among my own identity relays and
flushes my attachments which furtively dodge analytical attention. In the thinking that
writing produces, I wobble in the move Trinh (1989) describes between other and not
other; I am provoked into Butler's (1995) subversive citation; I am flayed by Spivak's
(1992) wounding process of deidentification. This is deconstruction at its finest, most
caucus and abyssal -- my own displacement and irruption into difference -- self-
formation.
So I write through the tears into a different thinking/writing space. The effects of this writing in the fold, this disruption, this movement, are what I have to offer as truth. I cannot always identify those effects or display them -- "Here, see, this proves my research is valid." -- since some are subtle shifts in tone or word-choice in the writing. Others result in the ability to "look awry" (Zizek, 1991) at data I have already settled into some slot. Some shifts have resulted in rewriting huge chunks of this dissertation in order to change its focus entirely. Whatever the effect, our Sunday visit to Milton prompted a timely divergence into a game of truth.

I will proceed with methodology talk, but the poststructural doubt that method can lead to truth nags and pokes at this dissertation and undermines the very methodology that it demands. So be it. On with the methodology game. It will surely take us somewhere.

This chapter on methodology, which I believe becomes at least strategy in poststructural work, will include a description of the research design of this study and a discussion of the interpretation of data.

Research Design

Overview

This overview describes very briefly the main features of the methodology used in this project; a more detailed description follows. This qualitative research study was designed to gather a variety of data with which to study the arts of existence used in self-formation by a group of older white southern women in a small rural community. The design takes advantage of the fact that I grew up in this community and have prior knowledge about the participants as well as about the community itself.

This study's research questions emerged from Foucault's ethical analysis, care of the self, which focuses on how people respond to the forces of their lives. I was
interested in identifying the practices, borrowed from their culture and invented, with which, in which, my participants have constituted themselves as the ethical subjects of their actions. I wondered whether they had resisted the normalizing discourses of their culture, what experiences their practices had made possible, and finally, what effect their ethos has had on their community.

Essex County, the site of the research, was practically a closed community with an agricultural economy based on tobacco until World War II. Since then, civic leaders have increasingly encouraged economic diversification and have courted industries which have successfully located in the county, bringing outsiders into this very conservative culture. The tobacco economy used slave labor until the Civil War, and at one point the population of the county was half white and half Black. Today, the ratio is about 4.5 to 3. The county retains its rural flavor, even though tobacco farmers worry more and more about the status of their cash crop. Most of my participants have been involved in the tobacco business in one way or the other during their lives.

I selected a sample of 36 women based on the advice of three older women in the community, each of whom meets the qualifications of my participants -- my mother, my aunt, and a friend with whom I had taught school years ago. The initial guidelines for sampling were revised when it appeared that being included in my study might be considered a mark of favor in the community. Therefore, I increased the number of participants to 36 from 7 and extended the range of the age requirement to 59 years old and upward from 65 and upward. The three women continued to be co-researchers during this study.

My 36 participants range in age from 59 - 95. Most have been married, and half are now widows. They generally call themselves middle-class, and most have been employed outside the home as teachers and in various local businesses and are
now retired. About half were born in Essex County. Many of their families have been involved in the tobacco industry in one way or another, and some of the widows have inherited large farms which they now manage. Many of them have taken on more active roles in the community now that they have retired.

Over the course of a summer, I used two methods to collect data in this study, ethnography and the interview. I supplemented a long-term prior ethnography with additional observation, including attendance at club meetings and tours of the county; with historical research using the resources of the county library; and with conversations with local people other than my participants.

My understanding of ethnography has been enhanced by the poststructural literature of space and place in which places are defined as particular articulations of relations. This literature helps in qualifying what some see as the troubling tendency of traditional ethnography to totalize culture and instead encourages focusing on a partial and specific representation. I also collected data by interviewing my participants. Since some of my participants were quite old, I found the literature of oral history to be most helpful as I talked with them, though none of my interviews were as comprehensive as oral histories. I interviewed each participant once using a prepared Interview Guide (Appendix A), and the interviews lasted from about 45 minutes to about 2 hours.

The poststructural frame of this project has required attention to language and representation. Thus, an additional method of inquiry, writing, was used in this study; and I employed the "aside" as a textual space of freplay. Too, the poststructural charge to examine the self-evidence of both theory and practice enabled a rethinking of the traditional way of languaging both the methods used in fieldwork and the data those methods produce.
Data analysis itself was ongoing as data was collected, and the Interview Guide was continually revised during the interview process. Using Foucault’s analysis which focuses on the practices used in self-formation, I analyzed the ethnographic and interview data in search of the practices which my participants have used to constitute themselves as the ethical subjects of their actions.

The remainder of this chapter is a detailed account of the activities this overview summarizes.

**** [Aside: Again, I slip into this story in a different place, this time to tell you another origin story.

I thankfully left my hometown of Milton in 1976, married, and moved to Ohio. My father's death ten years later prompted the renewal of a closer relationship with my mother. As long as my parents had had each other as best friends, I had felt I could more or less leave them be and get on with my own life. When my father died, however, I began going home more often, hoping to fill a tiny portion of the bleak hole in my mother's life. I met her friends, new friends since my father's death as well as old friends rediscovered. I went to lunch and supper with them, went shopping with them, was invited to their homes, and travelled every summer with my mother, her sister, and a dear friend of theirs, widows all. For the time I was in Milton I was once again a Milton girl. I thought I understood what counted for these women, how they went about their lives, what their practices were, since they had taught me those very practices, many of which I still practice both happily and in spite of myself.

I seemed very different from them in many ways, yet very similar. I could not think of them as Other since I was so bound up in them and their
place, yet I had found new practices in other places and theirs/ours now bore examination from my position of difference. I was particularly taken by the world they had created in this small community which, in turn, had created them. That world was inscribed in the patterns of my own life, whether I liked it or not, and I often used it as a standard for judging other worlds, thus setting up my own binaries of self/other and identity/difference.

These women maintained a singular and, in many ways, an admirable ethos crafted from, resistant to, and ambivalent toward a variety of codes which served them well in many ways, and I sensed little overt discontent with their lives. On the other hand, I often felt oppressed in Essex County, squashed flat, stifled, erased, and exotic, and I realized I had always felt that way to some extent.

Life in Essex County is very gendered; and the old, who used to be revered, are more and more taken advantage of. I was angry for my mother's sake and for the sake of these other women who had become my friends when I saw them being treated in a condescending manner because they were female and old. I understood that the small slights foreground a deeper, wounding erasure.

I was also intrigued by my own conflict -- my admiration for these women on the one hand, and my hostility to the effects which some of their practices sustain on the other. There was something to be learned here, and, as I pursued my doctoral studies, I began to be able to theorize what I was feeling and observing. I wanted to study these women. I wanted to try to understand how their subjectivities had been formed. I wanted to learn more about how had they been able to produce such an ethos. What were their practices, what knowledge did they call on as they formed themselves into the
ethical subjects of their actions? I wasn’t sure I understood them after all. This may be how this study began]

**Introduction**

This study of a group of older white southern women is qualitative in nature since my desire was to talk and interact directly with a group of women in Essex County whom the researcher had previously identified as worthy of study. Qualitative methodology uses "face-to-face interactions . . . as the predominant distinctive feature of its inquiry (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. xi) and was thus deemed an appropriate choice for this project. Bogden and Biklen (1992) explain that the data collected through interviews and participant observation, two methods used in this study, are "rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures" (p. 2). Qualitative research, however, privileges no theory, or paradigm, or set of research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3). Qualitative researchers often assume the role of the *bricoleur* and develop a pastiche of methods as the research process unfolds in order to address the complexity of the phenomenon in question (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 3).

Feminist researchers often prefer qualitative methodology since they believe that "we literally cannot see women through traditional science and theory (Dubois, 1983, p. 110). Cook and Fonow (1990) believe that feminist methodology is in the "process of *becoming* and is not yet a fully articulated stance" (p. 71). Thus, feminist researchers often seek to redefine traditional methods and to discover new methods and combinations of methods that suit the goals of feminism as they conduct feminist research. In particular, feminists doubt that the researcher can ever be a "neutral observer standing outside the social realities being studied (Acker et al., 1991, p. 136). Feminism is political and action-oriented, and "the aim of feminist research is
liberation" (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 6) through the transformation of institutions, power relations, and social practices that affect the lives of women.

Poststructuralism, however, as has been discussed earlier, is suspicious of metanarratives that promise liberation, and poststructural feminist researchers work in the tension of this conflict. The poststructural critique is also doubtful that the rational method privileged by science can promise truth, and poststructural researchers instead search for flexible research designs that provide a useful frame which can be adapted as necessary to the complex and changing nature of the case at hand. "The impossibility of science" (Lather, 1993a, p. 676) requires that the stricture, usefulness, and effects of the research design, as well as the researcher's situatedness, be foregrounded and subjected to ongoing critique.

Thus the researcher must beware of becoming too fond of either theory or method and must remain vigilant and critical of desires for the security and comfort of a blueprint that promises validity. As Lather (1993a) insists, "It is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing" (p. 675). Richardson (1991) explains that at the center of the poststructural critique "is doubt that any discourse has a privileged place, any method or theory a universal and general claim to authoritative knowledge" (p. 173). Poststructuralism is concerned with singularity, not generality, and with situated and contextual truths and reason and knowledge.

Both poststructuralism and feminism reject the subject/object, knower/known binaries. The researcher cannot be separated from the research process, since the phenomenon being studied as well as the researcher continue to be constructed as the study proceeds. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explain some of these issues as follows:

There is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective
observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they did and why. No single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience (p. 12).

Both feminist and poststructural researchers find the flexible, creative, interactive, diverse, and interpretive nature of qualitative methodologies useful as method becomes strategy rather than guarantor.

Two traditional methods were chosen initially to investigate issues of knowledge and identity in this group of older white southern women: first, ethnography, informed by the literature of space and place which has emerged from a variety of disciplines including geography and environmental psychology; and second, the interview, informed by an understanding of the life history method. Interviews are often part of ethnographies; however, in this project, the interviews provide a different focus and extend the complexity of the study. Thus, this project, in some sense, is actually two studies, an ethnography and an interview study, each of which informs the other.

Participant observation and document analysis are here considered methods subsumed under ethnography since they were employed in that broader activity. Both ethnography and the interview are commonly used by qualitative researchers; however, both have been problematized in this work by the poststructural critique, and the issues that make them attractive as well as the issues that make them suspect will be discussed directly. An additional method, writing, which I had often touted in a theoretical fashion prior to the writing of this dissertation, became a critical and practical strategy for dealing with the problems posed by ethnography, the interview, and the constraints of the dissertation format itself.
An explanation of how this research project has unfolded includes the following: (1) a restatement of the research questions, (2) a description of the research site, (3) a discussion of the participants, entry, and the time-frame of the study, (3) a description of fieldwork along with a critique of that description, 4) a discussion of validity, and (5) a discussion of the interpretation of data.

**Research Questions**

These questions have been worded a bit differently throughout this paper, since their sense shifts according to the context of the literature in which they appear. They focus, however, on issues of knowledge and identity which emerge within a particular place. My project represents a pastiche of desire which has evolved in a rhizomatic fashion and includes the following aims: to learn what one group of older white southern women counts as knowledge; to learn how they have formed themselves as ethical subjects of their actions using that knowledge as it works within the arts of existence available in their community; and to provide a partial ethnography of that community in order to ascertain which practices their "place makes possible and which it closes off" (Game, 1991, p. 183). These desires point to my political desire to dehisce the violence of the hierarchies that entrap the humanist category "older woman." Whether the women of this study feel the need to be liberated is an issue which will be addressed later.

**Site of Research**

**Introduction**

The people of Essex County are a very placed people who are conscious of and proud of their history. Like most of us, they don't talk about the details of their history that make them uncomfortable. The Essex County Historical Society is a thriving and
active organization which recently published a huge, beautiful volume which includes a history of the county as well as a section devoted to the history of the architecture of the county, including a pictorial inventory of buildings still standing (mostly homes, churches, some commercial buildings, and outbuildings, such as tobacco barns and smokehouses). During the near county-wide effort involved in the research for and the publication of this volume, many of the homes in Essex County were placed on the National Register of Historic Places. I saw plaques marking this distinction as I rang the doorbells of quite a few of my participants' homes, and the above mentioned volume, which has gone through two printings and is due for another, is a coffee table book in many living rooms in the county. I was lucky enough to tour a few of these lovely old homes, some pre-Civil War.

The women of the county who were born there are very conscious of their county's history, partly because kinship, kinship past and present, is such an important factor in their lives as it is in the South in general. As they spoke with me, my participants often made references to historical events and to prominent people, including their own kin, who once lived in the county. As is typical, those who married and moved into the area sometimes know more of its history than those born there.

Poststructuralism stresses the importance of situating the case of hand, of paying attention to its history. The history of Essex County has a great deal to do with the patterns of discourse, the social practices, and the plot lines that are available to women who live there as they practice self-formation. In order to place my participants within a historical context, I provide the following brief tour through the history of Essex County and then describe the county in a general demographic way as it is today.
In preparing this section, I used several sources that I found in the Essex County Room of the public library which contain similar information in order to verify what is considered common knowledge among residents, particularly local historians. I cannot provide citations for these sources since doing so would reveal the name of the county. Thus, I have omitted information that was unique to one source.

After reading these sources and talking with residents about historical matters, I had the impression that the history of the county centered on three issues: tobacco, education, and race. The first two topics are discussed extensively in most writing about Essex County. Race is discussed to some extent, but chiefly from the point of view of whites. Gender and sexual orientation have been erased entirely, and class appears only indirectly. What you will read is a white man's history, the construction that exists and counts for knowledge in the community in which my participants live.

The Land

Essex County lies in the fertile Piedmont Plateau about half a day's drive east of the Blue Ridge, the Great Smoky, the Black and Unaka mountain ranges which make up a portion of the southern Appalachian Mountains and a half a day's drive west of the coastal plain which borders the Atlantic Ocean. The altitude ranges from 175' in the eastern part of the county to 544' in the west.

Numerous creeks and several rivers provide fertile and well-drained soil -- from fine, sandy gray soil to heavy red clay -- that supports a wide variety of crops, notably tobacco, although corn, cotton, wheat, and ordinary truck crops are grown. The climate is mild and pleasant, with long but comfortable summers and short and temperate winters. The annual mean temperature is about 59 degrees Fahrenheit, with an average summer temperature of 77° F and an average winter temperature of 40° F. Rainfall is nearly ideal for plant life at about 48 inches a year. The first killing frost
usually comes about the end of October and the last, during the first week of April; thus, the growing season is ideal, about 200 days long.

A magnificent forest of pines and hardwoods, hickory and oak, covers the county and supports plentiful wildlife. Before the county was settled and land was cleared for farming, large stands of cane and grasses covered the banks of the creeks and streams and the adjoining fertile meadows. Camellias, magnolias, crepe myrtle, azaleas, and rhododendron find the earth sour but sweet, and Essex County might be called a "sweet spot" (Hiss, 1990, xiii).

* * * * [Aside: I expect you don’t know a thing about harvesting tobacco or filling barns, so I want to give you a picture of thousands and thousands of acres of tobacco turning golden in hot summer sun to carry with you as you read this history. Picture a freshly painted white frame country church sitting back a bit from a dirt road on a plot of carefully tended lawn surrounded by fields of ripening tobacco. Picture farmers in those fields with straw hats walking behind mules pulling wooden boxes between the rows. Listen for a farmhouse out of sight, busy with activity as folks wait for slides full of tobacco to be brought to them from the fields. Though much of what I describe here is now accomplished by machine, most of the tobacco produced through the centuries in Essex County has been handled by people. Here’s a tobacco story for you.

On every Milton corner is either a drug store, a bank with a clock, a hardware store, a church, or a tobacco warehouse. Essex County is a tobacco county and Milton is a tobacco town. Folks grow tobacco, sell tobacco, store tobacco, and many people there still smoke, chew, and dip tobacco. I don’t know whether anyone still sniffs tobacco, but I expect they do. Learning to
smoke at an early age was required when I was growing up there, as we were expected to support the local economy.

In the late summer when farmers bring to town the cured tobacco leaves neatly tied into bundles on trailers pulled by tractors, big trucks, or pickup trucks, you can smell the tobacco from any bedroom in town when you wake up in the morning.

My Dad used to take me to the tobacco auctions at the local warehouses to listen to the auctioneers, each of whom had his own lilting style as he reeled off melodious prices in a singsong voice, never stopping except to say, “Sold!” The auctioneers, buyers, and farmers walked from each wooden pallet of tobacco to the next, holding up a bundle of the noxious weed, passing it around to be handled and smelled by the buyers from R.J. Reynolds, American, Liggett Meyers, and all the other big companies.

Most folks in Milton have had some experience in working in tobacco. The economy runs on tobacco, school doesn’t start until the tobacco crop is in, and if the crop is bad, the whole community suffers.

On a family farm, everyone in the extended family plus additional hired help -- schoolchildren, day laborers, and friends -- pitch in to bring in the crop and, even though it’s hard work, there’s a strong spirit of community with accompanying traditions and festivities. The women who do the cooking get up very, very early in the morning in order to prepare hearty breakfasts for all the help -- buttermilk biscuits, ham, bacon, sausage, or fat back, eggs, tomatoes, peach preserves, buttermilk, tea, and coffee.

The tobacco has to be picked first of all. You pick tobacco when it's beginning to turn yellow. Narrow wooden slides, boxes, really, about four feet tall and seven feet long are pulled between the rows of plants by mules.
Pickers clean out the plants row by row and throw the ripe leaves into the slides. You have to make several passes through the fields since the leaves ripen in stages, bottom leaves first. The mules bring slides full of tobacco back to the tobacco barn area, hopefully to some shady spot, since this is hot August and September work. The slide is unhitched from the mule and left there, probably under a shelter in case of rain, so the tobacco can be unloaded, leaf by leaf. The handers stand beside the slide and gather single leaves into small bundles and hand them to the tiers, who tie tobacco twine around the stems of the bundles and then tie each bundle to tobacco sticks, which the men then hang in the barns to cure for days in the heat of wood fires. (My grandmother crocheted bedspreads out of tobacco twine, which is really a fairly heavy thread and not twine at all.) Tobacco sticks, to which the bundles of tobacco are tied, are about two inch wide sticks about seven feet long. They have many uses. If you drill a hole through the end of one and make a bridle for it, it's a pretty good make-believe horse. They can also be used as tomato stakes.

Tobacco is waxy and turns your hands yellow, and it's very hard to get the tobacco wax out from under your fingernails. Tobacco worms are common and squish grossly when you grab one as you pick a leaf. As the day wears on, everyone handling the leaves, those picking in the fields and those handing and tying, becomes dirtier and dirtier.

Getting the crop in is manual, stand-up-all-day labor. It's hard work, and everyone is always hungry. Lunch is early, another huge meal. Some of the women do nothing but cook all day to feed those working in the fields. About three in the afternoon, in the heat of the day, someone might call a break, go out in a field where vegetables are grown and bring in several ripe watermelons to be cracked open with an ax. Then folks might drink some
cool tea and eat watermelon and sit under trees and fan themselves and close their eyes for a little while. Everyone works 'til they can't see any longer, and sometimes it might be necessary to hang lights from the taller trees around the barn area or cut on the lights in the shelter and work on after dark in order to fill the barn with that day's harvest. Working in tobacco is tiring work, and bedtime is early and welcome.

Many of my participants have worked in tobacco and have helped fill barns. Their fathers and uncles were farmers; their husbands and brothers and cousins were and are farmers or owned tobacco warehouses, or worked for one of the tobacco companies. Their lives have depended on tobacco. It is a lovely weed. ] * * * *

Before the Civil War

Essex County wasn't permanently settled until after the end of the Tuscarora War, 1710-1714, since these Indians were a fierce tribe. Several other tribes of Indians lived in the area that is now Essex County, including the Tutelo, Saponi, Occaneechi, Nottaway, and Nansemonds. Most of the county was settled by people moving south down the Indian Trading Path from the state to the north. They came south because of the fertile soil and to escape religious persecution. The county was officially demarcated and founded in 1746 and divided into two parishes by the Church of England, even though most residents were either Presbyterians or Baptists. Dissenters to the religious domination of the Church of England often became the leaders of the Revolution. Essex County is one of the oldest counties in the state and was quite a bit larger in 1746 than it is today.

Those who settled Essex County from the north brought their slaves with them. There are some stories of early cooperation between the races, and some African
slaves were able to purchase their freedom. However, tobacco soon became the chief crop in the county, and its production was very labor intensive. As the demand for cheap labor grew, slavery became more entrenched. In the 1750's about a quarter of the total population were African slaves. That number increased to about 40 percent by the 1780's when the population totaled about 5000. At this time a few very wealthy men owned most of the land and most of the slaves.

John Penn who lived and practiced law in Essex County became a leader of the Revolution and signed the Declaration of Independence. His reputation and influence as an outstanding jurist has had longlasting effects in the county. There was no fighting in Essex County during the Revolutionary War, but it is believed that Cornwallis marched nearby on his way to Trenton and defeat in 1781. Essex County leaders, like many others, were not happy about turning over their power to a federal government. They held out for state's rights and voted against ratification of the constitution until the Federalists finally won the day and the state entered the union.

A planter society developed in Essex County and was maintained until the Civil War. At the time of the Revolutionary War farmers fostered a diverse agriculture in the fertile soil of the county, planting a variety of crops such as grains, corn, tobacco, and vegetables. They also maintained herds of livestock. Gradually, however, tobacco became the cash crop, and the county joined the "tobacco belt" and became economically oriented to the markets to the north. For this reason and because its land was more fertile, most early development was in the northern part of the county. By 1800, wealth had shifted, and there were more small farms than large farms and many wealthy families. By 1850, Essex County produced more tobacco than any county in the state, and to support this economy, the county had one of the three largest slave populations in the state. In fact, slaves composed about half the population, whereas statewide about a third of the population were slaves.
The Great Awakening in the 1780's fostered a renewed interest in spirituality, and a community life centered on church activities began to flourish. Travelling ministers who spread the Word by holding revivals at local churches were popular and provided opportunities for social events. Black and white ministers alike drew large crowds at revivals. The 1850 Federal census reports 26 churches in the county; the 1860 census, 54. During this period, the Methodists outstripped the Baptists in number of churches and membership, but this victory would not hold. Churches became very involved in the everyday life of the community and actively disapproved of those involved in the long-favorite sport of horse racing as well as those who frequented the numerous taverns in the county.

Because the economy was based on agriculture, most people lived on farms in the country and were separated from each other, and no large cities developed anywhere in the county. As time passed, however, Milton, in the middle of the county, became more important as a commercial, professional, and educational center, especially after the railroad began to provide easy access to markets to the south. It eventually became the county-seat.

Wealthy landowners required attorneys, physicians, educational institutions, newspapers, libraries, and cultural activities. John Penn had set standards for legal practice in the county early on, and the first courthouse in the county was built in Milton in 1840 and still stands. Milton eventually became known statewide as a center of culture and refinement and referred to itself as the "Athens" of the state. It considered itself an enlightened community and attracted professionals and intellectuals who continued to enrich its culture.

Before the Civil War, Essex County was extraordinarily prosperous in many ways. Its agricultural base was sound, it boasted a growing professional and business class, excellent schools, an active religious community; and its strong community of
free Blacks provided all sorts of labor for wealthy white citizens. Even though its tobacco economy relied on an increasing numbers of slaves, Black religious and educational leaders, free men, were sometimes accepted by the white community as valued citizens.

Nat Turner's slave revolt of 1831 in Virginia in which 57 white people were killed echoed through the South, producing fear and drawing firm racial lines. As a result of new state legislation during this period, Black free men who owned property in Essex County lost the right to vote and white men who did not own property gained the right to vote.

Essex County's state, on the whole, was less invested in slavery than others, and was one of the last to secede from the United States. Many Essex County men were mustered to fight in the war and saw considerable action. No fighting occurred in Essex County. When the war ended, about 11,000 Blacks in the county were free men, and the planters accordingly lost millions of dollars in human property.

After the Civil War

After the Civil War, relations between Blacks and whites were contentious and often violent as political power shifted, and issues centering on race and class produced much bitterness on all sides. The political party system which had been run by white men was destroyed for a time when the state became part of a military district supervised by federal officers, and legislation required that many local officials who had previously been appointed be elected instead. Black leaders were elected to local offices until the party that was to become the Democrats regained control and reestablished appointed offices. In the 1870's parts of Essex County where many Blacks lived were annexed by adjoining counties. Not all were happy with this political strategy aimed at changing voting patterns.
The Populists defeated the Democrats, and Blacks once again held elected office. The Democrats responded by managing to pass the suffrage referendum in 1900 which excluded Blacks and illiterate whites from voting. This situation held for Blacks until the 1960's. The separation of Blacks and whites in the community became stronger than ever during this period, and the effects of segregation on day-to-day life were numerous.

The county continued to be dependent on tobacco, and new and better varieties of tobacco simply increased that dependence as did the emergence of a thriving cigarette industry in neighboring towns.

The large plantations could no longer function without free labor, and throughout the South small farms, worked by hired labor, renters, and sharecroppers, became the norm. Before the war, in 1860, there were about 1300 farms in Essex County of an average size of 300 acres most often managed by their owners. Thirty years later, there were about 2500 farms averaging about 100 acres each. About half were managed by their owners and half were rented for a share of the profits. The largest farms, however, were still operated by their owners.

Bright Tobacco became the variety of favor, experts came from all over the world to study Essex County's success with this crop, and it was agreed that the county produced the best Bright Tobacco in the world. The sandier, less rich soil of the southern portion of Essex County proved more fertile for this crop than the richer soil of the northern part of the county where the large plantations had been located. The increasing focus on tobacco as a cash crop resulted in less interest in other kinds of farming. The soil was depleted of nutrients, livestock herds were reduced in order to farm more land, and less land was available for wildlife. Subsistence farming gave way to tobacco farming, and farmers became more and more influenced by the uncertainty of a market economy.
The depression of 1870 affected farmers adversely as did the Depression of the 1930's, which brought enormous hardships to the county as it did to the rest of the country. Tobacco prices bottomed out, and farmers planted food crops instead. Religion was important in sustaining people's spirits, and they tried to help each other out as much as possible. In the 1930's farmers lost their crops as well as their markets because of tobacco wilt, a disease that not only destroyed the plant but infected the soil. Banks failed because they had, as usual, lent money to the farmers who could not pay their debts. Some local professional people were able to buy prime farmland cheaply and later became very wealthy. The Tobacco Research Station, established in 1911, eventually produced a wilt-resistant variety which saved the tobacco economy, and further research resulted in a doubling of production. As a result of bad economic times, however, the county's population stopped increasing and began to decrease, especially as Blacks began to leave. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, Blacks had been in a majority; however, after 1900, most residents were white. The Blacks who remained were laborers or tenant farmers, the groups hurt most by hard times.

Easy transportation of tobacco by railroad gradually shifted the tobacco markets from the state to the north to Milton and other towns in the state and further south, and Milton became known as an important tobacco market in its own right. New businesses and several factories located in Milton, and it continued to thrive.

The county, the state, and the South eventually became somewhat reconciled to being part of the union again. Thirty years after the Civil War, a new generation of young men fought in the Spanish-American war under the name of the local troop that had fought the Yankees. Twenty years later this troop fought in the Mexican War. As soon as they returned from Mexico, they were called to duty again for World War I.
Perhaps the most important influence on Essex County after World War I was the increase in communications technologies which linked it to the rest of the world. Another was the automobile. Milton's streets were paved in 1916, and in 1921 a bus service began.

The economy of the county stalled after the war, however. The private academies closed, people moved away to seek their fortunes in neighboring boom towns, and many citizens feared that Essex County's day in the sun was over. There seemed to be no commitment to the kind of progress that ensured steady growth. The county's leaders were conservative and satisfied on the whole with a steady state. Tobacco was the center of the economy, the county remained rural in nature, and opportunities for young people became more and more limited.

The New Deal, however, brought federally assisted projects which boosted the economy and attracted new people. The CCC and WPA were active, and the county received about three and a half million dollars in federal recovery funds.

The people of Essex County experienced World War II almost first-hand it seemed, since a $40,000,000 army base was established near a small town in its southwest corner on 40,000 acres of the county's prime tobacco land at the objection of many who owned that land. The camp included a large medical complex, and soldiers came to the camp before being shipped overseas or were sent there between duties for rest and relaxation. The camp disrupted the rural flavor of the county considerably, as soldiers from all over the country moved in and out of the base and relied on Milton and other nearby towns for entertainment. Some soldiers who were stationed there returned after the war (as did my own father) to marry Essex County girls. Stories abound which illustrate strained relations between the base and the conservative, religious civilian community, even though the county benefited a great deal economically from the base.
By 1946 many people in the county could trace their place in this area through 10 generations or more. The county had not boomed, and most people who lived there knew just about everyone else who lived there, and if they didn't know a particular individual, they knew a cousin or uncle or in-law. Essex County, one of the oldest counties in the nation, valued its tradition and history above all and was not willing to trade that for uncontrolled progress.

There was a great deal of concern about the county's economic health in the 1950's and 1960's. About half its population fell within the poverty range (13.47% in 1990), and few counties had as high a percentage of tenant farmers as did Essex County. About 7000 residents, mostly Blacks and young people left during the 1940's and 1950's. The problem, of course, was that the economy continued to rely on tobacco as its chief source of income. As farmers began to mechanize planting and harvesting, there were fewer and fewer jobs, even low-wage jobs, available. Two alternatives, more diversified farming and increasing the tobacco yield, did not create enough jobs to sustain the economy. Nor could the local cotton mills or wood products industries take up the slack. The extensive hospitals at the military post eventually became a complex of mental and penal institutions and provided jobs for some.

In the 1950's, the low point of the decline, the business section of Milton and the other small towns of the county began to die, buildings stood empty, and some say that about 80 percent of the county's high school graduates looked for work elsewhere. Younger local leaders finally prevailed on older leaders to begin a serious search for something other than tobacco to guarantee prosperity, and they formed development commissions that brought industrial development to the county. Light industries, manufacturers of recreation equipment, television antennas, china, cosmetics, lace, etc., located in Essex County, and by the 1980's about 40 companies provided new
economic security. From 1950 to 1980 the number of women in the workforce doubled. The economy was no longer solely based on agriculture and many mourned the loss of that era.

Communities which had been relatively closed for centuries had to open to welcome new residents with strange names who came with the industries. Many of the newcomers were very content with small town life and found Milton and Essex County as beautiful as did those whose families had lived there for hundreds of years. The wide, tree-lined streets, the exquisitely graceful old homes, the beautiful churches, the lovely, peaceful, and now-prosperous countryside still growing fields of tobacco, were very attractive.

Education in Essex County

Before taking a cursory look at Essex County today, I will review the history of the ongoing and special commitment of the county to education. Residents brag about their schools past and present and with good reason.

Early on, the county owed much of its good reputation to its understanding of the value of education, and the wealth generated by the tobacco economy fed that commitment. During the colonial period the concept of government support of education was ill-formed. Literacy was highly valued, however, and schooling was provided by the family and the church. Families who could afford to jointly hired a tutor for a portion of the year who taught in what was called a "field school." German and Scotch-Irish immigrants provided a strong early commitment to education and increased the number of these subscription schools substantially.

Early statutes required that the government provide for the education of poor children, including orphans. Boys and girls were often boarded out to those in the
community who were willing to teach them a trade as well as to read and write. Subscription schools led to several larger and more permanent schools, still supported by individuals, until the academy movement in the Revolutionary period.

In 1779, Essex County assumed educational preeminence in the state by chartering one of the first classical schools, Essex Hall Academy, funded by taxpayers, whose board was composed of influential state officials. In addition, a seminary opened in 1788 with about 50 students and a curriculum of English, French, Latin, Greek, arithmetic, mathematics, rhetoric, geography, astronomy, and philosophy. The county's privileging of education kept it in the running in the 1780's for the site of the state university, even though it did not win that distinction. Once the state university opened, however, it attracted more of Essex County's young people than any other county, and four members of the first graduating class were from Essex County.

Libraries were not common in colonial and Revolutionary Essex County. Many people owned a Bible, but books were simply not readily available for purchase. The first printing press in the county was not introduced until 1749, and it produced mostly government documents. Some individuals, of course, did possess personal libraries which were usually mentioned in their wills. A judge owned the largest library of about 230 volumes. Newspapers were not common because of a diffuse population and a general lack of interest. Even though the county was far ahead of most in the state educationally at the beginning of the 19th century, many of its residents were illiterate.

However, the county grew increasingly prosperous because of its successful agricultural economy, and wealthy landowners insisted on access to education for their children. The first library in the state was formed about 1800 in the then most prosperous town in Essex County, Johnsboro, the northern hub of the county's growing tobacco economy.
By the 1830's Milton had become the largest town in the county and boasted the Milton Male Academy and the Milton Female Academy, both of which educated state leaders. By 1850 there were five academies of varying sizes in Milton. In addition, in 1851 Milton Female College, in 1855 the Jones Military School, and in 1857 the St. James College were chartered. The faculty of these schools offered public lectures and debates, theatre productions, musical events, and even French lessons and dancing lessons to the community. Milton became known for a level of cultural refinement uncommon at that time.

In addition to these private schools, the state began opening common schools in 1840 which resulted in more access to education for Blacks and whites. By 1890 there were at least 100 schools in the county. In the 1870's and 1880's both a white and a Black orphanage were established, each of which supported its own school. One of the finest private schools for Blacks in the state opened in the 1880's and served as the only high school for Blacks in the county for many years. Some of the schools managed to remain open during the Civil War. Even though the private academies established in the nineteenth century have not survived, the county continues to pride itself on its commitment to education.

It is important to remember that the mothers of many of the participants of this study grew up in this era of Milton and were active in this society. They placed enormous value on culture and refinement, education, and civic and religious leadership and impressed the importance of these values on their daughters. They founded the first public library, which began in a room in the Milton Woman's Club building. They formed educational and civic clubs which are maintained by their daughters today. Local lore goes that there have always been a disproportionately high number of well-educated men and women in Essex County.
As public schools began to predominate, each small town in the county developed its own school system, supporting elementary, junior high, and high schools, and this system was in force until the 1960’s when the county began voluntary integration by first consolidating the white city and county schools. Small, local schools closed, resources were merged, and all white schools fed into two high schools, one in Milton and one in the southern part of the county.

This city and country consolidation paved the way for integration in the early 1970’s, which required further shifting of resources. Both the city-county consolidation and integration were managed well by educational and civic leaders. Both Black and white community leaders feel that Essex County’s long-term strategy of consolidation followed by integration was a model which allowed everyone time to adjust to change and difference. There were, however, serious racial problems in the community in the late 1960’s and 1970’s which were felt in the schools, though both Black and white administrators and teachers tried to provide an atmosphere of tolerance and public forums for conversation. Often, Black and white leaders said that the community could handle its own racial problems if only outsiders would leave it alone. There may be some truth in that sentiment, but others believe the status quo requires a healthy jolt before change is possible.

During a period of economic revitalization in the 1960’s, an emphasis was placed on vocational education, and Essex County joined with a neighboring county in opening a technical institute, a community college whose goal was to train local residents for the labor force new industries required. The community college has had the complete support of the community since it strives to fill local, specific needs. Residents are very proud of the college, and some of my participants have taught courses there.
Women have made some inroads in the administrative positions in public education in the county. A woman was head of the school board for a number of years, and a woman is now principal of one of the high schools. Education is still a practice of freedom in the community and a path to some political power.

Essex County Today

Recently, Milton and its small-town charm have become very attractive to residents of larger nearby cities who discover it on a Sunday afternoon drive and end up purchasing and renovating one of the beautiful old homes on Broad street or buying a century-old farmhouse and country acreage within an easy drive of several cities and major universities. The small community remains focused on religion, on education, and on responsible citizenship, and these values are much in demand.

Census data from 1990 shows that there are about 40,000 people in Essex County, with slightly more females than males, with about 23,000 whites, 15,000 Blacks, and about 400 people of other races. The population of Milton township is about 7000, with slightly more females than males, with about 4,000 whites, 2500 Blacks, and about 50 people of other races.

The median age in the county is 34 and in Milton township, 38. The median family income for the county during 1990-1993 was $35,500, and the per capita income in 1991 was about $14,000. In 1990 about 13 percent of the county's residents were living in poverty.

There are approximately 130 churches in the county and about 100 of them are Baptist. Civic, educational, and garden clubs abound. Residents have recently organized a little theatre group. There are several small strip shopping malls which have hurt the business sections of the small towns. There is no longer a local cinema in the county, and residents have to drive ten to twenty miles to see a movie. The
farms in the county look amazingly prosperous. Residents believe they have the best of all worlds: they have the advantage of small town life but are only half an hour’s drive from any activity, service, or product they could want in neighboring cities.

The county retains its rural flavor. In 1987 there were 847 farms in Essex County totaling about 160,000 acres, with about 190 acres/farm. The few small farmers left usually rent their tobacco allotments to the large farmers. Tobacco continues to be the chief crop, though some farmers are slowly beginning to try truck farming and even raising ostriches. Some farmland, particularly in the southern part of the county, which is close to other cities, is being sold for residential building. The activities of the Tobacco Experiment Station financed by the federal government have ceased, though the state still funds some research there.

Many residents are very worried about the future of tobacco farmers and, at the same time, grateful that there is an industrial base in the county to provide some economic stability in a period of enforced transition. The dilemma for tobacco farmers is that they don’t believe there is another crop that can provide the income that tobacco has historically provided and see no attractive alternatives. Essex County remains a tobacco county.

Participants, Entry, and Time Frame

Entry

Since I had once lived in this community and since my family still lived there, I had friendship and kinship connections that provided easy entry. Dillman (1988) points out that entry can be a real problem for researchers in the South because of "the incredible wariness and distrust of outsiders by Southerners, especially those in rural and small-town areas" (p. 11). Being welcomed by my participants, however, was a mixed blessing, since it intensified the ethical burden of not betraying the trust they so
graciously extended. My participants, of course, certainly had a second line of defense in that, even after agreeing to participate, they could control to some extent what information they revealed. I was very aware on some occasions that I was getting a public version of events. Some women told me, however, that they would tell me whatever I wanted to know, since everybody in Milton knew everything about them anyway and they had no secrets left.

My participant letter was, of course, my first research-oriented contact with most of these women, and its content varied according to how well I knew the participant. Some of my letters were fairly formal and some were considerably more personal, recalling past shared activities and inquiring about their children with whom I had attended school. If I had maintained a relationship with the woman through the years, I began by describing my study. If I did not, I “placed” myself in the community in the first paragraph as follows: “You may or may not know that I grew up in Milton (I am the daughter of Rowena Hicks and Maurice Adams), taught English at Milton High School, then married and moved to Columbus, Ohio about 20 years ago. Since I have been living in Columbus, I have worked as a librarian. However, about three years ago I decided to go back to school at The Ohio State University to work on a PhD in English Education.” It was important to use my mother’s maiden name, since it established the kinship connection in the county. There are several “Hicks” families there, and I assumed that even if the woman did not recognize me or my parents, she would make the “Hicks” connection. I found no obstacles to entry.

Co-Researchers

Once I had decided to study these women and their place, I immediately enlisted the help of my mother, her sister, and a long-time dear friend with whom I
had taught high school English in Milton in the early 1970's. I could not envision doing this study by myself. It became increasingly apparent that I would have to count on these women, who would not be my participants but who met the qualifications of my participants, to keep me honest and to serve as briefers, debriefers, readers, and advisors. In addition, I would be able to maintain contact with Essex County from a distance through them.

It seemed quite natural to extend these lifelong mentoring relationships into this particular job of work. These women have taken seriously their roles as on-site advisors and have been consistently gracious and generous with insight, data, analysis, interpretation, perspective, good humor and have modeled that ethos I so admire in Essex County women. I also briefly enlisted the help of a childhood friend, the son of one of my participants, who is the current president of the Essex County Historical Society.

**Selection**

I sent all four of my co-researchers a copy of my proposal so they would know what I intended. I had written in that proposal that I planned to interview five to seven women in a first round of interviews after which I would decide whether to propose a second round in order to go into more depth with those women. I had set four qualifications for participation: age -- from about 65 years old on; health -- ability to take part in a series of interviews; background -- having spent their childhood and most of their adult lives in this county; and willingness to participate. Through telephone conversations and letters, my advisors and I compiled a list of 26 candidates to whom I sent letters in early summer.

Two of my co-researchers had included the names of several Black women on their lists. I decided not to interview these women even though I knew them and had
taught school with a couple of them. Later, some of my participants recommended that I interview the very same women who, interestingly, are much like them -- mostly middle-class, often school teachers, and pillars of the community, i.e., they are not women of the projects. I would not have been uncomfortable interviewing these women; however, I felt I had to limit myself to a particular articulation of social relations in this community or I would drown. Too, after a first flush of excitement and energy, I felt increasingly squeamish about my project -- about studying the place I call home -- and could not imagine presuming to understand or theorize the lives of Black women in Essex County. I felt I understood the nuances of the lives of the older white women of this community well enough to temper the violence of my scientific gaze. I have no such understanding of the Black women of this community, and a study of this group is a different study. Race is everywhere in my project as it is, present in its absence.

In any event, 13 of the 26 women accepted my invitation, six declined, and four did not respond. On good advice, I chose to interview three of these women whom I knew very well on my first trip to Essex County -- June 25 - June 29, 1994 -- in order to try out my interview schedule, my equipment, and my skills. I felt sure these three friends would be patient with me and forgive any ineptness. I actually interviewed only two of these women, since one interview was postponed because of illness.

I returned to Essex County a second time in the middle of the summer -- July 20 - July 28, 1994 -- and interviewed nine women for a total of eleven. I did not interview all 13 of the women who had accepted since some were unavailable because of deaths in the family or illness or vacations.

These 11 women were extremely gracious, generally more interested in me than in my study, and eager to help me out in any way they could. When I called to
schedule times for these interviews, one of the women who had recently been troubled by many problems said, "Bettie, I have been holding myself together for you." The degree of cooperation was exceptional. On this trip, my participants as well as my co-researchers suggested I interview other women in the county who they thought were interesting, smart, educated, active in civic activities -- someone too good to pass up. Although I had originally intended to interview only women who had grown up in Essex County, I found myself unable to impose such a limit. When I met my mother and her friends at the Milton Inn for lunch between interviews on this second trip, they had additional names for my list. I was briefed on a particular woman's qualifications and found I could not refuse, since the women being recommended were indeed fascinating. My mother also reminded me on a couple of occasions that so-and-so might be hurt if her friend were interviewed and she were not. Selection became an ethical issue, and the criteria changed. Thus, the list of candidates for another trip grew longer and longer. By this time, I had given up the idea of interviewing the same women a second time and became reconciled to interviewing every white woman in the county over sixty if necessary. In fact, I still have a list of women I will interview after I have defended this dissertation. This research project will continue.

Near the end of the second trip, my mother and my aunt reviewed the list I had been compiling for the third trip and suggested I scan church yearbooks which contain members' pictures to be sure I wasn't leaving someone out and to help me put names with faces. We also made an effort to include women from the county as well as Milton women. Finally, I left the selection up to them as they explained that I might as well not waste my time on so-and-so since she always wanted to know everything about you but never told you a thing about herself, so-and-so was probably too senile now, so-and-so had just gone down so much lately, etc. I took their word for it and returned to Ohio with the names and addresses of 34 additional candidates to whom I
sent letters. In telephone conversations with my mother more names surfaced, and I duly noted them on a new list to which I continued to add names during the third trip.

Of the 34 women invited to participate in the third round of interviews, 26 accepted and 8 declined. On the third trip to Essex County at the end of the summer -- August 26 - September 14, 1994, I interviewed 22 of these 25 as well as 3 postponed from the two previous trips. Again, several interviews were postponed for various reasons. I also interviewed a younger woman holding public office in Milton as well as my advisor with whom I had taught English in order to thrash out some of the problems I was encountering. By now, many people in town had heard of my study, and I began to feel that being interviewed had become a mark of favor. I regretted that I could not interview more women. On this trip as well more candidates were recommended, and I had good intentions of returning in the autumn or winter for more interviews. Alas, I had to stop interviewing in order to write this dissertation.

I had invited 60 Essex County women to participate in this study. Of the 42 women who accepted (70 percent), I interviewed 36 (60 percent) and have 6 interviews pending with women who officially agreed to participate. Fourteen women declined (23 percent), and 4 did not respond (0.7 percent). I thus interviewed a total of 36 participants during three trips to Essex County over a period of four months.

**Description of Participants**

At the time of the interviews, my 36 participants ranged in age from 59 to 95, with an average age of 74. Only one, one of the youngest, declined to tell her age. Thirty-three had been married and three had never been married. Of those who had been married, half are widows. Many of these women have celebrated golden wedding anniversaries. Nine of the 36 never had children. I did not ask the women
whether they had ever been divorced since it seemed an indelicate question, and no one volunteered that information.

Eighteen participants were born in Essex County; four came to the county to teach school and later married "Essex County boys"; seven were born elsewhere in the state and married men from the county; and the remaining seven came at other points in their lives. About a third of my participants' mothers were teachers; one was a mill worker, one a seamstress and nurse, one a musician. Two woman called their mothers farmers, like their fathers. The remainder described their mothers as housewives or homemakers, even though it became clear during the interviews that their mothers had had many responsibilities on family farms and in their churches and communities. Many of their fathers worked in the tobacco industry, mostly as farmers, or worked for the railroad. Some were country merchants, one a blacksmith, another a manual laborer, one a lumberman, and another a preacher. During the Depression, their fathers often had to travel wherever they could get work, and they left the family in the hands of the mothers. These women, then, grew up in the Depression, and most had stories to tell about hard times, though they also said they hadn't known they were poor then since everyone else was poor too. Several of these women had lost one or both parents at a young age and had been brought up by relatives. The trauma of their early loss and displacement is still strong, and their stories are marked by phrases like, "Before my mother died" and "after I went to live with Aunt Sally."

Many of their husbands are or were involved in the tobacco industry in one way or the other -- as farmers, as owners of local tobacco warehouses where the county's crop is brought to be stored and auctioned, as employees either of the large tobacco companies located nearby or of the Department of Agriculture. Some are or were bankers and insurance men, local merchants and attorneys; others own car dealerships or hold local political office.
Education has been a practice of freedom for these women. Their families sacrificed, they worked at a variety of odd jobs, including "working in tobacco," and they studied hard to earn scholarships and fellowships in order to continue their schooling past high school. They spoke of how fragile their link to the university or to business school was as young women: "the crop was good that fall and Daddy said I could go back another quarter." Only one of the 36 did not graduate from high school. She lost her mother and, as the oldest child, had to quit school after the ninth grade to take care of her brothers and sisters. Of the remaining 35, one did not continue formal schooling after high school, two completed some combination of an undergraduate degree and a business degree, i.e., they had to forgo their university education because of financial problems and settle for a business course offered by the local business school. Seven completed some kind of business degree, 20 completed an undergraduate degree, four completed their masters, and one, one of the youngest, earned the EdD degree.

Of the 20 who completed an undergraduate degree, eight majored in home economics. I asked one of the women about the popularity of this degree, and she explained that it was a very versatile degree that expanded the normal female occupations of teaching, typing, and nursing to interior design, dietetics, extension work, fashion design, and so on. A home economics degree provided mobility in more ways than one, since home extension agents were expected to travel and thus were released from the boundaries of the home, the office, the sickroom, or the schoolroom. Too, there were several wonderful home economics teachers in the county who influenced these women, and I was fortunate to interview one of them. (I too would have majored in home economics if this woman had been my teacher.) Most of these home ec majors ended up teaching school in another subject area, such
as elementary education, since schools generally employ only one home economics teacher.

Nineteen of the 36 participants had been career schoolteachers. Most of them quit teaching when they had children and went back to their profession after their children started school. Several of the older women had had to quit teaching when they became married because local restrictions required that female teachers be single, but they returned to the classroom later. Two other participants began teaching, quit when they were married, and never taught in the schools again. They still, however, think of themselves as teachers. Seven worked in business; eight called themselves housewives or homemakers; and the two with the least education worked in the local textile mills most of their lives.

Twenty-six participants now live in Milton proper; the remainder live in one of the other small towns of the county or in the country. All of these women live in homes they own, and most would call themselves middle class. All except the housewives have been employed most of their lives and have retired, some after 40 years or more, with fairly comfortable incomes. Those who call themselves housewives or homemakers have given years and years of free labor to their churches and in support of other good works in the community. Some women said they are better off financially than they have ever been. Others, though they do not say so directly -- no need to complain -- imply that they have a hard time making ends meet. Several inherited huge farms and other large holdings when their husbands or parents died and are now wealthy landowners who are learning how to manage not only the farms themselves but the income they yield.

This demographic information provides a surface look at the 36 women of Essex County whose voices grow louder between the lines I write as I become more impatient to tell their stories.
Methodology in Transition

Introduction

As stated earlier, this project was designed to employ a blend of methods in order to accumulate a variety of data with which to investigate issues of knowledge and subjectivity. Traditional methods used in this study include ethnography, informed by the literature of space and place which has emerged from several disciplines including geography and environmental psychology; and the interview, informed by the life history method. Reinhartz (1992) explains, "Ethnographic studies frequently include interviewing components, and interview studies frequently include ethnographic components" (p. 281). Ethnography, of course, relies on participant observation and oftentimes document analysis. These methods were also used in this study. The entire project, of course, is being represented in writing, and, traditionally, the process of ethnography is represented by a product called the ethnographic text. Thus writing, often treated as transparent but foregrounded in this study because of the poststructural understanding of language and representation, also becomes a method of inquiry.

I will first present the traditional descriptions of the methods used to collect data in this study. These descriptions will then be elaborated by poststructural concerns with those methods. A brief description of qualitative data is also included. Finally, I will describe how these methods were used in the field to collect data.

Ethnography

Description and Problems

Wallace Stegner (1992), essayist and novelist, describes his understanding of the relationship of people to places as follows:
But I am the only instrument that I have access to by which I can enjoy the world and try to understand it. So I must believe that, at least to human perception, a place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, known it, died in it -- have both experienced and shaped it, as individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities, over more than one generation. Some are born in their place, some find it, some realize after long searching that the place they left is the one they have been searching for. But whatever their relation to it, it is made a place only by slow accrual, like a coral reef (p. 201).

Stegner (1992), seeing places as "places-for" (Hufford, 1992, p. 232), emphasizes the importance of place in our lives, the places we help to construct through relations, which, in turn, help to construct us. Like subjectivities, places are constructed and constructive.

Researchers use ethnography to study people in their places. Marcus and Fischer (1986) define ethnography as follows: "Ethnography is a research process in which the anthropologist closely observes, records, and engages in the daily life of another culture -- an experience labeled as the fieldwork method -- and then writes accounts of this culture, emphasizing descriptive detail" (p. 18). Clifford (1988) describes Marcus and Fischer's (1986) "fieldwork" method, participant observation, as "shorthand for a continuous tacking between the 'inside' and 'outside' of events: on the one hand grasping the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts" (p. 34).

Ethnography is thus about description, which is, in fact, interpretation, and Geertz (1973) says, "A good interpretation of anything -- a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society -- takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation" (p. 18). Thick ethnographic description, Geertz (1973) explains, [he credits the phrase "thick description" to Gilbert Ryle (p. 6)] has three characteristics: "it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and the
interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms" (p. 20). In ethnography the fieldworker tries to become an insider without "going native" in order to understand the culture while also maintaining her status as outsider/interpreter. Ethnography emerges "out of the tension developed by this ability to shift point of view" (Wax, 1971, p. 3).

Some feminists see ethnography as a valuable method in that it can recover women's lived experience, provide thick description of that experience, and assist in understanding women's part in culture. Reinharz (1992) defines feminist ethnography as "research carried out by feminists who focus on gender issues [where] the field sites are sometimes women's settings, and the key informants are typically women" (p. 55). Reinharz (1992) also points out that ethnography may include interviewing, observation, participation, and archival analysis (p. 46). The aim of ethnography is to learn as much as possible about another culture, using appropriate methods. Reinharz (1992) says, "It is easy to understand how a feminist ethnographer can take information in from everywhere, at all times, for her project. Although this attitude may be true of all ethnographers, it is significant for feminists who seek an understanding of the links between micro-and macrosystems of gender politics" (p. 55).

Reinharz' (1992) use of the phrase "gender politics" (p. 55) implies that power relations are at work in cultures, and feminists are greatly concerned with the power relations that are inevitable when we study and interpret another culture. Part of this concern issues from the second meaning of the word "ethnography," the textual representation of the culture, which is clearly the interpretation of the fieldworker. The ethnographer, the interpreter and writer, eventually assumes the position of author/authority of the culture. The complex problems of representation in a
postmodern world have already been discussed at length, and Clifford (1988) warns us that ethnography is not transparent, that "The words of ethnographic writing then, cannot be construed as monological, as the authoritative statement about, or interpretation of, an abstracted, textualized reality" (p. 42).

Some ethnographers have latched onto self-reflexivity as the curative for the arrogance of ethnography. Wolf (1992) reminds us that "this period of intense reflexivity has made a good many of us take stock of who is now in our audience and of how ragged the line between our community and the communities we study has become" (p. 136). Putting it even more bluntly, she says, "A barefoot kid who used to trail along after you will one day show up on your doorstep with an Oxford degree and your book in hand" (Wolf, 1992, p. 137). Clifford (1988) reminds us that "Henceforth neither the experience nor the interpretive activity of the scientific researcher can be considered innocent" (p. 41). Self-reflexivity itself is not innocent, especially if it borders on a modernist self-reference, a desire to move closer to the essence of oneself (Rajchman, 1985, p.12-13), rather than to engage the Other.

In traditional ethnography the fieldworker remains separate from the native by maintaining the self/other, subject/object relationship, i.e., it is important not to go native. Today, ethnographers doubt that this distance is possible or even desirable, either in the field or in the resulting text. Distance becomes even more problematic when the researcher studies her own kind. Weiler (1988) says, "a different kind of relationship is called for between knower and known, researcher and the object of research" (p. 61). Feminists do not wish to objectify their participants or distance themselves from them, nor do they believe they have no influence on their research. They agree with Rosaldo (1993/1989) who says, "Social critics should be meaningfully connected with, rather than utterly detached from, the group under critique" (p. 182). "It is in these areas of mutual trust and, sometimes affection,"
explains Wax (1971), "that the finest fieldwork can be done." Krieger (1991) urges social scientists not to see themselves as contaminants to their work" (p. 1), and Strathern (1987) says that "Anthropologists and their reactions are thus part of the data, rather than being mysterious hands. The anthropologist's own experiences are the lens through which others of his or her society may achieve a like understanding" (p. 288). As Caplan (1989/1988) puts it, we are all "Others" (p. 17), especially now that more and more ethnography is being done close to home.

The trouble with telling the truth about others, "speaking for others" (Alcoff, 1991), has led ethnographers to experimental forms of writing in order to disrupt the transparency of the ethnography. As a result, some believe "anthropology flourishes as the postmodern narrative par excellence: multi-vocal, heteroglot and essentially inexhaustive" (Hastrup, 1992, p. 129). Some feminists, however, believe ethnography, even postmodern ethnography, is more dangerous to women than positivist research, since the researcher intervenes in relationships in her role as powerful expert, changes those relationships, and then leaves the site with no consequences (Stacey, 1988; Mascia-Lees et al., 1989). Others reject entirely the notion that lives should be scienticed and call for the end of ethnography. Clough (1992) believes that any textual representation, postmodern or otherwise "maintains empirical science's hegemony" (p. 8), and she urges us "to give up on data collection" (p. 137). Geertz (1988) summarizes this debate in a nutshell when he says "the burden of authorship seems suddenly heavier. Once ethnographic texts begin to be looked at as well as through, once they are seen to be made, and made to persuade, those who make them have rather more to answer for" (p. 138). Thus, we are left to sort out these ethical issues as best we can, case by case. We can no longer assume that a beautifully written ethnography, in and of itself, is a guarantor of validity or ethical practice.
Space and Place: Social Relations

So be it for the literature which describes traditional ethnography and recent efforts to deal with the violence of the power relations involved in both the process of fieldwork and the textual representation of that fieldwork. These very serious ethical issues have produced fear and trembling in this researcher, and I have often imagined Foucault shaking his finger at me, saying, "All alternatives are dangerous," and Spivak rising in dismay from her teaching machine to lecture me, saying, "just look at everything you haven't thought of yet."

If "responsibility must bind the call of the ethical to a response" (Spivak, 1994, p. 57), I reply that I seek alternatives which are less dangerous than others and that I have enlisted the help of advisors to help me think. I have also searched for some way to at least limit the view for which I'm responsible in this ethnography, rather than presume that I can represent the whole of Essex County in a few pages of this dissertation. Clearly, I have squirmed my way out of the fruitful paralysis of analysis caused by Foucault's and Spivak's gazes, since I am poised to write an ethnography of sorts in the very next chapter. What has helped me sidle out of some of these dilemmas is the poststructural literature of space and place (from geography) and the literature of place attachment (derived from environmental psychology). I will briefly survey some of this literature which has helped me rethink ethnography's tendencies to totalize.

Before the industrial revolution, most people thought of space and place as one and the same, since they might know only one place. Other places were often only names mentioned by the few who had opportunities to travel. However, once people began to venture out in the world and see other places, the unity of space and place was separated, and space began to be thought of as a container for places.
Humanism, in fact, describes space as transparent stasis, a void, "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (Foucault, 1972, p. 150); and it biases time in favor of the future. Humanism has, in its illimitable fashion, set up powerful binaries to categorize space and place and time. In this picture, space is beyond time or presence, is elsewhere. Place represents presence and thus time, of course, and is where the action is. Time is thought of in a teleological fashion, and where we're going is more important than where we've been.

We use the concept of space in several ways. For instance, Lefebvre (1991/1974) explains that, in philosophy, space has generally been thought of as an "empty area" (p. 1). Philosophers propose space to be "in opposition to the doctrine of categories" (Lefebvre, 1991/1974, p. 3), and this understanding informs the notion of "mental space" which has been used extensively in this dissertation and which Lefebvre (1991/1974) says is never really defined by anyone even though we talk about "literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth" (p. 3). Lefebvre (1991/1974) is concerned that this undefined mental space always remains separate from "the space of people who deal with material things" (p. 4), from "that social space wherein language becomes practice" (p. 5). I might add to that list of mental spaces the space of the aside which I define by using quite a few theorists' representations of "mental space." I have, however, to this point, attempted to use the space of the aside to link the theoretical talk of this dissertation to the field. In the ethnography which follows this discussion of methodology, the aside will be used to pit text against text in an "incitement to discourse" (Lather, 1993a, p. 673).

Tuan (1977), the geographer, thoroughly explains humanist space and place in his classic text. He says that "Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (p. 3). "Every person is the center of his world, and
circumambient space is differentiated in accordance with the schema of his body" (Tuan, 1977, p. 41). This premise supports all sorts of humanist gendered hierarchies which follow from seeing our own bodies as centers of the universe: vertical/horizontal, top/bottom, front/back, right/left, self/other, identity/difference, space/place, space/time. In humanism, undifferentiated space (absence) becomes place (presence) as it "acquires definition and meaning" (Tuan, 1977, p. 136). Space is a container for the content, place.

In this space/place dualism, space is undifferentiated and uncontrollable, and we shift our attention to the identifiable and more manageable place. The burgeoning literature of place attachment (Gallagher, 1993; Tall; 1993; Altman & Low, 1992; Game, 1992; Hiss, 1990; Walter, 1988) testifies to our concerns with being located in a place, with the need "to fix the meaning of particular places, to enclose them, to endow them with fixed identities and to claim them for one's own" (Massey, 1994, p. 4). As "contemporary articulations of identity [deal with] issues of placenames, language, and landscape" (Nash, 1994, p. 228), identity becomes territorialized (Pratt, 1984). "Time-space compression" (Harvey, 1989, p. 240) which has evolved from the marvels of global telecommunications may produce a postmodern "multiphrenia" (Gergen, 1991, p. 73) in which the "small, face-to-face community" (Gergen, 1991, p. 61) vanishes and the imagined exotic Other speaks to us from the televisions in our bedrooms. In this dislocation, place becomes a center, a refuge, and "intimate places are places of nurture where our fundamental needs are heeded and cared for without fuss" (Tuan, 1977, p. 137). Some long for these centers, places where they know who they are because others tell them who they are. For example, Norris (1993) writes the following about her place in the Dakotas: "When with considerable misgivings I joined my grandmother's Presbyterian church more than ten years after she died, an old woman startled me by saying, 'It's good to have a Totten in my church again'" (p.
There is a tendency, even in the theoretical literature, "to identify 'places' as necessarily sites of nostalgia" (Massey, 1994, p. 5), and "tradition is now often preserved by being commodified and marketed as such" (Harvey, 1989, p. 303). The media constantly present us with the simulacra of a place called home and that signifier's predictable relays.

We might ask whether attaching identity to place is desirable for everyone. Massey (1994), a feminist poststructural geographer, asks some important questions in this regard:

Who is it who is so troubled by time-space compression and a newly experienced fracturing of identity? Who is it really that is hankering after a notion of place as settled, a resting place? Who is it that is worrying about the breakdown of barriers supposedly containing an identity? It is at least by no means a coincidence that the exultations in the uncontrollable complexity of the city (Virginia Woolf), the questioning of the very notion that a settled place to call one's own was ever a reality (Toni Morrison, bell hooks), the insistence that memory and recovery does not have to take the form of nostalgia (bell hooks), and the celebration of a multiplicity of home-places (Michèle le Doeuff) . . . that all this has so often come from those who were "on the margins" of that old, settled (and anyway mythologized?) coherence (p. 123).

Humanism's space/place binary has had some very political and material effects. Traditionally, geographers have literally drawn maps that territorialize, colonize, and fix places, and "maps are central to colonial and postcolonial discourses" (Blunt & Rose, 1994, p. 8). Said (quoted in Massey, 1994) urges post-colonial intellectuals to reject traditional notions of place identity: "With regards to the consensus on group or national identity, it is the intellectual's task to show how the group is not a natural or god-given entity but is a constructed, manufactured, even, in some cases, invented object, with a history of struggle and conquest behind it, that it is sometimes important to represent" (p. 6). Essentialism may no longer serve people very well, whether it be found in the identities of subjects or places.
Women have suffered in places which were especially mapped for them; they have been bound, fixed, locked up, and stuck in places. Men, many men that is, have the freedom of space; women are expected to make places and to be places to which men return for succor. Space is male and place is female in this binary. Women's access to space is limited, partly because the male gaze and attendant violence have operated unrestrained in spaces. If a woman operates freely in space, she deserves what she gets. The story and the reality goes that women need to be protected from space, kept in their places, for their own safety. Wilson (1995) points out that the flâneur, that much beloved dandy of the mid-1800's resurrected and valorized by some later writers (Kracauer, 1937; Benjamin, 1973), could only be a man. As the embodiment of the male gaze, the "flâneur's freedom to wander at will through the city is essentially a masculine freedom" (Wilson, 1995, p. 64). There could be no flâneuse traversing space with such ease. Some believe women are more easily controlled in small towns than in large cities, and there is a long history of women disguising themselves as men in order to enjoy the freedom of the night and the city and space.

Several theorists would like to rethink our understanding of space as well as place attachment. Our attachment to places may or may not have something to do with the search for origins, as some claim. Game (1991) tries to rethink place attachment so that it is not the desire to fix meaning or the desire for origins: "There is a living in a place that refuses the objectifying gaze; and what cannot be seen cannot be spoken either. . . . There is a hint of the haunted," (p. 183) a sense of something outside discourse or representation. This brings to mind Clough's (1992) "haunted realism," which she describes as "a reconstruction of a story that cannot be completely narrated, a story that instead makes visible the erasure, the forgetting, the disremembering" (p. 124).
In reading the codes of a place or a text, something always escapes since both are haunted by memories and relations, by deferrals. Thus Game (1991) takes issue with the confounding of the desire for a place with the nostalgic search for origins. Shifting the privilege from home to exile maintains an easy opposition which erases a complexity requiring more attention. Game (1991) doesn't think we should valorize "homelessness over home, with hints of an imperative to be 'on the move' as it were" (Game, 1991, p. 148). Explaining that "It is a mistake to equate place with 'a signified' and movement with 'the play of the signifier,'" she rather becomes interested in "practices of space" (p. 148).

Massey (1994) too, would like to rethink place attachment so that it does not imply setting boundaries nor become conflated with a nostalgic search for origins but rather is progressive and outward-looking (p. 147). She attempts to "formulate the concepts of space and place in terms of social relations" (Massey, 1994, p. 2) and sees the spatial as integral with time, a process, a "dynamic simultaneity" (Massey, 1994, p. 3). Massey (1994) explains her theory as follows:

Such a way of conceptualizing the spatial, moreover, inherently implies the existence in the lived world of a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces: cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism. Most evidently this is so because the social relations of space are experienced differently, and variously interpreted, by those holding different positions as part of it . . . The observer is inevitably within the world (the space) being observed. And this in turn means that it partly constitutes the observer and the observer it, and the fact of the observer's constitution of it means that there is necessarily a multiplicity of different spaces, or takes on space" (p. 3).

Foucault (1986/1984) agrees, saying "We do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things . . . we live inside a set of relations that
delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (p. 23).

Thus, there is no essential space beyond time, beyond presence, and place is not the fixing of space. The space/time, space/place, presence/absence binaries do not work in a poststructural understanding of the spatial. "It is not that the interrelations between objects occur *in* space and time; it is *these* relationships themselves which *create/define* space and time" (Massey, 1994, p. 263). It is history that brings time into being. Indeed, "both social phenomena and space [*are*] constituted out of social relations" and "the spatial is social relations 'stretched out'" (Massey, 1994, p. 2). The simultaneity of spatial relations implies that all "'observers' (participants in social life) move relative to one another, each thinking of themselves at rest, and each therefore 'slicing the space-time continuum at different angles'" (Unwin, quoted in Massey, 1994, pp. 3-4) In this theory, space and place, like subjectivities, are created in relations. Lefebvre (1991/1974) explains that

(Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity -- their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. At the same time there is nothing imagined, unreal or 'ideal' about it as compared, for example, with science, representations, ideas or dreams. Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others (p. 73).

Thus, we cannot think of any group of people as a coherent set travelling together through space and time. Their activity is rhizomatic and irruptive, and relations become happenstance with unpredictable effects. Thinking of space in this way can be a practice of freedom, Butler's (1990) "subversive repetition" (p. 147).
In turn, place cannot be fixed and bounded space. It cannot be thought of as "a site of authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity," since this conceptualization of place depends "in part on the view of space as stasis" (Massey, 1994, p. 5). Place becomes "one particular articulation" (Massey, 1994, p. 5) of the social interrelations of the space-time context. Places are not just the inside, but are the outside folded in; they are permeable, "open and porous" (Massey, 1994, p. 5). Massey (1994) gives us a different definition of place: "where localities can in a sense be present in one another, both inside and outside at the same time. [This] view stresses the construction of specificity through interrelations rather than through the imposition of boundaries and the counterposition of one identity against an other" (p. 7). Place, then, is socially constructed and "any number of realities may be anchored in the same physical space" (Hufford, 1992, p. 250).

Obviously, the dissolution of the space/place and exile/home binaries enables a variety of alternate readings which might produce useful strategies for a post-colonial world. Since the construction of space/place has been heavily coded with gender, I am very interested in the politics of space-place as it relates to this study. How, then, does a rethinking of space-place and place attachment affect the doing and the writing of ethnography for this poststructural feminist who, as Stegner (1992) says, thought she wanted to be placed, but had been displaced for so long she feared re-placement was impossible?

De Certeau (1984) says that "Every story is a travel story -- a spatial practice" (p. 115), and Game (1991) warns that there is "no stability in the stopping place" (p. 166), no rest in the pause. In ethnography, then, I believe we have to focus on a particular articulation of relationships and the accompanying practices which code that articulation in space-time rather than attempt a panoptic metanarrative of all relations. In the travel story that is the writing of ethnography, we might give a nod to some of
the paradoxical and antagonist articulations which are juxtaposed against the articulation we construct. The meaning of places, like the meaning of signifiers must finally be deferred, and the ethnographic text must allow that deferral. We cannot do traditional, totalizing ethnography on folds of simultaneities spiraling "side-by-side" (Foucault, 1986/1984, p. 22) in relations. We must limit and focus and look for the intersection of particular relays.

Places, like subjectivities, cannot be counted on to be the same from one day to the next, since "people everywhere are conceptualizing and acting on different spatialities" (Massey, 1994, p. 4). There is no need to be nostalgic for places since they have metamorphosed with each articulation of difference. Instead of looking for truth in a place, we can momentarily highlight our understanding of the effects of a set of relations and practices in order to think about different relations which might produce different social effects. It seems to me that writers like Stegner (1992) have always understood that place was about relations in process. Welty (1956), for example, says "Location is the crossroads of circumstance, the proving ground of 'What happened? Who's here? Who's coming?" (p. 59).

**The Prior Ethnography**

This ethnographer (I keep this handy moniker) has appropriated and flouted the privilege of the flâneur. Instead of being a rather bored and jaded male wandering the streets of a great city, one who merely observes, this flâneuse has not been bored at all and chose to get right in the middle of things in the small towns and country crossroads of Essex County.

I have, however, retained two of the features of the flâneur: that of being marginal and that of being a writer (Wilson, 1995). As you see, I write. My
marginality leads to the prior ethnography of this study, another origin story of this research project which actually began 43 years ago.

This ethnographer, who may be the chief informant in this research project, was five years old when she was displaced from her father's home, a tiny resort village on the St. Lawrence River in upstate New York, and came with her parents to live with her mother's family in a small southern town in the Piedmont of the Carolinas. My father and I, clearly two Yankees, never really forgot that we were foreigners, and we celebrated our otherness at times. My mother's family loved us both, but the town had been closed, bounded, fixed for centuries, and it was only after World War II that strangers began to disrupt the place. We were welcomed in the town because of kinship, but I remember that I spoke strangely. I remember that I longed for my Yankee grandmother's cellar where she hid donuts especially from and for me. I remember longing to ride on the St. Lawrence in the wooden boats that my Yankee grandfather built. In school I remember trying to squeeze "Alexandria Bay, New York" in the short blank beside "Place of Birth:" while most of my new friends scrawled "Milton." I remember loving my father's stories about growing up on the St. Lawrence and wishing I could grow up there too. I remember that I felt an outsider in Milton because I had not been born there, yet I remember feeling a special difference because I had another place as well.

I remember studying Milton from my otherness that was always with me. I remember all the time we spent talking about the Civil War in school, and I remember the deep and abiding anger directed at the vicious and uncivilized Yankees. I remember the boys practicing Rebel yells; I remember refusing to sing Dixie. I remember difference. We returned to the North every summer to my father's family; and when we came back to Essex County, I was conscious once again of being different, yet less so each time.
At some point I made the turn to southernness, and I wanted to learn the new patterns. I learned to smile and speak politely to every adult I met. I learned that a lady always carries gloves. I learned which parts of town I shouldn't ride my bike through. I learned to love cornbread and fried fish but never collards and turnip greens. I learned to love the smell of tobacco in the fields and in the trailers pulled behind pickups coming to town on Saturday mornings. I learned there were different water fountains in the local department store for colored people and white people. I learned the words to all the songs. I learned to love my southern cousins, my huge family, the love and love and more love from endless kin. I learned that colored people sat in the balcony at the local theatre and white people sat downstairs. I became placed in the South and called myself a Southerner and damned the Yankees along with the rest.

Yet the Yankee was still there, and I continued to keep a bit apart, to study the women, in particular, since I was supposed to end up like them, to marry an Essex County boy and build a brick house on an acre or two near my parents and go to church every Sunday and teach school and raise an upstanding family and become a band booster and the secretary of the PTA and look out for anyone in need -- I was expected to do my duty and remain cheerful. I knew at some point that I was an imposter, a fake, that I didn't fit the bill. I learned this after much studying, through an ongoing and very serious ethnography, after much data collection and analysis. The ethnography has been stalled occasionally, but never completed. This research project is its continuation, a midlife need to check in with the women of Essex County and see how they're holding up, to see how I might have been.

I tell you these origin stories because I cannot not be "part of the plot" (Hastrup, 1992, p. 120). "By writing myself into the text autobiographically, I aim to keep the self/other dialectic in constant motion" (Linden, 1993, p. 10). Rosaldo
(1993/1989) believes that all ethnographers are positioned and that their lived experience enables them to understand some phenomena better than others (p. 3). I believe there is some truth in this, and, as I have said, my distrust of my scientific gaze has been tempered by my belief that I can recognize and move among the conflicts evident in this place more lightly than a damned Yankee perhaps. We would surely tell different stories, the Yankee and I, but there are many truths. "There is no such thing as 'getting it right,' only 'getting it' differently contoured and nuanced" (Richardson, 1994, p. 521).

Interviews

Description and Problems

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) define the interview as "a purposeful conversation, usually between two people but sometimes involving more" (p. 96). LeCompte and Preissle (1993) say that "interviews depend on face-to-face questioning of participants and eliciting data from them (p. 165). Mishler (1986) describes the qualitative interview as a speech event, a discourse, in which a joint construction of meaning occurs as the researcher frames questions and the participant frames answers (p. 52). Proposing that interview responses are often stories and that narrative is, in fact, innate, he concludes that a narrative analysis of interview data is a useful way of bringing "out problems and possibilities of interviewing that are not visible when attention is restricted to question-answer exchanges" (Mishler, 1986, p. 67).

Scheurich (1992) takes issue with what he calls Mishler's modernist understanding of the interview as follows: "Interview interactions do not have some essential teleological tendency toward an ideal of 'joint construction of meaning,' no matter how Rogerian the researcher-interviewer might be. Human interactions and
meaning are neither unitary nor teleological. Instead, interactions and meaning are a shifting carnival of complexity, a moving feast of differences interrupting differences" (p. 14)

Schurich (1992) believes that interviews are chaotic and unpatterned, and that any structure that does exist is one overlaid by the interviewer/analyst and later 'discovered.' He also finds the notion of the innateness of narrative a modernist, essentialist assumption that is based on a Western definition of story as well as our humanist desire for unitary order. In the modernist view of the interview, there is a reality to be uncovered, a truth to be found, a sensible meaning to be made, a unity to be revealed. Schurich (1992) urges us to question these assumptions and to see what else we might make of the interview.

Having thus problematized the traditional approach to the interview, I must point out that it nevertheless remains a favorite research method of feminist researchers, and I will review the literature that describes some of the issues they find particularly attractive.

Feminists generally see the interview as a particularly useful method since it allows women to name their own lived experience. The data gathered through interviews is nonstandard and specific to the individual and her context. Interviewing is also appropriate for feminist research in that the interviewer can attempt to give up control of the interview and establish trust and connection with her participants and allow them to "construct data about their lives" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 20).

In her classic article about interviewing, Oakley (1981) takes issue with the traditional subject/object approach to the interview method, and to traditional research in general, by explaining that when interviewing women, "it becomes clear that, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the
interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship" (p. 41). Thus, feminists often see the interview as more of a conversation than a formal question and answer session with a list of predetermined questions. According to Acker et al. (1991), the "research process becomes a dialogue between the researcher and researched, an effort to explore and clarify the topic under discussion" (p. 14).

Minister (1991) explains that "Women use questions to maintain and enhance conversation, men interpret questions as requests for information" (p. 38). Minister (1991) describes feminist interviewers as follows:

Feminist interviewers adopt their narrators' time frame, shifting gradually to new issues only after old ones have been developed generously. The leisurely pace frees interviewers for the kind of demanding listening that nourishes inferences about what issues may be waiting to be born and examined for the first time. When these issues are close to term, interviewers will need a peculiar mixture of determination and tact to validate narrators' public naming of buried or previously only whispered experiences (p. 39).

Langellier and Hall (1989) say that the "interview is shown to be a communicative event that constrains all participants and the emerging data" (p. 215). Of chief concern to feminists is the constraint of the power relation built into the interview situation in which one person, the researcher, is considered to be the expert who is in control of the process. Feminists try very hard to disrupt the subject/object binary described by Oakley (1981) above. Acker et al. (1991) say that "In the ideal case, we want to create conditions in which the object of research enters into the process as an active subject" (p. 136). In other words, feminist researchers don't believe that the interviewer can or should be distant or neutral, separate from the experience, or that the interviewee is someone from whom information is simply
extracted. Both the interviewer and the interviewee are responsible for the construction of the interview.

Achieving this goal of mutuality is not easy, and feminists struggle with this issue. Interviewing is not so simple as it may seem, since, as mentioned above, a power relation exists in the interview situation. Weedon (1987) reminds us that the 'confessional mode implies specific relations of power in which the 'speaking subject is also the subject of the statement,' subjected to the discourse which she speaks' [Foucault, 1978/1976, p. 61]. The questioner is an authority figure who solicits and passes judgment on the confession. . . . In each case the subject of the discourse is at once constituted by it, and subjected to it, and she has her position as subject guaranteed by the 'expert' inquiring voice" (p. 120).

Schurich (1992) discusses how the power relations that are present during the interview may be disrupted by pointing out that "Interviewees do not simply go along with the researcher's program" (p. 24). Schurich (1992) explains as follows:

I find that they carve out space of their own, that they can often control some or part of the interview, that they push against or resist my goals, my intentions, my questions, my meanings. Many times I have asked a question which the respondent has turned into a different question that she or he wants to answer. . . . In other words, interviewees are not passive subjects . . . They, in fact, often use the interviewer as much as the interviewer is using them. They use interviewers as an audience for their verbal performance. They use interviewers to work out their thinking on a particular issue. The often validate themselves in the process of telling their stories (p. 24).

Schurich (1992) sees the discussion of the powerlessness of the interviewee as paternalistic and believes that "the dominance-resistance binary has itself become a new totalization that is in need of critique" (p. 25). He believes that there is much that happens in life, as well as in the interview, that is outside the dominance-resistance
binary and that this space, which he calls both "freedom" and "chaos" (Scheurich, 1992, p. 25) as well as what occurs in it is worth our attention.

**Oral History**

I use the term "oral history" here since this is the term Reinharz (1992) settles on in her excellent review of feminist research methods. Reinharz (1992) found that the following terms were used almost interchangeably to talk about this generic method: oral history, life history, case studies, in-depth life history interviews, and personal narratives (p. 129). Perhaps the diverse terminology reflects the fact that many academic disciplines inform oral history: speech communication, linguistics, folklore, psychology, sociology, history, and contemporary literary theory (Gluck & Patai, 1991, p. 3).

Gluck (1979) distinguishes between oral and life histories by saying that oral histories can be topical, rather like open-ended interviews, or biographical, like life histories (p. 5). In 1935 Dollard defined life history as a "deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it" (p. 3). Reinharz (1984) says, based on her own oral history work, that it is "a type of scholarship that begins with an insight about women's condition that requires further elaboration so as solve the puzzle of one's own life" (p. 275). Her comment echoes the comment by Glesne and Peshkin (1992) that the roots of our research interests are often found in our biographies (p. 103). I prefer not to get too bogged down in terminology but to point out that as I designed this research project, I found the literature of oral history most helpful in thinking about interviewing older women.

Feminists who report their experiences with oral history point out that "while ethnographies give the general overview, that is, the public, male-oriented version of the culture, the life history is used to provide the 'woman's view'" (Langness, 1965, p.
14, quoted in Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985, p. 170). Anderson et al. (1990/1987) point out that "women's perspectives were not absent simply as a result of oversight but had been suppressed, trivialized, ignored, or reduced to the status of gossip and folk wisdom by dominant research traditions institutionalized in academic settings and in scientific disciplines" (p. 96). In patriarchal societies, what women think "may not always be reflected in what they do and how they act" (Anderson et al., 1990/1987, p. 97). Thus, recovering women's lived experiences through oral history allows them not only to tell what they think but to be the experts on their own activities. Along the same lines, Anderson and Jack (1991) report that women may tell two contradictory stories about their lives, "one framed in concepts and values that reflect men's dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman's personal experience" (p. 11). Harding (1991) confirms this point of view when she says, "Women feel obliged to speak and act in ways that inaccurately reflect what they would say and do if they did not so constantly meet with negative cultural sanctions" (p. 125). Recovering the private from the public/private dichotomy is of much concern to feminists.

Middleton (1993) says that oral history methodology seems natural for women, as they often tell each other stories about their lives in order to help each other make meaning (p. 65). Oral history research reminds us that we desire to make sense of our lives, that we construct and reconstruct our personal histories based on new events and knowledge. Myerhoff (1980) explains that remembering the past is not simple: "Remembering involves gathering all the others in one's life as well as all one's selves together to order and make sense of one's life" (p. 77). Myerhoff (1978) reports that the participants in her oral history project, senior citizens, made efforts "at ordering, sorting, explaining -- rendering coherent their long life, finding, integrating ideas and
characteristics that helped them know themselves as the same person over time, despite great ruptures and shifts" (p. 34).

Oral history might thus be seen as integration since, "In the life review, many an old person, living with intimate knowledge of coming death, may undertake the construction of a sacred account, constructing a formulation as to what life has been about" (Myerhoff & Tufte, 1975, p. 541). Along the same lines, Hankiss (1981) says that we rearrange historical events in order to smoothly incorporate them into "the strategy, or 'script,' of our present life" (p. 204). And Patai (1988) says that "A particular version of one's life story may become an essential component in one's sense of identity at a given time" (p. 9).

Bruner (1990) puts another twist on the life story by speaking of it as autobiography, which he describes as follows: "It is an account given by a narrator in the here and now about a protagonist bearing his name who existed in the there and then, the story terminating in the present when the protagonist fuses with the narrator . . . The Self as narrator not only recounts but justifies" (p. 121). As the participant, the narrator, tells her story, Bruner (1990) says she is deciding what to make of the past narratively at the moment of telling. . . And why things are included remains mostly implicit, the unspoken pact in force being that you, the mostly listening interviewer, will figure that out for yourself. And if you should ask that reasons be made explicit, your question will surely steer the account in a direction that it would not have taken otherwise. For the interviewer becomes part of that "swarm of participations" that distributes Self across its occasions of use (p. 122).

Patai (1988) sees the oral history "as a point of intersection between two subjectivities -- theirs and mine, their cultural assumptions and mine, their memories and my questions, their sense of self and my own" (p. 2).
Listening is critical for the interviewer. Laub (1992) explains that the act of listening for the researcher is not passive and may be as difficult as the act of telling is for the narrator. If a difficult or traumatic event is not really known until it is told and heard, then the listener, the researcher, assumes a hazardous position, since by witnessing the telling and knowing of the event, she becomes a witness herself. The hearer is, so to speak, "the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (Laub, 1992, p. 57). Laub (1992) explains that the listener needs to listen to and hear the silence, speaking mutely both in silence and in speech, both from behind and from within the speech" so that she can be "a guide and an explorer, a companion in a journey onto an uncharted land, a journey the survivor cannot traverse or return from alone" (pp. 58-59).

Where is the truth in oral history? Passerini (1989) says that "the guiding principle could be that all autobiographical memory is true; it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose" (p. 197). Middleton (1993) says that in her study "adult memories and interpretations were accepted as valid because the central concern in the study was not the events themselves but the interpretations the women made of them and the importance the women attached to these interpretations" (p. 68). Middleton (1993) reminds us that the stories we tell are told within certain power relations and that the kind of narrative we might construct for one audience could be quite different from that we construct for a different audience (pp. 67-68).

All of this talk of integration of the self through oral history sounds very humanist. Our humanist culture has certainly taught us that a centered self is one to be desired. Clough (1992), however, reminds us that the narrative element in life history "authorizes factual representation through a representation of a subject's struggle for identity" (p. 66). Using narrative and its unifying potential as an attempt to make
sense of the random and disjointed nature of living should perhaps be recognized as an identity strategy and not a guarantor of an essential self. Clough (1992) explains that the life history form "historically developed in relationship to both a clear and concise writing style and the opposition of factual and fictional discourses" (p. 66). A life history related by a participant which is based on clear writing, the object of which Trinh (1989) says is "to prune, eliminate, forbid, purge, purify" (p. 17), as well as on the fact/fiction binary, is a prime target for the poststructural critique.

The point, however, is that people do attempt to stabilize and make sense of their lives through talk. Of interest in this study is what kind of identity they present and how they believe that subjectivity was constructed. The oral history method is thus a useful method in the study of identity.

Unlike the interview, its intention is to take into account the whole span of a person's life rather than to focus upfront on one specific aspect of it. Though none of the interviews in this study assumed the proportion of an oral history, several participants did attempt to span a large portion of their lives during the interviews. I was glad that I had read this literature and understood the nuances of integration and re-membering and did not interfere with their making sense.

Writing

Langer and Applebee (1987) report that writing shapes thinking and that the more we manipulate information and work with it the more we learn. They believe that the different kinds of writing we do also lead us "to focus on different kinds of information, to think about that information in different ways, and in turn to take quantitatively and qualitatively different kinds of knowledge" (p. 135) from our writing activities.
Richardson (1994), working in the possibilities of a feminist poststructural sociology, foregrounds this understanding of writing as a method of inquiry and explores the ways in which researchers have always used and continue to use writing to help them think. Now that the crises produced by poststructuralism, post-positivism, postmodernism, post-etcetera -- crises of representation, legitimation, objectivity, subjectivity, truth, knowledge, power, etc. -- have been admitted (by some) and now that the author is back in the text (in some texts), researchers are beginning to take advantage of the play of language in order to produce different knowledge about their topics.

The tables turn and the old question, "Can 'experimental writing' (Richardson, 1994, p. 520) produce legitimate knowledge?" becomes "What knowledge have we traditionally erased by not bringing all the writing guns to bear on a topic?" If different genres produce different knowledge, if form constrains content, should the researcher/writer continue to privilege the expository essay which remains the legitimate genre for reporting the research process and its findings? In other words, can we continue to justify limiting knowledge to that produced by the scientific paper? Perhaps rigorous inquiry calls for writing about, in, and through a topic strategically, using different forms to complicate and enrich content and to produce a more complex understanding of the case at hand.

Many fear that truth is undermined when we veer from the straight and narrow. Poststructuralism, on the contrary, admits that writing is a game of truth. If an author can posture in words in a certain way and can skillfully use citationality and academic encoding, the reader assumes the academic text is true. The notion that truth is automatically a by-product of any particular writing style cannot be taken as self-evident. At stake here is the fact/fiction binary, which seems to be the hardest for many researchers/scientists to give up. At stake here is the idea that the knowledge
produced in the essay the researcher writes about her hometown in the morning is truer than the lyric poem she writes in the afternoon about the same topic. When one begins to explore the construction of truth in science and in science writing, it falls apart. What is left for science then? Where is truth? How can we write the truth about what we study? Do we care about truth?

As I ponder these questions, I think about the everydayness of writing the ethnographic text and am reminded of Bruner's (1990) comment about the flimsy vulnerability of interviewing which holds true for writing as well: "And if you should ask that reasons be made explicit, your question will surely steer the account in a direction that it would not have taken otherwise. For the interviewer becomes part of that 'swarm of participations' that distributes Self across its occasions of use" (p. 122). When writing, the ringing of the telephone or the quick glance at the hawk soaring outside the window or the crooning of young birds in the study's chimney or the smell of popcorn in the microwave can produce a line of flight different from that which might have been produced if all had remained insensible. Writing is exquisitely fragile, and how can the Truth of metaphysics be so fragile?

With this in mind, some researchers/writers, like Clough (1992) call for an end of ethnography. Lather (1993a) writes about the "impossibility of science" (p. 676). And perhaps science and ethnography are both impossible as they have been defined by Western metaphysics. However, many of us still want to study a culture and its people and write about what we've learned.

I wanted to write a book when I returned from Essex County last autumn but did not. I believe that lost book, which I had sketched in my mind and which did not employ science writing, would have been as true and much more interesting than this dissertation for most readers and especially for my participants. This dissertation, however, has produced knowledge different from the lost book, and vice versa. I still
intend to write a book, which will be different from the one I lost since I will have
written my way through this dissertation in the meantime into a different
understanding of Essex County women. I believe that the most ethical and scientific
treatment of my topic would involve writing about the women of this community in a
variety of genres. I don't believe that simplifying the complex by using some rather
arbitrary but accepted form of writing produces either ethical or rigorous
interpretation. The Truth of humanism gives way to the truths of poststructural
thought.

Geertz (1973) helps us out of this quandary by explaining that
"anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order
ones to boot. . . They are, thus, fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are 'something
made,' 'something fashioned' -- the original meaning of fictio -- not that they are false,
unfactual, or merely 'as if' thought experiments" (p. 15). The written text, our fictio, is
all we have of the research process, since no one follows the researcher around, thank
heavens, to police the methodology which is supposed to guarantee true results. That
we can make no truth claims of this fictio and that we count on readers to understand
that they are reading an interpretation and not the truth must become the point of
departure as we think about the representation of research after all the "posts." The
positioning of the audience in truth-making, then, becomes significant, as Rabinowitz
(1977) explained several decades ago.

In fact, we may need to shift the conversation away from truth to something
else. Or must we? Perhaps truth is one of those necessary signifiers Derrida (1974)
talks about, and perhaps it must continually be placed sous rature. Perhaps we cannot
do without the concept of truth even if we do not subscribe to its premises. Lather
(1993a), in fact, finds validity a "fertile obsession," and I will discuss my own
experience with its limits directly.
I remain of two minds about the truth so, on the other hand, am not sure it is necessary. Why must we have truth? What might we desire other than truth? These questions wind around again to Foucault's (In Fornet-Betancourt, et al., 1987) questions:

After all, why truth? And why are we concerned with truth, and more so than with the self? And why do we care for ourselves, only through the care for truth? I think that we are touching on a question which is very fundamental and which is, I would say, the question of the Western world. What caused all Western culture to begin to turn around this obligation of truth, which has taken on a variety of forms. Things being what they are, nothing has, up to the present, proved that we could define a strategy exterior to it (p. 15).

I expect that researchers are constantly eating away at the truth by employing strategies which transgress its sacredness. I expect there are those unschooled and unmired in positivism who do not see its truth as self-evident and practice a different science which they do not even label transgressive but which moves within an altogether different time-space articulation.

I believe that when we give up the desire for truth, subjectivity looms large and we begin to think of it, not as a contaminant, but as a strategy for the production of knowledge. We value a particular researcher's relations with participants, her situatedness, interpretation, skill and flair as a writer -- all those rich identity relays that work in relations. "An individual is singular, not because the individual is a deep subjectivity or interiority, but because an individual is always a specific nodule in the web of a singular event, always already embedded at some juncture in a unique constellation of circumstances" (Caputo, 1993, p. 95).

Each truth enlarges our understanding; and much of this, of course, is reflected in writing. We can't leave the power of the writing behind. Along these lines, Geertz (In Olson, 1991) talks about the importance of rhetoric in ethnography: "Somehow,
the sense of circumstantiality and of power in reserve (if an anecdote or an example doesn’t sound strained but sounds like you’ve got fifty others and this is the best one you chose) are factors that are rhetorically important" (p. 249). Rigorous research provides those anecdotes.

In ethnography, variations of subjectivity have begun to produce what Marcus (1994) calls "messy texts" (567) which attempt to straddle the fence between fact and fiction since this binary has not yet been undone or displaced. Why call them "messy" except to set them off against "neat and coherent," the adjectives that have traditionally defined most science writing? Displacing the truth/untruth, fact/fiction binaries is difficult but is beginning to lead to a reinscription, an irruption of difference. Undoubtedly, the cocky, scandalous folk will lead the way, or those who never knew positivism.

At any rate, experts continue to urge researchers to write, write, write during the course of their research projects (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Richardson, 1994; Van Maanen, 1988; Wolcott, 1990; Wolf, 1992) in order to help them think. Richardson (1994) suggests keeping several different kinds of fieldnotes -- observation notes, methodological notes, theoretical notes, and personal notes (p. 526). Wolcott (1990) says "Write a preliminary draft of the study. Then begin the research" (p. 22). Van Maanen (1988) describes several different kinds of ethnographic products: realist tales, confessional tales, and impressionist tales. Wolf (1992), in fact, seems to employ all three in her A Thrice Told Tale: Feminist, Postmodernism and Ethnographic Responsibility in what might be called a postmodern triangulation.

Writers are cautioned to reveal themselves in their texts so that they are not disembodied experts from nowhere who see everything but are situated selves with partial understanding who are complicitous in the inscription of lives (Haraway,
1988). However, they are also cautioned not to reveal too much of themselves lest they overshadow the case at hand. For a time, writers displayed a list of identity categories at the beginning of a piece in order to locate themselves in a serial identity politics until this began to seem absurd, e.g., "disabled Latina lesbian mother" (Wicke, 1992, p. 22). The trick is to find a balance, to let the reader know who you are in more subtle ways, in the ways literary writers have always known.

Dealing with subjectivity seems to be a critical task in postmodern research, and rather than deny it, I believe we must strategize it and take advantage of our subjectivity as it relates to the case at hand. Writing in qualitative research after poststructuralism becomes a personal, local, specific, and emergent activity employing and conflating subjectivity and objectivity, the inside and the outside.

*** [Aside: (Prior ethnography)] Southerners, like those all over the country, create occasions for fellowship and celebration, and many of these events emerge from the harvest. Making brunswick stew is a traditional late summer or fall event in Essex County, one that requires a great deal of time and dedication and thus is shared with friends and family. There are dozens of recipes for the very best stew, and they vary considerably. Brunswick stew in Essex County contains vegetables from the harvest -- onions, butter beans, white corn, tomatoes, potatoes -- as well as meat. Stew is frozen and then eaten all winter.

Neighbors used to get together to make stew, but not so much anymore. It's a time-consuming, hot job, so civic groups make stews these days. My mother's freezer is always stocked with quarts of brunswick stew made by the Civitans, the firemen, or the Lyons, who sell their stews to make money for community projects.
The best stews, of course, are those made in somebody’s back yard. Every fall good friends of mine made brunswick stew in their front yard, thereby affirming the worthiness of this activity in their lives. Making brunswick stew is a daylong process and you have to be careful whom you invite to your stew, because they are liable to come early and stay all day and into the evening.

Very early in the day, you clear some ground away from the house and build a wood fire over which you hang a huge, black cast iron wash pot. You start about seven in the morning by pouring a bucket of water into the pot and adding the meat (about 5 pounds each of plate beef, chickens, and fresh pork, and i squirrel if you desire), 2 pounds of onions, a pod of hot pepper and some salt. When the meat has cooked long enough to fall off the bones, you pick the bones out and add the vegetables, one by one, saving the corn for last. You may need to add more water along the way. Corn means Silver Queen corn and that is the last vegetable to be added. After that comes catsup, sugar, black pepper, and vinegar. About 4:30 in the afternoon the stew is ready to eat if you’re ready. It is usually served with sliced loaf bread, slaw, and iced tea.

Everybody who is invited to the stew has to help stir it, and it has to be stirred constantly or it will stick and burn. The fire has to be kept going too and can’t get too roaring hot or the stew will boil and not simmer. It seems the men are always either adding wood to the fire or pouring water on it to make everything hotter and steamier. The stew requires a lot of attention, and there are always three or four people gathered around the stew pot, sweating from the heat of the wood fire.

Getting the bones out of the stew is a tiresome but necessary job. There must be a sensible and sanitary way to do this, but generally you ladle
up a big spoonful of stew, hold it out to someone on the other side of the pot who stirs around in it with a spoon and picks out any bones they find. Bone pickers have to be healthy -- no colds, no flu -- since they are busy fooling around in the stew for several hours. They take their job very seriously because they catch hell during the meal if anyone comes upon a bone. “What were you doing out there anyway, I almost choked on this one.” “For God’s sake, this is a whole leg bone! How’d you miss this one?” And so on.

As the stew cooks, people visit, children play, the women set tables and make pies and cakes for dessert, the men make beer and ice runs, some play scrabble and backgammon and hearts, others read in the hammock, watch baseball games, solve the problems of the world, fall asleep in rocking chairs on the porch, whatever. This is a day for relations, for keeping the connections alive. * * * *

In the Field

Methods Are Easy

I had years and years of a prior ethnography under my belt before I returned to Essex County as an authorized ethnographer in full regalia in search of the natives. I arrived at the site with large, sturdy tape recorder for official interviews; high-tech, state-of-the-art microphone that picks up roosters crowing down the road as well as all the pieces of the interview; small tape recorder stashed in my purse for intimate, instant data collection and those brilliant, off-the-cuff theoretical analyses that emerge at awkward moments; index cards in my handbag to use when the tape recorder would seem impolite; portable computer in the car for prompt transcription of fieldnotes. I was well-equipped.
This preparedness was handy but, mostly, I did the same things in Essex County that summer of data collection that I usually do when I go home to stay with my mother. I did everything she did and then some, as they say in Milton.

I scheduled the interviews for my first two trips while I was in Columbus before I went to Milton, and so I arrived there with little to do but sort through a plethora of adaptors and plug all that equipment in to see if it really worked. I had talked endlessly with my mother on the phone about my research and what it entailed, so she was prepared for an excess of activity. Little did she know how much I was going to count on her to serve as my chief advisor. That role, however, has always been her best. I believe she was a tiny bit more careful than usual as she made recommendations or helped me sort through options, though she has always been one of the fairest, most "objective" people I have ever known. My own highly-opinionated nature comes smack up against her level-headedness and ability to recognize other points of view and withers every time. Though I never broke the confidentiality of my participants, I presented my analyses to my mother throughout those days in the field, and she responded with insight, skill, and her usual oblique directness.

My mother served in various capacities: advisor, briefer, debriefer, and tour guide. I knew some of the women I interviewed very well, I knew others to speak to, and others I didn't know at all. I counted on my mother to keep me from embarrassing both of us by quickly briefing me about each participant before I drove off to interview her. For instance, Mother would tell me whether my participant's husband was still alive, and if he wasn't, what had happened to him and whether it had been a hard death. She would remind me that I had gone to school with so-and-so's son, who now lives in California and has two daughters. When I returned from an interview with a question or encountered a problem as I transcribed a tape, she served as my
resource. She showed no particular interest in the data I was collecting other than to ask me about someone's health.

My mother's sister who lives just behind her was also a valuable advisor. She was particularly helpful in the selection of participants, and I called on her often to get a third opinion when my mother and I disagreed on something. She had worked for years at the Tobacco Experiment Station and served as my chief resource in that area.

I drove to a nearby town several times to visit, consult with, and interview my third advisor, a brilliant scholar and dear friend, one who married and came to Milton to become a central figure in the community and then left after her husband died. She was my member checker, though not a member. She was able to theorize with me and to explain contextual issues I couldn't understand. We talked about self-discipline and the long-term effects of the Civil War. We talked about race and class and gender. She is in very much the same position I am in, an outsider/insider/outsider.

It seemed very natural to ask these three women to lend their proven mentoring skills to this research project. Who better to help me get it as right as I could? And who's to say they are not participants in a certain way. After all, they have inspired this study to some extent, and at least some of the prior ethnography is what it is because of them.

At any rate, on the evening of my arrival in June, I tested my equipment and caught up on gossip with my mother until it dawned on me that somewhere on the interstate between Columbus and Milton I had become a researcher and should probably write up some fieldnotes before I went to bed -- the arrival trope. The phone rang about then, and I talked with one of the three women I was scheduled to interview on that first trip who, it turned out, was ill, and we decided to postpone her interview. As we chit-chatted, I revealed the names of the other two women I would be interviewing that week. She seemed a bit surprised that I did so, and I wondered if
I was in trouble already. Thus, the first entry in my journal/fieldnotes "in the field" is as follows: "Well, I have screwed up already." It had never occurred to me to keep the names of my participants a secret since I had assumed that everyone in the county would know whom I was interviewing before I knew myself. This turned out to be the case, but I was certainly brought up short and much more careful about my assumptions after that.

On that first trip I interviewed only two women and, other than that, mostly tried to get used to treating my hometown as the object of my research. I was never completely successful at doing that, and, when I was trying to be most official, would run into someone I hadn't seen in years and instantly be positioned as Bettie Adams with the strange married name who's been gone for so long and what are you doing here now? I was usually in a state of sheer confusion and disruption, even when I was reading in my favorite chair in my mother's living room. Bettie-the-researcher intruded at strange and inappropriate times but could not be found on other occasions when her presence was critical. I did, however, become adept at switching on and off, at shifting positions, at doing everything at once.

On the second and third trips, I usually had two interviews a day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and met Mother and her friends for lunch at the Milton Inn. We went out to supper several times a week with friends. We went to Sunday School and church every Sunday. We went shopping with my aunt and other friends. I listened a lot and tried to be a dutiful daughter to all these women as I always do when I go to Milton. In addition to doing some non-member member-checking on our early morning walks, I asked my mother more questions than usual about the county and its people, tried to get some facts straight, to sort out people in town whom I thought I should pay more attention to, and to get a take on local politics.
I followed up on all the gossip. If I heard a juicy bit of data from one source, I asked everyone I talked with to confirm/deny/contextualize it as long as it didn't compromise my participant. This sort of member-checking was an ongoing activity. I revised my interview guide as data emerged from the interviews and from other fieldwork. When I was confused or needed information, I consulted my mother, my aunt, and their friends at lunch. "Why are all the roads in the county named for men?" I heard a variety of opinions in response to questions like this and took note of them all. I was very interested in the differences.

When I had some spare time, I walked the town streets looking in store windows. (Through the windows of a downtown gym that I think used to be an upscale woman's clothing store, I saw a lovely young Chinese woman on a treadmill. The East has arrived in Milton.) I did some shopping, noting the smiles and genuine interest in me as a stranger. People tried to "place" me. "You look so familiar, are you from around here?" When I identified myself, they would say, "Of course, you look just like your Aunt Lib." I took another look at all the lovely churches that adorn the street corners. I walked down Broad Street to admire the magnificent mansions with their spacious porches decorated with appropriate porch paraphernalia -- ferns and wicker chairs with faded cushions and swings.

I took pictures of the tall statue of the Confederate soldier that used to stand in the middle of the main intersection of town and snarl traffic. During desegregation in the 1970's, he was moved to the grounds of the new public library, and he looks a bit lost now, having lost his dominant position in town and his authority, as well as the war.

I, a well-trained librarian, scoured the town with my mother's help for data about Milton. We tried to verify the rumor that women own more property than men in Essex County at the Register of Deeds Office. That data isn't readily available, but
the young women who worked there were very interested in my project and volunteered to turn pages and pages of property tax records, even though I demurred, since they too wanted to know the answer to my question.

I spent hours analyzing documents in the Essex County Room of the public library reading the history of the county and newspaper clippings from the turn-of-the-century. The librarian magically produced documents, books, and maps for me to buy or keep that everyone had told me were out-of-print. The genealogical resources in this room are heavily used by people from several states, since many settlers moved south through Essex County along the Indian Trading Path. Some stayed in Essex County for a time and then moved on, leaving traces of family which now serve as pointers to their descendants. I learned that a local man had clipped articles from the county's newspaper for decades and had sorted those clippings by subject into notebooks, e.g., Women's Clubs, Civic Clubs, Wars, Education, etc. His meticulous work enabled a profitable tour through the history of the county as I focused on topics of particular importance to my study. I found the stellar historical volume published by the Essex County Historical Society an invaluable reference tool. In addition, I discovered two master theses and one doctoral dissertation about Essex County, two of which centered on racial issues. My participants shared the annual programs of the many cultural and educational clubs to which they belong. My family and friends saved newspaper clippings, church bulletins, and other documents which they thought I might be able to use. There was no shortage of written information about Essex County. In fact, I was overwhelmed with data.

I officially interviewed a woman who is a City Commissioner, not a participant, to get her take on Milton. I interviewed in a casual way many other people in town, including school friends, shopkeepers, whomever I was talking with at the time. I saw friends I hadn't seen in years. I wanted to meet them again to see what
growing middle-aged in Milton looks like. I visited the home of one of my participants to pay my respects on the death of her husband and met her daughters after a twenty-five year gap -- one had been a best-friend and one a favorite student.

When I expressed some interest, I was kindly invited to attend a meeting of the Wednesday Literary Club where I, a young teacher-scholar, was once invited to lecture about Buddhism, of all things. That afternoon we sat in folding chairs in a circle in a lovely dining room in a beautiful old house on Broad Street and were served fruit and cheese straws on elegant china and coffee from silver urns before the presentation about one of the state's famous authors.

I went to a luncheon meeting of the Woman's Club where I had never been before and recited the pledge to the flag, which I hadn't had occasion to do in decades, sang the words to the clubwoman's song which I didn't know [With joy we meet, each friend to greet, from mountains and from sea / Hand clasped in hand, as one we stand, in faith and loyalty / We love our work, no task we shirk / We serve where needs are found / A good deed done is for each one, to make more joy abound], and had a lovely lunch of ham, green beans, corn pudding, a salad made of lettuce with canned green peas on top, homemade rolls, and pecan pie.

I drove up and down the streets of Milton, looking at all the houses, wondering if I might now be living in this one or that one if I had stayed there and continued to teach English. I imagined myself walking out my front door and on to the post office, or the drug store, or the courthouse, or to church on Wednesday nights for prayer meeting.

I was concerned not just about Milton but the entire county. When I was growing up in Milton, we children made sharp distinctions between those who lived in the town of Milton and those who lived in the rest of the county -- they were country people, rubes, red-necks, tobacco farmers, and certainly not as sophisticated as we
thought we were. We teenagers avoided the country, except maybe at Christmas time when we set out to shoot mistletoe out of a tree, or to pull up running cedar from some farmer's pine forest to decorate our mothers' mantles, or to locate the homeplace of a handsome Talbot boy.

For that reason, I was concerned that I didn't know the county as well as I knew Milton proper. I had never known any of the other little towns in the county very well, but knew that some of my 36 participants were originally from Hickory Hill or Brandon or Cambridge or Talbot. I had completely lost track of the growth around Brandon, where the World War II army camp had been built. That area is now prosperous since the military facilities have been transformed into famous psychiatric and penal institutions. I felt the need to connect with these other places, with the farms, with the country churches that I remembered, with the fields of tobacco, and with the fertile land of Essex County.

Mother's family is kin to half the county, and her connections outside of Milton are strong, so we made plans to remedy my own lack and headed out with a full gas tank and county maps on Sunday afternoons to scout around and be ethnographers. Our main goal was to locate the homes of the participants I was scheduled to interview the following week. She knew where practically everyone lived, or at least knew the country road they lived on. I took my little tape recorder and recorded what we saw, Mother's comments and responses to my questions, my own analyses, things to think about later, and any special features of the landscape or of my participants' homes and properties as we discovered them. We had a marvelous time.

My distance from Essex County allowed me to appreciate its beauty, since I was not used to taking it for granted. As I read more and more history of the county, these Sunday trips become more significant. I noticed the change in the soil as we drove south. I paid attention to the old-fashioned tobacco barns. We discovered one
particularly well-maintained group of four barns made of logs, each barn anchoring the corner of a square in a field near the road, with a shelter house standing in the middle of the square. I could almost hear people laughing, telling stories, and singing as they handed leaves and emptied slides of tobacco and carried bundles of the weed tied to tobacco sticks to the barns for curing.

I have always loved the unassuming country churches, usually built on a rise, because they often have huge open shelters right next to the church with picnic tables designed for covered-dish suppers and revival picnics as well as graveyards behind or to the side. It seems that even after you're buried there, you're close enough to keep an eye on what's going on, still part of the congregation, so to speak. Mother told me that many of the old frame churches are being bricked up to preserve them. The red brick isn't as beautiful as the gleaming, pristine white wood but necessary I suppose. We stopped and I took pictures of every church, of that group of tobacco barns, and of one house, in particular, that I drove back to look at again and again.

*** [Aside: I tell you, I would like to live in that house. It's on a country road, set back a ways, situated in a clearing but surrounded by a forest of hardwoods and pines. It's a very old, small house and appears to be one-story but has a steep roof, almost like a modern A-frame, made of tin that slopes down at quite an angle and then glides out at a softer angle on one side to cover what I think must be the living room and maybe a bedroom. A covered porch of fair dimensions about one step up from the ground shelters the simple entry. On the same side of the house as the porch are two fieldstone chimneys, probably for heating the living area and the back of the house where I expect the kitchen is located. The house is made of wood and is gray shading somehow to a deep rose; it hasn't seen any paint in decades. Behind the house]
is a small frame storage building, also unpainted and roofed in tin with two big
galvanized washtubs hanging on one side. Behind the small building is the
well. Poles supporting a clothesline tilt off to one side of the well heading into
the shade.

Everything is very tidy and in its place. Bushes have been planted
around the yard and are neatly trimmed. The yard is not a fine, suburban lawn
of Kentucky bluegrass; rather, whatever comes up and is green counts as lawn
and is closely mowed. A red dirt road leads to the house and there is a large
dirt parking and turn-around area to one side, extending under the oak trees. It
looks like it's been swept recently. I had forgotten that you sweep dirt to keep
it neat. I saw no television antenna or power wires or telephone lines going to
the house. It sits there as it has sat for more than a century, well-maintained in
a certain way and self-disciplined, sufficient, sturdy, and pleasing.

I'm not sure why I was so drawn to it. Perhaps its age linked me to the
history of the county which I had been reading so much about. I never saw
anyone there, and I thought it must be waiting for me. For some reason, I can't
imagine living there with anyone else.

If you lived there, you'd have to give up your shoes, because the red
dirt would quickly ruin them. You'd have to go barefoot to visit your friend
down the road or to pick tomatoes in the garden or to cut branches of
pussywillow and forsythia for your table, and then you'd have to sit on the
porch step and wash your feet in a bucket of water and dry them on an old
towel that your cats regularly pull off its hook before you can come in the
house.

You'd have to read a lot or think a lot or write a lot of letters or a book
or just drift. You'd probably talk to yourself as well as your cats. I can
imagine sitting on that porch in the twilight watching the lightning bugs under the trees, shelling butterbeans and humming tunes. I can imagine sleeping through a storm in the loft that must be hidden under that steep roof. I can imagine letting the lawn grow and turn dandelion yellow in the spring. I can imagine asking friends to come help with brunswick stew in the autumn after my garden has come in. I want to live there. I may invite you to come there for stew some day.] * * * *

I became attached to Essex County last summer as I had never been when I lived there. The more history I read, the more women I talked to, the more I drove the country roads -- all those connections of being in the place almost convinced me to move back. I felt that I could even be a Baptist again if I could attend the Wilson Baptist Church in Lewis. I knew how things should be done, I knew what to say when, I knew when to keep quiet, I knew what counted. I slipped back into my position as an Essex County girl, and I suppose I went native.

I was curious about my attachment to this place I had so eagerly left twenty-five years earlier. I was becoming attached not only to its material beauty but to the women I was interviewing. I was reconnected to Essex County, this particular articulation of relations, at a breakneck speed as I listened to life after life after life. I heard one woman mention another who had been so important in her life and then interviewed that woman, who mentioned another whom I then interviewed.

I interviewed my former Latin teacher, an all-time favorite and still an inspiration, who quoted Browning and showed me pictures of her favorite teacher who became her life-long mentor. As I packed up my tape recorder at the end of the interview, she gave this middle-aged woman the same advice about my dissertation
she'd given me when I was a teenager, "Bettie, do your best and you might surprise yourself."

I interviewed a country woman who lives in a tiny crossroads, in the seventh house on the left after you pass the sign announcing her town, a former first-grade teacher who turned out to be my cousin. The simplicity of her goodness was overwhelming, and I felt small by comparison and grateful that we were kin.

I interviewed a woman who remembered my great-grandmother, Lizzie, who had nursed everyone in town. This was the only woman who directly mentioned gender trouble in her interview. She told me she had always been a bit of a troublemaker, was always in the middle of things, and that she couldn't keep her mouth shut when men got too uppity. When I asked what she thought had made her that way, she leaned forward, looked me in the eyes, and said she didn't know what it was, but that I must have it too or I wouldn't be doing this study. I was taken aback. I thought I was being so docile in Milton, but I had blown my cover.

I interviewed women who were daunting in their achievements in this very patriarchal society, women who had achieved public office, been chair of the county school board or city commissioner, widows who lived in the country but served on boards of directors of huge companies, managed thousand-acre farms, travelled all over the world, and were vigorous, confident, and above all self-disciplined.

All the relations began to nestle around me, and the feeling of displacement which I have both admitted and denied since I left Essex County became overwhelming. In the middle of some busy lives as well as some lonely lives the women of Essex County did their duty by an almost-native daughter who had asked for help and in doing so brought me back into their web of relations. I was helped out and sent on my way with good wishes, the name of a book to read that would explain southern women, the name of another very interesting woman I should interview who
lives just down the road, greetings for my mother, and even pickles and chocolate chip cake. Several of them blessed me by remembering my father. I may have been a passing curiosity or even a slight nuisance for some of them, but my participants have become bright stars in my life.

If this sounds like a pretty picture, it's because it is a pretty picture. There are other pictures, of course.

How could I not notice the Black ghettos in Milton, the horrible poverty of the projects? How could I not hear the absence of any concern with race in many women's words or the frequent denial that there are any problems in the county as a result of poverty and racism. Did I see the ghettos and hear/speak the denials when I lived there? I drove down the street where I had grown up. A low-income housing project has been built at one end of it, where Blacks had always lived, and now most of the whites have moved out. I read the two masters theses in the library about racial issues, one written by a Black woman and one written by a white man, the best friend of my best friend's son. I read a 1949 article from the local paper in the library praising the KKK for protecting white southern womanhood from the rape of the Negroes. I drove by the building that housed the business of the white man who killed a young Black man in 1970 because he had looked wrong at a white woman. That murder started a race riot which turned into burnings and boycotts and big trouble. I remembered the horrified phone calls I had received from some parents when my all-white cheerleaders had hugged the all-Black basketball team when they were competing for the state championship. I remember a neighbor berating my father for allowing a Black student to visit me at my parents' house. One of Milton's most famous sons is a Black leader who is just a few years younger than I am. As I walked the streets of Milton, I wondered whether he had been standing in the colored ticket line while I had been standing in the white ticket line at the movie theater on Saturday
afternoons when we were children. I remembered the pain and joy of integration when I had taught school in Essex County. This story is not part of this story. It is another articulation of relations that is juxtaposed in antagonism just out of sight of the story I tell. It is deferred and bright in its absence. Carry it along with you as you read more about ethnography in Essex County.

I learned so much and so little from interviews. The interviews themselves varied in length. I talked with some women for only forty minutes or so and with others for several hours. I had prepared an interview guide, and, on good advice, began by asking straight-forward questions about age, marital status, number of children, parents, etc. I then moved into questions probing issues of knowledge and subjectivity.

Many women greeted me by saying that their lives were not very interesting and they didn’t see how they be of any use, but that they’d be glad to help me if they could. Two asked me to correct their grammar if I quoted them. One seemed so concerned about my taping the interview that I told her I’d send her a copy of the transcript for her to edit. She returned it with some changes on the first few pages, but had obviously given up. Her accompanying note said, "You never know how you look until you get your picture took." Her language is the deliciously beautiful rural Southern talk that makes me smile and want to listen forever. Another woman said that one of her relatives had always promised to interview her but never had, and I sent her a copy of her interview tape.

Some women seemed happy that I had a list of questions and followed my lead. Others took charge of their interviews immediately, and I never had a chance to ask a single question. Doing so would have been extremely rude. These women had decided what they would tell me, told me, and I understood that what I had heard was all I was going to get and I was appropriately grateful. Since they knew I was a
teacher, some women had prepared their education-stories for me and would not swerve from those even when I told them I wanted to talk about anything and everything. Some women had a fine sense of continuity and focus and answered a question, elaborated, and then returned to the issue at hand. These women were teachers, and I could hear them thinking that they had gotten too far off the track. Some stories were severely chronological; some moved back and forth through their lives. Some women talked chiefly of their childhood. Children were mentioned occasionally; husbands hardly ever, perhaps because I asked few questions about these relations. Time collapsed when women talked about their mothers: they spoke as if their mothers had just stepped out to take something next door. I was deeply touched by how hard some of the women worked to answer my questions. They took my work and theirs very seriously and approached the position of interviewee with the same diligence and sense of responsibility they did other jobs of work.

Though I had read about being a witness to others' pain during oral histories, I was not prepared when I witnessed despair myself. That pain was usually evident in the oldest women who seemed lonely and in frail health, and I found myself wanting to hold them like children and tell them everything would be all right. These were the longest interviews, often rambling. I was a willing audience who changed tape after tape as they worked through issues and explored their lives. When I could see they were very tired in spite of themselves, I excused myself but was always invited back. The walk out to my car was very slow as they thought of other things to tell me on the way. I was told on several occasions that the best gift the young could give the old was to listen. "I was deeply moved and saddened when people blessed me for merely listening" (Meyerhoff, 1978, p. 36). And I was embarrassed and angry that these women were dependent because they could no longer drive or see well -- because they were old. One had missed her great-grandson's christening because it wasn't
convenient for anyone to pick her up; another had missed church because someone
had forgotten her. They didn't complain, mind you, about this neglect since it was
actually unusual; rather, it was mentioned in passing as a condition of old-age to
which they had become reconciled.

In the evenings at my mother's house, after supper, I wrote thank-you letters to
the women I had interviewed that day, often so moved I did not know what to say. I
printed those letters when I returned to Columbus after each trip and mailed them off.
As I transcribed tapes, I was once again caught up in their lives and wrote each woman
another letter to maintain a connection. In February, I sent each one a valentine. I
have received some letters in return. Mother and my aunt both tell me that many
women have told them how much they enjoyed talking with me and how much they
have appreciated my letters.

Sometimes I feel much too far away and long for Essex County and these
women. I have come to understand that I grieve for them and for myself, since I will
never know them as I would like to. I will probably not return to Essex County to
live, and some of them will die before I ever see them again. One of them has already
died, and I was not there to mourn her passing with all her other friends. One has lost
her husband. I dread my mother's news: "I thought you'd want to know that - - - - - so
you can send a card."

At the end of each trip, I drove, interviews complete, the long, lonely 546
miles through the mountains, across the West Virginia turnpike and across Ohio to my
other home, feeling empty, already heartsick for the beauty of Essex County and its
women. About halfway home, my emotions gave way to analysis and the researcher
kicked in, eager to get at some truth of the matter, and I began speaking to my tape
recorder once again, remembering as well the conflicts and the not-so-pretty truths
about Essex County. I continued making data and analyzing data about the
articulations of relations I had experienced and those I hadn’t so that I could tell stories later.

Essex County women are always on my mind. Because of them, I have re-examined my own life, shifted some priorities, and am positioning myself to practice care of the self based on some of their practices. I am also attempting to practice subversive repetition in order to regain some practices I might once have had but have lost as well as to learn others I have never known but desire. Of course, I also wish to free myself from some practices I learned in Essex County and elsewhere that drag me down. I feel very clumsy. My ongoing care of the self will be a pastiche of practices, an outside always turning inside as I form and reform, moving right along into difference.

Folding is Hard

There is a different story about being in the field that emerges from the polyphony of subjectivities in this writing space. Let's stand back for a moment and look at all that talk about methods and data which I reviewed early in this chapter as well as the story you just read about being in the field. I'd like to analyze some of the data presented so far -- the data about methods which appears in the literature, which I have conscientiously reviewed, and which was used to frame this study before the official fieldwork began. Like any other ethnographer, I have told one of my true stories about being in the field and expressed what an emotional and transforming experience it was. However, Spivak and Foucault just bellowed that I consider the self-evidence of all this talk about methodology before I leave it behind to dig into care of the self in Essex County.

In the literature, traditional methods of data collection are usually discussed separately; in fact, they are separate entries in the indexes of most methodology texts.
It is as if discrete methods produce discrete data bits. In practice, these distinctions are not so clear, and confusion seems to hide under the word "immersion." I would like to think about what "immersion" means in this study and about the problem of looking at methods as discrete practices that can be discussed separately which produce discrete data bits which can be categorized, coded, analyzed, and interpreted.

We do, of course, describe methods method by method, and I have done so to show that it can be done once again. However, it is distortive to describe my practice in the field in such a linear fashion. It is difficult for me to say, for instance, that from 9:00-11:30 am on Monday I used the interview method and from 1:00-5:00 pm that same day I used participant observation. For example, many women I interviewed gave me tours of their homes and yards as I asked them questions (interview and participant observation) and showed me pictures and scrapbooks (interview and document analysis) while we talked.

This all comes back, of course, to the impudence of language. When I stop overlaying words like "ethnography" and "interview" on my practice in the field -- stop forcing practice into received categories -- and think about what happened (or what I remember happening today based on my fieldnotes), I find that language has failed me once again, or rather that my reliance on the self-evidence of language needs to be critiqued. In other words, what is absent from the presence of these words?

This also comes back to a confusion of subjectivities which has produced some methodological insights. Rather than treating my positioning as insider in this community as a contaminant producing some kind of suspect subjectivism, I have used subjectivity as a *bricolage* would to learn what it might produce. I am beginning to believe that we researchers might profit from embracing the forbidden and exploring its uncomfortable effects as much as we can bear. Since subjectivity is the focus of this study, I have been seduced into examining it in all its particulars.
At any rate, employing an image like the "fold," "the inside as an operation of the outside" (Deleuze, 1988/1986, p. 97) is useful in this exercise of examining the self-evidence of methods and data and fieldwork in relation to subjectivity. [Remember that Badiou (1994) says the fold is "a figure of interiority (or of the subject) that is neither reflection (or the cogito), nor the relationship to, the focus (or intentionality), nor the pure empty point (or eclipse)" (p. 61).] Thus, the subject cannot be a limit, and knowledge is released from an object. "Knowing is unfolding an interior complexity" (Badiou, 1994, p. 62). Deleuze (quoted in Badiou, 1994) says, "I always unfold between two folds, and if perceiving is unfolding, I always perceive within the folds" (p. 62). I will think about methods and data and fieldwork in relation to language and subjectivity using the image of the "fold."

To begin with, I will look at language and must question the self-evidence of the word "interview." Often, the most interesting interview data emerged when the formal interview ended, i.e., when I turned the tape recorder off. I left my participants’ homes with data from an official interview as well as data from an unofficial and more relaxed conversation. As I drove away after the "interview," I recorded as much as I could recall of that conversation at the end of the "interview" tape. Does the latter data count as official interview data or as general ethnographic data? I often interviewed in an informal manner people who were not participants. For instance, I discovered Milton’s new and only bookstore, a wonderful and prosperous enterprise in the Episcopal Church, and interviewed everyone there. However, I have not counted those interviews as "interviews" but as part of the ethnography since those folks were not formally invited to participate. What counts as an interview? Are there official and unofficial interviews? And what about my interviews of myself during this long process, e.g., "Why did you call her 'Susie' at one point in the interview, Bettie, and 'Mrs. Johnson' at another?" Sometimes these interviews of myself were quite lengthy.
Or is this self-reflexivity? Too, I often heard something in one interview that I began asking everyone else about, participant and non-participant. I believe this activity amounts to a survey -- or is it simply the creation of another interview question, or is it a member-check that includes some nonmembers?

There is another take on interviews as well. I believe I have been involved in several interviews with each participant. There is the interview I experienced in the flesh, with my body and my senses -- the material interview when the sofa was too soft, when I was worried all the time about whether I had the microphone on, when I was distracted by the tractors on the road or the beauty of an old face, or when I cried along with my participant at a sad story. Then there's the tape recording of that interview which I can listen to over and over but which omits entirely too much of that material experience. There's the interview I think I remember as I drive to the grocery store (later I realize I've put one woman's words in another's mouth. What's that all about?). There's the ongoing interview with one particular woman in my dreams. Then there's the interview I wish I had had (Why didn't I ask her about that?) or the follow-up interview I imagine now that I understand so much more.

It all gets very jumbled up; the categories fail. There's more. When I was reading in the Essex County Room at the public library, I participated with residents (helped answer some reference questions when the staff were busy since I am a librarian); observed the use patterns of the library since they reveal much about a community; and interviewed other library patrons as well as staff in an informal manner. In this instance, document analysis, interviewing, and participant observation were not discrete activities but were employed simultaneously.

Naming data is troublesome also. Van Maanen (1988) explains that "Textualization' is Ricoeur's term for the process by which unwritten behavior[s] ... become fixed, atomized, and classified as data of a certain sort. Only in textualized
form do data yield to analysis" (p. 95). My, my. What a positivist conception of data
-- "fixed, atomized, and classified." And, I beg your pardon, but I have analyzed lots
of data that never made it into words on a page.

Miles and Huberman (1984) discuss qualitative data as follows:

Qualitative data are attractive. They are a source of well-grounded
rich descriptions and explanations of processes occurring in local
contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological
flow, assess local causality, and derive fruitful explanations.
Then, too, qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous
findings and to new theoretical integrations; they help researchers
go beyond initial preconceptions and frameworks. Finally, the
findings from qualitative studies have a quality of
"undeniability" (p. 15).

My, my, "preserve chronological flow, assess local causality." The "lead to
serendipitous findings" sounds acceptable, however.

Words like fixed, classified, preserve the chronological flow, and causality
belong to that group of "words like origin, home, truth, reality, objective, fact, know,
and experience"-- words that give poststructuralists "the creeps" (Austin, quoted in
Swardsdon, 1994, p. 300) and set ouralarums screeching.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) define qualitative data as the "rough materials
researchers collect from the world they are studying; they are particulars that form the
basis of analysis. Data are both the evidence and the clues" (p. 106). This description
seems a bit more palatable and allows for the inclusion of the "rough materials" that
have informed this study. The point to be made from these descriptions of data in the
literature is that, on the whole, they are still very positivist.

What about my emotions, for instance? Are they data? If so, how do I
describe the method that produced them? Kleinman and Copp (1993) say that we
should indeed count our emotions as data to be analyzed. Van Maanen, Manning, and
Miller (1993) say that fieldwork is "yet another addition to our repertoire of ways to
make ourselves uncomfortable," that "emotional labor is thus central to the trade," and that "we might be made somewhat more comfortable if less of our efforts were devoted to the avoidance, denial, and control of emotions and if more of our efforts were directed to the understanding, expression, and reporting of them" (p. viii). But how do I name the method that produced that emotional data? I have already talked about self-formation, i.e., the painful deconstruction of self and the irruption of a different subjectivity, in connection with validity, but I believe I might also talk about self-formation as a method which produces emotional data. Alas, I'm afraid I didn't keep track of all those devastating explosions of the self as well as I might have.

What about the data of my dreams? Foucault (1986/1984) calls the "space of our dreams" "the space of our primary perception" (p. 23). How, then, can I discount them? Can I name dreaming a method of data collection? Can I mine my extraconsciousness? I have had many dreams about Essex County and my participants. In fact, some of the first data presented in this dissertation was dream data. These dreams have surely made me think, and I have surely analyzed them, as I have other data. They have also added a layer of complexity to my understanding of my topic.

What about all that data that cannot be textualized but that hovers around the words on the page and flavors the cadence of a sentence or the choice of an adjective? I wish you could hear the voices of these southern women. I wish you could see the fat sunlight of the rosy crepe myrtles on Hester Road. I wish you could taste the vinegary pit-cooked barbecue and the crunchy hush puppies made with a touch of onion at Joe's Pit-Cooked Barbecue. That sensual data of the body is somewhere here among these words if you look for it.

(Part of the pledge for poststructural researchers is to refuse to write a paragraph discussing the triangulation of data unless they are going off on a truly tantalizing line of flight.)
And member checking? I member-checked constantly. It has not been a
discrete activity I tacked on at the end of the research project. I member-checked in
the field of Essex County with members and almost members and non-members. And
I have been member-checking in the field of this text all along -- with you. You’re the
audience who was invited in at the beginning, Spivak’s (1993) "responsible,
responding" coinvestigator (p. 22). There’s no binary here between us. I’ve written
every word knowing you were sitting there reading with your eyebrow raised.

Another complication is that much of what would traditionally be called the
ethnographic portion of this study relies on a long-term prior ethnography. Thus, time
serves to disrupt the boundaries of this research design since I was always working
simultaneously in several time-spaces at different speeds. Or was I? How do I
textualize the kind of subjectivity which disrupts Miles and Huberman’s (1984) need
for data to "preserve chronological flow" (p. 15)? I lived in this community for a
stretch of twenty years, left, and returned periodically over another twenty-year period
before beginning this official study. Because of the folds of time-space, I cannot
possibly sort the data I have collected over almost half a century into official
(collected by legitimate methods within the bounds of this study) and unofficial
(leftover, sedimented, sensuous data), data produced by "living in a place that refuses
the objectifying gaze" (Game, 1991, p. 183).

Time has been troublesome indeed. For example, I spent many hours in the
library looking at pictures of the Milton of the past, as well as pictures of my
participants in old newspaper clippings. Later, as I ethnographically walked the
streets of Milton and was cheered by the renovated courthouse built in 1840, I
remembered the pictures of what the courthouse had looked like in 1875 with a
squadron of Civil War Veterons formed up in front of it and remembered as well the
slow disintegration of the courthouse during my youth. During an interview, I might
remember a picture of my participant as a young woman posed in a suit speaking to a
Red Cross group during World War II, or smiling as she served food for a church
group during the 1950's, or standing with the Garden Club celebrating the planting of
the medians on Hill St. I can't sort all this out. I could not observe without
remembering. Memory "bends time by collapsing the (culturally constructed)
boundaries separating past and present selves" (Linden, 1993, p. 35), between past and
present everything. And I must confess that sometimes I only think that I remember
the deteriorating corridors of the courthouse during my teenage years. Perhaps I've
been told that I remember, so I do. What counts as a memory? Does it matter?

I can go on. If I take a different look at my study and think about methods and
data with subjectivity in mind, I get into more trouble. I may not want to move in this
direction. But I see glimmers of all the methods my participants have used during my
study to collect data about my study. I am not the only subject in this study, and I am
not the only researcher at work. I may call myself official, but I have been studied
unofficially and intently by my participants. What methods have they used, what data
have they collected, what has their analysis yielded, and what are its effects? Their
activity is not a member check or collaborative research, but something else entirely --
another fold of the outside in. Adding time to this folding produces even more
trouble, since I begin to think of all the methods they have used through the years to
collect data and the theory they have used to analyze it in order to produce data for me
to study. Maines (1993) says that "the uninterpreted datum does not exist" (p. 22).
Who is the researcher? Where does the study begin? You must realize by now that I
have lost the beginning of my study. I don't know when it began, and rather than
make that decision myself, I have given you several origin stories from which to
choose. But these are still variations of my origin story, not theirs. Think of all their
variations, of all the possibilities of self-formation which wrap around and fold into
this rather capricious construction, Bettie's study. Describing a design, and naming and categorizing method and data becomes an arbitrary, binary sorting exercise that may not be very useful.

Questioning the self-evidence of method and data just leads to trouble. As you can see, it's difficult to identify all the activities that might be named method. It's difficult to define data. Sometimes having data leads to a search for the method that produced it as in my search for the method, self-formation, that I think produced many of my most distressing emotions, which I do, by the way, count as data. As illustrated, it is also difficult to separate these methods into discrete activities since practice, or perhaps questioning the self-evidence of practice, transgresses traditional grids which separate method from method and data from data. Positivism's neat slotting of activities into categories called "interview," "ethnography," "participant-observation," "observation," "document analysis," or "survey" does not reflect my practice.

Steady-state methodology in this project, if there is such a thing, has been to do everything at once, which may be what postmodern ethnography entails. This then requires if not a different language, at least different images, such as Deleuze's (1993a) "fold," as well as different modes of representation. Methodology has been about the simultaneity of a multitude of relations folded in unbounded time-space, method folding into method, data into data, and subjectivity into subjectivity.

Thus, it seems to me that the function and understanding of method is, and has been, blurred as much as the function and understanding of genre and that the poststructural researcher is a nomad who becomes facile at deterritorializing any of the self-evident boundaries which language permits. Methodology becomes a rhizomatic practice, a practice of working in the folds of subjectivities in time-space with no rest in the inside and no comfort at the pause. And issues relating to subjectivity have led
me to this understanding. Prying up, meddling with, and burrowing into that forbidden contaminant, subjectivity, has moved me along.

Representing this kind of fieldwork in writing becomes even more problematic, of course. And since I do believe we do write to learn, I have written and written and written. However, the idea seems to be that once everything heard, seen, smelled, felt, thought, etc. is translated into words on a page, as if it could be, it is "really" data. I won't dwell on the doubtful ability of language to locate and fix the meaning of anything, but that contradiction is something to keep in mind. Data escapes language.

One of the most troublesome aspects of this research has been the "burden of authorship" (Geertz, 1988, p. 138). As previously stated, I am well aware that whatever inscription I produce about Essex County and some of its women will have effects beyond my control. I write with care, I rewrite, I change a word here and there that seems too sure of itself, I qualify and qualify and qualify a precarious position and then sometimes I just get tired of being so namby-pamby and let statements fly.

In the struggle to find a fitting text, I come at this project sideways and twisted up, believing that there is no reality of Essex County women which my research has uncovered, no reality which I can represent in this text. I question the meaning of methodology, and methods, and data. I certainly have no conclusions. However, the purpose of this research project is to prove to you that I have followed proper methodological procedures in the field to collect acceptable data, that I have uncovered some knowledge/truth there, and that I can report my conclusions in the accepted format of the dissertation.

Contrary to my expectations (Lord knows, I have complained often enough about it), working within the dissertation format in an attempt to represent the real has been both challenging and profitable. Pushing against its limits has given me an
inkling of all the forces of the outside, the excess of absence, that folds this piece in upon itself. I understand that I will always work within and against those forces, no matter how free I believe this writing self is. Kvale (1989) questions "the validity of the validity question" (p. 73) as I do. However, I also expect its limits may produce "practices that open up spaces for the exploration of that which eludes capture and resists being closed off into concept" (Lenzo, 1995, p. 19). I speak here of those absences which we only miss when they are deferred from the self-evidence of presence.

The entropy in this supposedly systematic process, this supposedly bound system called the research project, only increases as it is subjected to scrutiny. Randomness, disorder, uncertainty, and a limited knowledge of where things are and what they are doing becomes business-as-usual. You figure. I believe that the persistent critique urged by poststructuralism enables a transition from traditional methodology to something different and am not too concerned at this time with naming whatever might be produced.

I cannot close this discussion of methodology, particularly with its focus on subjectivity and on writing as a method of inquiry, without considering the effect of the reader's subjectivity on the women of Essex County. Holland and Sherman (1986) explain that "Texts do not determine responses -- it would be closer to the truth to say that experiences determine texts" (p. 232). If the text is created anew each time it is read, then you are its "co-producer" (Still & Worton, 1990, p. 2). I continue to work very hard at the persistent critique of self-evidence as I become aware of it, and I am very aware of your absent presence. What "swarm of participations" (Bruner, 1990, p. 122) do you bring to this project? What will you tell your good friend about these women? How will you describe them?
If this subject is indeed cranked up into a transition running around and ahead of methodology, where is the reader in that transition? McGee (1992) talks about the need to "start reading 'seriously' whenever reading seems to become impossible, where the reading subject encounters the greatest density of resistance to the understanding" (p. 8). What is your responsibility to this text and to this project? Am I being too impositional in asking this question? Perhaps my probing will get your dander up, since I intend these questions and comments as an "incitement to discourse" (Lather, 1993a, p. 673). In any event, I am very curious about how we will rethink the position of the reader of the representation of the research project in poststructural inquiry, a concern which has emerged from this particular discrete problematization. If everything is dangerous and if all is subject to critique, then methods are easy; it's folding that's hard.

Summary

Ethnography, and other methods it might include -- participant observation and document analysis -- as well as the interview were used to collect data for this research project. Even though a great deal of data collected using these methods has been textualized for later interpretation, much has escaped deliberate control. Writing has been foregrounded in this study as a method of inquiry, as a strategy for sense-making, and as a research practice whose effects require further critique. Once the transparency of writing is troubled, the role of the reader in the research project becomes an issue which must be addressed. Questioning the self-evidence of traditional qualitative methods as well as the data collected using those methods by employing Deleuze's (1993a) image, the fold, has been the task of this researcher. Poststructural thought thus enables seeing the practice of research differently.
Interpretation of Data

Problems

As explained earlier, the interpretation of data in the prior ethnography of this research project commenced when I was a child, and I have studied the women of Essex County for decades. Since it is not a particularly useful task, I have given up sorting data collected during the official time-space of this study from that collected during the prior 40 years. I have journal data, fieldnotes, approximately 500 pages of interview transcriptions, papers I have written in the past about Milton, and files and files of documents and books collected on site. In addition, I have emotional data that catches me unawares, dream data that is absolutely out of my control -- perhaps -- and memory data from the prior ethnography that surprises me with its detail and richness. Then, of course, there is this dissertation, which is also data. Too, I am still receiving data from the field -- articles from the local newspaper, cards and letters from my participants, and my mother's ongoing reports of the activities of the women I now call my friends. When I think of myself as one who has at least partially been constituted by the practices which have constituted my participants whom I now study, I realize that I can treat myself as data. I recognize traces of my own subjectivity in interview data; I practice de-identification; I describe and analyze my own life as I play with theory. The subject/object binary breaks down, and I become data.

It is difficult at this point to try to reconstruct the process of managing and interpreting all this data, since such a process, like methodology itself, is bound up in folds of subjectivity and time-space and cannot be broken up into discrete tasks. How discrete should I be? Every sentence I write represents the making and management of data, its analysis and interpretation. Am I to explain the writing of every sentence? Interpretation, like methodology, is hardly self-evident, and I am sure there are many complications I have not thought of yet.
How do I describe this process? Much data has not been textualized but just comes to me as I think and write, so I see myself as a huge database storing decades of data about my topic which I access when I need to. The notion that something is real only if it is observable evidences a humanist preoccupation with the visual. I am not happy with the idea that data must be textualized before it is data -- it seems another attempt to establish the really real.

How do I talk about coding and categorizing some of this data? I haven't typed up this morning's dream or my memory of the taste of a drippy summer sandwich made with Merita Bread, Duke's mayonnaise, and my father's Beefsteak tomatoes. I haven't coded those pages with colored pens, cut the paper up into pieces of disconnected, uncontextualized data bits, and sorted them into piles for reassembly into something else at some other time. Is that kind of rote activity supposed to tame the ambiguity of living? I worry too much about separating content from form, since meaning changes depending on whether the interview was performed as a lecture, a narrative, or a visit. What kind of poststructural practice is that anyway -- creating categories? On second thought, I should apologize for my huffiness and say that if such an activity promotes thinking, one should by all means cut and sort.

I, however, been unable to cut up any woman's interview transcription. Laugh if you will or be horrified at this confession of improper research procedures. I find it awful enough that I must squash all their words, all their lives together in this single text, and that, for my own selfish personal and academic purposes, I must decontextualize their practices from the particulars of the fragile time-space relations in which each exists. To physically cut up their words on the page is impossible. I did some elementary sorting of data immediately after transcribing each interview (I coded and categorized) and, of course, all this writing is sorting, but for some reason, taking the scissors or the mouse or the dull and stolid ETHNOGRAPH to the
transcript pages -- my material representations of these women -- makes me gasp. Such a requirement would be the straw that broke the back of this feminist's ethos. The tapes and these pages are all I have of the women, and I cannot cut up the pages. In this case, the "flesh of the other supplies the site of the poetics of obligation" (Caputo, 1993, p. 216). I give you my foolishness. Call the police if you must.

I prefer the anarchy of disorder, since "The arche is always a stroke of violence, a violent incision, a cutting up and ordering about of events, of the singularity of events, by a sweeping principal power" (Caputo, 1993, p. 221). Thus, I have struggled through the 500 pages of transcriptions over and over again, rereading whole sections of interviews, looking for something I remember that Jane or Sally said, discovering something else, pausing to make a note, to make different connections, going back to the tapes to listen again. As a consequence, I believe I have memorized the interviews. I have surely sorted and ordered and linked and speculated, but I have tried all the while to pay attention to the context and the tone of voice and the rhythm of lives and to remember the materiality of the fine summer days we talked as well as the girth and strength and fragility and brittleness of shattered bodies. I may have lost some data by not cutting and sorting, but I have found data as well; the surround has deepened and extended my understanding. I have done the work differently because I had to. My categories -- and perhaps "category" is another of those signifiers we can't do without -- are pretty shifty, slippery, leaky, and insolent. I assure you that I can do a modernist sort into categories and produce a codebook if required, but alas, I don't have any little piles of data bits handy at the moment.

**Discussion**

I should probably pause here to define what I mean by the interpretation, description, and analysis of data, though there are, of course, other translations of
these terms (See, for example, Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Wolcott, 1994). I use Lather's (1993b) concept of the interpretation of data which includes both description and analysis, both of which occur at the same time and influence data collection. According to Lather (1993b), the first component of interpretation is description in which the researcher looks for themes and patterns by coding and categorizing the data. Analysis, or theory-building, is the second component. Analysis is a leap into the unknown which attempts to answer the "why" questions. In poststructuralism, "how" questions might be more appropriate, since poststructuralism is skeptical of origins and causes.

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe theorizing as "the cognitive process of discovering or manipulating abstract categories and the relationships among those categories. It consists of playing with data and ideas . . . Formally, the tasks of theorizing are perceiving, comparing, contrasting, aggregating, ordering, establishing linkages and relationships and speculating . . . It is merely normal human cognitive processing." (pp. 239-240). Once data has been described, the researcher begins to analyze, to establish links to larger, previously identified theoretical frameworks or to develop a different framework.

The thought of attempting to identify and describe interpretation in this study is overwhelming, and you can see how leery I am of all this talk of categories. Thus, I have decided to limit the following discussion to my interpretation of interview data, since the women's words greatly influenced the collection and interpretation of other data. With this narrower focus I will be able to describe the management of interview data in some detail. The following description is linear and simple, an inadequate representation of the very complex processes involved.

In my dissertation proposal, I developed research questions based on poststructural issues of knowledge and identity. With these questions in mind, I
developed an Interview Guide (Appendix A) consisting of about 45 questions ranging from those intended to collect fairly straight-forward demographic data about age and educational status, for example, to those intended to collect data about the more complex issues of identity and knowledge. Some of the questions in the Interview Guide worked and some did not. For instance, my questions about identity issues seemed merely to puzzle my participants. When I asked them whether they thought they had changed during the course of their lives (I was trying to get at essentialism or a core self), about half said no. When I asked those who responded positively why they thought they'd changed, they said that living just changes you, and that was the end of the discussion. Rather than continue to ask those identity questions, I began asking my participants what they did during the course of their days, what activities they were involved in. These questions produced a great deal of information which I thought told me a great deal about their identities.

As I have explained earlier, I did not even use the interview guide in some interviews, since my participants took charge. And sometimes I was able to ask only a few of my favorite questions: "what do you do when the world is falling in around you?" (I really wanted to know their answers to this question) and "what advice would you give young girls that might prepare them for life?" (they loved this question which positioned them as wise women).

Thus, after interpreting several of the first interviews, I stopped asking certain questions and began asking others. The focus of the interviews shifted from what the women knew and thought to what they did. However, this was not a carefully thought-out strategy, and I did not rewrite the interview guide with each shift in my interpretation. Rather, I began to ask different questions of each participant, tailoring my questions to her style, her difference, her particular performance. I began to respond rather than to lead.
My interview questions also changed because of what I was learning from collecting other kinds of data. For example, I asked my participants about problems I was encountering in my historical research. Too, if one woman mentioned something interesting, I began to ask other women about that topic. I believe I became a better interviewer and a better researcher as I proceeded. I gave up trying to follow some quasi-scientific model and began to pursue what intrigued me, and them. I began to understand what qualitative research is all about -- the precarious, delightful, and confusing difference which attends each portion of each study, some of which may have been named and described by another researcher but some of which hangs there outside of language waiting for attention.

Interpretation has occurred simultaneously with every other activity of this research project, so it's hard to find it and describe it. I will try, however, to remember what happened as I transcribed interviews. After a few minutes of listening, I was lost again in each woman's life because of the peculiarities of her diction, her imagery, her rhythms, her energy, her confusion, her search for suitable answers, her singularity [Lest we confuse singularity with essence, I give you Caputo's (1993) explanation: "An individual is singular, not because the individual is a deep subjectivity or interiority, but because an individual is always a specific nodule in the web of a singular event, always already embedded at some juncture in a unique constellation of circumstances" (p. 95).] I was always astonished when I began listening to the next tape. It was as if I was in an entirely different world -- sounds and colors had changed, words no longer had the same meaning, I sat up straighter or relaxed, the pace had changed. The next life was so different! This poststructuralist who uses the word "difference" too easily was unprepared for the startling difference in lives which became evident during the time-compression -- life-compression -- of transcription. I
began to wonder how I could ever presume to normalize and regulate and subdue these women in one piece of writing.

In spite of these reservations, I found myself using the bold feature of my word processing system as I typed to highlight data that I thought was particular intriguing ("I have lived my education."). I decided to add a "Notes" section to the beginning of each transcript to secure ideas and analysis which I knew I wouldn't remember months later: "I see little resistance in Susie," "Note that near the end she begins to ask me what I think of her decisions," "Note how she clams up when she figures out I'm a feminist," "Note how she says 'I got married' and clearly regrets it," "Note that I don't ask a question until about 400 on the counter," "Note that she says 1936 as '19 and 36," "Think about how to get at race since nobody brings it up." In the notes section I also included comments about the form of the particular interview, whether it was a dialogue, a monologue, a story, or a chronological life history. In addition to the form of the data, I also looked at its function. I noted that some women, as the literature suggests, seemed to be using the interview to make sense of their lives. Some also clearly wanted my comments about critical decisions they had made at various times -- "What would you have done, Bettie?" Some women treated the interview as a "visit," a time to chat and talk about what they had been doing recently. Some of the teachers saw me as a willing pupil and taught me what they thought I should know about Essex County women. In this section I also recorded some of those wonderful southern phrases in case I wanted to use them later in storying: "I declare," "I got one in yonder," "I thoroughly enjoyed it," "if I git to where I'm goin,'" and "I swanee."

Later, I added a summary section after the notes section, into which I copied from the main transcript short answers to my basic questions. I also copied any journal notes about the participant before the notes section. Thus, each transcript has
four sections: journal data, notes, summary, and transcript. I believe that handling the data several times in this fashion extended my understanding of my data more than sorting would have.

When I realized how many interviews I was going to have and how long it had taken to transcribe completely the first five interviews, I reluctantly decided on selective transcription. I could not bear, however, to miss a single one of the women's words, so, rather than edit their remarks, I decided to cut my questions to the bone, e.g., my question, "What do you do when everything is falling in around you, when everything bad that can possibly happen happens, when you can't figure out what to do next, when you're in absolute fear and terror?" was transcribed as "When it's bad?" Even that compromise reduced the transcription time considerably, since I did tend to go on and on sometimes.

As I completed each transcription, I added data about each woman to a chart I had created with columns for age, marital status, husband's occupation, children, parents' occupation, place of birth, her occupation, educational level, etc; short answers to other basic questions (when it's bad?); as well as information about issues for which I had no questions (Was race mentioned? Who brought it up? Was class discussed?). I used this chart earlier in this chapter to describe my participants in a general fashion.

Fortuitous coincidence must bless researchers, or maybe we just know we need some help and go looking for it. Last autumn I decided I could hardly call myself a good feminist without having read Foucault's series about sexuality. I began this reading project as a break from transcription about the time I realized that I had better find some focus for my terribly data-laden study. My research question was to learn what Essex County women do and what knowledge they employ to make themselves what they are. That question is care of the self in a nutshell. Foucault's ethical
analysis thus suited what I was hearing as I transcribed tapes. I heard a lot of morality talk and a regret for the decline of values, such as self-discipline, which these women cherish. I listened to the women talk about their duties to their family, their friends, their churches, and their communities. They told me how they manage in times of trouble. I was, of course, aware of the cultural patterns of the place, and I also knew the women had developed their own responses to those patterns. In general then, Foucault's ethical analysis helped me focus, provided some guidance, helped me make the sense I had hoped to make, and pushed my own interpretation further. The literature of space-place-time also helped immeasurably, in that it relieved me of the burden of trying to explain all the other articulations of relations in Essex County which surround these women and allowed me to focus on them and their particular ethical practices.

Using Foucault's analysis, which is centered on practice, also helped to resolve some ethical concerns. I felt it might be easier to avoid identifying individual women if I wrote about practices rather than events in individual lives or very intimate and personal thoughts. Essex County women may indeed know everything about each other, but I don't believe I need to exploit or foreground that knowledge in this text. I won't be telling any secrets here.

Once I had decided to employ Foucault's ethical analysis to interpret the data, I was able to begin writing. When writing Chapter 4, I went back into the data to look specifically for practices, avoided other themes that had emerged, and forced myself to stop thinking about all the other stories I might tell about Essex County women. (I did make some notes for that other book.)

Interpretation has, of course, been facilitated by writing. I have learned that when I can't write, I need to stop and analyze the research process. Something is wrong, and I am not doing what I need to do. Perhaps I need to read or talk with
someone -- move out of lone-scholar mode. I have found that certain other practices facilitate getting unstuck: vacuuming, scrubbing bathtubs, pushing wheelbarrows of mulch and manure from one side of my yard to the other, weeding my perennial beds, taking my daily constitutional. There is something about the body-in-motion, like writing, that seems to be critical to interpretation, and, given time, I intend to explore this phenomenon -- the physicality of theorizing. Perhaps an increased level of serotonin shakes up the chemistry just enough to get the neurons flashing, making connections, and producing bursts of insight. I talk to myself a great deal when I am in motion. I review and speculate and play with sentences, and leap from one place to another I didn't know existed. I have learned to go for a walk when I'm stuck. I have also found that reading a couple of pages written by certain authors -- Spivak, Butler, Linden, Trinh, Foucault, Derrida, Rajchman -- feed interpretation, and rather than talk to myself, I sometimes talk with them.

**Summary**

The interpretation of data has been on-going, and its theoretical framework has shifted somewhat from an initial feminist poststructural concern with issues of knowledge and subjectivity to a variation of a more specific framework, Foucault's ethical analysis, care of the self.

Having presented this explanation of interpretation, I reiterate that there is no truth in Essex County to uncover and no deep meaning to be made in this text.

Foucault (quoted in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982) explains: "If interpretation is a never-ending task, it is simply because there is nothing to interpret. There is nothing absolutely primary to interpret because, when all is said and done, underneath it all everything is already interpretation" (p. 107). Despite this doubt of origin, or essence, or truth, I still make meaning, I still interpret, and my interpretation produces effects.
What do I say when a participant finds my interpretation violent, disagrees with it, and challenges my audacity? I believe I can only reply that I bring my singular understanding to this study, that I approach Essex County with fear and trembling but with theory that helps me make my own sense of lives that I respect enormously. Mind you, I am being very careful, but I am interpreting. How can I not?

Validity

At this point in the dissertation some say I should salute and show my validity papers. I have talked much about truth and validity throughout this text where it seemed appropriate and am not sure that speaking of validity in a section separate from a discussion of theory or practice is particularly useful. If we must retain truth-validity in a postmodern world as one of those transcendental signifiers we cannot do without, we should at least deal with it *sous rature* and within the context of a specificity. Giving it its own subtitle in a text seems to release it from the erasure of the palimpsest.

As I have said, I am of two minds about truth-validity. On the one hand, I am perfectly willing to give it up as it has been defined by Western metaphysics. On the other, I find it enabling if it is considered a constraint emerging from the case at hand, a pointer honing in on the traces deferred. I have found working within and against the limits of this project useful in bringing absence closer, in helping me recognize the forces of the outside which are always folding inside to reform this project and this researcher. I must trouble this second position, however, by wondering what I might have produced within other limits that were not these limits, but that is all about another variety of contextual truth-validity. And so it goes.

Briefly, then, within the context of this research project, I have found validity in self-formation. Since the theory and practice of subjectivity and self-formation is
the focus of this study, truth-validity has emerged within those issues. In this study, self-formation involves two activities: the constitution of oneself as the ethical subject of one's actions as well as deidentification, the persistent critique of the self so constituted.

Working within the folds of subjectivity, I have found myself more or less profoundly dislodged by the outside -- participants, advisors, debriefers, committee, audience -- from one complacent and unexamined position into a different position where I rested for a moment trying to imagine all the things I hadn't thought of yet. This event has occurred over and over again. I believe that this aspect of self-formation, deidentification, has been critical to whatever truth you might find in this project. The effects of deidentification have produced certain ethical practices of self-formation which include the now almost automatic probe, "Why am I thinking/doing this and why am I thinking/doing it this way?" I have, of course, failed miserably on many occasions to practice deidentification, but I have tried, since that is where the action is. The rest is pretty boring after all.

As I have said, you may not recognize the effects of this truth-validity-ethics labor. Since this entire project finally rests on representation, I am well aware that validity is also a performance, a staging, a rhetorical activity. I also know that you bring your own notion of truth-validity to this project, and I must count on your willingness to critique your own preconceptions as you engage my performance. Validity is finally worked out in the relation between the author and the reader, in what we all hope are ethical practices between those subjectivities.

Summary

Deleuze's image of the "fold" has been helpful in thinking about methodology as it was practiced in this research study that employs Foucault's ethical analysis, care
of the self. In the field I used ethnography and the interview to collect data about
issues of knowledge and subjectivity in a group of older white southern women.
Discovering Foucault's ethical analysis, care of the self, shifted the focus of the study
to an interest in the practices the women use to constitute themselves as ethical
subjects of their actions within their small rural community.

By exploiting subjectivity rather than denying it, by keeping the literature of
space-place-time in mind, and by taking very seriously the poststructural charge to
question the self-evidence of theory and practice, I have attempted to trouble the
meaning of "method" and "data" and "fieldwork" and "interpretation" in the case at
hand. These received categories and others fall apart when subjected to the scrutiny
enabled by a feminist poststructural practice that looks awry at the way it would
ordinarily be described.

The act of writing, the description and inscription of the project, has been a
method of inquiry used to disrupt the self-evidence of other methods. Glimmers of a
methodology enabled by the entropy of this particular project, one that relies on
subjectivity and writing to push through some of the limits imposed by Western
metaphysics as it plays out in the language and practice of research, are beckoning.
This study takes a tiny step into a transitional methodology, which is probably all that
methodology can ever be, as it continues to be created in response to the exigencies of
the case at hand -- as the forces of the outside cause it to fold upon itself.
CHAPTER IV
AN INTERPRETATION

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of freeplay. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of interpretation. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology -- in other words, throughout the history of all of his history -- has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of game.

(Derrida, 1970, pp. 264-265)

* * * * [Aside: Dear reader, I waver. From the beginning I have feared this place and I hesitate. I have delighted all along in imagining this pause, the Interpretation, which is not "the end of play," but rather an affirmation of the lack of a center, the lack of truth, the lack of origin and presence, one trace among many" (Derrida, 1970, p. 264). This is an insecure pause, this particular ending. It displaces and defers other endings, and, though it is no "Big Metaphysical Deal" (Caputo, 1993, p. 93), it surely matters.

I don't suppose I could change my mind at this point, just forget practices of self-formation [after all, it could be a "category mistake" (Caputo,
1993, p. 31)] and tell you another story -- the story about growing up in the Depression, or the story about working in the Norfolk shipyards during the war, or the story about everyone's favorite teachers, or the story about trying to survive those first months after a beloved husband's death, or the story about taking care of dying mothers. Those are good stories too, and it's hard to decide what to do, isn't it? After a couple hundred pages of care of the self talk though, I think I'm committed to the story about practices of the self. I would like to try deconstruction's "writing with both hands" (Caputo, 1993, p. 88) but fear it may be too hard. Here, then, is that Ending that the Beginning promised; and, as I told you upfront, this whole thing gives me the willies, the heebie jeebies, and makes my head hurt with plot promises I don't particularly care to keep.]* ***

Introduction

It is always problematic to find a fit between poststructural theory and the case at hand, to keep theory from naming practice, to keep practice from norming theory (Spivak, 1993, p. 29). The deconstructive stance, in fact, produces "the lack of fit between discourse and example . . . between theory and practice" (Spivak, 1993, p. 28). This crisis is what makes deconstruction "impossible though obligatory" (Spivak, 1993, p. 29), and this is where the action is, in the agentive gambol where theory stretches and is transformed and redeployed to stretch and transform and redeploy practice. Knowledge comes from difference, not from identity; and a fit between theory and practice would result in a dead end and the closure of knowledge.

There is no pure theory or analysis then. Even though I have used and will continue to use Foucault's ethical analysis, care of the self, to interpret the data
collected in Essex County, I call on Foucault (1972) himself, as he speaks of Nietzsche, to justify my adaptation of his analysis to the case at hand:

But I am tired of people studying him [Nietzsche] only to produce the same kind of commentaries that are written on Hegel or Mallarmé. For myself, I prefer to utilise the writers I like. The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest (pp. 53-54).

(I believe I hear Foucault laughing at my impertinence, though he may soon be groaning and protesting.) Foucault's categories of morality, which include ethics, serve as a point of departure for interpreting this particular case, though, as of this moment, I place those categories sous rature. There will be no attempt to pour data into categories, but to use categories as markers of excess.

Morality

If you remember, Foucault (1985/1984) posits three elements of morality: the codes, actual behavior, and ethics itself, which is the focus of his history of sexuality. The moral code is the "set of values and rules of action," either stated or implied, which are recommended by institutions within a culture (p. 25). The interplay of these values and rules allows for "compromises or loopholes" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 25). Foucault does not dwell on the codes, since he believes most moral codes are very similar. Nor does he discuss in any detail the actual behavior of people, their accommodation, ambivalence, or resistance to the codes. Instead, he moves to ethics, care of the self, which he breaks down into four major aspects: (1) the ethical substance, (2) the mode of subjection, (3) the self-forming activity or elaboration, and (4) the telos (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 27).
I will briefly summarize the features of morality posited by Foucault in his study of the ancient Greeks as I believe they relate to Essex County women in the particular articulation of relations in which they exist. Before proceeding with that task, however, I remind you that Foucault chooses to designate the arena of sexual relations as the site of self-formation. In this study, however, I believe that the arena of friendship relations serves as the site of self-constitution. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) describe the following complications with a focus on friendship:

From Homer to Cicero [friendship] is always among the highest virtues because it is in relation to friendship that human beings can achieve reciprocity and thereby actualize most fully what it means to be human. With the appearance of Christianity, however, this primacy of friendship is no longer possible because any intense human involvement is seen as deflecting a love that should be directed toward God. So, for example, Augustine interprets his suffering over his friend's death as evidence of the hazards of directing one's love towards a finite being. Because it has no central place in the Christian understanding of human reality, friendship disappears as a philosophical theme. It also disappears if one is studying the history of systems of thought. Yet it obviously continues in a variety of forms as a marginal Western practice (p. 262).

I maintain, however, that friendship is not a marginal practice among the women of Essex County, that it is not overshadowed by the patriarchal theory and practice of Christianity, and that friendship relations among women thrive and are aesthetically stylized (stylization here means a job of work, a practice, a choice) in loopholes resistant to Christian codes that don't completely obtain. I maintain that friendship relations serve as a practice of freedom and produce a space of subversive citation which partially displaces the force of codes that aim to keep women in their place. Keeping this first break with Foucault in mind, displacing sexual relations with friendship relations, I will use his categories to describe my interpretation of how Essex County women constitute themselves as the ethical subjects of their actions.
The official moral code of most everyone in Essex County, regardless of race, class, gender, or age is the code of Christianity as described in the Ten Commandments. Other codes exist, however, some regional in nature; some generated by race, class, and gender; and some created and maintained by the women themselves. There are codes, codes, and more codes in Essex County. The four discussed here are Christianity, the racial code, patriarchy, and what I call the white southern woman's code. I found quite a bit of evidence about accommodation, ambivalence, and resistance to these codes; and this second category of morality, actual behavior, leaks into the third feature of care of the self, technologies or practices of the self. The women have created practices of self-formation to take advantage of the loopholes in all these codes.

Within ethics itself, I believe the ethical substance -- the part of oneself to be worked on by ethics -- is the sinful part of a humanist self, the part of a core self that is flawed, not good enough, that is unable to sustain the level of love and duty expected by one's personal God. There is some confusion, however, in transforming this substance since codes conflict, e.g., the biblical command to love one's neighbor as oneself does not necessarily include loving people of all races.

The mode of subjection -- the way in which one is invited to become ethical -- is, officially, through divine law and, unofficially, through the women's desire, much like that of the ancient Greeks, to have a beautiful existence as defined by their culture.

The self-forming activity or elaboration -- all the activities that one performs on oneself in order "to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior" (Foucault, 1985/1984, p. 27) -- are many, are related to resistance, ambivalence, or accommodation to the codes, often occur within friendship relations, and include the
following: cheerfulness, significance, and pride; kinship; gender; religion; education; and widowhood and old age.

The telos -- the goal of this exercise -- is to be immortal. However, the path to immortality is marked by other goals which contribute to an "ethics of pleasure" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 65). My participants wish not only to be good Christians on earth by renouncing the self to some extent but also to live a beautiful life through love and good works and to "enjoy the trip." Self-discipline, like the self-mastery Foucault found as a rationale for care of the self in the ancient Greeks, is a recurrent theme as women talk about their self-formation and leads to an "ethics of control" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 65). Finally, all of the activities of self-formation are preparation for participation in society; thus, duty to oneself prepares one for duty to others. These features of morality will now be discussed in more detail.

Moral Codes

I have identified at least four codes whose forces, I believe, create my participants' subjectivities: Christianity, a racial code, patriarchy, and what I call a white southern woman's code. I discuss each of these in this section.

Christianity

The most obvious moral code at work in Essex County is the code of Christianity. Religion continues to be very important in the lives of Essex County residents, and it played an even more important role in the lives of my participants as they were growing up, since the activities of the church were often the chief source of social contacts, particularly for country people. "We were a very self-reliant, self-producing family. We produced most of our food at home, had very little spending money. And, of course, much of this time was during the Depression years. So I
came from a very, very conservative rural background. The church was a big part of our family life." In a closed community, difference is erased, options are few, institutions patiently maintain the status quo, and it may be almost impossible to imagine different practices.

The Christian code was taught not only in the church but in the home and in schools. When I asked my participants where they learned the information they have relied on to make the important decisions in their lives, almost all of them replied that they had learned it at home. Few mentioned the church directly, and, when I specifically asked, few said they had relied on their schooling for guidance in dealing with life's tribulations, although some believed individual teachers could be very influential: "What you are rubs off on those children." Their values derive from their parents, chiefly their mothers. When I asked them to describe what their mothers had taught them, this knowledge that had served them so well, they replied that it involved knowing how to get along with other people, what to do when they were in trouble, and how to live a decent, Christian life. Leaning to do it right, to mind the codes, was learned on a micro-level, event by event, at home.

Their parents, and their mothers in particular, translated and applied the Christian code to day-to-day activities as they grew up. "Papa was the provider, and what a good one he was. And Mama was the homemaker and what a perfect one she was. And she taught me so much so early. Mama had high standards. Have great expectations for what you're doing and or what you're entrusted with. You never know what's going to come out." Though almost all of these women could recite the ten commandments on demand, this code seems to have been translated into something like "do your duty and remain cheerful." I believe this translation incorporates both the Christian code and the ethos of their Victorian mothers. Everyone knows what your duty entails: public service to the schools and the
community and your church; a personal and private commitment to take care of those you encounter in your life who are less fortunate than you are (and that involves action, not talk); a personal and private relationship with your God; the self-discipline to make yourself into a good Christian woman; and the good spirit to enjoy your own life and to bring joy to others.

Much of this duty-work is private and self-effacing. Most people are aware of the public service of citizens. However, good deeds are between the individual, those she helps, and God -- your reward is in heaven. Private service is often revealed only in sad remembrance and celebration at the funeral home or at the beauty parlor after someone has died. At that time, people recall the hard times in their lives when Jane or Sally came "to help out." There are, of course, people in the community whom everyone recognizes as saintly. Those who succeed in doing their duty or fail or fall somewhere in the middle are recognizable as well. There is no privacy in a small town, and women know they will encounter others at every turn who know everything about them. They cannot hide. Remaining cheerful as you do your duty is critical. Over and over again these women told me that "nobody else wants to hear about your troubles." As you can imagine, these women are appalled at the secrets revealed on talk-shows and at the general confessional nature of today's society. One woman said "I'm very open, very frank, but if it's a personal problem, I wouldn't take it to anybody. It's probably pride, I would say. I probably just don't want anybody to know I have a problem." It's one's duty to remain cheerful during disaster, to set an example for others, to keep on going no matter what, and to avoid pity. Walking around with a whiney face is not appropriate. This does not mean, however, that acceptance comes easily or that grief at loss is not devastating. After her husband died unexpectedly, one woman said, "And I cried every day for two and a half years. I would get up and say, 'I'm not going to cry today.' But I would." Some women are
concerned that this charge to remain cheerful no matter what has been taken a bit too seriously and that it might be better if their friends share some of the bad times as well as the good times.

For most of these women, however, your troubles are between you and your God. Life's disasters are simply unexplainable, and God is the only one who understands why things happen the way they do. These women rely on the will of God rather than on their own interpretation to make sense of much of the madness of living, and they are more or less adept at turning their lives over to the will of God. "The good Lord was just with me all the way." I believe that Caputo (1993) explains this positioning beautifully: "Faith does not, however, extinguish the abyss but constitutes a certain reading of the abyss, a hermeneutics of the abyss. Faith is not a way of escaping what happens, but a way of interpreting it and coming to grips with it" (p. 245). One woman told me, "I think really the Christian faith is the greatest thing. Because paradoxically it builds up self-esteem yet it also connotes humility." This is the take on Christianity that I found among these women. I will discuss cheerfulness, in relation to practices, directly.

[Aside: The following are excerpts from a 1949 article in the local paper reviewing the history of the KKK.

The original K.K.K. was organized as a means of diversion by a group of former Confederate soldiers at Pulaski, Tennessee in 1866. The carpetbagger, who did not stand a chance of holding a respectable office in the North, migrated to the South shortly after the war to seek his fortune in politics through the power of the newly emancipated Negro. . . . Negroes were most numerous in the Legislatures of Louisiana, South Carolina and Mississippi -- $600 would buy a Senator in Louisiana. No Governor dared permit the Southern whites to organize as militia. In South Carolina the carpetbagger Governor enrolled 96,000 Negroes as members of the militia. . . . Farm and garden tools, household utensils, and other movable property was carried off by the Negroes to get a "start" on the farms they thought the government"
was going to give them. . . . White women and girls were assaulted. In many places women would not dare venture from their homes even in the daylight unless there was a group of them traveling together. . . . Such atrocities prompted all the K.K.K. Clubs of the South to hold a convention. . . . The society was established as "an institution of chivalry, humanity, mercy, and patriotism." Any white man over eighteen could join. . . . The principal victims of the Klan were the Negroes, carpetbaggers, and scalawags. A victim was never visited before being warned to cease his activities or else suffer punishment. The white victims were usually visited by the Klan and persuaded not to accept, or to vacate a local office. If this failed, the whip or tar and feathers were used. Death was usually the next resort that was used. A visit from the Klan was usually enough for the Negro.

That's another interpretation of the code of Otherness, an example of how the self/other binary of humanism plays out in practice.]

Racial Codes

My interpretation of data revealed a code in conflict with the code of Christianity, a sedimented, regional, racial code that creates a palimpsest of God's code of love. The subject of race was hardly ever initiated by the women I interviewed. (Neither was class, for that matter, or gender, or sexual orientation, or any other identity category. There were no Others.) I finally decided to begin asking questions about the racial situation in the county since it was being erased from my study. Some of these women were cared for by Black men and women as children and young mothers, and some continue to be cared for by old Black men and women who have worked for them for decades. Most younger Black men and women find jobs elsewhere and no longer have to work for white people in their homes for token salaries. Older Black people, however, may continue to work for white families since "that is all they know how to do."

There can be no excuse for slavery, and the people of Essex County surely trafficked in slaves. The weight of slavery is always already a part of every
conversation about race relations in this region. I can't imagine that any woman I
interviewed believes that slavery is ethical; and they, along with all white southerners,
live, in some fashion, on a day-to-day basis with guilt. What resentment obtains
because of that guilt? How does that guilt and resentment play out in current
relations? How do these women deal with the burdens of history as well as with the
everyday collisions of different cultures?

On the one hand, I heard some women say, "Some of my best friends are
Black"; on the other, I heard that Blacks just "keep things stirred up" and, "the more
you stir a stink, the worse it smells." About half of the women I talked with think race
relations in Essex County are in pretty good shape, and that real progress has been
made. They say this with the qualifier that "our Blacks have always been good
people; it's the outsiders who cause all the trouble." One woman explains this
phenomenon in regard to some of the children she has taught. "So many of these
children don't know who they are or where they are. They've been bred somewhere
else and sent here. And they're the ones we're really having the trouble with in your
schools and with your stealing, and so forth, and I think maybe they brought the drugs
with 'em."

This notion of outsiders as the real troublemakers -- whether Black or white
reformers or Black children from the North sent South to stay with relatives -- derives
from the extreme localism common in small southern towns as well as from the big
trouble, the Civil War, caused by Yankee outsiders in another era. Righteous
outsiders with the answers, both Black and white, often come to the South to fix it
with questionable success. As the beneficiaries of all this fixing, white southerners
have come to believe that what is inside is good; what is outside is suspect. The
self/other binary thrives.
Though some of my participants think race relations are improving, others are not so sure: "Well, I was hoping things were doing pretty well, but it's iffy, iffy. It's iffy. It is everywhere. We've made progress and there's more that needs to be made. But, I declare, we haven't made enough that's permanent." Another says, "Underneath there are problems -- different cultures." Still another believes that "It could explode again at any time." There is fear that the promise of the Black spiritual, "We Shall Overcome," will be fulfilled, and that the whites will indeed be overcome.

White women are not always happy about having their purity at the center of what they see as a public male racial violence, and some women are clearly not in favor of racial injustice. "But you know, I just feel it's a public school, and all children ought to be able to go to that public school." A schoolteacher told me the following:

I know I grew up with loving Black people too because my parents had this back farm. And I remember when we first integrated and I had the little children. I can see one I had right now with the Christmas ribbons all over her head, you know. And it was so different than what I'd been used to. But someone would say, "How many Black children do you have, how many white?" I said, "I don't know how many," unless they asked me and I'd have to put it in my register. Then I had to think about it. Because when I taught those children, they had no color. For the ones I hurt, I ask forgiveness.

Some women believe their suspicion of Blacks is justified because of the lack of pride and self-discipline for which they have daily evidence. Everyday wisdom is that if Blacks move into an area, it will soon be trashed. Several of these women live in once-expensive homes whose value has decreased by half now that public housing projects have been built at the other ends of their streets. They watch Black children walk to school on the sidewalks in front of their homes and later find a pistol in a pile of leaves in their yard or syringes thrown under shrubbery. "And we have a lot of problems with Blacks, particularly over this thing, we're so close to this Black housing
development down there. And we have a lot of trouble -- people breaking in, taking things, a lot of rowdiness up and down the streets." They connect drug usage, violence, and crime with the Black way of life. "But I think there's a lot of anger among the white people in the county because of the terrible things that happen with drugs and housing projects. There's just constant turmoil there." They are angry at paying taxes to support Black children whose parents and grandparents they believe have never worked. They resent being told they are prejudiced by outsiders who don't understand their local, specific problems. One woman, however, commented as follows as we discussed the media's, the outside's, focus on the racial situation in the South. "The racial situation would be better off in the country if we didn't have too much of that. But then that would be ignorance, I reckon. I don't know." Still, there is clearly an inability to accept difference. One schoolteacher continued to try to model her ethos for Black students even though her efforts failed. She says the following:

My mother taught me, you don't tell people to shut up. I don't care who you are. "That's my cousin," they'd say. I'd say, "That's all the more reason you ought to be nice to 'em." And it never dawns on 'em. Nobody has ever told 'em. You don't go round talking that way to each other. Fun or not fun. They hear it at home. So it just goes on and on. Then here they have their child at 14 and they tell that child to shut up every time they open their mouth good. These teenage pregnancies, just rampant. And I don't know how the cycle's gonna ever get broken on that. We did not pull some of these people up to what we say is our level. Our students have gone down to their level, instead of us pulling them up.

I heard no one make any connections between race and class. The liberal humanist narrative that hard work can solve any problem and that most Black people just don't want to work hard is the prevailing theme. The Black people white people
hold up as examples of good Blacks -- those I was told to interview, for example -- are middle-class citizens who have escaped poverty.

Everything is dangerous and everything is political, and I can make no facile judgments about the racial problems in Essex County. Finding an equitable position which values the experiences but critiques the ideologies of both Blacks and whites is impossible. I am as complicit in racial oppression in Essex County as any other white person. "None of us gets an individual dispensation that releases us from our racial position, from its inequitably derived rewards, or from White racism" (Scheurich, 1993, p. 9). Perhaps the best we can do is take the advice of the Christian schoolteacher and ask forgiveness for those we have hurt as well as to take Derrida's (1974) advice and begin to address racial oppression "Wherever we are; in a text where we already believe ourselves to be" (p. 162). I make another beginning in this text, though it seems a handy, academic cop-out at the moment.

[Aside: That last sentence sounds rather pompous, doesn't it, a bit holier than thou? "He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her." (John 8:7), as my grandmother, Hettie, might have said. I am not satisfied with this academic approach to racial oppression, or any other kind of oppression, though I'm awfully fond of theory. How can I make a big deal of my participants' positioning with regard to race (or class) when there are no Blacks or poor people or any other people of difference in my life. There are no Others. I live a very nice, tidy white middle-class life. When we go on an academic tear about racial oppression, whether we are Black or white, what experiences do we speak from? What experience informs our theory? If we refuse to privilege either of those heavy signifiers with which we explain racism, "theory" or "experience," we seem to be left with a "minute analysis of
the practices that make particular forms of experience historically possible" (Rajchman, 1985, p. 86). We seem to be left with some obligation and some agency and the opportunity to practice "subversive citation" (Butler, 1995, p. 135). What different practices might we imagine to produce different forms of experience?

I am reminded of a practice of the self I read about years ago in a series of books for young girls called The Little Colonel series by Annie Fellows Johnson. I am lucky enough to have some of these: The Little Colonel at Boarding School, The Little Colonel's House Party, The Little Colonel's Hero. Several generations of southern girls learned "how to act" by reading these adventures which are much like the Nancy Drew or the Bobbsey Twins books but have a southern setting and a southern heroine whose grandfather had been a Colonel in the Civil War. She is rich and beautiful and, since she has her grandfather's feisty spirit, she has been nicknamed "The Little Colonel." In one of the books she decides to improve her character -- to be good, in fact -- to hurt no one's feelings, but to be obedient, kind, and thoughtful, all those characteristics cherished by southern womanhood. At the end of each day, The Little Colonel reviews her progress toward goodness, much like Marcus Aurelius did, come to think about it, and, if her day has been unblemished by cruelty or neglect, she adds a pearl to her necklace.

As a child, I was enchanted with this practice. I was at an age when goodness seemed desirable and even attainable, especially since I wasn't rich or beautiful; and I decided to emulate my heroine. I broke a necklace of cheap pearls and stored them in a small tin can decorated with scenes of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II and practiced goodness diligently for several weeks. Alas, I almost always failed to be good enough to earn a pearl, and I
finally gave up, hiding my skimpy strand of beads in a box along with love letters from my sixth-grade boyfriend.

I gave up on Goodness in the intervening years but not on action and wonder now whether I should break another strand of pearls and add a pearl to a new necklace for every day I seek out, confront, and push against oppression, racial or otherwise. It might be just the practice to add to my list of self-forming activities. * * * *]

Patriarchy

The codes of Christianity and race are very powerful and very patriarchal in the South. Both are aimed at keeping white southern women in their place, set apart, out of the path of danger and strife, and silent. Women who grow up in the South know there is some centuries-old standard of grace, charm, courage, and dignity -- often defined by men but maintained by both men and women -- to which they should aspire.

Some may think the notion of the white southern lady is a myth, but the myth is alive and well, and not just in the South, but all over the country. I have been labeled a southern lady in a condescending and disparaging way many times by people who automatically assume that anyone reared south of the Mason-Dixon line embraces the myth. Subscribing to that myth is a dangerous practice, as is applying any such handy label to women. Paradoxically, women around the country are as guilty of this practice as men. Some fascination with the idea of the southern lady persists, even though, as one of my participants said, "I hate to say it, but southern ladies are a dying breed, because of the influx from the North."

Patriarchy seeps out of all other codes, lurks in corners, and whacks you "up side the head" when you least expect it. The construction and practice of gender
among my participants will be discussed later, but almost all activities in the South are
heavily gendered. Southern women have to deal with "the tenacity of the culture . . .
and there are multitudes who are still promoting the continuity of the culture in spite
of all the apparent changes going on around them" (Dillman, 1988, p. 6). Dillman
(1988) explains this phenomenon:

It is well known that religion permeates Southern culture . . . The
school system remains a weak rival for family and church in
socializing Southern children. . . . Of course there is religiosity
in other parts of the country; of course there is family cohesiveness
in other groups, particularly ethnic groups. But Southern culture
embraces all these aspects and pervades an entire region, not just
pockets of certain areas or scatterings here and there. Not only
regional traditions, not only extreme religiosity compared with
other regions, not only strong family ties, but adherence to the
opinions, beliefs, and values of elders, extremely deep regard
for kinship networks, and open conservatism on issues of social
change create a formidable impediment to becoming part of the
mainstream (p. 7).

Even though she did not directly use the phrase, Dillman might well have added
"extreme patriarchy" to her description, since it is part of the conservatism about
which she writes.

I am always surprised when I return to Essex County and encounter that very
debilitating patriarchy which devalues women, who, according to the myth of the
southern lady, are to remain strong and gracious in spite of it. I am amazed that the
women resist as well as they do. Women who venture into the business world may be
advised to consult their husbands or fathers before closing a deal. One woman
explains, "He told her to go sit down with her father-in-law and talk this over and go
to your Daddy and talk this over. And it infuriated her and she said, she said, 'You get
that contract ready and I'll deal with it myself.'" Women are generally considered too
adle-brained to make a decision about anything significant and to require male
wisdom and protection, though it's fairly clear to observers that women practically run
southern communities. The women, unfortunately, are complicit in maintaining their status. The paradox is very unsettling.

Women who don’t stay in their places but steadily encroach on male territory learn to work twice as hard, to ignore the slights, to refrain from complaining, and to remain cheerful and purposeful. They don’t brag about success but say something like, "I’ve been so fortunate." They might, however, follow that statement which implies that their position is due to good luck with something like "I am a person who has strong convictions and will stand up to a man or to whomever, you know, as long as I think I'm right."

Clearly, some extraordinary kind of self-discipline is required to venture out of the female sphere in such a society. The women who have done so advise younger women who want to do the same to grow a thick skin, since the men will invariably try to beat them down. A woman who takes on such a challenge must be beyond reproach, extremely competitive, focused, goal-oriented, and gracious. She must learn to function above the fray somehow. I met and talked with women like this, and found them formidable indeed.

**White Southern Woman’s Code**

Another code evident in the ethos of Essex County women is the code of white southern womanhood, which borrows some elements from the codes of Christianity, race, and patriarchy, but which, I believe, produces local practices aimed at filling in gaps not addressed by the other, more public codes. This code focuses particularly on the manner in which women should comport themselves, both in public and in private. It is anchored in survival and self-discipline, governs the rules of friendship among women, addresses issues of aesthetic stylization, and produces pleasure and joy. The effects of this code, its practices, will be discussed later in the section on ethics.
Self-Discipline

If you remember, Deleuze, in discussing Foucault's care of the self, suggests that "the subject is the individual who, through practice and discipline, has become the site of a bent force, that is the folded inside of an outside" (Boundas, 1994, p. 115). Some of the outside forces which create subjectivity in Essex County women are the codes which have just been described: the code of Christianity, the racial code, patriarchy, and the white southern woman's code. As Deleuze points out, all of these codes entail discipline, and the prevailing theme I encountered as I talked with Essex County women was the theme of self-discipline, which echoes self-mastery, which Foucault identified as the initial goal of care of the self for the ancient Greeks. An "ethics of control" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 65) governs the relationship of self to self and prepares one for ethical behavior with others. I believe self-discipline is the crux of care of the self for Essex County women.

Actual Behavior

* * * * [Aside: Codes conflict and actual behavior illustrates that conflict.
This story is an effect of the racial code, which is clearly in conflict with the Christian code. And, of course, the sanctity of white womanhood is at stake. The following are several paragraphs describing the murder of a young Black man in Milton on May 11, 1970 who was accused of making a sexual remark to a white woman. The consequences of the killing -- demonstrations, boycotts, and burning -- are also discussed.

The men stood above the prostrate Marrow, kicking him. The barrel of the rifle pointed toward Dickie's head. "They were right down on top of him," said Boo Chavis. "The barrel was down on his head, touching it." Accounts vary, however, as to whether it was Roger or Larry who now held the gun. Though it would become an important legal question, for our purpose it hardly matters.
"Shoot the son of a bitch," said Robert Teel. There was a popping sound, no louder than a firecracker. As William Burgwyn, the prosecutor, would later say, "They shot him like a hog. They shot him like you or I would kill a snake." Teel put it another way: "That nigger committed suicide, wanting to come in my store and four-letter-word at my daughter-in-law."

The fact that virtually all of the black community readily believed that the Teels were not going to be arrested speaks volumes about their level of faith in the local authorities. "We knew at that point that we would not get justice."

A grand jury, made up of fifteen white citizens, met a few weeks later and ruled "Not A True Bill" in the Oakley case, ostensibly meaning that the grand jury saw no reasonable cause for suspicion that Roger Oakley had been involved in a crime. The fact that he had testified under oath that he had been holding the rifle that killed Henry Marrow was apparently insufficient grounds for indictment in the view of the grand jury.

Not surprisingly, black people ... attributed the acquittals to the race of the killers and the victim and to the fact that the leading white citizens ... rallied around the Teels. "I think a lot of white people who would normally have good intentions ended up getting caught up in the polarization ... They ended up supporting Teel not so much because they agreed with what Teel did but because Teel had become the symbol of a world that was no more."

After the court announced the acquittals, the black community lost no time in advancing their struggle against white supremacy. "The economy ... depended on black consumerism, which we knew ... and we decided we were not going to spend our money with businesses that were supporting injustice. ... Black people stuck together here, for that particular time."

The boycott lasted for several months. In time, of course, considerable organizational efforts were necessary to sustain the boycott. Black women were at the center of the organizing. "The women always be the first to come out anyway ... The First Baptist Church would be filled with women."

The actions of the enclave of black veterans who torched the tobacco warehouses ... are not unrelated to their experiences in Vietnam and elsewhere. The campaign of firebombing may also be viewed, however, as part of an ongoing tradition of arson against property as revenge for and resistance to racial oppression. Arson had been a mainstay of slave resistance throughout the South; the means of production -- warehouses, cotton gins, and the like -- were special targets. ... When arson as a means of resistance is considered along with more conventional definitions of southern violence, it appears that the distinctive tendency toward violence as a means of redress has not been exclusive to the white side of the South.

While the violence brought increased racial bitterness, it also gained for blacks a measure of respect. There is little evidence to suggest that their boycott would have had the swift
and substantial success that it did without the flames which preceded it. Otherwise, we would be forced to conclude either that moral suasion had convinced whites to change racial policies, which seems unlikely, or that the white community had experienced a sudden change of heart despite the violence, which flies in the face of evidence that white racial attitudes actually hardened during the period (Tyson, 1990).

The second category of morality, people's actual behavior, doesn't seem to work very well. As I said earlier, I believe it leaks into practices of the self which will be discussed in detail in the next section, ethics. Accommodation to, ambivalence about, and resistance to the codes is expressed in practices.

Some general comments may be in order, however. In a small, fairly closed community where one is constantly subjected to the normalization and regulation of the panoptic gaze, it seems almost impossible to elude the power of the codes. Not only is everyone openly observed and talked about all the time, but one, of course, regulates one's own behavior to avoid scandal and discomfort. Self-discipline is partly about maintaining codes without constant, overt surveillance from the enforcers. Small towns bring both peace and violence, the kind of violence that is evident in the following: "I think I have spent a lot of my life trying, uh, if I'm with somebody, I, I should try to please, you know. I don't know, sometimes it hasn't been comfortable. You can't always please." White southern women, in particular, have long been carefully observed, since their purity, purity in all matters, is at stake. Remember that white southern women have been considered, "an absolutely inaccessible sexual property... the most potent symbol of white male supremacy" (Hall, 1993/1979, p. 155).

Any sign of difference in a woman indicates trouble brewing, potential resistance, "forwardness," and certainly calls for a response from friends, family, and well-meaning citizens. Intervention is usually quick and sure, no matter how old the
female. And, of course, it really is important to warn loved ones that they are transgressing limits, since the stakes are high, especially for women. The effects of conventional behavior, that which maintains the codes, are rewards; unconventional behavior brings censure, which can be more or less devastating.

When I think of such devastation, I think, in particular, of the charge to be cheerful and not talk about your troubles. A dear Milton friend of mine suffered from chronic depression and was unable to be very cheerful for many years until her illness was diagnosed and treated. She waited a very long time to seek help, since she had been well-schooled in keeping her troubles to herself. During that period she suffered not only from the depression but from the reproaches of townspeople who faulted her for not presenting a more lively face to the world, for not pulling herself together and getting on with her life. There was little room for her difference, an illness about sadness, in Essex County.

A bit of sassiness is acceptable, and the South values its odd souls at a distance. However, conventionality is expected, and you will be sure to pay somehow, sometime for resisting. I expect there is more leeway in Essex County these days, but the expectations for behavior which I have described were in force when I grew up there, and it is evident that they even more fiercely folded in upon the women I interviewed.

*** [Aside: When I lived in Milton, I found that matching helped to camouflage a multitude of sins. As long as your shoes, handbag, and belt matched, you could get away with quite a lot of scandalous talk. If your watchband happened to match too and if your sweater picked up a subtle color in your dress, you were in even better shape. Appearance counts, looking normal counts, wearing fairly classic clothes counts. It's as if people don't]
worry too much about what you say if you look normal. This strategy, this practice of the self, learned from several beautifully matched but intellectually rebellious and splendid Milton women has served me well in a variety of places which are, after all, not so unlike Milton. I continue to deploy that strategy, matching, as a radical practice of freedom.

Ethics

The four categories of ethics, which I have already defined briefly but discuss here in detail, are the ethical substance, the mode of subjection, the self-forming activities, and the telos. I will save the discussion of the practices of the self, or the technologies of the self, for last, since it is the focus of this research study.

The Ethical Substance

As stated earlier, the ethical substance is that portion of oneself that one decides is in need of repair or elaboration. Christians are constantly urged to identify their sins, to ask forgiveness for them, and to sin no more. It appears to me that trying to sin no more is very much like Butler's "subversive citation" (1995, p. 135), trying not to repeat the same "I." Most Milton women learn the hard way or perhaps are told what their character defects are, and those who go to church are regularly presented with a catalog of common human deficiencies, some of which may hit the mark. Christianity calls for an ongoing administrative review, an ongoing examination of one's progress toward goodness. Each person is required to work on his or her defects and to select that portion of the ethical substance in need of repair.

The self under review in this process is, I believe, the individual of liberal humanism, which I described early on in this text. I have also pointed out that my questions aimed at eliciting some discussion about an essential self with inherent
agency versus a poststructural subject constantly being reconfigured were met with puzzlement. I asked questions like the following: "Do you think there's some part of you that stays the same, no matter what happens to you, or do you think you are really very different from the way you were, say, at 15?" Most women looked at me askance but replied that, even though they believed they had mellowed, they thought there was some part of themselves which they had carried with them through life. The following is a typical response: "Well, I do feel like I've changed, say in the last 20-25 years. I feel so much more satisfied, well, with myself. I don't wish I were someone else. I'm content to be myself and it doesn't bother me what other people do or have -- things are just right with me. I don't wish for anything different."

As part of my obligation to critique my attachment to poststructuralism, I have studied carefully my participants' responses to my questions about identity and my own probing questions. What did I hope to learn from them with these questions? Did I hope to hear someone say she was a completely different person than the one she had been when she was 15? What would that have told me? Was I hoping to uncover a closet poststructuralist? If someone who has no concept of the subject in poststructural theory says they have changed tremendously, what would that mean?

What was brought home to me through this exercise is that people cannot begin to theorize their lives until they have the language with which to do so. If I had reviewed some of the basic tenets of liberal humanism with my participants and had asked them whether they espoused those beliefs, I expect they would have said they did. Still, I wonder about some of them. I heard cracks in humanism, the same kind of cracks I felt most of my life until I encountered the language of poststructuralism and could begin to word my world differently.

I believe that things work together for good. I believe the Lord will -- if you can just hand it over to him. I think about that sometimes, you know, and I have prayed that
prayer many times, um, when his best man, Peter, I think, says, "cast all your care upon him." That's hard to do, but I do think, and I don't believe you'd know, and you can't see it and I don't know if you ever see some things, but I think if you can be, try to live in the will of God, that things will work out, but I've had many disappointments and things of that kind that I don't see yet. And I haven't seen where that worked out.

This particular woman used her interview to try to make sense of her long life. My questions called for reflection and conclusions, and, as you can see, she struggled conscientiously to work through painful issues. She had followed the rules beautifully during her life, counting on things "working together for good" at the end. Well, it's almost the end for her, and some of the most important things in her life haven't worked out. There have been a lot of disappointments, terrible losses, and she can't make sense of it. She has practiced acceptance, but still.

Caputo (1993) says that events do not have meaning: "When events are torn asunder, when the loss is beyond repair, when events leave us in shreds, in 'tears,' then you suffer a disaster and you lose your lucky star. That is what activates lines of obligation, what gives obligation a sense of urgency" (p. 234). I surely felt that sense of urgency as I watched her lovely, pained face as she spoke, and I admit that I felt obligated by her tears and wanted to give her my answer-of-the-moment, poststructuralism as a strategy of sensemaking. But it's too late. I fear she has been duped by liberal humanism and I mourn. On the other hand, I must wonder what solace poststructuralism brings at life's end. How does one choose a frame for living? And suppose you don't even know you have any choices? (There are so many things they never told us.)

Clearly, one chooses to define the ethical substance according to the theoretical framework in which one is located. Religious faith obviously has a large place in these women's lives. It is their strategy for "reading the abyss" (Caputo, 1993, p. 245),
and my gripe isn't necessarily with religion but with the general dualistic nature of humanism which so easily dismisses its alternatives.

**The Mode of Subjection**

I noted a striking difference between the younger and older women whom I interviewed. The younger women seem much freer, more public, and much less accepting of business-as-usual in Essex County. They are venturing into public office, do not sidestep discussions of gender or racial issues, and generally live *in media res*. I laughed with some of them about how we had been raised, what counted, what the rules were -- "Every lady wears her hat to a tea." Things have certainly changed. Adult women do wear bermuda shorts to the grocery store these days; however, many of my participants still would not think of doing so. The mode of subjection of their youth was most effective.

The official way in which one is invited to become ethical in Essex County is through the code of Christianity. In addition, I believe the white southern woman's code unofficially and rather insistently invites females to live their lives on earth according to its rules. If one goes to church, one soon learns the Christian code. It is interpreted and applied to daily life not only by the church but also by other institutions such as the family, education, and local government. As you might imagine, there is a lot of lip-service to the Christian code in small towns. Hypocrisy seems to thrive in communities where the code is pervasive and too burdensome, e.g., we all need some loopholes. Males, however, are usually forgiven their transgressions; females likely are not.

Girls learn the southern female code along with the Christian code. Not only are there things Christians should and should not do, but there are also things Christian girls should and should not do. "Obedience is one of the main things." Add to that
mix the racial code which operates in opposition to much of the Christian code, and white southern girls find themselves stepping gingerly through a highly charged complexity of "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts." Girls, then, operate under extra layers of codes in this particular articulation of relations, and these codes sometimes cause conflict and confusion. Perhaps it is the threat of the terrible psychic wounding of censure and rejection which enables them to learn to negotiate the force of the power relations within which they live with the grace and dignity which many attain. These codes were in effect when my participants grew up and still are. Such a life is their reality and they maintain it.

Remember that there is no place to hide. Milton was and still is very much a small, closed community. If you transgress too badly, you will simply have to leave home; you can't move to the south side. This is all about survival then, and adult women have always more or less gently helped girls learn "how to do it right" in order to survive. And the female code is learned from all older women, not just mothers and other female relatives. This matter of being southern, female, and white is so complicated that older women all work together to help girls learn how to do it. One of my participants has still not given in to what she sees as a loss of values. "Don't conform to all the changes of the world," she says, and she continues to remonstrates young people for impolite behavior. When she recently greeted some young girls in church who then flew past her without speaking, she called after them, "'Woah, woah, now, you're not in that big a hurry! Nobody else has taught you to speak to your elders, I will. Now do you know who I am?' 'Yes, ma'am.' 'Well, don't let me catch you up this hall again that you don't speak when I speak to you.'"

Boys and girls are segregated in Sunday School classes, and bible stories that are often patriarchal are reinterpreted by Christian teachers who translate the lessons for girls. Female clerks in stores give you little no-no looks if you are not behaving
properly. Everyone's mama gives you advice. Your girl friends pass on their family's often surprising interpretations of the code. Boys don't mind speaking right out and telling you you're not behaving like a lady. Interestingly, adult men are usually not involved in this code-enforcement; they seem to leave this chore of getting the girls in line up to the women. For survival's sake, women regularly check you out to see how you are conforming to standards. The goal of this effort is self-discipline, turning the panoptic gaze on oneself, keeping oneself in line.

I felt this examination from quite a few of the women I interviewed. I think they were curious to see whether being away from Milton had compromised the standards I had been taught which I was expected to carry with me elsewhere as a representative of Milton womanhood. For example, some of these women think only a certain kind of woman dyes (not "colors") her hair. Several of them commented on how "natural" my hair looked. I believed that, since they knew how old I was, they were letting me know they knew I dyed my hair. I must admit that even though I was amused, I felt duly reproached. Though I have changed, these women still have power over me, i.e., I found myself reviewing my decision not to go gray. I still care what they think, and I have not forgotten how to do it right. (My mother interpreted these comments differently; she thought they just liked my hairdo. After due consideration, I stand by my interpretation.)

I expect that these codes have congealed for many of these women, and that they no longer question the way many things are done. However, the burdens of the female code have been softened and elaborated into stylized and aesthetic practices which add some tinsel to its harshness, which soften the rules and lend a certain elegance to their coarseness. It's almost as if the women say, "Well, if we have to do all this, we might as well embellish the doing and do it in style and with some panache."
So survival, and survival within a certain articulation of relations, pervades this invitation to self-discipline and the female code. Women must learn to become adept at negotiating the complexity of being a white female in a small southern town where patriarchy prevails and where the ratio of whites to Blacks is about 4.5 to 3. This daily and ongoing survival is fueled by a history of survival with dignity by southern white and Black women which derives from the Civil War, during and after which the survival of lives and honor often fell in the laps of women. My participants' grandmothers and mothers learned self-discipline the hard way and trained their daughters well. "We forget it, but the war just did terrible things to the South -- did terrible things all over when the people were killed and maimed and so forth. So, a lot of that self-discipline, which has carried over into their daughters, was developed during that period for them."

Many of the daughters, my participants, also learned to some degree "that vivacity that the people Mrs. Jones' and Mrs. Smith's age had." Some of my participants continue to exhibit their mothers' energy and determination to battle and win out over the legacies of the Civil War which remain and which include poverty, loss, dishonor, guilt, anger and resentment, and devastation. They model their mothers' drive and spirit in the ruins of their mothers' articulation of relations, in a post-history, "where the events of history shrivel up and become absorbed in the setting" (Benjamin, 1977/1963, p. 179). They are goal-oriented, and the liberal humanist narrative that promises reward for hard work continues to provide sustenance in their battles.

Along these lines, one of the women who has been very active in her community says she has found her battles "invigorating." Her philosophy is as follows: "You can be anything you want to be. You can do anything you want to do. I really believe that. You've got to set your goals. You've got to know what it is you
want to be and what it is you want to do and be realistic enough to understand what you may have to sacrifice in order to accomplish those goals. And I think that we must learn that long-range goals are superior to immediate gratification." This woman animates those around her; she makes you want to sit right down and work on your ten-year life plan.

Other women seem content to rest within the closed community they cherish and prefer not to fight: "I never questioned it. I never thought about it. I just kind of went on a pattern. I've always been satisfied with a little town. I liked it better some time ago before it got so big with so many industries that bring in so many people that I don't know. I want to know them, but I just can't. But there was a time, you know, when we knew everybody in Milton. Yes, I love a little town." This woman exudes goodness and kindness and has been content with a different kind of life. I felt soothed by her acceptance of her world and envious of her peace.

A variety of strategies emerge from the need to survive. "The right way" is reinterpreted as the articulation of the time-space relations in which one lives shifts; however, traces of the old "right way" remain and inform today's way.

The Telos

The goal of Christians is everlasting life -- to live forever in God's love, and to be free of the pain and confusion of living. This is certainly a goal to work toward; however, life must be lived until death and resurrection. Thus, Christianity sets standards for behavior amidst the confusion and madness of living. My participants, like people everywhere, interpret these standards and elaborate them to suit the forces, the power relations, at work in the particular articulation of relations in which they live.
My participants passed on to me, and now I to you, their personal interpretations of these standards, their individual goals as they work toward everlasting life: "Be true to yourself and set goals"; "Learn to take care of yourself"; "Be honest, find a church, have real friends, and work hard"; "Be careful about your choices"; "Try to be happy down on the inside"; "Learn everything"; "Practice the Golden Rule"; "Avoid confrontation"; "Enjoy the trip"; "Find a gracious way of life"; "Have values and stick with them"; "Find some quiet time for yourself"; "Listen to what people say since they may need help"; "Love everything you do"; "Be a good neighbor"; "Remember that you can't let the days get you down"; "Try to save something but enjoy what you have"; "Be adventurous"; "Listen to older people, particularly your mother"; "Find a job you like"; "Find some balance and be purposeful"; "Live so you have a clear conscience"; "Be a friend"; "Take care of the old and sick"; "Follow your dream"; "Accept yourself"; "Don't teach school"; "Enjoy every single day"; "Practice self-discipline." Only one woman said she had no wisdom to pass on, but she passed on to me her humility. These individual goals reflect acceptance, accommodation, and resistance to the code of Christianity as well as the codes elaborated by the women themselves as they work toward immortality.

The Arts of Existence

Introduction

Remember that Foucault (1984/1983) says that, for the ancient Greeks, *epimeleia heautou*, care of the self, involved more than self-absorption or preoccupation with the self but implied "a sort of work, an activity; it implies attention, knowledge, technique" (p. 360). The Greeks saw their lives as objects to be elaborated and stylized, and they developed an "aesthetics of existence" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 348). They were not concerned with life after death, and so their ethics
became an ontological matter, an activity aimed not at transcendence but at everyday practice and the aesthetic creation of an existence on earth that gave "the maximum possible brilliance to their lives" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 362). Foucault identified sexual relations as the arena in which the Greeks practiced care of the self.

I believe that care of the self is most often practiced by the women of Essex County in friendship relations. And, since they are concerned with life after death as well as life on earth, my participants' ethics is grounded in transcendent as well as ontological matters. They have adopted and modified practices which were available within their culture and have created new practices which reflect their accommodation to, ambivalence toward, and resistance to its larger institutional patterns. Throughout their long lives, they have responded within friendship relations to the charges of the church, education, and the state. Together they have produced certain stylized practices as they have interpreted the theories of those institutions. Their local arts of existence have several goals: to embody Christian ideals, to both maintain and resist the power relations of the codes of their culture, and to stylize and embellish the strictures of the code, thereby producing joy and pleasure.

The force of the codes and their practices of the self have folded the outside in to create complex subjectivities which could never be captured in this text. What you learn about Essex County women here is a fragile and fleeting trace of their hard work during their long lives as they have constituted themselves as ethical subjects of their actions in this small southern community. So much is deferred.

**Essex County, Again**

As we think of practices, we must not forget where we are -- in Essex County. This county and its small towns are powerfully attractive. "You know how people get homesick for Milton." People leave for life and end up coming back. Look at me! I
might as well be there as to write so much about it. Some of my participants have moved away for various reasons and have returned. "He was never very happy over there anyway. He was a Milton guy. You know how people who are born in Milton are. We got back here where we knew everybody." Even if you've been gone for quite a while, re-entry is fairly simple. "It had been years since I'd seen a lot of people. I didn't know them at first. But as soon as I realized who they were, it was just as though I'd never been gone." I confess that I too felt that way after a summer of fieldwork.

Many of my participants, particularly those who were born in Essex County, mourn the fact that they don't know everybody anymore. "I could at one time, Bettie, go up the street, and I expect every person that I met, I would know, or I would know a member of that family." This community was closed for a great portion of these women's lives, and closure has its good points as well as its bad points. For example, "I knew the families and most everybody, they called me Cousin Sally. Most of them were kin to me, you know, back then, before the war." In the country in particular, kinship and community relations remain strong, and people driving cars still wave at each other as they pass, whether or not they recognize each other. They think they should recognize everyone on the road, and they wave rather than appear rude.

One of my participants, and her three sisters until one of them died, have always lived on the same street where they were born. There are three of them left on the street now, and she says, "And I think about it sometimes when people who have moved in here from somewhere else, and their families are not here, and I say to myself, 'Oh, you are just blessed.'" Sometimes, however, people start out with big families in Milton and end up there alone, serving as the anchor for those who have strayed:
And when I married in Milton, my family, my mother and father were living here, and my husband's mother and father, of course, lived here and I thought, "Well, this is just going to be wonderful!" And now we don't have a single soul in this town kin to us in any way. But, on the other hand, this is home, and that's bothering me too, Bettie, because I'm not going to be able to entertain all this family like I have done. Home for his sister, home for my sister and brother, and of course for my children. And there are lots of his cousins and lots of my cousins, and I've done a tremendous amount of entertaining.

Things just don't always turn out as people would like. Family members die and move away and leave others behind with no kin around, no sisters just down the street. And those left in the hometown, the anchors, become unable to orchestrate the magical gathering of kin as easily as they did when they were younger.

Place attachment is very strong for some Essex County families. One woman pointed out that there are people in the county who live on land given by the king to their ancestors. Those with such a history of place may understandably be leery of change. The people with the strange names who have moved into the county along with the desperately needed industries are called "foreigners" by some. "We have so many foreigners in here and getting more everyday. Well, they ride through Milton and see such a pretty town, they want to retire, and they come in here and buy a home. A lot of people have done that." Some of these outsiders "have gotten extremely involved in the town and want to run it like the Northerners or the Californians do: you hire people to have things done, you don't get in there and do it yourself."

Outsiders who come to town for whatever reason have to be very careful about how they deal with local residents or they are likely to be talked about as follows: "I did not like him. I did not like him at all. He was a Yankee. He didn't exactly understand what was going on down here." Outsiders don't know the rules, don't know how to act, don't know "just basic culture," what "you probably learned from your mother."
And I once used to visit people when they came into town and they would return your visit, your call. But nobody does that now. Nobody does that now. Nobody visits. Not many return your call. So, I think, graciousness and that southern charm have gone somewhere. But we have been invaded by the North. And I'm not saying that they, I've got some good friendships among the newcomers, who are gracious, but they are rare.

Things started changing after World War II, of course. "So many people resettled around here from different places, and there're a lot of people have come back here after they've seen the world and found out the world's different from this little town. World War II did a whole lot to change the world."

However, there is a recognition that things had to change in Essex County, that the long-term decision to diversify the economy in the 1960's was necessary. "Just think, if Milton was totally dependent on tobacco like it used to be, why it'd be a disaster. And you look at Johnstown. Johnstown never wanted to bring in anybody else. Johnstown, poor Johnstown's about to fold up, except for Blacks. They never worked to bring outsiders in. And Milton has been good to people who come from outside. And that's why industries have been so happy here. And a lot of them have been good corporate citizens."

Some of my participants who moved to Milton as young women may wonder about the community's being so good to outsiders. They came to town, lived there most of their lives, but have never quite felt at home. "I'm like Mama. I like folks, but I don't know. I don't think I was really part of the old guard or the new guard. I belonged to things they belonged to and all, but I don't know that I was one of the girls, if you want to say it that way." Difference is difference, after all. Another woman said that older people in Essex County are really not very welcoming to strangers, though the younger folks may be. Not being born and bred in Essex County certainly puts one at a disadvantage there. Interview me and I'll tell you all about it.
When asked if they've ever wanted to live anywhere else, however, most of my participants replied that they have not. "It's just a wonderful little town. Just a wonderful little place to live. I would hate to think of ever having to leave it. I call it the fertile crescent. I don't want to tell anybody else about it, cause I don't want it to get any bigger. It's just right. Um hum." Someone else said, "It's a good place to live but never a place to get rich."

Speaking of money, there was hardly any mention of class issues in my interviews unless I probed for a response, and perhaps the following remarks should preface any discussion of class. "Now you've got to remember something. Most of the women you are interviewing grew up in poverty by today's standards. The South was so poor. And your folks always had plenty to eat and my folks always had plenty to eat and a good warm house, but a whole lot of folks didn't. We still had nothing. It was hard. We lived in rented houses and didn't have much of anything. And this is where an acceptance of things comes from. But we came out of the Depression rapidly." There were some people in Essex County who made out pretty well during the Depression, those who had some money to begin with and were able to increase their wealth by buying farmland when the banks foreclosed on loans. Thus, for quite a while, there was a small wealthy elite as well a very large group of people barely making it.

According to my participants, class used to be more of an issue than it is now. "It's entirely different from what it was, in lots of ways now. It's not as class-conscious as it was. I think it's mellowed a lot in that way. I was certainly aware of rich and poor when I was growing up," another explains. "There was the Harris Hill group that felt that they were FFV's [First Families of Virginia] or something. They were born and reared as the aristocrats of Milton, and they associated only with themselves and not with the average folks." Some women spoke of the cotton-mill
crowd who attended a different school than the other children in the elementary grades. "And they just didn't mingle, the two groups did not mingle." Another woman who married and moved to Milton from another small town in the state described a different picture. "Well, I remember that we, we didn't go around with the mill people in Hawkins. But here, according to John, they were just as nice as anybody else, you know."

Some believe there is still some snobbishness in Milton, that is, maybe the Episcopalians are a bit too high-falutin' and maybe the insiders, those who were born in the county, think they are better than those who moved in from the outside. There is still the country-club crowd, those who have the time to play golf and tennis and bridge. There are still those who work in the mills and industries. "Most anybody can get in any club they want to; the country club is certainly not elite. It's just anybody that can pay the dues, and I don't think there are really any classes and that's good."

So there.

Another identity category that was practically erased from this study is sexual orientation. I asked no questions that would have elicited comments about this topic, and only two women addressed it. One said that she knew of only one lesbian in Milton, and that, generally, the older Milton women like gay men because they are attentive, polite, and well-mannered. The other comment about sexual orientation relates to the good old days which one woman misses a great deal. "Gays were in the closet, and I want them to stay in the closet. But that's just a different ballgame now."

This, then, is the place from which the women speak, this beautiful fertile crescent, this lovely hometown. It is a wonderful place, don't get me wrong. Remember that I am an insider as well as an outsider and so can take a loving, frustrated swipe at it now and again.
Friendship Relations

My participants have elaborated many of their arts of existence with the help of other women in friendship relations. Even though most of them worked outside the home a great portion of their lives, the majority of their relations, whether public or personal, have been with other women in the female sphere. Relations with men other than their husbands or family members were just not common. Women have typically provided comfort and support for each other by necessity or by choice and have stylized their practices of the self in female activities or settings.

Men have certainly been important in their lives, however. As I mentioned earlier, these women talked very little about their husbands during their interviews. At any rate, if there had been problems in their marriages, they certainly would never have told me about them. Those who did speak of their husbands did so in a loving way. When I asked them whether they sometimes told their women friends something before they told their husbands or whether they told their friends something but not their husbands, most made it clear that they told their husbands just about everything and that their husbands were their best friends: "No, I think I told my husband first. I could confide in him more, I felt like, than I could my friends." Friends, however, are critical, especially when husbands die.

Friendship, which is dangerous like everything else, can be both wonderful and terrible in a small town. On the one hand, you can be best friends with the same person for 80 years if you choose to and if you both live long enough. One woman told me about her long relationship with a dear friend born on the same street who was her "sandbox playmate" and who remained her best friend and neighbor until her death. Another spoke of her best friend of 38 years with whom she had talked practically every day. "If she were at home and I was at home, we either saw or talked to each other every day. We'd meet down this little path here, a lot of times, and uh,
well, I'm sure there were exceptions, but not many." Her friend is dead now, and she still cries for her. Another woman and her best friend met at boarding school and remained friends until one of them died just a couple of years ago. When they were girls, they picked daffodils together in the springtime, and "when I was 13, we made a pact that we would always be faithful to each other, over those daffodils." Through the years they exchanged cards and gifts of yellow to remind each other of their early pledge of friendship.

On the other hand, friendships in small towns can turn out badly, and you can grow to despise someone you thought was a friend whom you'll have to deal with for the next fifty years. Suppose, for instance, you confessed everything to someone who turned out not to be the kind of person you thought she was after all, and you had to deal with her for the rest of your life.

One woman explained the ground rules in small-town friendships as follows: "Seek real friends and don't be, don't choose the first one right off, but take your time in choosing your friends and be careful of their influence." Since you are expected to maintain a cheerful demeanor no matter what your problems and to keep those problems mainly to yourself, you must have someone you can tell your troubles to who won't betray you, someone who will help you get through the hard times. But, in a small town it's critical that you be able to trust your friends, since one slip means that everybody knows your secrets.

Friends do help you work out your problems, as this woman so eloquently expresses:

Have a friend that you can talk to, and heaven only knows, I have friends that I don't know what I'd do without them. You know, you can go to 'em, talk to 'em, say what you want to to 'em, tell 'em really what's bothering you, and once you get it out, you always feel better and most of the time you get it out, you've figured out a way to deal with it, rather than keep it within.
Another agreed and went on to say: "I've always had a good many close friends. I belong to book clubs and bridge clubs and the church groups. I feel very close to a good many women. I like women more that I do men, really. I mean I, I never have had a desire for anybody but my husband."

The friendship relations of the women of Essex County serve as the basis for their social, religious, and educational practices, and they have aesthetically stylized certain practices which have become more or less enmeshed in the fabric of their days. I have identified several technologies of the self, several self-forming activities, several practices of the self which I believe the women of Essex County use to constitute themselves as the ethical subjects of their actions. You have read about some of them already -- working in tobacco, going to Sunday School, making Brunswick stew, matching -- and I will now describe some others: cheerfulness, significance, and pride; kinship; gender; religion; education; and widowhood and old age.

**Cheerfulness, Significance, and Pride**

The elements of this practice all seem to run together somehow, and I was unable to separate them into different categories. Remember that I said that the white southern woman's code, which I believe is derived from both Christianity and the ethos of my participants' Victorian mothers, seems to have been translated into something like "do you duty and remain cheerful." I discussed duty to some extent earlier, and you will certainly find these women doing their duty in many of their practices of self-formation. Remaining cheerful, however, is a state of mind and a deliberate and cultivated practice which affects all other practices and one which, I believe, creates pride. That the practice of cheerfulness requires some attention is evident in the following:
Try not to do anything that will make you unhappy with yourself. I love a day when I feel good on the inside. "Well, boy, I did pretty good today," you know. But I hate those days when maybe I said something I shouldn't have said or did something I shouldn't have or didn't take the time with a child that came to my door, maybe I'm busy, and I didn't take as much time with her as I needed to. That sort of thing.

I suspect that what feeds cheerfulness is a particular emphasis on valuing each day, on enjoying each activity, on treating everything in your life, no matter how small, as significant. "Details do matter, and angles matter." "It's the little things that make up life." It's important to "love everything you do, no matter what it is. I enjoy cutting the grass, or I enjoy sweeping the floor, or you know, everything that I have to do." Mundane activities are not taken for granted or dismissed but represent a tiny valuable portion of each valuable day, i.e., everything counts.

An expression I heard over and over again was "I thoroughly enjoyed it." By enjoying everything you do you affirm the value of your activities, your self, and your life. When an older woman says, "I have loved everything I have ever done," the conversation is cranked up to another level somehow. When, after 50 years of teaching, a teacher says, "I had a ball teaching -- it was a joy and a thrill and so exciting," teaching becomes something out of the ordinary, as does the woman.

This joy and cheerfulness is not only an attitude but becomes an attention to detail and requires a certain focus on the task-at-hand. The old adage, which I heard constantly as I grew up, obtains: "Anything worth doing is worth doing well." Rather than disparage their work, whether it be sweeping the floor or teaching school, these women have valued it. They have not allowed patriarchy or anything else to devalue their work. They might have done a lot of unpaid or poorly paid "woman's work," but it counted, and they paid attention to the detail that was involved in the activity that produced the product -- the cake, the dress, the clean floor, the flower arrangement, the lesson, the bandage, the dinner party. If there are only certain things women can
do, well, they may choose to do them magnificently so that everyone can see how
good they are. I believe this practice is about much more than acceptance. It's about
significance, about cheerfulness, about pride, "about enhancing your abilities and
graces," and about resistance. Naturally, not every woman I talked with evidenced
this attitude, but the pattern across interviews was strong indeed. And, of course, not
every woman is able to bring off this attention to detail when the occasion demands,
for example, a daughter's wedding. One woman explained as follows:

I did everything wrong. But anyway, Milton just picked me
up on its hands. Mrs. Smith came down -- I can see her
now -- she sat down on the sofa and said, "Now I can take any
four people." She said, "John and I live on one side of the house,
but if you've got four people that can use the same bathroom on
the other side, send them over." Mrs. Jones sent Willie over to
drive them wherever they wanted to go. Mrs. Morris and Mrs.
Simpson had the supper at the Woman's Club after the reception.
That's what they did. They got me through it.

If a woman's skills lie in another direction, her friends will help her maintain the
southern woman's code when it really counts so she won't embarrass herself or them.

A specific example of the practice of pride and attention to detail is the
luncheon, a gathering of women friends. Women in Essex County are always having
lunches: Christmas luncheons, bridal shower luncheons for friends' daughters,
birthday luncheons, spring luncheons, luncheons for any old reason. A luncheon is
not lunch. Luncheons are formal affairs, and guests are expected to wear a Sunday
dress, good stockings, and heels. It's appropriate to bring a little gift: a jar of
watermelon rind pickles that you made last summer, a box of pretty note cards, a loaf
of homemade bread, some flowers from your garden.

The hostess uses her good china and silver and crystal and linen. Extra tables
are set up in the living room or foyer if necessary, since people are not expected to eat
with a plate in their lap perched on the edge of living room chairs or buried in the
sofa's too-soft cushions. Proper linen card table cloths and matching luncheon napkins
are required for the extra tables, since every table should be as beautiful as the dining room table.

There are certain favorite foods served at luncheons, and each woman is known for special delicacies which her friends hope she has had the time to prepare. Of course, if you have a luncheon, you make sure you have the time to do everything right, to meet your friends’ expectations and to exceed them. Some favorite offerings are the following: little tiny sandwiches on white bread with the crusts cut off -- egg and olive, homemade pimento cheese, cucumber and watercress, ham salad, chicken salad; a congealed salad with fruit and nuts and cream cheese; cheese straws; juicy cherry tomatoes stuffed with cheese and herbs; stew that you made last autumn; homemade slaw; strawberries dipped in white chocolate; homemade luncheon rolls which seem smaller than dinner rolls; coconut cake made with cream cheese frosting; and homemade mints. Coffee and tea are served from the silver coffee service which mothers-in-law are apt to give as their wedding presents.

It is most appropriate if the centerpiece has been made with flowers from the hostess’ own garden. In addition, floating a single impatien blossom in a crystal salt cellar by each plate bestows a special honor on each guest. Luncheons are elegant. The attention to detail is wondrous. Only women appreciate all the work and trouble that goes into a luncheon. Women pamper each other at luncheons. They say, "See how special I think you are? See how creative I am, how beautiful I've made everything for you?" A luncheon is a stylized, aesthetic practice of friendship, a private affair that folds women in on themselves in grace and beauty and joy.

Kinship

A practice that pervades all other practices in Essex County is kinship. Kinship has often been more important in the South than class. There are many stories
about the black sheep of a well-to-do, well-respected family who has degenerated into a sorry specimen of mankind but is treated respectfully by everyone because his Daddy or Granddaddy was a good and well-loved man. Who you are kin to counts in Essex County.

One of the first things my participants who didn't know me did when I sat down in their living rooms and fumbled with my tape recorder was to try to "place" me. We went through the usual, "Now, are you kin to Lib Hicks? Was Ollie Hicks your grandfather? Are you related to Wilbur Hicks who used to work at the A&P? Oh, that's who you are. Well, don't you know that I remember Lizzie Hunt Clark, your grandmother's sister?" It was important for them to fit me into the kinship network of the county.

If I close my eyes, I can imagine rhizomatic people-connections floating in the ether above a large, colorful map of the county with everyone connected up in some fashion; with new families sprouting out of nowhere but with a marriage to an Essex County girl imminent; with some family trees anchored deeply in the county's red clay; with names like Hicks and Currin and Watkins and Lumpkin and Averett and Williams and Yancey and Puckett and Hobgood and Harris and Hawley and Evans and Elliott and Daniel and Ellington and Cozart and Chavis and Burwell and Blackwell and Allen and Adcock jostling each other, nestling into each other.

It's very important in Essex County to know how everyone is related. Cousins five and six times removed are not too distant to keep track of. When you are introduced to someone, the introducer will say things like, "Well, Bettie, this is Jane Thorne, and you probably remember her aunt, Susan Watkins, who taught third grade at Broad Street School for years. And her father was Ron Jones who ran Jones Service Station on Carrington Street." If you are slow to nod your head during this
description, you’ll get more kinship connections, until you know where she fits into the whole piece of Essex County. She drops into place.

To aid in this practice, women retain their maiden names. You certainly don’t give up your maiden name when you marry but simply add another name to the end, thus maintaining the old connections and adding new ones. A woman may always be called by three names: her first name, which might in fact be a double name, Sally Ann; her father’s surname, and her husband’s surname. For instance, when people refer to me in Milton, they call me "Bettie Adams St.Pierre," and that long moniker is my name lest anyone forget my origin. My participants have all addressed their letters to me to "Bettie Adams St.Pierre." On a day-to-day basis, that long name might then be shortened to Bettie Adams, the name I was born with, which would then function as a double first name.

After my father died, my mother and I used to vacation each summer with her sister and a dear friend of ours. As I drove us north to my father’s hometown in my mother’s huge Buick, Bettie-the-ethnographer began to pay attention to a practice of kinship which she had found terribly boring all her life. Mother sat in the front seat with me, and my aunt and our friend sat in the back seat. If one of the women mentioned a name someone else didn’t recognize, the kinship practice began. It goes something like this. Sally says, "Now, Lib, was Essie Mae the daughter of Joe or Sam Averett?" And Lib says, "Well, I believe it was Sam, because, don’t you know, Essie Mae used to go round with John Currin, and her sister, Phoebe, who married the Parham boy, well, I know she was Sam’s daughter. Now, Sally, whatever happened to Lester Parham, the brother? Didn’t he marry LouAnn Frazier? Was she the one that worked at Leggetts’ all those years, in the basement?" Sally says, "La, no, Lib. She married Tom Hunt. Well, isn’t he kin to you and Ro?" Leaning forward, putting her hand on Mom’s shoulder, Sally says, "Ro, do you know who Lester married?" This
kind of rhizomatic kinship practice could go on for miles and miles and miles. As I have grown older, I have found it very comforting to know that someone is keeping track of all these connections. I don’t know whether the younger women in Essex County are so careful.

Gender

My Interview Guide (Appendix A) included a set of questions designed to elicit information about the construction of gender in this community. I felt that the women I talked with, on the whole, were uncomfortable when I probed about gender issues on a personal level, though some were quite forthcoming when I moved the conversation to a more general level and we talked about women’s political influence in the county. At one point I assumed that the younger women were more aware of gender issues than the older women, but data analysis proved that an incorrect assumption. Age did not count, and I could find no other variable in common among the dissenters. Some women are just more attuned to and annoyed by discrimination than others. Too, some of them are probably just more willing to talk about it. As I said earlier, only one participant, a woman in her seventies, initiated any talk of gender without my prompting; that is, she began to discuss discrimination she had experienced before I asked any questions about it.

Unsurprisingly, a range of attitudes about gender was expressed during the interviews -- from being surprised that I was asking questions about such a thing, to accepting the traditional roles of males and females and acknowledging that they had never questioned those roles, to saying that they had always been able to do whatever they had wanted, to actually defending traditional roles, to admitting that they may have lived in a circumscribed world, to being angry at being treated badly, and to understanding their own complicity in gender discrimination. As usual, my
participants' comments represent a diverse set of expectations and responses to life. Nothing is simple. I will present some of their comments which more of less follow the order of the range of responses just listed.

After some surprise and a bit of annoyance that I persisted in my questions about gender issues, the women who had generally accepted their traditional female roles in this community said things like "Well, I knew there were things I couldn't do, but it didn't bother me. I had to mind. I had to do what they told me to do. And you know, the sooner you accept that, the better off you're gonna be." This business of being obedient and following the rules laid down by parents was a common theme. "I knew there were some things I was not allowed to do growing up. But I thought it was because Mama and Papa didn't want me to do them. And I never wanted to do anything that Mama and Papa didn't want me to do, so I was not conscious that it might have been because I was a girl." Another said, "I didn't put up a fight at all. I just did what they told me." One woman said that she simply hadn't known the difference; she had not been aware that anything might be amiss. Another who had worked before she was married explained that "my mother-in-law didn't want me to work. She thought women ought to stay home and keep house. A lot of pressure on you not to work." Still another mentioned that her own mother had told her that she'd never drawn a free breath, since she had gone straight from her father's home to her husband's home. This woman said, however, that she had never regretted it.

Quite a few women assured me that they had never felt limited in this community. "I have been as liberated as I wanted to be. I was able to work and I was able to do things that it didn't matter whether I was male or female." One woman qualified this position as follows:

Bettie, I've always said, you know, I've never been a strong proponent for women's lib activities because I've said that I've always been able to do whatever I wanted to do. Now, maybe
I didn't want to do some of the things that women today want to do. Maybe my world was somewhat limited and the things that I wanted to do were within that limit that I knew I could do. I think the limitations were somewhat controlled. But I don't feel anywhere along the way that I have been neglected or that I've been discriminated against because of gender.

Her level of perception is unusual. She is one of the few who admits the possibility of a culture which has constructed a limited world for females.

Some participants clearly reject anything to do with women's liberation by pointing out that they like being taken care of by men. "Never had any desire for any rights that a man had. I like for people to open doors for me and I don't get that done very much, but I like to be a woman." Life is deliciously uncomplicated for some women. "All I thought about was to get married and have a home and have children and to go to church. Just a very uninteresting, not exciting life." One made it very clear that she liked her traditional role. "The other day I was ordering something from New York and the florist said, 'Is that Ms.?' And I said, 'Indeed, it isn't! It's Mrs!'"

Another thinks feminists have gone too far. "And when they started this women's lib, you should have heard me. Um, now understand, I think women ought to be able to have their place in the world, I mean I think they ought to be allowed to do whatever they want to do, but there're some of these women's libbers that lean too far backwards."

I heard anger at patriarchy expressed sarcastically as well as more directly from some women. Those who had worked outside the home had often experienced gender discrimination in their jobs. One brilliant woman, capable of thinking rings around almost everyone I know, thought about what advice she would give young women today. "When you're talking to young women and want them to know about prejudice, remind them that they may need to hire a man with a doctorate who can come and tell them how to spend the money they've got." The woman I think of as the
rebels said, "You know, it's bad when husbands don't let their wives learn how to tend to their business. Be awful if you didn't drive and didn't know what money you had in the bank and so forth. I've always been an independent person. I've always had my own bank account, as you probably knew! I guess I might have been in the women's lib. Men resent women having anything. They resent it. And you're not going to get your foot into something a whole lot if they can help it." Another very much like her pointed out that there are generational differences among men, "But older men, why they don't think a woman can do a thing, you know, but sweep the floor and make up biscuits." She points the finger at herself here, "It's partly our fault. We let 'em think that. We need to hit 'em over the head every once in a while and say, 'Looka here! Here I am! I can do something too!' I don't hesitate to let folks know that I'm equal to a man, that my opinion is just as good as his is."

As my mother and I drove around the county, I was appalled to see that, almost without exception, every county road is named for a man. It was explained to me that the roads were named after men long ago. Men, of course, owned the property, and the roads were named for the large landowners whose farms fronted the roads. One widow explained that "our husbands owned the land, but my name was not on the deed as long as my husband lived. Of course, he had inherited it from his mother, but the property was in his name. And I became property owner after his death."

I asked this same woman if women had very much power in the county, and her answer sent me off on a new tangent. "I do think women have power in this community. I mean, the wealth of the county -- I've seen the statistics, though I don't remember the figures very well." These were the statistics I was unable to locate, the figures showing the breakdown of property ownership by gender. However, practically everyone I talked to assured me that women do indeed at the moment own more property in Essex County than men, though, of course, that doesn't necessarily
mean they control the property. Too, I must consider this information suspect since I was not able to verify it. However, it makes sense, since so many widows have inherited the largest farms in the county. Another woman told me that women control most of the money. "You know, it's because their husbands are dead; there're so many widows." Of course, once these women die, the property may very well be divided up among children, and the picture will change again.

So, my question became, "Do women use their power?" The answer to that seems to be that they don't. They are making inroads politically, but it is a very slow process. There are women in administrative positions in the schools now. One of the two high schools has a female principal. One woman made the school board and was actually Chairman of the School Board. She is always mentioned with admiration. There are women preachers who are much loved and respected. Two towns in the county now have a woman as City Commissioner. One of the very small towns has had a female mayor, and that office may be attainable in the larger towns. There have been no female sheriffs. Few of the women I talked with believe that a woman has much of a chance of being elected as a County Commissioner, since this is the group that really has the power.

Women themselves, of course, have kept women out of leadership positions. The prevailing philosophy that maintains this position sounds something like the following response to my question about women and politics:

I really hadn't thought, I mean, that hadn't crossed my mind, Bettie. But, now you are finding such as our Register of Deeds is a lady. Maybe we are crossing that line. Cause I think on the average, now I'm not, I really am not prejudiced, but I think the average woman's got just as much sense as a man. They just haven't been allowed to use it, unless they are unmarried and have a job that they can, you know, say what they want to.
There is, however, movement out of this position into one like the following:

And you knew that the best jobs were going to a man. And I reckon, now, like when we got a woman preacher, the first one, I was as opposed to it as anybody could be, said I didn't want a woman preacher. I prefer a man for a preacher and also a man for a doctor. But I've changed as time has gone on. Women have proved themselves to be, and I think are more honest and better leaders than men are. But they can't, they can't. A man has a lot more power and privilege.

One woman told me that Essex County women think politics means to "go vote," and they don't even use that power. Fifty-nine percent of the voters in the county are women, and they might be able to make their influence felt if they determined to do so. Several participants said that women don't want to be involved in politics and that they are passive and apathetic. "They're more interested in playing bridge, playing golf." Another agrees that women may have some power but that they don't take advantage of it, even though "wherever there's a woman that can use her influence it has helped a lot." She explains further as follows:

I think we don't take advantage of it. I think we could do more than we do. Because many of the things that go on in our city management, and with the Commissioners and what not, that I read in the paper and say, "How can we let this happen?" But what do I do? Nothing. I should just organize a group and do down there and say we're not going to have this. Of course, some have done that, men and women, and it didn't do any good.

[Aside: Bettie-the-researcher asks, "Do women have any power in Milton?"
She hears, "Men run this town, Bettie," "Men have the power, Bettie," "No, I think that the men still have the power," "No, it's very patriarchal," "It's still controlled by men," "I still think it's a man's world. I think you've got to be twice as good and work twice as hard to get the same position that a man's got. I think women have gotten where they are probably because of the quota]
system as much as anything. You know, we've got to have a woman so let's look around here and see."

Bettie-the-feminist wants to move back to Milton and run for County Commissioner. But she'd never make it. She's too mouthy, too angry, and has never had the subtlety to deal with the good-old-boys, with the smiling put-downs she remembers so well, with the condescending and violent shifts as conversations move from a discussion of issues to sexual innuendoes. Her desire is to "hit 'em over the head." She left, split, ditched that place. She wonders how the women who have broken the barriers have been able to do it, how they have kept their dignity amid such prejudice from men as well as from their own friends. It's all about self-discipline, of course, about preparedness, and setting long term goals and not letting anything deter you from what you want, not "letting the days get you down." It's about "hanging loose," and "loving everything you do." Here's some political advice I probably don't have the patience to heed.

Show them your skills, let them know that there are certain things that you can do and are willing to do and stay in that role until you see that you have gained their confidence and you can work with them and that you are an individual and that you demand respect and that you are a respectable person. I think that so many times that women are looked at wrong and we have to prove ourselves dependable and morally decent and that kind of thing. Because along the road I have been tried.

I ache for these women. Some days I think we could tackle anything together, and I long for organization and strategy sessions and victory. Other days I am so tired, so beaten down from reading these interviews, from the slowness of everything, that I am paralyzed. I would like to give these strong, self-disciplined women who, as they grow older, are moving into the public
sphere and slowly chipping away at that stubborn, patient monster, patriarchy. some feminist poststructural theory, a different language with which to think and talk about what they are experiencing. That's my desire.

And how can I find fault with their efforts? Are things really any better here? How political am I? About all I do these days is "go vote." I haven't yet met the "good old boys" who live in this town. Maybe I need to work on some self-discipline. Maybe I need to start a second necklace -- and add a pearl for good political days.]

The practice of gender among my participants exhibits accommodation to, ambivalence toward, and resistance to the codes of Essex County. And so it goes.

Religion

The code of Christianity defines religious practices in Essex County, though it has, of course, become entangled in other local codes. Most of the residents are Protestant, and the Baptists outnumber other denominations. I have written about one religious practice, going to Sunday School, but the churches offer a variety of activities for their members since they continue to be focal points for social as well as spiritual activities in this small community. There is something going on at church just about every day -- choir practice, prayer meetings, breakfasts, suppers, Bible School in the summer, circle meetings, revivals, and lots of activities for the young people.

Women have broken barriers in some churches by becoming deacons and even preachers; however, some congregations remain patriarchal. No matter, my participants find solace, companionship, and spiritual nourishment from the church. The code of Christianity continues to have a great influence in their lives, and they
speak in ordinary conversation of "saying a little prayer," of turning their wills over to
God, and of following the Golden Rule. For them, being religious is part of breathing.
When I asked if there were places in the county, other than their own homes, to which
they were very attached, most mentioned their churches. They see their churches as
their second homes.

Their spirituality has obviously enabled them to survive terrible confusion and
loss. It also gives them the confidence to grow and change. It has, in some ways,
been a practice of freedom for many of them.

I was a shy, timid person and to be called on in the classroom
to answer a question frightened me. I was very nervous to stand
before the class and give a report. I blush very easily, and I
still have some of those traits. But I, I've thought through the
years about this, and I'm guessing that my experience in teaching
had a lot to do with helping me overcome some of that. I also
think my own spiritual development has helped me. Because
I'm a child of God, I am somebody, I'm worth something and
therefore I've got something to tell you. I've got something to
share with you.

One spoke what many implied: "the church keeps me on an even keel." They
regret a society that "has taken God out of everything," and believe that a life without
the acceptance that faith brings can only lead to dissatisfaction and eventual despair.
They believe that their own "good Christian home upbringing" has made all the
difference in their lives.

In their talk, they often divide up their duty-work between civic work and
church work, and their church work is more personal than their civic work -- it's "soul
service" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 54). These older women are the pillars of their
churches. They are the ones who have the time and the desire to volunteer to do the
work that must get done. They take care of the church physically, they volunteer to
manage functions, they teach Sunday School, they serve as Deacons, and they chair
committees. They show up every Sunday. They tithe. They identify local needs and
address them. They pray for everyone else. They visit the sick and the shut-ins. They raise money for missionary work. They advise new preachers about "how to do it right."

He said, "I'm kind of nervous about this communion since this is my first time." I said, "Dr. Jones just had a short sermon and then he had communion." He said, "Short?"
He said, "Would it bother you if I stayed 'til 3:00?" You know what I said to him? I said, "If it's any souls that's gonna be saved, I can stay with you 'til six."

What are the effects of so much soul service? It may be good for the church, but one woman said that being involved in so many church activities "is restrictive in itself."

I heard some objections from these women to the patriarchy that pervades southern religion (During the course of my life, I have heard quite a few objections to the teachings of Paul), but not enough to cause them to give up "their" churches.
After all, they have often been baptized as girls and married as young women in their churches. They have sat in a front pew and stared at their mothers' caskets. They have sat in a front pew and watched their husbands escort their daughters down the aisle to be married. They have attended their grandchildren's christenings and baptisms. They have sat in a front pew and stared at their husbands' caskets. They have found the strength -- "God gives you the strength to do what you must do." -- to come to church and face everybody alone the Sunday after their husbands' deaths.
When things are bad, there's always somebody at church to help you out.

My participants have created their own space within the church to take care of themselves and their friends. They may or may not encourage change in the church, but they are spiritual women and religion counts in their lives. Their religious practices involve their own personal relationship with their God, about which I did not inquire, as well as all the obligations to others derived from that relationship.
Education

Education has been a practice of freedom for my participants. Their parents certainly saw it that way. The women I interviewed said that their educations had been a priority, and that despite all the troubles of the Depression -- "I declare, we were doing good to survive. People wouldn't believe it now." -- they saw to it that their daughters had some education beyond high school. My participants who were not so fortunate recognize what they had missed. "Many, many times in my life that I, you know, if I had had more education, I could have done better."

Those who did not work outside the home, did not "use" their educations, explained that "although I haven't made any money with my education to speak of, it's helped me in many, many ways in my volunteer jobs -- my church work and my civic work." One woman said that people told her, when she got married and stopped teaching, that they expected that her father was sorry he had wasted all that money educating her. She explained, "But I knew when I was born, if it was any way in the world that they could do it, they would educate us before anything else." Another elaborates, "Dad saw no way by which he was going to be able to send me to college, pay tuition and so on. Daddy did not discourage me, but I think he was just trying to be realistic. Mother continued to encourage and support me, and we put pennies together, and I worked at the college and earned much of my tuition and room and board that way." (Mothers were important, e.g., "Mother wrote to me every day that I was in college."). I was told by one teacher to remember that during the Depression "they were mostly serious students. In the Depression nobody made any money, but we were all in the same boat. Teachers didn't make any salary, the students didn't have any money to pay for their education, but we learned together. And in adversity there was prosperity. In adversity, we all grew together."
I was struck by the depth of commitment to education which I heard as these women told their education stories. One said, "I have lived my education" and proceeded to explain to me exactly what that had meant for seventy years. She is still actively involved in the schools as a volunteer through the Woman's Club and continues to make education a priority in her life. I believe that education has been held in high esteem by these women because it was so hard to come by. Too, some of them have experienced heavy losses in their lives. It seems as if everyone they have loved has been taken away from them, as if all their dreams have been dashed. One of my oldest participants kept telling me what her grandparents had told her when she was a child: "Get an education because nobody can take it away from you." At one point, after reviewing loss after loss and one disappointment after another, she raised her frail arms in the air and shook her fists and said, "But nobody has ever been able to take my education away from me." I was stunned by her emotion which contrasts so sharply with the common careless disregard for education which prevails these days.

My participants have strong memories of their own teachers, some of whom remained their mentors throughout their lives.

She was my ideal teacher. She kept up with me through grade school -- although she taught me just one year -- through high school, through college. She came to my college graduation. She came to see me and my husband here after we were married. She was the kind that followed through (italics added). A lovely, lovely, sweet role model for me. Loved her dearly. She had a little, little frame, very diminutive, but even in her retirement, when she was called back to substitute sometimes, that little five-foot figure, weighed 100 pounds, could walk in and get perfect rapport. She never had to raise her voice.

As one woman explained, their teachers could not be married and usually lived together in a hotel or in someone's home or in a teacheage. "They were old maids. They didn't have families see, and they needed some entertainment like. Mother used to always have the teachers for a meal during the year. And they came to our home
and we knew them well and knew about them and they knew about us. It was a much better situation than it is now." Another said, "We had wonderful teachers who lived in the community, who were interested in the children, and, uh, well, they played with us, they studied with us, they worked with us, and we were a big family in that school." There was the amazing comment, "I don't think I ever had a teacher I didn't like." A long-time teacher said much the same thing, "I just loved my teachers and I just wanted to be like every one of them. The first day I went to school I knew I was going to teach school."

Some of my participants didn't think their teachers had particularly influenced them, one way of the other. "Well, as for being inspired, I can't say that they particularly changed my life that much." "But I don't know that any of them really changed anything that I would have done," explained another.

Of course, someone also mentioned the bad teachers. "They didn't know much more than I did, and that was pitiful." "She was not really an educated person. She was not a teacher really. That was all she knew how to do," commented one teacher about another. Several agreed with the following comment, "Some I was crazy about, and some I couldn't hardly stand to look at."

Since they valued their educations so highly, I asked my participants whether what they had learned in school had prepared them for life. Some agreed that their schooling had been useful, but most pointed out that the knowledge that had really counted in their lives had been learned at home. Even though the values taught by their parents were derived from the church and educational institutions, they attribute their success to their families. "It's what you do with your education that counts. And your mama and your daddy teach you that."

Indeed, what I learned was that these women have done a great deal with their educations. The historical commitment of the community to education has surely
played a part in this attitude. "I think any place that has a college is special. I think
that's one reason that Milton has a quality about it that a lot of places do not, is
because of all the educational facilities that there have been in this town in times past."
Traces of the academic and refined culture that existed at the beginning of the
twentieth century when Milton was home to several small colleges remain. The
influence of their mothers and aunts and the other women of that generation who
attended Milton Female College continues. Thus, in the case of education, my
participants have adopted practices of self-formation based on patterns that already
existed in their culture. They have found those practices worthy and continue to
support them.

The lively and learned Victorian women who instituted those practices
organized the Milton Woman's Club and various study clubs, some of which have
survived and serve as models for other clubs. Most of my participants belong to or
have belonged to these clubs: the Wednesday Literary Club, the Shakespeare Club,
the Tuesday Study Club, the Cosmopolitan Club, and the Saturday Book Club.

The Milton Woman's Club was founded in 1901 by women who wanted to
bring about some needed changes in the community. In 1911, the mayor lauded the
members' efforts to improve the town as follows:

Let the cause for present day activity of womankind be
what it may, no right thinking man can find aught to criticize
in the aims, the purposes, or the activities of this society. Too
often the interest exhibited by women in matters of public
interest and their efforts for public advancement and public
improvement meet with discouragement from men, furnish
the unthinking with a target for their jeers and their jests.
Believing as I do that the best product of the old South was
its gracious and womanly women and the chivalric devotion
shown them by the men of that time, I would be unwilling to
see the woman of today by any act of hers forfeit the high place
of her mother or step out of the sphere which gave the world a
womankind like that of those old days. But I firmly and
emphatically believe that by your membership in this Society,
in the work you are thus doing, you are true to all the best ideals
of the womanhood of that old South -- womanhood which in such full, ample measure, received the homage of the men of that time and has today the reverence of their sons (local newspaper).

My, my, need he say more? Make your plans, ladies, but remember who you are -- the gracious, genteel daughters of the old South. Let's keep those standards up and not get too rambunctious here.

In 1911, a meeting of the club was reported in the local paper as follows:

The policy of the Club has been to go slowly and surely -- suggest by example and to work in co-operation and harmony with the men and the Town Authorities generally. The President urged that all suggestions be made in a kindly way instead of as complaints and to keep everlastingly at it; that it was all right to suggest that the Court House be given a thorough overhauling, and kept cleaner and more respectable; that the jail should be put in a sanitary condition; that the market-places should be inspected daily, and all meats screened well from the flies; that the merchants should keep the walks in front of their stores neat and clean and the alleys in the rear free from garbage, old boxes and papers, and that suitable rest rooms should be provided for the ladies from the country who are spending their money with them; that owners of property should keep their fences and gates in repair, and that those who raise chickens should be required to have them confined to their own lots by the use of poultry wire; that cows should be led and not driven through the streets; but in making such suggestions be sure that we practice what we preach.

What energy and nerve these women had.

In 1916 the club sponsored a meeting on Equal Suffrage which was well-attended by the women of the county. "The building was thronged with a full representation of the activity, brains, and beauty of Essex County" (local newspaper). At the end of this article, the reporter says about the renowned speaker, "It seemed to need only a glance at Mrs. Henderson's Southern beauty to realize that where she leads there is no danger to womanhood in following" (local newspaper).
It seems clear that the Milton Woman's Club was organized, in part, for political and civic reasons. As I skimmed newspaper clippings about the club over the decades, I noticed that the focus of the club shifted from political and civic interests to social activities. In the 1930's the reports from the club seem to be more about artistic and social events and less about civic affairs. Garden tours were popular then. However, the club continued to take a stand on local issues. The activities of the club were suspended during World War II. Bridge clubs became popular in the 1950's, and the importance of women in the home is evident in reports of meetings, e.g., invited speakers addressed the influence of the home on children. A 1953 article in the local newspaper features a group picture of some of my participants, "bachelor women," and reads, "When a group of bachelor girls, members of the Milton Junior Woman's Club showed up without a date at the annual men's night banquet, scheming members of the organization were ready to help. For them a special table, called Hopeful Club, was prepared and the club has added a new department for the year ahead, called Hopeful Club... the 'girls' joined gleefully into the spirit of the scheme." Gleefully? I wonder.

At any rate, the club has prospered, and there are now two women's clubs, the original club and another aimed at women who work outside the home. Both are active. There is also a Junior Woman's Club with an active membership. Some of my participants are not so favorably inclined toward the Woman's Club, however, and think it does not live up to its former commitment to action and social change. They believe the club's commitments are too scattered and unfocused to bring about much real change and that most members maintain their memberships strictly for social reasons. "What a waste to society not to have those women like that be productive. That's just the way it was."
Still, the Milton Woman's Club has historically been the public forum from which white women have addressed civic issues. It founded and maintained the county library for years and has had an ongoing commitment to education, offering scholarships to graduating seniors, sponsoring a variety of educational events, and taking on specific projects as needed. The study clubs, however, have served a private need and were organized by educated women who wanted to meet regularly but informally in order to read and study together. The early clubs were often sponsored by faculty at the local colleges, particularly the Milton Female Academy. They also drew on the local colleges and nearby universities for speakers and coordinated their topics of study with activities on local campuses.

The Shakespeare Club was organized in 1898 and is the oldest literary organization in Milton.

The Misses Hilliard, who operated the Hilliard School, were enthusiastic, and offered their large school library for use at early meetings. It was no casual get-together, but a group of women interested in books and reading, and particularly well read in Shakespeare's plays. The discussion and written papers, from the very first, were of a serious nature. All members of the group were close friends, and, in many cases, relatives. The Club has always kept this close-knit organization, having stated in their constitution that new members had to be unanimously elected. Perhaps its long life results from this intimate relationship. New members were added from time to time, but the Club never departed from this practice. It was a highly selective group (Club Bulletin).

I was told by a current member that when the roll is called at each meeting, each member, appropriately, responds with some lines from Shakespeare. Traditionally, the daughters of members are asked to join when someone dies or leaves the club for some other reason. As membership is currently down because some families have died out, some outsiders have been asked to join.
Another early club, The Woman's Literary Club, which is no longer in existence, reported in 1916 that, at its February meeting, members read the play, "Man and Super-Man" by George Bernard Shaw. "A lively discussion of the characters in the play and the style of the dramatist" (local newspaper) followed the reading. Afterwards, the hostess "served a delicious luncheon in three courses -- consisting of Creamed oysters in heart shaped paltic shells, pickles and tiny heart biscuits, ice cream with cakes in heart shape, coffee, and little heart dinner mints all of which were in the colors of the club, yellow and white" (local newspaper).

The Saturday Book Club was formed in 1921 "for social relaxation as well as the pursuit of literary pleasures. There are no hard and fast rules binding members to a prescribed course of study and involving the preparation of papers" (local newspaper). This club is still in existence.

Another early club, the Current Book Club, which no longer exists, was organized in 1930 with the following intent:

To stimulate interest in modern books and authors. Twice each year a book committee orders twelve books which are circulated in order among the twelve members. At our regular Book Club meeting every two weeks, one member gives a review of the book and author drawn by her for the series. While the hostess serves a cup of tea and a sandwich, each member present tells of some interesting current event. We found our club so congenial we did not like to wait two weeks for a meeting, so now, every other Wednesday, we get together and play contract bridge (rather badly) (local newspaper).

At one time there were both a Tuesday Book Club and a Tuesday Study Club. The latter still exists. One year the program for the Tuesday Study Club was "Adventures in Reading" and its task was "to rigidly consider what the mere ability to read means" (local newspaper).

The Cosmopolitan Club, with a maximum of 18 members, organized in 1935 for "the intellectual and cultural advancement of its members and the community in
which it exists" (Club Bulletin). In 1995, this club will study "Russia -- A Land of Giants." Programs will survey the history, art, dance, music, literature, and cities of Russia.

The Wednesday Literary Club, founded in 1948 by some of my participants, limits its membership to 24. "Its objective is the literary and artistic culture of its members" (Club Bulletin). Each March the members select a topic to study during the coming year. During 1995, the group will study famous authors of the state. Some of the topics for previous years are the following: Adventures in Opera, Pulitzer Prize Winners, Rivers of the World, Famous Prisoners and Their Stories, Victoriana, Poets and Their Poetry, First Ladies and Their Times, and Women of the Modern World.

The younger women of Milton have organized the Pickwick Papers, a club which serves the same purpose as those described above. Clearly, some of the clubs control their membership, and, historically, it has been considered an honor to be invited to join them. Others are open to those who would like to attend and are willing to support the goals of the club. The programs are taken seriously, members spend quite a lot of time studying and preparing their presentations, and outside guests are invited to speak if they have special knowledge about a topic under consideration. (As I scanned the list of program topics through the years for the Wednesday Literary Club, I discovered that "Religions of the World" was the topic in 1972-73, so that must be the year I was invited to lecture on Buddhism.) Members usually meet at each others' homes, and the presenter is usually not the hostess whose job it is to provide refreshments. The degree of formality varies, and socializing is, of course, one purpose of these clubs. However, the main purpose is to keep on learning.

Some of my participants who are particularly interested in history are also active in the Daughters of the American Revolution and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. They do research and participate in local and regional groups which
seek to preserve the history of the area, particularly that related to the Civil War. An article in the local newspaper explains that "Some of the finest writings and much of the history of this fierce struggle and of the years which followed have been written by this patriotic organization, the United Daughters of the Confederacy."

When I was growing up in Milton, I knew about these clubs and took them for granted. When I began studying the county as a researcher, one particularly interested in the long-term influences of education on women, I was amazed to find so many of them still in existence and still so very active. These clubs have provided forums for lifelong learning for my participants. They spoke about the need, particularly since they’ve retired, of using their minds so they won’t "dry up." A woman who clearly has an academic bent said, "I love to study. And if you have a theme or something to challenge you, it’s so much better." She continued, "So I always, Bettie, try to have another interest. There’s so much I want to know, but I try to keep every year, an interest in something different." Another said, "You know, we really have to study in these clubs." These women are also library users. "Well, now. I bump into something every day that I run to the library and get everything they have on it." The following is one of my favorite bits of advice. "It’s important to keep a book by your pillow all the time." Even horrible events serve an educational purpose for some of the most dedicated teachers. "With all the trouble spots in the world, it’s given us a chance to study world geography." And a final comment from a simply splendid teacher: "You probably remember this favorite line from Browning: 'How good to live and learn.' I love it. I love it. 'How good to live and learn.' That keeps me going."

As an English educator, I was very curious about my participants’ literacy habits. Just about every women calls herself a reader, but only 8 of the 36 call themselves writers of any sort. Of course, quite a few of these women taught school and worked in offices, so they surely did some writing; however, they don’t think of
themselves as writers. One of the eight writes professionally, one keeps a journal and uses it for narrative writing, several have done quite a bit of academic writing, and a couple write personal narratives and the odd poem. I received letters and notes from some of the women who say they are not writers, and their writing skills are far above average. Only two women talked with me at any length about writing. One advised me to keep moving. "Well, you're just getting seasoned. Writing is good exercise, like walking. And so writing will help you write more." After her interview was over, another who writes professionally talked with me about how difficult it would be for me to represent Milton women in my dissertation. She is used to being a careful, ethical writer and had good advice for me.

As I thought about how effectively these women have used education as a practice of self-formation during their long lives in their careers and in their civic and personal activities, I reflected on my own educational history in this town. Reading, not writing, was the focus of the English classroom in my day as it was in theirs. At the end of my schooling in Milton, I certainly did not think of myself as a writer. I was told over and over again by English teachers, who were dear, that only after I had mastered the essay could I think of writing in any other genre. Creative or personal writing was reserved for the exalted few, and we were certainly never encouraged to experiment with writing or even to keep a journal. I became an expert at the expository essay but didn't write a poem until I went to the university. When I left teaching and became a librarian, any glimmer of writing for writing's sake died -- I had not learned that practice of self-formation. It was not a habit. Only when I returned to the university at mid-life did I begin to believe that I might be a writer, that I might write to learn.

These Milton women are surely not averse to learning. They read, they use the library, they study, they speak publicly, they teach, they write letters, yet they have
never learned the practice of writing. It is not in their bones. Like me, they were never given the chance to use writing in self-constitution as did the ancient Greeks, to use the technology of writing as an ethical practice that feeds "the perfect government of the self -- a sort of permanent political relationship between self and self" (Foucault, 1984/1983, p. 363). What might they have been and what might they have produced if they had been able to use writing as a practice of freedom? What might their hypomnemata have looked like? As my interviewing progressed, I longed for someone to answer with a "Yes" my question, "Are you secretly writing a book?" Only one woman said that she was doing any writing about her life. I thought of Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) who believes that we women need to write our lives in order to help each other think of different ways to live. I believe we also need to write our lives for ourselves so that we can practice "subversive citation" (Butler, 1995, p. 135) and reimagine the protagonists in our life stories.

Widowhood and Old Age

As my participants grow older, they lose their husbands and are forced to reinvent their lives. Learning how to do everything solo that you've done with a mate for 50 years is just awful: "to lose almost half of you is hard." When their husbands die, my participants enter what Rosaldo (1993/1989) calls the "community of the bereaved" (p. 29). There may or may not have been a period of transition when the wife nursed the sick husband for months or years, a period during which she began to prepare herself for the inevitable. Afterward, the key is to keep going somehow by relying on faith and friends and on the values that your mother taught you when you were a girl in the hope that you will somehow adjust to devastation. "I kind of learned to live again." One widow explained, "Well, it wasn't perfect before I got married and
it wasn't perfect after I got married and it isn't perfect now. I think it's as good as it can be."

Some of the women seem to have blossomed in widowhood. Left to their own devices, they have nurtured their strengths and talents and are simply stunning. I could never forget, however, the pain and terror they must have gone through at some point when they were suddenly alone after decades of marriage.

To learn how they have dealt with this kind of devastation, I asked the "when it's bad" question which ended up being something like this: "What do you do when everything goes wrong at once, when the world falls down around you and you don't know what to do next? How do you get yourself out of that horrible place, what I call the 'black hole,' and keep going?" The death of a husband would certainly fall in the "when it's bad" category, as would some of the other terrible losses that occur as one grows older: the loss of children, the loss of one's own health, the loss of social and perhaps financial status, etc. Of course, since many of the women rely on their faith, they responded, "Well, of course, I pray." Many recommended doing something physical: clean, cook, or garden. The latter is a favorite activity of quite a few. "I could forget the whole world if I can get out there and dig in the dirt." Almost all say that "there's no use in sitting home and feeling sorry for yourself." It's absolutely essential to change the scene, to get out of yourself and your own grief and do something for someone who's less fortunate than you are. This might involve visiting someone at the nursing home, cooking something to take to someone, planning an outing with a friend who can't drive anymore, sitting down at your kitchen table and phoning some people who need a cheery call, going to the church to hang the new draperies, at least just getting out of the house. There's plenty to do if you're willing. In a small town "you know everybody, you're concerned about everybody, and it does keep you awfully busy, because you're always making a salad or something you've got
to send to somebody. And it does keep you on your toes. It's not much rest when you know so many people." One woman's advice on dealing with grief was "Go on back to church, cause those people are good to you when you need 'em." The important thing is not to burden other people with your misery but to try to cheer up someone else. Of course, this doesn't always work. With grief comes anger, and I was delighted when one woman told me she slams her kitchen cabinet doors when she's distraught and when another told me she walks around saying, "Damn it, damn it, damn it, damn it."

What kind of life is possible after a husband's death? I saw quite a few alternatives at work, from holding public office to teaching Sunday School, to a heavier reading schedule, which often involves an attachment to reading biographies (how do other people do it?). Essex County women have chosen to keep themselves busy in numerous ways and have reinvented their lives in order to take advantage of the values they have always espoused, of their talents, and of their desires, given what may be more freedom than they ever thought they wanted.

I was terribly impressed with the widows' ability to cope with the problems of home ownership and financial planning in a community in which it has been customary for men to handle business matters, including writing the checks. At this point, most of them still live in their own homes, are responsible for their maintenance, and, except for the oldest, are as active and perhaps even more active in their communities than they have ever been, since they have more time now after retirement.

It is the highest compliment to be called a "good worker." Devoting time to others is part of doing one's duty and is called "service." It entails volunteering for "Meals-on-Wheels," the Bloodmobile, being active in senior citizens' activities, in organizations like the ACIM (Area Christians in Ministry) which help the needy, in
the churches' women's missionary circles, and in community events. Service is about "having a little job of some kind all the time," and "trying to do something every day to help somebody or to improve somebody's outlook." It is also about "doing for" somebody who has done something for you. If you can't return the obligation, then you are obliged to "do for" somebody else entirely in order to meet the circle of obligation. You always pay back in some fashion. Of course, some women choose to be more active than others; however, each has found her niche in offering her services to her community. My participants serve on boards, chair committees, hold high offices in their churches, and offer the community, at no charge, the values and skills -- the attention to detail, the determination to do their best, and a lifetime's accumulation of learning and judgment -- which they have finely honed through decades of experience in a variety of positions.

Most of these women seem to be in fairly good financial shape -- remember that most retired after 30-40 years of working -- and several said they were more comfortable financially than they have ever been. They take advantage of travel tours, they decide how their money will be spent, they are in charge of their lives and seem to be enjoying that responsibility for the most part. "Frankly, as you get older, you don't feel as circumscribed by, will folks like this or that." Another explained that she enjoyed her freedom, that it was "not that he kept me from doing anything I wanted to do. Course, if I knew he didn't like something, I didn't do it. Not because of the consequences or anything like that. When you love somebody, you try and please them."

These women have each other. There are many widows in Essex County, and when a husband dies, there are friends around to keep an eye on the newest widow, to honor her grief, to encourage and praise her first ventures into the single world, and to
help her reinvent her life. Still, it is a job of work that finally must be done alone, and coming to terms with the difference is not pleasant.

I remember when Susan's husband died, she said she stayed just as busy as she could. She took up bridge again and everything. You know, you do anything you can to keep from boring everyone to death with it and yourself. And she said after 5:00 is the worst, because then you're really -- everybody else is in and you don't want to bother them.

Fear may become an issue when there is no man in the house. Several women have newly learned fear -- "And that is a big, big, big thing, I think." -- and they take a variety of precautions to protect themselves against the unknown. Neighbors try to look our for the widows by paying attention to whether certain lights come on at the usual times or whether draperies are open or closed. The police have special sessions to instruct older women in safety precautions. Of course, everyone in town knows who the widows are; thus, they feel particularly vulnerable.

You see, I was living in that great big house all by myself. I could not hear somebody come to the front door. At night I locked myself into that side of that upstairs. I had two bedrooms and a bathroom. I could be locked into any room or rooms there. I left the doors to the bedrooms from that bathroom between open so I could get to the front porch in case the house caught on fire. I could get to the roof and get out.

In addition to fear, there may be an additional and unexpected change in status, since married friends may or may not continue to include new widows in social activities. "I realized that once you're a single in a society of married people with children, you're just not invited to do things anymore. You don't entertain 'em anymore. Here I don't entertain couples because I don't have a man." There is some agreement here. "Something that bothers me, that I think about, the friends that you and your husband had, folks that you thought, and that were, close friends, you don't
see them any more." Another widow, however, explained that the couples she and her husband had run around with still include her in their regular outings.

One of my participants who is beautiful and gracious and eloquent lost her husband unexpectedly just before an early retirement. She says the following about how it's been since then:

I have gotten along much better than I thought would have been humanly possible, because his death was unexpected, and he died in March and he was going to retire in December and we thought we were going to do all those things, you know. And we, didn't have to worry tomorrow where the next meal was coming from, that sort of thing. But, I just got up every morning and thought, 'Well, I'll just do the best I can today.' I cried, not for myself all the time, but something sweet would come up. That makes me cry more than the bad things, so much more than the bad things. But I have done much better, and I can do things that I thought I would never be able to do.

Widowhood often comes with old age, when life just seems harder anyway. It's bad enough to lose a husband, but to lose dear women friends at just the time when you need them to help you negotiate old age is a real indignity. "Of course, so many of my friends are dead. I went through the address book about a month or two ago and got so depressed that I quit." Those who are left must take care of each other, and the practice of checking up on one another is another duty. "So Jane's life now is looking after two first cousins in the nursing home and in Branton and Mary Jo, of course. And she comes out here about every ten days, just to see if I need anything or what I want. I've got the best friends in the world." One woman talked lovingly about "my two angels," young women who came to her home regularly when she was ill to take care of her. She says, "They've both been like little angels to me. So you see, you can have adversities and good things come out of them."

However, when your friends die, who's left to call you, to check up on you? One woman said, "No one has been to my house in two months just to sit down and
visit me. But I'm a loner in a way. I don't get lonesome." Another explains, "You know, if you live long enough, you're the last one."

As they grow older and as their health fails, they can't do many of the things they would like to do. Finding a sense of perspective about this is important: "I would like to keep things up like we used to, but I can't. I don't let it worry me anymore." An early mentor gave me her wisdom about perspective: "But don't try to for complete perfection; balance what you do. In other words, if you're working on a PhD, don't worry too much if there's a little bit of dust in the corner, you know. In other words, kind of hang loose. Cleaning gets on my nerves anyway, whether they [her children] do it or I do it." As one who has always been concerned with the details, she is having to "hang loose" these days.

Poor health means that activities become more and more restricted. You may have to "take back a lot of things" you said when you were younger, things you said you'd never do when you got old. "I used to think why do old people walk so totteringly, you know. I find I'm doing that now." My participants have always planned shopping forays to nearby cities, often making a day of it with friends and having lunch at a favorite restaurant. Out-of-town shopping is almost an impossibility for some of them now, since they drive hardly at all and only venture forth in their cars to the grocery store, the bank, the post office, the doctor's office, the funeral home, and the beauty parlor. Shopping is no longer an adventure, and as one woman puts it, "You can tell when people are getting older. They no longer push the cart, they lean on the cart. So I have reached the stage of leaning on the cart." They also used to attend concerts, the opera, the ballet, as well as plays and lectures in nearby cities but would not think of driving after dark now. Heavy traffic and deteriorating eyesight and reflexes make driving a dangerous activity. "I'm sorry that I can't go to all the things that are available now, because I don't drive at night." Thus, their world
becomes more limited, and they are more and more cut off from the outside and dependent on friends and family to take care of the outside for them.

Having to move downstairs may be necessary. Having to have people in to take care of your body and your home may be necessary. Having to leave your home, and Essex County, may be necessary: "I don't ever want to leave Milton. I might have to some day, if my health is no good. Mary [her daughter] lives in West Johnstown, and I might have to go up there to a retirement home. I love Milton."

When I was so sad I could hardly bear it, I talked with old women who really have something to be sad about but weren't, and I was ashamed. "It's no struggle to breathe. But if I walk from here to the bathroom, I get tired out. But, I have no pain, no pain! I'm just blessed. And I'm just blessed with so many good things in the world." My participants' common desire is to "go quickly," but then "We never know what's going to happen to us, do we?" In the end, it comes down to our bodies.

Nothing is simple, and I'm sure these women were making the best of things when they talked with me; however, I saw them working on these practices when I was out and about in Essex County, and they used each other in the interviews to exemplify the arts of existence I have described here. I think this is a pretty fair picture. And as you know, I observed them carefully as I grew up. Some days I wish I had been a better student.

Summary

For the ancient Greeks, care of the self was a truly social practice. There was "a ready support in the whole bundle of customary relations of kinship, friendship, and obligation," and "the care of the self appears as intrinsically linked to a 'soul service,' which includes the possibility of a round of exchanges with the other and a system of reciprocal obligations" (Foucault, 1986/1985, p. 54). Foucault's words could just as
easily describe care of the self among my participants. I did not find a Christian
preoccupation with the self but rather a commitment to self-discipline in order to help
others: an ethics of control that enables an ethics of obligation. Both of these are
embellished by an ethics of pleasure.

My participants practice care of the self within the limits of a variety of
cultural codes, and I have identified Christianity, a racial code, patriarchy, and what I
call the white southern woman's code as several of the most obvious. Through the
centuries, these regional codes have been interpreted locally. As a result, a variety of
local practices lingers in the culture and continues to be reinterpreted and practiced by
each generation.

My participants have been strongly influenced by their families and their
churches, and they believe that the knowledge that has been most important in their
lives -- how to live a decent Christian life and how to get along with others --
knowledge derived from the code of Christianity and southern womanhood, was
learned at home.

Even though they don't credit schooling with preparing them for life, they have
practiced life-long learning in a variety of study clubs which they and their mothers
have organized. They have carved out this space, this loophole, in their community
for the practice of their own code, which I have called the white southern woman's
code. In this particular articulation of relations -- friendship among women -- they
practice self-formation in elaborate, aesthetic rituals which privilege what they value
-- learning something new every day, self-discipline, an attention to detail which
expresses beauty and love, doing their duty to themselves and others, and remaining
cheerful in the face of adversity.

This practice among themselves seeps out into their more public practices and
is evident in their friendship relations in their churches, in their jobs, and in their
community. They do their duty to themselves and to others. They answer obligation's call. The forces of their lives have folded them into a place within which they fold again as they accommodate and resist self-formation.
CHAPTER V
AN ENDING

The work of an intellectual is not to mold the political will of others, it is, through the analyses that he does in his own field, to reexamine evidence and assumptions, to shake up habitual ways of working and thinking, to dissipate conventional familiarities, to reevaluate rules and institutions, and starting from this reproblematisation (where he occupies his specific profession as an intellectual) to participate in the formation of a political will (where he has his role as citizen to play).

Foucault, 1989, pp. 305-306

Introduction

A lifelong engagement with a group of older white women in a small southern community prompted this study. As I interviewed these women and studied their community, I began to believe that Foucault’s ethical analysis, care of the self, might be useful in making sense of how these women have constructed their subjectivities in response to the forces of their lives, how the outside has folded them inside into subjectivity.

Foucault’s analysis focuses on how people respond to the forces in their lives. It foregrounds the practices they borrow from their culture or invent in order to create themselves as the ethical subjects of their actions. His analysis also prompts an examination of their aesthetics of existence, the ethos which is made possible by those
practices. In other words, what experiences are possible for them as their own forces fold upon the world?

These questions, then, became my research questions, and I approached the topic from a feminist poststructural point of view, trying to keep in mind Spivak's warning (1993) that "what I cannot imagine stands guard over everything that I must/can do, think, live" (p. 22). Thus, during the research process, I attempted to question the self-evidence of both theory and practice.

I also determined to use writing as a method of inquiry. Writing has surely led me down many unexpected paths. It has also enabled a more direct relationship with the reader, since the self-evidence of the author/authority position is disrupted when the reader's contribution to the meaning of the text must constantly be addressed. I can confirm Spivak's (1993) comment that "an audience shows one something" (p. 22). Of course, I can only comment on my own response to this methodological practice. My readers will have to comment on theirs.

All of these research issues were complicated by a poststructural understanding of subjectivity, since the disruption of the subject/object binary and a foregrounding of my own subjectivity, one who grew up in the same community as my participants, meant that, as I studied them, I studied myself. "I construct the text, and the text, in turn, constructs me" (Linden, 1993, p.11). What was produced by a foregrounding of subjectivity which enables the researcher to say, "I was the field" (Linden, 1993, p. 4)?

At the beginning of this dissertation, I pointed out that both Butler and Nietzsche ask us to critique the frame with which we approach the world, "that philosophy in which we feel freest; i.e., in which our most powerful drive feels free to function" (Nietzsche, quoted in Spivak, 1974, p. xxvii). Butler (1995) believes that what is interesting is "why it is that we come to occupy and defend the territory that we do, what it promises us, from what it promises to protect us" (pp. 127-128). Thus,
in addition to my fairly straightforward research questions, I kept the following questions in mind during the research process: what does poststructuralism promise me and from what does it protect me? I will address these two questions at this time as well.

In this chapter, then, I will discuss the issues I have identified above and will attempt to make some sense of what I have learned during the research process. I will summarize the following: what I have learned about my research questions; what I have learned by attempting to question the self-evidence of theory and practice; what I have learned by foregrounding writing as a method of inquiry; what I have learned by foregrounding subjectivity; and what I have learned and not been able to learn by privileging poststructuralism.

The Arts of Existence in Essex County

My study was designed to identify the arts of existence of a group of Essex County women, and these arts have been described at length. The following, therefore, is a summary of that discussion. The older white southern women who are the participants in this study have created themselves as the ethical subjects of their actions by using practices already available within their culture and by inventing other practices which take advantage of the loopholes made possible by the imperfect intersection of the moral codes of their community. They both accept and resist the formal codes of Christianity, race, and patriarchy. In addition, for over a century or more, the women of this community have developed within friendship relations what I call the white southern woman's code which is anchored in self-discipline and obligation. This code produces a space for the invention of practices which resist or ignore patriarchal codes and which are stylized by the women for the sake of love and pleasure.
These practices include activities associated with the following: cheerfulness, significance, and pride; kinship; gender; religion; education; and widowhood and old age. My participants have used these technologies of the self to govern themselves in order to meet their obligations within both friendship relations and within relations in the public sphere. Some of these practices have been mandated by their culture; others have been adapted from prescribed practices or chosen by the women themselves in order to stylize their everyday existences, to make their lives beautiful, and to create pleasure.

The kind of existence produced by their practices within the codes of their culture seems limited to this feminist who is fond of poststructural theory. On the one hand, difference is suspect, patriarchy thrives, and racism continues in the midst of a culture that calls itself Christian. Humanism seems to hold everyone in thrall. My participants' response to difference is mixed: some question the status quo; others do not. Some accommodate and defend the codes; others resist.

Regardless of their positioning, however, the women of this community have created their own responses to the public world in which they have historically had little influence. They have created their own ethos in a private sphere which, in turn, has had a rhizomatic, unexpected, and uncontrollable influence on their culture. Their self-discipline, their purposefulness, their sense of obligation, their delight in beauty, their joy in each other and in their lives has escaped the bounds of private friendship relations and has marked this patriarchal and conservative culture in very distinct ways.

Their aesthetics of existence, their ethos, is responsible for the graciousness for which the South is so famous, a compassionate courtesy which involves careful attention to the other (some others), stylized practices of obligation (to some), and a delight in beauty (as they define it). I believe their graciousness, a response produced
by an increasingly inadequate humanism, centers on obligation laced with cheerfulness. If you needed them, the women of Essex County with whom I visited would attend you with kindness and good cheer.

Looking Awry

I am haunted by Spivak's (1993) warning that I will always be limited by what I have not been able to imagine (p. 22). Since reading those words, I have felt that there must be an extra dimension out there somewhere, a paradox of possibilities, an abundance of alterity just beyond my ken. When I think about it, I realize that I have taken someone else's word for practically everything. I have mostly assumed that the way it is is the way it is. I might sometimes have complained about business-as-usual, but I have seldom set my mind to pursuing the difference.

Lately, however, I have found myself applying Spivak's provocative admonition to ordinary situations in my daily life and have been able to unkink longstanding, annoying certitudes and to imagine other possibilities for living. This strategy is fruitful, political, and playful, in both senses of the word. For me, Spivak's warning embodies the poststructural critique, and the more I deploy this practice, the more absorbing and curious life becomes.

It seemed particularly important that I look awry during this research project. I am surely not proficient in doing so; yet, when I have deliberately tried, it has been most helpful. For instance, I thought long and hard about how a poststructural understanding of language might help me rethink methodological issues. None of the material I had read and studied about qualitative methodology described what I believed I had done during the research process. When I looked hard to see whether the given language suited the process, I realized that it did not. Language is a convenient cover, a handy hiding-place for stale and sluggish thought. The mother-
tongue needs to be poked at, and heavy words need to be turned over to see what's hiding underneath.

This strategy is all about questioning the self-evidence of our theory and our practice, stepping back to look at how we've languaged inquiry, and being on the lookout for the limits that language inevitably imposes. This strategy is about limits and restrictions that may not have to be limits and restrictions at all. We think they're real because we've accepted someone else's word for it. But there are other words and images and articulations, and we just have to think of them. We may be freer than we think.

I find that an enchanting notion. I'm not very good at this yet, but, once begun, this business of looking awry becomes addictive and invigorating. I feel that I'm beginning to rev up my looking-awry engines and hope to have them well-tuned for the next encounter.

Writing as a Method of Inquiry

If one works within a poststructural frame, one must trouble the self-evidence of writing. If words do not represent the Real and True but construct a text loaded with contested signifiers which are open to multiple interpretations, then paying attention to what is going on as words appear on the page and to the effects of the product becomes not only an intellectual activity but also an ethical one. And, even though the text we construct may enable different interpretations, we, as researchers/authors, still initiate the project, define the questions, play with theory and practice, stage the text, choose the words, and use rhetorical devices to inscribe and erase. We cannot escape responsibility for our own constructions.

As I have written this dissertation, I have often thought that I could have presented just as careful, real, thoughtful, rigorous, and perhaps a more entertaining
take on the constitution of subjectivity in Essex County women through other genres. The posturing and authority of academic prose seems particularly weighty. But all writing is dangerous, and the poem can inscribe just as heavily as science writing.

Any genre used to represent the research project -- a play, a poem, a personal narrative, a dissertation -- ends up being an inscription of lives, so this queasiness about writing is a pointer to another whole set of questions that seems to center on Foucault's question about the will to truth. Why do we need the truth? What is it that we think we need to know? Why do we need to do research? Have we questioned the self-evidence of this practice? Who wins at the end of the research process? Who suffers? Is research ethical? These are questions feminists have been asking for decades. The burden of authoring the representation of a research study is heavy indeed, and some researchers, after questioning the self-evidence of the process, wonder whether what we think we learn from these projects is sufficient to offset the harm that we may do when we inscribe lives. These intellectuals look for other ways of making sense of their worlds and sharing their knowledge.

I am selfish, however, and am not yet ready to give up on writing, since it takes me places I have never been before. Textualizing data and writing lives congeals thought so that it can be examined again and again. Goody (1977) contrasts oral and written societies and explains that "Members of oral societies find it difficult to develop a line of sceptical thinking about, say, the nature of matter or man's relationship to God simply because a continuing critical tradition can hardly exist when sceptical thoughts are not written down, not communicated across time and space, not made available for men to contemplate in privacy as well as to hear in performance" (p. 43). And Lord knows we women need to be rigorously skeptical about all the words that have been used for all these centuries to construct a world that is not very comfortable for us, that, in fact, does us violence. So writing, then, may
become a political activity. We may write to respond, write to critique, write to change the what-goes-without-saying. But the will to politics is also dangerous and takes us back to ethics. Who wants change? Whose desire prompts this political activity?

This dilemma is an individual struggle, and those who decide to keep writing must write more carefully and think about writing differently. We must treat writing as a strategy and twist it and make it groan. The "messy texts" (Marcus, 1994, p. 567) that qualitative researchers have been producing attest to an understanding that form constrains content as well as to a commitment to critique the self-evidence of science writing.

Politics is not the only reason for writing. We write because it's fun. The intensity of thought that writing enables is exhilarating. As you feel yourself writing your way into an understanding you had not been able to imagine before you sat down at the keyboard, you realize how very powerful writing is, how purposeful it is, how exciting it can be, how invigorating the whole process is. It feeds critique, it encourages risk, it makes you laugh and say, "Good Lord! Look at what I just wrote! Now where did that come from?"

When I began to write about this research project, I was struggling in a morass of undiscriminated data. All the activities that writing facilitates -- sorting, organizing, categorizing (yes!), reflecting, exploring, connecting, disconnecting, etc. -- have helped me make this particular sense of that data. Who knows what other meanings might still be made? However, the data would have floated around in the ether in all its different forms forever without the writing. Maybe that's where it should still be. Whether the product will be useful to women in their struggles to free themselves from the grids that lock us up is the big question. I must count on you for help in that direction.
Troubling Subjectivity

Before I began, I was warned that subjectivity could be a serious problem in this particular project and that I would have to be especially careful not to slip into subjectivism and even solipsism. Believe me, I scoured the dictionaries to make sure that I did not accept the self-evident meanings of those signifiers but understood them in all their subtleties. As you can imagine, close study made understanding the problem even more difficult, since I found myself running off in all directions, looking for the real and true boundary between subjectivity and subjectivism.

For the life of me, I couldn't figure out how to get myself out of this study. Everywhere I turned, there I was! Feminist theorists like Judith Butler (1995), Dorinne Kondo (1990), Susan Krieger (1991), Ruth Linden (1993), Barbara Myerhoff (1978), and Minnie Bruce Pratt (1984) helped me understand that I absolutely had to be in this text, that it was, indeed, the particular intersection of relays that have created this "I" that must bear the responsibility of the sense-making and the representation. It was not ethical for me to hide. Too, don't you think that you, the reader, need to know this "I" before you can take me seriously? I wonder. Thus, the strategy I settled on was to foreground my subjectivity by trying to pay attention to how my presence in this study had affected it and to tell you about that involvement. I could not to be an absent author but had to confront my positioning as insider. The rest is more rhetoric which is much too complicated for me to dissect here.

As I have thought about this study and its particular bugaboo, subjectivity, it has occurred to me that each study must have at least one such forbidden limit, one tricky element, something a little squirrely that the researcher might prefer not to have to deal with and might, in fact, not deal with. I believe these forbidden elements, these limits, tell us something about the boundaries of inquiry, about the restraints we have imposed on research and therefore on knowledge, which is what we say we're after.
Rather than avoid trouble, perhaps we need to leap headlong into it, scrounge around in it, and see what it enables. If we question the reasons for these limits as they emerge from the case at hand, we might begin to know differently. It seems to me that ethical research practices would then require that we address those issues and not take for granted the definition of research as it exists, but that we purposefully facilitate research as transition. Our charge, then, would be to keep pushing at whatever limits we have imposed on research out of fear, out of ignorance, out of indolence, or out of a personal investment in the status quo. We put the Ethics of research sous rature and end up with an obligation to deal with trouble. "Details matter. And angles matter."

Summary: The Poststructural Frame

I chose to approach this research project using a feminist poststructural frame since I believed it might enable a different way of thinking about subjectivity and, eventually, a different politics, one more favorable to women than the politics enabled by humanism. The liberal humanist theory of subjectivity posits a self that is given, an essential core self with inherent agency which one carries throughout life. This stable core can be languaged, defined by identity categories (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, health, etc.) and slotted forever into certain binaries (male/female, white/people of color, rich/poor, heterosexual/homosexual, young/old, healthy/unhealthy). In humanism, the first element of the binary is usually privileged and male; the second, unprivileged and female.

Poststructural feminists object to the violence that the binary theory of humanism does to women and others who are on the wrong side of the oppositions. The aim of poststructural theory is to deconstruct what is given, to question the self-evidence of the ways in which we have languaged the world, and to use language
differently in order to imagine different ways of thinking about our existence. In this case, poststructuralism offers a different way of thinking about subjectivity, one which breaks open humanism's binary theory, takes account of the forces which limit the subject's agency, and still offers the possibility of change.

In poststructural theory, the self is not given, and there is no core self which remains the same throughout time. The poststructural subject is constantly being reconfigured within relations and in response to the power of the codes that exist in cultures. This theory admits that power can sometimes be overwhelming, and that the humanist narrative that "anything is possible if you work hard enough" may not be a true story at all. Poststructural theory, then, recognizes that power exists, but that it exists in relations and that it shifts in those relations. In fact, freedom is the very possibility of power relations, and we are able to resist power and subvert the codes as power shifts. Some resistance is always possible, and "the problem is in fact to find out where resistance is going to organize" (Foucault, quoted in Fornet-Betancourt et al., 1987/1984, p. 12).

The subject of poststructuralism thus has the opportunity to reconstruct itself, and agency lies in choosing not to repeat the same "I." The subject folds in upon itself into subjectivity because of the forces of the outside but continues to fold and reconstitute itself as it exhibits agency in response to those forces. The poststructural subject is in play. It is not locked up in a binary opposition, not locked out of some inherent agency so weak (female, poor, Black, homosexual, old, sick) that escape may be almost impossible.

Foucault developed an ethical analysis in order to examine the creation of subjectivity within sexual relations among the ancient Greeks. In particular, he examined the practices, the specific everyday actions, which they created in response to the power of the codes of their culture. He was interested in learning what they did
in order not to repeat the same "I." How did they create themselves? What kinds of subjectivities were possible given their codes and their practices? In this study, I used the same analysis to study other codes in another culture and to learn what kinds of subjectivities had been created in response to those codes.

I would not have chosen to use Foucault's ethical analysis, care of the self, to analyze data gathered during the course of this research project unless I had thought it would be fruitful. Indeed, his understanding of morality was most useful in providing an organizing mechanism with which to study subjectivity among my participants.

There is, of course, always a lack of fit between the deconstructive stance -- poststructural theory -- and data. It is not that Foucault's categories of morality don't work perfectly well in making sense of the data I collected. In this study, the lack of fit, the awkwardness, the disjointedness, comes in trying to describe in poststructural language a world already thoroughly languaged by humanism, our "mother tongue" (Spivak, 1993, p. 27). If my participants had understood poststructuralism, we could have had a fine old time talking about their lives from that point of view. As it was, I have had to take what they said and translate it into a poststructural language of my own making in order to describe their lives. Surely, much has escaped my translation and subsequent analysis. Theorizing is always about making those leaps, but the chasm between humanism and poststructuralism is wide indeed, and I admit that I am a novice at this enterprise.

With that in mind, I would like to think about what poststructuralism has enabled me to learn, what I am sure I have not been able to learn, and what I think it has protected me from in this study. In response to the first of these three questions, I reply that I believe I have been able to step outside humanism for a time and show that the humanist, patriarchal codes within which my participants have lived have greatly limited their lives. Their talk resounds with humanist binaries which divide up their
world: insider/outsider, male/female, white/Black, public/private, married/single, etc. The codes which keep these binaries in place have been extremely powerful, and my participants are complicit in maintaining those binaries and the limits they produce. These women grew up in a community which was practically closed to the outside, to difference; and, generally, they were unable to imagine a different way of living. Little in their culture provided them with the motivation to change. In fact, resistance was practically impossible and subject to severe censure. It must also be noted that some have found their lot perfectly acceptable and have been quite content. They do not share my desire for their emancipation, and I do not believe they suffer from a false consciousness.

Some, however, did resist, and poststructural theory has enabled me to locate that organized resistance. Working within severe constraints, my participants have created spaces, friendship relations, within which they have developed practices to suit their own desires. These relations and these practices exist, for the most part, outside the control of, but informed by, the other patriarchal institutions and codes of their very conservative culture. The success of their resistance to the codes shifts according to the strength of the power relations they confront and according to both their willingness to rework resistant practices which may have congealed as well as their commitment to create new practices to address emerging forces.

Power relations in this community have begun to shift somewhat as the outside intrudes, and the younger participants are developing practices in media res which are publicly resistant to the codes. Even so, these women proceed very carefully and risk a great deal by challenging entrenched truths.

Using a poststructural frame, I have been able to illustrate what women are capable of doing within such severe constraints when they organize and work together. I have been able to show how they may choose to stylize their practices in order to
create an aesthetics of existence for their own pleasure. I have been able to show how women may translate the personal work of self on self to the public work of self with other. I have been able to describe the practices of the self, the technologies of the self, which this group of women have used to create themselves as the ethical subjects of their actions. And they have done all of this in a world languaged by humanism.

What might these women have been and what might they have produced in a world in which they were not on the wrong side of an ever-increasing number of binaries? I have been astounded at their intricate and stylized practices of resistance, at the way they have practiced self-discipline in order to focus their efforts on the task at hand, at their strong sense of obligation to others, and at the effect of their ethos on their own community.

I believe, in fact, that my participants have put the transcendental Ethics of humanism sous rature and have found obligation in the day-to-dayness of living in relations. I believe they have taken a poststructural potshot at one of the big guys, Ethics, and that the result of that deconstruction, their irruption of difference, has been a very deliberate, stylized, local, and aesthetic ethics of obligation. And, as Caputo (1993) says, "Life in general, and the life of obligation in particular, is a rather more difficult, risky business than ethics would allow" (p. 4). Taking care of all the others in one's life keeps one on her toes -- there is always somebody who needs a salad. This is Ethics sous rature.

I believe my participants have, in short, deconstructed the truth of an Ethics defined by male, humanist privilege and have produced a body of local ethical practices which addresses the particular ethical obligations of their cultural articulation. They carry the practices they have developed within private friendship relations into more public relations within their community. Thus, their ethics of obligation spreads in a rhizomatic fashion throughout the community, and all are
influenced by their arts of existence. Their ethos helps to take the edge off the harshness of certain codes even though it is unable to dull others. "The whole economy of obligation, the obliging and being obliged, is a bit mad. Still, it happens. Here and there" (Caputo, 1993, p. 219).

In this study, therefore, I have used poststructural theory to observe the construction of subjectivity among my participants and have been able to describe cultural codes as well as some local and specific ethical practices which they have used to create their subjectivities. I have chosen to word their world using the language of poststructural theory. I believe that doing so has sharpened the limits of the humanism within which they have lived and has set off alarums in the direction of all they have had to defer during their long lives.

Poststructuralism did not help me learn the answer to the really hard question which was not a research question for this project but which has occasionally disturbed this text nonetheless. It is Judith Butler's (1995) question, if you remember: "How is it that we become available to a transformation of who we are, a contestation which compels us to rethink ourselves" (p. 131)? What makes us open to refiguration? What enables the tiny explosions of the self that refuse to repeat the same "I"? I asked one of my participants this question, and she could not help me. I don't know how we become available to change. Does the answer lie in the disruption of that identity/difference binary? If all is the same, closed, identical, can we imagine difference? Education doesn't guarantee a willingness to embrace the Other. I wonder.

I must also address the third question which is to think about what poststructuralism has protected me from. I must reply that I'm not sure, since I have tried to address whatever I had not been able to imagine whenever I was able to imagine it. There is surely much that I have not thought of, and now I must call on
you, dear reader and co-investigator, to help me think, to pop me out of the limits of my own subjectivity. Perhaps I should organize a study club, since I can only go so far alone. This call, therefore, is an incitement to discourse. If we all work at this, what might we produce? As I continue to struggle, I want to believe that you are still sitting there with your eyebrow raised.

To continue then, poststructuralism does not protect me from humanism, since humanism is always rearing its strong and lusty head and requires a careful and diligent response. It does not protect me from politics but instead pushes me directly into the political arena. It does not protect me from obligation but points out who needs attention. (After all, I'm working on a couple of necklaces these days. There is something to be said for the commitment to action and the daily administrative review this technology of the self demands -- sliding that pearl onto that necklace is not so easy.)

Perhaps what poststructuralism protects me from is, once again, my own will, my desire to change what some might not wish to have changed. Perhaps my desire for a new and different politics that allows women more freedom is impositional. What is freedom and who wants it? Who am I to speak for women? My earlier question still holds: when you're very close to the wrong side of that most material of binaries, life/death, is poststructuralism any more useful than humanism? Or is there something else altogether which we haven't yet imagined that might be more useful? My big trouble these days is that I'm seduced by that last possibility, and I want to pursue the deferred.

In conclusion, I find that I can't answer the very last two questions which have emerged from my study. I suppose I could do some more research. I could also give up on data collection entirely and plan a nice luncheon for my friends. Still, everything is dangerous, and everything is political. What I do know at this point is
that the women of Essex County have much to share with other women about living and that I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute I have spent with them. I admire many of their arts of existence. I too believe that details matter, that angles matter, and I intend to cultivate cheerfulness.

I find that Essex County women are always on my mind.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Demographic Information
*
* Age
* Marital status
* Occupation
* Residence
* How long have you lived in this county?
* Where did you live as a child?
* Did your parents work? What did they do?
* Do you have brothers and sisters?
* Did other family members live with you when you were growing up?

Ethnographic Information
*
* Tell me about this town. How would you describe it to someone who has never been here?
* Have you ever wanted to live somewhere else?
* Is this town friendly to women?
* What is the role of women in this town? Are there special things women do here? The Woman's Club, for instance?
* Are there places in Milton, in the county, or in other locations that have special meaning to you? Why?

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Educational Experiences

* What was the general nature of your educational experience? Where did you go to school? How many years were you in school? What was school like?

* How would you describe yourself as a student?

* Did you have a favorite teacher, someone who really influenced you? Can you tell me about her/him?

* Do you remember your English classes, your English teachers? What kinds of things did you do in English classes?

* Do you do much reading these days? What are your favorite kinds of books? Why?

* Do you do much writing these days? Letters, a diary?

* Are you a speaker at events? Do you teach a Sunday School class or speak at the Woman's Club meetings?

* Has what you learned in English classes helped you with these activities?

Gender Issues

* What was it like growing up as a girl in this town? Was it different for boys and girls? Were there things you couldn't do? Were there any advantages in being a girl?

* Has your opinion of what it means to be female changed as you've grown older?

* How do you feel about being female now?

* Would you be a man in your next life if you could?
Identity Issues
* Describe to me what you were like when you graduated from high school?
* How about when you were first married?
* When your children were born?
* After your husband died?
* Do you think you've changed? If so, what has changed? Why?
* Do you think you deliberately made decisions to change? Why?
* How do you describe yourself to yourself now? To other people?
* Do you have a picture of yourself that you've always wanted to be? Can you tell me about it?

Knowledge
* What were the things your mother and father thought it was important for you to know?
* What did you learn from church?
* What did you learn from friends?
* What do you think of the kinds of things you learned in schools? Have they been helpful as you've lived your life?
* Do you think there are things women know that men don't?
* Any regrets? Are there things you didn't learn you wish you knew now?
* What were the most difficult times of your life and where did you get the information to get through those times?
* Knowing what you do about living now, at this point in your life, knowing what you do about all the different kinds of things women deal with in their lives, are there a couple of things girls need to know that would be really helpful to them, a couple of things somebody needs to tell them
when they are fairly young, a couple of things that could set them up for life?

Research Issues

* How does it feel for your life to become "data"? Has the way you think about yourself changed as you have thought about and participated in this study? Has the way you think I might represent you in my study influenced the way you think about yourself? Has this been a useful exercise? Why/how or why not?
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