

Stepping Off The Road: A Narrative (of) Inquiry

by

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ABSTRACT

I am not sure I have told a coherent story, or even answered the questions I have been posing. I only know that I am bound by time, trying to meld the horizons of my past and present, in an effort to keep imaginative doorways open, trying to stay personal, to own what I am saying. Remaining at the centre is difficult. Old messages urge me to retreat to the margins where I can safely categorize what I have learned, which is to stay with the process as it unfolds, to construct myself anew by restorying my experience, weaving new webs of understanding.

This account of my struggles to understand the experience of being a woman returning to study in a university setting, first from the stories of others, then shifting to my own, renders visibility to the process of meaning making. Recursive moves abound, including writing about my experience of being a graduate student in the moments in which it unfolds, connecting me in a deeply grounded way with the research I describe. Changing direction by altering the method reveals the joining of two landscapes: a landscape of consciousness, and a landscape of action (Greene, 1987). It is this process of doing re-search--searching again and again and again, of finding and letting go, without prescribed method other than beginning with myself--that is foregrounded here to generate commentary, to stimulate readers to engage in their own self-reflective process, and perhaps to change.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother,
Catherine May (Wainhouse) Jackman (1919-1991)
who unwittingly taught me that it is healthy
to question authority

...My dear, what you said was one thing
but what you sang was another, sweetly
subversive and dark as blackberries
and I became the daughter of your dream.

This body is your body, ashes now
and roses, but alive in my eyes, my breasts,
my throat, my thighs. You run in me
a tang of salt in the creek waters of my blood,

you sing in my mind like wine. What you
did not dare in your life you dare in mine.

Marge Piercy
My Mother's Body

An Ingot of Time and Space¹

This is definitely not the thesis I set out to create. Originally, my intention was to write a descriptive text focused on the experiences of four registered nurses returning to school to complete their BSN education, this text being part of the ethnography I had proposed to undertake. I entitled it, "Women's experience of returning to school: A mini-ethnography of nurses", and because this research was consciously feminist, I was concerned with issues of power embedded in the experience. But as I journalled my struggles and thoughts during this research experience, and especially when I began to experiment with writing the ethnographic text, these writings led me to a different place, one in which the questions I had been asking about my chosen research method deepened and became more insistent. I had to pay attention.

An encapsulation of this process is indicated in previous writings, the first of which outline some early purposes of the research (*Journal entries appear in italics*)...

September 21, 1990

...Earlier I had asked myself some questions about feminism and nursing, and the possible benefits of marrying the two. My study can be an example of how feminist research can help to change existing ways of educating and relating to women / nurses who are in post-basic programs.

¹ This introduction is designed to give the reader a sense of the inquiry as a whole, following the recommendation of Connelly & Clandinin (1990) to create "a narrative sketch", which they suggest might be called "an ingot of time and space. It is primarily a chronicle of the inquiry" (p. 11).

A note about the footnote...

Although it is irregular in terms of APA style to include footnotes in the text, I have chosen to do so for both aesthetic and functional reasons. The footnote above appears here to eliminate the need for the reader to flip pages in order to read it, a distracting and sometimes annoying practice.

As well, in the body of this work I have divided certain kinds of text from others on the page in different ways, including the use of lined separators (See for example, p. 19). This was done to allow for a variety of writings to appear on one page at a time, and to create a visual effect. Those appearing at the bottom of the page are not footnotes *per se*, and although they resemble footnotes, the reader will notice that they do not have numbered reference marks. Footnotes, when they appear, will be numbered sequentially.

An excerpt from my research proposal, August 1992:

The purpose of this research is to develop knowledge about how women, especially nurses, experience their life-worlds as they return to school. I intend to discover the significant aspects of this experience, and to obtain meaningful interpretations of their life-worlds, while suspending judgement and preconceived ideas. In doing so, I also seek to uncover the unconscious aspects of women's lives and experience by eliciting descriptive data that reveals these nurses' meanings and beliefs about their life-worlds. I will ask the nurses to describe their experience in order to elicit deeper layers of understanding, with a goal to developing further insight into women's lives for those who counsel and teach them.

November 11, 1993

...The purpose is not to generalize beyond the women in the study but to begin to address the construction of meaning. The intent is to identify common themes that characterize the experience for these women.

July 26, 1994

...As I do this research I am always keeping one eye on nursing, and know that one purpose of this research is to advance the process of change in nursing education towards less oppressive methods. Another is to stimulate others--nurses / students / nurse educators / counsellors--to question what they know and how they know it and to create different ways to understand this experience, or at least create within themselves an openness to possibilities in their teaching and learning.

...which transformed into certain related, but different understandings of 'purpose'...

December 5, 1994

So now I'm back to "What am I doing?" knowing that what I have just done is part of what I am doing; reflecting on and beginning with my own present experience and questions, writing the process as it unfolds, using the literature when it feels right, and paying close attention to what I am doing. I am also interpreting my experience in a critical way through the lens of feminist thought, deconstructing realities of my own, and those shared with other women, which are harmful and disempowering. I also tell a story with my experience, understandings and insight as I go, a story of what it is like to be a woman doing research for the first time. This is my method.

December 15, 1994

My research can be an example of the experience of learning as viewed by the student, my inner reality of doing research, generating knowledge.

January 15, 1995

...I am writing a story about my experience as a female researcher, learner and creator of knowledge within the context of a traditional, male-dominated university, and discipline. This encompasses my history as a student, including my nursing education experience. It also includes the development of my voice, mind, and ability to recognize contradictions and critique my practice as a researcher as I learn how to be one.

I am a graduate student struggling over time to learn how to do research. As a neophyte researcher, I didn't initially expect to be altered by the research experience, but this element also changed as I reviewed the literature, talked to peers, and wrote my thesis proposal. By the time I began the ethnographic interviews, I sensed that my 'informants' would likely influence me in unimaginable ways. At that time, I had no inkling of how that would unfold, or that the process itself would transform me, and especially the ways in which my own understandings of research would be transformed. These came much later. The four women I interviewed, and whose lives became part of my experience, are in this work. Throughout I feel their presence, and hear their voices reminding me of what I know, pointing to my own experience. Occasionally, you will hear their voices too, in a way much different than I had originally intended for them to speak. I also refer to them by pseudonym-- Rachel, Shirley, Camilla, and Faye.

Adhering to my chosen method, I completed the ethnographic interviews with all four women, including the different levels of analysis required by the method, but I was perplexed by how to create the text. This quandary then gradually became the inquiry as I gave serious consideration to issues of power, representation and authorship. With resistance slowly slipping away, I let go of the research I had undertaken; or, perhaps the research I was engaged in was reconceptualized, firmly anchored in concrete experiences of my own.

My understandings about power, including my own voice, emerged from the development of my feminist consciousness, itself fueled by my participation in a small group of like-minded women students who challenged

the status quo in our academic setting. Insistently, this research has also been informed by my reality of living with chronic illness. Activism and illness intersect as the praxis I engaged in moved to the larger social arena. All these factors have influenced my experience of doing research, and can't be separated from it, turned into variables, 'controlled for'.

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) urge writers of narrative inquiry to consider the possibility of distinguishing between the research story and the personal narrative, and how these might overlap. In considering their advice, I reflected on the story(ies) I plan to unfold here. In this particular situation, I question whether this distinction can be made, and to what end. At the heart of this challenge is the knowing that implicit in the narrative I have created is the overlap between these two kinds of stories; they are inextricably intertwined, and perhaps mostly indistinguishable from each other. You are about to discover how they are interwoven, as I have.

Mostly, this narrative, I believe, tells a personal story. Please read it as you would any story: aesthetically, in a way that immerses you in the experience, as you make connections with your own. Much of the story has been retrieved from my research journal, which I independently began as a way of keeping track of the process, but also, as with more personal journals, to work through in writing the dilemmas and questions that I knew would emerge. I never imagined that this journal, begun intuitively, would figure so prominently in my research, and in fact become part of the text.

It is an embodied process, which includes the place of my body in the text as vehicle of understanding, and something itself that I seek to understand and respect as the experience unfolds. In addition, embodiment conveys information about my relationship with the texts I create, and engage with. Traditional academic discourse is 'disembodied', neutral, objective, and communicated in a detached way through the use of the third person, leaving the writer's experience invisible, and at best, implied.

The arrangement of the text is such that the eye is drawn to pieces set apart from the central narrative.

Sometimes other writings (and the writings of others) run beside it, as if competing for space on the page. These may be experienced as interruptions, and are exemplary of

These represent other realities: my own at different points in time, my informants', the writings of others who challenge and inspire me, and often point to current understandings applied to past experiences and understandings.

the process I have been engaged in while writing this research. I believe they

This de-centering of the author via *intertextuality* is a demonstration of how the author is inevitably inscribed in discourses created by others, preceded and surrounded by other texts, some of which are evoked, some not. In my own writing, the accumulation of quotes, excerpts and repetitions is also an effort to be "multivoiced" to weave varied speaking voices together as opposed to putting forth a singular "authoritative" voice (Lather, 1991, p. 9).

also acknowledge the recursiveness and disruption inherent in the experience of writing (and) research (which are disguised in traditional text), dispelling myths about linearity and continuity.

This thesis is written in the present, about both present and past (which are now both past). Time and

timing inform the character of the writing in numerous ways, stories about my past experiences are interwoven with self-reflections written in the recent past, or perhaps today as I write. Recursive moves abound; my story is informed by how long it has taken to write, and journal entries are dated, in some cases indicating the passage of time.

This thesis is written with presence: mine to my life, my experience of being a student/researcher, and to the generation and generativity of my own understandings and questions. None of these threads happen in a linear fashion, but are buried in the fabric of the text; sometimes the interruptions change the text(ure) as a new connection, another thread weaves through. Occasionally, a thought interrupts/intrudes and appears as an 'aside'

[like this one which is pushed over to the side of the page]

creating gaps in the text (Jardine, 1992). Your experience of reading may resemble mine in the writing, "losing the thread" and "finding it again" (Jardine, 1992, p. vi), and like myself, it may be that when you again find the thread, it is in a place slightly different from where it was let go. These spaces in the writing are "invitations to the particular reader to speak, to write, to generate meaning" (Jardine, 1992, p. viii). It has not been easy to remain present, to hold on to all the threads this writing re-presents--the struggle for complexity, ambiguity, irreducibility, and the multivocal and "multilayered nature of discourse" (Daly, 1990)--and I respect the difficulty it may present to you, the reader.

This thesis is written in part to present you with an opportunity to participate in its generativity, to become part of its fabric. I acknowledge the challenge that I have set forth for you; to read a text that is structured unfamiliarly, and in taking up this invitation to enter the text I have written, you become an irreplaceable thread in the whole. Your present is your presence, which brings forth the text(ure) of what is woven here. It becomes the blanket I am (we are?) laying down, and unfolding.

My thesis is an extension of myself, not something outside me, and my journal has become a silent teacher, enabling me to see the growth and development of my ideas and and a place where I recorded the influences on my ideas and experiences. It has shown me the value of reflection on my own experience, and the articulation of my reflections. Self-expression in my journal leads to self-knowledge and insight, and personal integration of the content.

Writing down what was happening or how I was being affected by my experiences has helped to identify unspoken feelings and as I wrote, the direction of my thoughts became apparent, my motivations became clearer. It's like holding a mirror that reflects me to myself. Writing is not just a way of doing research; it is a means of creative self-expression. Being able to express myself, and to embody my thoughts and feelings in my own words, means that many insights have been captured that would have been lost. For me it has become a way of life, and an unending journey of exploration.

From my research journal:

December 9, 1994

I am very much aware of all those who will read my work, and what it may have to offer others. I cannot speak for their lives or experience, but I can touch in my readers those experiences that bring forward their understandings of coming to authenticity and personal authority, as it relates to the process of learning in formal settings. My wish is that it helps others in their quest for meaning, and I hope that my work reflects what Greene (1987), following Max van Manen, refers to as the search for "pedagogic textuality", a text that is strong in that it "should always aim for the strongest pedagogical interpretation of a certain phenomenon and that it can be used as a resource for producing more pedagogic understanding and interpretation... to be rich, rooted in a fascination with the concreteness and diversity of lived life and to be deep, filled with an awareness of the obstacles in the way of finding meanings" (p. 14).

As I write as well as read my own writing, I am changed, like you are. On the path of knowledge, we can never arrive (Newman, 1991). Knowing this, I cannot make claims about how others should do research. It is easy to be seduced into thinking that there is some end-point at which all student researchers must arrive to make the leap to 'experienced researcher' or creator of knowledge. Our understandings of what knowledge is, who creates it, from what, how it is constructed and for whom are all in question now, leaving us without answers, end-points.

This is an inquiry into my own research practice as I learn to become a researcher. I have written primarily to illuminate for myself my own understandings and how they have changed over time through the writing. I dislodge and explore my own assumptions and beliefs, and the contradictions inherent in the experience. In writing, I theorize my own practice of doing research. My writing and research has been practiced reflectively, as I have learned to do everything, and I do so here so that you can reflect on your practice (of counselling, nursing, researching, and teaching), and that you will hopefully consider the relevance of the issues I raise for that practice.

New traditions in social inquiry, expressed in their most recent forms by postmodernists and feminists, point out something different: that 'I' is central; that our accounts of the world can only be constructions, made up from language, meanings, and ideas historically available to us, the 'I'. The old distant voice of the objective observer/writer is seen as a fiction, and as a mechanism of power which ensures the domination of certain accounts (Jones, 1992, p. 18).

There are many "I"s telling this story, and these reflect the roles I play in the narrative: I am a subject (as is my experience), I am the author, and I am the commentator. I interweave these multiple voices in a text that has rich, and colourful texture, comprised of all the different parts of the experience that informed (and directed) the research. Two metaphors seem to figure strongly in the writing: that of weaving, and the metaphor of journey. Both incorporate the concept of disjuncture: new threads, new paths. Turning points.

...[research as lived and research as described] amble along on their paths sometimes parallel--often not--occasionally, in moments of insight, intersecting (Grumet, 1987, p. 140).

I have chosen four such turning points or disjunctures which embody my experience and learnings, including how I have learned what I now know about myself (as a researcher and thinker), about research, and about power and knowledge. Each turning point is part of the whole. Each also contains the whole, and all its parts; by focusing on the particular, I point to the whole.

Where to start is the problem, because nothing begins when it begins and nothing's over when it's over, and everything needs a preface: a preface, a postscript, a chart of simultaneous events....Any point of entry is possible and all choices are arbitrary. Still, there are definitive moments, moments we use as references, because they break our sense of continuity, they change the direction of time. We can look at these events and we can say that after them things were never the same again. They provide beginnings for us, and endings too. (Atwood, 1993, p. 4)

Prelude One: Many Beginnings

The urge to introduce and re-introduce is a form of cowardice. Always timid, moving back, repairing wounds that might inflict, hedging bets and covering hunches that might just not work out, wanting to have the first word before which other words need to be said...

David Jardine
Speaking With a Boneless Tongue

It is true that this writing has had many beginnings. A few months ago, I began as follows:

How does newness come into the world? How is it born? Of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made? How does it survive, extreme and dangerous as it is? What compromises, what deals, what betrayals of its secret nature must it make to stave off the wrecking crew, the exterminating angel, the guillotine?

Is birth always a fall? Do angels have wings? Do men [sic] fly?

Salman Rushdie
Satanic Verses

It's difficult for me to remember when I decided to approach being in academia differently. In trying to recall how this unfolded, I am reminded of Novak's (1971) words about discerning one's own standpoint: ascending the mountain--those deliberate, effortful steps forward, a different and more expansive perspective with each new rise; and, yes, the flight of the dove, serendipity--unexpected events, occurring seemingly unconnected to the whole, but which produce flashes of insight and knowing, moving us to new standpoints.

Having to bow to the limitations on my energy as a result of having a chronic illness seems central to this decision, but I sense there was more. Initially, like my peers, I had also chosen not to have much of a life, and to

pursue my academic work relentlessly, using up most of my energy on my studies. Institutional imperatives bore down on me, a transport truck of rules, regulations and codes of conduct leaving me on the shoulder whirling, like so many fallen leaves, in deadlines, meetings, assignments, and presentations. Also, the silence surrounding the sexual harassment of two women students by a tenured professor in our small department, which erupted in my first term, left me confused and angry. Responding pro-actively, I added political action to my heavy academic load, and became part of a small group of women students, who decided to meet regularly for dialogue, support and response to ongoing issues of concern. I'd often reflect on how amazing it was that I had been blessed with such unusual energy, and so timely.

I had no choice about having emergency abdominal surgery after my first year as a graduate student, my life was threatened. Yet this frightening event represents a divergence, important because it forced me to reflect on my life, once again, in an altogether different way, to formulate not just new meanings, but a new self. I could no longer allow myself the questionable luxury of putting most of my life on hold. I was being required to live it as fully as possible, which included, but did not centre on, my experience of returning to school to complete a master's degree. I could now slow down to carefully consider my former experiences as a BSN student, and those as a graduate student in counselling. From this reflection emerged my thesis research, which I intuitively undertook in a self-reflexive way, creating not just my present understandings about research and methodology, and the contexts within which these sit, but something new and often tenuous--a different way of doing research. And as I repeatedly revisited my experiences and the text I was creating about these experiences, these recursive moves revealed to me the essences of my experience of learning.

Thinking about what I should say to you made me think about what we learn in college; and what we unlearn in college; and then how we learn to unlearn what we learned in college and relearn what we unlearned in college, and so on (LeGuin, 1989, p. 147).

What I present to you is a story about doing research in a way in which I have honoured my unfolding (and unlearning and relearning) as a woman, a student, a researcher, and a knowledgeable person with authentic voice, and growing personal authority. It is also a story about (researching) women's

lives, but more than that it is a story about research; context, method, and self-reflexivity.

Prelude Two: What Is A Thesis?

thesis [fr. LL, lowering of the voice; fr. Gk, act of laying down, fr. *tithenai*, to put, lay down]. 1. A position or proposition that a person (as a candidate for scholastic honors) advances and offers to maintain by argument. 2. The first and least adequate stage of dialectic. 3. A dissertation embodying results of original research and esp. substantiating a specific view; *esp*: one written by a candidate for an academic degree.

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary

What does this tell me? Perhaps number three most closely embodies some of what I have been doing. When I go to the library at the university, I see the plain, royal blue, hardcover versions of "original research" which have gone before me. Occasionally, I take one down from the shelves and glance through it, sometimes looking for interesting writing(s). Rarely do I get any sense of what it was like to actually do the research now living between the book's covers. I wonder what sacrifices the author/researcher made to complete the work I hold in my hands. What was his or her connection to this process? What supported it, mitigated against it?

I know that the document I hold is not 'it'. What happened to the rest of the thesis? Where is the researcher, and who is he or she as a knower, a creator and disseminator of knowledge? Did this person just follow a prescribed method, one proven to provide reliable results, and a basic understanding of the research process. Or did she struggle with methods of different kinds?

These questions I ask from the place of one who has done both, one who has been researching, that is "Searching for" (Daly, 1990), the work you hold in your hands.

Prelude Three: Subversive Threads

To the outside observer of Mayan culture, things related to weaving seem to curve stealthily back to an element which is symbolically, even archetypically, female. At some point, the study of virtually any dimension of Mayan weaving winds back to reveal that aspect. To the Mayas, however, there is nothing at all labyrinthine about this process. Quite simply all that is related to weaving is, in and of itself, female. The element most vital in this femaleness is the moon, who is sometimes addressed as "Grandmother". Since ancient times, Mayas have perceived in the moon a relationship between conception, weaving and birthing. To the Mayan mind, there is an inseparable quality to these elements. The moon, Grandmother, provides the common thread.

A remarkable quality of the Mayas of Guatemala is their refusal to be conquered. The Mayas' tenacity in this regard is evident even in hand-woven cloth, what might be called "subversive threads". At times, Mayan costume has been used to designate and buttress indigenous civil authority. Still, at other times, it has served as a statement of spiritual belief, intelligible only to Mayan eyes. In all cases, however, it forms as an elegant, though sometimes defiant, statement of Mayan identity. In these and countless other ways, the Mayas have deflected intrusive dictums about who they must become.

Robert Carlsen
Guatemalan Rainbow

Prelude Four: Who Knows (what)?

I have a story to tell you. It's about my experience, still ongoing, of doing research as a graduate student, but more importantly how I came to be included in that research. Mostly, this story seems like a search for method.

I have another story to tell you. It's the story of how I came to recognize my own authority and voice, and myself as a credible knower and creator of knowledge. This story isn't just about what I know, but how that knowing informs what I do.

I have yet another story to tell you. It's the story about how I learn, and create knowledge, which is different from before when I thought learning was a result of certain structured activities, prescribed and practiced in schools and other educational settings.

One other story comes to mind, the one about living in my body, and the unpredictability of chronic illness, and how this influences what I know and how I experience the world, especially while doing this research.

These days I've been trying to figure out how to tell all these stories at the same time, and when I try to separate the pieces, I realize that each is also part of any of the others. I suspect there are more stories. I like telling stories, and don't usually have trouble doing so, but this one seems particularly complex, and it's hard for me to know what to focus on so that you have a clear picture of this experience and what it means for me. I want to be able to weave these stories together so that they re-create the fabric of my experience and my knowing.

Every time I read and re-read the pieces I have already written about the experience, I am aware that I am always interpreting these from the present, and although some of the interpretations seem constant and durable over time, many shift, or reveal other, deeper meanings, making the experience

(and the interpretations) difficult if not impossible to categorize. I search for ways to describe the multiple levels embedded in this inquiry, to create a coherent text out of increasing complexity and ambiguity.

I have also been aware that, when I think in outmoded ways, I get stuck. I sense that if I can free my reading of the text from old, ingrained notions, then perhaps I am free to see it in new ways, and to represent and construct myself anew. When I return in the writing to present considerations, and ask about the meanings of my experiences from this vantage point, I am also asking how I might create a new story of myself, which changes my historical meanings and descriptions.

It seems like there are no easy answers, and as has been my inclination throughout this experience, I return now to writing to make sense of it. Yet, at each moment I am faced with the equally difficult task of maintaining the sense of the whole, which has driven this inquiry, while describing in detail those parts of the experience that are exemplary.

This is not the first time I've struggled to find a textual form that conveys to you my understandings. Previously, I would have been quick to judge my own ability as a writer as somehow lacking, but I am sensing that I may be facing something more difficult to articulate. I wonder if some of my difficulty isn't concerned with what I believe are my options in terms of representing this experience as text, for as I try to visually imagine a text that encompasses these stories, I draw a blank. I resist my own ideas of constructing a text in which writings or journal entries illustrate my thoughts as the writer of this narrative. I lean towards creating a form in which the writing inductively tells its own story, opening you to imagined possibilities.

As the researcher of my own experience, and the writer who engages with this experience textually, I am still telling my ongoing story as it is lived, told, relived, and retold (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). My writing thus far reveals to me how I restory earlier experiences as other, later experiences are reflected on, shifting the stories and their meanings over time. Indeed, when recounting the story of this research verbally to others I am often surprised in the telling and retelling, realizing that I haven't thought of the story in these slightly altered ways, which transforms me, and I notice how the story is different in the next telling.

And I have been constantly aware of the need to clarify the "I" telling the story, and to convey the complexity of this voice (these voices). Each of the

stories I introduced above is narrated by a different "I", which shifts with the various parts of each story. "I" is me, the person telling the story as lived; "I" is me, the neophyte researcher who wrote the journals that describe my experiences and struggles; "I" is me, a changed researcher, reflecting on these journals, and interpreting them through the lens of my present understandings about inquiry. I strive for a "liveable harmony of competing narrative threads" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 8).

An effort of recovery and creation, an exploration into the possibility of recapturing and restating a past, autobiography simultaneously involves a realization that the adventure is informed continually by shifting considerations of the present moment....autobiography becomes both the process and the product of assigning meaning to a series of experiences, after they have taken place, by means of emphasis, juxtaposition, commentary, omission...the autobiographical act: an interpretation of life that invests the past and the "self" with coherence and meaning that may not have been evident before the act of writing itself (Smith, 1987, p. 45-46).

...reconceptualization means to conceive again, to turn back the conceptual structures that support our actions in order to reveal the rich and abundant experience they conceal. [This is] "reflexive scrutiny" which is endangered by "paralyzing doubt", "eddies of confusion and anxiety" (Grumet, 1981, p. 139-140).

Perhaps the question I ask is not, "Is it possible to create a coherent text?" but "How is this possible?" or even "Is coherence what I seek?".

...I would like to beg you...as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love *the questions themselves* as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live with them. And the point is to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer.

Rainer Maria Rilke
Letters to a Young Poet

The text you are reading is both the process and product of doing the research I am engaged in, its *raison d' être*. This process involves learning contingently, intimately connected to those experiences peculiar to my life as it has unfolded over time. It entails a learning that is difficult to define, and perhaps is only done so partially and inadequately. I have not only learned from the experience, but from others who travel similar, and sometimes parallel paths, and whom I consider to be other teacher/learners (I now see these as inseparable). In telling my story and listening to other shared or similar stories, I receive tools with which to further retell, and construct my story (and hence my knowing).

Writers...invent not only alone but with others with whom they must work, or with whom they choose to think; and not in utter isolation even when they are alone, but by means of inner conversations carried on with internalized others. One invents in part because of others, because one thinks fruitfully in the company of a great many others, who are both possible and real (LeFevre, 1987, p. 93).

The dialogues I engage in are as much within me as with others. There are many voices in this work, many selves, each representing a way I apprehend the world. From this multiplicity you learn something about the possibility of seeing. I don't pretend these dialogues are orderly or precise. More often they are, like any communication, somewhat chaotic, unfinished and prone to interference and noise (Newman, 1991). When I record these dialogues, especially the internal ones, and reflect on them, I point to the power of reflection as a learning tool.

The truth of any situation is to be found through the interweaving of many voices and perspectives, and is socially constructed. I arrive here not just through critical reflection on (the practice of) my research, but through reflection on the situations as they have arisen and presented themselves to me in the course of my research/writing.

Yet at the heart of this interwoven truth is a fiction, or more likely, fictions, ideas that shift continuously like desert sands exposed to powerful forces, molding and shaping in unimaginable ways. Fictional considerations and reconsiderations (Keay, 1995, p. 3).

But nonetheless, there's a way in which all nonfiction is fiction: the backward search through happenstance, trivia, the flotsam

and jetsam of life to search out a pattern, themes, a meaning is by its nature an imposition of order onto what was chaotic....In writing what the world will call autobiography, I am torn between the facts and history and the truth of the imagination, and it is to the latter, finally, in terms of my personal history, that I lean (Butala, 1995, p. xiv)

Disjuncture: Choosing a Topic to Study

Near the completion of my undergraduate degree in nursing I had the good fortune to meet a nurse who had researched women's inner strength, interviewing nine women, asking about their lives, and their experience of feeling strong. Coming from a discipline that valued traditional scientific methods, hypotheses, dependent and independent variables, validity and reliability had all become familiar language to me. We hadn't studied what values lay at the heart of these methods in social science, and it hadn't occurred to me that there were any, after all, wasn't science neutral and objective?

I had been more concerned with being able to remember how to calculate and interpret standard

deviations and statistical significance, all the while learning about the importance of an holistic approach in community nursing practice. How did these two fit together? One seemed so objective, the other so person-centred

Human science can no longer...seek mathematical and logical certainty. Instead, it should...aim at producing results that are believable and verisimilar (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 161)

and subjective. What reality did descriptive statistics actually represent? What did it mean to quantify observed behaviours? I wasn't sure of the answers, but reflecting on my own nursing experience, I had become aware that, to my knowledge, science didn't

really accurately describe it.

How is choosing to study the BSN experience a turning point for me?

It marks the application of my budding feminist sensibilities to scholarship. Although reading feminist literature generated in me a multitude of questions about my life and the experiences of other women, in addition to being at once validating and somewhat disturbing, I didn't initially think that these could be guiding questions for the research I

Before my shift in understanding, I wrote with confidence this analysis of a study reported in the nursing literature...

The researchers have used the randomization process to assign subjects to each of three groups. This is the most effective method of obtaining comparable groups, thus reducing systematic bias as a result of personal extraneous variables. In an effort to obtain a more homogenous sample, subjects were chosen with respect to similarity on a number of personal variables such as the absence of perceptual impairments, previous Barium enema and/or additional X-ray on the same day. The use of pre-test format (administration of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory) allowed the researchers to control for differences in these personal extraneous variables. (*Excerpt from an assignment submitted as part of a nursing research course, 1986*)

There was something missing. Unexpectedly, learning how to answer

To sever the portion of human existence that is hermeneutically expressive in order to fit it into a formal science grid is to misunderstand and distort the subject matter that the human disciplines seek to know. Human existence takes place in and is figured by a linguistic milieu, with narrative being the primary form through which humans construct the dimension of their life's meaningfulness and understand it as significant (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 155)

research questions seemed to be generating more and more questions for me. Before meeting this nurse-researcher, I had never heard of phenomenology, and the idea of putting lived experience at the centre of the question, rather than being 'controlled for', seemed to me to be closer to the mark.

As a person who was coming to understand the world and her own experience as a whole, to learn that

experience could also be studied felt validating to me; and I wondered if I too could do this kind of research. Phenomenology felt accessible, and in beginning to embrace it I began a transformation in my understandings about myself, research, and science.

Nursing is both an art and a science employing a complex and diverse array of qualities and skills (cognitive, interpersonal and technical) to assist clients to achieve health. "As nursing increasingly sees the human race made up of individuals who must be regarded in a whole way, the belief that health must be regarded holistically and from the perspective of the individual concerned is the logical basis for practice" (Pearson & Vaughan, 1986, p. 44).

Upon entering graduate school, I merely knew that I was interested in nurses' lives, and believed, based on my own experience, that stress levels were

This view provides the rationale for the two values basic to nursing: holism and humanism, and enables the nurse to incorporate biological, psychological, and spiritual processes into her view of man (*sic*) and her practice. (*Excerpt from paper submitted for credit in 4th year nursing course*).

high amongst nurses. This seemed like a fruitful area of study. At the time, I did not call myself a feminist, although (in retrospect) I was open to feminist understandings, and I knew nothing about academic feminism, or that there

was expected to do. I didn't even see that the questions themselves were leading me towards this end.

Belenky *et al*'s (1986) book, despite its limitations (which I discovered later) had a profound impact on me in terms of understanding my education, and these understandings in turn were helping me make sense of my experience as a graduate student, itself not without seriously problematic elements. What I consider to be most significant was the connection I was making between my belief in the necessity of nursing to consider feminist perspectives, and how nurses were being educated. Adhering to androcentric ways of knowing wasn't just something nurses did, but something they transmitted in nursing education. I really believed that if I wanted to know more about nursing's questionable relationship to feminism, I had to look more closely at how nurses are educated. Why did

was a growing body of literature about feminist research methods. Most of my nursing professors had accepted "valuing which accords more credibility to objective methodologies of the physical sciences" (Spencer, 1994, p. 78) than to other ways of knowing. I had, despite my questioning, adopted their values. Like myself, nursing just wasn't connected to the women's movement in any substantial way that I was aware of, a mere five years ago.

Nonetheless, between my undergraduate degree and the beginning of graduate school, I read *Woman's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986) and began to put the pieces together. Each of the epistemological categories, or 'ways of knowing' described by these researchers rang true for me, with the exception of the last, *constructed knowing*, or the "impetus to allow the self back into the process of knowing, to confront the pieces of the self that may be experienced as fragmented and contradictory" (Belenky *et al*, 1986, p. 136). I hadn't really articulated a way of thinking about truth and knowledge that could guide my intellectual life. In fact, if asked, I would tell you that my intellectual life had been focused on getting assignments done, including reading and quoting from others' work. Reading illuminating books like that of Belenky *et al* actually occupied a large portion of my extracurricular activities, and was somehow separate! Reading this book and the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) changed my thinking and put my education, and more recently, the frustrations of my BSN experience into a context which liberated me from self-limiting understandings, as this excerpt

nurses adhere to (and transmit) the masculinist intellectual and scientific traditions? And how? This was clearly a problem I began to see as researchable.

It also demonstrates how my personal experience, unresolved and therefore open to question, generated a viable topic of inquiry. Although I originally conceptualized the research as a phenomenology (studying other nurses' experience), my personal concerns, which I made explicit, informed the research. This impetus/motivation is notably absent from traditional research paradigms, and in voicing my own implicit researcher bias, I become visible, a potentially risky venture.

In a discipline's effort to achieve objective knowledge it absolutizes the relative, atemporalizes the historical, and rationalizes the political status quo (Pinar, 1988, p. 136).

which accords more credibility to objective methodologies of the physical sciences" (Spencer, 1994, p. 78) than to other ways of knowing. I had, despite my questioning, adopted their values. Like myself, nursing

Another significant alteration to the text [is] its use of the authority of other authors. In most formal academic accounts of research, the arguments and position of other theorists enter from above; as (usually) disembodied voices imported to add legitimacy to what the author is saying. In my new situated/partial account, other theorists [can] only enter as other points of view, selectively added to the conversation for particular purposes (Jones, 1992, p. 22).

from my research proposal (1992) shows:

I was influenced by the works of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) and Gilligan (1982), and came to realize that some of my frustration may have been a result of the lack of fit between how I learn and experience the world as a woman, and the way I was expected to learn as a BSN student. My feelings of disconnectedness, which I believe were engendered in part by a climate of competition--between students, between students and faculty, and between nursing faculty and other faculties--went contrary to my need to connect with others which seems to be an essential component of my learning.

I also stepped on to the slow road to understanding that what counts as knowledge, and who can be a credible knower, are culturally defined, dependent on status.

Even though my formal studies in counselling, for the most part, mirrored those of my undergraduate degree, especially in their lack of feminist content or process, by the spring of my first year, I had decided to study the experience of registered nurses returning to school to attain baccalaureate degrees in nursing. I wasn't really sure exactly why I had chosen this topic, and was initially concerned about my lack of clarity and my own assumptions, expectations, and personal biases.

As a graduate student, my experience, although limited, was not limiting in the same ways the BSN experience had been, and served to intensify some

The practice of using personal documents draws upon "an intellectual tradition which is radically different from the reductionist behaviourism which has characterized, until quite recently, much of our thinking about education. This tradition relies upon ideas drawn from phenomenology, psychoanalysis, existentialism, and humanistic psychology...it seeks to give contemporary form to the ancient art of hermeneutics" (Powell, 1985, p. 42).

of my feelings about having been an undergraduate in nursing. I began a research journal; journalling in a self-reflective way helped me to become clearer, to sort out the feelings from what I had come to know intellectually.

Early in my counselling program, I recognized myself and was recognized by others as an excellent student with well-developed listening skills

What also strikes me as significant is my use of journalling. Although one of my original intentions with the journal was to provide a place to chronicle my experience, to store information and insights, to work through questions and concerns, thoughts and feelings, to struggle, it assumed a new role. The journal became fertile ground from which pieces of my thesis, at this point my proposal, began to grow. I realized this added dimension as a valuable resource.

and writing ability. I was rewarded accordingly with top marks, felt more confident and was more outspoken in the classroom setting than I had ever been. Being recognized fostered my creativity, and I wrote a short autobiography for one of my courses, focusing on several important experiences in my life in a search for underlying themes. This writing experience transformed my understandings of myself, and myself as a writer.

In retrospect, the narrative I wrote **was** research, but I did not know it then, and did not consider enlarging on it as thesis work. It seemed to be a more 'personal work', satisfying for my soul in its capacity to generate insight and integrate my past experience and present understandings. I did not consider myself a credible knower as a result of that writing, after all I was just writing about my life, hardly a topic for serious academic or scholarly pursuit, as I understood a thesis to be. Curiously, I had set these two apart, although I longed for a time when I could return to that particular writing, and writing about myself.

Reflecting on my nursing education experience I questioned why my nursing professors had not seen my creativity, or if they did, why they hadn't shared this knowledge with me. I had struggled with choosing topics for nursing assignments, because I had no recent practice to draw from, due to my lengthy disability. It had never occurred to me that I might be able to write about my own experience of living with chronic illness, or use it as a focal point for my nursing studies. If this thought had been mirrored in the minds of my nursing professors, I never heard about it, and thus my first autobiographical experience (as a counselling student) was somewhat bittersweet.

There is no more subversive act than the act of writing from a woman's experience of life using a woman's judgement (LeGuin, 1989, p. 177).

Our schools and colleges, institutions of the patriarchy, generally teach us to listen to people in power, men or women speaking the father tongue; and so they teach us not to listen to the mother tongue, to what the powerless say: not to hear that as valid discourse (LeGuin, 1989, p. 151).

Many of us have had the disconcerting experience of being told that we should not write ourselves into our research accounts and student essays. Or, at least, we have been made to feel that owning our responses to what we read or study is somehow illegitimate or inappropriate. The personal voice has been all but silenced in mainstream academic writing... The tradition of objectivity in the social sciences...has insisted that the 'I' who writes the text is not welcome; for the 'I' represents subjectivity and bias, the enemies of truth (Jones, 1992, p. 18).

bittersweet.

How was it that I was getting the highest marks of my life, in a new discipline (counselling), and with a fraction of the struggle I had experienced in previous educational experiences? Was there something about nursing and nursing education that 'pushed' students to the limit, and made top rewards virtually unattainable? Was it something about nurses as women that lay at the heart of this experience? My own experience was clearly generating the kinds of questions I sought to answer.

Admittedly, I had a fair amount of angry energy, and even enmity with respect to my own nursing education experience, partially because I felt cheated out of a graduate fellowship due to the way the marking system worked in the School of Nursing. Not receiving a fellowship left me with only my disability pension to support me through graduate school, and I had considerable anxiety about how I would finance my education living at the poverty line. My pension earnings precluded eligibility for student loans.

In my research journal, I wrote about my BSN experience (and my subsequent understandings). A 'toned down' version of this entry was included in my research proposal, under the heading "Impetus for the Research":

May 2, 1990

My first reason is personal. I am a recent graduate of a post-basic BSN program, and although my circumstances were somewhat unusual while working toward my undergraduate degree, in listening to my peers and to myself I became aware of a multitude of emotions arising from this experience. Many of these emotions were strong, sometimes angry, sometimes overwhelming, and seemed to be related not just to specific incidents, but also an accumulation of experiences over a short period of time, and a pervasive sense of pressure. To say that 'stress levels' were high is an understatement; many of my peers seemed to be in constant crisis.

My thesis proposal puts my thoughts and angry feelings into context:

By questioning and exploring my anger about my undergraduate education, it is clear that my feminist awakening was facilitated by my experience. Feminism has provided me with a framework that helps to focus my thinking and direct my creative energies; it is my intellectual and political home (Kaschak, 1992). As a result, new light was also shed on a limitation in my awareness which was shared by most, if not all of my peers; that of being a woman student learning in a male-dominated institution. And although my experience occurred largely in the company of women faculty and students, androcentric ways of knowing, teaching, and learning, were largely subscribed to. In addition, faculty offered little in the way of feminist perspective or analysis of the nursing profession. I have realized that, despite being a predominately feminine discipline, populated by women and based on a philosophy of caring, nursing has eschewed feminist perspectives for the most part. (*Excerpt from thesis proposal, 1992*)

Pressure seemed to be coming from several sources. I was conscious of a high degree of competitiveness, which seemed to be engendered by the 'program', and was perpetuated by both faculty and students. Personally, I was unable to satisfactorily determine what it took to achieve the elusive 'A+', or what constituted exemplary work, even though my heart accompanied my scholarly ability in all my projects. As a result I felt both frustrated and in competition with those who seemed more worthy or able and these feelings undermined trust in my ability to think critically, or to explore more creative ways of learning.

Although not my circumstance, many of my peers continued to maintain their careers, and still others combined part-time careers with intimate interpersonal relationships (spouse and/or children), all of which made demands on their time and energy. A common feeling of unworthiness, combined with disequilibrium was pervasive, and many of the women experienced these feelings based on a change in role from professional to student. At the time there was no organized or visible means of emotional support for the RN student, other than those offered through the Counselling Services at the University. I am unaware of how frequently these services were used by the RN students, and if they were sufficient to meet student needs. There was no ongoing support group, facilitated or not, offered within the School of Nursing, and certainly nothing which demonstrated a commitment to the mental/emotional health of RN students.

There was also a pervasive feeling that we were somehow different than many of the students in other faculties for several reasons; 1) we were predominantly women, 2) we were all mature students who had spent varying lengths of time in the work force, 3) we seemed to have a more rigorous course load. Although at the time I did not have the experience of being a graduate student, I felt as if I were one.

Many of the projects or papers we were expected to complete, in comparison to other students, in social work and child care, for instance, were considerably more demanding of our skills, time and energy. As an example, in our fourth year agency practicum, we were expected to do a needs assessment of the agency and from it design a program to meet the identified need. In the same practicum course, we were expected to write a scholarly paper describing our conceptual framework for community health nursing (15 page limit). Although these experiences were extremely valuable, the wear and tear was visible on many of the students. My personal disappointment came when I realized that my marks from this course (which were high and would have resulted in a competitive GPA), were not considered in determining graduate fellowships at the university, because it is a 'practicum', despite its rigorous academic component.

Money was also a problem for many. Even if they came from dual income families, the loss or partial loss of a source of income was constraining. As mature students, many had mortgages and other financial responsibilities to meet, in addition to the added burden of tuition and books. Often, working was the only way that many could make ends meet, making students ineligible for student loans.

In reflecting on what I have written, I am aware of the negative valence to most of it; I seem only able to recall the hardship, the suffering, the battle. However we were all able to complete the program, some a little worse for wear than others. How did we cope? What did we learn from being in the program, from getting our nursing degrees? I learned that it was not enough education for me (either amount or type) given my circumstances, but others learned it had been almost "too much", and that now that the experience is over, they are likely not to tread on academic ground again.

So what was driving me forward? Why did I want to do this research? The previous passage doesn't reveal the unspoken, the part of me that lived in silence and wanted nursing and nursing educators to know how poorly treated, unrecognized, and unsupported I had felt, not just during my education, but also in my nursing practice. I had been experiencing the old expression familiar to most nurses, "nurses eat their young". This hurtful legacy engendered by nursing's subscription to patriarchal ideology had left me somewhat wounded. I didn't speak of my pervasive feelings of being different, an outsider to nursing, perhaps because of the radical views I held, as well as the constant questioning and challenging in which I had engaged in with my peers, perspectives I was mostly frightened to voice to my superiors or those in authority. I knew what it was like to be a scapegoat, and I didn't want to re-experience the devastation I had felt when I had been betrayed by another nurse with whom I had formerly worked.

I was embarrassed by these resentful feelings, and judged myself

July 26, 1994

Nursing and nursing education for me is a double-edged sword in terms of working on my thesis. On one hand getting a BSN has provided me with a window of opportunity that keeps opening wider. On the other hand my experience for the most part reinforced my own internalized oppression and masculinist thinking fostered by so many years in traditional educational systems, including nursing.

*As an example, I found using nursing models restrictive, and now believe they impose structure on nurses' experience of nursing. These are typically designed by 'experts', and are believed to be 'good', and a good way of helping nurses and nursing students make sense of what they do. I am not alone in my thinking that nursing models are "make work projects"--all my informants agreed that nursing models are part of "jumping through hoops". For me, these were rarely helpful as a way of conceptualizing or understanding my nursing practice, which I intuitively know to be a way of being with others that facilitates healthiness. Models **never** gave me insight into who I am as a woman, and as a nurse, two of my primary concerns.*

as ungrateful, especially considering the gifts nursing, and certain nurses, had brought to my life. I also judged these unspoken reasons for pursuing this research as not 'academically sound', unfit for scholarly discourse, and perhaps base and unrefined. I had not even included them in my research journal; I had kept them to myself. A long history of being a student in a way that denied my own reality, including my feelings,

was manifesting its destiny as I carefully reviewed the impetus for the research. Clearly, I needed to unearth those solid, acceptable scholarly reasons I had for doing this research.

The following writings from my research journal (May 2, 1990 again--a landmark day!), were written initially to illuminate the contours of my biases and assumptions, a first step to

bringing these to light so they could be 'bracketed' during the research, even though I later questioned the extent to which bracketing was/is possible. They were:

First, I sense that this is a stressful experience for many (if not all) the women involved in the process of getting a degree. Although I have from my own experience derived some meaning from the experience and how I perceived it, I am interested to know if some of those perceptions are shared by my colleagues. Of course, this is a double-edged sword in regard to this research: it provides me with ability to understand the experiences of and be empathic towards the RN students, based on my experience as a student and as a woman. On the other hand it may lend (considerable) bias to the research, which hopefully can be integrated into the study in an unobtrusive way.

Second, to provide further understanding of the experience for those who are currently involved in it, or who are anticipating entering the process, and also for those educators who are part of the RN student's experience, who were also once involved in the process itself. Hopefully the themes developed will lead to new perspectives for nursing education which may serve as starting points for change or future educational research.

Bracketing, or placing my conscious assumptions into parentheses will allow me to see more clearly what the nurses reveal as meaningful about their experience. Further, preconceptions cannot be eradicated completely, but can be tested critically in the course of substantive inquiry by seeking out the informants' views within the dialogical encounter (Gitlin *et al*, 1989).

I believe as Bernstein (1983) does that it "is an illusion to think we can assume the position of disinterested observers by bracketing all our preunderstandings...we can only (understand others) by adopting the performative attitude of one who...enters a dialogue with the subject aimed at mutual understanding" (p. 182). (From my thesis proposal, August 1992)

Third, as a counsellor, I am interested in their experience from the point of view of how the students perceived it, how it affected their emotional health and how they dealt with it. What aspects of the experience were perceived as stressful/not stressful? How did the individual cope/manage the process? What was that like for her? What sources of support did she perceive/experience? Lack of support? Again the emerging themes may provide new perspectives on how RN's can best grow as a result of the experience and provide starting points for future counselling research with female helping professionals. Also university counselling centres, career counselling with women.

Fourth, I am aware of how the experience of these individuals cannot be separated from the systems within which each of them lives, works, studies, and the androcentricity of these systems. Although I am not out to prove that much of these womens' experiences derives from, is related to or connected to male-dominated systems, it is important that this reality be acknowledged and taken into account at some level in the study (and the experience). The competitiveness that I keenly felt is an example of the effect of this quality on my undergraduate education.

Fifth, I am seeking to develop a deeper understanding of the experience from the individual student's perspective, in order that new perspectives and/or programs are student-based, i.e., based on the student's experience as a mature female student in a helping profession. By studying the experience from a phenomenological point of view, the exploration or discovery is holistic, i.e., it includes relevant and meaningful aspects of the experience. Ultimately I hope that the findings will promote the mental health and creativity of future students, which will inform their future professional practice, the benefits filtering down to the health care consumer or client level.

I derived a certain freedom from listing these reasons, even though it was initially designed to cover up thoughts and feelings I had not given myself permission to express. Perhaps, because I was coming to see that both were true, I could include them in the impetus statement of my proposal. What would it take for me to voice my dissatisfaction openly? Ultimately, it was the support of my peers, themselves expressing their anger about the inequities experienced as female graduate students. In our women's group, I had been a witness to their anger, which joined my own, and provided us with the strength we needed to challenge the faculty. We called ourselves feminists, and knew what this might cost.

Interlude

Creating the first chapter, "Disjuncture: Choosing a Topic to Study" took a lot out of me, especially in trying to learn how to format the different 'voices'. It also raised some questions about what was included, and not included and how to proceed next.

[Yet I thought I already knew what to do next, or at least I had planned to move right into telling the story about my involvement with The Women's Group, and how that praxis informed this research]

...which leaves me wanting to follow this disruption for a short while to see where it takes me. Missing from the text thus far is my desire to situate myself in this endeavour, a constant wrestling with the ambiguity of being positioned as a female graduate student with a physical disability in a place of relative privilege in Western society, the halls of academe. Of no less importance is the way in which I work, my relationship with my Self as a writer, and the tensions generated between equally compelling prescriptions for creativity and scholarship. Recent journal entries bring some of these struggles to light:

May 9, 1995

It's clear that over time there have been a number of interruptions in this process. Not all have been because of institutional constraints, or because of my illness. Many have come because of my persistent questioning of the process while engaged in it. Time is an important context for this research, in part because it marks out the way the work has proceeded / moved. A pattern has been established in which I write about my experience, or others', and the writing is interrupted. Sometimes a bodily or felt sense of energy being blocked will reveal (upon reflection) that I don't know how to proceed. Other times questions will intrude, and the writing stops. My next move is often to reflect, asking the question, "What have I been doing here?"

As I write about what I have been doing to shed some light on how I might proceed, insight is often generated, and I will resume writing, often in a slightly different direction, or at least changed in some way. Often in these forays into the past (most often the recent past), I will bring forward much more than what interrupted the writing. The questions move me further back into the past and I bring more of that experience into the

present. Through this process of retrieval, I am developing an increasingly complex, and insightful knowledge about this particular experience. Additionally, complexity and the interrelationship between present and past build up through the process of repetition.

May 15, 1995

*How a person works, or creates speaks volumes about their orientation to the world. I wonder if other researchers approach their writing in a meditative way, emptying, creating space and receptivity, allowing the words to show themselves. Stories about this way of being seem to be the domain of the artist, the Buddhist monk, or in a larger sense, the Aboriginal peoples of the world. Sharon Butala (1994) describes a unique awareness in *The Perfection of Morning*, a book about her relationship with the landscape of southwestern Saskatchewan. She has an experience of not just emptying, and the "things entering me, but of me going out to mingle with them" (p. 128).*

Perhaps, for her (and for me), in the "mingling" is an intimate dialogue, a shared knowing, a collaborative search for understanding, or even for what is known. When asked "How do you do it?" the Japanese potter Hamada, working in an unhurried, intuitive way, answers, "I simply look at the pot and ask it what it wants." (Cino, 1995, p. 30). I have known that much of what I have been doing has been a dialogue, an asking and seeking to answer questions, beginning beyond my consciousness, and stepping across the threshold as the doors are flung open, often in bringing the questions to words / speech.

The words and ideas on these pages are the result of that knowing, emerging from a way of working that asks that I be still and quiet, releasing expectations, letting go of thoughts I think I know, and the categories into which I put these thoughts.

You know nothing. You understand nothing. You only have what your body tells you and only your experience from which to make judgements. You may have misunderstood; you may be wrong. Teach me, is what you should say, and, I am listening. Approach the world as a child seeing it for the first time. Remember wonder. In a word: humility. Then things come to you as they did not when you thought you knew (Butala, 1994, p. 129).

How do I reconcile the conflicting demands of this thesis, to be scholarly and creative? Forming this text in the context of an academy that values writing and research that is objective and disembodied creates a profound tension in me, which challenges my ability to attain any transcendent state, that fertile ground for writing. Yet, I persist because part of my project is to remain true to what I value and believe about knowing, and the ways I know.

Articulating my situation/position with respect to this research also invites the project of critiquing that 'situation'. More specifically, I am aware of the juxtaposition of my relative powerlessness as a student (with a disability), with the complicity and privilege I experience in being a creator of knowledge in the academy. A large part of my life currently exists within the university, thus I am deeply sensitive to how knowledge is used to assert authority over others, and am concerned that, although my intentions with this work are liberatory, I am implicated in the academy, which I am ultimately striving to transform.

Feminism's longstanding tendencies toward self-reflexivity provide some experience of both rendering problematic and provisional our most firmly held assumptions and, nevertheless, acting in the world, taking a stand. Women's simultaneous experiences of positions of privilege and marginality ground for the development of practices of self-interrogation and critique (Lather, 1991, p. 29).

Despite my awareness of the subversiveness of a woman's autobiography vis-à-vis the dominant discourse and academic canon, I am

... "writing under erasure." What this means to me is that to write "postmodern" is to write paradoxically aware of one's complicity in that which one critiques. Such a movement of reflexivity and historicity at once inscribes and subverts (Lather, 1991, p. 10).

writing as part of a degree circumscribed by designated procedures, leaving my writing (and the knowledge I create) open to appropriation and entrenchment within the accepted tradition of scholarship. How do I reproduce/

accommodate the culture of academia, and how do I resist this tendency? Better still, how do I de-centre my authority, while actively asserting it?

Lather (1991) suggests that researchers like me "...intervene in the production of knowledge at particular sites in ways that work out of the blood and spirit of our lives, rather than out of the consumerism of ideas that can pass for a life of the mind in academic theory" (p. 20). Am I not working from the "blood and spirit" of my life? Will this be enough? Is self-reflexivity a sufficient antidote for the bitter pill I accept as a participant in the production of knowledge?

I struggle endlessly with beginnings, and by association, endings, and in this struggle another related issue surfaces, a familiar message, a companion on this journey, which frequently voices its presence, as my journal writings indicate:

September 28, 1994

Something happened yesterday that is significant to me within the context of my life as a student researching the student experience. At the Women's Health Council meeting, I approached a colleague about the possibility of getting a copy of her thesis. In her response, she spoke with emotion of her disappointment in it. Apparently, she really hadn't done what she had intended because her recent academic appointment was contingent on having her thesis finished and degree completed, well before her anticipated date. She also told me that she had worked 18 hour days in the last month to meet these new deadlines, and therefore compromised her intended work. In the interests of expediency, she had admittedly forfeited her integrity, and produced a thesis that did not in fact reflect the depth of her thinking.

Hearing this brought into view my resolve to 'have a life', and not get trapped by deadlines, as part of completing this thesis. I was again reminded of institutional constraints, and the sacrifices to our own truth and creativity that we make in negotiating them. For it is a negotiation with self that happens.

May 2, 1995

How does a person whose creative life is just blossoming come to know or understand that a work like this one might not be a life's work, but just a piece of it? It seems to me that that knowing must be something which happens in retrospect, something you realize after you have completed it, after you have made the decisions you need to make to contain it, to end it. So many have kindly and gently reminded me of this, but it seems a difficult task, especially when you are someone like me, a person who never expected to even be attending university, or never even thought she'd be writing or thinking in this way. And for someone with a fluctuating and debilitating illness, which may narrow the future for me, how do I know this isn't the culmination of my life's work? Can you promise me that it won't end here? That this is in fact a doorway to infinite future possibilities?

May 27, 1995

I had a conversation with a close friend yesterday about two different thoughts in relation to this thesis. One is, "it's just a thesis" (as in "you'll do the 'real' work later"), the other is "it's not just a thesis". These seem in opposition to each other, but seem equally true. The first statement signifies the limitedness of this endeavour (and, perhaps those who say it), the second signifies the importance of this writing and experience for my life, as a way of life, and the possibilities embedded in it.

What these writings point to are other ways in which I live or am 'situated' in this research, at least during the writing. These are dialogues with myself, reminders designed to validate my own experience, in an effort to understand and affirm it. My colleague's experience points to how mine is different, to my commitment to myself, borne out of living with chronic illness, to creating ample 'living space' for me as I do this research. This 'negotiation with self' is a constant redefinition of what is important to me in the face of others' efforts to define this process for me. Many are well-meaning, often concerned about the length of time it has taken me, and some seem perturbed by the amount I'm doing, after all, "it's just a thesis". Perhaps, and paradoxically, it's much more than that; "it's not just a thesis", it's the beginning of knowing myself in a new way, embodiment being my connection to a fertile life of the mind.

Disjuncture: Praxis

Living as we did--on the edge--we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole.

This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world view...that sustained us, aided us in our struggle...strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity (hooks, 1984, p. ix).

Very early in the first term of my graduate program my studies were disrupted when I learned that complaints of sexual harassment had been put forward by two female students against one of the male professors. The tension in the course he taught that I took at the time was palpable. Additionally, the silence of the faculty with respect to the complaints resulted in informal exchanges of rumours and hearsay amongst students, increasing the confusion and chaos surrounding the event. "We later discovered that formal faculty acknowledgement had been withheld partly because of confidentiality restrictions set by university policy, and also due to their own distressed responses to complaints placed against their colleague" (Austin & Kimpson, 1992, p. 84).²

As a new student unfamiliar with the program and the faculty members, I felt vulnerable, and was shocked that this professor was currently teaching courses despite the complaints placed against him. This was a person whom I personally had no reason to fear or mistrust, however the power he held with respect to my marks, coupled with not knowing his stance at the time regarding the complaints (i.e., did he accept or deny them?), made me extremely cautious in his presence.

² This quote is taken from an article written by myself and Bonny Austin about our experience of breaking the silence in our department about the harassment. It was presented by both of us in workshop format at the CAASHHE Annual Conference in 1992.

What was particularly disturbing to me was the silence of the all-male faculty. I certainly didn't at the time hear anything about the complaints from faculty, and wondered how it was affecting them, and what position they were taking. The contradiction of professors who teach in a discipline that values

People crave objectivity because to be subjective is to be embodied, to be a body, vulnerable, violable. It's often easier for women to trust one another, to try to speak our experience in our own language, the language we talk to each other in, the mother tongue; so we empower one another (p. 151)...The mother tongue is language not as mere communication but as relation, a network. Its power is not in dividing but in binding, not in distancing but in uniting...and we all know it by heart....It is the language stories are told in (LeGuin, 1989, p. 149-50).

openness and honesty keeping silent about a situation that was directly affecting students' lives was not lost on me. Fortunately, I had met another woman (co-author, above) with whom I could share my concerns, one who was coming to the same conclusions. We came to know each other well, our common experience and story becoming a strong bond between us. By the

spring, we had made a decision to request a formal acknowledgement of the complaints from the faculty, in a setting that provided the opportunity for students and professors to openly discuss their responses.

A few months following this request (penned by B. Austin), twenty women students met initially with the sexual harassment advisor of the university, in order to respect fears of openly disclosing our distressed, and for some, angry reactions in the presence of faculty members. In finally breaking the silence in this way, I felt a sense of release in talking about how confused, angry and fearful I had been feeling, nevertheless I remained very frightened about discussing my feelings with most faculty members, my supervisor excepted. A small group of students, myself included, convened following this meeting, to further discuss our fears and concerns, and obtain support from each other. The five of us agreed to continue our discussions, and, proudly and plainly, decided to call ourselves "The Women's Group".³

³ Although I write about the group collectively, from whatever authority being a 'founding' member gives me, I am telling my own story, which is intertwined with the group's. I am aware of the danger of speaking for others, and that the story would likely be told in a different way by each individual member. We recently recounted our history as a group to newer members, and I was amazed at what I had remembered and left out in my own telling. Nonetheless, what you read is my experience and interpretation of the events that took place during this period of time.

I suspect some faculty might debate our interpretation of being instrumental in making changes in the department. As a Women's Group member, this would not surprise me. Faculty never collectively acknowledged us as a positive force in the department, and as

Faculty subsequently agreed to our request to meet in community with students to discuss our reactions to the harassment issue. I was tense and nervous, yet relieved that we were finally, after a whole year, talking openly with the faculty about the harassment, and how it had affected each of us. Clearly, there were divisions amongst both student and faculty groups, and I experienced frustration with the rhetoric espoused by some faculty members, which diluted the implications of this experience for me as a student. This discourse also seemed like it was designed to mystify. However, a suggestion from one of our "Women's Group" members to continue to meet as a 'community', thereby providing an ongoing forum for open dialogue between students and faculty, was taken up by the faculty, and these dialogues continue to this day.

Early in the group's infancy we "collectively realized that our concerns as feminists extended beyond the sexual harassment issue to include larger issues relevant to us as women

graduate students" (Austin & Kimpson, 1992, p. 85). Included in these were such things as the lack of tenured women faculty in our department, the absence of a feminist counselling course, and the pervasive sexism experienced in many of our classrooms.

As part of one of our community meetings, members of our small but influential group⁴

brought pressure on the chair not to rehire a sessional instructor who had allegedly sexually harassed several female undergraduate students, even though no formal complaints were placed against him. Later, we also influenced such important changes as having a graduate student regularly

Voice is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community...The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and feeling heard by others are all part of this process...Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of his/her experience and hence, to language, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4, citing Britzman [in press]).

a group we believed that many of the faculty probably wished we didn't exist. Part of our identity was being a thorn in their sides, although I for one wished that we could be recognized as valuable.

⁴ We were influential because, as a group, we were organized and relentless in our efforts to bring about change, not because we were respected by faculty members, or other students for that matter.

attend faculty meetings, as well as placing a graduate student representative on the hiring committee for new faculty.

On at least one occasion I assumed the responsibility of corresponding with our department chair, with whom none of us felt comfortable enough to

Experienced knowledge is tacit and implicit, and it is also personal and practical. It is rooted in our direct experience and hence must be defined in terms of our experience. It must be communicated experientially--you will understand it fully only through your own experience in drawing out your own knowledge (Hunt, 1987, p. 7)

meet in person at that particular time. He had suggested to us in a memo that meeting in person, in his experience, provides more clarity and exchange of information than is possible in a series of memos. Our experience differed. I, for one, had left face-to-face encounters with him (in

our community meetings) more confused and mystified than when I had begun, feeling like I had not voiced my concerns clearly. The issues the Women's Group were trying to bring forward were extremely important to us, and we were worried that some of the faculty misunderstood our intentions. An excerpt from a letter, written by myself⁵ on behalf of The Women's Group, addressed to the chair of our department at the time, illustrates our concerns and the clear stance we had assumed:

March 2, 1992

...As to the issue of "fair and equitable education", we believe this concept has numerous antecedents and components depending on how one defines it. In no way did we mean to suggest that this was not currently the case. Our concern as stated in our letter to you (February 4, 1992) is to promote behaviours that **further** enhance the possibility of this occurring. Three concerns of The Women's Group which directly relate to this concept (and which we have been actively working on) are outlined below, so that you have a better sense of what we are referring to in using this term:

⁵ Writing this letter was a watershed for me; I realized that I had choice in how to respond to an authority. I didn't have to meet with him just because he requested it. I felt strong in the writing, which was driven in part by feeling personally misunderstood by certain faculty members. Most of my strength came from knowing that I was not alone, that I was part of this small group of women who were experiencing their education in similar ways, and that we were respectfully challenging the authority of the professors. Our student experiences, both individually and collectively, were viewed through the lens of feminism, and we developed a keen ability to critique all the questionable aspects of our lives as women students.

1. The inclusion of Feminist Counselling in the curriculum exposes students to theoretical material whose research base focuses on the psychological health of women, who have been notably absent from most psychological theory or theory-building. This course provides a balance (equity) in the education of graduate students so that their perceptions are less likely to be biased when working with women.

2. As stated in our letter, student representation and input into decision making within the counselling section would ensure that decisions made **for** students would also be made with student participation, increasing the likelihood that these would more closely fit student needs (as students perceive them), and may reduce any felt sense of powerlessness.

3. The fact that there are no tenured female professors in the counselling stream of the Department is a serious matter especially for female graduate students (feminist or otherwise). Recent research has shown that these students have a heightened need for same-sex role models and mentors at the tenured level. Certainly male students would also benefit from a much-needed women's perspective. The fact that this is not the case right now means that students *to some degree* are being shortchanged. We recognize the existing financial constraints within the department re: tenured positions, and the intention of the search and hiring committee to give serious consideration to female applicants should a position become available.

It is also important for us to acknowledge the favourable response of the faculty and yourself to these concerns. We can see that all are being given serious consideration, which is validating for us as students. The community meetings also contribute to equitability in our educational experience, and we are pleased with faculty and student response to these. We will continue to raise issues of concern and be proactive in

How is this feminist action an important turning point for me?

If I had any doubts about using a feminist perspective in my research, these were increasingly dispelled through the caring support and encouragement of my peers in the Women's Group. We were not a 'discussion' group, and although on occasion we may have shared interesting readings with each other, these were useful in terms of understanding and validating our experience as students with limited power, pointing out possible directions for action. This combination of theory and practice, necessary given our circumstances and shared beliefs, was a powerful site of learning for me. What is interesting to me now is that I had decided to study women's experience of returning to school, perhaps uncannily, and although my focus would be BSN students' experiences, I was unknowingly generating a wealth of experience, fertile ground for research.

Nonetheless, I began to see that doing feminist research is also praxis, and, like the action I was engaging in (with the others) to change the relations of power in our department, it inherently reflects my beliefs about the world I live in and want to live in; one in which each person's experience is valued, and viewed as valid, and that all voices are heard and respected, especially those whose (institutional) lives are circumscribed by others

dealing with them. Our activities are not intended to exclusively benefit our group, or just women students, rather we seek to improve the educational experience for all.

To conclude, although we agree with you that the present form of communication may not provide the kind of information exchange that meetings do, at this time we believe that written communication with you does provide the kind of clarity we need. We acknowledge the lack of efficiency, the frustration, and the potential for misunderstandings which may result, and we recognize that these elements can also be present in meetings. For now, we would prefer to continue written correspondence with you, which allows us to remain clearer in our responses.

As a group, we were also concerned about telling our story to incoming students, in part to ensure that our efforts continued to be visible, but also to offer support to new women students who might be feeling overwhelmed and vulnerable, as we had been as new graduate students. We knew that there were strong imperatives for MA students to finish their degrees within two years, and perceived this thinking to be part of the 'system's' way of making sure that questioning would be kept to a minimum, and that there wouldn't be an opportunity for a groundswell of support amongst students for change. If it was 'nose to the grindstone', then students wouldn't have time to look up and see that they might be bleeding. Hence, continuity was essential, as was telling

...my women friends had become so firmly woven into the fabric of my life that they were as vital to me as breathing... Together we were inventing a new world, and that resulted in ties so deep to each other that they'll never be broken in this life (Butala, 1994, p. 27-28).

the 'herstory' of our group, and our continued efforts to voice concerns.

It was the first time I had openly called myself a feminist, and had engaged in action clearly identified, not just by myself, but the other women who shared it with me, as feminism. It felt right and it was frightening. I had no way of knowing if, or how, it might affect my future as a graduate student, or beyond, but I knew

with more power.

My involvement with the Women's Group demonstrates how I was changing my relationship with authority, offering my experience, unapologetically, as my truth (LeGuin, 1989), rather than, in a general sense, allowing the fear of speaking up to overwhelm and silence me. As a BSN student, I challenged authority rarely, and never collectively with other students. This shift reflected a similar one in my relationship to my own 'authorities', drawn from outside me and internalized as a child as part of learning. I began to experience a sense of authentic personal authority, which would at once unfold and guide me during my research. Increasingly, my choices would be informed by this emerging facet of self.

that I was forming powerful bonds with other women, and feeling my own strength and authenticity because of it, and this I was not willing to forfeit. I was learning that these were all part of putting feminist theory into action. Praxis.

The debate as to feminist research and methodology is not closed. But if we want to move forward with the women's movement, or more precisely, if we do not want to lose that for which we have already fought, then it is important to understand that feminist research cannot simply be inserted into or added onto the old scientific paradigm, a scientific paradigm that everywhere splits up living unities into life and thought, politics (morality) and science, and which implies their dominion over women, primitive peoples, and other races. If we want to arrive at a new paradigm, a new horizon of thought and action in which these divided and subjugated parts coexist in a living...integrated, relationship, then we must "go beyond" the old paradigm, transcend it. But this cannot be a going beyond in thought alone, in a permanent academic discourse. A new horizon of thought must be one which--at least this applies to us as women--can be and then indeed is experienced. Without a change of position in the concrete sense, without praxis, without a change in the status quo, no new horizon will become visible (Mies, 1991, p. 82).

Interlude

Thinking of ways to incorporate the story of how living with chronic illness has influenced this research leads me backwards in time, to cull from my journals pieces of writing which I think might be significant. On their own, these tell a story, and isolating them here somehow doesn't really portray how insistent this thread is in my daily life. The places where they interrupt the process vary; sometimes these are just minor or short notations of how I am feeling to provide a context for how slow or difficult the work seems to be proceeding; at other times, I am derailed, or perhaps sent off in a different direction, for example, following my emergency surgery. My decision (in the present) not to have these experiences regularly interrupt the central narrative, as they did in reality, is an aesthetic one, driven by concerns about distracting the reader, and also my own difficulty in deciding how to arrange them in a text that is unfolding in a way that doesn't seem to readily accommodate them. Just as my life doesn't always readily accommodate my illness.

Behind the struggle with fatigue, chronic pain, and stiffness, lying low like a snake in the grass, always ready to strike, is my fear of finishing this degree, of launching myself into an unknown future, of moving from the relative security of living on a pension to having to work for a living. Which requires a body that is dependable, or optimally, predictable. These fears sometimes paralyze me.

Ultimately, I have been able to see how living with my illness informs the research, a much more inclusive and freeing stance, one which honours the centrality of my health for my life, and therefore my research as an important part of my life. This knowing creates space for me, so that rather than having unrealistic expectations about what I am able to do in a given period of time, which constrain me, taking care of myself, the primary research tool, becomes possible. And even though my relationship with deadlines has been ambivalent, every time I let a deadline go, I feel immensely relieved, and have come to understand that these have not been very useful for me in the context of this thesis. More lessons in the 'curriculum of the self'.

There are ironies and ambiguities in these writings, for example, complaints of not being able to write my story because of having to deal with

the demands of my illness, while at the same time writing (the story of) these same demands. Of course, many of these journal entries were made without the intention of including them in my text. I also continue to set deadlines, even though I know their limitations. Both of these examples demonstrate the persistence in my life of understandings learned long ago--not including myself in the research, especially a part of myself that is painful; and acting on pressure from outside, which I have internalized, about how long a thesis should take. What follows in sequence is a sampler from my journals of the physical (and emotional) challenges, inextricably linked to each other, that I have been facing.

August 14, 1993

It feels good that I am so focused right now on my thesis. And it's scary. It also feels like such a huge task--although I do trust that my direction will come from the process--if I just keep actively and consistently engaged in it. I've been having some 'lonely' feelings. It's not exactly loneliness--it seems coloured by a 'responsible' feeling--the fact that I'm the only one who can do this. No one else will do it for me. It just feels weighty, and I want to run away, or have someone rescue me. So that's a huge part of this challenge, and the result is maturity, which seems so laden with heaviness. But there is freedom in the wisdom of maturity, which I give short shrift to. It helps me make better (healthier) choices as I move through this world. And in making better choices I am less likely to get bogged down with that which stifles my creative--yes, youthful--spirit.

September 29, 1993

What about admitting that there's only so much I can do, and that's not very much? How do I know how much it is? It's such a problem trying to figure it out because my energy fluctuates so much. Like, if how I feel now is the reality for the rest of my life, I wouldn't be doing very much, just lots of sitting around, reading and writing--actually more reading than writing--'cause it takes energy to write. I have a strong urge just to give up. All this seems so difficult. And what for? So I can live a life with even more uncertainty?

I'm not going to give up, and I need it to be a bit easier. I know that's a somewhat unreasonable request--but it's more about how I can make it easier on myself. Just balancing is difficult, but that's what it takes. Do enough thesis work to get it done, and not feel guilty or behind. And rest--real rest. I wonder if that's possible before I finish. Somehow it doesn't seem possible. I feel under the gun.

September 7, 1994

I'm finding it hard to believe that it's been over a month since I did any thesis work, and I still feel really tired and run down, and emotionally exhausted. I just read my summer's entries and had trouble getting engaged with them. I am torn between writing up Shirley's experience or just transcribing Faye's interviews. Intuitively I sense that doing the former will require more brain power and ability to focus, which I seem to be lacking right now. Of course I could always try and see what happens. I feel really pressured now to work on my thesis, no matter what, especially if I am going to finish in the spring. It seems to be taking so long, and I am still finding out what my energy levels are and how my emotional world, when it requires my attention, drains me. I fear my therapy tomorrow, especially given how tired I feel right now. So tired that I have to lie down.

September 15, 1994

Why does it take me all day to come down the white wooden basement stairs, and do this? Today I have become enlivened by a conversation with one of my peers about our research, but what really got me here was this intense feeling of pressure, centred in my chest. This feeling of being just about to explode with thoughts and ideas and how I'm having more and more difficulty containing them. And why should I have to? I just feel overwhelmed by them and the constant, and perhaps impossible task of ordering these notions. I come to rest with my intuition that if I just write, it will all fall into place, and I will be relieved of my burden.

September 16, 1994

I am still feeling really tired, especially in the morning, and have this constant worn out feeling in my chest. I am also feeling sad today. It is a crystal clear, early fall day, with a playful breeze off the water, which is afire with the sun's dancing reflection. It dazzles in its brightness, yet I yearn for something lost, or unattainable on this day when all seems possible.

September 20, 1994

I awoke at 0550 this morning, and was a bit surprised that it was not yet dawn, although the dark was beginning to fade. I could make out my bedroom furniture through sleepy eyes. I have been berating myself for not meditating at this time of day, before the world becomes busy, and most mornings unconsciously zip to the bathroom, and return to bed, as if this trip never really happened. Many mornings find me in a fitful sleep, tossing to get comfortable, avoiding the light by putting a pillow over one ear and and my duvet on top of that, and keeping out the rising sounds of

my roommate by using those pink waxy earplugs. My cat, in all her grey and white stripiness, insists on her morning meal well before I'm ready to oblige her, and sometimes I get up and give her those little hard brown pellets with impatience and frustration. Later, when I do arise, usually after my roommate has left, I feel tired, no, exhausted, but not sleepy.

This morning I did something different. After the requisite jaunt in the dark to the bathroom, the moon baring her bright soul before the light of day sends her into hiding, I knelt down on my aqua cushion made of cotton, with the padded stool supporting my buttocks, and drew my well-worn folded flannelette sheet around me, abandoning my nighttime nest. I began slowly to focus on the breath moving in and out of my nostrils, warm and moist. Immediately my mind began to wander, and I indulged it until I noticed where I had gone and returned to the breath.

I can't remember now all of what interfered with the serenity I was seeking, but it was intensely familiar, and I felt a bit frustrated because I really didn't need to run the whole thing by one more time. Slowly, I noticed that I was able to sustain concentration for longer periods and moved, as I was taught years ago, to the systematic focus on sensations in my body, from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes and back up again. As I did so, a deep feeling of exhaustion emerged, seeming to come from every cell, enveloping me like a heavy, thick blanket which pressed down on me. I couldn't move. I felt no tension, just a relaxed awareness, and gratitude.

Knowing this truth so deeply was comforting. I wasn't going crazy or making it up. Up until now the weariness had been in my consciousness, but experiencing it like this opened me to acceptance. Then my busy, hard working mind moved in to take it away, to fix it, to change it. What can I do about this? How can I organize my life differently so this isn't happening? How can I get the rest I need? What about the thesis deadline I've set for myself? How does it contribute to this incredible feeling of pressure I have? How can I justify dragging out this degree any longer? Will my chronic illness and the accompanying compromised energy levels be enough of a reason to grant me an even bigger extension? Again I am caught in my struggle with institutional demands, and how these live inside me, constant reminders of my place.

Moving back and forth from focusing on the breath then to body sensations, the former to strengthen my ability to perform the latter, I sense the feeling of being overwhelmed by my research, and confused about where to go next. I finish my hour long inner journey feeling once again my weariness, and slide back into my down-covered nest.

Later in the day...

I am torn between doing more transcribing of Faye's interview, and writing about where I am in my research, and how I got here. I am sore today, mostly an ache in the middle of my back, and a bit frustrated because I have spent the first hour at my desk finishing up my preparations for the talk I'm giving in early October. Balancing these kind of activities and my thesis is so hard, and I wish sometimes I could just go

away and do the thesis, and not have this life. Yet I know that this life I'm leading is what is keeping me healthy, it tells me I am progressing, healing, and that my education is rewarding. My own sense of myself has changed so much since I began this degree, building on the little bit of self-confidence I gleaned from my BSN experience.

Earlier I thought I could do some of both, some transcribing and some writing. I have done a bit of writing (vignette above), but not a sustained effort. Even though I was exhausted this morning, something was telling me to get up and write about it. Right now I feel less in that creative space, especially because the pressure of transcribing is getting to me. If I spend the rest of today transcribing, I can write tomorrow, and can even get up early morning if need be. Just to give myself permission to do this seems right. I also just thought that if I get the transcription done, then I am free to write and do nothing else, and not have this incredible torn feeling all the time.

I think what I've written about above is an example of several of the dilemmas, or problems I face as I do this work and try to live my life while being a student, with a disability. These little impasses require energy which, in my case, is extremely limited. To deal with the pain of confusion, to struggle with indecision, to work with self-doubt, and to recognize and negotiate my relative powerlessness within the university and other systems is part of the work I am doing on myself and my recuperation, coming to terms with my commitment to being different than I was before the arthritis set in.

October 12, 1994

I didn't sleep very well last night, and was awake at about 0400 thinking about the latest challenge to arise as part of my degree. The serious tone of the letter from the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies has frightened me. There's an air of finality about it, like a missed ferry pulling away from the dock. I also feel a bit like I'm being punished. What is to gain by me registering for this term? What could he be thinking by demanding that I do so?

*What have I been doing? I am getting my thesis finished informally (with academic support), despite the fact that I'm not officially registered. Technically I should be registered if I am 'working on' my thesis, but this category doesn't include **the way** I am working on my thesis or at least have been--slowly, sometimes sporadically, picking away at it bit by bit. The rules require me to suspend the rest of my life, and to some degree, my illness and make an all-out onslaught on the work-at-hand. In short, to not have a life. Yet my overriding concern has been that I have the energy to carry out my life--my rehabilitation, if you will--and to abandon this course of action has serious repercussions in terms of my health. I don't think I would be able to do very much else if I devoted most of my time to my thesis. The reality is that I am attempting to include it more and more, increasing the time spent at it slowly, so it gains momentum.*

The other issue, which is always present and the major reason I withdrew last term is money. Of course this is apparently not a valid reason to withdraw. Yet, I am ineligible for a student loan because I have a 'regular' income, albeit one that keeps me at the poverty line. I have exhausted my credit, and need to keep my credit cards free for any emergencies.

I wonder if any of these facts about my life will have any influence on the Assistant Dean when I go to talk to him on Friday? Will I have to launch a campaign on my own behalf? Or will he prove to be a compassionate person, willing to make exceptions given the hardship I suffer, and the exigencies of living with chronic illness. Should I tell him about the emergency surgery, mid-degree? Or the death of my mother during my recuperation? These were very difficult for me, and took their toll on my health, requiring lots of rest. What about the paper I presented in New Brunswick--representing the university with my scholarship? It took time away from my thesis to prepare. Again I feel powerless in the face of this huge institution and it's rules, which don't reflect or accommodate my reality as a disabled woman.

December 5, 1994

It seems like it's taken me all day to get to my desk. It's 1230 now and I've just cleared off all the tasks I thought I had to do to be able to work. I'm not really sure where I am right now in my work, and feel a bit like I have to re-orient myself, and am not really sure how to do this. Is it enough to trust my intuition? It's hard to know. I do feel a bit lost right now. I've been wondering if I should just begin telling my story. I've been wandering around in the literature, and am not really getting any direction from it, just more information, and in part, am only slightly able right now to relate it to what I'm doing--perhaps because I'm not sure what I'm doing. Again.

I'm actually in a lot of physical pain and have been for a little while now, and it seems to be distracting me, keeping me from being able to focus on the deeper awarenesses I need in order to generate insight, and direction. This quote I read recently is interesting, and points to my experience:

Once you become conscious of the questions active in the moment, you always get some kind of intuitive direction of what to do, of where to go. You get a hunch about the next step. Always. The only time this will not occur is when you have the wrong question in mind. You see, the problem in life isn't in receiving answers. The problem is in identifying your current questions. Once you get the questions right, the answers will come. (Redfield, 1993)

Unfortunately, I found most of this book simplistic, and facile, but was interested in the quote. My sense is if I keep the question(s) in mind, I will

find direction. Here are the questions I am asking today. What am I writing about? What am I questioning? What am I exploring? How should I explore? What is the question central to my inquiry? Is it, "What is the experience of doing research as a female graduate student?"

I really don't feel like a writer today. I'm really in a lot of physical pain, and need to take just little steps. I can only do so much, especially when it's difficult to concentrate on writing. So I follow what's happening for me in my body right now--the burning in my wrists, the achy, weak feeling pulling my body down, pulling energy into the pain, using it up like coal in a fire. It hurts so much, I begin to cry...

*Journeys bring power and love
back into you. If you can't go somewhere,
move in the passageways of the self.
They are like shafts of light,
always changing, and you change
when you explore them.*

Rumi

These Branching Moments

The tension of bearing the pain subsides. I experience relief, and clarity. Being enervated passes.

Which passageway should I enter now? There are so many calling to me, and I stand before them, unmoving, waiting for a sign, a voice gently echoing, leading me forward. I am wrestling with whether or not to write in response to my reading of Bateson's (1994) "Peripheral Visions", but as I think of doing that it feels like I should be writing in response to my own research journal, and what I have recorded since I began. I think I am stuck because of a judgement I have of myself that I don't know enough to respond to either of these texts in a way that creates an intelligent critique. It feels like I'm having a 'crisis of the literature'. I've read a bit, enough to pique my imagination and stimulate my thinking, but not enough to really understand how it can guide me right now. So I am torn between reading others' works and beginning to write an account of how I came to be where I am now.

As I slowly articulate this conflict, again paying attention to my body, I become aware of a slight pull towards writing rather than reading, and then I notice a supportive thought--that I don't have to critique while I write, I can just write. Maybe I can critique later, when I have a deeper understanding of how to do it. Why do I need a deeper understanding now? Won't that come as I use my existing understandings in a reflective way?

So I write, but not what I think I should, but with a question intuitively sensed. And then another. What has got me stuck? This deep sense that I'm not sure what I am doing. Where did it come from? I read Carol Orom's (1992) essay (Searching for method; or how sticky flypapers catch flies) last night, and was intrigued by it, and made the fatal mistake of comparing my writing to hers.

*It seems I **am** being guided by the literature, and my relationship with it, and how it informs my relationship with myself. In response to my first reading, I thought, "she is better than me", "she said all the things I've*

been thinking", and I feel like I'm not allowed to say them now because she has, and so eloquently. And I became aware that I am not familiar with the body of literature she is referring to, and felt inadequate. Then I went to bed, dejected. Once again I had succumbed to devaluing my own knowing, and woke up paralyzed and in pain.

Now I slowly reread Orom's work, with a promise not to devalue my own knowing, rather to look for what I found useful in her words, what fits for me, and, in doing so, I discover that what makes sense to me is her notion of "method-on-the-go" (Orom, 1992), the idea that the questions I am asking come from who I am as a woman, situated in a world of women which is constructed in a way that excludes our voices from public discourse. I, too, question this construction, and thereby ask questions of gender and politics from my place at the margin. And, like Orom, I am drawn to her "rebellion"--asking my questions on my own terms. In this way I can have my relationship with the existing and emerging bodies of thought, choosing what fits and rejecting what doesn't.

December 24, 1994 (Yes, Christmas Eve!)

The idea of time being meaningful is significant for me in terms of how I am able to see over time how I have become a researcher, but also how having "more time on my hands" because of my illness, has created the climate for doing the research the way I've been doing it, reflectively. Time, of course, is not the only factor, but seems to me one that has played a role in my work. Even now setting a deadline feels unrealistic for me, so in a sense time is suspended in terms of this research. I abandoned my 'time line' (created for my proposal), and always felt incredibly pressured by it, and had a deceptive relationship with it. I knew it would take longer, but not by how much, and felt dishonest even including it in my proposal. But it was recommended to me as a necessary piece.

January 30, 1995

I am aware that there is something about 'going home' which permeates this work, and even though I have stepped off the path and cut a new one, I still get the sense that I am travelling home, which, paradoxically, is eminently familiar, and totally unknown. Certainly, writing this work and finishing this degree in the context of 'liberating' myself from a disability pension has played a large role in generating the kinds of fears that feed my self-doubt and confidence. These fears are real and exigent for me and I have tried to attend to them as they arise. They take time and a soothing, tender, supportive and reassuring presence. Sometimes that is difficult for me to muster, especially when I am consumed with pain, stiffness and fatigue. I am moving toward an unforeseen future, while trying to get a solid sense of the present lay of the land, as a way of trying to generate some certainty in what is, and has been from it's onset, an incredibly unpredictable and fluctuating process of living with chronic illness. There are so many paradoxes, ambiguities

when one abandons assumptions of one truth or reality. All becomes possible, presenting situations of incredible complexity, yet I know too that there exists simplicity in all of it.

February 12, 1995

I'm quite depressed these days, maybe for two or three days. My left wrist is quite sore, but I have been having trouble with both my wrists, knees and feet. Even my hip was sore two nights ago. I'm not sure what is going on, but I feel down, and kind of lonely. Yesterday, I completely vegetated all day. I really didn't feel like doing thesis work, and was very aware of the sense that I was wasting time. I have been thinking about the work I'm doing now. My only question right now is whether or not I should be more openly (overtly) critical of my experience. I mean critically reflexive.

The other burning question is where to put my activism and how to describe it. It is definitely part of what I'm writing about now, but seems to be in the background. How do I bring it forward? And I'm being pulled to read Brookes' (1992) work again, for inspiration. Hopefully not to compare myself with her. I also want to spend some time critiquing the method section of my proposal, and my assumptions and limitations. When I read sections of this proposal, I am struck by how insightful I am, and how still naïve and unaware.

February 27, 1995

It's almost hard to believe I am working in this journal right now. I am very weak physically and have been in terrible pain for quite some time. I wondered if I would ever return to my thesis, last week was so stressful, and emotionally taxing. My health has deteriorated, and pain is more present; rather than knocking at the door, it has let itself in. I am trying to decide whether or not to write a letter to I'm-not-sure-whom protesting the cancellation of my subsidized homecare services. I am very angry and feeling intensely powerless about this latest Ministry of Health decision, and am once again confronted with the reality of living with a disability, and the constant eroding of my resources, economic and otherwise. I am angry that I am likely going to have to take precious time away from my thesis to deal with what feels like an affront to my dignity. I am too incensed to let it go, and know that I have the kind of voice and power that can be heard.

I lean on these few words of inspiration...

The moment one begins to investigate the truth of the simplest facts which one has accepted as true, it is as though one had stepped off a firm narrow path into a bog or a quicksand--every step one takes one steps

deeper into the bog of uncertainty." (Leonard Woolf cited in Guralnick, 1994, p. xiii).

...which seem significant for me: intricacy, complexity, integrity, ambiguity, irreducibility. The idea that my experience/story does not lend itself easily to one interpretation exclusively, nor do all its parts reflect anything that resembles an undifferentiated whole. This work is a beginning, not an end, an invitation to inquiry.

February 28, 1995

What stands out for me is the persistence of my illness. I think back to the beginning of the month and wonder how it was affecting me then compared to how it is affecting me now. I remember complaints of wondering or perhaps just wonderings about whether or not my knees and other weight bearing joints would make it to a friend's house and back. It doesn't seem in reflection that the tiredness, weariness of day-in day-out pain was a concern. It just wasn't there in the same way, dull, persistent, annoying, debilitating, constant. I want to be free of it, and know it will not pass as soon as I would like it to. I feel a bit like I am being consumed by my health. It is taking over my life, demanding more and more rest, preventing longer periods of sleep that would enable me to feel rested, and regenerated. This is what is happening inside me, a slow slide into dispiritedness. A losing touch with what I want to be able to do, having to face what I can't.

Outside, the world, the institutional world hammers at my door and gains entry, and I spend the morning writing a letter to the Minister of Health--repairing the damage, or gathering the tools and material I need to mend the broken door. Yesterday, I thought about and got the support and information I needed to move forward with this unwelcome project. I resent the time it takes and the energy, and I rage at the unfairness that I even have to do this. My life seems so taken up with all the things that take me away from what calls me the most--writing my own story.

March 2, 1995

Much of my pain over the last week was, I believe, coming from the resistance I have been feeling to interrupting my work to deal with this health care concern. I had plummeted into a familiar, alone place of powerlessness, wanting the issue to go away, but it wouldn't. Inside, my voices complained to me about not wanting to have to do anything about this, and about the unfairness I was feeling so acutely, and how thwarted I felt, hating these kinds of obstacles. Why couldn't someone else fight this battle for me, someone who could go forward and leave me behind to tend the burning embers of my thesis? Even finding someone who could advocate for me seemed like too much work. I didn't want to get up in the morning, and my sleep was interrupted by the pain droning away in my joints, depleting my energy, and I was angry. I knew I had to act, but I

really didn't want to, and couldn't until the discomfort I was feeling became persistent and intense enough to break through the wall of resistance.

On Tuesday, I took to class my letter to the health minister and read it to my peers, not to get sympathy, but to illustrate how living with a disability influences the progress of my thesis. These events--the removal of my homecare, and the need to lobby the nurses's union right now for changes to our disability pension--can't be ignored. Both have serious ramifications for my life, and although others could carry the ball right now, moving to action is one of the primary ways that I can free myself from the anger and powerlessness I feel, and which has been creating painful symptoms for me. Being political in this way, advocating for myself, and by association, others, takes time and effort.

It is Thursday now and I feel as if I haven't really got to my thesis, at least the writing of it for over three weeks, because of having to deal with these emergent issues. No one is paying me for doing this, and I certainly didn't invite it into my world, but it is one of my realities of living with a disability--being at the mercy of others' views of what is best for you. Even though I use my time and well-developed political skills on my own behalf, which effects other people, I am not being compensated. It just isn't fair, and points again to another inequity in the lives of those with disabilities.

April 26, 1995

Living with chronic illness has not just inserted itself in times of health crisis/emergencies, e.g., surgery, but requires a constant balancing of energy, energy depleted by pain and stiffness, and the physical effort to complete tasks. Often it takes twice as long for me to complete a task because I have had to adapt ways of doing things due to decreased manual dexterity or other physical limitations. When in pain, my emotional state has merged with the physical, becoming one, and occupied my focus preventing me from serious intellectual work.

[Yet it helps me refocus on my body which requires my attention. This same attention provides the research with an embodied quality, the hallmark of woman's experience and writing about self].

Disjuncture: Ethnographic Intentions

My life had slowed down considerably following an emergency hospitalization for abdominal surgery, and I took a year 'off' to heal. A meditative quality infused my recovery as I focused inwardly, reading, working in my personal journal, going to therapy, having Reiki, and being nurtured by those who cared for me. It was as if for the first time I was learning the lesson of listening to what resides inside, and of recognizing and honouring my own authority, especially with respect to my health care. Part of my recuperation from surgery had been a renewed commitment to listen to my body, and to respect its wisdom. Trusting that I would know when I could return to my thesis, I enveloped myself in healing, a soft, gauzy cocoon muffling the call to return to the noisy, intrusive, demanding external world.

While I was drawing my energy together, and perhaps realigning, my thoughts about my thesis continued, mostly below the surface, and slowly I reconsidered my original intention of using phenomenology. I wondered whether it would actually uncover implicit understandings about power, which I believed were connected to the participants' awareness of the influence of gender. I did not have much faith that it would, and persistent doubt and questioning left me with a lack of confidence in this method. I knew I wanted to somehow uncover understandings that I assumed were beyond the students' awareness, as this journal entry reveals:

January 28, 1992

I am seriously investigating the use of ethnography as a method for researching what it is I am trying to study. I am now aware of the possible limits of a generic phenomenological design for eliciting the data I want. When I conceptualize my participants as a culture, I realize there will be implicit beliefs, values, rules, and roles for these women. Ethnography provides the tool I need to get at these underlying dynamics that inform

How is deciding to use an ethnography a turning point?

It marks my developing awareness of the importance of fit between method and topic. The element of submerged consciousness had plagued me, and I had assumed that, like myself, the BSN students would not sense the influence of their gender and socialization on their experience of returning to school. Being a beginning researcher, it was not apparent to me how this element would be revealed using phenomenology. It is clear, however, that I viewed the influence of gender as extremely important in the experience, and suspected that it was central to how the students would be experiencing their BSN program. I needed a

their experience. I have known that I couldn't ask explicit questions about their awareness of how the (oppressive) system(s) informs their experience. Context emerges frequently in the literature I have been reviewing and writing about, and aligns with the basic assumptions of ethnography.

This quote from Hagell's article (1989), "Nursing knowledge: Women's knowledge" lends strong support for my choice of ethnography as a viable methodology: "Nurses as a group (or epistemic community) do develop a particular frame of reference and therefore a particular kind of knowledge... based in part on their situation as women in a patriarchal society and in part as women involved in a specific gender-defined occupation--nursing, which is given little value in society" (p. 228).

A colleague (Bannister, 1991) had used Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interview method to study women's lives, revealing important issues of gender and power submerged in their consciousness. I was intrigued and began to read more about ethnography. Reading about method, especially ethnographic method, was the main focus of my efforts as I worked towards creating my thesis proposal. Building on existing understandings of qualitative method, I was able to readily grasp the usefulness of ethnographic design for my proposed study, and Spradley's method appealed to me because it was mapped out clearly, in twelve 'easy-to-follow' sequential steps.

I was excited and energized by this new direction, and my immersion in the relevant literature about ethnography and culture, led me to Roberts' (1983)

illuminating article which describes nurses as an oppressed group. Conceptualizing nurses and nursing this way was validating for me, as a nurse and researcher, and it was a very short leap for me to begin viewing those I

The ethnographic interview method is structured in two phases: an initial interview and a second or follow-up interview. The initial interview provides an opportunity for myself and the informant to develop rapport through the process of eliciting information (Spradley, 1979), and for the informant to begin discussing her experience of returning to school. This descriptive data is then subjected to a focused analysis from which emerge the fundamental units of knowledge (or domains). The follow-up interview will use more specialized questioning (structural; contrast), to confirm my analysis and to distinguish the meanings embedded in the informant's language. Again analysis (taxonomic; componential) follows the second interview to discover cultural meanings and themes. The final event in the sequence is writing the ethnography, the cultural description. (*Excerpt from research proposal, 1992*)

method that would reveal this submerged consciousness, including implicit understandings about power, and how these elements informed their experience. When Bannister's (1991) findings revealed this particular limited awareness in her informants, I was excited about the possibilities that Spradley's method might have for my study.

intended to study as a culture. I realized that ethnography provided me with a vehicle to see the experience through the eyes of the women I intended to study, to describe their culture in their terms, and to see the larger context in which their experience unfolded. When I read Spradley & Mann's (1975) question about women's lives, "What are the adaptive [survival] strategies used...in manipulating their roles and exercising the power that's available to them?" (p. 16), I knew I was on track. Ethnography not only seemed possible, it seemed appropriate.

My feminist understandings were already well-developed at the outset of my research, and although I was aware of how these guided me, I really wasn't completely sure how these might interfere, if at all. I reasoned that I wouldn't have to worry so much about any bias I might have if I was studying, as Spradley suggests, how the women used language (as a tool for constructing their realities). His method seemed to provide me with the means to take both myself and my informants beyond their surface awarenesses and understandings, which I assumed were limited for nurses in general, as to the influence of gender and socialization on their lives.

Any doubts I might have had about how my biases might be **informing** the research were beyond my awareness at this point. My concerns lay primarily with the effect these might have on the women, and by extension, the findings. Yet I knew that it was important enough to me to carefully articulate them in the 'Assumptions and Limitations' section of my proposal, which I prefaced with this quote by Dorothy Smith (1986),

Taking sides, beginning from some position with some concern does not destroy the 'scientific' character of the enterprise. Detachment is not a condition of science. We must begin from some position in the world. The specification of that somewhere and the explication of the relations to which it is articulated, including the ideological discourse, is the aim of the inquiry (p. 12).

In retrospect I was clearly struggling with the tension I was experiencing between the influence of my own insight into the experience, and the potential it might have for obscuring the experience of the participants,

Choosing ethnographic method also maps out the concrete beginnings of my struggle with bias, and the questions it posed for the research. These doubts I was articulating in my journal in a slightly different way. I assumed that my understandings about the experience would likely differ from the informants' because of my feminist analysis, and the reflective work I had done regarding my own BSN experience, and I was worried that

who I was now referring to, in ethnographic tradition, as "informants". I searched in the literature, and questioned colleagues for ways that might reduce this effect, and was never really convinced that these would wholly eliminate it.

Interestingly, my research proposal also reveals (superficial) awareness of power issues in the research, while at the same time touching on its emancipatory potential. Yet, even though I sought

to find ways to redress imbalances, I was not convinced these would be effective, ever aware of the limitations of how I situated myself in the research.

I come to the research with a 'position' composed of assumptions and presuppositions based on my experience as a woman and a nurse who has returned to school and these have great potential to influence what is to be found. This 'natural attitude' (Becker, 1986) then becomes a double-edged sword. My pre-understandings provide important insight into the experience; on the other hand they may be imposed on the nurses, obscuring their experience, so that the invisible may fail to be rendered visible (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). (*Excerpt from research proposal, 1992*)

The reciprocal influence of the interviewer and interviewee is a strong point of the qualitative research interview, the shared cultural world of the two being taken as the starting point of the investigation (Kvale, 1983). I share the same gender socialization and membership in the same minority group as my informants, creating a basis for equality. Oakley (1981) states that, "A feminist interviewing women is by definition both 'inside' the culture and participating in that which she is observing" (p. 53), and as a result is better equipped to study the culture of women (Mies, 1983).

To some degree being inside the culture I am studying has limitations. I may overlook language differences because they may not be blatantly different to me, and I may take too much about the culture for granted because it is part of my cultural knowledge (Spradley, 1979). (*Excerpt from research proposal, 1992*)

I rationalized the difference between myself and my informants in terms of our awareness of gender effects, understanding this difference as a tool for reducing "the likelihood that I miss important cultural data" (Kimpson, 1992, p. 12).

In essence, I chose Spradley's method for both personal and political reasons. I thought it would simplify the research process for me, a neophyte researcher, and would reveal implicit understandings of different aspects of power embedded in the experience. To a

certain degree, expediency seemed important at the time; I had been cautioned

I might somehow impose these on the women I intended to interview. Again, naïvely, I thought Spradley's method would 'control' for this effect. Because I didn't completely understand at the time what 'interpreting the data' meant, my concerns focused on the effect that my bias might have on the women themselves. Any problems with *a priori* theorizing and its imposition on the data were at this time either absent or implicit. I understood reciprocity to be the mutual effect of researcher and researched on each other, not the more sophisticated and emancipatory view I subscribe to today, i.e., the involvement of research participants in the construction and validation of knowledge (Lather, 1991). Also, my belief

to "keep it simple", and figured Spradley would help me do this. I was seduced by the 'simplicity' of the method, and how detailed and well-mapped out it was. My hope was that in following the steps outlined by Spradley the complexity I understood to be inherent in phenomenological method would be reduced, and that perhaps it would make my work easier and proceed faster.

My first reading of his book found me confused by my unfamiliarity with the method and the strange terminology I was encountering. I reassured myself that this confusion was because I didn't know the method, and clarity would emerge as I immersed myself in the research. What I didn't share with others was my ongoing doubts about my own ability as a researcher, in part because of my bias, but also due to my inexperience. As my journey unfolded, even Spradley's 'simple' sequence couldn't ease these doubts, and in fact, created new ones.

in the power of Spradley's method to provide validity tells me, at this reading, that I was still willing to trust an 'authority' when uncertain.

Making the choice of ethnography also gave me confidence, and I felt like doing this research was possible; it wasn't just something I read or dreamed about, or struggled with. I was also pleased that I had found a method that I thought would reflect my beliefs about power, and that would easily incorporate my feminist perspective.

Interlude

This interlude I have retrieved from my research journal of November 7-12, 1994. At the time, I was reading Jean Anyon's (1983) intriguing article about accommodation and resistance, and was inspired by a conversation I had with one of my peers whom I encountered while shopping for groceries, which reminded me of the following event, and how disturbed I still was about it:

We are sitting, all of us, graduate students in counselling and a couple of faculty members, in a large circle in a high ceilinged, carpeted meeting room in the graduate students' building. Over the last year, and now again in this first term we are meeting together to discuss issues of common concern to our department. I am nervous, and feel the comforting presence of the other members of our small women's group around me. A couple of us have volunteered to bring what we believe to be serious concerns to our 'community' meeting, and strongly suspect that these may not be well-received. During some cross-talk following our usual "go 'round" of names and years in the program (in which I reveal I have been a graduate student for over two years), one of the faculty members calls me an "experienced student" in an overtly ridiculing tone. I feel a wave of shame, followed by the searing heat of anger, which I quell expertly. It would not be appropriate for me to reveal my true feelings. Intuitively I sense that, to use in an assertive way the communication skills I have learned, to challenge this affront to my integrity, would not be wise. With the audacity of the female lion at the kill, I have mistakenly helped myself once again, only to be discovered and put in my place by the king of the jungle. I back down, and retreat, entering the company of the other women, licking my wounds. I learn that taking longer than is necessary to complete a degree is something deserving of public humiliation, especially when you choose to question those in authority, as I have been doing.

Like other graduate students I have always been aware of the ongoing pressure in our program to finish within the expected rather than allotted time limits, a clear expectation that students undertaking master of arts degrees in counselling, requiring a thesis, will finish their degrees in 2 years, despite the fact that the Faculty of Graduate Studies generously allots 5 years for this degree. In addition, students completing MEd degrees in counselling, requiring a 'project' rather than a thesis, are expected to take a year from start to finish, based on a faculty belief that the project will take less time than a thesis.

The situation illustrated above was not the only time this particular professor voiced his displeasure of me in an indirect, oblique way. Never have I sensed from him any awareness, empathy or compassion for my particular circumstances. Unfortunately, when these incidents have happened I have spent considerable time feeling inadequate, or berating myself for not being able to finish on time, even though I have known at an intellectual level that these comments tell me specifically about him, and his particular way of viewing the world. In vulnerable moments, the weight of my socialization, a well-used bowling ball, has knocked over any silly notions I have had about honouring my own voice, or my rights as a person with a disability. My ingrained belief that people in authority know better, and that there is something wrong with me if I can't finish on time, seem to be blemishes on my skin, masking any clear, strong, authoritative self that may lie below the surface.

Over time, I have been able to set these judgements aside more often, and to reflect on how my research was being affected by the need to extend my deadline beyond the allotted limits. How have I been able to set aside these judgements? In what ways have the process of reflection and the element of time affected my research and learning?

Like me, the BSN students I interviewed felt considerable time constraints. It is with reflection and the passage of time that, like them, I have learned about myself, and deepened my topic of interest; this I have done by sharing my experiences with my peers, and by mutually supporting each other's learning. In fact, I believe I have learned more in the company of others (mostly peers), and through my own ability to pursue in a systematic, in-depth, and reflective way what interests me than I have at the hands of most of the professors. Short conversations with peers about their work, like the one I had yesterday with Diane over the display of fresh apples in the grocery store, inspire and help me to reflect further on my work and what is important to me. Having regular contact with others who are struggling with the same research issues, or procedural questions in the same paradigm has been rewarding and fruitful for me.

We share the common experience of doing research in a way that is not valued in the academy in general, or in our small department (with notable exceptions) in particular. For me, this has intensified my

experience of feeling like an outsider, and has acted as a stimulus for me to personally challenge what is unfair in the culture of this institution. As Anyon (1983) points out, this challenge can be seen as part of my active "response to social contradictions" (p. 19), my attempt to cope with and resolve discrepant social messages about how I'm supposed to be as a student and a woman in this context. University is the site of higher learning, yet only certain forms of learning are valued and acceptable. This is one of the contradictions that spurs me to seek different ways of learning, about myself and my field of study.

As a woman returning to school I have also lived with, as do the informants in my study, the disjuncture between two competing ideologies: that which prescribes certain types of behaviour for women (nurturant, submissive, non-competitive with men), and that which in our society values non-domestic, competitive activity as the means for achieving self-esteem (Anyon, 1983). As a woman. I cannot escape these conflicting views. I have internalized them, and they lie buried beneath the surface only to manifest themselves as the self-doubts which I described in the italicized passage at the beginning. Part of my task, as a woman doing graduate studies, has been to actively come to terms with, or to transcend, the inherent conflicts in being a woman studying in a male-dominated institution. I have not achieved this through all-out resistance. I could not have survived had this been my stance. I have had to accommodate in some circumstances. This is also true of the BSN students, who I believe are engaged in the process of "accommodation in resistance", or perhaps "resistance in daily accommodation".

These students have demonstrated passive resistance through their engagement in "bitch and moan" sessions with their peers. They accommodated on a daily basis, in the classroom, as I did, by "jumping through hoops", and "finding out the hidden agenda". Examples of resistance are few: Faye speaking out in class about women and poverty from her own experience; Rachel challenging the idealism of one professor; Shirley's constant questioning to gain clarity, rather than blindly accepting what she has been told, yet going away every time in confusion, frequently relieved in dialogue with peers. As Anyon points out, "the dialectic of accommodation and resistance is part of *all* human

beings' response to contradiction and oppression...most females engage in daily (conscious as well as unconscious) attempts to resist..." (1983, p. 23) (*Italics in original*). In the case of the informants, like so many others, including myself, resistance largely happened in private thoughts or beliefs, which have been withheld from those in authority. I witnessed discrepancies between the informants' public behaviour and their private thoughts, which I believe is a necessary contradiction, given their experience of powerlessness.

My experience in the community meeting (described above) could be seen as a clear example of my own resistance-in-accommodation. I was thinking that the faculty member had no right to say what he did and that he knew nothing of me or my reality, thereby questioning his authority to make disparaging comments based in his own privilege and power. Shirley's experience of being kept waiting by a professor in the hall, well past the time of their scheduled appointment is also illustrative of my point. In a similar situation at her doctor's office, for example, she would speak on her own behalf, telling the doctor that her time is valuable too. In reflecting on the incident in the academic setting, she recognized that to speak on her own behalf, by pointing out how valuable her time is, could jeopardize her marks. She understood her place, and the power of the professor to influence her life, and accommodated to these. Yet, in talking to me she spoke in an angry tone about this incident (and others), revealing her resistance, which she sensed at the time, but which remained unspoken.

I think my position of being another student, without control over their marks, and my ability to develop rapport and trust as a researcher, allowed the students to share with me what they had been thinking privately, while at the same time describing to me behaviours and experiences that contradicted these thoughts and beliefs. In classroom situations, I, like my informants, have often sat thinking my own thoughts, including about what is happening in the class, or judgements of the quality of the teaching, while passively taking notes, and appearing to be a good student. This discrepancy between public and private behaviour is an example of what appears to be an acquiescence to our role as students, but is more accurately "an

accommodation with a critical edge: it contains an internal resistance; a separateness; an internal non-subordination" (Anyon, 1983, p. 24).

I also know that quite frequently my public behaviour has and still does demonstrate resistance to feminine stereotypes of compliance or submissiveness. I am often outspoken, speak frequently, and am articulate. Yet, I know that in some of these circumstances my private thoughts, and some of my deeply internalized beliefs continue to hold to ideologies that devalue me as a woman. In this case, I am internally accommodating to these ideologies while resisting them publicly. Anyon (1983) says that, "in daily interactions with men and in social institutions women engage in a negotiation for equality, respect and power" (p. 26), despite the fact that they may have deeply internalized society's devaluing of women and their abilities.

Returning to seek higher education and an attempt to excel, which, in the university context requires aggressiveness, perseverance, and independence, firmly places my informants (and myself) in resistance to societally prescribed behaviours for girls and women. I reflected on this in my thesis proposal, "despite the dilemma posed by the conflict between the feminine and professional roles, nurses seeking higher education can be viewed as adopting a masculine model of achievement, one which stresses independence, competition, assertiveness and influence" (Kimpson, 1994, p. 21).

How much difference does this resistance make in terms of reorganizing or transforming the institution, or the relations of power that govern it? I believe that some of my actions (in collaboration with other women) have affected the climate in our department, and have mediated that environment somewhat, but significant structural change has not resulted, despite our collective action. However, I agree strongly with Anyon (1983) when she says, "while accommodation and resistance as modes of daily activity provide most females with ways of negotiating individually felt social conflict or oppression, this individual activity of everyday life remains just that: individual, fragmented, and isolated from group effort" (p. 34). The group efforts I engaged in were based in this belief about strength in numbers.

Unfortunately, all of us had busy and exhausting personal and academic schedules, which mitigated against our ability to keep a solid,

constant challenge to professorial and institutional authority. We would also reflect upon how the pressure on graduate students to get through quickly, acted as one barrier to organizing or gaining some momentum in terms of resistance, and change. The other was almost insurmountable academic demands, in terms of time and energy, combined with already busy and demanding lives. I often felt powerless during these discussions. It seemed to me that the institution was structured purposely to reduce the likelihood that any serious resistance would ever occur or become truly effective. Organizing and engaging in this type of resistance within the academy would likely have had to be a full-time job, not something any of us were prepared to do.

I also came to believe that what I was completing was largely an 'academic' degree, rather than an experientially or skill-based degree in counselling. Some students stay longer in the program to do more practica, because the skill base is not built-in throughout the degree. Counselling skills are a primary concern during the first term, to ready students for community practica, but later are only focused on in some specialty classes, taught during spring session by predominantly female sessional lecturers. Experientially-based learning of skills is a low priority; scholarship seems to have more value. Most students know about faculty resistance to experiential types of learning. This resistance is based in the questionable ethics of having students become emotionally vulnerable as a result of their engagement in personally risky learning exercises.

To learn that this a primarily academic counselling program, as opposed to skill-based, has come as a great disappointment to many students. It has also created considerable anxiety for myself and many of my peers. For me, it has meant that I have had to stay longer in the program order to build the confidence I need to counsel others effectively.

As in nursing, where academic rigour is also highly valued, this small department has little power within the institution; counselling as a field of study is not valued. Hence, the institutional pressure to meet set criteria and standards, and even perhaps to excel, in order to survive, is transmitted to the students. The academy does not value experiential learning, or encourage those activities which might leave it at risk for

potential lawsuits. These values in turn govern the educational experience of future professional counsellors, whose effectiveness in their work depends in part on the skills they have acquired during their formal education.

This kind of writing is an example of how I learn, and more importantly, how reflection on both the informants' experience and mine, brings each into clearer relief. It also points to how I use the literature, in this case Anyon's article, as a tool for conceptualizing our respective experiences, and making further sense of them in a way that is empowering for me. Writing about my own experience, and reflecting on it creates further understanding of my self in context. Anyon's notion of "resistance-in-accommodation" frees me from being trapped in perceiving that my behaviour is problematic (which the institution wants me to do). My subversive thoughts are examples of how I refuse to blindly accept what I am being told by those in authority. My connection with the women's group is an example for me of active resistance. I don't think my graduate education has been solely characterized by resistance; mostly, I think I have accommodated, and as my education and experience have progressed, I have become more resistant, or perhaps more willing to engage with external authority in an assertive way, including writing pieces like this.

What I didn't reflect on in my journal when I wrote this piece (above) was the therapeutic nature of the writing, and how it helped me to resolve and let go of the angry feelings I felt towards this professor, and some of the shame I experienced. Putting the incident into a plausible and understandable context was liberating for me. Ostensibly, I had reframed my experience of remaining silent in the face of his power and authority, and given recognition to my inner world and voice. Further, I had a useful tool for understanding similar experiences in the future.

Disjuncture: Stepping off the Road

I looked up the road I was going and back the way I come, and since I wasn't satisfied, I decided to step off the road and cut me a new path.

Maya Angelou
Wouldn't Take Nothing For My Journey Now

When I think of the actual moment I "stepped off the road", it was the culmination of a lengthy period of questioning about the research I was doing and my role in it, to the point where the questions themselves began to turn the research around, to guide it. As I asked and attempted to answer these questions, my deepening understandings were pointing me in a direction that I hadn't intended to follow at the outset. Or one I hadn't even conceived of as possible.

It took me almost two years to complete the eleven interviews with four women, the transcriptions, and the different levels of analysis (domain, taxonomic, componential). The interviews were lengthy, usually ninety minutes each, and I transcribed them myself, which generally took two or more weeks of fairly consistent work.

Transcribing, which happened throughout the research process, brought up numerous thoughts about the BSN students' experience and questions about the method, which I would put in my research journal, mostly as a way of suspending bias, but also later to keep track of my methodological difficulties. My journal also contained 'interpretations' I had made about the informants' experiences, which I sensed I might be able to use when I created the 'ethnographic text'.

Returning to school involves a new social experience. As the students begin to work on their BSN degrees they also learn new patterns of cultural behaviour, as they experience the transition from one social group to another ('professional' working women to student), for which they may need and use different cultural knowledge. And each has learned wider cultural rules (and those specific to nurses) about their 'place' as women in society, and their relationship to authority, from years of participation in social life at home, in schools, and at work. Often outside their awareness they know they must please those in authority and play the game.

These and hundreds of other bits of tacit cultural knowledge have been learned previously and could easily be adapted to the returning to school experience. And as each woman learns the more superficial level of the new culture they use the deeper underlying principles they have learned as part of the wider culture (*Excerpt from notes, September 1993*).

I was able to establish an easy rapport with all the informants early in the process, and remember being fascinated and in awe of their lives and experience as I listened. In debriefing my initial interview, I noted on paper a few comments Camilla had made, things she hadn't said during our taped sequence and which emerged during the informal conversation we had following it, in which we both talked about our lives as students. She said she thought that "the professors were stuck, and not progressive, but more progressive than authorities at work". She admitted to "not having challenged the status quo" while being at school, and that she "had jumped through hoops or done projects" that she "really wasn't that interested in". We also talked briefly of her newly-developed understandings of 'oppression theory'.

I had these kinds of conversations following each interview with all the informants, wherein we would share common experiences and understandings. I was stimulated by these dialogues, and the BSN students seemed genuinely interested in my experience and understandings of being a student. To my surprise, I learned through these unrecorded, and often exciting discussions that all the informants had, to varying degrees, feminist understandings, something I had not been prepared for. Apparently the 'cultural scene' was changing.

This unanticipated shared reality delighted me and ultimately led me to later befriend one of the women, and to later join an action group regularly attended by three of them (and other BSN students). What would this mean for my research, and research method? Would I need to alter it in some way? Considering these questions in light of my intentions to be open with the informants about my research goals, my reading of feminist literature about interviewing women (Mies, 1983; Oakley, 1981; Salner, 1989) and the importance of reciprocal, non-hierarchical relationships, I decided to continue with the method as I was slowly learning it, interview by interview.

Proceeding as intended, I later discovered a central contradiction in the lives of these nurses during their BSN education. While they were learning about 'oppression theory', the historical oppression of nurses as women in the health care hierarchy, and society in general, and the application of this theory to their work settings, and perhaps their individual lives, they rarely applied this new awareness to the ongoing oppression each of them was feeling as undergraduate students in nursing. When they did put these two together, it seemed to be with a certain degree of resignation, coming from a place of

relative powerlessness; I never heard about it being used to guide collective action toward changing their circumstances. They also spoke of how they grew in so many different ways, and I wondered how they made sense of this, given the powerless feelings they had all experienced. I asked questions directed at

finding out how they lived with these kinds of cultural contradictions, which unexpectedly pointed to contradictions in my own life as a researcher.

What I was not prepared for were the kinds of questions our dialogues raised for me in terms of power in the research process. I was not prepared for the difficulty, and perhaps lack of fit I had with Spradley's ethnographic interview method past the initial interviews, when I had asked primarily descriptive and clarifying questions. I was not prepared for the immense struggle in trying to discover themes, themes I knew implicitly, buried just beyond my awareness, borne of my own experience of being situated in the same 'culture' of women returning to school. I was not prepared to deal with my personal 'battle with bias', trying to bracket my own assumptions, all the while questioning whether or not this was possible, and what ends this device served in my research.

Sally: You'd told me about how you'd grown and about how you felt more confidence in your abilities as a result of the experience and also you told me about how you felt powerless...

Rachel: Yeah.

S: On the surface they seem to contradict each other and I was just wondering...how did you make sense of that contradiction during the experience?

R: Yeah, I see what you mean. They do sound...um...I guess the way I would put it is like the growing part...you sort of realize you feel powerless. You realize what that...that you can identify what that feeling is that you don't like and identify why maybe you're not...what the feelings are that are making you not stand up for yourself in the way you would like to.

S: So the growing part...?

R: Makes you move towards being able to do that.

S: So the growing part helps that awareness?

R: Yeah. I think so. I can't say the powerlessness was overwhelming. That wouldn't be how I characterize it in the big picture. My experience is that I think that I certainly did have that experience especially more at the beginning.

S: Mmm...mmm.

R: And there was some frustration because that was still there to some degree with some of the courses.

S: So essentially making sense of it is just being aware that that's what it is?

R: Yeah. And I think maybe even helped move towards how you can maybe not be so powerless, within the limits of that setting. Some things you can't change, but some things you could.

(Excerpt from final interview)

And because I was not prepared for any of these questions, I did not initially recognize their importance as they arose, tending to view them as researcher errors or something I should have been able to see and understand in a certain way, a way predetermined by the method I had chosen.

Another concern I had was how long it was all taking. After doing a domain analysis on the initial transcription, and formulating structural questions for each domain, I would return to my informants, and show them cards containing (key) phrases or words they had said, asking the questions I had devised. They would organize these cards in ways that made sense to

Sally: Would you say also that one of the things that might have happened was that you became more self-aware as a result of... as part of this enlightening part of the experience?

Faye: Mmm... mmm.

S: Could you say a little bit more about that?

F: You start to realize that... you start to become more aware of the fact that a lot of the stuff is already present, like a lot of the whatever--the theories, or the books, or the learning--is sort of present, and that in fact you have more knowledge than you realized and that, in a lot of ways, your own personal experiences make you already a knowledgeable person.

S: So that the awareness there is that you come to realize that you are a knowledgeable person?

F: Mmm... mmm. And then you just... when you're self-aware you realize that, gee, maybe I'd like to find out more about that but I'm not sure, so you're more confident about... you know, say, talking to somebody or asking somebody about what they think, or "What did that mean?", or "I'm not really clear about it", or "Tell me about that" "Could you teach me what you know about that?"--that sort of thing.

S: Mmm... mmm. More confident to ask or seek out knowledge?

F: Mmm... mmm.

S: What's your awareness there? What are you aware of inside yourself?

F: That... I guess I'm aware that it's OK to have limitations.

S: Mmm... mmm.

F: But you can... and recognizing that there's no problem with seeking help. (*Excerpt from last interview*)

them, picking out 'cover' and 'included terms' when requested to. At the same time, I would ask about each of these terms in order to confirm or disconfirm hypothesized domains, to illuminate semantic relationships and to elicit all the included terms in a folk domain.

The next level of analysis (taxonomic) was undertaken after transcription of the second interview for each informant. I would also do domain analysis of any new data received during the second interview. It was only after conducting two interviews on two of my informants that I became aware of how much I needed to narrow the focus of my questioning. I had a great deal of difficulty doing this, as well as some trouble asking both structural and contrast questions at the third interviews. I felt very unfamiliar with the use of these kinds of questions, and when transcribing, I would identify places

in the text where I had failed to use these types of questions. It lead me to wonder if I was actually gathering the kind of information I needed to do the required analysis. My omission of more frequent use of structural and contrast questions was partially a result of feeling awkward, given that my natural style of interviewing is to ask open-ended, descriptive questions, clarifying and

summarizing as I go, and because during the interview I would respond intuitively to the informants, forgetting that some of their responses might require me to ask either a structural or contrast question.

I did not conduct my interviews sequentially, that is all three interviews with one informant before moving to the next person. Moving completely through the Developmental Research Sequence (Spradley, 1979) with one informant before moving to the others may have offset some of the uneasiness I was having trying to learn and utilize the kinds of questions I was supposed to ask to elicit certain levels of information. However, I assumed that, after a second interview, I would have everything I needed to complete the final analyses, and really didn't anticipate having to return for third interviews. Later, I became extremely disappointed, and somewhat defeated because I was not even sure after the third interview with each informant that that would be enough.

**The Developmental Research Sequence
(Spradley, 1979)**

Step One	Locating an Informant
Step Two	Interviewing an Informant
Step Three	Making an Ethnographic Record
Step Four	Asking Descriptive Questions
Step Five	Analyzing Ethnographic Interviews
Step Six	Making a Domain Analysis
Step Seven	Asking Structural Questions
Step Eight	Making a Taxonomic Analysis
Step Nine	Asking Contrast Questions
Step Ten	Making a Componential Analysis
Step Eleven	Discovering Cultural Themes
Step Twelve	Writing an Ethnography

In addition, because I continued to ask descriptive questions, each interview revealed more data, and I had trouble fitting some of it into what I already knew without returning to the informants for confirmation. I was trying to follow the advice of a colleague, which was to focus on parts of the experience that seemed relevant to counsellors, and on topics described most often by the informants. What they frequently talked about were the difficulties they had encountered as part of the experience, but I wondered if I had somehow led them there, because they all began their interviews exclaiming how wonderful their BSN experience had been (while in the same breath bemoaning its stressful nature).

It seemed like it would never end, and eventually I became frustrated with what I judged to be my lack of understanding about how to conduct a componential analysis and what it would actually reveal to me. Indeed, I found

the taxonomic analysis (following the second interviews) interesting, but I had become perplexed as to how it would point to themes. I was also unsure of what

May 21, 1994

*One of my other problems is that each informant has her own experience, and way of seeing this experience, which by necessity are different, and I've only asked a few questions like, "Would you say/think/do/feel that?"--to get at what's common for all. I know that I can, to some degree, answer that question from my own experience, and may yet have to--and where do I put **that** element into the research? I sense the paradigm worksheet is going to reveal some things--but what? Will it be something I already know--likely? And what do I do with the gaps? Will it be just a matter of counting up the number of times someone had the same reasons or similar reason? How would that point to themes, if it does at all? Part of my problem I think is how close I am to this topic and how difficult it is for me to see things because it's part of my tacit, cultural knowledge. (Journal entry)*

to do with the diversity of experience represented by my informants; interpreting their common language seemed simple enough, but what about how different the experience was for each? What was I to do with that important component?

In the second year of conducting the research, all of my informant's were no longer part of the 'cultural scene' I had set out to study--they had already graduated with their BSN degrees--and although re-interviews were concerned primarily with confirming ethnographic hypotheses based on what they had told me while they were students, I was worried that their experiences were now retrospective accounts.

Suspecting that this might have some effect on the research, I began to slowly consider the possibility of modifying the method, although I had been resistant to this suggestion by my supervisor several months earlier when I had begun to sense that the ethnographic method of questioning didn't suit my style. The notion of modifying the method midstream had been too overwhelming for me to even entertain. But I had begun to write, or to experiment with writing, as the interviews, transcription and analysis began to wind down. Writing opened doors for me; the direction my reading of the literature had taken provided the key to opening those doors.

I had become intrigued by the life of Zora Neale Hurston, a black, female ethnographer and writer studying rural black culture in the thirties, and read her account entitled, *Mules and Men* (1935). She struggled with, among other things, being positioned as a member of the culture she was studying. Zora had been tutored by the eminent anthropologist Franz Boas, and was skeptical of

her role as a detached observer, and the distortions resulting from having to translate an oral tradition into a fixed textuality. Her autobiography, "Dust Tracks on the Road", was part ethnography, part autobiography, revealing an unorthodox style. Francine Lionnet (1989) points this out about Hurston,

Because she remains radically *critical* without proposing positive and totalizing alternatives, she exemplifies a truly philosophical sensibility. Her urge to ask questions rather than propose solutions invites and provokes her readers to think beyond the commonplace and received ideas of our cultures, beyond those proverbial voices of the community, the vox populi...which enunciate the webs of beliefs that structure local consciousness of self....She opens up a space of resistance between the individual (*auto-*) and the collective (*-ethno-*) where the writing (*-graphy*) of singularity cannot be foreclosed" (pp. 107-108).

This reading inspired me to consider more deeply some of the problems I was having being situated (more or less) in the culture I was studying. Other struggles with method continued (as above), but I wasn't exploring any of these in a deeper self-reflexive way, and continued to interview, transcribe and

analyze my data as it was being generated. Earlier, I had learned from Spradley (1979) that being inside the culture I was studying had limitations, mostly the danger of overlooking language differences because they may not be blatantly different to me, and taking too much for granted about the culture because it is part of my cultural knowledge. I had been careful to include this caution in the 'limitations' section of my proposal, but had no idea then how it might play out in the research I was proposing.

Sally: Would you say you felt like...one person used the expression "the powerless student feeling" and for her it was about being in the student role...rather than being a professional and whatever authority you have with that and she really felt like a powerless student a lot.
 Shirley: Yes I felt that at times but I also expected that.
 S: Could you say more about expecting it?
 Sh: I expect my confidence to wane when I'm not in authority on a subject matter. I mean you go there to learn things. You don't come in as an authority.
 S: Mmm...mmm.
 Sh: I think that when my self-confidence goes in certain situations I feel somewhat powerless. I think that's safe to say.
 S: Mmm...mmm.
 Sh: It's not that I lacked self-esteem...but you know...confidence at times. I think that's a normal...that's a student role.
 S: That's part of the student role?
 Sh: Yeah, as far as I see it. Yeah. (*Excerpt from last interview*)

My reading of feminist challenges to ethnographic method, specifically Judith Stacey (1988) and Margery Wolf (1992), was even more

revealing. I was also introduced to James Clifford's (1986) challenge to the established canon of interpretive texts in ethnographic work, and the notion of partial truth.

Reading Stacey first, I was relieved to find that her experience had paralleled mine in that she had chosen ethnography for the same reasons I had: because it was "particularly appropriate to feminist research"; it "emphasized the experiential"; "its approach to knowledge was contextual and interpersonal"; "the researcher herself is the primary medium, the 'instrument' of research"; and, it "appears to provide much greater respect and power to one's research 'subjects' " (Stacey, 1988, p. 22).

However, what she found troubling was just light spring rain on a seed that had been planted early in my research. She questioned, and opened the possibility for me to question the "difficult contradictions between feminist principles and ethnographic method" (Stacey, 1988, p. 22). Questioning more seriously my 'informal' discussions with my informants, and my subsequent befriending of them, I acknowledged feeling some conflict of emotion between myself as an authentic, related person, or even participant in their lives, and me as a detached observer, or worse, an exploiting researcher.

Along these lines, I was conscious of how I sometimes felt caught up in the drama of Faye's life, and how trapped she was by her single parenting situation, and how by extension I

found myself somewhat entrapped too. I had tried to be as authentic as possible about this when it emerged and consulted with fellow researcher/counsellors when I thought that my emotions (frustration at repeatedly trying to set up interviews unsuccessfully) might have interfered with my ability to empathize with her. I made assumptions that my presence at the group (which Faye had invited me to join) would equalize some of the power imbalance germane to research, but failed to explore with the others how

May 12, 1994

It seems that because of the different types of experience available to students, in part because of the variability of the profs, students live in two worlds during their degree, and have two types of experience--one of being oppressed, and one of enlightenment or personal growth. Again, as in the larger culture, these women are being expected to live in two different worlds--the world of potential community with other women who are oppressed, in this case students, and the world of the oppressor with all it's imperatives for success and competition. This creates an underlying anxiety and tension, which for some manifests in self-doubt about one's convictions, ability to speak or challenge the status quo. (Excerpt from journal)

they felt about me being there, given that they had shared personal information with me as part of the research. To this degree, they may have felt exploited.

Sally: What other things would you be doing to compensate for the fact that you "have to meet preset criteria" and you "don't have much input into content"? You said having to jump through hoops and being passive ...

Rachel: Well I think it really makes you feel like you don't care as much about the criteria and content--if you have no input into it, it doesn't mean anything to you. I think you are going to be more passive. You're not going to really make a whole lot of effort to really learn from this, you're just going to give them what they want, which is the hidden agenda, and do whatever you have to do. I think doing that makes you feel powerless, it makes you feel less confident, you're not likely to take risks ...

S: You don't feel free to question?

R: Yeah, I'm not going to be real critical if you're [sic] feeling... that you don't have any input... any stakes in this at all. (*Excerpt from last interview*)

Reflections brought more questions, and I asked myself, "What other ways might I be unconsciously exercising my power as a researcher"? What emerged was the 'authorship' of the ethnography, even though I had been wrestling with other related issues with respect to writing about the informants' experiences (e.g., how to foreground their experience in the text with verbatim quotes; how to relate their experience to

the existing literature). I became aware that I was the one who was creating the end product of our labours, and was stunned by Stacey's (1988) words, "In the last instance an ethnography is a written document structured primarily by a researcher's purposes, offering a researcher's interpretations, registered in a researcher's voice." (p. 23). My feminist understandings were being challenged. What about their purposes, their interpretations, their voices?

Wolf (1992), echoing Stacey, called the creation of text an "exercise of power" (p. 11), but she also spoke to me of the dilemma I was having with the different experiences and interpretations expressed to me by the informants, and I began to feel

even more burdened by my 'ethnographic responsibility'. She says, "My control over possibly competing interpretations is determined by my ability to

The act of looking at interviews, summarizing another's life, and placing it within a context is an act of objectification....some process of objectification of the self is a necessary part of coming to an awareness of one's own existence; it is not less a part of coming to an understanding of others. Acknowledging that a necessary part of understanding others' experience involves an act or moment of objectification poses further problems and contradictions. The question becomes how to produce an analysis which goes beyond the experience of the researched while still granting them full subjectivity. How do we explain the lives of others without violating their reality? (Acker, Barry, Esseveld, 1991, p. 142).

comprehend and process the data available." (Wolf, 1992, p. 10), something with which I was clearly having a great deal of difficulty. To be truthful, I was making sense of some of it, but much of the data was like a maze to me, with very few signs to point me in the direction I needed to go. I thought the method would do this, and perhaps might be

doing it, but that somehow I was missing what I was supposed to be seeing. Wolf also underlined for me

One needs to be constantly on guard against the seductive illusions of technique (van Manen, 1990, p. 3)

the importance of having not just a "tolerance for ambiguity, multiplicity, contradiction, and instability" (p.129), while working with the data of human behaviour, but of bringing forward my thoughts and understandings of these in

Sally: These--"sense of ownership", "feeling empowered", "being able to choose the issues you want to write about" and "autonomy"--can you tell me how those are similar to each other? [pointing to cards with these phrases written on them]
 Shirley: I think the feeling of empowerment comes from the fact that I have autonomy, and that comes from being able to write...being able to choose the issues I want to write about.
 S: The feeling of empowerment comes from autonomy?
 Sh: Well that...it comes from the fact that I have it...to do this ["...choose what to write about"].
 S: So when you feel empowered, you have the autonomy to choose the issues you want to write about?
 Sh: And feel this ["sense of ownership"].
 S: And when you write about these things you have a sense of ownership?
 Sh: Yeah.
 S: OK. Is there anything else about how they may be related?
 Sh: Well all four of these cards seem again...speaks [*sic*] to me of freedom...like again...I guess that's probably synonymous with autonomy to some degree.
 S: How are freedom and autonomy similar?
 Sh: For me, it's being able to choose...
 S: Mmm...mmm.
 Sh: ...what I would like to do or write about...and not have someone come along and say, "no". So that I know that I can follow through on something where my heart takes me as well as my brain. (*Excerpt from last interview*)

some coherent way. And that an interpretation of a certain reality is at best partial.

Both Stacey and Wolf invite exploration into the postmodern and feminist issue of whether or not it is possible to share voice/authority/authorship with informants, something that I had also wondered about, but was not willing to consider seriously at that point because, again, I feared the work entailed in altering my method, imagining a huge drain on my limited energy. I had also begun reading Street's (1992) critical ethnography of nursing practice, and although inspired by her method, I knew that to change mine by including the informants in the analysis, as she did, would

be a logistical nightmare at this stage. All except one informant lived elsewhere in the province.

Reading Stacey's article helped me to re-conceptualize my research as intersecting ethnography and feminist research. She posed important questions, which inspired me to ask, "How could I make this a feminist ethnography, especially halfway through the research?" and "What is a feminist ethnography?" My thinking at this point was that my work was not primarily an ethnography; it was feminist research, using an ethnographic interview method.

Sally: I'd like to know what it was like for you to experience learning about feminism and oppression theory and those kinds of things, while at the same time having to play the game--like having to jump through hoops and trying to find out the hidden agenda, and all the rest of it. What was it like to have those two things going on at the same time?
 Faye: Well it really uh... well it was exciting on one hand...
 S: Mmm...mmm.
 F: To get into the theories and the works and the writings that existed
 S: Mmm...mmm.
 F: The major voices coming out, right?
 S: Mmm...mmm.
 F: You feel a bit of a fake, I suppose, Because you watch yourself going through the motions of the very oppression that you've just read about and it makes you excited to know that indeed you're not as crazy as you think. And so it creates a conflict. But...I found that I was able to be more articulate about... you know...like reading and learning about it helped sort of give you the words--those tools of communication so that you could express yourself more clearly, but still feeling a sense of frustration because you feel like you haven't arrived yet. (*Excerpt from last interview*)

Questions about whether, or even how, the method I was using might not be liberating for the informants, had also been subsumed by my firm conviction that it would reveal aspects of their experience that were oppressive, thus opening the possibility of freeing them from submerged/false consciousness⁶. I was asking them to talk about their lives using a method that I had difficulty with, and although they were 'teaching' me about their experience, I was also teaching them something; that, as a researcher I was in control. I knew the kind of questions I was supposed to ask to get more

detailed and meaningful information from my participants. I don't deny that this type of questioning might be useful and to a degree, liberatory, however I was having doubts about whether or not the questioning process (and methodology) truly represented the interests of those whose experience it was designed to uncover, and explicate. Simply put, it seemed like too much structure for me, and I began to wonder if I was imposing structure, especially with the analysis, on the women's experience, in an effort to make sense of it.

⁶ False consciousness is the denial of how our common sense ways of looking at the world are permeated with meanings that sustain our disempowerment (Lather, 1991, p. 59)

Not only was I in control--I had designed the research--and although the informants self-selected based on their desire to share the process of bringing the experience to light, ultimately I owned the research. Yes, to some degree we had been in a collaborative, reciprocal quest for understanding, but it's interesting that, when we broke out of the questioning and just talked about what we wanted to, I turned the recorder off, and when it came time to transcribe I did not create a text (other than the few field notes I made) out of this important work together. I regret, now, that I have erased most of that dialogue.

As I was getting closer to writing the text, I realized that I couldn't ignore or minimize these doubts about the methodology, and it's lack of fit with whom I understood myself to be as well as my feminist values and beliefs about power. I saw that it called me to make interpretations, judgements, and evaluations, and I began to see that my original intention of doing "member checks" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the text with each informant would not

eliminate the problem of unequal power and authority. These were not just my concerns; the literature I was reading reassured me that there was a history in ethnography of grappling with these issues.

Are there any critical junctures in the social structure, stress points where conflicting alliances and competing interests come together? I think so. Having to interact with professors who have more power and who dole out marks. Interactions happen generally in the classroom or in professors' offices, never on student's turf. This is a culture the student becomes part of, but eventually they will leave it; the professor remains behind in the culture. How do students negotiate this relationship so that they don't completely lose a sense of themselves? The primary and underlying, implicit, tacit question students ask of themselves is, "What does a person have to do to get good marks? To survive? Students learn quickly they have to 'play the game' and 'jump through the hoops' to get good marks, which are valued.

Not all of the interests of these two groups are competing--both students and profs want the student to learn. Additionally, they share a relatively low status in the institution as women, drawn together by gender, pulled apart by conflicting issues. Conflict results for students when they end up having to learn or do things that meet the profs' agenda. Students weigh very seriously any decision to confront professors, typically about marks they feel they don't deserve. Often they will consult with other students to check and see if they are too 'attached' to their work and are not seeing things objectively. The 'bitch and moan' session is a place for students to vent their frustrations about coursework, profs and being at school, but these discussions happen only amongst students.

The ongoing life in the school of nursing obscures the presence of a deep structural conflict. Although both the students and the professors are predominantly women, both devalued in the larger society and in the university community, the professors have more power, usually the domain of men. Rather than being able to commiserate with the female profs in a sororal fashion, at the very least because they are women and nurses, professors are seen by some students to be somewhat untrustworthy and avoided, and fear of "confrontation" runs high. (*Excerpt from notes, February 1994*)

Reading (the) literature, I realized at this point that I was actually drawn to more participatory/action-based research of women's lives, or other topics directly concerned with power. Stacey (1988) describes postmodern ethnography as a "critical and self-reflexive ethnography, with a literature of meditation on the inherent and often unacknowledged hierarchical and power-laden relations of ethnographic writing" (p. 24). These postmodern ethnographers also "bring to their research an awareness that ethnographic writing is not cultural reportage, but cultural construction, and always a construction of self as well as of the other" (p. 24). These thoughts inspired me to further ask, "How can I make this a 'postmodern ethnography' "?

Wolf (1992) also spoke about the disadvantages of studying one's own culture, stating that it required "a great deal of reflexivity" (p. 138), which I sensed I was developing, yet she also eloquently validated my choice to research within my own culture,

Whether we are talking about nonexploitative methodology in field research or authority in writing ethnography, we are talking about power--who has it, how it is used, for what purposes. This is what the study of gender, class, and race is really about: how subordinated sectors accommodate to and resist the power of privileged sectors, how privilege (like resistance) is camouflaged, how power is earned, learned, and occasionally spurned. Just as the reality of male privilege affects the lives of every woman, whether she is conscious of it or not, the concept of power is by definition a factor in every feminist's research. Feminist standpoint theorists claim that those who occupy a subordinate position will have a more complete and less distorted knowledge of the system under which they live, and that only through struggle against the opposing group can a researcher acquire knowledge of the social reality she wishes to study (p. 133).

As the questions slowly mounted, like clouds building before a storm, I continued along the path I had chosen, despite the fact that the ground was becoming considerably less firm. By this time I had dropped my first

informant, Camilla, from the study in an effort to reduce the amount of work, and was continuing with Rachel, Shirley, and Faye.

I had already written a summary of the cultural scene, and a descriptive summary of Rachel's experience as told to me. I was consciously experimenting with 'writing styles', and began to create a third document in which I wrote about Faye's experience, bringing in aspects of feminist theory and other literature to explain or theorize (about) her experience, and the parts of the experience she had in common with the others. I hadn't really conceptualized the text of the final document (the 'ethnographic text'), and my experimentation with writing was, in part, a way of helping me decide how it would be written. Unwittingly, it was also helping me develop themes, which I had tentatively named (power, powerlessness, empowerment or personal authority), but remained unsure of. I still wasn't really sure I was 'doing it right', coming to the themes in the systematic way outlined by Spradley.

At that point, not yet really ready to make any changes, I began in earnest to explore my difficulty with finding themes, penetrating more deeply and self-reflexively into the concerns that had been erupting all along, and

June 13, 1994

I've been writing a summary of Rachel's experience. In our first interview, she talks about professors telling students that they are "on track" with respect to an assignment, which is a qualitative answer, and the student interprets it quantitatively--in terms of marks. This brings up the question of differences in communication--are these communication differences between someone who has power and someone who doesn't? Or communication differences across cultures--are professors yet another subculture? They are clearly part of the university culture, and the culture of nursing, the culture of the school of nursing within the university. Do students and professors communicate differently based on their relative positions in the hierarchy? Professors share with their students their membership in the same culture of women in the larger societal culture. Professors, like students are in two worlds, they have to "translate" the university's requirements to the students, just as the students have to translate what the professors require into a concrete product. The professor has to give marks not just to the student, but also has to give the students' marks to the university. Both are dancing, in different ways, to someone else's drum. Both, to some degree, have to play the game. (*Excerpt from notes*)

Why is letting go of the ethnography a turning point for me?

It represents a new respect and honouring of not just what I knew, but the myriad ways of knowing lying close to the heart of my personal authority. It was a difficult decision,

which I had not been willing to consider seriously for fear of disrupting the flow of the research. Ironically, I failed to see how the process had been interrupted so frequently throughout, by not only the exigencies of my life, but also by my persistent questioning. In an effort to crack the frustration I was feeling in trying to make sense of componential analysis, I met with another colleague who had just completed her research using Spradley's method. Our discussion freed me to suspend the endless attempts to arrange data in ways that weren't making any sense to me. It was a breath of fresh air to know that I really didn't have to perform all the tricks that were part of taxonomic and componential analysis, and that I could move to discovering cultural themes

...learning to critique through autobiographical reflection and analysis is one means by which researchers, teachers and students can begin to know and examine the biases and assumptions which organize different ways of working. Such an approach is beneficial because it does not depend on an artificial separation of the personal and the public. Had I, at an early age, been taught autobiographical analysis as a way of learning to think and write critically, I might have been spared years of pain and silence (Brookes, 1992, p. 3).

just based on what I had been intuiting and seeing in the data.

What was especially helpful for me was to hear how important the process of writing can be for pulling ideas and themes together. I had sensed this intuitively, and was having an ongoing inner debate between the part of me that wanted to begin writing (and feeling ready to do so), and a voice (the oppressor housed within?) telling me I didn't know enough. I knew I needed to generate more confidence that I did know more than enough to write this thesis. Renate Tesch's (1987) work helped me to get a clearer sense of how to intuit and discover themes, and I used my research journal to dialogue with her:

July 27, 1994

I'm reading Renate Tesch (Emerging Themes, 1987) and she talks about how "the researcher is faced with the task of 'naming', 'linguaging',

one that played on my insecurities, but that ultimately felt right. I was finally listening and attending to my own intuition and voice, after deferring for so long to the 'experts'. While learning to value my own knowing, I was unlearning values I had learned about the knowledge of these experts, and the methods they espoused. With respect to the research I had undertaken I was moving myself from the margin to the centre, while paradoxically moving from the centre of the dominant discourse (ethnography) to the relative margins (interpretive/autobiographical inquiry), yet as a woman always removed from the centre of power in the culture I live in.

'making explicit', or 'articulating the meaning', (p. 232) even though some of the meanings can be captured in the words of the participants. Once this list of themes is made explicit, the researcher "continues to refine the phrasing of the themes and to confirm their relevance" (p. 232).

This is important to me right now because I think I have uncovered the larger themes (or metathemes) of power (who's got it and how do they use it?), powerlessness (how does this feel / play out?) and empowerment (what does this look / sound / feel like?). Yet I'm not totally comfortable with the words I have used to describe these and am looking for a different way to phrase these or to refine how they are phrased, as Tesch suggests.

Tesch also talks about unique themes--idiosyncratic ways in which the phenomenon manifests itself, and which can make us aware of the range of individuality in the shared experience (p. 233). I think of Shirley's theme of struggle, Rachel's of pleasing people in authority, and Faye's not being herself to survive. Tesch describes metathemes as the major dimensions of the phenomenon being studied and are more abstracted entities, usually formulated as a succinct narrative. E.g., Women students who are nurses return to school with the knowledge and expectation that the professors have more power than they do. For these women, this power is based in the perception that professors have expert knowledge of the subjects they teach, and that they have achieved advanced degrees in nursing or other disciplines, which are highly valued by nursing elite. Because professors mark and evaluate students' work, they also have the power to influence a student's future. (This is a short description of the metatheme of power or professors have most of, if not all the power).

Various individual themes may have contributed to a metatheme, yet the relationship between them is not summative; it is an associative distillation of meaningful wholes (p. 234). Metathemes can emerge and be valid before they are actually confirmed by the process. This is so because phenomenological researchers study experiences which have special significance for them, and are deeply involved in the phenomenon. It is something at the center of their personal and professional interests, and therefore they know a lot about it on a human level, even before the data are in (p. 236). This statement supports my sensing of the themes fairly early in the data analysis, but not knowing this or not being aware of this fact, I tended to deny my own reality, instead attributing my awareness of themes wholly to my own experience, which I had been told to make explicit but to "bracket" when I was doing the analysis. Again I offer a challenge to this research. Perhaps bracketing is not enough alone. A more accurate representation would be a movement back and forth from

Resting both in the centre and at the margins undeniably creates a certain tension in my work, each of these 'positions' placing its demands on me. Have these been in conflict? Perhaps, but my task has been to remain present to the process which has unfolded in a reflective way, to remain true to myself. I was invisible, but not without my own 'knowing', which became increasingly insistent in the research. Jo-Anne Kirk (1992) underlined for me the lack of focus of feminist academia on the contradictions and tensions that arise from "integrating 'competing' locations during the actual process of feminist research", and "attempting to integrate the principles of feminist research within the reality of patriarchal institutions" (p. 61).

explicating my biases, bracketing them, to including them as valuable knowledge about the experience. Indeed I am trying to come to terms with studying the experience of others while immersed in the same experience--a meta level in itself that is reflected and echoed by the participants' experience.

She connects 'recognition-producing ability' or 'intuition' to Polanyi's notion of 'tacit knowing', a knowing that comes from some deeper source inside us (p. 237). This is how I intuitively 'knew' the themes. She says, "as I learned in my own life to trust intuition, I realized that I have the strongest intuitive insights in situations that have become familiar to me". These insights are "not reflected, and perhaps cannot be processed in a rational way. It is knowledge that I possessed but could not articulate or explain. As a researcher I must bring into play intuitive knowing that senses what is there. It grows out of pre-reflective familiarity with the experience, and in this sense is re-cognition" (p. 237).

I think one problem was that I had learned throughout my education to not trust this voice inside me, my intuitive knowing; when I relearned to not trust it as part of my BSN education, the pattern was reinforced. "Paradoxically this intuitive recognizing produces new insights" (p. 238)--hence my insights about also being part of this research and the echoing and reflecting that has been happening with my experience and my participants'.

Mostly I have entered this dialogue with Tesch to help me flesh out my description of what it is that I have been doing, and how I have conducted myself doing this research, especially now that I am thinking about becoming transparent, by including my self-reflective understandings.

The reflexivity and self-critique I was intuitively engaging in, and also the sense that my situation as a student (inside the academy) might allow me to crossover into my own research, lead me to think that these might be other possible ways of reducing some of the power-based limitations of creating the ethnographic text. I was caught in the unavoidable ambivalence germane to the relationship between feminism and ethnography. Perhaps then a move to

I had often felt like I was groping in the dark, looking for light somewhere between the lines on Spradley's page, when in fact the light was within me. In some ways, I merely had to turn inward. I sensed that the ethnographic method of interviewing didn't quite fit with who I was, yet I doggedly continued to fit myself into it, rather than attend to what I intuitively knew. At the outset, with my critical consciousness just developing, like that of my informants learning about oppression theory, I didn't have the experience or skills to critically understand or analyze the method I had chosen, or to change it. The questions, "Where is Spradley's method situated?" and, "Who does this method serve?", were not asked. And like my informants' preoccupation with survival as BSN students, I got caught in my own survival with respect to this thesis, which interfered with my understanding of how the power held by the method was affecting my life as a researcher. When I couldn't do it, I mostly blamed myself.

Like Stacey, I had been seduced by ethnography, believing it to be well-suited to my purpose of revealing women's tacit knowledge during their experience in the male-dominated

include myself could be an attempt to reduce some of this ambivalence. I encouraged myself to make it "feminist research that is rigorously self-aware, and therefore humble about the partiality of its ethnographic vision and its capacity to represent self and other" (Stacey, 1992, p. 26).

Truly I was grappling with an ethical/moral dilemma in my research, and perhaps may have been doing so all along at an unconscious level. Shulamit Reinharz's (1992) words

echoed in my ears, "when doing data analysis, feminist ethnographers point out the important difference between drawing on feminist theory and imposing feminist theory" (p. 72).

Many of my questions about bias centred on this crucial difference. Had

Some feminists stress that reflexive strategy is not just politically important, but also a necessary condition for a rational account. To put it another way, we need to go beyond a recognition of the partiality of feminist as well as patriarchal texts. As feminists, we need to examine critically all accounts for their implications for power relations (Jones, 1992, p. 27).

I somehow been imposing feminist theory as I read through the transcriptions, as I chose certain domains to focus on, as I searched for themes, as I wrote about the informants' experiences?

Reflecting on my own student experience, themes about power were repeated, and seemed to confound my understandings of the informants' experience. But really our lives were mirrors for each other. Just as all of the women had talked to me about the different ways they had to 'jump through hoops', and 'play the game', I knew that there were ways that I had been doing some of the same things as part of my graduate education. Perhaps I was having trouble seeing the emerging themes of power because they were so familiar to me. Every time I would try and articulate them, I judged myself to be imposing my own understandings on the data.

academy, to my beliefs about the importance of myself as the primary instrument in the research, and to my ability to draw on my resources of empathy, connection and concern for women and nurses. I assumed that the caring relationships I had developed with my informants, and the quality of understanding emerging from those relationships would erase any potential for exploitation inherent in the method. Mostly I had worried about my bias and views about nursing education, and my need to redeem myself in my own mind within nursing. Perhaps my shame about my defiance, or my need to set nursing educators straight had kept me from exploring this bias further at the time.

Reflecting on my subsequent attempts to deal with what I now see as legitimate bias brought me face to face with the reality that I had obscured the themes emerging in the research, despite their insistence. I discovered that I had been doing the same thing the informants had reported doing--not honouring my own voice and authority. I would minimize or get caught in a judgement of myself as being incredibly biased, which affected my ability

When I asked myself, "How is my own experience similar to theirs"? and more specifically, "How does doing this research mirror what they are telling me about their experience"? I began very slowly to see how I had jumped through the hoops set out by the method, in part because I was a beginning researcher, and also because I hadn't yet learned to trust my own authority and ways of knowing. So assiduously had I been following the rules, trying to bracket my assumptions and biases as I had been told to do, that I had negated my own parallel experience and knowing, obscuring the themes. The contradictions with which I had been living were in my face. Not only had I been exercising authority vis-à-vis the informants and the research, I was appropriating power that was not really mine to take, authority that was external to me, and that also held power in my life.

Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves (Adrienne Rich, cited in Oakley, 1984, p. 2)

One of the most important areas of learning for adults is that which frees them from their habitual ways of thinking and acting and involves them in perspective transformation. This means the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions about the world in which we operate have come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships....there are two paths to perspective transformation: one is a sudden insight into the structure of our assumptions which have limited or distorted one's understanding of oneself and one's relationships: the other is directed towards the same end but it proceeds more slowly by a series of transitions which permit one to revise specific assumptions about oneself and others until a stage occurs in which the assumptions become transformed (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985, p. 23).

As I continued to write in my research journal in answer to the question I was posing, I wasn't disappointed. About this time, I began to read Anne-Louise Brookes' (1992) "Feminist Pedagogy", in which she learns to critique her own understandings and academic practices through the medium of autobiography. I wondered if autobiography could also be a possibility for me, perhaps as part of some future project,

to do the interpretive part of the study. In this silencing of self, my creative, intuitive, knowing self was not free to emerge and play with the data in ways that made sense to me. I had focused instead on being as true to the data as I could, while trying to leave myself out of it. And as I began to trust my own authority based on the knowledge I was generating from my experience, I recognized my ability to interpret the data in a mature, insightful way, and to write about the experience with some authority.

vaguely aware that I too was beginning to critique my own understandings. I hadn't actually changed the research as yet, or at least thought I hadn't, but it's clear to me now that I was writing the change, even as I persisted with the analysis of the transcriptions. Although I was considering the possibility of personal narrative, I had not yet begun to write myself in (to) the text.

July 24, 1994

I'm thinking a lot about writing and how I'm going to write and, most recently, the importance of including my own voice in the research--not some disembodied observer. I asked myself the question, "Where is my voice in this research?". Part of the context of this research, and a much more important one than what I was initially willing to give voice to, is my own experience as a woman returning to school. Me, the researcher, the one constant in this research. Of course, my plan has always been to use the first person in my description of the methodology, but I am now moving towards a chapter or section devoted to my own text--my own experience of returning to school, and specifically focused on my experience of doing this research--what it has been like for me, and what I have learned from doing it. I could draw parallels with my informants when I notice them (probably more than is apparent right now).

I'm not convinced that I am going to follow Spradley's guidelines for writing. Writing is the place where my voice is heard, and the voices of my informants. At the same time I rail against that part of me that thinks (Is it true?) that I have to follow a specific format. I guess these are the hoops, like those of my informants, specific to my current education and I question them deeply, as I question the institution itself. I have no idea where this direction will lead and this is both exciting and frightening. I will finish this degree, and am aware that it will hopefully be (as it has been) as much on my own terms as possible. I am also aware of my love-hate relationship with university learning, and my deep questioning, through my encounters with feminist theory, of how much of it is still male tradition.

Any questions about it are based in my criticism of the institution--it's values, structures, and practices--knowing that I feel different there, almost dishonest. It is not very compatible with my beliefs about what is healthy for humans, and women and other marginalized groups in particular. I want this degree, and I jump through the hoops, but I don't totally believe that the system is healthy, or fosters human growth and potential. Schick (1992) reminds me that "what the university reproduces is a systemically distorted notion of knowledge that is inadequate for both female and male students, and for meeting the challenges of justice and

The questions that interrupted the ethnography were penetrating, and called into question, among other things, the possibility of accurate representation of an informant's experience. How could what I might write about the experience be the 'truth' when it was

equality being contested daily in society" (p. 10). Criticism of the university is fine--it shows how it is committed to debate and alternative views, and advancing knowledge, but it is on their terms; and real change, e.g., in the marking/grading system, or even making universities safer places for women, is resisted. And feminist scholarship, being inherently critical of how universities reproduce women's oppression in society, is open in its political intent and questioning of the system's tacit politics, and therefore mostly unwelcome. The status quo persists strongly.

Carol Schick's (1994) *The University as Text*, also inspired me to think more critically and deeply about my own experience as a graduate student, and the implications for the research I was doing. She writes about not being able to speak in class because she felt she didn't know how to speak, and that if only she had more expert knowledge she would have more authority. She echoed the voices of the informants in my study, exemplifying the theme of powerlessness. I thought about how this theme reflected my work as a student, especially the way I had been feeling about my thesis, and how what was not being voiced was my growing awareness that my own experience, especially with chronic

The analysis of feminist ethnographic materials and the manner in which they are reported also leads feminist researchers to questions posed by scholars who are interested in the problem of writing. To what extent should the ethnographer utilize her own voice, to what extent should the members of the setting have control over the product, and to what extent should materials be interpreted in ways that diverge from the members of the setting? These are some of the current dilemmas (Reinharz, 1992, p. 72)

illness, but also as a woman student, gave me authority to speak. This I hadn't always known, but it was being nurtured within the context of caring relationships, with women especially, and a few men. I was coming to understand in a much more profound way how my experience, as a woman, a student, a disabled person, with few exceptions, is not

valued in the academy, and certainly not as a basis for any authority.

Another question arose as I reflected on my role as a participant in a number of different kinds of research during my student career, including qualitative and phenomenological studies. When the researcher presented me

being filtered through my own bias? Adrienne Rich's (1979) words were ringing in my ears, "There is no 'the truth,' 'a truth'--truth is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity." (p. 187) When I began to challenge my chosen methodology the emphasis on interpretation was not sitting comfortably with me, so I sought to somehow equalize the relationship by including myself in the research, not to overshadow it but to underline and accentuate the experience, to demonstrate its complexity.

Despite uncertainty about how I might actually include myself in the study, my newfound resolve to do so was an important decision for me; one with integrity, I believed, given the feminist nature of the research, specifically its project of generating knowledge

with the analyses for accuracy, I had felt like someone else was speaking for me, and asked myself "Would a more truthful representation perhaps be me speaking for myself"? Even though I asked this question, I recognized that not

...I conceptualize ideology as the stories a culture tells itself about itself...a stance [which] provides the grounds for both an "openly ideological" approach to critical inquiry and the necessity of self-reflexivity, of growing awareness of how researcher values permeate inquiry (p. 2). As we come to see how knowledge production and legitimation are historically situated and structurally located, "scholarship that makes its biases part of its argument arises as a new contender for legitimacy." (Lather, 1991, p. 3)

all those whose lives are considered fruitful ground for research are in a position, or even desire to conduct self-reflective research. Yet my experience as a participant had heightened my awareness of how partial the knowledge is that researchers generate and disseminate about my (or any) particular human experience, and of how, at least in these instances, even

with a previously established trusting relationship between myself and the researcher, I had felt somewhat objectified.

July 26, 1994

As I decided to write myself into the text, I felt a bit more enthusiastic about my project, but was now beset with the problem of how to do so. I had just completed the final interview at the time, and was actively transcribing and trying to analyze the data. I remember at that time feeling like I was scattered and unfocused, and that I had a lot of really big loose ends to tie up, leaving

I'm now questioning the format: should I interpret my experience through theirs or should I interpret theirs through mine? My intuitive sense is the former, but I wonder if it isn't more a reflective process in which I move from my own experience to theirs, then back to mine, with no real start or end. Actually it might be best to start, as I did with the proposal, with my experience, but not with the intention of interpreting it solely, but to deepen my understanding of all. (Excerpt from research journal)

me feeling pressured, and sometimes overwhelmed. These feelings occupied my senses through much of the fall of 1994, during which time I had been

about women's lives (as they experience returning to school). I was becoming aware of the parallels with my informants, but more the way that I was hearing their voices echoing my own when I reflected on my struggles as a student researcher. Personalizing the account by including my problems, doubts and excitements along the way was becoming possible, in a way that would allow others to hear my voice as a participant in a very similar and sometimes parallel experience.

attending a 'Writing Research' class. My primary intention in joining this seminar was to get support and guidance for writing the ethnographic text, especially considering I had decided to modify it with some kind of personal account.

Once again I was back in class, but it was qualitatively different, and I had no idea of the transformation(s) I would undergo, arising from my experience with these other

teacher/learners, and the writing I engaged in between seminars. To begin with, we negotiated mutually acceptable criteria for meeting the university requirements for marks, based on the concept of "getting smart", essentially moving from one place of knowing to a place of deeper knowing, as demonstrated in our ongoing writings. We would focus on and submit these, rather than creating separate assignments designed to demonstrate 'creative thinking' or 'mastery of content'.

This was exactly what Rachel had spoken of when I had questioned her about what would be an ideal way to award marks (given that she felt powerless in the face of rigid criteria, predetermined by professors without student input). She had described the

concept of marking according to 'growth over time', assessing where a student is at the beginning of a course and their growth at the end. I was astounded to

October 28, 1993

This process is so slow. I just had an insight which helped me to see, at least in part, how I have been stuck. Because I have so many unresolved feelings about my nursing education experience and how oppressive I found it, I may have negated, or at least given less attention to, the part of that experience that represented an opening of doors, a broadening of my thinking, a realization of my intelligence and my ability to think critically, and to write. This has come from doing Rachel's taxonomy of personal growth, and realizing that her former self-awareness didn't include a realistic assessment of her academic or social skills. Camilla had the same self-doubts about her ability to do the work required to get the degree. Perhaps part of this is the idea that universities are for smart, ambitious people and that none of these women (or myself) ever really saw themselves this way. (Excerpt from journal)

The more permission and support I had for pursuing what had become both fascinating and compelling for me--the questions I had been asking--the more I wanted to stop doing the summaries, and launch without reserve in the direction towards which I had been veering. Initially, the permission and support was external, coming from my advisors and peers. Their support awakened in me the possibility of my own support in the form of listening to the voice which speaks from my own experience and knowing about what learning and research are.

be actually experiencing this idea being put into practice.

Something was shifting inside me; I felt recognized as someone who could grow over time (which I generally do with coursework), and actually be rewarded for it. Now my experience of increased awareness, and growth in the depth of my thinking would not just be something I carried around inside myself, or which was expressed abstractly as part of some project or assignment I was expected to complete, as was the case for my informants. I was free to grow in whatever direction my learning was taking or guiding me.

Our mutual responsibilities in this liberating process were clarified. As students, we would ensure that we participated actively in discussions, and shared our work with others for comment and feedback. At some point we could hand in written work, without length, or format requirements, so that the professor had some sense of our thinking and ability to express our thoughts on paper. Earlier in the class we talked about the notion of 'quality' described by Robert Pirsig (1974), the kind of quality that many of us might instantly recognize in another's writing, that is not necessarily limited to sincerity, motivation or importance of the topic to the author, but, perhaps, more a notion of 'persuasion'.

This particular classroom experience was significant in that it heightened my awareness of a personal responsibility for my own learning, rather than just strictly adherence to guidelines or criteria, which tend to make me less responsive to my own ways of knowing, and more tied in with institutional imperatives. A dialogue with self reveals my thinking at the time:

[Or perhaps there was/is more? Maybe the responsibility I talk about is to parts of myself, to my creative, intuitive self on one hand, or my practical, competitive, high achieving self, on the other?]

[Yet, I am not comfortable with this dichotomy. Is it one I have created for myself? How so? And why?]

Clearly, I was developing a critical consciousness of my university education, and that of my informants', learning to perceive (social) contradictions and taking action to change oppressive elements of this particular reality (Friere, 1970). I had become aware of the power imbalance in this research, and was seeking to alter somewhat that situation by making myself and my experience more transparent, rather than hiding myself as a researcher, and burying myself in the text through careful use of language and exclusion of personal information. To a degree, I was on the elusive quest to get it right, even while

[My first impulse would be to lay blame squarely in my own patriarchal heritage, with its legacy of naming and dividing, as a way of making sense of and controlling the world.]

[But these two aspects of self are not wholly me, and admittedly I have felt more wholly me when I am honouring my intuitive, creative self. How can these co-exist within me?]

[Unfortunately without much conflict and tension, which brings me to the thought of how difficult it has been to critique the experience of returning to school from within this very context. I keep looking for easy answers, which I have learned over time to be possible (and desirable). I **can** reduce this to several important factors or variables or themes. I **can** make sense of it.]

[Thinking this way, I have felt seduced, and yet, I know that the master's tools cannot destroy the master's house (Lorde, 1984).]

[Again, I realize that I am moving my study from mere description to critique, and feel a bit on shaky ground.]

Not only that, the ground was about to shift radically as I began to write about yet another contradiction. **For a long time, I was to hover partly in each [world], without solid footing in either one (Butala, 1994, p. 49).** developing in my awareness, central to my experience as a student researcher. Despite the fact that I continued to analyze Faye's third interview, while completing a descriptive summary of Shirley's experience, I was getting (and generating within) more and more support to focus on the most compelling thing I was doing--questioning my assumptions and deepening the

learning from Margery Wolf's experience in *A Thrice Told Tale* that there is no right way.

In fact the right way for me was, ultimately, to realize the importance of the questions I was posing, and to pursue them, while writing self-reflectively about it. Creating an inquiry of the experience as it continued to unfold seemed like a direct move towards

understandings I was having about the research. Most days found me writing about my own struggles in an increasingly reflexive, critically aware manner, as this journal entry demonstrates:

November 14, 1994

Today I am returning to Shirley's summary and doing what I can with it. I am concerned about all the pieces I am pulling together. Perhaps some of what I am feeling might be coming from my internalization of what is expected re: how a thesis is supposed to look or be put together, and I have been encouraged to notice when this is happening, asking the questions, "What message to myself has pushed me into defending my position, or attempting to substantiate my thinking?" and "What lies behind this message?"

There is a tension between my own ways of learning, views of success, and understanding of expertise, vis-à-vis how the institution defines these. This is one of the contradictions I am living with, and which I am in the process of elaborating. What are all the different ways of living this contradiction? And what is it like to live in this in-between place, which is fraught with tension and uncertainty, which seems neither here nor there? It is to be constantly making choices.

As I read the stories of my informants and reflect on my own stories, I can begin to appreciate all the ways that a person lives in this particular in-between place. Perhaps the tension results from not being able to transform the experience into a paradox, or at least live it in this way. For me a para-dox represents two different voices speaking together, existing simultaneously side-by-side, rather than in opposition (as in contra + diction=two different ways of speaking or two different voices speaking against each other) And how am I going to talk about what happens in this tension place in the middle? Here, it is a question of how I'm living. What are the concepts that describe how I am living here, the endless dialectics, e.g., accommodation/resistance, centre/margins, continuity/disruption, clarity/ambiguity, knower/known. The themes (of power) left me dissatisfied, so I am required to find other ways to describe what is happening.

I shared some of my writings with the others in the seminar, supported by thought-provoking dialogue, with the effect that I began to realize that personal and contextual considerations were equally valid and researchable, not just experiences that happen during the process, traditionally silenced in

authenticity, and rang true for me. Ostensibly, I was undoing some of what I had learned over my life in formal educational settings. How was I doing this? By beginning with myself. Like many academic feminists, I had unconsciously subscribed to traditional scholarship, needing to do so to generate a level of knowledge that could 'free' me to validate what I knew, or have known, or was coming to know. Like the idea that moving from ethnography to narrative inquiry would present me with new, and strangely familiar challenges.

the text. Clifford (1986) alluded to this when he commented on traditional ethnographic texts,

At best, the author's personal voice is seen as a style in the weak sense: a tone, or embellishment of the facts. Moreover, the actual field experience of the ethnographer is presented only in very stylized ways....States of serious confusion, violent feelings or acts, censorship, important failures, changes of course, and excessive pleasures are excluded from the published account (p.13).

Serendipitously, I was challenged about these two very paths I had my feet on; the ethnography based on a method I was clearly having trouble with, and the increasingly enjoyable, revelatory and affirming writings about myself and what I was (and had been) doing as a student/researcher. This particular contradiction, perhaps was a mirror for the ones I had discovered in the BSN students' experience, borne of adhering to familiar comfortable ways of knowing that failed to acknowledge my own authority juxtaposed with an ever-deepening critical consciousness of the academy and my own experience as a student.

An important feminist challenge to academic research is over the importance attached to "having knowledge" as opposed to "ways of knowing", the latter being characteristic of many feminist approaches (Schick, 1992, p. 36).

The implications of this knowing became increasingly apparent as I journalled my confusion:

November 23, 1994

I'm really feeling mired down and confused following my meeting with Antoinette yesterday. It seems I have been holding on to the notion of including summaries of each participant's experience as the means of representing it, yet she pointed out the discrepancy I've been fostering; calling into question the whole possibility of accurate representation of a person's experience or even a culture, while preparing to present a text that I think is legitimized by the fact that the informants have read it and agreed to it's accuracy. It seems I have been operating from the old paradigm in this regard, believing that I can reach truth value or validity simply by checking my summary description of their experience with them. I think the heavy feeling is my sadness at possibly having to let go of this part of the research and being presented with the possibility that I won't include any of their experience at all. I feel like I'm in a trap.

Given what I'm challenging and the questions I have been asking about research and validity, can I represent their experience at all, and

how? If I own the text as my own point of view, is this enough? It still means that their experience is represented in the text and for what ends? My original goal of describing the culture of nursing education seems far away. Can I still include it and how?

I do think it helped to meet with Antoinette today, although I'm not quite sure because I feel turned around again in some way. What way? And what about all that stuff about the interstices--living the experience of tension between institutional demands and my emerging understandings and sense of authority. Her comments about my original intention are well taken--Was I setting out to describe a culture or study individuals' experiences? Which seemed more prominent? I think the culture to begin with, but the individual experiences became fascinating for me. So because I never resolved that focus by writing the complete text--it remains both, and I'm not sure whether it is a problem as such right now.

I am not really trying to find a solution, rather I am honouring and keeping open to my own questions. There has been a need to interrupt my self and process during this research, and indeed it could be characterized as a series of interruptions. Antoinette advises me to write about what's driving me to persist with the summaries, what's pulling me to abandon them? I have this drive to get it right, to tie it up, to bring it to closure--this also needs to be questioned in the same way--What is driving me to do this and what is pulling me to abandon this course?

I'm having some insight as I write these words and I'm beginning to see that these desires are just another manifestation of this place of tension between the institution and my drive/leanings to explore in my own way. Again I am caught in the middle. What is the contradiction here? That I can accurately represent a reality doesn't somehow seem possible to me, especially someone else's, but I have learned that representation is possible, and have acted on that belief, all the while thinking that it can't be done. Old habits die hard it seems. How is this process reflective of the counselling process? Knowing that clients will often act from old beliefs despite espousing new ways or new philosophies. Also that myself as a counsellor will often act from old places, while thinking of and espousing new beliefs. And how important increased self-awareness is.

Antoinette and I talked about the problem of how this (aspect of) thesis is linked to counselling, and I realize now that within the client-counsellor relationship we are always dealing with representation of others' experiences; some of these representations are problematic. And it is important to question these. All the questions I ask about the data or text are important to ask about a client's representation of his / her experience, and my own as a helper. This is the asking of questions about what we take for granted, which frees us from our own false consciousness.

Essentially this thesis has been generating difficulties, issues that arise as we do this kind of work--trying to work with others' experience. I am calling into question that which is assumed to be true when a person does (ethnographic) research. These questions are an important part of the territory; they interrupted the smooth flow of research, and in paying close attention I have noticed the questions interrupting me, and allowed them to do so.

After much deliberation, she decided to include her own responses and become another research subject, rather than pretend that she had remained unaffected by the research process. The woman's inclusion of her own responses could be interpreted by some as having transgressed the mythical bounds of objectivity; but it is also an example of scrupulous honesty in the process of doing feminist research (Schick, 1994, p. 29).

Choosing to write autobiography...she unmaskes her transgressive desire for cultural authority...she must also engage fictions of selfhood that constitute the idea of woman that specify the parameters of female subjectivity, including woman's problematic relationship to language, desire, power and meaning (p. 50). When a woman chooses to leave behind cultural silence and pursue autobiography, she chooses to enter the public arena (Smith, 1987, p. 53)

I rose to the challenge I had set for myself and decided to leave the ethnography behind.

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