

RECONSTRUCTING WOMANHOOD

A Method and an Account

*by*

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## ABSTRACT

This work explicates the social construction of womanhood by providing an instance of its reconstruction. I organise the body of the text into three chapters: a frame, a method and an account. In the frame I outline the context of my research, sketch the organisation of my inquiry and provide my location in relation to the discipline of sociology. The frame makes explicit the need for and view from my shift to women's perspective. The inquiry begins in the rupture I lived between experience grounded in my physical female being not yet mediated by words and the social forms of expression available to me. I extend the work of Dorothy E. Smith to account for the bifurcation between women's bodies / work in the body and ruling forms of mental production. These forms exclude women and constitute us as objects by building in and taking for granted as the source the consciousness of (ruling class) men. This construction annihilates women's subjectivity and is manifest as our inability to generate authoritative statements. The practical lack of ability to decide and to speak for ourselves is a consequence of a ruling relation in which women exist for men. To enter the dominant forms of expression we must suspend our sex, cut off our bodily power and attempt to stand outside ourselves. Sociology practices a ruling relation by working in the abstract-conceptual mode that excludes concrete, local and particular embodiments. The female body discredits and disqualifies us for positions in the head world of ruling. However only by adopting the stance of insiders to ourselves can we account for the practice of the ruling mode because our work in the body provides the conditions of the abstract-conceptual mode. This insiders' stance allows us to reclaim mental work by generating social forms of expression that make visible / speakable / knowable our bodies and bodily work upon which work in words depends. Writing from women's perspective is the means by which I reconstruct my knowledge of womanhood as sociology.

The chapter on method lays out the specific procedures I use in accomplishing an alternative construction of womanhood and provides the conditions of producing the account which reconstructs my past. The focus is on performing a relocation of myself from object to subject by starting from myself, my female body and my everyday experience as a woman and originating forms of expression from this centre. I create this shift through writing a journal.

In the account I relate how I came to know myself as a woman in the process of growing up, uncover how family relations constructed the social meaning of womanhood and account for my experience of inferiority. I learned to practice bifurcated consciousness of head and body and a ruling relation to myself by internalising the split between my father as the agent of ruling class authority and my mother as the exemplar of woman's silenced embodiment work.

The thesis contributes to the body of knowledge explicating the split between public and private domains by presenting personal relations as social relations of corporate capitalism and linked to social relations of public production.

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The writing of this thesis is embedded in a web of social relations not fully explicit in the body of the text. To draw these out adequately I would need to sketch the entire context of my life and to acknowledge by name all my co-workers, comrades and friends over a period of three years. I don't want to do that. And yet I do want to draw the attention of you who read this to the many who supported me directly and indirectly in my efforts lest you see me falsely as assuming the power of a subject in isolation. My reconstruction is not a heroine's act of individualism that overcomes social oppression. The power in my work, to whatever degree you find it, springs from a social movement made of and for women in which I take my part. This step in building a new social order is one in a very long march trod by many. It is in joining women moving forward that I find a strong voice.

I wish to state my appreciation to the members of my thesis committee: Dr. Helga E. Jacobson, my advisor; Dr. Elvi Whittaker and Professor Barbara Williamson. They showed great patience during my struggle for words and never once told me I could not do this work in a way that expressed the truth as I understood it. They have used their abilities as academics and feminists to clear ground for me to stand on. Their suggestions have been useful and insightful. I have found their support invaluable.

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this work is to explicate the social construction of womanhood by providing an instance of its reconstruction. I organise the body of this text into three chapters: a frame, a method and an account. In the frame I outline the context of my research, sketch the organisation of my inquiry and provide my location in relation to the discipline of sociology. In the method I lay out the specific procedures I use in accomplishing a reconstruction, detail how I fashion a way of knowing and make available the conditions of producing the account. In the account I relate how I came to know myself as a woman in the process of growing up, uncover how my family relations constructed the social meaning of womanhood and account for my experience of inferiority.

I intend the term reconstruction to be read in both its common sense and sociological meanings. The common sense notion of a reconstruction refers to a version of past events that is fashioned retrospectively. The sociological usage underlying *Reconstructing Womanhood* refers to the understanding that social meanings are produced by a practice of individuals in organised relations, in both face to face and mediated interactions. Both uses point to the significant features of the interpretation I use here: 1) that an account, any account, including one of the past is worked up, i.e. constructed, and 2) that the meaning of womanhood is produced and displayed by observable social practices of individuals in relation to each other.

Accounts are socially constructed. Their versions of the past are organised by relevancies at the time of producing them, by the social context of accounting for. An account is situated in a particular framework of accounting for what, to whom, for what purpose and on what occasion. There is not one possible account of events, not merely one that is true and complete. There are many. That there are many possible true accounts is a feature of the many possible settings and occasions for working up an account. Different accounts of "the same" events are required and provided for different practical purposes. (Garfinkel 1967: 3-4) The account I provide in Chapter III is a particular possible true one. It renders the sense I found in becoming a woman in my family relations at the time of its writing. Particular historical and material conditions organise the practical purpose of my account. I make these available in Chapter II, the method. There I explicate how I came to know what I included in the account and show how the actual organisation of my work appears in the organisation of the account.

Womanhood is socially constructed, as are other aspects of social reality, by the organised practices of individuals. (Berger and Luckmann 1966, G. Rubin 1975) Each social organisation accomplishes a reality of womanhood and these realities differ in significant respects. These varying constructions are embedded in biological realities of femaleness given in human organisms. My concern with the social production of womanhood is not a refutation of sexual differentiation in human beings. I do not address debates of "biological determinism" vs. "cultural conditioning." What my inquiry does is disclose how the social category of women is constructed on the basis of biological femaleness in one instance. I focus on how bodily experience of femaleness is translated and articulated by social forms of thought and expression. The physiological events that mark womanhood, such as menstruation and pregnancy, must be "discovered, recognized, named, treated and otherwise made sense of." (Michalko 1977: 9) We take these events and their meanings for granted only by presupposing a socially organised world in which discovering, recognizing, naming, treating and making sense of womanhood are routine social practices and activities.\* In this work I explicate this taken for granted social organisation from and about my location as a woman in contemporary North American society.

I stand in the place of women. The view from here is women's perspective. This framing of my experience in women's perspective allows me to focus on the meaning of womanhood from within. I move back and forth weaving together the theoretical and experiential writings of women's perspective with my own life history. The focus of much writing from women's perspective has been a split between public and private domains, also called domestic and non-domestic, personal and political (e.g. Smith 1973, Jacobson 1978, Freeman 1972, Rowbotham 1973) Such works point out how the domain of personal, private, domestic has been assigned to women, unexamined and taken for granted as inconsequential and invisible from the public point of view. These works challenge the exclusion of women from social study and social expression. They call for an account of how this separation of spheres is constructed and/or for women's accounts from the private realm. My work begins from these concerns. My framework acts to reveal instances of personal relations, through which the meaning of womanhood is constructed, as relations of power and authority, what Millett (1971) terms "sexual politics." I demonstrate how these are

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\*Michalko (1977) explicates the social meaning of blindness in giving an account of how blind persons accomplish the sighted world. I draw parallels between blindness and womanhood as embodied and socially constructed phenomena.

social relations of domination embedded in a broad social organisation which generates both domestic work and public production.

The framing of my work in Chapter I organises the field of viewing somewhat like a window frame. The frame acts in the manner of a "view finder" in constructing an image. The frame selects what we can see by setting it off from the surrounding context. The frame points our attention to a particular area by drawing bounds around it. The frame I choose is one available from where I stand. Looking through this frame further produces a particular perspective. As with windows, we are practiced at losing sight of the frame and seeing only the view available through it. In Chapter I, I aim to draw your attention to the frame that organises the picture I present so that in looking through this frame to reconstructing womanhood you do not wholly lose awareness of it. In the frame I sketch the outlines so as to suggest the shape of the pieces which follow.

The order of the chapters of this work (frame, method, account) is the reverse of my order in writing them. The understanding of the social construction of womanhood I present in the frame shaped my method of work and my account of my past throughout the writing of this thesis. However, I did not begin with a clear and well developed statement of my assumptions. I saw through the frame though it was not clearly visible to me. In writing the frame after drafting Chapters II and III I laboured at making explicit the ideas and concepts that had already organised my work. The procedure I followed at every point was drawing out the implicit connections. Reconstructing womanhood has been for me a work of discovering what was already there, seeing it differently, allowing the existing pieces to shift into a new pattern. The dynamic for you will be reading an outline of themes I use in women's perspective, seeing the outline filled with descriptive accounts of my method and life history, and re-viewing the assertions of the frame with this substantiation.

The experience of womanhood, the practice of it, is not separable, distinct or discontinuous from knowing, interpreting and understanding womanhood. Our experience is always shaped by the social forms of expression that articulate it to a social order. In this work I cover ground commonly bounded as sex role socialization and the sociology of knowledge. I transverse these both because I cannot take apart learning the behavior of womanhood and learning the meaning of womanhood. How I come to know myself as a

woman is inextricably bound up with how I come to practice myself as one. Thus in giving an explication of the practice of knowing as a woman I build into my frame a description and an instance of social organisation of the production of knowledge and the relation of the knower to the object of her knowledge.

What I am explicating goes beyond the notion of "socialization" when that concept means a period of time during which an individual does not yet know how to practice behavior appropriate to her social category. The time period "before" we are socialized does not exist. "Social interaction does not wait for socialization to be accomplished." (Michaliko 1977: 8) We learn womanhood by participating in situations where we are expected to know the very things we are simultaneously being taught. (Garfinkel 1967: 147) (MacKay 1974) For me to take some action or statement as an expression of an underlying meaning of womanhood depends on my knowing some of the particulars of that underlying meaning to begin with. (Wieder 1974: 161) Wieder refers to this as the self-elaborating nature of a schema of interpretation. What counts as an instance of what, the pattern of behavior and the evidences of it, are used to elaborate each other.

How I come to know myself as a woman happens continuously. At every point how I receive my femaleness and how others receive it is being acted out. The sense of our orientation to the fact of my womanhood is a product of the continual application of our interpretive methods. Wieder (1974: 161) says of the convict code: "...it is much more appropriate to think of the code as a continuous ongoing process rather than as a set of stable elements of culture which endure through time." This quality of always unfolding is the case notwithstanding definable shifts in my interpretation and practice of womanhood. In fact, it is a basis for such reconstructions. That each next thing can change the sense of the thing before it arises from our method of constantly interpreting. "Oh *now* I see" [in a way I didn't see before] can be said because of our continuous sense making which connects events with previous events. We are ever reconstructing. (Garfinkel 1967: 3)

Throughout this work I stand on the following criterion of adequacy: that a work provide for the conditions of its existence. An adequate explication makes visible how it came to be. (Smith 1977a) Silverman (1975) reads in Castenada (1968), in Durkheim (1964) and in lay usage in our society a belief in and practice of "method" as the route

to truth. Truth is defined as conformity to rule. To follow a set form of procedures is to be method-ical. I make available in this work my procedures in producing it. I lay these out in detail in Chapter II entitled "A Method of Writing from Women's Perspective." I make visible how I arrive at the truth of the account in Chapter III.

. . . Understanding is never passive. It is always Me, here, now, *producing* sense – as I produce sense by my reading of Castenada's text. So my writing and reading are always acts of production – of possible societies, of selves. And that production is both mine and not mine alone. Mine because in my acts of production I re-member my-self. Not mine alone because 'I' exist in and through a dialogue with a tradition that always already precedes me, and with an emerging social order that will be the readings of my text. (Silverman 1975: 42)

The sense I produce by reading my past enters a traditional construction of womanhood and an emerging social order. By reading my text we together make something of reconstructing womanhood. We make new meanings to each other and grow a new social order.

My method of work is an application of the life history method as practiced by ethnographers. Langness (1965) gives procedures for producing life histories. One of these is describing the interactional situation of "taking" the life history, i.e. the relation of the social scientist to the informant. (1965: 38-42, 53) I follow this practice by describing my relation to myself, because in this work I act both as social scientist and as informant. Langness asserts life histories are essential resources in seeing culture as something lived out by actual individuals. He counters Boas' position against using biographies which Boas describes as memories that select, distort and colour the interpretation of the past. (Langness 1965: 50) Langness does so by calling on ethnographers to account for the human actions of remembering and interpreting. I address this issue by accounting for how I accomplish the selected memories that interpret my experience of womanhood, by showing how I work a reconstruction.

The kind of theorizing I do in this text using my life as the source expresses what Blum (1971) calls "a form of life" and what Silverman (1975) terms "a way of knowledge." I "call to mind" what I already know (Blum 1971) and in so doing I "re-member my-self" and "re-collect" the society I am part of. (Silverman 1975)

This "calling to mind" is a way of recovering what one has all along, it is a way of seeing and as such is inextricably tied to a way of living. More than this, it is to re-constitute or re-create out of one's life and history of a society another possibility for seeing. To theorize is to re-formulate one's self. (Blum 1971: 305)

The new form I express my-self in is embodied concretely by my words in this text. My self is public and socially available as my forms of expression are, as this manuscript is. All stay oriented to a social reality which is a joint endeavor.

I assert that the method I lay out in Chapter II works an undoing of the meaning and practice of womanhood constructed by my family relations. These relations constructed womanhood in the predominant mode in which women are excluded from authority and from expression of our experience in authoritative forms. In this mode, authority is an exclusively male attribute. Women appear only as objects. The work of reconstructing my past reshapes the meaning of being a woman in the present. In accounting for "how it worked that I learned to be a woman as a social subordinate" I use a method based on practices that work differently. This alternative method begins with women as the subjects and authors. In it we present the world through our eyes and in so doing constitute our experience, bodily work and bodily activity as the ground from which to begin. I am not in the periphery as a woman but rather at the centre. The place from which I begin in this new way is a journal that documents my everyday embodied practices. My shift to writing from women's perspective involves procedures that counteract my previous forms of subordination. By using this method I take steps in changing the social construction of womanhood. More steps must follow. The alternative method is only starting to unfold. It is a work in progress. I struggle to make headway. I may in some passages resume/re-assume the old mode unawares. Bear in mind that I speak of the ruling mode as "now existing" and the alternative of women's perspective as "being born."

In the account in Chapter III I do not claim to speak to "what actually happened" from a location outside of these events. I do not claim to present a "bird's eye view" that portrays a construction of womanhood independently of my participation in it. I do not claim to present "what actually happened" from the location/point of view of my father, brother, mother or sisters. I do account for myself, for how I received my femaleness in relation to them and for my interpretations of how they received it. Whether my interpretations match theirs is not at issue in this work. My concern rather is with the consequences in practice of my construction of womanhood in relation to them.

I presented an earlier version of the account in Chapter III to fifty colleagues at a conference.\* This version has been published as well.\*\* The responses I received provide verification that this account is recognizable and reasonable to members as one instance of the experience of womanhood. My sister said upon reading "An Account of How Family Relations Construct a Woman," "Yes, that is the same family I grew up in." My colleagues at the conference recognized what I was talking about and responded with similarities and differences in their own histories as women. All credited the relevance of authority and silence as themes in the social construction of womanhood. These women validated my reconstructions not by understanding my experience as identical to theirs but rather by using what Schutz (1962: 310) terms "the reciprocity of perspectives." They provide verification that my account makes the bridge to an intersubjective world by crediting that any woman in my circumstances could have seen and done as I did. Together we construct my account of practicing womanhood as reasonable.

The correspondence between my discoveries and the experience of other women does not originate in my ability to box them up in my categories treating their experience as mere stuffing. It does not originate in beginning from "universals" that disallow the appearance of differences nor in a manufacturing of theory from thin air. The similarities between my account of myself and the lives of other women come from the similar social conditions we encounter.

I do not present my construction of womanhood in the account as "typical."

"type: 4. a thing or person that represents perfectly or in the best way a class or category; model" (Random House 1968)

My experiences are not typical in the sense of representing perfectly the category of womanhood. I do not claim that my life history can "stand for" that of other women, even for other women of my social class. I do not assume that women's experience is relatively unchanging, stable or universal. I do not assume our differences are inconsequential. To make this assumption would be to vastly overgeneralize on the basis of as yet a very small body of writings from women's perspective. Our ability to piece together a broad tapestry of women's experience lies ahead. At present we have only fragments. The framing of my

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\*Conference of the Women's Studies Association of British Columbia, March 1978.

\*\*"Breaking Through the Silence," *Makara*, Vol. 3 No. 3, Fall 1978.

experience in this work suggests to me that women whose social locations bring them into less direct <sup>or</sup> and personal contact with men in authoritative positions may have substantially different experience of the public-domestic split and thus differing relations to an available bifurcated consciousness. The testing of this possibility awaits consideration of other women's personal accounts.

The validity and impact of my reconstruction do not rest on a claim to universality. They rest instead on this work's success at making available, accountable and observable my concrete location in social relations and on the possibility of seeing from there how the differing locations of others organise their experience differently. The framing of this work drafts a map of socially constituted space. The existence of both similarities and differences for others is accounted for by their locations within this space. Our varying locations relate us to each other and form one social organisation. It is one we share.



## CHAPTER I

### A FRAME FOR RECONSTRUCTING WOMANHOOD

My project in this chapter is to locate my work in relation to the discipline of sociology and to the academic discourse. This relation is problematic, a question to be looked into, an inquiry that takes me on a journey. I use the analogy of exploring and charting new terrain. Locating my work on the map requires that I trace the frame and sketch the outlines of the territory. At first the contours are only suggested. The later chapters fill them in. How I draw the map gives you vital information about where I am going, literally puts it in context, reveals the backdrop. And where I am headed is to new ground; I write from a new location, the standpoint of women.

Here is where I begin. My work originates in the conditions of my life in a framework given by my experience and not in the conceptual organisation of the discipline. I do not begin with the topics and themes as they are already laid out in the body of texts that are constituted as the discourse of sociology. I begin with the rupture of two parts of myself,

of two ways to be. I begin with two opposing forces. I begin with the moment of their rending. Only as they come apart can I see the pieces. Only by explicating the contradiction I lived between woman and sociologist can I articulate my relationship to the discipline. This rupture is between the immediacies of my life prior to expression and the social forms of expression available to me; between experience grounded in my physical female being not yet mediated by words and a language of words and images provided for me by others. I ask how the experience of this rupture is produced. This leads me through a critique of the methods of intellectual work that accomplish it to an alternative based on integration rather than bifurcation. I want to show how this cutting in two happens, lay bare the way of working that produces it and arrive at a new way of proceeding that brings together rather than breaking apart.

What I do in the frame is lay out the bases of women's perspective. In the method I give how I worked on the basis of these assumptions. In the account I give a piece of reconstruction framed in these terms. My descriptive work, Chapters II and III, fills in the frame of women's perspective. I used this frame implicitly in writing of my experience. The frame and experience mutually interrelate. They elaborate each other as a schema of interpretation. I give the terms and concepts sketched in this chapter fuller, more particular expression in the chapters that follow.

Works which present women's perspective embody an epistemological shift. They do not merely add the topic "women" to the agenda of existing approaches. They act to redraw what forms an agenda (Smith 1977a) by constructing knowledge from a new place. Women's perspective is not more knowledge about women seen as objects. Rather it is the knowing from the standpoint of women and presents the entire world as it appears through our eyes. (Smith 1977a, 1977b, 1975a, 1974a) (Jacobson 1978, 1977) And this is a radical alternative. Women's perspective is not yet readily available. We are just beginning to imagine what women's perspective is and what shape social relations appear in from this standpoint.

This work spins out certain threads of women's perspective. I begin by recognising and explicating our exclusion from developing the forms of social expression, the language of concepts with which we know and speak the world. I consider how this exclusion is accomplished and obscured. I focus on authority relations as ruling relations in which authoritative

versions of reality exercise domination over concrete embodiment work. I look at relations between men who work in words and women who search for means to give expression to our bodily work. I focus on women in "middle class" circumstances: my mother doing unpaid housework on the income of my managerial father; and women struggling on the boundary of universities to reclaim and transform the mode of mental production.

My ability to name and focus on this rupture between the social forms of thought and experience depends on my use of women writers, particularly Dorothy Smith (1977a). The rupture between our experiences as women and how we can think and express them is the focus of major works of the women's movement (de Beauvoir 1970, Millett 1971, Friedan 1964, Rowbotham 1977, Wittig 1975, 1971). What emerges for me as I take in their ideas is an awareness of how the social forms of thought exclude me as a woman, exclude my experience as woman's experience and constitute me as an object. I am on the outside of the language and images readily available to me.

I use dictionary definitions as authoritative descriptions of how we use language on an ordinary everyday basis. Dictionaries compile descriptions of how words are socially practiced. These descriptions construct certain meanings of womanhood. They represent and uphold the taken for granted standards of standard usage which, once exposed, make visible my exclusion. (Miller and Swift 1977)

The 'I' [Je] who writes is alien to her own writing at every word because this 'I' [Je] uses a language alien to her, the 'I' [Je] experiences what is alien to her since this 'I' [Je] cannot be "un écrivain". If in writing je, I adopt this language, this je cannot do so. J/e is the symbol of the lived rending experience which is m/y writing, of this cutting in two which throughout literature is the exercise of a language which does not constitute m/e as a subject. (Wittig 1975: 10-14)

The one who writes "I" is the author, defined as "the maker of anything." This creator, maker of words, does not include me. I am not an author but rather "referring to a woman, authoress." (Random House 1968) I am defined in terms of the male, with reference to him. The male is not defined by reference to me. I find no parallel or alternative definition of authoress as "the maker of anything. . . referring to a man, author." In fact, there is not even a separate listing for authoress. It is subsumed under the male term because we make male into general. Man is species, woman is sub-species. (Swift and Miller 1977: 144) "Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man." (Benda Rapport d'Uriel in de Beauvoir 1970: xvi) The point of origin, the One, the self, the ego is

assumed to be male. In our language the tacit subject of sentences is "one, he." As a woman, I am constituted as an object, as Other in relation to men as subjects. And the object in sentences is optional. Only the subject and verb are essential. "One writes" stands alone. I may add, "He writes about women," *if I wish*.

The duality of subject and object, of self and other is not symmetrical.

In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. (de Beauvoir 1970: xv)

The neutrality of general terms that assume while hiding maleness is exemplified in our talk of doctors. A woman doctor's peculiarity is revealed by our use of the limiting descriptive criterion "woman." No such restriction is necessary when referring to a man doctor. The maleness of doctors is assumed unless explicitly counterindicated. "Man doctor" is redundant. Doctors (in general, unmodified) are implicitly men. This slippery representation of women as negative *not* neutral appears again in "actor," the "person who does something." "Actor" is also defined as "a person, usually male. . ." As a woman I am an actress, "a female actor." (Random House 1968) In writing the sociology I enter a disciplined language that analyses "the social actor." In doing so I leave behind the strange notion of including myself, "the social actress."

All in all my ability to write of myself as a "person who does something" is tenuous at best. My claim to personhood is only recently established. It took an appeal to the Privy Council in 1929 to overturn the 1928 decision of the Regent Supreme Court of Canada that women were not included in the term "persons" insofar as rights and privileges were concerned. (Bassett 1975: 165-8) We can see with this explication that generality or universality is overtly neutral and covertly masculine. (Smith 1977a: 5) (Swift and Miller 1977) According to Polanyi (1969: 134) "All thought is incarnate, it lives by the body. . . . But it is not *thought* unless it strives for truth, a striving. . . with universal intent." (his emphasis) That "woman" is limited and particular in a way "man" is not shows that the thought incarnate in my female body gets treated as somehow defective.

In the midst of an abstract discussion it is vexing to hear a man say: "You think thus and so because you are a woman"; but I know that my only defense is to reply: "I think thus and so because it is true," thereby removing my subjective self from the argument. It would be out of the question to reply, "And you think the contrary because you are a man," for it is understood that the fact of being a man is no peculiarity. (de Beauvoir 1970: xvii)

Male subjectivity, though hidden, it assumed to be congruent with truth. Female subjectivity invalidates "universal intent." That I do not like these definitions, that I oppose them and work to change them, that others do likewise does not erase the social reality of the language I inherit and must enter in order to speak my experience. It is a language that poses me as incapable of universal thought.

This construction of the world that annihilates women's subjectivity is what I address as the oppression of women, my oppression. This is the core of my reconstruction of womanhood: the lack of authority, the silence of women we manifest as inability to author or generate statements. In writing "I am, I do, I see, I think, I feel, I know," I am simultaneously revealing my exclusion and reclaiming my power as the subject.

The forms of thought, the means of expression, which we had available to us to formulate our experience were made or controlled by men. From that centre women appear as objects. In relation to men (of the ruling class) women's consciousness did not and most probably still does not appear as an autonomous source of knowledge, experience, relevance and imagination. Women's experience does not appear as the source of an authoritative general expression of the world. (Smith 1977a: 3)

What is clear already is that how I am excluded is related to my femaleness, my womanhood. The centre from which authoritative statements originate is assumed to be male. These statements present men's perspective in the guise of general thought. They take for granted a form of expression suited to that purpose. From this standpoint I appear as an object, I exist for them. Last night I heard lines on the radio that went roughly like this: I'm working so hard out on the range / while he's at home with all the women. . . I get only a dollar an hour while / he gets a wife and ranch and family. It was an ordinary sort of folk song. I do not need to tell you the "I's" voice was male. You have already taken that for granted. I point out that in both cases, the "I" who has not and the "he" who has, the women exist for men, the object of their desires (along with money, ranches and children). As a woman I can enter this song only as an object. I become present for the author/performer by his relevancies, not by my own. That we are not subjects in these forms of expression and that men are requires that our visibility be on their terms.

That the subject of sentences is male and that I appear as an object in that construction is not all that I discover about how my exclusion is accomplished. This "one" that is assumed, this source that generates a version of the world, is not "men in general," not men floating in space unlocated in the social organisation. This One that poses me as Other

is particular men occupying particular positions of power in certain definite institutions. Military officers; legislators; judges; corporate board members; administrators of hospitals, universities and government agencies; managers; business executives; doctors of medicine, psychiatry, philosophy and law; established authors; recognized artists — these are the men who mutually orient to each other's words, who constitute themselves as a circle by attending to and naming the significance of each other's expressions, who define the forms that make sense and discard and dismiss ones they decide to be insignificant. Their authority to define the world, to decide for others and issue orders springs not merely from their manhood. They claim this authority by virtue of their offices. (Weber 1964) Their manhood is a necessary and not sufficient condition of this entitlement. Their legitimate power is vested in the institutions from which they rule. (Smith 1973, 1977a)

Male authorities act as agents of corporations and corporate arms of the state. These organisations have an abstract transpersonal life. Exxon and the U.S. military can survive as entities through complete changes of personnel. Though they exist only by virtue of the real acts of specific individuals, the positions or offices are more lasting than the individuals. The authority of ruling is appropriated by the organisation. (Weber 1964) This authority is manifest through persons only in so far as they act as agents of the corporate bodies. These agents of ruling are men. Women do indeed work for ruling organisations but we do not represent its authority. We are disentitled by sex from fully entering the offices that generate authorizations. These ruling institutions of corporate capitalism together form a ruling apparatus. It is a loose structure that does hang together even with its various parts, segments, specialised practices and jurisdictions. (Smith 1973, 1977a)

The source that is built into the forms of expression available to me and to us as women is the consciousness of ruling class men. A piece of this construction is that women exist for men. The social relation of this setup is a ruling relation. The expressions from a male centre are not merely "a" perspective, not simply one of the many available. This male outlook is *the* dominant one.

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Marx and Engels 1974: 64)

Their hegemony is established not by some mysterious means of possessing the language but rather by practical means of controlling the production and distribution of ideas in words and images, in the media of print, television, radio, film, etc. (Tuchman 1974) For an instance of this I cite my bibliography. The publishers of many of the works I refer to are small in scale, not well known, nor wide distributors. A number of my sources are unpublished. The unpublished articles are almost exclusively by women. The works I rely on to reconstruct womanhood struggle to be heard as an alternative voice against the domination of ruling ideas and the material means of promoting these ideas. Relations between men in positions of authority and women are not symmetrical, not reciprocally exclusive. Men's perspective and women's perspective are not equally available. The male exists "in general," as the general, generic, purportedly universal, certainly the dominant form. Male authorities rule not merely in quantity of space. They rule *over* me. They speak for me and take my silence for granted. (Smith 1977a) They do not even consider asking me to speak for myself. Suffragists were told that women already had a voice in the state – their fathers or husbands voted for them. (Cleverdon 1974) The practical lack of ability to decide for ourselves and to speak for ourselves is a consequence of a ruling relation.

Throughout this work when I use the word "ruling" I refer to practices of ruling, managing, governing and administering. This includes what is normally called bureaucracy, accounting, and planning.

rule: verb transitive; to control or direct; exercise dominating power authority or influence over; govern. Syn. administer, command, govern, manage  
 ruling: adjective; governing or dominating, controlling, predominating  
 (Random House 1968)

These practices involve issuing directives for others to follow as well as creating images for others to think with. The notion implies ruling over someone/something and imposing upon them. In the context of this work it refers explicitly to ruling over women. In corporate capitalist society the ruling class has the authority to dispense the existing order by explaining it, transmitting it and training others for it. The ruling order is a moral order. The agents of this order assert that the way things are (by their definition) is right/righteous/morally correct. Built into the ruling construction of womanhood is the assumption that this meaning is right, natural, inevitable, desirable, preferable, healthy, proper, etc. (Smith 1973)

That I speak of ruling as a relation deserves emphasis. My description of the ruling

class or agents of ruling on the one hand and women on the other\* does not suggest these to be two classes or groups of like kind. They do not at this time exist separately or independently from each other [though it is possible to imagine a world without rulers and/or one without men (e.g. Wittig 1975)]. Social relations construct social class. Family relations construct a woman. The silence of womanhood only appears in relation to the authority to express appropriated by the rulers. Only in relation to a glorious manhood can womanhood be constructed as inferior.

The work of and from women's perspective initiates a redefinition of social class. My thesis takes part in this discovery of class as a practice of relations. We are only just beginning a description of class in this way. I draw heavily on the work of Dorothy Smith (1977a, 1977b, 1973) in recognising and participating in this project. I assume "class" is a potentially useful term. I do not assume it is yet further defined than by the manner I use it here. Do not presume that my use of "ruling class" and references to Marx and Engels place my work uncritically in an established body of "class analysis." Just how class relations appear differently from women's perspective, how class looks once women's relations are not taken for granted and rendered invisible is only beginning to emerge. (Barling 1975, Firestone 1970, Rowbotham 1973, Ziegler 1978) This thesis unearths class relations in my experience from women's perspective.

In the forms of expression that are generated from the places of ruling, women appear as Other, as objects. Smith (1977a) calls us strangers in the territory of male discourse. Wittig's "j/e" is an alien. (Wittig 1975) We are on the outside. As women we are excluded from the positions that legitimately originate, that serve as the source point for universal truths and authoritative expressions. The forms of expression I inherit see me from the outside. And I learn to practice this relation to myself. Women are instructed to view ourselves through men's eyes. We stand in front of the cameras they wield to construct images of us. They choose the frame. We smile for them. This external viewing of ourselves on our part Rowbotham (1973) calls a nihilistic relation to our own consciousness. In practice it can mean I am invisible unless someone else is viewing me. I do not see myself except through someone else's eyes. I display this standing outside myself by using the third person to speak of myself – "the sociologist, he" or "the author, she" or "women, they," I

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\*The dominant class rules over more people than us as women. They also rule over working class men. That social relation, however, is not the topic of this work.



exclude myself by eliminating from my writing the inclusive "we, women," and "I, author." I participate in this form in presenting myself as an object for others. I write sentences in the passive voice. Things are done unto me by others; I do not do them myself. I am not the author or actor. I am the acted upon, the written about.

This standing outside myself is contradictory. In attempting it I suspend my sex. I leave behind my female body which discredits me, which "limits" me, which has feelings and experiences that cannot be named. I attempt to think from somewhere outside my body, to think like a man, to neuter myself, to become a pseudo man. I cut myself off from my grounding, I rend my life in two. I think with my head only. I think against my body. I am doomed to failure. My brain is a part of my body. I own no feet I can use to stand on outside of my body. My head is supported by my skeleton beneath. With no grounding, and no embodiment, I am literally no-where, and no-bodoy.

Yet, it is only within this suspension of my sex, of my experience as women's experience, of my subjectivity as a woman's subjectivity that I can enter the "life of the mind," the head world that is manned from ruling positions. I cannot participate in the general development of the science of man, in the progress of mankind unless and until I can squeeze myself into "man" and "mankind" by cutting out my womb, cutting off my breasts, stopping my menstruation and denying my fertility. I participate in seminars on male terms, speak in modes they define and perpetuate, proving myself "equal" to them by becoming like them, proving I will shed my sex so as not to be "handicapped" by it.

A few women have entered positions in the ruling apparatus. A few speak with the authority of its offices. And they do so only by special licence, never as the spokeswomen of their sex. (Smith 1975a) They are the exceptional women — the exceptions that prove the rule(ing mode). To be an exception is to accept the inferiority, the lack of authority of women and to exempt myself from this, to stand outside of "women in general" to treat us as "them" not "us." This procedure can even be used with growing numbers of exceptions. Claiming exemptional status means the construction of womanhood remains unchanged. The typifications go unchallenged. Women executives are not "typical" (real) women. Each woman in a ruling position does not ordinarily count herself or get counted as "one of us." (Cole 1976) To take this option is to suspend my sex, sever my identification with other women and thus stand divided against myself.

So far I have detailed the fissure between women's experience and the social forms given to us for expressing it that are not made by or for women. Now I intend to explicate this more specifically in terms of the rupture between my experience and sociological modes of thought.

Sociology rests on a happy irony. It seeks to study socially organized practices. Equally, it itself is a socially organized practice. Sociological descriptions, methods and claims to truth are brought off and recognized. . . by and for members of a certain community. . . . Necessarily, then, sociological accounts *exemplify* the very practices they would *describe*. (Silverman 1975: ix)

I follow Smith (1977a) in calling the dominant mode of sociological practice the abstract-conceptual mode. Its descriptions, methods and claims to truth are brought off and recognized by and for members of a community that I remain outside of except in so far as I leave myself behind by suspending my sex. My description of this ruling mode begins in a critique of how I am excluded in my concrete embodiment from entering it. In uncovering this relation I exemplify an alternative mode. I describe this mode as a method of writing from women's perspective. In this alternative mode I begin from inside myself, my female body and my social location as a woman. Through my critique I find myself starting in a different place and taking some different steps. Then, in this work I claim to describe how-to-do two different methods of sociological knowing. All the while I exemplify one of these modes as I write.

In the abstract-conceptual mode ideas and images come from a place external to the everyday world of experience. This place outside of the everyday is the place of ruling. Mental production is the privilege of the dominant class. (Marx and Engels 1970) They make ideas and images for us to use for their purposes, not for our own. These ideas articulate our needs, aims and interests to their concerns in ruling, not to our concerns of daily living. The ruling mode takes for granted the conditions of ruling class experience and it takes for granted the silence of those who do not participate in ruling, who are outside. (Smith 1977a: 10) All this is true of sociology.

Sociology is not a *tool* of the ruling class. Sociology is a *part* of the ruling apparatus. The university socializes people to the ideological forms upon which its own organisation depends. It is not the only institution that does this socializing. Nor is it the only one that depends on the forms of organisation it teaches. The family is another one. This is because they are pieces of a network, and the ruling apparatus is not homogeneous. It is an organised set of social practices of different positions and practices. (Smith 1977a)

Work is accomplished as sociology by being presented in settings defined as such — certain classes, conferences, journals, presses etc. To be recognizable as sociology, work must follow a form set out in these organs of the discipline and stay oriented to its concerns. In the past women have not been in positions from which they could give themes and topics to the “agenda” of sociology. (Smith 1977a) The domains of specialization in sociology that comprise the agenda carve up the world as it is seen from the places of men. Our experience as women doesn’t fit into these boxes. For example “housework” as the real activities we do cross cuts “occupations,” “leisure,” “socialization,” and “the family.” Starting from our places as women we would not generate the distinct topics “work” and “leisure.”

When we speak as women we begin to make observable some of the assumptions built into sociology. The “social actor” excludes me not merely by “forgetting” I am called an actress but also by taking for granted that “actor” means one with rational control over the world and one with the means to effect his projects. (Schutz 1967, Smith 1977a) This rational mode of acting is a form of ruling. It excludes emotion (among other things) and in so doing excludes women as those responsible for preserving a place for taking care of feelings. And we do not exercise rational control over our schedules. We ordinarily adapt our work tasks around the needs of others, e.g. the boss’ lunch time, the kids’ school hours, the husband’s overtime. We don’t organise our time for ourselves but in order to serve others. One way we lack the social means of effecting our projects is by lacking independent incomes. We can scarcely carry out projects of our own when we have no money of our own.

The way in which sociological knowing has placed me as a woman on the outside and then taken this for granted is not easily undone. This construction is built into an entire mode of thinking. This mode is called both “objective” and “scientific.” Schutz gives a description of and instructions for accomplishing “objective-scientific knowing.” These procedures involve detaching myself from the everyday world of activity, and suspending myself from the paramount reality organised around my centre. This means standing outside of or above my subjectivity, bodily existence, particular location in time and space and the practical concerns I have from this place. I can then adopt the stance of “impartiality,” “detachment” and “disinterestedness” that constitutes “objectivity.” (Schutz 1962) This presupposes I can find an “Archimedian point” outside of my social location and that in the relation of knower to known I can cancel out my self and my concerns as the knower.

From this "bird's eye view" the knower is anonymous and rendered invisible, only the object of knowledge appears. (Smith 1977a) In abstract sociological knowledge although that object is human "it" has no subjectivity. "It" is not portrayed as a reciprocal knower or possible knower. "It" may be a he or a she but sex is "merely" another "objective" feature of the data/object.

Although these procedures of suspending subjectivities that produce detachment serve to make the relationship between the author and the subjects disappear, they do not dissolve the relation. Detachment is, in fact, a social relationship. Sociology is the practice of a relation to those of whom we speak and write, whom we study and explain. (Smith 1977a: 28) I learned this objectifying relation to those I studied as a practitioner of sociology. I learned to treat "the subjects" as objects who don't look back or speak back, to present my presence as not affecting them, to do away with their being as actors by making what they do into "role," "norm," and "behavior." I learned this mode because it is the predominant mode of the corporate capitalist society I lived and live in. I learned it in my family, in school and particularly in university. I learned the "abstract-conceptual" mode because that's what sociology has been and to a large extent still is. I learned this mode even though I sought "alternative methods," "radical social science," even though I studied ethnomethodology and Marxism. I brought this practice with me to the study of womanhood. Only by a slow uncovering of the contradictions in this abstract-conceptual mode, only by groping towards an alternative method have I come to reconstructing womanhood. And I am still in the process of working my way out of this prevailing mode.

Practicing the abstract mode in relation to womanhood meant treating myself along with other women as objects. My journey uncovers that this abstract mode teaches precisely how to relate to myself and others from outside myself. And this mode, despite its mystification on this, is not for all. The abstract knower is in fact located. He is not neutral and sexless. (Smith 1977a) He is a male. He is not female, he is not and cannot be me. His abstract mode is not for women, we are outside of it. I cannot study womanhood from his supposedly unlocated place, nor can I study it from the actual ruling positions which he occupies and which I don't. I can only know womanhood from inside, from my location as a woman. And all men can only know womanhood from the outside, from their location as men. So in this work I drop the self-defeating attempt to do sociology in the ruling mode and cease craning my neck trying hopelessly to peek at myself from the outside.

Dorothy Smith (1977a) relates the practice of the abstract-conceptual mode to the emergence of corporate capitalist organisation. This organisation which the abstract mode is a part of is a particular form of ruling, one which is detached from the local and particular. Corporations exist in abstract space. Decision making is based on accounts and documented facts removed from the subjective intuition of particular individuals. Planning is separated from the concrete activities the "facts" are about or from those that carry out the decisions. (Braverman 1974) This form of ruling is expressed, practiced and accomplished in the medium of symbols, primarily in written form. Documentation establishes the facticity of events. Undocumented actions are of doubtful reality. (Zimmerman 1974) This production of "information" removed from "what people think" and "people who think" is a necessary basis for the trans-personal existence of corporations. The local and particular agents of ruling produce and enact a knowledge that, like the corporations, exists beyond them and yet not anywhere without them.

The conceptual mode removes knowing from knowers to produce disembodied thought. It abstracts ideas away from fleshly persons who think them. "Mind" replaces people who think. "Attitudes," "norms" and "values" acquire a life of their own quite apart from what people say, feel or do. Smith (1977a: 35) claims Parsons' exorcism of the actor's body from his model of the social actor is apt in constructing this mode. Sociology becomes gathered up into the head world where the abstract "one" (who is literally no-body) lives the life of the mind. The person is severed at the neck, guillotined, cut off from physical power. He speaks, reads, and writes. He authors words. As a sociologist, he does not engage in practices of the body, the hand — of material work. He remains absorbed in the conceptual mode only by disattending his bodily existence and "passing beyond" it. (Smith 1977a: 40-42) He passes beyond the material text to the ideas it expresses until he happens upon a torn page or a blurred copy when its embodiment as marks on paper erupts into focus.

The abstract-conceptual mode constructs a bifurcated consciousness, by cutting in two thinking and doing. Yet, we cannot ever leave behind material reality, cannot stop doing. We always live in the body in the local and particular. All mental work must be given material form (as sounds in air or on tape, as lines on paper, as electronic impulses in a computer) to exist at all. To sever this embodiment, to render it background, to take it for granted requires our active work. A great deal of this work is provided for men by women. A sociologist who notices the illegible text may direct his secretary to produce a new copy.

A man whose writing is interrupted by hunger pangs may order his wife to make food appear before him. My mother bought my father's ties and typed his menus so he could stay absorbed in the head world as a food manager.

For us as women this passing beyond the conceptual mode is a continual problem. We are limited in arranging for the material conditions that allow for disattention to embodiment. We are blocked by the obstacle of our work. The bodily mode remains a focus for our chores, our duties, our responsibilities. We cannot take for granted who is minding the kids, how the dirty clothes are getting clean and how to arrange for meals. We must attend to them and organise them even if and when we hire others to carry out this work. And since the female body discredits and disqualifies us for positions in the head world of ruling, we must carefully manage our female functions (e.g. menstruation, menopause) so as to render them invisible. I used to wear dull monochromatic clothes in a narrow range of browns in an attempt to neutralize my "femininity" and to appear more credible as an intellectual. I needed to hide my body to display my claim to mental work.

As a woman, I cannot sustain prolonged absorption in the abstract conceptual mode. The concrete and particular embodied world erupted in my experience of unplanned pregnancy and in my reckoning with my father's dying. My father's long struggle with cancer focused his attention on his body and cancelled his ability to stay absorbed in the practices of ruling. I saw in this change a distinction between his embodiment as a person and his position as an officer or manager. I noticed his difference in practice. During our last visit he sat patiently working saddle soap into my boots. Our social relations constructed us far differently than when I worked as his receptionist and he directed my work. In discovering my pregnancy I had to decide immediately whether to allow this process or to stop it. Doctor's appointments and attention to my body demanded the foreground. Classes and essay writing had to recede. The body comes first as the ground of my existence, as the support for my head, as the place to think from. The vividness of these bodily events produced a rupture along the line of fault between everyday embodied experience and my entry into abstract embodied ruling in words.

My ability to see and describe the abstract mode and to contrast it with the embodied mode is a feature of my social location. As a woman I am assigned to work in the embodied mode and excluded from fully entering the abstract mode of ruling. As a sociologist, as a student, as a child in a middle class family I learned to suspend my sex and enter the ruling

conceptual mode. My experience of bifurcated consciousness is not the same as men's nor as women's from other social classes. The potential for rupture in my life came from my location attempting to bridge the great divide between my woman's work in the body and my intellectual work in the head world. When the bridge collapsed I was challenged to account for its faulty construction and to develop a method of constructing a new one that would be able to hold my weight.

Adequate explication is one that provides for the conditions of a thing's existence. By cutting off the local and particular and suspending embodiment, the abstract mode cannot provide adequate explication of itself because the link to its own conditions is lost when the knower is cancelled in relation to the object of her knowledge. In "rising above" or "passing beyond," the connection to the ground is severed. However, to begin as a woman, to start from myself as a socially and bodily located knower means to reground myself. I can account for myself and my practice of the abstract mode because my work ensures the conditions of the abstract mode. My work as a woman provides for the embodiment of head work. My silence is the suppression of my bodily work as visible/speakable/knowable. Reconstructing womanhood breaks through this silence, I speak what I could not say before.

Starting with myself involves regrounding myself in a social world, in one I share with others, a world we mutually construct in family relations and in the social relations of the university. The place to start is my everyday world, the "trivia" of my life, the daily experience recorded in my journal. How I start there is not by treating it as an object, as the discrete and self-contained phenomenon "everyday life." To do so would be to stop without getting started, would be to sever the connections of my daily experience with a broad scale social organisation. I avoid this false start by not describing my family as "the family" as if there were one abstract and universal form of intimate social relations. For me to write of my family relations as "the" everyday world of "the" family would be to slip again into the abstract-conceptual mode and to miss the truth that there exist only real particular concrete families. The organised sets of relations and practices that constitute a family vary by social location. (L. Rubin 1976, Smith 1973)

What I do in this work is to locate my family in a social organisation and to describe some of our concrete relations. I do believe the method I use to uncover how these relations are embedded in the wider social organisation can be used to disclose other aspects of

other family relations.\* The themes of silence, self-denial, management of the body and female inferiority/subordination that emerge in my account are generalizable to a social construction of womanhood that is widespread. How these themes are concretely experienced by other women in other families is a matter for empirical investigation and goes beyond the scope of this work. Families are places where social meanings and social organisation are interiorized, where we take in social reality that constructs who we are. (Families are not the only such places.) Different women take in different pieces of this reality. I am confident further work can account for such differences by using and elaborating upon the framework and method I begin here.

The feature of the family relations I describe here that emerges most vividly in the framing of my account is the difference in the locations of my father and mother. As a military officer, my father stood inside the positions of the ruling apparatus and could himself assume the conditions taken for granted in its dominant mode of knowing. He worked as an agent of corporate organisations in the abstract-conceptual mode and represented the ruling order to me, my sisters, brother and mother. My mother stood outside of the places of ruling and these practices. Her dependence on my father's income for the means of life organised her subordination to him. This organisation of relations turned her work into a personal service to him. This is a consequence of the social organisation of production, *not* something inherent in the "nature" of household tasks. (Smith 1973) My mother's work gave concrete and particular form to my father's needs, both emotional and physical, such as to allow him to stay absorbed in the abstract mode of ruling. Her work and her silence were part of what he could take for granted. She was excluded from the authority of the ruling order even as she taught me the practices of womanhood needed to uphold it. She stood as an example to me of the central contradiction of the prevailing construction of womanhood: use your power against yourself.

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\*For an instance of this see Ziegler (1978) on her family relations with a middle class father, working class mother and older brothers on an Ontario farm.



## Changing

I start out as a plate of noodles  
smooth with butter and cheese.  
From the fork I see myself  
moving toward my mouth.  
I begin laughing, gasping,  
trying to stop me from choking on myself.

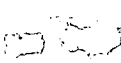
Later I flashback as razor blades  
dreaming I am stuck in my throat.  
My keen edges menace  
my soft tissues from inside.

I have not yet drawn blood.  
I will be all right  
if I can just keep from swallowing myself.

I rescue myself by becoming a cough  
dislodging myself in piece after sharp piece.  
I put myself back on the plate  
disarming me of my fragments.

Now I breathe as a stream  
dissolving myself from a sword  
to a neck unsevered.  
I converse my opened passageways  
connecting myself body to head.

At last I come together  
reclaiming myself from hunger denied  
I speak my name.  
I am desire.  
I am no longer  
a guillotine  
hiding in a plate of noodles.



Reconstructing means exposing the foundations and rebuilding from the ground up. For me this involves revealing the roots of my practice in past social relations. This journey discloses the landscape of sex and class relations from my location in them. Starting from my self I travel outward tracing the socially organised practices that construct particular meanings of womanhood.

In relocating myself from object to subject I reclaim my power to know for myself. This shift in centre transforms the imagery of the universe I inhabit. As a child I imaged the ruling order with my father fixed at the centre as the sun. From that immobile place outside myself I charted my motions and those of my mother and sisters as earth, moon and planets. Reclaiming myself as centre, source of illumination, does not depose male authority by posing myself as the sun or my father's son. I remain the earth, grounded in myself, not claiming that the heavens revolve around me. That I begin from my centre redraws the universe. It enters me into a field of relations with other moving bodies, each a possible beginning point. Our courses are intelligible to each other by the differences in our positions and motions. The location of the moving observer is essential to account for the moving pattern of the heavens from her or his place. We become then, many centres, all moving, all in relation to each other, many worlds composing the dance of one universe.\* For you, these centres located outside of and in relation to me, I aim this explication. Here is the view from my earth. Here is the light I can reflect. Here in I make myself visible to you.

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\*Dorothy Smith's (1977a) and Ann Kent Rush's (1976) uses of cosmological metaphors have enriched my own.

## CHAPTER II

### A METHOD OF WRITING FROM WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

. . . as women, we are not taught to see our lives, our work, our feelings as the authoritative place from which to begin. In making our own experience the starting place and focus of the discussion, we are creating a new approach to understanding the world. This cannot be done without difficulty. (Jacobson 1977: 11)

This essay is an explication of my method of work in writing 'An Account of How Family Relations Construct a Woman,' given in Chapter III. I am accounting for that account. Chapter III outlines practices by which I came to know myself as a woman. In it I draw out how I learned in relation to my parents and siblings to deny the authority of my own experience, to know myself as inferior because female, to hide and despise my womanly body and to cut off my physical grounding from my articulate knowledge. In Chapter III I locate these family relations in the broader social organisation and make clear how these ways of knowing myself were in the ruling mode. Now I aim to expand on how I came to

reconstruct this past. The writing of the account unfolds from a reconstruction of myself as a woman. In accounting for my earlier practices of knowing myself I accomplish an undoing of them. I develop procedures which replace my older ideological ones. This new and different method of knowing myself is an alternative to the abstract-conceptual mode of work. The method of writing from women's perspective reconstructs me from an object to a subject. Herein I trace practices that accomplish authorising and voicing my own experience, diminishing my female subordination, reowning and making visible my womanly body, and reconnecting my physical grounding and articulate knowledge. All these are practices that underlie the production of the account which serves as the reference point of the work that follows.

Sense unfolds over time. Each next thing can change the sense of the thing before. Our accounts of our selves change through time, not merely by expanding. The sense of the present is built on putting together the past into how it led to here, how it turned into now. Sense is made of experience by accounting for it. Our sense of "what actually happened" shifts over time as we produce revised accounts. This is not falsifying the past. It is seeing it, making sense of it. My biographical facts are not constructed once and for all, they are in the process of unfolding. Sense doesn't stand still, I am ever constructing it. (Smith 1976)

Part of the sense of an account is in how it is used. My account of family relations is used in part as a way of settling accounts with my father upon his dying. My production of this account is one means of my being visible without standing in his aura.

Facts don't speak for themselves. They are produced and selected as significant and relevant facts. I account for my methods of producing and selecting facts in this chapter. I draw the facts of my life history from the document of my journal. I used as sources for my journal writing my everyday experiences, memories, dreams, therapy, domestic tasks and passing thoughts of all kinds. I explicate my methods of producing these into a journal and from a journal into an account in this chapter. I provide the social organisation of the production of the account.

I began work towards the account after a crisis in my life that ruptured my older method of intellectual production. I had been a graduate student at one institution and teacher in another. I was overworked and in chronic poor health. I fell behind in my work and felt increasingly stagnated and incompetent. My struggle to lead the life of the mind was severely undercut when I accidentally became pregnant. While I was waiting for an abortion I learned that my father was terminally ill with cancer. Then I parted ways with my lover, who left town. I took these eruptive bodily experiences to be tragic and irrational. The powerful emotions that came with them immobilized me in my intellectual work. I could not make them make sense and I was drained of energy for making sense of other subjects. Yet I refused to give up my commitment to doing mental production. The very themes of women's studies — female experiences with reproduction, fathers and lovers — were rendering me incapable of effective performance as a student and teacher of women's studies. This contradiction demanded a new resolution. Since my old ways of comprehending the experience of womanhood were inadequate I had to find new ones.

I stopped teaching and decided to focus only on writing and my graduate work. I arranged to have the four months of the summer to complete my unfinished course work. I recovered physically from my abortion then went east to visit my father for what I knew might be the last time.

When I returned I attended to the physical conditions that would organise and allow a new integration of work. I decided to work at home where I had a separate room for sewing and study. While I was commuting between two distant campuses I used my study/workroom mainly as a dumping ground for books, papers, fabrics and tools. As a prelude to writing steadily, I spent a week or two bringing order to this space for the first time in a year. I made a place in my home life for my work. I no longer read and wrote in my bedroom, kitchen and living room, or else in a distant office. I worked in my study.

That my study was also a sewing room helped me see my writing as a work of production. I came to understand the similarity between constructing garments and constructing a paper. This analogy grew very practically out of my activity doing both. I went from piecing together a patchwork to piecing together my past and then back again. I began to see my day to day writing as similar to accumulating beautiful pieces of fabric and lace. Both kinds of bits could be worked up into visually coherent forms.

Reducing the distance between mental work and domestic work was an effect of my

working at home in other ways as well. I lived in an apartment in a large old house in an immigrant and working class neighbourhood. This house was located half a block off a commercial street. Most of my activity was centred in this neighbourhood which extended about ten blocks both north and south, four blocks east and west from my house. Here I did my shopping, banking, mailing, laundry and eating out. At the community centre nearby I swam, saunaed, read newspapers, used the library and bumped into friends. The close proximity of all these facilities allowed a daily integration of my writing, recreation and maintenance work. Working at home meant intellectual work and housework flowed into one another without abrupt breaks in time and space. I wrote each day in spurts. I filled the breaks with a dash to the corner market, a short walk, an hour swim, or by making a meal or straightening my apartment. I did not attempt to follow a schedule with regular times for housework, for writing, for play. I did the task that demanded my interest and attention at the time. Sometimes I decided on a clear Tuesday to spend much of the day visiting a friend or lying in the sun. I learned to spend a Friday or Saturday night at home alone, writing, without any sense of being left out of weekend revelry. Being quite flexible and in control of my own schedule in this way meant I was never wholly off work. Since I was using my dreams as raw material for writing, I often worked even in my sleep. But this work was not onerous, alienated labour. It was clearly for myself. I liked working hard in this way because I saw the fruits of my labours in positive changes in my life. The boundaries between head work and embodiment work faded also because I wrote about all my tasks. I recorded what I cooked and bought, what I observed at parties and in the sauna. My everyday existence entered the realm of mental production by being articulated and worked over.

Other material conditions crucial to my work were that I lived alone and had a small but livable income without being employed. Virginia Woolf said, '... a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction. . .' (Woolf 1973: 6) My equivalent gave me the possibility of writing seriously. I was very largely in control of my time and space. I could arrange quiet, uninterrupted time for writing. I was not obliged to organise my work around the needs of bosses, husbands, children or housemates. I appreciated the rareness of these conditions in my own life and in the lives of almost all women. This fueled my energy for discovering a method of work uniquely allowed by such conditions.

When I went east to visit my father for what I knew might be the last time I took with me two volumes which particularly stimulated me in beginning to write in a new way,

*The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing and *Writing Without Teachers* by Peter Elbow. The former spoke strongly to how my fragmented life kept me blocked in my writing. The latter offered specific procedures for becoming unblocked. I resumed my journal writing. This time I make problematic my rupture between embodiment and academics, between my experiences as a woman and sociology.

I am tempted away from writing into reading a novel about the writer who can't write. The character isn't the author because she is writing the novel but it also obviously is her. Maybe I could write an academic paper for women's studies about how I can't write academic papers anymore after doing women's studies. (All quotations which follow and are unreferenced are from my journal.)

Wanting to write sociology from women's perspective meant I wanted my own concerns as a woman to motivate my writing. I was not able to produce a piece of my own work simply from notes on what others had said. Separating my notes on lectures and readings from my personal journal was a practice that enforced the schism. After witnessing Lessing's Anna struggle with four separate notebooks, I began to consider allowing all my different kinds of thinking and writing to go together in one journal. I debated with myself:

I hefted the weight of my personal journal and poetry drafts. If only I had written near as much for my academic work. Why not make notes on all my thoughts? Because I like talking and reading better. But I could learn to change and after all, I'm not very pleased with how things are going.

I began to realize that ideas, *my* ideas, came not only from books and lectures but also from the so-called trivia of my everyday life.

I stopped disconnecting my intimate thoughts from my notes on readings, intellectual work, letters, shopping lists and poetry drafts by writing them all in one journal. I started writing every day. I wrote what was going on in my life, what actually happened in my head, my body, my actions, my feelings, my observations, my dreams, my fantasies. This constituted my own experiences as material to be worked up into knowledge. This procedure of giving expression to my daily concerns transformed the explicit aim of my sociological work:

I want to make a work of my life. Make sense of my life. Live sensibly. Sense things. Be sensitive. A sensate being. Feel. Do. Sense and make sense. I want my writing to make sense of me and to me.

I began the simple and dramatic step of building an understanding of the world by starting with myself.

Since the forms of expression and images available had come from outside the task became how to find new forms and where to look. The answer was to begin right here,

from my centre (in practice). Journal writing makes this new beginning. Writing of everyday work, events, feelings, passing ideas, practical problems meant forming expressions for my experience. Daily writing of "trivial" "domestic" "intimate" concerns began the new translation. The journal/diary form has been the basis for many women's writing. (Braid 1974, Chicago 1975, Lessing 1962, Moffat and Painter 1975, Rich 1976, Rush 1976, Nin 1975, Stevens 1970) Journal writing gives expression to precisely what is excluded from, taken for granted and rendered invisible in the ruling mode – concrete and particular embodiment.

In addition the journal form is ordinarily a private one – notes to myself. This is a space for women to be for ourselves, not for men, not for others who see us from the outside. It is by definition an insider's view, a form that requires the visible presence of the subject. If the subject's location is erased the organisation of the material is lost to the reader, since the organisation is the organisation of her life – her moving centre. In women's hands, then, journal writing can be a tool for reclaiming our annihilated subjectivity. My journal writing became a way for me to see myself as I had not been capable of before. With it I reflected upon my social activity.

I did not know at this point that by starting with myself I would land up with 'An Account of How Family Relations Construct a Woman.' In retrospect I can see that I headed out in this direction.

What I seek is how my writing work can serve the people, serve women, serve us in seeking change, in uncovering the organisation that determines our lives so that we can control it, in showing how the seeds of the new world lie in the womb of the old. What are these seeds in my life now? Learning to write my words; finding my voice; believing that what I have to say is valuable, insightful, important; paying attention to my passing thoughts; writing them down. How kin and family relations situate women in the world. How they work to determine other possibilities. How they are determined. How they change.

My concern with making sense of my own life and my interest in how family relations construct women were both present in this writing, but they were merely juxtaposed, the connections were not clear. During the bulk of the summer I could not envision the nature of my end product at all well. When friends asked what my work was about I was rendered singularly inarticulate. I knew I was doing it but I could not specify what 'it' was.

I had done sociological writing as a participant observer before. I had written about a small group's structuring of time on a two-week camping trip, analysed teacher-student



interaction at a Headstart program, and examined career conflicts experienced by female students at an elite private college. Each time I had located myself as a member of the social situation described. As a teacher of women's studies I had encouraged my students to write about the everyday lives of women – their grandmothers, mothers, themselves – and I had exerted myself to aid them in developing analytical tools appropriate to this inquiry. I knew being one's 'own best informant' (Michalko 1977: 16) to be a legitimate academic standpoint *and yet*, engaging directly in a method of work that started with myself was enormously difficult. I struggled continuously to orient myself to writing about myself as real work. The ruling ideology of our society knows the everyday activities of women as 'not real work.' The domestic labour and emotional support work that all women do is discounted as work because it is not wage labour, not directly organised by capital. The paid labour of women is organised into ghettos of service, support and maintenance work that allow it to be invisible and to be known as unskilled and unimportant. Our work giving concrete embodiment is treated by the head world as not worth thinking about. I confronted my own practice of the ruling mode against myself repeatedly as I questioned the validity of my work. This struggle appeared to me most vividly in a dream:\*

In a laundromat, I overhear two working class women complaining about earning so little – only sixteen dollars more than they would receive on welfare while raising their children. They are not only underpaid but have to spend their days off washing clothes. I am doing laundry too. One of my machines is not working. I try unsuccessfully to figure out why. General Eisenhower is present. He is contemptuous of our women's work and orders the broken machine to start up. It remains stopped.

In this dream I identify myself with working mothers. I portray my work of writing as washing clothes, a form of housework. I know this to be socially necessary labour though unpaid. But in the form of General Eisenhower\*\*, the embodiment of male authority, I rule over myself doing women's work. I am contemptuous of writing about my family relations, which amounts to washing my dirty clothes in a public laundromat. The contradiction was that I required clean clothes, and a new account of myself. My journal records the message of the dream in these words:

I can't order myself around like a general and refuse to see my women's work as work or I stop myself from writing.

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\*For a detailed explication of my method of dream translation, see pp. 40-43

\*\*The figure of Eisenhower represented ruling class male authority, through my father to me in this way: As a military man and a Republican my father respected Eisenhower enormously. During the 50's he visited my father's air base. As housing officer my father helped arrange for the President's quarters. For this work he received a silver dollar embossed with his name and the General's thanks. My father treasured this greatly.

My guideline for journal writing amounted to 'rule nothing out.' (Persky 1977: 158) I experimented with this tentatively as a means to stop the boxing of my life. Elbow suggests that the writer needs to learn to produce words prolifically. His means to this is 'freewriting' in which one writes without a break whatever words come to mind. (Elbow 1975) Whatever can be thought can be written. I began to do 'freewriting' as an exercise. And I did come to write prolifically — over 800 pages in four months. I regularly practiced writing whatever was on my mind and especially did so whenever I was stuck for something to write. Here is the opening of my first freewriting exercise.

I can't figure out the margin release and this typewriter skips and my fingers are too weak to type and my back hurts because I can't get close enough to the table the typewriter is on but at least I am writing for the first time since I got home and I'll get better at typing if I practice a lot.

This method of writing without stopping or censoring meant not crossing out words, mistakes, misspellings or half-formed sentences. My procedure was not to go back but simply to go on. Not eliminating "false starts" in this way made visible the entire process of articulation. I could see how I repeated attempts to become clear, to form clear statements. My efforts were on the paper as evidence of how I ordinarily worked up my thoughts into increasing coherence. Many of the journal quotes I present in this paper are repetitive. They show that I wrote words and concepts over several times in slightly variant forms to explore their meanings and modifications, to grow familiar with them, to gradually shape up my ideas.

I need to produce a text. I need to learn how by doing it, to work over ideas, words on paper, to work them over visually not just mentally. Yes, this is right — write. I don't have to keep myself from doing it, to convince myself I don't know how by not doing it. I want to act, to practice intellectual practice. It takes practice to write. Writing is a practice.\*

At the same time as freewriting made visible to me my practice at articulating, it allowed me to uncover the organisation of my thoughts and feelings. Giving up the practice of consciously pre-ordering my words made me expect chaotic results. Certainly the organisation of this writing was not evident to me as I first produced it. However, to my surprise, upon rereading I always found some kind of order, a thread that wove through changes of

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\*That I needed to develop my manual skill in typing through practice aided me in learning I could improve my intellectual skills by practicing at them.

topic, a circling back to a theme of sorts. About two months into this work I found the sense of this phenomenon.

The connections of the world don't have to be made artificially by me. Things, events beings ARE ALREADY CONNECTED. I need to explore, uncover, explicate, unfold their connections, their relations. I need to ALLOW MYSELF TO SEE THE REAL, ALREADY EXISTING CONNECTIONS.

(The poem "Changing", p. 25, embodies this realisation.) My need to write, my pregnancy, my pain with my lover, my father's dying, my interest in kinship were not disconnected events. They were organised by my life. My writing was a forming of my consciousness. The organisation of my consciousness was determined by (as well as being a constituent part of) the organisation of my life. (Marx & Engels 1974: 47) My life was not an unintelligible jumble. It was organised and organised within a social organisation. My writing, which was the translation into the forms of thought of my life, was likewise ordered and articulated to the social order. How the various pieces of my life that had previously appeared as fragments would come together in an account of constructing womanhood, was that they were actually connected in the material circumstances of my life and that I found a means to give them conscious expression. This means was to lay them out on paper. Language is practical consciousness.

The "facts" of my journal do not decay over time, laying them out on paper meant I could go back and keep reseeing them until they came together sensibly through my production of an interpretation of them. This developing interpretation also became documented as facts in my journal process. Carr (1961) refers to this dynamic in writing history:

... the more I write, the more I know what I am looking for, the better I understand the significance and relevance of what I find. (Carr 1961: 28)

The facts of my life history given in the account are worked up on the basis of my journal documentation and "No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought. ..." (Carr 1961: 16)

I identified feminist therapy as a source that could inform my writing. As I had seen it practiced, feminist therapy started with the everyday experience of women and moved

toward a knowing of how our oppression is individually practiced and socially constructed. In mid-summer I joined a women's emotional self-defence group that met weekly. I entered it with a desire to explore my relationship with my father. I had recently dreamed my brother David as my lover's son. Several days after the dream I realised that in it I equated my lover with my father. I wanted to unravel how I made this equivalence and its significance. In writing the similarities that came to mind, I began to trace how I repeated practices I learned in childhood with my father in relation to my lover. I used material uncovered in the group and in my dreams to aid me in my journey. I also arranged and lived with a collage of family photographs on my bedroom wall for most of the summer. They also served as material for my later account of family relations.\*

The injunctions I followed in my practice of womanhood told me to be this way and not to be that way. They insisted that as a woman I *was* certain things and *was not* others. These voices appeared to come from inside. I spoke them in my head to myself. The gestalt method recognizes this internal dialogue and renders it visible/speakable in the two-chair or two-pillow method. These voices and responses to them are separated and allowed expression. (Fagan and Shephard 1973) (Perls, Hefferline and Goodman 1951) (Stevens 1970) In using this method I played all the parts. Often one voice emerged as what someone else said to me. My work in this summer centred around unfolding my internalized dialogues with my father. I gradually learned how his voice represented to me the voice of ruling male authority. I began to articulate what I took as his non-verbal messages about who I was. One such message was "you are just a girl."

Here is an instance of my work in the therapy group on this discovery. After beating a pillow and yelling to my father, "see me, see me," the therapist asked how I experienced myself. I said, "My rage is helpless." She suggested, "Maybe he will never see you. If so,

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\*Several of these are described on p. 54 and reproduced on p. 55.

what will you tell him?" I then proceeded to list to him all the things he had missed by discounting me as "just a girl" and refusing to see my real accomplishments in the world. This was a turning point for me in knowing that I need not be invisible without my father's light shining on me. I did have a light of my own. I could practice self-validation.

By expressing the dialogue and playing it out I can resolve it anew. By identifying what and how my voices came in from outside, I can choose to credit or discredit certain ones. I can reflect on my construction of myself as a woman and work to reconstruct oppressive messages. (Wyckoff 1977, Ziegler 1978)

By giving social expression to my voices of ruling and being ruled over in a group with other women we could discover and recognize the shared patterns in our experience that had not been visible to us before. In this group I was particularly affected by seeing ten other competent successful women struggling to validate themselves in terms of their work. A number worked through conflicts with male lovers and fathers. This aided me in my growing vision of my family relations as sexual politics, as socially constructed relations of domination.

A piece of recognizing my old practice and grasping a new one came when I wrote about work another woman had done in relation to her lover and her father. As a child she had experienced her father's attention as smothering and pushed him away. He went too far away for too long and she was hurt by this loss. At one point in the work she lay on the mattress reaching up with both arms. The therapist said, "Who are you reaching for?" She said, "My father." The therapist said, "Call to him. Call him to come back." The woman reached but did not call. After another encouragement she cried out adamantly, "No, I won't." She repeated this several times, then moved back into her work about her lover. I saw her unwillingness to call out to her father being repeated in her current difficulty in asking for more closeness with her lover. The day after I witnessed this work I was triggered into recognizing its similarities to my own practice. The lack of social forms for the expression of our everyday experience comes into view most clearly as we begin to undo it by creating them. Consciousness raising, emotional self defence and other experientially grounded groups of women at once shatters and exposes our isolation from each other. We take a step outside our confines in the domestic world and our confines within language which excludes our women's experience by coming together and revealing the truth of our

lives with each other. In feminist therapy groups we not only work through emotional blocks but also think through these obstacles as social forms of women's oppression. We come to see our changes as both personal and political advances. (Freeman 1971, Smith and David 1975, David 1977, Rush 1973, Kimball 1976, William 1976)

When my father turned his love and attention to my brother I would not say, "come back, I'm hurting from your distance." I hid my pain in an attempt to be less vulnerable. I suddenly understood the practices that produced such defensive anger on my part. I stayed frozen to my father's attempts to give me affection ever again as protection against further betrayal and abandonment. And I saw how I was practicing this pattern with my lover. When he told me he was leaving town I believed he was punishing me for becoming pregnant as I believed my father stopped loving me because I was entering puberty. I turned my pain into anger and pushed my lover farther away. "Don't come back," I said. I wanted to spare myself further pain. But that was not the result of this practice. I knew this in witnessing the woman's therapy work. Refusing to express my feelings prolonged my vulnerability. Once I saw how this worked I wanted to stop doing it. I admitted to myself that I wanted my lover back and faced telling him. I did not have to lose my lover as I had lost my father.

I don't want to be smothered or abandoned. I don't want betrayal. I want to be loved for who I am, good and bad, strong and weak not because I am a good girl. I'm not going to be a good girl for him anymore. I'm going to be me. If he loves me in this way I will have found a treasure, if he doesn't I will go elsewhere but I don't want to be not myself out of fear he requires me to be good. I don't have to be good. I can be myself.

Being myself meant being a grown up woman with breasts, body hair and periods, one who became pregnant. I was not an androgyne, or "Daddy's good girl" any longer. And I was learning that this could be okay. The possibility of a new practice in relation to my pain appeared in another dream which I translated into this poem.

## I WANT TO BE TOUCHED

I join the circle  
prepared for the attack  
my knife well hidden  
as my fingers.  
I am game  
for the play  
for the fight  
for the hunt.  
When they are full of spirit  
the others close on me  
and I flash my metal eyes  
I cut them off  
by threatening my  
razor touch.  
But you challenge my defenses  
by leering back  
your own sharp sight.  
No. I won't duel.  
I will not be penetrated.  
You test me by shooting me  
and something clicks  
as the ball enters my head.  
My eyes dull.  
My fingers begin to feel  
each link of the chain  
binding me  
from and to you.  
I trace it back  
through the hole in the wall  
until I reach your finger  
and find you  
are touching my pain.  
Now, I'm letting you hold me  
and I'm not dead  
I am crying.

Not deadening myself to my pain allowed me new discoveries. Choosing to feel my feelings rather than to numb myself to them was very scary. Letting others in close brought with it the danger of being vulnerable. What drew me on was the excitement of reclaiming my denied desires and my conviction that feeling the links of the chain was a prelude to breaking the chains.

Dream work provided me with a whole set of images, metaphors, and reflexive meanings that greatly affected my writing. My dream work succeeded in birthing the process of generating social forms of expression for my direct experience. These forms began an alternative to the externally imposed ones and could enter a movement of women working to speak our lives to each other. My poems included in this thesis especially embody these new images. And the inclusion of poems in a sociological thesis is a step in creating new forms. I wrote poems as translations of dreams, communicable though still metaphors, work in words on the journey toward a sociological language from women's perspective.

I expected work on my dreams to be a source that informed my writing. I wished not to exclude any part of my life from my writing no matter how seemingly personal, individual and asocial. As my work progressed, in fact, I began to look especially to those areas of my experience which I had excluded from my intellectual work in the abstract-conceptual mode. I dimly intuited what is now quite clear — that precisely what I had severed off in ruling sociological work could give birth to an alternative. Before my crisis I had had vivid dreams predicting my pregnancy and my father's death. I had largely ignored or interpreted away these foreshadowings. After I lived them out I was amazed at my easy dismissal of obviously important messages to myself.

As a step towards undoing my willful "not knowing" what I in fact already knew in a dream form I started keeping a dream journal. I kept this one aspect of my writing in a separate notebook so that it could remain conveniently at my bedside. Upon waking I wrote each dream in this book before doing anything else. If I woke from a dream in the middle of the night I would turn on my light and scribble it down (this often helped me to return to sleep after vivid or frightening dreams). I wrote the dream in the present tense allowing myself a sense of re-entering it and relating it as it happened. I did not attempt to compose grammatically correct sentences. I put down the words as they came to me — often only half awake. I tried not to censor or discard isolated fragments or seemingly insignificant details. I attempted to delay any desires I had to interpret these dreams until after I had written them. I was often surprised at the wealth of detail that emerged in this manner of recording. Here is the text of one dream from my journal:



The tug boat is pulling away. It is very flat bottomed. It lies low in the water, overloaded. There are many, many people on this boat. Just across is another boat. Everyone is happy, positive. This is the beginning of a new way, a new life, a new social order. But Carl is very, very, sad. He has lost something. No one but me understands or is moved by his sorrow. There is a whirlpool. Carl dives in to try to retrieve what he has lost. He is under water. Then the little boy goes in. He has fair skin and hair and freckles. He's roundish. He takes a red floatboard and goes after Carl. I begin sobbing hysterically. I'm afraid neither will come back. I don't want there to be no more Smiths.

The simple creation of these texts occupied me for a while. I was fascinated by how my daily experiences and past were fragmented and rearranged in my dreams. Also, merely attending to my dreaming acted to increase my dreams and memory of them greatly. I was soon generating texts prolifically. This procedure revealed to me my already existing ability to author. Despite my exclusion from the concept of authoring, with no effort I created vivid forms of expression each night. I simply needed to write them down to render this visible. So my dreams were an alternate source to the social forms of thought generated external to my experience. But for them to become social forms of expression intelligible to me and others rather than opaque though intriguing stories they required translations or interpretations. They needed working up. (Fagan and Shephard 1973, Nin 1975, Rush 1973, Stevens 1970)

My first stage of work was to spell out my immediate associations with the dream images that were not fully explicit in the text. My initial response to this particular dream was to puzzle out the identities of the other figures. Carl Smith\* was a man I'd worked with years before – and the brother of my lover. My immediate sense was that Carl had gone under to retrieve his brother. The little boy of the dream was related to them somehow. When he followed them under there were “no more Smiths.” My sobbing then was for the loss of my lover, who was estranged from me at that time. This was the first meaning I read in the dream.

I engaged in a second stage of dream work once I invented an adaptation of the Gestalt principle that “you are every part of your dream.” (Fagan and Shephard 1973, Rush 1973,

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\*This name is fictitious.

Stevens 1970) I developed this form of dream work well after I began recording my dreams and before I witnessed Gestalt dream work in therapy groups. I worked from the text of my dream sentence by sentence, this time writing in the person of each object and character. I elaborated on who or what I was about in this shape. Making the dream self-reflexive in this way dramatically uncovered new meanings. The work that follows is lengthy and repetitive. Nonetheless I quote it in full to illustrate the entire process of work on the above dream.

I am a tug boat. I am a strong small boat with a big motor. I push or pull myself. I am pulling away. I am very flat bottomed. I am like a ferry. I ferry myself to another shore. I lie low in myself, the water. I am overloaded. I am many many people on myself. I am carrying myself as many many people. I am just across from myself. I am another boat. I am two boats just across from each other. I am happy, positive. I am in a good mood, excited at new beginnings. I am the beginning of a new way, a new life, a new social order. I am new and better. But in the midst of my joyousness I am very, very sad. I am Carl. I am my lover's brother. My lover is my brother. I have lost something. I have lost myself. I have lost my brother. No one but me understands myself. Only I am moved by my sorrow. Part of me is joyous and new. But part of me mourns the old. I am a whirlpool. I am circling water, pulling down, sucking under. I dive in to try to retrieve what I have lost. I follow my sorrow under my surface trying to bring up what I have lost, what parts of myself. I am under water. I am below my surface. I am not visible to me. Then I am a little boy. I follow myself under. I go into me. I dive into myself. I am fairhaired and skinned. I have freckles. I'm roundish. I am my own brother or child. I am related to myself through my lover. I take myself as a red float board and go after my sorrowing self. I want to help me. I want to rescue myself. I want to pull me to the surface. I want to keep myself afloat. I don't want to sink with my loss. I begin sobbing hysterically. I anticipate even greater loss. I think I can't bear to lose even more. I cry to see myself go under and then be driven to try hopelessly to bring myself back. I'm afraid neither parts of me will come back. I think I am gone for good, forever. I don't want me to go. I don't want to lose me as lover, brother and child. I don't want there to be no more Smiths. I don't want to lose my family. I don't want to lose my past. I don't want to let loose of my past. I am sad about moving on to a new order. I look back and under and cry for losing myself.

This procedure transformed the relations of the dream characters to each other into relations I practiced with myself. I am no longer moved by Carl's sorrow. I am moved by my own. This technique portrayed every action of the dream as my own. It made visible my authorship of the dream.

In this process of writing I again attempted to put aside desire for a full sense of the meaning of the dream. If I tried to force sense out of my dreams I became blind to disquieting meanings. I would not allow them to teach me. It was hard for me to take in the meaning of my dreams. They often spoke things I was more comfortable not hearing.

Entering and exploring each object or person in the dream in turn allowed me to discover its aspects and to be surprised, disturbed and enlightened.

After writing this dream work sentence by sentence I usually still lacked a sense of the whole. My third step was to read over this work thinking not of the dream but of the literal meaning of the sentences. I underlined ones that spoke to me as true. From the above work I extracted:

I am overloaded.

I am beginning a new way, a new life, a new social order.

Part of me mourns the old.

I follow my sorrow under the surface trying to bring up what parts of myself I have lost.

I cry to see myself driven to try hopelessly to bring myself back.

I don't want to lose my family.

I don't want to lose my past.

I am sad about moving on to a new order.

These statements build a fuller, deeper meaning of the dream. I was surprised to learn I mourned my losses at a time when my excitement at working in a new way and releasing myself from old painful practices was high.

I did not recount the specific autobiographical events that were instances of my family relations until I actually wrote a draft of the account. (The drafts were distinguished from the work that preceded them in that I kept them separated from my daily journal). However, my ability to recall this detail and to organise it into that particular account was predicated on the recognition and acceptance of the losses that this dream spoke of. The dream work revealed that "no more Smith's" meant to me "no more family." The message of this dream entered into my account of family relations in my explication of losses: I lived apart from my natal family and reaffirmed my choice not to enter another by terminating my pregnancy; I lost my father's love for being "just a girl," and then I lost my respect for his patriarchal authority; I lose a close relation with my brother by being divided from him by the practices of gender; I lost many of my own abilities through recognition of gender-specific limitations; I lost touch with my female body through careful management techniques; I lost closeness and solidarity with my mother and sisters by our practices of silence. I accomplished moving from the emotional learning of the dream to accounting the ground of such emotions as practices by continuing to write in the method I have described.

My further journal writing revealed yet another message of the dream. I had this dream on the day I discovered I was pregnant a second time. I knew this from reading my body without the confirmation of a medical opinion and I did not doubt it. Since by that time I had spent three months learning from my lived experience my first response to this unwanted pregnancy was to ask what I could learn from it.

Why am I being pregnant now? What is the purpose to me in my life right now? What struggle have I mapped out for myself? . . . This could be a chance to deal with unresolved things from the past. . . . I want to lie down and have the meaning of all this come to me in an important dream message.

The above dream appeared as my answer. How being pregnant was connected with sorrow for my losses remained obscure to me until I related my question and the dream to a friend. We discussed my dream work and she said, "But Cindy, you are forgetting that the little boy you have lost is yourself. You certainly can't be your daddy's little boy if you are pregnant." Then, by noticing that all my losses were of male personas, I was able to read meaning in the dream's answer. Pregnancy was my struggle to give up trying to be a man, trying to deny my female embodiment, trying to suspend my sex and enter the conceptual mode on male terms. In developing a new way of life, a new method of work, I was letting go of being Carl, my lover, a little boy, my brother, my daddy. I did not have to continue the practice of trying to be loved by men as the magic little boy "David" at the expense of my woman's body. I was beginning a new way of living as Cindy, a grown-up woman and a new way of work from the standpoint of women. I wrote this poem shortly before I produced the account.

### Déjà Vu

the second pregnancy  
the second abortion  
the second failure of statistically safe birth control  
the second growth away from my head

my body has a mind of her own  
with which she re-minds me,  
just as I try to live in the moment,  
at each point on the circle,  
this very second,  
I am not only now  
but again

I was circled back to the place of my beginning. I was again pregnant, facing an

abortion, knowing that my father was far away and growing close to death. Only this time such encounters with the body and the boundaries of life did not immobilize me in my work. They no longer discredited me from pursuing the life of the mind. My focus on my embodiment re-minded me of this as the source of my generation of words.

How much I still want to forget my female body. How much I still want menstruation to be odourless, stainless, crampless, hassle-free, invisible, as close to non-existent as possible – except, of course, I want it to tell me with relief that I'm not pregnant which is worse undeniability of my body. Un – not. Deni – deny. Ability – ability. Not able to deny my ability. Pregnancy as ability?!

The practice of starting in a new place, starting with myself, starting as a woman required starting again, this time from my body.

I suddenly remember I am still bleeding from my cunt. I go to put in a tampon. Is there a unique women's art if all culture has been male-defined? I think of tampon art with menstrual blood as paint. Women's art begins in our very bodies.

My integration of concrete embodiments in my head work allowed me to write from my body rather than against her. I wrote the drafts of my account of family relations while pregnant. My bodily awareness at this time stimulated me particularly in accounting for my practices during puberty.

Uncovering how bodily experiences had been managed so as to remain inarticulate meant speaking the unspeakable. In exploring the lack of a language adequate to express my woman's body I worked at producing one.

I am a new body discovered not as Other, as foreign, abnormal, shameful and dangerous but as my own, myself, my being, my feeling, my power. My breasts are lovely. My orgasms are magic, my genitals a beautiful flower. My fluids smell so good, taste delicious. My menstrual blood does not scare me. My cunt is not unknown. It is a wonder, soft, strong, warm, dark and comfortable. In the guided fantasy I explored my femaleness. I travelled through my vagina and cervix, gazed into my womb, tentatively looking into all my dark corners, feeling myself where I had been taught to have no feeling, where I had been taught to deny myself. Now, I have hair where hair grows – on my chin, nipples, stomach, crotch, underarms, legs. I am beautifully lush. I love my soft and curly locks. I like the feel of my hair, I like my look too.

Writing from the standpoint of insider to my body allowed an account of my previous distance and denial at the same time as it transformed this relationship. I could not see my body or myself as an object when I fully entered my bodily activity as the doer. I wrote in full sentences and stopped eliminating the subject. I carefully avoided disappearing my activity through the passive voice or the personless "one." I often wrote in the present

tense to emphasize the immediacy of my activity. I authored arrays of sentences all beginning with "I want. . . .," "I need. . . .," "I resent. . . ." I swam and I walked and I jogged. I went to the women's sauna as often as five times a week. There I attended to the bodily practices of other women. I noticed who wore swim suits, who wore towels, who went naked, how they sat and moved and looked and didn't look at each other's bodies. I practiced being visible to them naked, sweating, hairy, lumpy, imperfect and myself. And I wrote about what I saw and did. In doing so I was breaking the rules which require female bodies to be socially inexpressible, mute and unnamed. I was breaking the rules for producing an objective observer with a bird's eye view suspended from his concrete bodily location and concerns in that place. I was breaking the tacit annihilation of women's subjectivity. By standing inside my writing as the subject, by standing inside my activity as the agent, by allowing others to see me as I saw myself, I replaced the practices of self-denial that made me nobody with ones that constructed me as some-body.

In my account of relations constructing womanhood I moved from my discovery of myself as "just a girl" to my practices of bodily management in puberty. I built my understanding of this linkage on my uncovering of my mother's part in constructing the meaning of womanhood to me. How I came to focus on her relation to me was by noticing its absence in my writing. I read Judy Collins' autobiography (1969) and commented:

I am touched. I notice her devotion to her father. I notice how she takes her mother for granted, a backdrop figure, though she dedicates the book to her. I think of my own writing. Where is there any living presence of my mother?

Again, I took my observations of another woman's practice and compared them to my own. Again, I noticed our similarities. I made visible what I had previously taken for granted. I was treating my relation with my mother as less important than mine with my father. Once I knew this I could ask how I learned this practice and account for it in working up Chapter III. In my journal I broke the silence. I stopped taking my mother for granted and wrote about her. I wrote whatever images and memories emerged. I reread this passage several times until I came to see its organisation. I wrote about my mother's appearance, her clothes, about my visual and textured memories of her.

You were my strongest image of beauty, style and elegance.

I recalled the special ways she fed me and cared for me when ill. The theme of the entire three page passage was her association with and attention to the bodily needs of our family.

You taught me how to make cookies and spaghetti and lasagna. You typed Dad's

menus and my papers. You kept all the appointments straight and drove me to the orthodontist. You never spoke to me about our woman bodies and I learned my shame from you. When I caught you naked you covered your breasts. You embarrassed me by not shaving your legs scrupulously enough and then I shocked and offended you by letting my own hair grow out all over. You minister all our lives to our pee and shit and vomit and dirt and blood and disease and yet you cover up and keep this our oh too fleshly level sunk below the surface as it should be. You attend to practical details every day of your life. You are the true daughter of a Dutch farm wife.

My analysis of this writing allowed my awareness of my mother's practices of embodiment work and of her management which accomplished its invisibility. From this new awareness I went on to uncover her impact on my own practices. I did this in the writing of the account.

How my method of work allowed me to make visible my family relations as practices of class relations is difficult for me to explicate. A concern for class relations and ruling class practices did thread through my writing of the summer. Most of the time, however, these passages were merely juxtaposed to ones about my family. That I knew class and family go together in this social organisation and that I could not articulate how was consciously a problem for me. The ruling mode of sociology I had been trained in did not equip me to see as a whole a social organisation that creates a gulf between domestic arrangements and the relations of public production. I read and reread Dorothy Smith's work in this regard. Perhaps I was blocked by trying to force connections rather than uncovering them. The location of my family practices in the class structuring of society became obvious only as I wrote the account of family relations. This came together as soon as I focused on my father's position as a military officer. I then understood his work to be issuing orders for others to carry out, and could see the contrast to my mother's work of embodiment upon which he depended. Coming to understand class as relations of domination between real active individuals rather than as a set of categories for labelling is work contrary to the abstract-conceptual mode. Perceiving class relations starting from the standpoint of women is a work barely begun. To reiterate the opening of this chapter: In writing from women's perspective, "we are creating a new approach to understanding the world. This cannot be done without difficulty." (Jacobson 1977: 11).

I have aimed in this chapter to make available my method of work in producing the account. I have been explicit about how I came to know the practices of family relations that constructed me as a woman. I have also shown how the work of accounting for those practices provides for an undoing of them, for a reconstruction. I have made visible how

the organisation of my account reflected and translated the organisation of my life at the time of writing it. To summarize: the account is structured roughly chronologically. I discovered and worked up its insights in approximately parallel sequence. That I made the rupture between my intellectual work and my encounters with anatomy problematic allowed me to make problematic how I became divided against myself growing up in my family. The eruptions of female bodily existence into visibility that crippled me as a practitioner in the head world set the stage for my account of those that discredited me as a neuter androgyne. The focus on my relationship with my father came from the material condition that it was about to culminate in his death. It also came from his centrality in the drama of my practice of female subordination. He had the visibility that I wanted in public. He had the means to express himself which I lacked. The externally imposed authoritative versions of the world he presented were what I attempted and failed to fully enter as an exceptional woman practicing the abstract mode of sociology while suspending my sex. The struggle to be seen and heard from where I am as a woman is the project of this thesis. The appearances in my past of my invisibility and enforced silence are what I organised my account around. Accounting for my past subordination and for my method of making this account has required a redefinition of mental work such that I can reclaim it without severing myself from my womanhood.

The insistent "thereness" of my woman's body in yet another pregnancy proved the test of my method of work. With it I relinquished my attempt to think from somewhere outside my female body. I practiced instead thinking through the body. I strove to convert my embodiment into both knowledge and power. (Rich 1976: 290-1) Writing from woman's perspective, from my own standpoint as a woman authorised and gave expression to my own experience. Writing from the actual setting of my everyday life reconnected my physical grounding and articulate knowledge. Writing from my embodiment as a woman reowned and made visible my womanly body. Each of these presented my private and domestic experience as aspects of social relations of authority and ruling. In so doing they trace over the broken ground of public and private domains, diminish my confinement within the domestic and my subordination as a woman. I have both employed and explicated these practices of writing in this chapter. The method that allows me to account for my previous construction of womanhood has now served as the basis of an account of my reconstruction.



### CHAPTER III

#### AN ACCOUNT OF HOW FAMILY RELATIONS CONSTRUCT A WOMAN

A specific condition of my discovery of my practices in family relations is my present distance from them. I do not live everyday life in a family or in any setting resembling one. I live alone. My parents, sisters and brother live 4000 miles away and maintain close relations with each other. I left my parents' home nine years ago and have visited irregularly – at most once or twice a year for a week or two. My life here appears far removed from them. And yet, I discover my practices with them continue to underlie my practice of daily personal relations. I left my family but they have not left me.

Both of my parents grew up on small dairy farms during the 1920's and 30's. They met during the Second World War when my father was in officer training school. Soon after, they married, and my father was shipped overseas. My mother continued to do office work while he was away. On his return, they moved near his relatives and began having children. After a few years of trouble finding steady work, my father returned to the Air

Force. My two older sisters and I were brought up on military bases in various locations. Following twenty years in the service, my father worked as a life insurance salesman and country club manager. My mother worked at home and not for pay after her first daughter was born. The setting of my account is the transient, military, upwardly mobile, white, Protestant, middle-class suburban America of the 1950's and 60's.

I first learned how to relate to ruling authority in relation to my father. My father was the first male authority who took the power to define me and my world. He held the authorized version of reality. He represented to me in the family the awesome power of the real world. He worked there. He moved in that world with comfort and ease, as if he belonged. He literally wore its uniform. He knew how it was and he told me. I knew only through him.

Without him my world was limited. Alone, I moved in space bounded by my house, school and the homes of others. With my mother I could gain entrance to church, stores, the movies and the library – but we entered as polite users, customers. We went these places not by right, we were allowed in by those who ran them. The year my father was stationed away from us my life was circumscribed in this domestic sphere.

Only in my father's presence did I move through the important world where decisions were made, men worked and things got done. On his arm I could enter the officers' club, the mess hall, the housing office. By following him I could see where food was ordered and delivered, troops were fed, men were housed, papers were signed. In this world other men treated him with deference – called him "sir," smiled, saluted – and did what he told them to do. When I was with him this aura of authority spread to me, I stood in its glow. These same men smiled at me, wanted to please me and kept a respectful distance – all because I was his daughter. They acknowledged me because he presented me to them. "Bob, this is my little girl, Cindy." He spoke for me. I was who he said I was. When he introduced me as smart, good, loved, the baby, I was recognized as such by the world that mattered. But I could not appropriate his authority to myself. If I said, "Hello sergeant, I'm Cindy," I was ignored or told not to interrupt. I could not speak for or present myself.

My father carried this legitimate power with him into the family. At home he had a guaranteed right to express himself. He took all the family photographs. These images of my childhood were made by him. They show my past through his eyes. I learned to be the

object he saw, to stand still and say "cheese." My father also produced family entertainment: slide shows with commentaries, and stories of his travels and his buddies. My mother, sisters and I looked and listened. We became his audience. My father also practiced cooking as a form of self-expression. Unlike my mother, he did not prepare food as an offering to please or satisfy us. He cooked what he liked. He was a gourmet. Although he did not need my approval of his dishes, he did expect my admiration. Here again I came to act as his audience. And when he touched me I became the object of his affection. When he wished to express his needs by cuddling me I dared not refuse, even when I felt belittled by his babying me. He could say and do what he wished. I could only say or do what would not cross him. If I asserted myself against him too forcefully I was spanked. But for the most part I gave way easily. My father was secure in his authority and took his place over the rest of us for granted. He was friendly and jocular with us just as he was to the men under his command.

I came to see my father as the sun, possessed of inner light and heat which he shined on the rest of us. My sisters and I, like planets, revolved round him and glowed only with reflected light. My mother complemented him by being the moon, revolving around us and reflecting his light onto us at another angle. His money was the source of life to us; he appeared as the source of power upon which we all depended.

He said he loved all "his girls," and I knew I had a special place in his universe. I was his darling, his baby, his littlest girl. I remember the treasures he sent from Japan — a pearl ring, silk pajamas, ivory chopsticks. He gave off what I needed and more. Because I stood firmly in my father's light, I flourished, I grew up as a favoured child. I got straight A's. I was the best swimmer. My classmates elected me to the part of Snow White. The teacher picked me to be the captain of the boy-and-girl soccer team. I was neither surprised nor puffed up about receiving these honours. I took them as my due. My daddy loved me and all good things came to me.

I learned in these ways to honour ruling male authority and to deny my own. I wanted to be good for Daddy, to please him, to be the apple of his eye. I learned to exist on his terms, not on my own. I became the object to his subject. I came to be seen rather than to see, to listen rather than to speak, to be loved rather than to love. I knew my stature in the world to be dependent on my father. I situated myself always in relation to him. I consented to my own silence. I participated in my own oppression, and I did so willingly.

While securely under the patronage of my father, I did well in the world. I was content with the benefits I drew from being Daddy's girl. I did not challenge these relations of domination.

But although I knew how to act as a woman in relation to authority, I did not yet act a woman in being half my human potential. I did not know myself to have gender specific limitations. I was not yet merely the complement of a male. At four I had a fist fight with the neighbour boy and also played dress up in my mother's clothes. At five I played with both guns and dolls. At seven I became Snow White and soccer captain. My father called me by boys' names sometimes. I was still an androgyne to myself. I felt I could do almost anything. I intended to go to Princeton University and become a great astronomer. I did not perceive my fate in female terms.

When I was ten years old all this changed. We moved to a new base, my body grew lumpy and bumpy, and my brother was born. All of a sudden I was no longer Daddy's baby, his darling, the favoured one, the androgyne. I was just a girl. David, the new baby, was the one with the special place. This new child was not called "our baby" as I had been; he was called "the boy". Only with his arrival did I fully experience myself as not-male. Only by comparison did I realize I could never be fully in the male glory.

I experienced myself as abandoned. My father's light no longer shined on me. I stood in darkness. Believing I had no light of my own, I became invisible. For five years almost all of the pictures my father took were of "the boy". I could no longer tolerate the slide shows which posed as entertainment the daily chorus of "look at your brother." I wanted to be the object my father viewed but I had been displaced. For those years as well, I did not enter my father's world of work (I re-entered when I became old enough to be his secretary.) Only as the favoured object of a man could I appear for the offices of ruling. My father no longer presented me to those strange men for recognition. His attention was focused on his son.

I believed I was being cruelly betrayed. Not only was I just a girl, I had always been and never known it. I had thought myself an androgyne but the others had always known better. My parents had been waiting for "the boy" for a long time. I had only been a temporary and inadequate substitute. I discovered that when my mother went to the hospital to give birth to me my sisters had been told "We're going to the hospital to bring home David." When they came back with me instead, my sisters had to be stopped from calling

me his name. They always knew I had been an accident. I also learned the reason I had no middle name was that my parents "hadn't had time to think one up." As further evidence that I was the wrong baby I figured out that I was the only child not named for friends or relatives. Now when my father called me Sam or Fred or Pete I knew it to be because he did not want me to be who I was. I had been fooled for ten years and now the jig was up. I now thought "I was never good enough."

Since I no longer stood in my father's aura, I lacked confidence and became timid. I was no longer the favoured one. I still got straight A's but this brought me no honour. My classmates called me "stuck-up" and "the brain". I was elected to nothing. I lost my ability at sports. I sat and watched the others practice cheerleading. A friend let me know that I could never go to Princeton University, that they did not let in girls. Knowing myself as female narrowed my world.

I believed I was being punished for growing up into a woman. From age ten on I could no longer even pretend to be the baby, the androgyne – my body was becoming recognizably feminine. I had my first period at eleven and was fully developed to my present weight and height before I was thirteen. My father's refusal to see me came not merely because my brother was better but because I was worse. I was no longer the baby he had loved, I was a grown up woman whom he would not love.

My relation to my brother was complicated. Although he appeared as the agent of my downfall, I held myself responsible as well. For this reason I did not allow myself to hate him openly. Although I resented the existence of the male glory I did not want to admit I had not known I had lacked it until my body betrayed me. I did not want to look foolish or vulnerable. I withdrew into my hurt. I was expected to babysit him frequently. I was divided in my feeling while taking care of this boy baby. Sometimes I slyly teased and punished him, sometimes I tried to throw myself into the acceptable female behavior and act "the good little mother". When others were around I tried to be near David so that the light cast his direction would fall on me. I would stand near my brother in order to get in the picture my father was taking of him. I was thrilled when the first word the boy spoke was a corruption of my name. I learned that the way to compensate for my lack of inner value was to relate myself to a male and draw visibility through this association. I learned to exist for men.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

I used snapshots such as these as evidence in my reconstruction. I re-collected that my father took these photographs. They present me as I was for him at moments throughout the time period of the account.

1. Age 7, I am on the left next to my sister who looks away. I have just won an honour at Brownie camp as “the favoured one.” I pose here as “Daddy’s good girl.”
2. On my tenth birthday I am the athletic androgyne.
3. Seventeen months later I am “just a girl” in the background to my baby brother who is the focus for my mother’s and father’s attention.
4. I get into the picture by playing “the good little mother” and associating myself with “the boy.”



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In addition, getting rid of my brother did not seem a solution to my betrayal and abandonment. Nothing would undo the terrible knowledge that I had never been and would never be completely loved because I was flawed, I was female. I saw my father as the one with all the power in this process. He was the one to whom I was not good enough. He was the one who wanted a son. His authority appeared to me in a new light — it was no longer benevolent and I began to resent it. I grew critical of the way the family existed for him. I noticed he ordered us about our chores without doing any himself. I bristled at his commands. When he expressed affection for me I was frigid. I did not want to need to be loved. I did not wish to be his object. We started having explosive fights but I was not safe in expressing anger at him. I flared up and then retreated to my room behind a closed door. In trying not to risk or lose I locked myself in, both physically and emotionally. My resistance to his male authority was purely defensive. I could never hope to challenge it and win. I could imagine no authority of my own to counterpose. My father was uncomprehending of our skirmishes. He clearly saw himself only as the benevolent executor of legitimate power. He knew not what I had to defend myself against.

As my brother grew past infancy I began to perceive him as also subject to my father's authority. I saw his position as the favoured one to have certain weaknesses. He was a thin child quite susceptible to colds, hay fever and ear aches. He was going to have trouble being the he-man my father wanted. I began to see that the real David wasn't the magical David my father had so long awaited. I secretly predicted a fall from grace similar to my own. Of course, this gave me consolation that I was not uniquely flawed, and allowed me to be sympathetic to my brother's suffering. So while my resentment of his male privilege didn't dissolve, I buried it beneath layers of understanding for his common oppression. When he grew older and tormented me about not being feminine by saying I had a mustache and calling me "Braces," I responded with embarrassment and irritation. I didn't feel legitimate in attacking him openly for his participation in the male order.

I present my mother's part so far as a back drop. Her love did not carry the weight of authority my father's did. In my world she did not have the light to shine on me. Her caring for me was more constant and less noticeable. I came to take it for granted and did not fear its loss. Since she did not have the same right to self-expression that my father had, she spoke her pride, affection or displeasure with me less fully. She talked to me about my behavior but she did not present me to others. I learned to treat her words as less important.

Nevertheless in relation to my mother I learned practices essential to my becoming a



woman. She practiced the lack of authority in relation to my father I was learning. And I knew from her manner that women as well as girls must hold themselves in in order to respect men's right to express themselves. Most importantly, my mother showed me how to manage bodily existence in such a way that it could be disattended. She did this daily for my father so he was able to enter the head world and become absorbed in the conceptual mode as a manager of words. She taught me how to accomplish this split between the head and body in relation to myself as well.

Soon after I discovered I was just a girl, my mother put a booklet by Kotex Co. at the bottom of my underwear in the drawer, carefully hidden where I would find it. I read it, as I read everything. Then one morning I showed her my bloody pajama bottoms. She washed the spot on the sheet and showed me where the sanitary napkins were kept. She said virtually nothing and I took this to mean that something unspeakable was happening to me. The napkin boxes reappeared without an agent just as the bleeding did. I sensed strongly I could not ask about any of this. I read the word menstruation in the booklet but never heard it pronounced. Things existed in material form – paper, print, pads, blood – but they were not spoken. I learned about tampons from appealing advertisements, but I learned from my mother's silence not to ask her to buy some. I only inferred years later that the reason they were forbidden was that their use required a conscious familiarity with the vagina.

My breasts developed soon after I was ten. Several girls in sixth grade were wearing training bras and my breasts were larger than theirs but mine jiggled unbound. I was ashamed. I kept trying to dress so my breasts would not be visible. I looked forward with dread to seventh grade gym class and daily exposure in the locker room. I could not raise the courage to ask my mother to dress me properly. Then one day while shopping, my mother handed me a packaged bra and told me to go in the changing room. I came back and told her it fit and she bought several. She put me out of my misery as wordlessly as I had suffered it.

I began to worry about my spreading stiff black body hair. I found it shocking and ugly. Summer came and I wanted to wear a sleeveless blouse to the sixth grade picnic. I cut the hair under my arms as closely as I could with cuticle scissors. It was still thick

and dark and visible. I tried to keep my arms pressed to my body all during the picnic. The next day I locked myself in the bathroom and experimented with my father's razor. I didn't draw very much blood. The following day I scraped off my legs, too. No one said anything or seemed to notice. Maybe I was going to be allowed to remove my shame without putting words to it. About a week later my mother handed me a razor she'd bought and said I could use it.

My mother controlled my access to consumption almost totally. I had not money of my own and no ability to get to stores without her. Even if I had, I could no more ask for the unspeakable to clerks than to her. By this means my mother re-enforced her practices towards women's bodies onto me.

My encounters with my anatomy during puberty taught me how to construct womanhood physically. I learned how to act as if the parts of me that gave out insistent messages were not there by carefully hiding my female functions. I avoided tight skirts that might reveal the outline of a menstrual pad, changed pads frequently to prevent stains and "telltale" odour, wore a bra and girdle to restrain my bouncing flesh and shaved every day so my legs might appear to grow hairless. And I learned to accomplish these things in silence. My vagina, menstrual blood, breasts and body hair were not named or spoken. Their existence below the level of language meant that I experienced them while lacking the means to give them social expression. I sensed what could not be said. My rites of passage through puberty were silence and isolation.

My sisters seem curiously absent from these processes of my learning how to do womanhood. Since they were older, you might suspect they would act as models for my growing but they do not come to mind as such. Their presence did not ease the punishment of puberty for me. The drama in which I learned how to manage my bodily functions was played out between me and my mother. I do not recollect ever talking with either of them about periods of bras or body hair. We respected the boundaries between the spoken and the unspoken we had each learned separately from my mother. We hid ourselves from each other just as we hid them from the world. I practiced in relation to them the separateness from others with common fates that is so characteristic of women in our society. We learned to endure similar oppressions quite alone while side by side. There was some silent eye contact that implied understanding of resentment and resistance to father's authority, but we never openly expressed this to each other. We had no language with

which to articulate our bonds.

My practice of growing up situated me firmly in the bifurcated world divided by class and sex. Its split was mirrored in my family between my father and my mother. My father appeared as the agent representing the ruling apparatus that governs through the abstract-conceptual mode. My mother's attention to his bodily needs maintained him in this relation. She acted as his subordinate. I learned in relation to them how to deny the authority of my own experience, how to know myself as inferior because female, how to hide and despise my womanly body and how to cut off my physical grounding from social expression. These practices divided me from my sisters and brother. They also divided me against myself. I could think like a man, pursuing math and science and high grades, while I neutralized my woman's body with careful management. I internalized the split between mental and embodied production in corporate capitalist society by ruling my female body with my "male" head. I actively enforced my own passivity. I asserted my own agency in denying my own voice. I lived out the contradiction of our society in which "the harder . . . [one] works the more she strengthens the order which oppresses her." (Smith 1974a: 10) I want to undo this method of opposing myself. I want to stop co-operating with the authorities ruling over and against myself. I require a social transformation to accomplish this, and breaking through the silence imposed on me by giving social expression to my experience is one step.

## Wallflower

Here I sit,  
waiting to be asked,  
so accustomed to  
pretending I'm not waiting  
I'm astonished to discover  
I'm doing it again.  
I mean, I thought  
I'd abandoned  
that paralysing feminine passivity  
when I started pursuing  
first men, then women,  
but here I am,  
after all,  
still the same girl  
who sat on the bleachers  
at the sock hop  
trying to look cool  
while repressing my burning passion  
to dance wildly,  
only this time,  
I'm not waiting for  
that socially required  
but faceless male partner,  
this time,  
I'm waiting for you, my sisters.  
I want you to hear me and see me.  
I long to cry out to you  
with my pain and my strength.  
And no matter how hard I try,  
I can no longer keep myself from knowing  
I want to touch you  
with my voice  
and I don't want  
to sit here  
waiting to be asked.

## CONCLUSION

Accounts are socially constructed and they are organised by the conditions of producing them. The organisation of this account reflects and translates the organisation of my life at the time of producing it. The method I have used to produce a descriptive account of my construction of womanhood also exemplifies an alternative construction. In accounting for my ruling construction of womanhood I accomplish an undoing that reconstructs myself. This is a change in practice, a shift in my method of work, an altered form of mental production. At its centre is a relocation from practicing myself as an object to standing inside myself as a subject.

I started this inquiry with what was problematic in my life. I began with the rupture between my intellectual work as a sociologist and my encounters with anatomy in pregnancy. This called into question how bodily experience of femaleness is translated and articulated by social forms of thought and expression and allowed me to make problematic earlier social relations in which I learned a division between silent womanhood and articulated learning. The rupture gave definition to the split between experience grounded in my physical female being not yet mediated by words and social forms of words and images provided for me by others who are (ruling class) men.

A social order based on women's oppression annihilates our subjectivity, disentitles us from the authority to generate statements and enforces our silence. In this order of things we are treated as objects and excluded as subjects by virtue of our womanhood. Its forms of expression see us from the outside. As women we practice a nihilistic relation to our own consciousness. We see ourselves through men's eyes and speak ourselves in their words and voices. The source that is built into the forms of expression socially available to us as women is the consciousness of ruling class men. My father, the military officer, was a source of this consciousness for me. My father spoke for me in presenting me as a girl recognizable to others. I gained visibility on his terms, as an object for him. The recorded images of my past capture me as I stood for him in front of his photographic lens. My father's income from and membership in the ruling apparatus appeared as my source of life and light. I became an object for him by being seen rather than seeing, listening rather than speaking, being loved rather than loving.

I willingly subordinated myself when I saw my choices confined to existing for men or becoming totally invisible. I longed to appear through men's eyes rather than to stand in darkness. I learned with my father and brother that the way to compensate for my lack of inner value was to relate myself to a male and draw visibility through this association – to bask in reflected glow. Once I lost my position as the favoured object of a man I resented my need to be loved by a father or a male lover. I began to challenge these relations of domination only as I worked out the alternative possibility of acting for myself. Instead of being a good girl for men I decided to be myself. By practicing self validation I could act as a subject for myself and cease being the object of men's desires.

My mother's work of embodiment upon which my father depended contrasts to his work issuing orders for others to carry out. Writing of my mother's association with and attention to the bodily needs of our family led to me an analysis of her embodiment work and practices which accomplished its invisibility and taken for granted character. My mother exemplified to me the practices of managing bodily existence so that this work could be disattended. She accomplished this embodiment work and its silence daily for my father so that he could enter the head world and become absorbed in the abstract-conceptual mode as a manager of words. I learned through my mother and my father how to accomplish this split between body and head in relation to myself as well.

Ruling practices require that I manage my female functions so as to render them invisible because our women's bodies discredit and disqualify us for positions in the head world of ruling. Suspending my sex meant denying my body and entering the ruling mode on male terms. The alternative of beginning from the experience of women means struggling through our contempt for women's work. It required me to undo my belief that my own work was not worth seeing and not real work. Writing at home in the midst of my women's work in the home integrated physically and temporally my mental and manual labours. My everyday women's work of embodiment entered the realm of mental production by my articulation of it in my journal.

The alternative also exposes and reverses the contempt for women's bodies I learned in the ruling mode. By writing from the standpoint of insider to my body I account for my previous distance and denial and transform this relation to my physical being. I cease

treating my body as an object when I fully enter my bodily activity as the doer. Allowing my immediate experience in the body translation into words accomplished my experiencing pregnancy as creative ability and my knowing my body as the physical grounding for generation of words, for my authorship. Moving and seeing from inside myself in daily practice is reflected in practical consciousness by constructing myself as the subject of sentences. By standing inside my activity as the agent, by standing inside my writing as the subject, by allowing others to know me as I know myself, I reclaim my power to be some-body.

The abstract-conceptual mode accomplishes disembodied ruling through words. The ways of knowing myself I learned in family relations and continued in university were practices of this ideological mode. They work ruling over and against myself. By rising above subjectivities, cutting off the local and particular, and suspending embodiment, the abstract mode severs the provision of its own conditions of existence. The link is broken when the knower and her location are cancelled in relation to the object of her knowledge. This mode's procedures of objectivity construct an overtly neutral universality which in fact takes for granted my disappearance as a subject. It assumes men and excludes women. By using procedures of detachment we do not study womanhood from unlocated and sexless places. We merely render invisible our real locations by sex and class. In this work I drop such attempts to erase myself as the knower. In the alternative mode of writing from women's perspective I begin from inside myself, my experience, my body and my social location as a woman. My silence is the suppression of my work in the body as visible/speakable/knowable. By beginning from my embodiment I account for myself and my practice of the abstract mode because my physical work provides for the conditions of the abstract mode. I make visible in my work of reconstructing womanhood the conditions of its existence. The validity and impact of my reconstruction rest on this work's success of making available, accountable and observable my concrete location in social relations and on the possibility of seeing from there how the differing locations of others organise their experience differently.

Language is practical consciousness. Ideas come from everyday life. Everyday life is socially organised prior to its expression in a conceptual framework or as sociological concepts. I reveal through journal writing that I accomplish sense and order in my social

relations with myself and others prior to writing about them. I demonstrate that the organisation of real life can be discovered. It does not wait to be conceptually imposed. I stopped disconnecting my intimate thoughts from my intellectual notions by writing them all in one place. In so doing I constituted my experience as material to be worked up into knowledge. Following this method meant not foreseeing clearly where it would take me and continuing to work without an externally determined goal. This allowed me to discover the connections of my experience and ideas rather than stuffing my experience into conceptual boxes fashioned elsewhere for the purposes of others. My freewriting journal procedure made visible my practice at articulating. It allowed me to uncover the organisation of my thoughts and feelings by laying them out on paper. This method of writing translated the immediacies of my experience into social forms of thought.

In sum, the ruling construction of womanhood I used in family relations and in academic relations constituted me as an object for others. In the abstract ruling mode I acted to deny the authority of my own experience, hide and despise my womanly body, to cut off my physical grounding from my conscious knowledge, to know myself as inferior because female. These practices split my life in two by a work of opposing myself. I actively enforced my own passivity. I lived my life for others. I asserted my own agency in denying my voice. I thought and spoke against my body. I used my power against myself. The resolution to this contradiction grows in the reconstruction I undertake here. Herein I begin from my experience as a woman. I claim the authority to speak for myself. I reown, make visible and love my woman's body. I translate my physical grounding into knowledge and power. By thinking through not against the body I let my light shine out. I reconstruct womanhood by using my power of seeing, knowing, acting and speaking for myself.

I close by returning to womanhood as individually experienced and socially constructed. A feature of the social subordination of women is our isolation from others with common fates which I practiced with my sisters. We endured similar oppressions quite alone while side by side because we lacked the means of expression to articulate our bonds. By speaking what could not be said before I struggle to undo this isolation. Presenting personal relations as social relations of corporate capitalism challenges the subordination of women. Perceiving the connections of personal and market relations ordinarily obscured challenges the bifurcated form of social organisation that excludes us as women from



mental production, and that confines us to the domestic world of embodiment work. Our lack of the means of language cuts us off from social expression of our bonds and isolates us from speaking our common oppression. Recognising our social subordination by giving it social expression is a prelude to ending it. Breaking through the silence reclaims the means of mental production we need as women to transform ourselves into subjects. In finding our voices we can become the authors of a new social order. *Reconstructing Womanhood* is groundwork for the foundation.

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