

**Women Telling Stories About Reality:
Subjectivity, the Generation of Meaning
and the Organizing of a Union at Yale**

by

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Abstract

This qualitative study of women's responses to the organizing of Local 34 at Yale University provides an empirical grounding for feminist theorizing of women's generation of meaning. Based on interviews with clerical and technical workers, the study illuminates the relationship between experience and meaning. Subjectivities of gender, race and class contribute to meanings made and actions taken by union supporters and opponents in the context of social change.

Building upon feminist theory, the study suggests that the relationship between experience and meaning is a basis for action. The interviews offer examples of women's negotiation of multiple subject positions as they seek to sustain their identities in their responses to the possibility for change represented by the union. The research method, itself an encounter between subjectivities, undergoes scrutiny as a meaning-generating practice with implications for feminist theory and politics. Assessment of the strategic value for feminism of identity politics points to the exclusionary effect of appealing to a unified identity against which subjectivities work, whereas a politics of location admits the many positions from and within which meanings are made.

The study builds upon and extends the analytic tools and insights of feminist theory and contributes to feminist strategies for social change. Rather than reinforcing the expected classifications of pro- and anti-union women, of working and middle-class women, of white women and women of color, this project calls for looking beyond these categories in order to build theories and practices that accommodate the specificity as well as the commonalities of women's lives.

Abregé

Cette étude qualitative des réactions féminines à l'organisation de Local 34 à Yale Université fournit une base empirique pour la formulation de théories féministes de la formation du sens spécifiquement féminine. Elaborée à partir d'interviews d'employées de bureau et de techniciennes, l'étude met en relief la relation entre expérience et perception. Les subjectivités sexuelles, raciales et socio-économiques contribuent à la formation du sens par les partisans du syndicat et leurs opposants ainsi qu'à leurs actions, dans le contexte d'un changement social.

Construite à partir des théories féministes, l'étude suggère que la relation entre l'expérience et la perception est une base pour l'action. Les interviews offrent des exemples de négociations sur l'aspect d'identités multiples des femmes alors qu'elles cherchent à maintenir leur identité face à la possibilité d'un changement représenté par le syndicat. La méthode de recherche, elle-même confrontation de différentes subjectivités, est soumise à un examen minutieux en tant que pratique de la formation du sens avec des implications pour la théorie féministe et la politique. L'évaluation de la valeur stratégique de la politique de l'identité pour le féminisme montre l'effet excluant de l'attraction vers une identité unifiée contre laquelle les subjectivités travaillent, alors qu'une politique de localisation admet toutes les positions à partir desquelles et avec lesquelles se forment les perceptions.

L'étude utilise et élargit les outils d'analyse et les aperçus des théories féministes, et elle contribue à des stratégies féministes pour un changement social. Au lieu de renforcer les classifications habitu-

elles entre femmes pro- et anti-syndicaliste, entre femmes de la classe ouvrière et femmes de la petite bourgeoisie, entre femmes blanches et femmes de couleur, ce projet appelle à dépasser ces catégories afin de construire des théories et des pratiques qui prennent en compte les spécificités aussi bien que les expériences communes dans la vie des femmes.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Beginning in 1980 and continuing into 1985, clerical and technical workers at Yale University were the subjects of a labor organizing campaign. This campaign culminated in the formation of Local 34 of the Federation of University Employees, AFL-CIO. Over the years of the campaign these workers, most whom were women, confronted the possibility of changes in their workplaces and opportunities to participate in the initiation and evolution of those changes. This study explores women's responses to the organizing of Local 34, as reflected upon in extended conversations with a number of women employed by Yale. From a researcher's point of view, these women's accounts of their broader lived experience during the organizing campaign and its aftermath provide an occasion to investigate the generation of meaning. The accounts illuminate contexts within which each woman made sense of the organizing of Local 34 and attempted to determine its meaning for her particular life. This is, in essence, a study of women's generation of meaning in the context of social change.

Research Context

The study takes off in part from current feminist theoretical¹ and strategic concerns with the generation of meaning in everyday life. The study draws on a tradition of feminist analyses of the construction of gender, race and class as significant features of women's experience, knowledge, and generation of meaning, and the status of female experience as a source of knowledge (see Belenky et al. 1986, Bulkin et al. 1984, Caine et al. 1988, Davis 1983, Dill 1983, Haraway 1984, Hawkesworth 1989, Hooks 1984 and 1989, Jaggar and Bordo 1989, Janiewski 1983, Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, Palmer 1983, and Swerdlow and Lessinger 1983.)²

¹ The term "feminist theory" demands and resists definition. As Paula Treichler writes, "the term feminist theory is a falsely generic rubric incorporating diverse and sometimes contradictory discursive practices" (1986, 99). I do not mean to imply that there is one unified feminist theory, but use this term to refer to the body of theoretical work, greatly varied in focus, of feminists. For some, the term is an anachronism: theory is masculine, abstract, elitist, intellectual; feminism is concrete, accessible, action-oriented or "pure praxis" (Gatens 1986, 14-15). I believe that theory need not be removed from "real life," and indeed if theory is to be effective in explaining and improving the world, it must not be. However, there are as many "realities" to which feminist theory must be held accountable as there are contributions to "feminist theory."

² While some critical communication studies similarly address the generation of meaning as a theme for inquiry, asking questions about the legitimation of knowledge and distribution of power in a variety of communication contexts, relatively few do so from an explicitly feminist perspective or account for gender. The contribution of feminist theory to communication research has been noted by Margaret Gallagher, who has described a feminist perspective as "absolutely central" to "[t]he study of consciousness formation and of the legitimation of knowledge [which is] a well-established focus for communication research" (1985, 2), whereas Slack and Allor describe the concerns of critical communication research as "the ways in which the control of knowledge . . . is fundamental to the exercise of social power" (1983, 215). A recent example of communication scholarship addressing feminist concern with the control and production of knowledge is Jansen (1989).

The concurrence of feminist theorists' attention to women's negotiation of reality and identity with other critical theorists' interest in the negotiation of meanings is, of course, more than coincidental. Both feminist and critical studies are based in political analyses. In the present political climate--one in which the political objectives of many liberal and left endeavors have suffered setbacks--investigating how people make sense of and accommodate contradiction in their lives is a reasonable direction to turn. When mainstream mass media covered the Local 34 organizing campaign and subsequent strike at Yale as a fight over women's issues, I became interested in how the women at Yale were making sense of this disruption in their work and personal lives.³

Among the concerns informing my analysis are key questions of subjectivity. By subjectivity I mean the continuous process by which we experience the world and make sense of it. This is not an entirely individual or autonomous activity, but rather a complex interplay of material, structural and interpersonal encounters and relations often understood as personal. For feminist theorists, the subjectivity of women's experiences is both the location of the ongoing construction of "Woman" and the site of alternative, resistant constructions of self, identity, women, and knowledge (Gross 1986, 126).⁴

³ See the Appendix for explanations of two stylistic conventions adopted throughout this text. One convention concerns the use of the first person; the second concerns capitalization of the initial letter of the word Black.

⁴ The forms and significance of women's "resistance" in everyday life are the focus of a number of feminist studies. See, for example, Bourque and Divine (1985), Gannagé (1986), Hall (1986) and Westwood (1984, 1985). Jaggar and Bordo's collection (1989) explores gender as a

The study explores the relationship between experience and meaning, contributing to theorizing about subjectivity in several ways. As an empirical study, this work contributes a groundedness to what until recently has been a largely theoretical discourse, in both feminist and other literatures, on the meaning of women's experience in general and gender subjectivity in particular. The women's accounts of their responses to the organizing of Local 34 offer examples of the lived experiences that contribute to subjectivity. The interrogation of method as a meaning-generating activity draws attention to the interpersonal dynamics of the qualitative research process, raising questions about feminist research practices as encounters between and constructions of multiple subjectivities. By demonstrating how the meanings made of experience transcend the categories of gender and gender identity, the study points to the value and limitations of current theorizing about gender and other subjectivities for informing feminist practice. This project ultimately argues for looking beyond gender, race and class as categories of analysis, in order to build theory that accommodates the specificity as well as the commonalities of women's lives.⁵

Since feminism is proactive, working to change aspects of the material and ideological conditions of female existence, subjectivity is central to feminist theory. Feminist theorists are interested in the basis for being and knowing.

⁵ The concepts of subjectivity in general and gender subjectivity in particular are important for the entire field of communication studies, which is only beginning seriously to consider what feminist theory on one hand and women's experience on the other might mean for communication theory, research, and practice.

relationship between subjectivity, experience, and meaning "in order to build [new] meanings and bodies that have a chance for life" (Haraway 1988, 580). By investigating the ways in which women experience and make sense of the world and take up positions within that world, feminist theorists hope to identify material and ideological factors contributing to present circumstances as well as factors which might enable change. By documenting and theorizing the importance, for the generation of meaning, of the subjectivities of this group of women during the organization of a clerical and technical workers union local, this study both draws upon the analytic tools and insights of the feminist project and attempts to respond to its proactive model for change.

This study suggests a potentially fruitful engagement between feminist theory and research and other critical projects by examining women's negotiation of social and political messages in their own terms, those of concrete realities and individual subjectivities.⁶ Grounded in a commitment to permitting women to speak the truths of their lives, this study is not an attempt to compose a version of truth that conforms to theory. Feminist and other critical perspectives locate considerable power within the abilities of individuals and groups to reason, to

⁶ A parallel approach is apparent in American cultural studies, where one focus of research has become the responses of audience members rather than the content of cultural products themselves. See, for example, Brown (1990), Pribram (1988), and Seiter et al. (1989). Condit (1989, 104) and Fiske (1987, 391-408) emphasize the polysemy of texts due to differing interests and contexts of receivers/viewers. In contrast, the present study addresses the multiple meanings of experience, looking to differing interests and contexts in which meanings are made.

resist and to create meaning.⁷ Such power is, nonetheless, enabled and constrained by the material contexts of gender, race, class, age, and sexuality and the less commonly identified impressions made by the exercise of power through social relations and locations, discourses, and culture. Turning to the negotiation and generation of meanings as subjects of study, as do recent feminist research projects, assumes human ability not only to recognize inconsistency, contradiction, duplicity, misrepresentation, and manipulation, but to negotiate them, either by accommodating discordant meanings within a flexible world-view or by constructing alternative meanings with which to resist contradictory or unwelcome messages.

The generation of meaning is a timely subject for theoretical reasons as well. As an intellectual domain, feminist theory and research is presently situated against a background sometimes described as post-structuralist, in which language and other systems of meaning have become increasingly popular subjects for academic inquiry. The meaning of written texts has taken on renewed authority. Nonetheless, valorizing the written word is an exclusionary practice; emphasizing extant written texts renders invisible those people (women and others) whose thoughts and experiences have historically been recorded infrequently and whose meaning-systems and bases for knowledge are not always composed or preserved in written forms. This stance makes literacy a criterion for legitimacy, accepting the effects of social constructions

⁷ While this study does not take resistance as its focus, actions particular women described as resistant are among those discussed in later chapters.

of gender, race, and class in determining whose meaning-systems are worthy of study.

Feminist scholars have joined historians and literary theorists in reacting to analyses that isolate written texts from the contexts in which they are composed and read and the people who read them.⁸ According to Judith Newton, the reaction of historians has led them "to read written texts and 'social texts'⁹ . . . in relation to each other," a practice Newton notes has long been exercised in feminist work (1989, 6). Nancy K. Miller asks whether "feminist strategies of reading written and visual texts can be transferable to the study of such things as social and political institutions" (1986, 103). When Jacquelyn Dowd Hall reminds readers that "dominant groups secure their knowledge claims by suppressing the voices of those whose historical, social, and bodily experiences differ from their own" (1989, 909), she is referring to the contribution post-structuralism's critique of reason makes to historical research and to the effect of that same critique in suppressing "different" voices today.¹⁰ Where a text-focused perspective may miss the social processes and actions of meaning generation in everyday life-- what Emily Grosholz (1987) calls deliberations and what Sarah E. Senstein

⁸ Certainly some communications scholars share this view, but the theoretical debates are considerably more elaborate in distinctly feminist work than in much case study research in communications.

⁹ Newton describes "social texts" as "constructions of 'experience' or the material world," as distinguished from written texts (1989, 6).

¹⁰ The recent explosion of interest in ethnography as a research method and a knowledge-constructing practice is another reaction to this post-structuralist atmosphere. While my study is not an ethnography in the anthropological sense, I acknowledge here the overlap of some issues raised in later chapters with those occupying the current critique of ethnography.

(1983) calls negotiations of subjectivities--the present work focuses on women's reconciliation of culturally and historically contingent subjectivities in a context of social change.

Feminist theories of knowledge and meaning production stress the dynamics of power inherent in the authorization of particular knowledges.¹² These theories offer a subtext to this study in their explanation of ways in which what matters and is meaningful to women often does not get into public discourse.¹²

Media coverage of the events at Yale offers one illustration of those dynamics. Most of the actors in the events under study were women, and the organizing campaign at Yale was cast by mass media (and at times by the union) as a women's struggle for pay equity.¹³ However, in the early stages of my research I discovered that pay equity (or

" By using a plural form of the word "knowledge"--generally taken to be all-inclusive in the singular--I indicate the interests competing to determine what counts as knowledge. Further, by "knowledges" I emphasize the multiplicity of experiences that are the foundations for what we authorize as "knowledge."

¹² The feminist literature in the areas of epistemology, the generation of meaning, and methodology is abundant. Examples include Bleier (1986), Bowles and Duelli-Klein (1983), Caine et al. (1988), Fee (1981), Fonow and Cook (1991), Gallagher (1985), Haraway (1981), Harding (1980 and 1986b), Harding and Hintikka (1983), Jaggar and Bordo (1989), Janssen-Jurreit (1982), Keller (1985), MacKinnon (1982), Malson et al. (1989), Roberts (1982), Rose (1983), Stanley (1990), Stanley and Wise (1983), and Weed (1989).

¹³ These headlines are representative examples: "Union's Success at Yale: New Focus on White-Collar Women," New York Times, April 10, 1984 (by William Serrin); "Women's battle for pay equity is fought in Yale's back yard," Xenia (Ohio) Daily Gazette, September 6, 1984; "Comparable Worth at Center of Yale Strike," Los Angeles Times, November 18, 1984 (by Bob Drogin); "Yale's 'gutsy ladies' seeking man-sized changes," Philadelphia Inquirer, November 20, 1984 (by Carol Horner); "Women of Yale," The Nation, December 1, 1984; "Women's Work at Yale Wins Respect," Hartford Courant, January 27, 1985 (by Lucinda Finley).

comparable worth) was not foremost among the concerns of the women I spoke with at Yale. Nor did many of these women identify the organizing campaign as exclusively, or even significantly a women's struggle. The media's attribution of gender to the organizing campaign and strike circumscribed the relevant issues and located the entire struggle within a framework of gender difference. All the ideological baggage represented by "female" or "working woman" became overlaid onto the situation, displacing this particular labor struggle from the main/malestream of society: women, already "Other" by virtue of gender, are doubly "Other" in the male world of public work, and triply "Other" by contesting the conditions of their work experience. By overlooking (for the most part) the women themselves as sources of knowledge, many media institutions failed to discover what the women at Yale thought the union campaign was about. The media thereby exercised their power to legitimate particular knowledges and exclude others from public discourse.⁴

While the present text does not address in detail the control of knowledge as a factor in women's generation of meaning, I identify the self-interpreting practices of individuals as one site where the power/knowledge relationship is experienced, articulated and potentially transformed. In so doing, this study enlarges communication researchers' focus upon "the construction of the person through discursive interaction" (Angus and Lannamann 1988, 69) to account for material and concrete experiences that are not purely discursive, including in particular those of gender, race and class. These categories, usually

⁴ I have given more attention to this aspect of the generation of meaning and the campaign at Yale in Gregg (1987).

thought of as social, are not determinants of an account's narrative style or content but instead features of the concrete experience of subjectivity which is taken in this study as a significant contributor to the generation of meaning.

In addition to ongoing work in feminist theory and research, women's labor history offers another context for this study. Research in women's labor history has increased dramatically over the past two decades, documenting women's work and participation in workplace organizing over several centuries. In an article reviewing women's U.S. labor history of the period 1790-1945, Lois Rita Helmbold and Ann Schofield note that much of this research "reflects the influence of white and male models" (1989, 501). Helmbold and Schofield identify two dominant foci in women's labor history published since 1968: the role of ideology and economy in the development of a sex-segregated workforce and women's relationships to labor organizations.¹⁵ In both cases the authors note an emphasis on industrial work and a segregation of issues of race and ethnicity. Calling for studies that investigate and integrate relationships among ideology, economy, sexuality, lifestyle, race and ethnicity in the history of women's work, Helmbold and Schofield echo the movement in feminist theory towards positioning race, class and gender as equally significant categories of analysis. The authors cite Joan Scott's suggestion that historians focus on systems of

¹⁵ Ruth Milkman writes that much recent scholarship on women and work describes women's participation in the labor movement in relation to other social issues and institutions: the suffrage movement, the feminist movement, the family, and sexuality. She notes further that only lately have the conditions fostering women's militance and women's relations with formal institutions like unions and political parties received attention (1985a, xii).

meaning, and urge that more attention be given to comparative analyses of race, gender and class (514).

The present study is complementary to recent work in women's labor history in several ways. The categories of gender, race and class provide an organizing scheme for some of the interview material, and suggest the possibility of a comparative analysis based on these aspects of lived experience. However, the scheme and its implications for understanding subjectivity and the generation of meaning come into question, as the negotiation of subjectivities both embodies and subjugates gender, race and class distinctions. From a pragmatic standpoint, accounting for practices that simultaneously embody and subjugate gender, race and class difference is crucial for organizing for social change.

This study also complements historians' attention to systems of meaning. Because Local 34 was organized so recently, we have the benefit of living participants' reflections to enlighten us. We are able to learn about these women's relationships to formal and social institutions and issues and what meaning those relationships hold for them. However, this study turns a different lens on the particular circumstances of the events at Yale, taking neither a social issue nor a political institutional approach to women's labor history. The perspective taken here differs significantly from a traditional historical one by situating the events at Yale within these women's lives, rather than their lives against the events at Yale. This is most evident in each woman's story, where the magnitude or insignificance of the organizing

of Local 34 appears in its place with respect to other aspects of her life, her needs, and her reality.

The present work also complements and differs from recent sociological studies of women's work experiences. This study is sensitive to concerns about the relationship between the researcher and the "subjects" of the research. As discussed in detail in Chapter Four, both the method and analysis employed were designed to allow and encourage women to speak in their own terms. However, by taking the women's stories (instead of theory) as starting points, discussion of recent themes in sociological studies of women and work such as the relationship between "reproductive" and "productive" labor, women's "double day," and women's resistance in the workplace remain largely undeveloped here.¹⁶ Instead, this study offers an example of building theory in the light of data, rather than accumulating data according to the boundaries of theory.

Historical Context

The history of white collar organizing at Yale University and the chronology of the Local 34 campaign are important (though not always articulated) elements of the stories women told of their experiences during the organizing of Local 34. Over a period of more than twenty-five years five groups, including four different unions, attempted to

¹⁶ Gannagé (1986), Sacks (1988), and Westwood (1984, 1985) explore women's "double day" and resistance in workplace settings.

organize clerical and technical workers (C&Ts) at Yale University.¹⁷

Three years of organizing by Yale C&Ts, paid organizers from the Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HERE) union, and blue-collar Yale workers who were members of HERE Local 35¹⁸ culminated in a certification election on May 18, 1983. Although the election was delayed several months by the university's challenges to the composition of the bargaining unit and a contested site for a National Labor Relations Board hearing,¹⁹ the final election tally gave Local 34 of the Federation of University Employees (FUE) a 39-vote margin of victory. FUE, affiliated with HERE, became the bargaining agent for more than two thousand Yale employees.

Twenty-one months passed between the May 1983 election and contract ratification in January 1985. The first contract negotiating session took place on October 11, 1983, five months after the certification election. Frustrated by the lack of progress, six months later Local 34 members set a strike deadline of March 28, 1984. This deadline was postponed for twenty-four hours and followed by a vote to strike on April 4, 1984. On April 3, the strike was averted by the ratification of a revolutionary "partial contract," settling many issues but leaving

¹⁷ In the 1950s, the Distributive, Processing and Office Workers' Union; in 1967-68, Local 35 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) financed the Association of Clericals and Technicals (ACT); in 1969-71, the Yale Non-Faculty Action Committee; from the mid-seventies through 1979, the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU); and between 1979 and 1982, the United Automobile Workers (UAW) (Gilpin et al. n.d., 16-17; Wilhelm 1985).

¹⁸ HERE represented about 1000 maintenance and food service workers on the Yale campus. These workers had organized as part of the United Mine Workers (UMW) District 50 in the 1930s and affiliated with HERE in the late 1950s (Wilhelm 1985).

¹⁹ See Gilpin et al. (n.d., 29-31).

wages, benefits, pensions and job security still to be negotiated. On September 13, after a summer without progress and at the start of a new semester, Local 34 members voted overwhelmingly in favor of a September 26 strike deadline. Talks broke down at 10:30 pm at the seventy-third negotiating session on September 25, and the next morning Local 34 went on strike over Yale University's failure to negotiate a contract.

Nearly four months later, in January 1985, Local 34 and Yale University agreed to a three-year contract providing (among other things) wage increases and job classification changes designed to remedy extreme job compression that most severely affected minority employees in job classifications dominated by women.²⁰ When contracts between Locals 34 and 35 were renegotiated and renewed in early 1988, both locals made important gains in affirmative action and secured further adjustments to the job classification system (Tynan 1988, 16; see also McClure 1989).

²⁰ This series of events at Yale University was preceded and followed by organizing campaigns on a number of university campuses across the country. Regarding Columbia University, see Bernstein (1984) and Serrin (1984); regarding Harvard, see Glieberman (1983), Heller (1984), McCain (1984), McClure (1988) and Serrin (1985). That industrial unions are turning to educational institutions as potential organizing sites is an indication of the rapidly shrinking manufacturing base in this country, and a simultaneous growth in what is referred to as the "service" sector of the economy (even though clerical employment isn't necessarily increasing as a result: at Yale, the number of clerical and technical employees increased 9% over a recent 10-year period, while for the same period the number of managerial and professional employees increased 48%--see Federation of University Employees (1984, 16)). Successful efforts to provide union representation to clerical and technical workers in universities and the insurance industry, nursing and support staff in hospitals, and workers at all levels of public employment also reflect the growing numbers of women in the labor force overall and the conditions of their employment that make union representation attractive.

For the nearly two-year period between the certification of Local 34 as the representative of the bargaining unit and the ratification of the first contract, Yale employees and New Haven residents were targets of two opposing strategies: the university's efforts to wear down union members and foster opposition to the union, and the union's extensive communication networks that informed bargaining unit members of every administration move and turned routine communication into an organizing tool. As an example of a new arena for labor activism, Yale University attracted a media spotlight and the attention of labor and management activists and analysts.

Across the country union membership has been declining for over a decade, but while the numbers of union members overall are dropping, the number of women who belong to unions has been on the rise ("Union Growth" 1983, 8; see also Milkman 1985b). The loss of male-dominated industrial jobs is in large part responsible for the overall decline, and increasing numbers of women in the workforce have contributed to their growing presence among union members. Women in general and the white-collar workforce in particular are relatively new targets for union organizing, and labor organizers have had to discover what the concerns of women and white-collar workers are and strategies that will work with these new constituencies (Comstock 1987; "Strategies" 1986; "Women in Unions" 1987).

Method

The feminist research tradition encourages a politics of inquiry that parallels to a considerable extent many of the principles and

practices of much qualitative research. Communication research by definition is attentive to the dynamics of meaning construction. When the objective of research is the illumination of processes that are neither visible nor readily acknowledged--such as women's generation of meaning--interpretive and qualitative methods that encourage the emergence of concepts and themes are desirable.²¹ This research tradition recognizes the importance of social processes other than manifest ones, supporting both feminist and communication perspectives on the generation of meaning.

This study employed an inductive research process that began with women's concerns, asking the women at Yale what they thought of the organizing of Local 34 and related events. After hearing and reviewing a number of the women's accounts I began to notice themes and issues that appeared to link these stories. Some of these themes are addressed in Chapter Two, a discussion of feminist theory germane to this study. Other themes are articulated in Chapter Three, organized under the familiar categories of gender, race and class. This organizational scheme, defensible from a number of quarters, works for and against itself, demonstrating both the value and limitations of these terms, as the women's words make meanings by negotiating the categories.

Over the course of conducting the study, the concerns of feminist and communication theorists with the generation and construction of meaning in everyday life and in research practices became increasingly interwoven. In learning what the women thought about what was happening

²¹ For a perspective on analyzing unobservable media use, see Lindlof and Grodin (1990).

at Yale, I was pressed to acknowledge the degree to which concrete experience and available means of representation entered into their thinking and my own. In drawing out women's accounts of their experiences and reasoning, I was compelled to evaluate how the research process made sense of the events and constructed the accounts, through language, interaction, time and space, as well as how the women's stories shaped the research process. Issues of method and methodology are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Feminist scholars have always found women's narratives to be rich resources for research. Women's life stories tell of the negotiation of gender, race, and class experience, but also more than this. When women tell the truths of their lives, they simultaneously reinforce and challenge traditional knowledge. The reinforcement takes place when women's stories conform to expectations that individuals are rational and non-contradictory, that their perceptions and the evidence of their experiences are explainable by some general unified framework for analysis or, if not, those stories are aberrant or simply don't count. The challenge arises from making public truths that have been excluded or silenced, whether they be truths about women's knowledge, survival, sexual violence, resistance, or desire.

Organization of Text

The written text that comprises this thesis is one representation of the interweaving of two tales. One tale is about women making sense of the events at Yale and telling stories about their realities. The construction of narratives by the women at Yale, and by me, makes

attributions and represents identities and the realities in which they are situated and sustained. The other tale is about finding out about women making sense of their lives--the interactive process of eliciting, listening to and re-presenting stories women told about their experiences. The chapters that follow this Introduction weave a tension between those two tales and between the theoretical and the concrete. My intention in creating this alternating pattern between abstract and concrete is to allow the reader to experience these tensions and the resulting text as one of many possible representations.

Chapter Two offers both a review of and engagement with feminist theory about the generation of meaning. The interest feminist theorists have long held in the construction and enactment of gender has led to consideration of the authorization of knowledge, including what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts. The discussion of feminist theory in Chapter Two suggests that this theorizing can move beyond legitimizing women's experiences as foundations for knowledge, and begin to use the relationship between meaning and experience as the basis for action. I place this discussion of theory before the discussion of data (in Chapter Three) to encourage consideration of what the women's realities and stories mean for acts and effects of theorizing, rather than proposing theory as a lens through which to evaluate experience.

In Chapter Three, women's accounts of their responses to events at Yale provide examples of the relationship between experience and meaning. As stories women tell about their realities, the accounts also illustrate subjectivities of gender, race and class. We can see how women generate the meaning of their lives in a process of negotiation

between concrete experience, representation, and identity. By suggesting that responses to the events at Yale constitute affirmations of identity, this chapter introduces the necessity of understanding subjectivity as more than fixed social categories.

While Chapter Three may be read as a qualitative investigation of the generation of meaning, the next chapter takes the investigation itself as a meaning-generating process. Chapter Four reviews and extends feminist analyses of feminist research, focusing on interviewing as a data-generating research method. Using the present work as a case study, I call for more attention to the significance of feminist research practices for feminist politics in general.

Chapter Five addresses the implications of this study in two arenas, the development of theory about the generation of meaning and the development of feminist political practice. Building on earlier chapters, this conclusion assesses the strategic value of identity politics and a politics of location for feminist theory and feminist practice. For the dual feminist projects of theorizing the generation of meaning and organizing for social change, a politics of location emerges as more promising.

By describing women's accounts as stories about reality, I hope to avoid the simple rationalization of these women's lives. I want to show how the meanings women made of the events at Yale supported--however momentarily or imperfectly--each woman's identity, where the subjectivity of her experiences positioned her in relation to the union, the university, and other aspects of her life. This study of subjectivity and the generation of meaning does not easily reinforce the expected

classifications of pro- and anti-union women, of working and middle-class women, of white women and women of color. Instead, we see how individual and concrete experience are factors in the negotiation of reality and possibility, within structures, moments, and gaps outside the theoretical. These are sights the meanings of which are made in telling stories about reality; sites on a shifting and contested terrain where feminist theory and feminist activism meet women's everyday lives. It is from the positions offered by these figurative and literal places, these sights and sites, that "struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see" (Haraway 1988, 587).

Chapter Two

Theory,¹ the generation of meaning, and gender subjectivity

By taking women's responses to the events at Yale as evidence of gendered subjects generating meaning, I invoke current theoretical debates about the relationship between experience, meaning and gender subjectivity. In this chapter I discuss feminist theorists' engagement with several aspects of these debates. After a brief overview of structuralist and poststructuralist contributions to theories of the generation of meaning, the discussion focuses on feminist theorizing of the generation of meaning and gender subjectivity. Recent developments in feminist theory, including new conceptualizations of subjectivity as the site where the relationship between experience and meaning is negotiated, suggest how the experiences of women at Yale may be instructive for feminist theory. The women's accounts, presented in Chapter Three, offer insight into how the theoretical relationship between experience

¹ Inasmuch as feminist theory presents an epistemological critique, raising questions about methodology (the application of theory) as well as method (the gathering of evidence), the distinction between feminist theory and feminist methodology is not always clear. See, for example, Harding (1987b, 1987c, 1987d). Nonetheless, I have attempted here to separate the theoretical discussion from a discussion of method and methodology. In Chapter Four, I describe some of the methodological dimensions of a feminist perspective, with specific attention to how research practices generate meaning.

and meaning works in real life.² The chapter closes with a consideration of the contribution of subjectivity to identity and identity as a factor in a politics of location.³

In this chapter and the next I am arguing for the value of these women's accounts for theorizing the generation of meaning and for attaining the political objectives of feminism. By employing subjectivity as an analytical category while it is also a lived condition that is continually remade from experience, I want to demonstrate the importance of the relationship between subjectivity and the generation of meaning for strategies for social change. Poststructuralist theories encourage recognition of differing accounts of reality; effective strategies for social change must do the same.

As defined in Chapter One, by subjectivity I mean the continuous processes by which we make sense of our experience of the world.⁴ This definition assumes, as does the poststructuralist theory to which it is a response, that an individual does not possess an essential, coherent

² This theoretical perspective on the women's accounts is not where the research began, as is often the case, but rather where the research has led me. I began the project with the conviction that whatever the women thought and would say was important for understanding women's generation of meaning, but I did not know what I would find nor did I anticipate the theoretical positions described here. It is important, therefore, to consider the theoretical arguments discussed here not as explanations of the accounts in Chapter Three, but rather as constructs that have to answer to the accounts. While the accounts represent meaning-making processes that are frequently the object of deconstruction in literary theory, I do not address the accounts as literary "texts."

³ Adrienne Rich (1985) discusses the meaning of a politics of location.

⁴ The following four paragraphs summarizing the poststructuralist challenge to humanist philosophy draw on Jaggar and Bordo (1989), Macdonell (1986), and Weedon (1987).

self, but rather that individual subjectivity is situationally and temporally specific, constructed and reconstituted continuously through language (both thought and spoken) and other signifying practices. Of particular significance for feminism and feminist theory is the way in which this definition, and the challenge it poses to humanism, opens up the possibility of change.

Humanist philosophy, grounded in a Cartesian framework which has dominated Western thought since the seventeenth century, maintains that an objective reality exists apart from language or social structure and that this reality "out there" is accessible to human understanding (Macdonell 1986, 5; Jaggar and Bordo 1989, 2-3). Cartesian humanism assumes that through the exercise of reason every individual can arrive at the same understandings of the objective world. By implication, this perspective posits a homogeneity of individuals whose experiences uniformly provide intrinsic knowledge about reality.

Structuralism (drawing on Saussurean linguistics) and post-structuralism challenge these assumptions to different extents and in different ways. Noting that meanings are not uniform from one language to another, Saussure argued that meaning is an effect of language. According to structuralism, a particular language possesses a structure which neither represents nor reflects any pre-existing ideas but does assure that all speakers of that language are indeed speaking the same language. This structure makes meaning possible by a negative or oppositional relationship; meanings are determined only in relation to what they are not. Consequently language constitutes reality for us; the reality that exists is the reality that is knowable and expressible

only through language. Neither individuals nor objective reality are the sources or authors of meaning.⁵

In the nineteen-sixties and seventies some theorists questioned the generalizations of structuralism for their failure to account for history and changes and conflict in meanings and between discourses.⁶ In its insistence on a common structure within language, structuralism echoed humanist philosophy's claim of a static system by reference to which meaning is generated. To the contrary, according to poststructuralist work in discourse theory, meaning lies in concrete forms of practice, not in language (Macdonell 1986, 12). Poststructuralism emphasizes the effects of social organization and social reality on the construction of meaning. Subjective experience becomes the site where individuals "inhabit" numerous discursive positions simultaneously: I am middle-class, white, female, heterosexual. Established (everyday) discourses--those of class, race, gender and sexuality, for example--give meaning to subjective experience by suggesting appropriate subject positions from which to make sense of experience. Acting from a constellation of subject positions, individual practices reproduce, reconstitute and contest those meanings. By displacing the subject as

⁵ For elaborations on this admittedly cursory description of Saussurean linguistics and structuralism, see Hawkes (1977) and Saussure (1974 [1916]).

⁶ I am using here O'Sullivan et al.'s definition of discourse: "Discourse is the social process of making and reproducing sense(s). . . Discourses are the product of social, historical and institutional formations, and meanings are produced by these institutionalized discourses. . . . The theory of discourse proposes that individuality itself is the site, as it were, on which socially produced and historically established discourses are reproduced and regularized" (1983, 73-74).

the primary source of meaning, poststructuralism undermines the idea that there is an essential human nature or a uniform human experience.

The challenge early feminism and feminist theory presented--that the objective reality a humanist framework projected was both androcentric and ethnocentric⁷--has been expanded by some feminist theorists' adoption of a poststructuralist stance. The objective reality held up by humanist philosophy is itself a construction, one account of reality among many possible accounts; among those possibilities are conflicting and contradictory accounts of reality.

The development of a feminist poststructuralism is important because it opens up additional space for the articulation, recognition and acknowledgement of the realities of gendered experience. The humanist framework positioned women's realities against a norm of white, Western, male experience and dismissed them as non-objective and unimportant, distorted by obstacles we may now think of as subjectivities and subject positions. It is precisely these subjectivities and subject positions that are seen within poststructuralism as creating room for opposition, change, and the contestation of meanings. By discrediting the unitary subject of Cartesian humanism, poststructuralism allows the legitimation of more than one account of reality. From different and overlapping subject positions as workers, mothers, activists and citizens, women at Yale gave accounts of reality that are

⁷ This challenge also initiated feminists' questioning of the dualities of mind/body, culture/nature, objective/subjective, reason/emotion on the argument that each pair bears the gendered subtext of a heterosexual couple, with the first (male) element of the pair occupying a position superior to the second (female) element of the pair.

equally meaningful to each of them.⁸ The women's accounts of their experiences--what I call their "stories about reality"--make visible the contested meanings of self and identity within the interplay of subjectivities.⁹

Feminist theory and the generation of meaning

Accenting the relationship between gender subjectivity and meaning--how the experience of gender constructs meaning and how available discourses define and make sense of the experience of gender--seems akin to postmodernist (and not necessarily feminist) posturing about the pervasiveness of referentiality, the absence of stability in the play of surfaces and the impossibility of objectivity.¹⁰ But feminist theorists' interest in the experience and construction of gender has a longer history, and a more explicitly political purpose, than does the recent "linguistic turn" in postmodernist and poststruc-

⁸ This does not mean that each account has equal validity for feminism, which must choose between different accounts of reality "on the basis of their social implications" (Weedon 1987, 29), but rather that each account has equal significance for political strategies. I take this up in Chapter Five.

⁹ The poststructuralist challenge operates in many arenas besides feminism. What has been called a crisis in legitimation and the putting into question of the "Big Dichotomies" (Jardine 1985, 70-1) is also the dethroning of the master narratives of intellectual traditions as diverse as physics and anthropology. See, respectively, Gleick (1987) and Marcus and Fischer (1986).

¹⁰ See Balsamo (1987), Flax (1990), Harding (1986a), Nicholson (1990), Probyn (1987) and Scheman (1989) for discussions of the implications of postmodernism for feminist theory. The simultaneity of postmodernist and poststructuralist declarations of the impossibility of the subject with feminist theorists' creation of space for an active female subject has not escaped notice; see, for example, Ellis (1989, 42) and Jardine (1985).

turalist theory."

Feminist theory is in part the progeny of feminism conceived as practice. The term "feminism" connotes a perspective and a politics. Feminism is concerned with women's lives and experiences, beginning from an apprehension of the power exercised within and sustained by socially constructed and ranked gender relations (in which male or "Man" is the norm and female or "Woman" is both an aberrant and lesser party). Feminism is also a commitment to creating alternative social relations, with women's experiences and realities as part of the foundation from which those alternatives begin.²

The varied perspectives of feminism inform theory, empirical research and more activist forms of practice. People embracing a variety of feminist positions from a broad range of academic disciplines and non-academic locations investigate belief systems, social and cultural practices and existing social orders from the viewpoint of the experiences of women within those systems and orders.³ A feminist

¹ See Newton (1989) and Toews (1987) for overviews of the ways historians have taken up literary theorists' attention to language and meaning.

² Not all feminists will agree with this minimalist definition. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, unqualified reference to feminism will mean the spectrum of ideological and political positions and practices--including liberal, radical, separatist, and socialist feminist--that share at least these two elements. Recent formulations of feminism have extended the focus on gender, and insistence on its primacy, to account for other sites of oppression, such as race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and (dis)ability, using feminist analyses of gender relations of power as a basis for analyzing and transforming other power relations. See Conlon et al. (1985) and Hooks (1981, 1984, 1989a).

³ See, for example, Bourque and Divine (1985), Ortner and Whitehead (1981), Snitow et al. (1983), and Vance (1984).

perspective, like other theoretical perspectives, brings a particular lens to its terrain. Whether the focus of analysis or action is women's place in the economy, workplace activism, female authors and subjects in literature, women's experiences of health care, representations of gender in the mass media or some other aspect of human life, "feminists are not aware of different things than other people; they are aware of the same things differently" (Bartky 1977, 26).

Feminists' attention to the generation of meaning is "interested," in the sense that in seeking to understand women's lives feminist theorists do not "bracket" their commitment to transforming women's lives. I am referring here to the overtly political commitment of feminism and feminist research to social change (in contrast with usually unacknowledged corollary commitments of non-feminist research to sustain or advance particular political realities) and also to feminist theorists' assumption of an epistemological stance at odds with traditional claims of knowledge-generating research.⁴ This means, of course, that feminist theory creates the possibility of new, and at times oppositional, meanings about experiences, events or circumstances whose meanings are

⁴ Not all feminist theorists would agree; some continue to claim objectivity while others re-define objectivity. For example, Evelyn Fox Keller suggests that objectivity be reconceptualized as a dialectical process "that discriminates between the 'objectivist illusion,' which denies all intrusions of the self, and the 'objective effort,' which admits and accounts for these intrusions" (Abel and Abel 1983, 5-6). Harding argues for a reconceptualization of objectivity built upon what she calls "participatory values--antiracism, anticlassism, antisexism--that decrease the distortions and mystifications in our culture's explanations and understandings" (1986b, 249). De Lauretis notes that because of its accommodation of many truths, feminism cannot claim to be a science (1987b, 10). The corpus of feminist epistemology is growing; recent examples include Garry and Pearsall (1989), Jaggar and Bordo (1989) and Stanley (1990).

"already" established by more traditional scholarship.

I acknowledge here the meaning or significance generated by my selection of subject, focus, method and analysis: generating meaning about the generation of meaning. I take this up elsewhere. More important for the immediate purpose of exploring the generation of meaning is feminist theory's opening of new theoretical ground. What Moira Gatens distinguishes as a shift in the concerns of philosophy parallels and is itself informed by feminist readings of everyday phenomena (1986, 25-6). Gatens describes the concerns of feminist philosophers as a stress "on becoming rather than being, on possibilities rather than certainty and on meaning or significance rather than truth" (26).⁵

In the 1970s, feminists analyzing the construction of female identity documented and theorized the imposition of systems of meaning via language and other social and institutional practices, and the transformation of those systems into identities, values and world-views.⁶ As Judith Newton notes, feminism's attention to symbolic systems developed "not in response to post-structuralism but because the subordination of women, who have always been at least half of humankind, has seemed ideological to a large degree" (1989, 6). Feminist researchers seeking to understand women's position investigated women

⁵ These emphases are apparent in recent feminist theory in general; see, for example, Haraway (1985) and Harding (1986a). As noted elsewhere regarding history, the tendency appears in a variety of disciplines. McGhee notes in psychology a movement pointing to the future through an "epistemology of the possible" and structures of experience (1987b, 331).

⁶ Classic examples include Firestone (1970), Gornick and Moran (1971), Greer (1971), Morgan (1970) and Wallace (1979).

themselves:

To understand why people act as they do, we need to know how they see themselves. For by their actions people set out to make sense of their lives and their experiences. And what makes sense to one person in one way may have a very different sort of meaning for another. . . . So when we ask an individual woman what women are like, how she sees herself and what she wants, we must look to see how her views make sense for her of the particular social world in which she lives. What one wants depends in part on what looks possible (Fransella and Frost 1982, 13-14; emphasis added).

Feminists then set about changing symbolic systems, targeting among them sexist language, discriminatory practices in education, athletics, government and employment, and representations in fashion, television, news and advertising. Feminist analyses of the construction of female identity asserted "the political and historically specific nature of knowledge itself" (Newton 1989, 6), opening the way for theorizing the production of knowledge and its dependence upon the validation of a limited spectrum of human experience.⁷

The analysis of women's experience includes theorists' attention to ways of thinking:

The development of feminist theory has been specifically concerned with understanding the way we think, and how we can think differently. . . . feminists have a vested interest in understanding the processes of thinking and reasoning, and, in order to develop a feminist theory, have to begin by exploring and explaining human consciousness . . . (Spender 1985, 28).

Feminist theorists became interested in ways of thinking when activist women first sought the inclusion of women as equals to men wherever they

⁷ One result of this evolution of feminist theory is the new literature on gender and science; see, for example, Haraway (1989), Harding (1986b), Hubbard (1987), Jacobus et al. (1990), and Keller (1985). On images of women, see Banner (1983), Banta (1987), Betterton (1987), Chapkis (1986), Kuhn (1985), Martin (1987), Michie (1987), Spitzack (1990), and Suleiman (1986).

had been excluded, in practice (occupations, locations and institutions) and in theory (as subjects and objects of investigation).⁸ In the early stages of modern feminist theoretical work, as in the "first wave" of feminist activism in the U.S., proponents argued for the elevation of women, women's issues (private or domestic) and the feminine to status equivalent to (and later, above) men, men's concerns, and the masculine. When feminists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mobilized on behalf of a universal (white and middle-class/privileged) Woman whose higher moral instincts qualified her to participate in the "public" world of education and politics, men turned such posturing against women.⁹ In the dominant discourse, being closer to nature was a vulnerability, not a strength. The powerful had the power to recuperate women's meanings, turning women's use of men's discourse against women.

Eventually feminists discovered that inclusion was strategically inadequate to the task of intervening successfully in forms of [male] power "in order to subvert them and replace them with others more preferable" (Gross 1987, 196-7). The inclusion of women in institutions and practices would not necessarily alter the institution or the practice, and traditional theory often could not accommodate the inclusion of women and their experiences when the exclusion of women was fun-

⁸ See Caine et al. (1988), H. Eisenstein (1983), Finn and Miles (1982), Gross (1987), Mitchell and Oakley (1986), and Treichler (1986) for reviews of the development of feminist theory.

⁹ See Smith-Rosenberg (1986). This is an historic example of the inefficacy of "the master's tools" for dismantling "the master's house," Audre Lorde's admonition against using the arguments and methods of the oppressor to challenge him (Lorde 1981).

damental to the theory.²⁰

It was only a short step from Spender's focus upon "understanding the processes of thinking and reasoning" to recognizing the generation of meaning and the construction of knowledge as issues for feminist attention and strategy. Questioning the determination and legitimacy of traditional (and masculinist) norms and knowledge and using women's lives and experiences as the basis from which to do so raised questions overlooked by earlier feminist theory. The focus of feminist theory in general shifted along the same lines Gatens draws for feminist philosophy. Having challenged the content of traditional knowledge claims on the basis that "knowledge itself is a social accomplishment" (D. Smith 1987, 72), feminist theorists are now contesting "the forms and goals of traditional knowledge seeking" (Harding 1986a, 647). One result has been that feminist theory "legitimized the struggle over the production, distribution and transformation of meaning as a focus for political intervention and opposition" (B. Martin 1982, 3).

Feminist analysis of knowledge production is a project with both critical and reconstructive purposes (Gross 1987, 195). The critique addresses questions such as "What counts as knowledge?", "how are criteria established and by whom?", and "what means are employed to discover knowledge, and to what ends?" The critical project has launched a comprehensive epistemological critique, rocking the canon(s) and metho-

²⁰ See, for example, Harding (1986a, 646).

dologies of the sciences, humanities, and feminist scholarship alike.²¹ Feminist theorists are also proposing alternatives to dominant discourses and forms of knowledge. The reconstructive project is producing new practices and conditions of knowing, and new knowledges--women and other groups as subjects of knowing and knowledge, of history, and of theory, instead of their objects.²²

The meanings women generate as socially gendered subjects are important to feminist theory for what they reveal of the socially constructed experiences of women, for it is the boundaries that fix the possibility and meaning of experience that feminist theory as a political practice aims to subvert. For feminism to address adequately the realities and possibilities of women's existence, the meanings women make of their experiences must be accounted for. The relationship between gender subjectivity and the generation of meaning emerges as one in need of further analysis if feminist theory as strategy is to be effective. To create conditions in which new subjectivities (in the sense of where one is placed and places oneself in social reality) and new realities which are less dependent upon the present restrictive

²¹ In addition to texts cited elsewhere, see also special issues of journals, such as Communication Vol. 9, No. 1 (1986), Hypatia Vol. 2, No. 3 (1987), Journal of Communication Inquiry Vol. 11, No. 1 (1987) and Women's Studies in Communication Vol. 11, No. 1 (1988), and the numerous discussions of curriculum revisions; two examples are DuBois et al. (1985) and Signs Vol. 12, No. 2 (1987).

²² De Lauretis describes the reconstructive project of feminism as "reconstituting knowledge," reshaping "at once the field and the object of knowledge, as well as the conditions of knowing," and reconstituting women: "women as social subject, as subject of both knowledge and knowing" (1986b, 3). See also recent studies addressing women's ways of knowing; for example, Belenky et al. (1986), Lather (1991), and Luttrell (1984).

definitions and meanings of gender and gender experience are possible, we need to know more about how women make meaning out of experience.

Experience, meaning, and subjectivity

The theorizing of experience, meaning and subjectivity has lately taken on new urgency for feminist theorists and activists (among others). Feminists' claims regarding the significance of the exclusion of women's experience from social theory and policy, revolutionary though they were at one time, now appear to be an inadequate foundation for attaining feminist political objectives in the face of ideological slipperiness (and backlash), institutional intransigence and recuperation, and challenges from the world of theory.

In the present political climate of contested rights, interests and authority, insisting upon the primacy of generic or homogeneous "women's experience" is more destructive than ignorant. Attaining feminist political objectives will require legitimizing the existence of defensible and recognizable subjects for whom such objectives are desirable. Answering the challenges poststructuralist theory presents to early feminist claims to speak for (all) women requires more nuanced theories and terms better able to account for and represent the diversity of women's experiences and desires. Toward this end, feminist theorists have problematized experience itself, incorporating diversity within experience by asking such obvious questions as "what counts as experience?" and "whose experience counts?"²³ Identifying the subject(s)

²³ Rich raises the issue of who is meant by feminists' use of "we" (1985, 11ff.). See also Harding (1987b) and Lugones and Spelman (1983).

to whom such questions refer is one of the tasks occupying contemporary feminist theory.

One tool for this task of analysis which feminist theorists have drawn from poststructuralist theory is deconstruction. Based on the work of Jacques Derrida (1976), deconstruction focuses on how meanings in one text depend upon their relations with other texts. Meaning is never fixed, but is always deferred, between and among multiple texts. By de-constructing the oppositions upon which, according to Saussure, meaning relies, deconstruction may show how discourses work to produce meaning and therefore allow intervention within them (Weedon 1987, 163-164). For example, feminists have taken medical discourse about women's health as a fruitful subject for analysis, recognizing in modern medicine a conjunction of the assumption of objectivity in the natural sciences, the ideological relationship between science and knowledge, and the realities of women's everyday lives. Medical discourse about women's health reproduces cultural meanings embedded in other discursive practices such as religion, sexual behavior, economics and marriage.²⁴ With an understanding of these intertextual relationships women have been able to intervene in decisions regarding some medical practices, by asserting, for example, that women's physical health is not necessarily the same thing as cultural attitudes towards women's bodies.

But as Leslie Wahl Rabine writes, feminist theorists' engagement with deconstruction is not entirely benign. Of the tendency of feminists to incorporate poststructuralist concepts into strategy, she

²⁴ On the relationship between medical discourse and other meaning-making practices, see Fisher (1986), Martin (1987) and Todd (1989).

warns,

The deconstruction of metaphysical oppositions always takes place in a context of social hierarchy where speaker and listener, writer and reader, are placed in power relations with each other, no matter what the content of the text. Whether this play is progressive depends on who does it to whom, what is its historic or institutional context, and who makes the rules (1988, 28).

In the same vein, Mary Poovey notes the limitations of deconstruction, pointing to "the reluctance of deconstructive critics to examine the artifice --and historical specificity--of their own practice" (1988, 61). Poovey emphasizes deconstructivists' attention to "structures of language and conceptualization . . . instead of . . . an interest in the social relations or institutions by which language and ideas . . . are produced, distributed, and reinforced" (*Ibid.*).²⁵ In Chapter Three, the women's stories about their experiences at Yale point to some sites where such production, distribution and reinforcement take place.

More sensitive and thorough theorizing of experience and meaning has yielded a new awareness of the relationship between the two, a relationship captured for the moment in the concept of subjectivity. The rejection of an earlier feminist version of universal "Woman" by women whom it did not represent--women of color, poor and working class women, lesbians, women with disabilities, non-Western²⁶ women--acutely

²⁵ Newton and Rosenfelt (1985) argue for a materialist-feminist criticism that would address social and material conditions of cultural production along with the cultural products, or texts, themselves.

²⁶ Regarding the use of terms such as "Western," Martin and Mohanty note: "what is increasingly identified as 'white' or 'Western' feminism unwittingly leaves the terms of West/East, white/nonwhite polarities intact . . . The potential consequence is the repeated failure to contest the feigned homogeneity of the West and what seems to be a discursive and political stability of the hierarchical West/East divide" (1986, 193).

signaled the necessity of locating women as subjects of, not just in, their own lives. Subjectivity, newly theorized as the result of "that process by which one places oneself or is placed in social reality" (De Lauretis 1984, 159--adding agency to, rather than dismissing the commonplace meaning of subjectivity as the biased perspective of she who is placed), introduces the possibility of specific and different female subjects to fill the vacuum left by the dissolving universal Woman.

In part a response to poststructuralism's displacement of the unitary subject of humanism, feminist and non-feminist theorists have been asking, "If the subject is no longer the same as the individual, who or what is (are) the female subject(s)?"²⁷ The absence of a legitimate subject and unequally available or appropriate means of expression (because of the lesser status of women's discourses) may foreclose on the meaning of her experience. And as Poovey notes, even though women may be treated socially as unitary, that unitary category is not a "legitimate rallying point for political actions":

²⁷ The "problem of the subject" is one for more than feminist theory. The concrete, historical human subject as conceptualized in traditional humanist thought conflicts with a structuralist subject who (which), it is argued, exists only in the mind. What feminists offer to the humanist/structuralist debate is the discovery that in either case, the subject is (has been) male, leaving to women an undesirable choice between being either not-subjects (in humanism) or sub-subjects (in structuralism). Language also contributes to the problem, as in the case of gender-specific possessive pronouns and the assertion of a generic "man." See De Lauretis (1984, 161 ff.), Martyna (1983), McConnell-Ginet (1989), and Rowbotham (1973). Also important in this regard is Jane Flax's observation that some feminist theorists' emphasis on women's bodies reinforces man as norm and woman as problematic. At the same time, Flax adds, the reproduction of "culture-specific oppositions, for example, the one between 'nature' and 'culture' or 'body' and 'mind'" raises new questions: "does anatomy (body) have no relation to mind? What difference does it make in the constitution of my social experiences that I have a specifically female body?" (1987, 636).

On the one hand, we need to recognize that "woman" is currently both a position within a dominant, binary symbolic order and that that position is arbitrarily (and falsely) unified. On the other hand, we need to remember that there are concrete historical women whose differences reveal the inadequacy of this unified category in the present and the past (1988, 62).

At issue here is acknowledgment of the importance of experience even if that experience is unarticulated, for whatever reason.

The importance of women's experience for feminism and current feminist theory is precisely the power exercised by the attribution of meaning. The acknowledgement of the significance--or even more fundamentally the occurrence--of individual female experience in itself has been a major accomplishment of feminism (especially in making women's experiences visible). Even more important, and the object of this study, is attending to the meanings made of women's experience. This attention opens up to analysis "the process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed" (De Lauretis 1984, 159) and, consequently, draws our attention to what counts as meaningful and who gets to decide.

Investigating the meanings of women's experiences involves rethinking the processes by which meaning is arrived at and expressed. Taking the use of language (just one of these processes) as its focus, poststructuralist theory demonstrates that language is not a transparent medium reflecting an already given and fixed reality.²⁸ Instead, meaning is constituted in language; moreover, language is "a system always

²⁸ While this is not the place to outline the contours of structuralism and poststructuralism that have preceded the present status of theorizing the relationships between language, subjectivity and meaning, I do acknowledge that history. For a more thorough discussion see Coward and Ellis (1977).

existing in historically specific discourses" (Weedon 1987, 23).²⁹ Far from communicating identical meaning to all users and all audiences, language works as "competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world" (*Ibid.*, 24). Discourses have differing statuses and are unevenly accessible, determining the means available to articulate experience with authority. The "what" of meaning may be circumscribed by "whose," "how," "when," and "where."

The discourses of gender, class, race, age, ethnicity, and sexuality contribute to meaning, as do temporal and material conditions, sequences of events, logistics and necessity.³⁰ This is apparent in the interviews discussed in Chapter Three: for Marty Gilmour, the discourses of the sixties gave a particular, and positive, meaning to the organizing of Local 34; for Margaret Connolly, whose working class identity was not opposed to the ideology of individualism, the organizing campaign meant a threat to personal freedom.³¹ The inventory of possible meanings constrains as well as enables, and feminists' atten-

²⁹ See Treichler (1987, 290-91, Footnote 3) for a discussion of the specific "illusion" of transparency in the relationship between facts, realities and signifying practices in biomedical discourse. June Howard, however, cautions against taking discourse as the only force shaping reality: "To say that there is no human reality outside of language is not the same as saying there is nothing but language" (1988, 185-86).

³⁰ For example, see Victoria Leto DeFrancisco's (1988) innovative study of couple conversations, in which she creatively incorporated non-linguistic factors to arrive at a comprehensive analysis of conversations and meaning.

³¹ All names of interviewees are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. All quotations are verbatim from interview audiotapes, with editorial clarifications in brackets and any editorial emphases noted.

tion to the workings of social "technologies"³² of discourse improves our grasp of the connections between experience and the production of meaning in general and the meaning of gender in particular.

The Yale women describe ways in which the union and its organization have been (and remain) significant for their lives, for their identities, views of reality, perceptions of possibility and social and political positions. To recognize within their accounts a connection between meaning and experience is to call attention to the ongoing construction of reality, and the placing of oneself within it, that takes place in everyday life.³³ The women's accounts provide evidence of the experience of subjectivity, evidence in response to which we can advance our understanding about the construction of meaning, including the meanings of gender, race and class, and strategies for their transformation.³⁴

³² De Lauretis draws from Michel Foucault in her discussion of "technologie(s) of gender" (1987b, 2), despite Foucault's exclusion of gender as a consideration in much of his theory. As Weedon notes, such exclusions do not prohibit feminists' use of the theoretical work of non-feminists (1987, 12).

³³ The construction of the subject as a necessary feature of ideology is discussed in Belsey (1985) and Macdonell (1987).

³⁴ To take as evidence the stories told in interviews makes an implicit claim for their authenticity, without necessarily identifying the women as subjects who are independent authors of meaning. Claims such as this have come under scrutiny in recent feminist analyses of literary and historical methodology. See Popular Memory Group (1982) and Smith-Rosenberg (1986) for discussions of the presumptions involved in constructing a text. As Robert Fraser noted of his own use of oral history, "it may seem as though this book is saying: this is 'how it was'. But no. This is how it is remembered as having been." Fraser's foreword to Blood of Spain (1981) is quoted by Laura Marcus (1987, 80).

Feminist theory and gender subjectivity

Figuring the relation of experience and meaning and its (e)mergence into gender subjectivity seems, for the time being, fundamental to restoring feminism's explanatory and political power.³⁵ Formulating gender subjectivity in this way retains the power of a politics based on the experiences of women, without reproducing assumptions about essential human nature and reality that poststructuralism and earlier feminist analyses have shown to be constructions. Approaching the women's accounts as stories told from a subjectivity of gender may help us, in Weedon's words, "understand why women tolerate social relations which subordinate their interests to those of men and the mechanisms whereby women and men adopt particular discursive positions as representative of their interests" (1987, 12).

Feminist theorists ask how gender materially and discursively permeates the meanings women make of experience and the possibilities those meanings suggest for their lives.³⁶ The importance of subjectivity for feminist theory resides in the way this concept makes visible the situations in and processes through which women may and do act as agents rather than objects, constructing both the meanings and the possibilities of their lives.

³⁵ This relation has concrete historical as well as conceptual determinants and effects. For recent examples of historical perspectives on the relation between women's experience, meaning and the possibilities of their lives, see Fox-Genovese (1988), Meyerowitz (1988), Ryan (1983), Smith-Rosenberg (1986), and Stansell (1987).

³⁶ Although "the female subject is en-gendered across multiple representations of class, race, language, and social relations" (De Lauretis 1986b, 14), much feminist theory continues to insist that women's subjectivity is nonetheless a subjectivity of gender.

Gender subjectivity has become, in theory, the location in which it is possible to see "how it [women's experience] relates to material social practices and the power relations which structure them" (Weedon 1987, 8).³⁷ Teresa De Lauretis writes, "gender is a common denominator: the female subject is always constructed and defined in gender, starting from gender" (1986b, 14). This formulation of gender subjectivity opposes the traditional humanist belief in experience as a universal, unproblematic source of "true" knowledge. Moreover, the case recent feminist theory makes for gender subjectivity as a site of gender construction and resistance challenges the humanist tradition of a coherent and universal subjectivity providing all individuals with a common interpretation of reality. As Weedon notes, feminists claim "different realities exist for different individuals, all of which are valid, and women's realities differ from those of men" (1987, 8) and, I would add, from each others'.

More openly than most traditional theoretical orientations, feminist theory is a strategy, and acknowledgement of different realities has strategic value. As a "reflection on practice and experience," feminist theory has a purpose: to arrive at an understanding adequate to the task of transforming first self-consciousness, and then reality, through political action (De Lauretis 1984, 184). In this respect,

³⁷ Women of color have long argued that gender subjectivity does not supplant subjectivities of race or ethnicity. Feminist theorists' acknowledgement of multiple and contradictory subjectivities other than gender is a step in the right direction, but thus far inadequate and, as the discussion here demonstrates, continues to make gender primary. Carby (1982), Collins (1986, 1989a, 1989b, 1990), Hooks (1981, 1984, 1988, 1989a, 1989b), Joseph and Lewis (1981) and King (1988) offer analyses that counter feminist theorists' continued focus on the "primacy of gender" position.

feminist theory is like other strategies:

a local, specific, concrete intervention with definite political, even if provisional, aims and goals. . . . [Feminist theory] seeks effective forms of intervention into systems of power in order to subvert them and replace them with others more preferable. . . . All forms of strategy, in short, involve recognising what is in order to move on to what should be (Gross 1987, 196-97).

Feminist theorists' recent attention to the constructedness of the subject of spoken and written language contributes to this strategic purpose and to our understanding of gender subjectivity.³⁸ The search for a new speaking subject, notes Jardine, "should not be thought of as a search for new synthesis or transcendence, but as a strategy" (1985, 44). In their investigations of the constitution of the speaking (or silent) subject through the logics of language, the strategy of theorists like Jardine and Weedon is one of intervening by de- and re-constructing a system of power--language--that generates meaning in gendered terms. Weedon, for example, shows how the notion of common sense, which often functions to sustain the power dynamics of gender difference, assumes that experience gives access to truth and that language

³⁸ Feminist theorists' deconstruction of the subject of spoken and written language also has implications for the positions taken by feminist politics. If female experience has no unified or stable representation, neither can feminist activism or politics. As Rabine writes, "no synthesis between positions can form a complete and total answer, because they also exclude and threaten each other. . . . every position that contests or challenges our sociosymbolic order must do so incompletely because it must be formulated in the very language and logic of the order it wishes to overturn" (1988, 27). In response to the paralysis deconstruction might produce, Elizabeth Spelman "points out the arrogance of [the] assumption" that "if the picture of the world from where I stand is shown to be partial, biased, inadequate, then all pictures of the world must be equally so" (Scheman 1989, 20). Newton and Rosenfelt also address feminist politics in this theoretical context (1985, see especially pp. xxix-xxx), and Kate Ellis (1989) constructs a politics out of deconstruction's acknowledgement of subject positions and truths other than one's own.

expresses the truth thus revealed. The relationship between the individual and subjectivity maintained by these assumptions, combined with the power of certain discourses to assert the (one) true meaning of experience, suppresses the diversity of experience and reduces the plurality of possible meanings (Weedon 1987, 78).

Feminist analyses of conceptual and material determinants of gender subjectivity go beyond the poststructuralist claim that language is not a neutral medium through which all subjects are equally free and able to express their subjectivity. When powerful discourses assert the legitimacy and fixedness of human nature (Weedon 1987, 83), the status quo appears legitimate and the idea of change, not to mention its possibility, may seem irrational and threatening. In the case of the organizing of Local 34, Yale attempted to cast the union as a "third party" whose presence would alter "normal" relations between workers and the university; the implication was that the only possible outcome of union representation would be negative, a disruption of a legitimate and therefore presumably satisfactory situation. For workers who were dissatisfied with the status quo, intervention in that relationship had a positive meaning: the potential for change.

Taunts from delivery men who crossed the picket line similarly asserted a single legitimate social arrangement: that striking was inappropriate for women workers who should "go home to their husbands." In this instance, rather than convincing strikers that their behavior was inappropriate, the hecklers reinforced some strikers' sense that the strike was a statement regarding their subjective experiences as women who were not respected for the work they did--a statement no less valid

because it was made in a non-authorized discourse. As the subject of her own life, each striker was--as Bell Hooks puts it--the author of her speech and her own voice. In contrast with feminist theorists who question whether women can speak in man-made language, Hooks' point is that the act of speech is an assertion of self against the expectation of silence (1989a, 5-9).³⁹

The concept of subject position offers a basis for reconceptualizing the relationship between meaning and subjectivity. Henriques et al. (1984) describe how discursive practices provide "subject positions," that is, how the subject is not an individual, but a position within a particular discourse, indicating therefore that "there was no necessary coherence to the multiple sites in which subject-positions were produced" (203). In a reworking of Foucault's theorization of the relationship between discourses and power, Wendy Hollway (1984) formulates a way out of determining discourses. Reversing the passive construction her co-authors (in Henriques et al. 1984) make of the production of subject-positions, she writes that "discourses make available positions for subjects to take up," placing a certain degree of agency in the subject (Hollway 1984, 236). "People are constituted as the result of certain truths being current rather than others," she continues, suggesting that the coexistence of discourses offers choice

³⁹ Like Hooks, Paul Smith argues that "if women begin to speak and act from the same ground of . . . subjectivity and identity as men have traditionally enjoyed, a resistance is automatically effected in a sense" (1988, 137). Whether women can speak at all, much less in our own voices, when language and its logic and the rationality of traditional discourses are the products of male-dominated culture and reasoning is discussed by Jardine (1985), Spender (1980), Spivak (1988), and Weedon (1987, 74ff).

(237-39). The degree of actual or perceived choice, however, may have as much to do with individual history as with the positions offered by contemporary discourses. Hollway proposes, for example, that women may "choose" particular "subject positions" (such as for or against the union) because of the power a particular position promises relative to her "investment" in other "subject positions" determined by material needs, the maintenance or attainment of status, and personal history.⁴⁰ The classic example is that of a woman whose class identity is based on her husband's employment, not upon her subject position as wife, her own employment, her race, or other material and cultural locations. She defines the meaning of her experience in terms of the experience of the male with whom she is associated, terms allowed by the dominant discourses, and terms which subsume her experience within his.

De Lauretis' description of the "slippage between Woman as representation . . . and women as historical beings" (1987b, 10) (paralleling the humanist notion of a unified subject and the poststructuralist dismantling or decentering of that subject) suggests how the women's stories may help us understand this "investment" as a relationship between the generation of meaning and gender subjectivity. She locates the meaning of women's experiences both within and without the ideology of gender. Within the ideology of gender, women's subjectivity is con-

⁴⁰ Hollway defends her use of the term "investment" for its avoidance of problems with biologism and dualism, agency, and rational decision-making implicit in terms such as motivation, drive, instinct and choice. However, "investment" implies the availability of some discretionary "capital" over which the individual (subject) has some control and, more important, can afford to "risk." I am not at all certain that the taking up of subject positions by women and other less powerful groups involves the degree of autonomy or choice suggested by the term "investment."

structured as a universal sexual subjectivity: women as Woman, "the representation of an essence inherent in all women," (9) (all) female experience in contrast with (all) male experience. But because women are also "historical subjects governed by real social relations" (10), women's subjectivity is gendered within the context of the additional ideological and material dimensions of any particular woman's life: class, race, culture, age, among them. Women are both within the ideology of gender as Woman and without the ideology of gender as real historical beings. The women's accounts demonstrate that the possibility of resistance and the forms it takes are products of subjective and material conditions, discursive and socio-economic realities. For example, Laura Morrison is a white divorced single parent who opposed the union; for Morrison, striking was financially inconceivable, but she did not go to work for the initial three days of the strike as a gesture of support for her co-workers. May George, a young Black woman, drew upon her experience of the civil rights movement in the South to contextualize the struggle at Yale as one for global justice. Susanna Folsom is a white divorced single parent for whom the events at Yale underscored a feminist analysis of the waged work system.

Through personal accounts we come to know these and other women whose lives belie the universal representation of Woman, the presumed homogeneity of female experience, and the conformity of the meaning of those experiences to representations made of them. Nonetheless, we also hear how these women "continue to become Woman, continue to be caught in gender" (De Lauretis 1987b, 10). Each woman is engaged in the production of meaning via the (re)production of herself, translating the

experiences of subjectivity(ies) into meaning, turning them into an identity forged both within and against available discourses, located in a historical, social and material reality.⁴¹

In my discussion in Chapter Three of the women's accounts, the dynamic of discourse, power and experience takes shape as agency, an assertion of identity and possibility. Gender subjectivity does not (over)determine the meaning of experience; instead, the sense made by each woman is a product of negotiation between current truths, available discourses, material necessity and other, simultaneously occupied, apparently ungendered subject positions.⁴² The resultant meaning secures yet another location, a position where each woman is placed and can place herself in (her) social reality. Contesting the meaning--or, in Spender's term, the "naming"⁴³--of experience, then, becomes critical for

⁴¹ The women's interpretations of the union's and the university's positions is one example of resistance and accommodation; their reorganization of questions and emphases in the interviews is another. Patai (1988) discusses how the telling of a life history constructs a narrative and a narrated self. While the interviews were not entirely life histories, they did share some of the characteristics of life histories. I discuss the interview process in Chapter Four.

⁴² Kristin Luker found a similar negotiation at work between identity and historical moment in her study of pro-and anti-abortion activists (1984; see especially 116-17). S. Eisenstein uses Parkin's (1971, 92) formulation of "negotiation" in the production of working-class consciousness to explain women's "negotiation" of experience, relationship and tradition with dominant ideologies (S. Eisenstein 1983, 46-47).

⁴³ The significance for feminism of "the politics of naming" was outlined by Dale Spender (1980). Mary Daly (1978) also wrote about the power of naming. For a related discussion see Sutton (1976), who explores the effects of an academic tradition's "power to define" from the perspective of anthropology. In the present study, seeking to protect the anonymity of participants, I assumed the power to "name" them. A more equitable practice would have been to invite each participant to choose her pseudonym.

feminist theoretical and political strategy:

The meaning of experience is perhaps the most crucial site of political struggle over meaning since it involves personal, psychic and emotional investment on the part of the individual. It plays an important part in determining the individual's role as social agent. It affects both where and how the individual acts and whether her action is based on a consensual acceptance of the meaning and effects of an action, on conscious resistance to them or on the demands of other external necessities. The power of experience in the constitution of the individual as social agent comes from the dominant assumption in our society that experience gives access to truth. It is assumed that we come to know the world through experience. There is little question of experience being open to contradictory interpretations guaranteed by social interests rather than by objective truth (Weedon 1987, 79-80).

The negotiation of positions in women's responses to the union provides examples of "the power of experience in the constitution of the individual as social agent." Identity, agency and subjectivity intersect and are constructed in the narratives that make up each interview. The construction of self in response to the union (and self-definition within each interview), the assertion of a coherent identity out of multiple subject positions, was a form of resistance to the "otherness" of alternative subject positions. For example, several women explained their opposition to the union by describing how their lives, experiences, and self-images differed from those who supported the union. "I feel I'd lose my sense of self if I approached my problems [the way union members do]," said Rita Kushner.

The accounts discussed in Chapter Three may also be stories about engaging in, resisting and accommodating current truths. Included in these current truths were the university's and the union's competing representations of the "reality" of working at Yale. The attribution of meaning to experience becomes discernible as women describe the conditions in and by which they positioned themselves in social reality and

explain multiple and contradictory considerations in determining which conditions mattered and why. The women's explanations also insist that we think beyond gender as experienced only in terms of sexual difference. The subject "women" around whom and on whose behalf feminist theory and practices evolve live their lives across multiple subjectivities; gender difference is but one of these.

In a move to overcome the restrictions imposed by viewing gender as meaning exclusively sexual difference, De Lauretis urges a new theorization of the subject that parallels earlier demands for diversity in the theories, discourses and practices of feminism:

to conceive of the social subject and of the relations of subjectivity in another way: a subject constituted in gender, to be sure, though not by sexual difference alone, but rather across languages and cultural representations; a subject en-gendered in the experiencing of race and class, as well as sexual, relations; a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted (1987b, 2).

Thus, according to De Lauretis, gender subjectivity is one of many conditions in relation to which reality is constructed and compatible meanings of experience are generated. That her subjectivity is gendered does not assure a woman identifies herself primarily, or even at all, as gendered female.⁴⁴ The biological determination of sex is not identical to, nor experienced in the same ways as, the social construction of

⁴⁴ According to De Lauretis, gender is a primary instance of ideology, "regardless of whether particular individuals see themselves primarily defined (and oppressed) by gender, as white cultural feminists do, or primarily defined (and oppressed) by race and class relations, as women of color do" (1987b, 9).

gender.⁴⁵

Various discourses with the power to construct and control the field of social meaning "produce, promote, and 'implant' representations of gender" (De Lauretis 1987b, 18). Such discourses also construct and control the meaning of experience: historically women's experiences have either not been accorded a place in the field of meaning, or the meaning given by men (in the discourses they invent and control) to women's experiences was defined in contrast with and subordinated to the meaning of men's experiences.

In the first instance, the construction of gender went (and goes) on through the ability of powerful discourses to deny any meaning for women's experiences; there was but one form of meaningful experience, and it was male.⁴⁶ Dorothy E. Smith writes of what this has meant for sociology:

⁴⁵ However, see Judith Butler (1990) for a discussion of how "the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (7).

⁴⁶ Taking the male as representative of the human continues today in such authoritative practices as medical research. A recent study of the research practices of the U.S. National Institutes of Health revealed that "women are still being excluded from groups studied in federal health research projects" ("Sexist research"). Recent male-only research projects include studying the use of aspirin to reduce the incidence of heart attacks, monitoring the effects of cholesterol in the American diet and AIDS research ("AIDS: Rethinking the Risk;" Rosser 1989; "Sexual bias alleged"). Commenting on the exclusion of women from federally-funded medical research projects, U.S. Rep. Patricia Schroeder said, "What it's really saying is, it's OK to put women's health at risk" ("Sexual bias alleged," A1). From the perspective of the meaning of experience and gender subjectivity, such research biases imply that women's experiences do not merit the attention of medical researchers. One obvious conclusion, then, is that women's lives simply do not matter.

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 center women appeared 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 did not appear as the source of an authoritative general expression of the world (1979, 137).

In the second case, the meaning of gender is itself female; the norm of male experience, conceptually dependent though it is upon the experience of the not-normal "Other" (female), is not overtly gendered at all. Even here, though, if discourses (including the vocabulary and logic of everyday or specialized languages) available to make sense of women's lives dismiss, diminish, mystify, or universalize female experience--for example as that of universal Woman--such experience remains unexpressed or overlooked or becomes transmuted, distorted into expression that conceals (because it is not intended to, and cannot account for) the variety and variability of gender subjectivity. For women to derive meaning from their experiences--"as an autonomous source of knowledge, experience, relevance, and imagination" (*Ibid.*)--then, is to assert the legitimacy of the female subject's experiences as a basis for meaning and knowledge, hence a gendered subjectivity.

The women's accounts of their experiences at Yale demonstrate the construction of the female subject "across a multiplicity of [available] discourses, positions, and meanings" (De Lauretis 1987a, x). Because discourses and positions are occasionally in conflict with one another, and certainly are not fixed, each woman's account is a story told from and about the negotiated reality of multiple subject positions, or what Weedon calls "ways of being an individual" (1987, 3). While Henriques

et al. stress that the subject (or, more precisely, subject positions) is (are) not the same thing as the individual, Weedon's analysis enables us to go further, and to observe that subject positions are perceived as ways of being in relation to the individual each of us thinks she is. The accounts show women working to sustain, as well as resist, a gendered self in the conditions of everyday reality; how the different ways of being an individual are encouraged, contradicted and compromised both materially and discursively. As Laura Morrison put it, "I don't think of myself as a woman. I like being a woman." In telling their stories women generate the meaning of their lives within and across representations of class, race, culture, and gender, giving meaning to experience in ways which reaffirm and redefine their positions and, inevitably, gender norms. Paul Smith suggests this is a form of resistance "produced by and within the ideological. Where discourses actually take hold of or produce the so-called 'subject' they also enable agency and resistance" (1988, 40).

As a historical, political and cultural event, the organizing of a clerical and technical workers union at Yale University challenged then-existing relations of power, including the power relations of gender. The organizing of Local 34 created the possibility of reconstructing gender norms and gender subjectivity. The university is "male," dominant by virtue of its history, institutional purpose, power and the sex of most of its leadership. The clerical and technical workforce is "female," subordinated by its relationship to the institution--in status, power, compensation, and service role--and in its human composition. Local 34 is an institutional alternative whose purpose, power,

politics, structure, discourse and practices reflect (at least in some measure) the experiences and realities of the women who make up the majority of its membership. The women's experiences of the organizing of Local 34, the ways in which they made sense of the organizing and the issues the organizing and its aftermath raised for them are part of the context in which an alternative power structure became necessary and was created.⁴⁷ Despite differing opinions regarding the union, pro- and anti-union women shared their opposition to (male) institutional power, perceived as located either within the university or the union, and occasionally both. They also shared a resistance to particular present and powerful discourses competing to "implant" representations of gender (or, in Hollway's terms, current truths) within the issues of work, wages, the value of women's labor and the nature of worker/employer dynamics. Women's support, whether of the university or the union, favored specific discourses contesting, through competing representations, the meaning of these women's subjectivities.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The historical and particular context that made the creation of Local 34 both necessary and possible also enabled and constrained the shape it took. However, the degree to which Local 34 may have been or be an alternative to male-dominated union locals is not my point. Rather, I suggest that the existence of the local changed the perception and balance of power between the university and its employees, thereby constituting an alternative (new) power relation. For a history of blue collar unionization at Yale and valuable insights into the context of the Local 34 campaign, see Janick (1987). For insider perspectives on the Local 34 campaign and strike, see Cupo et al. (1984), Gilpin et al. (n.d.) and Ladd-Taylor (1985).

⁴⁸ In a recent overview of Black feminist theory, Patricia Hill Collins argues that "the individual [Black] women who in their consciousness choose to be self-defined and self-evaluating [rejecting, as it were, definitions and values not of their own making] are, in fact, activists. They are retaining a grip over their self-definition as subjects, as full humans, and rejecting definitions of themselves as the objectified 'other'" (1986, S24). While not all the women at Yale

By insisting upon the legitimacy of their different realities as the basis for their positions vis-à-vis the union, women at Yale asserted ways of giving meaning that both challenged and sustained traditional definitions of authoritative knowledge.⁴⁹ Each woman employed by Yale acted, resisted even, by negotiating the representations the union and the university made of the meaning of her experience.⁵⁰ The characteristic employee (female) accommodation to the power of employer (male) to determine truth and meaning regarding the value of work and the place of the worker was altered. The articulation of gender subjectivity by clerical and technical workers, institutionalized within the union and the organized opposition to the union, made possible a transformation of the power relations of gender. The conditions and meaning of gender

responded to the union from the position of Black female subjectivity, and the significance of each woman's behavior for her subjectivity has different meaning(s) (especially regarding what is meant by "the objectified 'other'"), the attempt by each woman I interviewed to be self-defined and self-evaluating and retain a grip over her self-definition as a subject against an objectified "other" is evident in the narratives in Chapter Three.

⁴⁹ A report to the community (Federation of University Employees, Local 34, 1984) contains vivid examples of pro-union women articulating their gender subjectivity in both concrete and abstract terms. Anti-union and neutral or inactive women did not create parallel public documents or texts, but, like their pro-union counterparts, in interviews with me relied upon their experiences, realities and needs as rational bases for generating meaning and justifying their positions.

⁵⁰ I am sensitive here to Denise Riley's admonition regarding the risks of consolidation. Riley cautions that "the collectivity which distinguishes you may also be wielded, if often unintentionally, against you. Not just against you as an individual, but also you as a social being" (1987, 44). This discussion of gender subjectivity inevitably consolidates, creating opportunities for subjection as well as subjectification, possibly compounding opportunities occasioned when women are distinguished collectively from men by culture and social practices. And as I discuss in Chapter Five, it is precisely the opportunity for subjectification created by the union campaign that has implications for strategies for organizing women.

subjectivity were open to challenge and change.⁵¹ By disrupting the silence audibly and behaviorally, vocal and active clerical and technical workers shifted, however slightly or indefinitely, the landscape of the relationship between Yale (male) administrative power and (female) workers' labor. Expressing gender subjectivity in terms of the meaning of experience had the potential ultimately to change even the material conditions of subjectivity; describing the experience of being underpaid relative to men, for example, exposed the terms--more money--that could transform at least that concrete aspect of women's subjective experience. With the articulation of this one aspect of gender subjectivity, it became possible to discuss others: equal treatment and respect, working conditions, compensation other than wages (health care, pension, training and promotion). In short, articulating gender subjectivity by giving meaning to women's concrete experiences opened up to public contestation assumptions undergirding the power of the university and dominant discourses to determine the place of women and the meaning of work, worth and compensation at Yale.⁵²

⁵¹ The interview context also made possible the articulation of gender subjectivity, but because of its private and individualized nature, the interview notably lacked the possibility of changing the concrete conditions of that subjectivity in any substantive way. However, some women did report later that the interview experience was itself meaningful, suggesting that while structural conditions of subjectivity were not altered by the interview, individual subjectivity may have been.

⁵² During the period of the strike in particular the entire community was drawn into discussion. See Gilpin et al. (n.d., 58, 65) and Ladd-Taylor (1985).

Subjectivity, identity, and a politics of location

Feminist theorizing of a female subject(s) seeks (among other things) to understand the possibilities of and means for women's agency: how can women act on our own behalf and in our own interests? For this theoretical project to have strategic value, there must be possible female subjects of some non-essential, non-universal sort, constituted by (and subjected to) material conditions and available discourses and constituting specific positions (subjectivities) materially and discursively.⁵³ These female subjects are neither entirely humanist nor post-structuralist, but both, which locates them "elsewhere," "inside and outside the ideology of gender" (De Lauretis 1987b, 26, 10). Catherine Belsey elaborates:

Women as a group in our society are both produced and inhibited by contradictory discourses. Very broadly, we participate both in the liberal-humanist discourse of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time in the specifically feminine discourse offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational intuition (1985, 50).

By allowing for a heterogeneity and simultaneity of perspectives on experience and reality that vary by person, within persons, and over place and time, feminism accommodates the apparent contradiction of presuming a collectivity of women while asserting the distinct and different specificity of each woman's material, historical, cultural

⁵³ Feminism's attention to the female subject means the creation of female subjects in a way similar to, but not identical with, the creation of political subjects by the movement for racial equality. Michael Omi and Howard Winant stress this point, recalling the weight of the power to define: "The social movement for racial equality had its greatest success in its ability to create new racial 'subjects,' in its ability to redefine the meaning of racial identity, and consequently of race itself, in American society" (1983b, 35; emphasis in original).

reality.⁵⁴ Feminist theorizing of the female subject(s) refuses the exclusionary uniformity of the humanist bind while still regarding women as a (social) collectivity; it also reconceptualizes the fragmented, displaced subject of poststructuralism while making central to its theory the multiple subjectivities women experience. Mary Poovey urges "pursuing two projects simultaneously":

The multiple positions real women occupy--the positions dictated by race, for example, or by class or sexual preference--should alert us to the inadequacy of binary logic and unitary selves without making us forget that this logic has dictated (and still does) some aspects of women's social treatment (1988, 62).

Feminism retains political power by what P. Smith calls a "quadrupled" strategy:

simultaneously an attack on traditional and masculinist notions of the centered subject, along with the revindication of female specificity; and . . . the embracing of fairly familiar poststructuralist notions of the decentered subject, as well as an increasingly frequent attempt to halt the tropological turns of that radical decentering (1988, 149).

Returning to De Lauretis, we can say that feminism is asserting the possibility of action or resistance on the part(s) of women without presuming an essence of "Woman," and at the same time preserving grounds for speaking of women "as a class."⁵⁵ That political power is theoretical--

⁵⁴ De Lauretis calls this the differences within, rather than between, women or between women and men (1986b, 14). Other feminist theorists have made similar arguments; see Christian (1980) and Collins (1986).

⁵⁵ Although feminism "enables us to say something about women as a group or class," thereby implying a traditional theoretical stance (Treichler 1985, 57), much current feminist theory does not claim status as a comprehensive "truth." To the contrary, recent feminist theory makes totalizing theories not only undesirable but impossible, by emphasizing multiplicity, diversity, instability and specificity as epistemological conditions. See Harding (1986a) and Flax (1987). Newton and Rosenfelt (1985) also discuss the possibility of action and resistance in the context of feminist criticism.

feminism is itself a challenge to the totalizing power of other discourses--and actual, showing how women act to negotiate conflicting and contradictory subjectivities, working out an accommodation between the representation of "Woman" and the concrete experiences of daily life.

Generating the meaning of experience out of and in terms of subjectivity creates--and either sustains or transforms--an identity. This is identity as positionality, the placement of the individual in social reality. Her position includes those she is put into and any she is able to create for herself. An example of the combination of self-generated and socially-created positions one woman may occupy appears in Yale worker Julia McKinney's description of her sense of herself as both the supportive female (in her marriage and in her work) and as an independent individual who "knows things" and can take political action on the basis of her life experience and convictions.⁵⁶ Her decision to begin using her maiden name several years after her divorce was finalized is an expression of her efforts to control her position (identity), this time through the power of naming. This identity is neither constant nor the end-point of an evolutionary maturing but rather an ongoing and flexible accommodation that reflects its history and its context and in any moment renegotiates, through interaction and articulation, between and among concrete circumstances such as work,

⁵⁶ Similarly, Moiram Ali found that during the British miners' strike, the process of politicization enabled women (miners' wives and others) to make connections between "seemingly separate issues . . . understanding how the world . . . works," and "how they fit into that order" (1987, 102).

family, and age.⁵⁷

While the forging of an identity may be an attempt to unify contradictory subject positions,⁵⁸ to endure an identity must be flexible, moving within shifting realities, even "positioned and repositioned from one moment to the next" (Henriques et al. 1984, 225). As Steven Epstein puts it,

To paraphrase Marx, people make their own identities, but they do not make them just as they please. Identities are phenomena that permit people to become acting "subjects" who define who they are in the world, but at the same time identities "subject" those people to the controlling power of external categorization (1987, 30).

Epstein is writing specifically about the identity politics of gay and lesbian activism, but his survey of the assertion of identity as a political place from which to speak as subject has other, equally significant applications.⁵⁹ He cites Lee Rainwater (1970, 25), who argues that identity emerges from available cultural material, and is

⁵⁷ This description of negotiation of discourse and material reality to create, secure and assert one's position/identity, giving meaning to one's experience, has been used elsewhere to describe consciousness; see S. Eisenstein (1983, 37-54), Epstein (1987), Janiewski (1985, 49), and Ortner and Whitehead (1981, 1-27).

⁵⁸ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl suggests that women's contemporary quest for identity may be the equivalent of the more public rites of passage experienced by males moving towards individuation and autonomy (1987, 218). She notes, however, that women's desire to achieve an autonomous, cohesive identity ("definition achieved rather than accepted, chosen rather than enforced, made rather than born") while "in many ways laudable in socio-political terms," silences the real contradictions and conflicts within which alternative ways of being may be possible (219).

⁵⁹ In a rather different setting, Polish journalist and Solidarity activist Halina Bortnowska described the relationship between subjectivity and agency in an interview with Lawrence Weschler. Weschler writes, "It was she [Bortnowska], for example, who'd commented, in January 1981, that Solidarity was 'now one of the most important expressions of what I'll call the "subjectivity" of Polish society, its capacity for acting as subject rather than the object of its history'" (1988, 22).

then "announced" when such announcement serves some need that society will validate "by a congruent placement" (Epstein 1987, 29). These variations on the politics of identity suggest a politics of location, backtracking through Hollway's formulation of the investment individuals have in particular subject positions and current truths.

Position--which is not only the abstractions of gender, race or class identity, but rather these and the concrete place(s) in which women experience, and from which they interpret and confirm, the realities of their lives--is both source and consequence of the generation of meaning. Each woman's story represents (and reproduces) realities within which her identity, her experiences, have a place. The foundation and framework of that story is the meaning of her experiences for the position she perceives herself to occupy.

Cultural valorization of individualism weaves its way into the assertion of position. I discuss this more fully in Chapter Three, with specific reference to the women's accounts. Here I note the relationship between the liberal humanist concept of individuality and the negotiation of women's position.⁶⁰ Cultural regard for individuality makes some positions appear more desirable than others, and material necessity for "freedom to act as an individual" (addressed in Chapter

⁶⁰ Henriques et al. discuss in particular how women academics may feel compelled to assert a coherent--unitary--identity to overcome the contradictions between being positioned as woman and as academic, especially when "the normative practices which fix us produce for us a model of a whole mature 'individual' with an 'identity'" (1984, 225). See Rakow (1990) for an example of this contradiction. At Yale, the organization of work encouraged employees to see themselves as individuals, and the status acquired by association with the institution was individual--a worker could take it with her into a social setting or to another workplace.

Three) makes some positions appear to allow more flexibility than others. For women, legitimating one's place in the world in terms of individuality may offer the additional reassurance of conformity to cultural and social values, even if the usual paths to individual accomplishment, and their desirability, are less accessible for women. We need to ask what is meant when a woman desires and articulates individuality, using the concept to explain her lived experience and the "identity work" she does.⁶¹

At the same time, aspiring to autonomy and achievement may be radical and resistant, instead of (or in addition to) signalling an attempt to conform with an ideology that offers women contradictory positions (Newton and Rosenfelt 1985, xxv). Strategic efforts towards equality with men for women are often accompanied by (or in some cases opposed by) a reconceptualized feminist perspective reflecting what Elizabeth Gross calls a "politics of autonomy." In place of the goal of equivalence to an already determined standard or norm, a politics of autonomy:

implies the right to accept or reject such norms or standards according to their appropriateness to one's self-definition. . . . Struggles for autonomy . . . imply the right to reject such standards and create new ones (1987, 193).

Stated this way, a politics of autonomy assumes the freedom to

⁶¹ Barbara Ponse uses the term "identity work" to describe the attempt by lesbians "to actively seek to organize into a coherent whole their thoughts, motivations, and experiences with others--to create a consistent biography which legitimates their places in the world" (1978, 65, quoted by Epstein 1987, 32-33). I do not wish to collapse the particular legitimation struggles of lesbians with those of the women I interviewed. Rather, I am using the concept of identity work to represent the necessity for members of all but dominant groups to argue for the legitimacy of places from which to speak and act.

choose one's "self-definition." The relationship between gender subjectivity and self-definition--where women may conform to or exclude themselves from currently available truths--clearly compromises that choice. To be able to engage fully in a politics of autonomy, self-definition--placing one's self in social reality--would have to be a good deal less bound by the powerful discourses of particular interests. The subject defining herself would have to be free to be motivated by her own desire, not by structural necessity, imposed norms and expectations or self-preservation.⁸²

As was the case for the women at Yale, the context of an assertion of individuality says quite a lot about the meaning of individualism for women. Roberta Spalter-Roth found that female street vendors resisted a union organizing campaign for a variety of reasons, which we could describe in terms of the investment each vendor had in particular subject positions and with reference to her concrete lived experience:

Other women told us that they were not interested in paying dues or sitting through meetings, or "paying for the privilege of being ignored" by the men running the union. Their strong sense of individualism and their experience in solving problems by themselves [heightened by the solitary nature of their work] made it difficult for them to want to participate in what some of them perceived as a hierarchical union structure (with men at the top of the hierarchy) (1988, 288).

Women's identification as individuals is particularly interesting, since Western culture is so successful (certainly the forms and degrees of success vary) at treating women socially as a class of undifferentiated "individuals." I do not mean to imply that the presumed accomplishment of autonomy that accompanies individualistic identity in women

⁸² However, even desire may be a non-autonomous basis for self-definition; see Benjamin (1980 and 1986) and Coltheart (1986).

is any sort of "false consciousness," but quite the opposite. Women's justified sense of accomplishment in the negotiation of contradictory subject positions is a source of power, resistance and pride, and doing "identity work" generates meanings that both incorporate and transform the proscriptive possibilities for women's lives. Individualism may be a cultural imperative, but the context, meaning and boundaries of individuality can change.

The women's accounts of their actual experiences in the interviews show them doing what Daphne Patai says "we all do," "forging human relations within the situations that constrain [them]" (1988, 163). In her interpretation of the story of one woman she interviewed, Patai stresses the structured nature of narrative, a self-expression in which the narrator is:

struggling to make sense of events that are beyond her control and to establish a place for herself in terms of the things that are within her control, and doing so not only through her actions but also through her representation of those actions via language (Ibid., 163).

One notable outcome of the way feminist theorists are currently formulating the female subject is the space created by feminist research for seeing, as well as being, subjects who act to negotiate their subjection to concrete historical circumstances and broader ideological and cultural expectations, pressures and constructions. The subject's "relation to its [sic] own history" is part of the formulation; feminism retains "the ability to point to and analyze material conditions, the actuality, or, in short, the reality of oppressions" (P. Smith 1988, 159-60).

The visibility of subjectivity and its relation to the generation

of meaning in the women's accounts is instructive for feminist theory as a strategy for social change. In addition to the necessity of learning what women think is important, strategy also relies on discovering places where change is possible. The spaces subjects occupy are "real," locations in which action, if not authority, is possible. The clearing of the space in which women are historical subjects governed by real social relations also allows for the location of female subjects with identities that can, and do, change. If social structures largely beyond the control of individuals create the contexts in which subject positions are staked out and investments in them are made,⁶³ we need to ask how change can happen. When discourses sustain practices and practices sustain discourses, what would cause a woman to change her investment strategy?⁶⁴

According to A Feminist Dictionary, identity "is what you can say you are according to what they say you can be" (J. Johnston in Kramarae and Treichler 1985, 205). Biddy Martin argues that identity "can only be understood . . . in terms of the complicated and often paradoxical ways in which pleasures, knowledges and power are produced and disciplined in language, and institutionalized across multiple social fields" (1982, 9). Hollway convincingly argues that power contributes to identity through its investiture in positions. From these perspectives

⁶³ See D. Smith (1987, especially Chapter 5).

⁶⁴ De Lauretis asks a related question: "What will persuade women to invest in other positions, in other sources of power capable of changing gender relations, when they have assumed the current position (of female in the [heterosexual] couple), in the first place, because that position afforded them, as women, a certain relative power?" (1987b, 17).

women may choose short term solutions that meet current needs, when preservation of one's current position (identity) is most pragmatic. In support of this view, Kate Purcell refers to Coates and Silburn's (1973) observation,

that in a slum where the roof leaks, it is a much easier, more practicable and more effective solution in the short term to put out a bucket to catch the drips than to organise a petition or campaign for better housing (Purcell 1979, 128).

"That is," Purcell elaborates, "to adopt the individual as opposed to the collective response" (*Ibid.*). For working women who are the object (subjects) of a union organizing campaign, "a decision to choose the effective short-term solution rather than the possibly ineffective long-term solution may not be less rational--or less militant" (*Ibid.*).

"[W]e negotiate our locales," notes Elspeth Probyn; "we are continuously working to make sense of and articulate both place and event" (1990, 182). When the locales in which women are situated change or offer opportunities for change, the negotiations between place and event, between identity and position, between context and possibility, become places where women can change the meaning of their experiences. Regarding their studies of "how women organize, live, and seek to change their lives," Susan C. Bourque and Donna Robinson Divine write,

Even without necessarily changing their behavior, men and women have enormous scope for changing the meaning they attribute to their own activities. Through these activities, either in response to situations imposed upon them or in pursuit of newly perceived opportunities, whether or not consciously acknowledged, women may also seek autonomy, power and control (1985, 9).

Weedon argues that only a concept of woman's subjectivity that accommodates contradictions, negotiation and agency within a historical, cultural, and discursive context holds the possibility of a feminist

practice able to "transform both the social relations of knowledge production and the type of knowledge produced" (1987, 7). She maintains that the experience of multiple subject positions--those "ways of being an individual" (3)--provides the opportunity for change. Her emphasis on experience as a source for and factor in change offers an answer to criticism that struggles over discourse alone are insufficient forms of political transformation.⁶⁵ Projecting the ongoing negotiation of subjectivity into an identity that consciously chooses among discourses, Weedon maps a route to change through spaces where resistance is possible:

The individual who has a memory and an already discursively constituted sense of identity may resist particular interpellations or produce new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions between existing discourses. Knowledge of more than one discourse and the recognition that meaning is plural allows for a measure of choice on the part of the individual and even where choice is not available, resistance is still possible (106).

In addition to the case I make in Chapter Three regarding the women at Yale, two recent studies may be useful in assessing Weedon's argument. In all three cases, identity is a vehicle of and for the generation of meaning by women who actively negotiate conflicts and contradictions in their lives. Given the opportunity (Probyn's "locale"), women negotiate among available discourses to sustain and change positions relative to other women (Finch 1983) and to men and other ethnic groups (Krojzl 1987).

In a study of women who organized playgroups for their children, Janet Finch found that the women created for themselves a new subject

⁶⁵ See Clausen (1982) for a discussion of the emphasis in literary theory on effecting social change by transforming the symbolic.

position. The new position altered those assigned socially (gender and class), but in so doing retained the premise of gender and class positions as significant. Finch found that participation in the playgroups offered women "the opportunity . . . to draw such boundaries so as to place themselves on the 'correct' side, thus enabling them to construct and reinforce their own position" (1983, 110). In an equation partially constructed by society at large and reinforced by their own adoption of it, the "correct" side was "respectability" as opposed to "rough." The act of locating themselves in such a clearly hierarchical scheme caused Finch to ask, echoing Hollway's "investments" metaphor,

What are the potential benefits that make these distinctions worth creating and maintaining? What do women get out of being 'respectable' rather than 'rough'? Are there any material benefits? or do they 'merely' derive prestige and status? (115)

Finch answers these questions by describing women's agency with reference to their subjectivity. The playgroup women are "actively constituting their own position in some relevant social hierarchy" (107). Finch's analysis of the relationship of that active construction of position to the playgroup women's many subject positions (she mentions class, gender and age but omits race and ethnicity, which may be equally significant) is instructive for feminist strategy and for the accounts of the women at Yale, and merits quotation of a lengthy excerpt. She addresses simultaneous "ways of being an individual" (Weedon 1987, 3), including the pressure to unite all those ways into some coherent self:

If one takes seriously the experience of the women themselves, then the very status of acknowledged respectability was in itself a real gain. The real significance of this can probably only be established on the basis of empirical data from different settings, but I can suggest three possible perspectives which may

begin to make sense of it. Firstly an individual woman's experience of her own placement within any significant social hierarchy is probably very complex, since she is located within cross-cutting hierarchies of gender, class, and perhaps status groups mediated . . . through her participation in a particular community. A 'respectable' reputation may provide, as it were, a summarising label, which subsumes several elements and gives a woman some comprehensible basis on which to handle daily relationships. Secondly, the creation of hierarchies among young mothers may be part of a wider pattern of such hierarchies which a woman experiences at different stages of her life. . . . Thirdly, an identity as 'respectable' should perhaps be seen as offering a way of being accorded status which distinguishes a working-class woman from her neighbors when no other means are available, since she shares both their economic position and their sex. . . . All of this is of course an entirely comprehensible response to being precisely in the material position which they all shared: accorded inferior status on many counts, with the only real possibility of scrambling off the bottom of the pile being to establish a superior position vis-à-vis other women (116-117).

The playgroup women were engaged in what Helen Callaway, referring to Carol Krojzl's study of immigrant Turkish women in Berlin, calls "the politics of classification" (1987, 220). According to Krojzl, by preserving markers of ethnicity in dress and language and refusing to assimilate into Berlin society, the Turkish women accepted the hostile classification given them by native Germans but turned it to their advantage. Their participation in women's advisory centers (financed by the Berlin Senate to effect assimilation) demonstrated and reinforced their group identity--gender as well as ethnic--since such activities recreated traditional Turkish female networks that Turkish men living in Berlin regarded, in this new locale, as a loss of control for themselves (Krojzl 1987, 209).⁶⁶ Krojzl explains:

⁶⁶ Compared with the Victorian women who were unsuccessful in their attempt to change their circumstances by reasoning in men's discourse on their own behalf, the Turkish women used ethnic and gender norms to resist discourses of assimilation and succeeded in preserving and even enlarging their autonomy.

In Berlin, therefore, the "traditional" behaviour of Turkish women becomes political. This is first because they have to assert what they were previously able to take for granted, and second because in making this assertion they often unintentionally become involved in the political struggles of the Berliners who work alongside them (209).

From the "positional definition" (Alcoff 1988, 433) of "woman"--located within and against discourses and other economic, cultural and political conditions--identity works personally and politically, marking a place where possibilities are created and assessed, new knowledges are made and asserted, and meaning is generated. In the women's accounts of the organizing of Local 34 at Yale and its meaning in their lives, their identities take shape at the intersection of experience and subjectivity, appearing out of the negotiation between multiple subject positions, concrete realities and available discourses. As Weedon notes, "the individual is not merely the passive site of discursive struggle" (1987, 106):

. . . discourses, located as they are in social institutions and processes are continually competing with each other for the allegiance of individual agents. . . . Individuals are both the site and subjects of discursive struggle for their identity. Yet the interpellation of individuals as subjects within a particular discourse is never final. It is always open to challenge (97, emphasis in original).

The interviews with women at Yale may be seen as records of the ways in which individuals negotiate material conditions and discursive options. They show how women work to negotiate possibilities and resolve contradictions. Subjectivity, position and identity are fluid; as circumstances change, the women change, generating the meaning of subjectivity into identities, positions from which events and circumstances make sense. What is negotiated, along with the viability of position that identity asserts, is the meaning of experience.

Where there are contradictions and negotiation, there is room for change. "The ways in which individuals understand their material conditions of existence," writes Weedon, "becomes a site of struggle where they can either be reproduced or transformed" (1987, 27). The meanings made of experience--including the multiple subjectivities of gender, race and class experience--may create as well as sustain positions and identities. We can see more than one pattern, "in the same situation the forces of oppression and the seeds of resistance" (Newton and Rosenfelt 1985, xxii). This, then, is the theoretical context in which women's responses to the events at Yale may be taken as examples of the generation of meaning by gendered subjects. This, too, is the importance of the generation of meaning for feminist politics.

Chapter Three

Telling Stories About Reality

My focus in this chapter is the negotiation of identities and subjectivities: what can we learn from women's accounts of their experiences that advances our understanding of how women generate the meaning of their lives? The variety of responses to the organization of Local 34, and women's accounts of their responses, affirm a diversity of identity and work done to (re)produce the social relations that make diverse identities possible and sustainable. A subtext in this chapter is the construction of identity in a particular historical moment and its function as a tool for and product of the negotiation of a particular and local reality.

I use excerpts from interviews to illustrate a relationship between identity, reality and perceptions of possibility; the interviews, then, are evidence of people creating (and recreating) reality and themselves through the stories they tell.¹ By identifying and asserting subject positions and their relationship to the union, the university, and the world at large, these women are creating the meaning of their life experiences. Understanding this meaning-generating activity is critical to the feminist project, for which "contests to set

¹ See Fisher and Groce (1990) for a thorough discussion of how accounting practices do interactional work within a larger social order, producing and constraining the organization of experience and the negotiation of identity, creating meanings in which the larger social order is implicated and reproduced. See also Alcoff (1988), who discusses the relationship between women's identity and the social and cultural positions of women.

the terms of speech" (Haraway 1981, 471) and "struggles over how to see" (Haraway 1988, 587) are fundamental.

Identity is a shifting and fluid composite of experience, culture, material conditions, personality; in the terms of the preceding chapter, identity is a complex subjectivity of position and location. This multiplicity of positions and acknowledgement of their presence and power is crucial for feminist theorizing about women's subjectivity and for organizing practices directed towards women workers.

The discussion of identity builds on the experiences of specific women confronting specific concerns in a particular context. Their accounts make a case for the construction of identity as an ongoing dialectical process: identity takes shape as a yardstick against which possible realities are gauged, while possible realities suggest and allow transformations, new dimensions of identity, to emerge. Through the lived experience and again in telling of it, women create meaning, including the meaning of one's place in a social world, the meanings of gender, race and class, the meaning of the events at Yale for one's identity, realities, and future. One Yale employee, not yet forty years old, evaluated the union's relation to her reality by projecting into the future, locating the meaning of the union in terms of the positions and lifestyle she anticipated for herself:

I could conceivably work for the next thirty-five years, I could live alone in marginal neighborhoods, I could approach entertaining myself on weekends as though it were buying a car, and I could retire into deepest poverty. What kind of a life is this? (Pam Norden)

Norden is negotiating possibilities, mentally playing off aspects of concrete, lived experience and identity against the implicit promise of another reality made possible by the union. Through this process of negotiating possibilities women create a social world in which they can believe and live. Through this process women also create the meaning of that social world and the meaning of their places in it.

Possible worlds are themselves products of larger social contexts. While someone may reject a certain possibility as incompatible with identity, such a response inevitably sustains other more compatible possibilities in the autobiographical present and future. For example, some women believed the implications of a union representing clerical and technical workers at Yale University were incompatible with their identities as autonomous, independent women:

Mostly I feel a) they [unions] are taking away freedom of choice and b) stop you from being individualistic. . . . the union was one of the most devastating things that happened to me. (Margaret Connolly)

Others believed a union would make possible the realization of a desired identity:

I was thrilled [when I heard about the union organizing]. Usually people's politics are quite separate from anything terribly real in their own life, and I had been sort of an armchair political person. . . . even if I was fighting for civil rights or a particular candidate or something, that didn't affect my life in a real way, in as real a way as this. It gave me a chance to express something I'd been wanting to express all my life. (Susanna Folsom)

The discussion in this chapter begins with the importance of identity and then addresses how particular and intersecting experiences of gender, race and class have contributed to these women's identities. Despite a widespread public characterization of the events at Yale as a

women's struggle, few of the women I interviewed described the union campaign as gender-focused. Nonetheless, their comments regarding gender and their experiences of gender subjectivity suggest how gender was a factor in their responses to the events at Yale. In the evaluation of the possibilities and realities proposed, in the negotiation of competing positions, in the creation of the meaning of these events, different experiences of gender and their contribution to identity are visible.

In the white women's accounts the relationship between race and identity is less perceptible than that between gender and identity. Members of a dominant race in the West are rarely conscious of their experiences as race-specific.² The majority of women I interviewed are white, as are the majority of women in the Local 34 bargaining unit. Women of color expressed much more readily than white women the significance of race for their life experiences and their responses to the union.

Although the union documented wage discrimination against people of color, race issues were not originally a distinct focus of the organizing campaign.³ Nor was racial equality part of the meaning the mass media attributed to the conflict at Yale, as was gender equality.

² See Hooks (1988) for a discussion of white women's unconsciousness of their race as an attitude of white supremacy. Stanback (1988) considers the same attitude among researchers.

³ This omission contributed to the formation of the Black Caucus, composed of Yale students who worked to bring minority issues onto Local 34's organizing and bargaining agenda. As of this writing, the Black Caucus no longer exists (Tuhus 1988, 11). Negotiations for and the language of the resulting second Local 34 contract addressed affirmative action issues more directly than had the first contract; see McClure (1989).

However, for several Black women, reconciling the representations of reality made by the university and the union with their life experiences attested to their identities as Black women rather than to gender alone. The relationship between an identity of race and gender subjectivity and reality appears in the ways in which these women's responses to the union reflect their experiences as Black women and their suggestions of the intersection of gender and race in their lives. For example, one woman remarked that she "always saw these two issues as integrated: women, minorities, are always . . . marginalized, people who are manipulated and used to set a certain standard, usually a low standard for pay for entry" (May George).

Despite the historic association of the concept of class with labor organizing, class was not an immediate focus of discussion in these interviews. Certainly this does not mean people experience class any less thoroughly than they experience being Black, white or female. Rather, the relationship of class to identity and its role in meaning-making are less apparent and less easily spoken of than are the relationships between gender and race and identity.

Class position does not have a physiological dimension, as do race and sex. One does not inhabit one's class in the same way that one inhabits a physical corpus that is Black, white or female, even though class may have material consequences that parallel those of race and gender. As long as class status--understood by most of those interviewed as a lifestyle reflecting income and educational level attained, not as a relationship to the labor economy or to the means of production--is believed to be changeable (and as long as sex and race are

not), articulated identity may be less imbued with class than it is with gender or race.⁴

Identity takes shape within the subjective experiences of everyday life; the realities these women know are experiential as well as abstract (ideological) realities. When the union proposed that workers at Yale were not respected by their employer, but could take steps to obtain respect, it presented these women with the suggestion that their assumed place in a given reality was not only inaccurate but could be improved. It then became possible for women working at Yale to understand their subjective experience in a different way. With that possibility came the necessity of evaluating competing representations of reality, reconciling contradictions and negotiating between identity and experience on the basis of personal knowledge.

The introduction of new ways of understanding subjective experience opens up new perspectives on identity and the personal knowledge that informs and sustains identity. The interviews demonstrate how life experiences provide a basis for claiming knowledge and how those experiences contribute to the meaning of the events at Yale. In telling their stories, these women reconstruct themselves as knowers and creators of meaning and locate their identities in a reality that is concrete and subjective, constrained and open to possibility.

⁴ The relatively awkward discussion of class (compared to discussion of gender and race) in the interviews also suggests women are less able to participate, via speech and language, in the construction of their class status or class identity than they are able to create, name, define, and mediate their experiences of gender and, for women of color, their experiences of race as well.

The importance of identity

The theme of identity conveys a legacy of theoretical inquiry and is also central to contemporary feminist thought.⁵ By identity I mean most simply one's conception of one's self. Within the context of this project and feminist politics this definition has historical, cultural and social content: one's conception of one's self as a woman having knowledge, with a history, and familial and social relations, located in a particular moment--a woman employed by Yale University, and a participant in or witness to events surrounding the organization of Local 34.

Any discussion of women's identity also has theoretical implications. Feminists inquiring into the realities of women's lives have recently emphasized the fluidity and multiple elements of socially constructed experience that contribute to identity.⁶ Recent studies document the variety of ways in which women actively work to assert autonomy and identity, even in situations where such opportunities may appear limited.⁷ The means to do so--through spoken language, behavior and thought--reflect culture, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ideology. Teresa De Lauretis refers to these means as the "particular discursive configurations" within which self and identity are understood, including whatever concepts, ideas, and forms of communication may be

⁵ See for example, Fransella and Frost (1977).

⁶ See, for example, Hollway (1984) and Weedon (1987, especially Chapter Four), who discuss the relationship between gender and the construction of subjectivity.

⁷ For example, see Ali (1987), Benson (1984), Bookman (1988), Dill (1988), Finch (1983), Hall (1986), Krojzl (1987), Janiewski (1985), Luttrell (1988), Purcell (1979), Sacks (1988), Shapiro-Perl (1984), and Westwood (1984, 1985).

known and available to express and legitimate one's self (1986b, 8).

She gives to identity a role as the starting point in the evolution of consciousness. Through identity, consciousness is made fluid because the means available to express identity are ever-changing:

Consciousness, therefore, is never fixed, never attained once and for all, because discursive boundaries change with historical conditions. In this perspective, the very notion of identity undergoes a shift: identity is not the goal but rather the point of departure of the process of self-consciousness, a process by which one begins to know that and how the personal is political, that and how the subject is specifically and materially engendered in its social conditions and possibilities of existence (8-9).

The conditions De Lauretis claims determine one's understanding of self and identity are evident in each woman's account of her experiences at Yale. Here "discursive configurations" appear not simply as languages or language use, but in the act of positioning one's self within possible social relations, class status, gender, race, history, and culture. In De Lauretis' terms, these are acts of inhabiting discursive subjectivities or subject positions.⁸

Each of us experiences a variety of potential subject positions in different places and at different times. Of those experienced in common, like gender, each "habitation" or position is understood and experienced differently by each woman I interviewed. The women's accounts demonstrate their awareness of these differences. For example, some women assumed (about others) that a family history of union in-

⁸ In addition to O'Sullivan et al.'s (1983) definition of discourse, mentioned in the preceding chapter, I have also in mind Kramarae and Treichler: "for women, this [discourse] usually means conversation, not the written work," and, quoting Gail Scott: "It happens on the back porch" (1985, 125).

volvement would make support of Local 34 more likely.⁹ The articulation of this assumption--that a person might be receptive to the union "because you had that kind of background" (Laura Morrison)--functions to distinguish one woman's personal history and her subject positions from those of others. This statement legitimizes Morrison's identity by asserting her own subjectivity: she is positioning herself in contrast with other women whose subjectivities, and whose responses to the union, she acknowledges to be legitimately different from her own. Similarly, women opposed to the union justified their positions as "my personal decision," acknowledging that their interpretation of the meaning of "union" (while legitimate in their own realities) might differ from someone else's interpretation. Such acknowledgement signals these women's consciousness of different experiences, and to some extent acceptance of different "subject positions" and different perceptions of reality. This diversity of women's experiences and identification with gender, race and class has recently become more commonly acknowledged in feminist literature.¹⁰

Before moving to what the interviews offer on the contributions of gender, race and class experience to identity, I want to draw a larger context for subjective experiences in general. I am thinking here of the context in which commitments to specific needs, locations and

⁹ However, the interviews demonstrated that neither a working class background nor union involvement of family members guaranteed a person would support this union. Cynthia Costello found similar circumstances among a group of female office workers in Wisconsin (1987, 299).

¹⁰ On diversity in subjective experience and identity, see Bourque and Divine (1985), Bulkin, Pratt and Smith (1984), Eisenstein and Jardine (1980), Joseph and Lewis (1981) and Swerdlow and Lessinger (1983).

issues, or personality attributes such as leadership or shyness are evident alongside the effects and experiences of gender, race and class. This larger context is the everyday world in relation to which knowledge and identity take shape and reality is negotiated. Dorothy Smith proposes that a responsible inquiry into women's lives begins from "the standpoint of subjects located materially and in particular places" (1979, 170). Accordingly, my discussion of identity as evidenced within these interviews attends to women "who know society from within their experience of it as an everyday world" (173). Smith explains:

The everyday world is that world we experience directly. It is the world in which we are located physically and socially. Our experience arises in it as conditions, occasions, objects, possibilities, relevances, presences, and so on. . . . It is necessarily local--because that is how we must be--and necessarily historical (173-4, emphasis in original).

I take this to mean that an accounting of a woman's identity employing the categories of gender, race and class must begin with experience rather than abstractions. Otherwise, such an account risks capturing only part of who she is, and may in fact be an accounting she would not authorize--particularly if those categories are not consciously part of her identity and direct experience of everyday life." The meaning of the categories of gender, race and class, then, is grounded in each individual woman's life experience. Her experience offers a way to understand each of these categories as something lived, as subject positions with overlapping and competing claims on her iden-

" The discussion that follows addresses this dilemma in three ways: the interviews were grounded in each woman's experience; each woman interviewed has had the opportunity to read and respond to the chapters based on the interviews, permitting clarification in some cases; and the experiences fragmented here are attributable to more than gender, race or class, as each woman's story attests.

tity. As categories of analysis, then, gender, race and class are ultimately inadequate to describe either her identity or her life. Nevertheless, I have specified Smith's description of "subjects located materially and in particular places" (170). While I have isolated, for the purposes of discussion, the dynamics of gender, race and class in the lives of these subjects (the women whose stories are the sources of this study), these categories are placed within the material and cultural location of this historical moment: a place to begin, neither static nor naturally given.

Gender²

National media attention to comparable worth and, by extension, to gender as the central issues in the Yale organizing campaign and strike offered many observers (myself included) only one picture of the significance of these events. Few women I interviewed described the union campaign as gender-focused; in general they identified fair wages and respectful treatment as major issues.

While gender certainly is a factor in the determination of inequitable wages and treatment, gender experience was also manifest in other ways. The union's documentation of the compression of women employees into lower labor grades and the unpredictability of promotions and raises confirmed (for those opposed to the union as well as union supporters) gender-based wage discrimination at Yale.³ The union also documented the difficulty many Yale clerical and technical employees and retirees were having supporting themselves and providing for their families.

² The organization of this chapter into separate sections on gender, race and class reflects neither hierarchy nor degree of importance. As the discussion acknowledges, these three categories are woven together (along with others) in lived experience and each may be experienced differently. Their separation in analysis is an artificial construct; in this case one purpose is to make connections and differences in experience and consciousness even more visible. On separating gender, race and class for the purpose of analysis, see Dill (1983, especially 181 and 186) and Jorge (1983).

³ See Federation of University Employees (1984).

Gender contributes to the material conditions of these women's lives as wage earners, single parents, college educated¹⁴ white-collar workers, and to their experiences as individuals seeking confirmation of their value as people and as knowers.¹⁵ These dimensions of gender help shape identity in such a way that the response to the union can be seen as a "gendered" response. In the context of a culture that encourages gender-appropriate behavior and that reproduces different material and cultural experiences for different genders (particularly in the areas of wage and non-wage labor and cultural and social status as knowers), gender permeates identity. A "gendered" or gender-appropriate response (in the form of an interpretation or a behavior) is possible, then, even if the response was not to a gender-specific issue, and even when individual women did not associate their gender with their response to union organizing.¹⁶

That socially-constructed gender operated in this way for the women at Yale concurs with feminist theory and current research fin-

¹⁴ More than seventy-five percent of the women I interviewed had attended or completed college. I have been unable to determine whether this is representative of the bargaining unit overall.

¹⁵ Certainly race and class also contribute to material conditions and experiences in this way. Each section of this chapter treats these categories of the women's accounts separately.

¹⁶ The contribution of gender to identity through the concrete experience of everyday life is not necessarily primary. Although gender may distinguish all women from all men culturally and socially, race, class, or other distinctions may override the experience of gender differences and one or both may be more important for identity at any particular time or location.

dings.¹⁷ The personal imbues the political, and private life suffuses public life, as the conditions of women's lives that are gender-linked inform identity, worldviews and perceptions of possibility. This does not mean every woman experiences her gender in the same way nor associates her particular experiences with her gender, nor does it mean gender identity overrides other aspects of identity such as race, class, and ethnicity.

For example, a perceived relationship between gender, economic status and cultural expectations was a factor in several women's responses to the union. Some younger women were moved to support Local 34 when they learned from older women about the inadequate benefits of the university's pension plan. One of the reasons Julia McKinney, a white technical worker in her late twenties, became involved in the union was on behalf of a co-worker who was near retirement age. McKinney recognized the relationship between gender, lifetime earnings and pension benefits and identified her co-worker's situation as one she might eventually occupy herself. In contrast, two single mothers thought membership in the union would intensify the gender/class relationship. Both Laura Morrison and Jane Bevins were near forty; each acknowledged gender-based wage discrimination and the union's success in drawing attention to pay inequities. Nonetheless, each asserted her own position as an example of what sufficiently motivated women can accomplish independently. Jane Bevins and Laura Morrison consequently

¹⁷ For example, see Belenky et al. (1986), Bourque and Divine (1985), Luker (1984), Personal Narratives Group (1989), and Sacks (1988).

rejected the union's characterization of all bargaining unit members as alike.

In talking about everyday life, gender was an expressed feature of social relations, personalities, memorable past experiences and hopes and plans for the future.¹⁸ Yet as the following discussion illustrates, gender identity is specific to each woman's life and particular circumstances. Whatever commonalities may be found among women, similarities and differences based in race, class, age, ethnicity or sexuality may be even more meaningful.

Gender identity¹⁹

"Being a woman means being a feminist," affirmed one woman I interviewed. Although her chosen career was derailed because of sex

¹⁸ Gender also suffuses the history of Yale University, an educational institution and a conferrer of legitimacy and privilege, a trainer of managers, ministers and world-makers. Yale has admitted female students since 1969, and the ratio of female to male faculty has long been a contentious campus issue. This educator of men/employer of women (the latter often faculty and student spouses) has as its motto "Lux et veritas" (light and truth), the irony of which was not lost on union supporters who used it, with the addition of a question mark, as a rallying slogan. Recent campaigns to organize support staff at other colleges and universities have also addressed gender as a feature of their particular circumstances; see, for example, Bernstein (1984) and Geron (1986) on Columbia University and "Lessons of" (1988), McClure (1988), and "Union Teaches" (1988) on Harvard University.

¹⁹ Costello discusses how a traditional definition of women's gender identity, meaning identification with family role, encouraged researchers to assume that women were unlikely candidates for collective action. She reviews recent scholarship challenging this definition and research which documents a claim "that women's gender identity has often underwritten a woman-centered consciousness and strategy at work and in the community" (1988, 117). I am using gender identity as meaning identification with or as female/woman, with all attendant social and cultural implications, but not automatically assuming identification with gender roles.

discrimination, this woman discovered through her work with the union that "I'm a leader, that's a direct result of the women's movement and feminism." However, Marty Gilmour did not see her identification with feminism as her strongest connection to the union. Her commitment to Local 34 was a commitment to a vision she traced back to her experiences in the 1960s, learning to identify a system rather than an individual as a source of social problems and a collective voice as a source of power:

I knew we needed a union at Yale but the UAW [which had earlier attempted to organize Yale clerical and technical workers] was not the way to go. . . . I knew that together we could change things at Yale, we could change the way we . . . thought about ourselves and our jobs, and also make the university behave itself.

Gilmour understood her identity as a composite of subjective experiences, captured in her self-description:

The way I look at the world is affected by facts about me: a white, Southern, middle-class, woman. . . . A Southern white woman growing up in the South when I did: being aware of Greensboro, Martin Luther King, watching television, a lifelong Episcopalian

Gilmour's receptiveness to the union was a positive response to an entire reality within which union support made sense, and a reality in which there was a confirming role for her identity as a person who cared about people and took action to improve lives. It was a political reality, rather than exclusively a gender reality, that resonated for her in the union's image and the possibilities this union represented.²⁰ Still, she credits the women's movement for making possible her new-

²⁰ There is, of course, some overlap in the commitments and histories of the civil rights and feminist movements, particularly in the vision Gilmour describes as looking to collective voice as a source of power and identifying systemic rather than individual sources of social problems.

found leadership abilities, and her identity as a caring person is culturally compatible with the social expectations of her gender.

The interviews demonstrate how gender identity takes shape within the broad context of individual lives. The union activity at Yale is only part of this context: while in certain instances gender identity informed a response to the union activity (or vice-versa), I am not making a case for a causal relationship. Rather, I want to explore here the relationship between identity (to which gender, race and class experiences contribute), and perceptions of reality and possibility. The relationship between possibility and gender identity appeared in three forms in the interviews: claiming gender identity, resisting or denying gender identity, and discomfort with gender-identified expectations. In all three forms, the importance of individuality appeared in counterpoint to gender identity, playing differently for each woman vis-à-vis the union.

Individuality

Affirmations of individuality appeared frequently in the interviews, but were not always expressed in terms of gender nor in gender-specific language. Being an individual or expressing one's individuality meant different things to different women. For Laura Morrison, being individual meant separation from others to whom she had been connected by marriage and social status. For Margaret Connolly, Jane Bevins, and Geneva Oakley, individuality meant autonomy, on and off the job. Individuality meant freedom from traditional expectations for Connie Young and Linda Wilson. Young was beginning a second marriage, and the

children from her first were out on their own. Wilson, nearing forty, was discovering "the beliefs I was brought up with, I'm finding are not true: forcing me to think over things my mother, grandmother, dad said." Wilson talked about how she sees herself now:

Now I'm older, I recognize what labels can do to you. Learn to be more daring, or I have to! I won't settle for people saying this is the way it is--I'm more willing to experiment and try, [not believe] "because of your background you can't do this or that."

In some cases the ideological implications of a classic definition of individualism were voiced--as when women explained their opposition to the union as a desire to protect the freedom or right to act "as an individual." One anti-union activist explained her opposition to Local 34 this way:

For one thing, no freedom of choice. Freedom is something you read about, especially if you're a foreigner, if you believe in it, would like it to be part of your life. . . . Mostly I feel a) they [unions] are taking away freedom of choice and b) stop you from being individualistic, like stopping a child from expressing itself (Margaret Connolly).

Connolly objected most to the agency shop, in which all bargaining unit workers are required to pay the equivalent of dues to the union representing them. In fact, under the first contract Local 34 established a modified agency shop, in which non-members had the option of paying the equivalent of dues to an administrative fund restricted to allaying the costs of administering the contract. The dues of members (and from non-members who did not elect the administrative fund option) went directly to the union, to be disbursed for a variety of union expenses.²¹

²¹ In 1947 Section 14b of the Taft-Hartley Act (formally known as the Labor Management Relations Act) gave state governments the power to legislate against agency, or "closed shop," workplaces in which all workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement must be members of the union elected to represent them. In "Right-to-Work" states the

Connolly's perception of unions as inhibitors of expression and suppressors of individualism was based in part on personal history. She grew up in a Western industrial nation in which more of the workforce is represented by labor unions than is the case in the U.S., and had hoped to find different circumstances after moving to the United States:

When I came . . . in '57 . . . I felt I'd have a better life here. Unions were very visible [in my native country]. I came here, hoped the same thing wouldn't happen. . . . I feel now, especially in America, where capitalism is supposed to be supreme, supposed to do your own thing, it seems to me it's [union representation] an anachronism, it doesn't make any sense at all.

The arrival of the union at Yale, then, destroyed Connolly's hope that life in the United States would be free of a social and workplace institution she had experienced and disliked in her native country.

The existence of Local 34 was a threat to Margaret Connolly's individuality in at least two ways. In the context of her workplace, the union threatened individualistic behavior (and anticipated individual reward); within her vision of what she could expect to happen in her life, the union threatened her sense of what she could control. In this latter context, the union presented a personal affront to identity:

agency shop is prohibited, making all union-represented workplaces in these states "open" shops. In all other states, "closed" or "open" shop is a matter of local option. Workers covered by a union-negotiated and administered contract in an "open" shop are not required to contribute (in the form of dues) to the costs of maintaining the contract that protects them. For unions, "right-to-work" laws increase the cost of union representation, since a collective bargaining agreement under such laws covers employees who benefit from it without paying for it. According to Ellwood and Fine (1983), state "right-to-work" laws reduce union organizing by about one-third.

The thing that looms largest and most unhappily in my memory is the fact that the union ever got in. I've been against it from the minute they started talking about it, which was a long time ago. . . . I think I've seen three tries. The first time it just about killed me to see. I was very unhappy because I didn't want it, and when it got in, I was devastated, really. . . . As far as I'm concerned, the union was one of the most devastating things that happened to me.

Given the dominant cultural environment in the United States, one would not ordinarily think of individuality as a characteristic of female identity. Everywhere women are encouraged to take on connections to, relationships with, and responsibilities for others. In role models, career opportunities, social life, education, religion and mass media images, the ways for women to be in the world involve consciousness of others and attention to their needs and desires.²² Nonetheless, there is a cultural value of individualism in the West, and in the United States in particular.²³ As inhabitants of this culture, women are subject to contradictory ideologies of gender-appropriate behavior and nationally-appropriate behavior. Therefore it is not surprising that most of the women interviewed expressed an affirmation of individualism in the form of autonomy.

Assertions of individuality were strongest and most frequent among women who became single parents, divorced and/or sole supporters of their families during the organizing campaign and just prior to the strike. The material experiences of everyday life for these women were very much conditioned by their gender and by social dynamics based on

²² See Benhabib (1987), Gilligan (1982) and Kerber et al. (1986) for different perspectives on the socialization of women to care for others.

²³ See Bellah et al. (1985, especially 142-63). The assertion of individuality by women is encouraged by some forms of feminism. See Z. Eisenstein (1981).

gender. Still, for most of them the need and desire for autonomy (and the confirmation independence could confer) overrode the possibility that the union could address those conditions in a material, or any other, way. A newly arrived at economic or social position--lower income and/or single parent--made adherence to cultural ideals of female self-denial and concern for others paradoxical. Throughout the interviews the relationship between individuality and gender identity appeared to be conditioned by concrete experience and perceptions of possibility.

Acknowledging gendered experience

In addition to Marty Gilmour, who referred to 1960s activism and feminism as sources of her response to the union, a number of women volunteered connections between gender and the events at Yale. Several described how the public focus on wage discrimination was reflected in their own lives. Awareness of gender-based wage discrimination did not always mean union support, however, which was consistent with most women's sense that the union represented more than a potential solution to unequal pay.

One active anti-union employee emphasized wage discrimination when describing her experience of differences between men and women:

There is something to this business of single women being treated like second class citizens. You know, that's not all talk. Because when you think about it, if you go to rent an apartment, you get a price mentioned, right? Fine. But if you're female or if you're male, the price stays the same. Whereas if you go for a job, the price doesn't always stay the same. You know, that's so basic it's not even funny. It's amazing how few people actually think that food costs the same whether you're male or female, rent costs exactly the same. In fact, a female is almost expected to have more changes of costume than a man ever has. So in effect what you've got is lower income and more expectation of using money than a man has (Margaret Connolly).

Another woman who also remains opposed to the union but is not an activist said,

In retrospect, [the union] was valuable in bringing up points, for instance equal pay for equal work. . . . And the inequity in job descriptions--they pointed out the concentration of women in certain jobs (Jane Bevins).

But for Jane Bevins, who previously had been employed in a union-organized workplace, working at Yale was "the first time I was able to negotiate, what I would get for salary, what I would do. I thought I would make out better as an individual than with a group."

Laura Morrison, a recently divorced single parent, evaluated the options presented by the union against her identity and the union's place in her world:

While I believe in many things the union is promoting, especially for women in clerical and support staff positions at the university, I have to balance all that . . . with my role as a mother and how I do best as an employee. It's a very individual thing, she explained. Like many other women, Morrison had experienced discrimination when she returned to the workforce after raising two children: "I term myself as a professional volunteer, because I was extremely active in the community and the school," she said. She continued:

Of course none of that counted when I went to look for a job. They didn't care about the eight years I had worked before my children were born. . . . it's to me a real crime. Because some

of the skills I attained doing volunteer work have enabled me to do some of the things on my last job. . . . For that to go unrecognized as not being worthy of any kind of recognition in a hiring for paid work situation is a crime.

Morrison described the circumstances under which finding paid work became a necessity and her identity as an individual took shape:

I was unemployed, living with a husband who had opened his own business. He was in upper-middle management at --- for ten years, and was part of the massive world-wide reorganization of the company. . . . He opened up his own business with three other partners in the space of three months' time, without any real discussion with me and no income coming into the family. We lost everything but the house. . . . So, that's what I meant by having to work. And the savings were going down and down and down. And that's when I became very individual, apart from my marriage, because our survival depended on me.

Because of her own situation, Morrison was particularly sensitive to the specific circumstances of other women's lives. She especially resisted what she perceived to be a characterization of all bargaining unit members as alike. Morrison underscored the importance of individual needs and choice to her perspective on the union when she described events prior to, during and after the strike. In an account of how several union supporters would not acknowledge a co-worker's desire not to attend union meetings, Morrison remarked,

It's a non-awareness of people who can't, who say "This is how I am," within your ranks. I don't want to be a clone of a clone of a clone. And the inability [of some union supporters] to recognize that spoke very loudly to me.

Morrison did not make a direct association between her gender, the material circumstances of her life and her opposition to the union.

The cultural value of individualism, combined with the specific circumstances that made individualism so important for the recently-divorced women (Morrison and Bevins), conflicted with the usual organizing rhetoric of collectivity and homogeneity. In particular, a

perception that the union characterized bargaining unit employees as a homogeneous "us" in a simple us/them showdown clashed with the ideological prescription of individualism as a right, the exercise of which would surely be rewarded in the workplace. Several women reacted to the generalized cultural image of unions as organizations that distinguish between members and management much more clearly than between members themselves. As Jane Bevins explained,

my experience had been union operations locked you into slots. You couldn't get more pay by being a better worker, you couldn't control your pay raises.²⁴ True, some people get left behind, but at least you get the option of trying to get more. And I think it was the rigidity of unions that made me uncomfortable.

In contrast with both Morrison's perspective on discrimination and Bevins' prior experience with and negative assessment of the meaning of a union, Susanna Folsom's struggle for economic security contributed to the union's appeal. Where Morrison equated pressure from organizers to make a commitment to group solidarity with a loss of individual identity (becoming a clone), for Folsom the economic pressures of daily life threatened her survival and her ability to provide a decent home for her child. In somewhat stronger language than that used by Jane Bevins in talking about wage discrimination, Folsom expressed her belief that Yale was "one of many institutions taking advantage of women":

²⁴ Jane Bevins was one of several Yale employees who saw a union contract as a loss of individual control over working conditions and wages. Apparently the union either did not attempt or was unable to convince these women that without a contract they had no consistent or reliable means of control over anything regarding their employment at Yale, excepting holding Yale to federal regulations on wage and hour standards for full-time employees. In contrast, the campaign to organize C&Ts at Harvard University emphasized self-representation through the union as a responsibility. See "Harmony" (1990), McClure (1988) and "Union Teaches" (1988).

I naively thought that the job world would welcome women who had been raising kids. . . . Now [in her early forties] I'm in my first secretarial job I've ever had, when it should be a time of my life when I'm getting somewhere. In the last couple of years it's been very painful to have had a good professional start. Instead, I suddenly found myself being used as a secretary. Jobs I applied for demanded my professional background, my editing and writing skills, and yet I was slotted in the low clerical levels and paid accordingly. I hope in a few years to be breaking out of all of that.

Folsom linked her involvement with the union to her desire to be financially secure. She did not share Jane Bevins' expectation of making out "better as an individual;" rather, Folsom believed that "we had to organize to take on something as big as Yale." Folsom's gender identity informed her evaluation of the union and how the organized power of the union could be used to aid individual women. Where Laura Morrison and Jane Bevins anticipated the union would impose restrictions on their autonomy, Susanna Folsom perceived a relationship between gender and the material conditions of her life, and the possibilities for change represented by the union.

Folsom had been divorced for a number of years before Local 34 was established at Yale. She described the years after her marriage in terms of gender experience:

NG: What does being a woman mean to you?

Deprivation! [laughter] It was a shock to me to find out what it does mean. I realize I had a pretty untypical beginning. I don't think I had ordinary experiences when I was young. . . . I think I didn't get repressed in the same way as a lot of females did. . . . I've been out on my own [after a fifteen-year marriage] ten years. I came out into the world just being very naive . . . I was shocked by early experiences and attitudes of men, landlords, and the way a single women is viewed. . . . I was amazed at the different ways you're treated if you're married to a professional male or you're an artist, single, female, living alone. Night and day. . . . I've been shocked at the different treatment, the lot of women who are not protected in some way. I just came from a talk on baboons, and recognized a lot of what they were talking about! Females lower on the social structure would try to find a male friend or protector. I haven't so much done that, and I know what it is like to be exposed, and I think men have a sense about that. Not just men; . . . You're automatically one down if you don't have something protecting you: career, money, marriage, family. I really don't have any of those things. I had all of them ten years ago, and the contrast has been very very extreme in my life.

Susanna Folsom associated her economic vulnerability with her personal experiences of culturally constructed gender dynamics. The union presented a way in which those dynamics could be altered, and promised a different reality in which Folsom might find a more secure place as a single parent and artist.

Gender enters frequently in these women's senses of themselves apart from, as well as within, the organizing campaign at Yale. Anne Proctor, who was close to retirement when we met, obtained her first-ever paying job at Yale when she was fifty-six years old. While talking about differences between women and men she compared herself to her husband and invoked her female ancestry:

My husband grew up in an average working-class family; they were not close. He was in the Navy, World War II, Korean War--influenced by military thinking. He is becoming more conservative as he gets older, me less so. I never was, anyway. I grew up in a very liberal family, split on politics, my mother and my aunts entirely different from my uncles. We always had a lot of discussion about politics. My family goes back to the New England intellectual women of the nineteenth century. A tradition of scholarship and service; the men respected their wives' intellect. . . . I've been influenced by my own family--intelligent and able women.

At first, Proctor didn't support the union. She feared it would be divisive, and as the supplementary wage earner in her household "wasn't feeling as oppressed as some people were." But when Proctor learned of the hardships experienced by other women in the bargaining unit, she "became convinced":

I became more aware of the fifty-nine or sixty-four cents to the dollar women earn compared to men, and the low salaries we had. I heard other people speaking at a rally, one who worked for twenty-three years, and had a pension and Social Security and was going to lose her house [because the combined benefits weren't enough to support herself in her home].

Women under forty were more likely than older women to express gender identity by referring to role definition and contemporary social attitudes.²⁵ One thirty-year-old woman, talking of her plans for the future, was careful to distinguish between gender identity and gender roles. Arlene Hamilton told me, "I've always been very maternal, ever since I was young. I'm trying to adopt a child now. It won't make me more or less of a woman; it will make me a mother."

Hamilton credited the union with enlightening women about the exploitative conditions of their work. "I didn't need the union to tell

²⁵ This generational difference might be attributable to the recent "second wave" of feminist activism and generalized attention to gender roles in popular culture.

me I'm worth more, but some people do. So the union helped some women rise up. Some women are really in a fog!" Like Marty Gilmour, Arlene Hamilton's description of herself as a caring person--a gendered characteristic in American culture--was consistent with her support of the union, which she saw as an organization that had the power to help people who were powerless alone. Hamilton emphasized the support function of the union and compared her situation to that of a younger brother who worked elsewhere, "in management. All we do is argue. He calls people like me his 'hourlies.' . . . I hope he realizes--God forbid, if anything happens, he's out. No [union] protection."

Linda Wilson, who was thirty-six at the time of our interview, was more explicit than Hamilton about her gender identity. She said:

I never thought of myself as a woman--nothing so unique about it. . . . But lately, I think about it all the time. Like "I know this is happening because I'm a woman." In a store, you ask to see the manager and people talk to you as though you're handicapped. They powderpuff you. A man commands respect. As a woman, I have to get hysterical or come across as cocky.

Wilson did not support the union in the early months of the organizing campaign. She collected and read fliers produced and circulated by the union and the opposition, but in keeping with her characterization of herself as "quite a loner" maintained a distance and no one from the union contacted her.

NG: Why were you anti-union?

The reputations of unions, they're historically racist. My uncle and father were not union people, so it was initially coming from what they told me. . . . My father belonged, but he still was not a union person, not gung-ho. My youngest uncle . . . supports unions but he knows that there's a lot of work to be done within unions.

Eventually Wilson signed a union membership card. Like Arlene Hamilton, Linda Wilson joined the union as a means of self-protection:

Only after reading about all the stuff going on, how the university was addressing certain issues, how it was justifying others, I started really looking into it. The woman I worked for was very nice to me but very fickle. She did something to me, and I saw the type of person she was. . . . I thought about the treatment I was getting, or might could get, if you had no network or no support system you could go to, or channels you could go through and grieve the process.

Arlene Hamilton and Linda Wilson are Black women. Each described how consciousness of the intersection of race and gender in her life was fairly recent. Wilson explained:

Being a woman is something you grow into. You know what I mean? You're born female, but you grow into being a woman. Being Black, I've always been. So it's only now I can look at things and say, this is a women's issue, and it be not Black or white. I can look at other things and say, this is a Black women's issue. And it's scary--because things can happen because you're a woman, others--a woman and a Black woman. And it's scary, it's like double jeopardy. 'Cause when you find out how horrible [being] a woman is, well, multiply that by two when you say a Black woman.

Both women traced their awareness of gender and race to new experiences and new ideas. For Arlene Hamilton, moving to New Haven from another part of the country meant encountering racism for the first time. Her understanding of what it meant to be a person of color was changing at the same time as she was becoming more aware of women's issues:

Now that my eyes are opened, I want to learn as much as I can about the wrongdoings in this world. I went to a New Haven Take Back the Night rally. It was sponsored by women, leaders talked, we had a candlelight walk. . . . I'm more concerned about women's issues, differences between men and women. . . . a lot of men are not sensitive to women's, people's needs in general.

Linda Wilson said her thoughts on race and gender had been stimulated recently by reading books by Gloria Watson (Bell Hooks) and Angela Davis.

Geneva Oakley, an older Black woman, also mentioned the intersection of gender and race. After working for a number of years for a male supervisor, she transferred to another area of the university. He filled her position with a man whose salary exceeded hers by four grades. While she held the job, her boss had promised an upgrade but never delivered on that promise. "He never did anything to me, but he never did anything for me," she said. "I knew he wanted a man in that job and he was going to raise it to a [salary grade] 10 in order to get one. He just thought men should always be in the upper [position]." More than ten years later Oakley was still earning at salary grade 6, an example of the compression of women of color in lower salary grades whose length of service was not significantly rewarded, prior to the Local 34 contract.

Denial of gender identity

Like Arlene Hamilton, Laura Morrison mentioned changing roles and expectations. But for Morrison (who is older than Wilson and Hamilton) gender roles came up in the context of a denial of gender identity. While the assertion of individuality on the part of divorced women and single parents was not always expressed in terms of gender, in these cases self-description took shape against a backdrop of gender relations. These women saw themselves and their options (and the meaning of the union for their realities) in the context of their status as single

parents, newly divorced, family providers--but most did not identify that status as gender-conditioned.

The individualism of Western capitalist ideology is not entirely gender-specific, but like many such values its point of reference is male experience.²⁶ Cultural expectations and the demands of women's everyday lives undermine and oppose traditional individualistic ambitions,²⁷ and in the interviews expressions of individualism frequently accompanied denials of gender identity. For women whose new experiences as single parents (to which they attributed the necessity of individualism) were conditioned by gender, resisting the constraints of gender identity (perceived to insist on caring for others, not for oneself) may have been imperative. Similarly, the union appeared to some to be calling for a repudiation of individuality, and resistance to or denial of a gender identity was more commonly expressed by women who opposed the union.

For Arlene Hamilton, who hoped to become a single parent by adopting a child, gender identity and self-description were consistent with

²⁶ This point is illustrated by comparing two recent definitions of individualism. Zillah R. Eisenstein writes that individualism "posits the importance of self-sovereignty and independence as a universal claim and therefore can be used to justify women's independence from men" (1981, 154). Cheris Kramaræ and Paula Treichler quote Eisenstein and add: "We need to be careful to distinguish this individualism from that which posits the isolated, competitive individual which would mitigate against women coalescing together" (1985, 209). O'Sullivan et al. locate the ideology of individualism within bourgeois/capitalist philosophy, stressing the difference between the traditional view of individuals as the source of social relations and signifying systems and an alternative view of the existence and action of individuals as the product of such relations and systems (1983, 114).

²⁷ See Lamphere and Grenier (1988, especially 248ff) and Purcell (1979).

her sense of the union's role in caring about people and helping them. For Laura Morrison, who suddenly found herself the single parent of two young sons, the relationship between identity and the union's representation of reality were quite different. Morrison's identification with independence and self-sufficiency and equivocation on gender identity were consistent with her sense of the union as an institution that thwarts individual motivation and causes "the removal of initiative and creativity." The material conditions of unanticipated single parenting made it necessary for Morrison to resist the gender socialization that discourages individualistic behavior in women, at least in terms of preserving her independence as an individual so that she could fulfill the more traditional role of putting the needs of her family before the needs of non-familial others.

In response to my question "What does being a woman mean to you?"

Laura Morrison replied,

I don't think I've ever thought of being a woman. I think of people as human beings. I don't really sort them into the male-female categories, even though we play traditional roles. I like being a woman.

Unlike Susanna Folsom (who supported Local 34 in part out of consciousness of sex discrimination and a desire for economic security), Morrison did not make a strong association between her gender and the material conditions of her life. She focused instead on continuity, echoing an earlier statement that after her divorce "the core me is the same." I asked Morrison whether her sense of herself as a woman had changed:

I don't think so. I think it's remained pretty much constant. I'm probably more willing to recognize what I perceive as areas that need work. I think I respect myself more than I did, because I know what I can do and I've had a chance to apply it, not just think about it. And I've had the opportunity to do that and it's been very meaningful to have an opportunity to do things I'm capable of doing--because that's the ultimate reassurance that indeed you are. So I just think of it as adding to a toolkit, and the toolkit's always strapped around my waist and I'll just take that toolkit with me wherever I go. Those things belong to me. [emphasis added]

The toolkit metaphor appears in feminist and self-help discourse about women's capabilities and talents. In keeping with Morrison's resistance to the union, this particular toolkit is also a metaphor for control through self-containment, self-sufficiency and mobility. The separation from dependencies within her marriage that Morrison described earlier extends now to a separation from other kinds of dependencies. Morrison's response to her new circumstances is one of learning and adaptability, in keeping with her identification with independence. As she put it,

If a job isn't going well does not necessarily mean it's because of the presence of the union or the lack of presence of a union. It may have to do with that job, and you are in control as to whether you stay in that job or not. And you have the right to make a choice to stay there or to leave. That to me is a much more powerful thing, to remain in control of your own life. To be intimidated into participation in something you don't know a whole lot about, where a lot of things go on in which you do not believe--then you've lost control. [emphasis added]

Morrison honored the picket line the first three days of the strike because she understood that some Yale employees felt a lack of recognition for the work they did. She also acted out of respect for people who felt they needed the union's support. But for herself, remaining in control of her own life was a governing principle and joining the union would mean surrendering that control. Susanna Folsom,

by contrast, looked to collective social and political solutions to achieve and maintain some degree of control over her life, believing that "we had to organize to take on something as big as Yale."

Morrison's ambivalence about gender identity--not thinking of herself as a woman, but liking being one--is not necessarily contradictory. Her assertion of individuality was not a unilateral rejection of commonality with other women. Morrison implicitly subscribes to a non-specific, generalized understanding of womanhood. She acknowledges this commonality in her explanation of what she likes about being a woman:

I like being a mother, which is one of the things about being a woman. I like things that are traditionally associated with women, as far as sensitivity. What seems to feel like a natural ability to nurture, which may be learned, and I haven't sorted that one out yet. There are things that appeal to me I suppose in a material sense because I'm a woman--although I am finding I have imparted to my own children [sons] a visual awareness of things around them . . . I'm pleased about . . . fulfilling my role as a mother but also in knowing it isn't something associated with just women. I like the company of men. I like the attention a woman gets from men. I think it's more a divergence in what I don't like about men that I like about being a woman.

As a newly-divorced single parent, Morrison wasn't the same woman she had been before: she was now more independent, more an individual, more in control of her own life, with "the core me" still the same:

I think I did not know what kind of reserves I really had until I had to tap them and use them, so I think what I've learned is more what's different, not that I've changed. I've learned that I have a lot more strength than I thought I had. . . . it's been more discovery and learning, but I don't think I've changed that much.

The possibility of new ways to be in the world, as a person and as a woman, like the option of staying with a job or joining the union, was a matter of individual choice. Material reality was different for Laura Morrison after her divorce, and negotiating a place to be within that material reality was up to her. Morrison again stressed the importance

of individual choice when we talked about on-the-job behavior and changing roles:

How that's all [gender roles and the workplace] tied into the male-female roles is, I think, confusing to a lot of women anyway, because there are so many dictates from so many different arenas. This is the traditional, this is where we are, and it doesn't necessarily fit for every person. I think those are all very individual questions and decisions.

Jane Bevins shared Laura Morrison's preference for making independent decisions. Bevins had also experienced the end of a marriage during the years Local 34 was being organized. Like Morrison, Bevins preferred not to make gender distinctions. When I asked what being a woman meant to her, she replied:

My first response: mother, but much more. That's not my sole feeling of what being a woman is. I like not to think of male and female differences, but more of individuals and what they can contribute. Instead of "she's a woman doing this," "she's a person doing this." I don't know whether my actions follow, but I tend not to think about that so much.

In talking further about Local 34, Bevins explained how her previous experience with a union was an important factor in her opposition to the union at Yale. Like her preference for separating gender from accomplishments, Bevins sought to maintain autonomy within an organized workplace:

I thought, if I'm going to be represented I should join, so I can vote and have a say. I found [in a previous workplace] I didn't have that big a say unless I got very active--and that jeopardized how your employer or supervisor looks at you. She looks at you differently, you're working at something pro and con, against and for. . . . I knew certain aspects . . . would make my employer look at me differently, if I were active. And sometimes I do feel I'd need to get active for it to be of any benefit. . . . That probably had more effect on my relationship to Local 34 than any other kinds of things I had done.

Bevins' remarks suggest that the visibility of union involvement carries a risk that she is unable to take. Like Laura Morrison, Bevins felt she

was unable to strike, since her family's survival depended upon her income:

Being divorced with two children to support, I had to work. I needed the paycheck, no question about that. Whether or not I agreed with what the union was doing, I felt I had no choice in the matter.

The importance of freedom to act as an individual coincides with material conditions that inhibit such action--economic vulnerability that is shared by other women who are single parents. As single parents, Morrison and Bevins are in a bind between the necessity of acting as partnerless individuals and having their individuality constrained by their family responsibilities. As long as they perceived the union as an inhibitor of individual action, no possibilities it represented could override this dilemma. Bevins' and Morrison's fundamental commitment to their families' survival came into direct conflict with the solidarity unions count on for their bargaining power in a strike situation.

Before her divorce, Bevins had been reluctant to join a strike in another workplace. At that time it was not material conditions that determined Bevins' actions but her sense of responsibility to those who were dependent upon her work:

There were a couple of strike actions while I was working at ---. . . . I felt I needed to be at work, there were patients whose [test] results needed to be gotten out.

And at Yale, Bevins felt a similar responsibility:

[This experience] made clear to me, knowing if I had a job--I'm not sure I'd feel the same in another area--in the medical field, patients shouldn't suffer because I'm not happy with a pay raise or the dental plan. . . . I feel, if I say I'm going to work for you, that's my responsibility to uphold.

The coincidence of their divorces with the union activities at Yale presented Morrison and Bevins with a variety of challenges. Each

woman faced adjustment to several new positions--head of household, primary wage-earner, single parent and newly single adult--at the same time that union organizers and co-workers were proposing a new characterization of the employee/employer relationship for white-collar workers at Yale. Morrison and Bevins perceived a conflict between competing representations of reality. On one hand, they experienced the material realities of single parenting and their accomplishments as capable and competent parents and workers. For example, Morrison received five pay raises and two promotions in three years at Yale. On the other hand, the union and co-workers articulated the reality of inadequate wages and benefits, unfair promotion procedures, and individually powerless workers. The union's representation of reality included the possibility that the conditions of employment at Yale could be different only if workers conceived of themselves as a collective entity.

While the union's case for better wages and working conditions included the assertion that clerical and technical workers were able and competent (and therefore deserved better treatment), a more salient message for some was that individual workers could not obtain decent treatment on their own. Morrison and Bevins found no confirmation of their self-images, successful autonomous experiences and realities as single parents and heads of households in this element of the union's case. Organizers' declaration of collective identity seemed to require relinquishing not only confidence in their abilities as individuals and the knowledge of personal accomplishment but also the autonomy and flexibility demanded by their family structures. The union's representation of

reality cast Morrison and Bevins as powerless and--even more important--wrong in their knowledge of their own lives. Laura Morrison and Jane Bevins did not perceive as necessary additional dependencies (in the form of worker solidarity) in order to secure their survival, nor did they perceive in the union's message reasons to act on behalf of anyone else. By rejecting the union's version of reality, Morrison and Bevins asserted the validity of their pictures of reality and the meaning of their experiences. They were not alone in resisting the union's attempted redefinition of their identities and experiences.

Barbara Neil was 28 years old, white and single. When I asked about her sense of herself as a woman, Neil answered as had Arlene Hamilton, a Black woman who is also young and single). Both responded by talking about gender roles and social expectations:

It's tough because my mother's pretty much a traditional woman of her generation. . . . It's tough sometimes to fight those really ingrained philosophies of my mother, or try to exist in the world as a single woman. My mother got married while she was in college, so she never had to be out on her own at all. So it's changing, and it's a struggle, trying to incorporate the traditional, old-fashioned views of my mother and ways of being with her, and more modern concepts of being a woman that I'm getting now.

But unlike Hamilton, roughly her age peer, Barbara Neil was opposed to the union and preferred not to focus on gender identity:

I used to say when I was younger that I didn't look at people as men and women, boys and girls, but as male human beings and female human beings. I like to look at people first as a person, secondly their gender. That's changing a little bit as I get older, but I try to cling to that. Being a woman for me does not mean--there are issues that are very important to me as a woman, equal treatment, equal pay, all those obvious ones--but I don't take the party line on women's issues.

I asked Neil to explain what she meant by "the party line on

women's issues." In her answer, she offers an analysis of social conflict that illuminates her opposition to Local 34:

I got turned off to feminism by some radical feminists who hated men. I just can't accept that. . . . I really am firmly convinced one of the biggest problems in society is men and women don't relate: stereotypes or broad opinions of what that gender/sex is like, don't relate to one another as persons. And I think that--it goes broader than that, [it's the] same major problem in the world: groups, cultures, ignorance, lack of understanding of other causes, racism, classism, the Middle East . . .

Neil's analysis of global social and political problems explains her negative response to the oppositional nature of labor activism. This response, like her resistance to gender distinctions, is consistent with her understanding that a paradigm of dichotomy, such as worker/boss, creates social and political conflict.

Barbara Neil's everyday life did not contain the same exigencies as those faced by newly-divorced single parents like Jane Bevins and Laura Morrison. Neil said she opposed the union largely because she felt a union wasn't necessary at a place like Yale, thereby qualifying her philosophical argument against Local 34 because it was oppositional. Neil compared working conditions at a previous workplace to those at Yale:

It was a lousy job, the working conditions were bad, the supervisors unreal. That's why I thought it so strange that people at Yale actually thought there was a need for a union. Because Yale is a very good place to work . . . At this laundry, you were on your feet all day, it was 97 degrees next to the steam machine. You had no fingerprints left after a couple of weeks, with that machine putting out over 100 degrees steam heat. You were not allowed to listen to the radio, the supervisor would time you, ask you why if your breaks would be more than exactly ten minutes including travel time. And then I come to Yale, and people are going on twenty minute breaks, come and go as you please, four weeks vacation. I couldn't believe it.

Barbara Neil, Jane Bevins and Laura Morrison each resisted a gender identity, and each woman emphasized her individuality in her self-description. For the two divorced single mothers, the union campaign coincided with their separation from the institutionalized gender relations of marriage. Clearly their identification with individualism and autonomy owed much to their new social positions and economic vulnerability: as noted by Linda Alcoff, position may determine identity for women (1988). In her self-description, Jane Bevins said:

I am intelligent--I had to tell myself, you aren't a stupid crumb under the rug somewhere. . . . There's been a complete change in my way of thinking . . . about myself and my family. . . . I didn't realize what I had done to myself in the relationship. I put behind me a lot of my own thoughts and feelings for the relationship, not realizing I was denying myself my existence. You are smart, you can make decisions, you don't have to rely on togetherness, you can be an independent individual [emphasis added].

Perhaps the structure and effect (anticipated as well as realized) of a union on workplace and work experiences were analogous to the experience of marriage. Both Bevins and Morrison had been in marital relationships that assumed mutuality, gave rise to expectations that were ultimately unmet and conditions that were undesirable, and whose dissolution meant altered possibilities and new constraints. Under such circumstances, people understandably question assumptions (including those underlying gender identity) and act to ensure stability and protect options. About how she came to hold her present job, Morrison said, "I knew my resources. . . . and at that time in my life I needed to know how things would work smoothly without any antagonism. I'd had very much of that."

Certainly these two women understood the meaning of the union in a parallel way. In the eyes and experiences of Jane Bevins and Laura Morrison, there was no place in their lives for the union and the kinds of relationships the union proposed, and no place in the union for women like themselves (who they were and who they wanted to be). In their reconstructions of their thinking before and during the union activity at Yale, the self-sustaining logic of Bevins' and Morrison's perceptions and reasoning is apparent.

Though Barbara Neil arrived there by another path, she shared Bevins' and Morrison's resistance to what she perceived to be the imposition of an inhibiting institution on her world. For Neil, this was a world of limitless, if difficult to discern, possibility. In talking about her opposition to the union, Neil referred to her earlier remarks about people of different genders and cultures not relating "to one another as persons":

And what I said before, about the problem with the world, it's all us/them: men and women it's us/them, cultures it's us/them, and that is so completely opposite of my view about how the world has to be. You have to work together to get anything accomplished, or to come to any kind of growth.

The union's oppositional politics weren't all that was incompatible with Neil's world view. Autonomy was an important component of Neil's identity. Despite her assertion that "you have to work together to get anything accomplished" (an unwitting echo of the union's rhetoric), the union's representation of the employer-worker relationship as one in which worker solidarity was the only possible way to secure decent treatment conflicted with Barbara Neil's sense of who she was and what was possible in her life:

. . . I'm firmly convinced I can do anything I want to do. I never developed the feeling that I've been discriminated against because I'm a woman. Maybe that's why I'm not a feminist. I've never had that, or felt that anybody has ever held me back from anything I wanted to do. The only fear I really have is whether I will know what I want to do. I think once I know what it is, I can go for it.

That there will be conflict between individualistic identities and the collectivist ideology of a union is predictable. Ambivalence about gender identity appears to support the conflict, particularly in the situation at Yale, where union activity was publicly associated with women's issues. This ambivalence is a response to the discourse of contemporary feminism and to personal experiences. Mainstream feminism's encouragement of individualism in women ironically won out in a contest with worker solidarity. We can see in these women's accounts the construction of identity in a particular material and discursive context and the significance of identity for perceptions of possibilities. Laura Morrison, Jane Bevins and Barbara Neil evaluated their options by reconciling representations of reality with experience, creating the meaning of these events and their lives in ways that preserve identity and possibility and a familiar location in reality. In doing and then in telling, each has secured herself a position as a knowing, competent person and affirmed her position in reality.

Childhood and gender identity

In addition to claiming and resisting gender identity, a third position appeared in the interviews. Two women brought up childhood and adolescent discomfort with traditional gender expectations as an important part of their identity as adults. Each had sought a way to be in

the world without conforming to traditional gender role models. When union activities at Yale presented a possible change in the existing employer-employee relationship, Sara Brach and Pam Norden knew what it meant to choose positions different from the usual ones prescribed for them.

At the time of our interview, Sara Brach had recently made dramatic changes in her life in an effort to reconcile her work situation with her political identity. In order to join the Local 34 bargaining unit, Brach voluntarily left a professional²⁸ career position she had held for ten years and began working in a lower level clerical position.

As a professional employee, Brach could not support the union without risking her job. This restriction of behavior was only part of Brach's reason for leaving her job; she objected as well to the framework within which she was expected to function at work:

The decision to stay out on strike was an end of a time in my life. I kind of knew I would do it, represented a sort of fulfillment of a lot of things I was feeling and thinking. . . . I came to feel I had to get out of that job, I couldn't be professional. . . . One of the . . . issues is extreme suspicion of qualifications, credentials as the most important point. The issue was arguing in terms of, is --- more qualified than --- ? And that's not what's most fundamental.

NG: What is most fundamental?

People shouldn't have to compete with each other for jobs! . . . Having gone to school since I was too young to go, and having knowledge and competence beaten into me . . . I'm forced by the setup to argue in those terms [measuring qualifications]. I was being asked to argue in terms I don't hold with.

²⁸ At the time Local 34 was organized, Yale University staff job classifications included clerical and technical positions, most of which were in the Local 34 bargaining unit, and managerial and professional positions, which were not.

Brach described the circumstances surrounding her decision and explained her rejection of a prescribed role:

I had a desirable job, but I was suspicious, uncomfortable with the professional position and role of being a nice, helpful, gracious person. Seeing people doing the same work, paid and classified differently.

In rejecting a prescribed role, Brach was refusing to be someone she was not. She was also resisting an entire paradigm of workplace dynamics. The values conflict she experienced is clear in the following account of an incident at work:

For a brief time in [workplace], I was "supervisor" of one C&T [clerical/technical worker]. This person and the situation very deeply changed my life. She is full of amazing qualities, an impossible person, unsuited to the job she was doing. I was supposed to rationalize her, and I found I would not do it. I realized it didn't seem to matter, in a big sense, but also whether people got [what they needed from the workplace]. I don't know why. But there was no way I was going to act the authority with this person. I started to imitate her. I was supposed to do [an evaluation] on her. I did one on both of us. [My supervisor] said, "You can't," and he rewrote it.

Sara Brach voluntarily removed herself from circumstances in which she felt called upon to behave towards other workers in ways she found untenable. She described the situation as "my colleagues and myself confusing fear and desire with enthusiasm, dedication and good-girlism and happy submission." The workplace scenario and her actions there parallel Brach's discomfort as a young woman with the expectations of gender-appropriate behavior:

Since adolescence, [being a woman] always meant I was expected to dance some sort of dance I can't do. At the time--girls behaved certain ways vis-à-vis men. It made no sense to me. The first inkling that I would be probably a marginal person, one way or another, came to me at that time, around twelve or thirteen. I felt for so many years, I can't do this thing, I'll just miss out on this part of life. Being a woman meant--supposed to be something you're not. It still does.

Now Brach wonders what the change in status and income will mean for her identity and her future:

What I'm doing now, not to be, to avoid being in any position of power over people.²⁹ The [workplace] world is a mini-universe for the time being, do the work at the ground level, identify with the people who do that. . . . I'm trying to put first things first: [I care about] rottenness in the world, translate that into action day to day. . . . I'm forty-five years old, I can't pay the rent. This may be a step in putting first things first, but it also could be a step in becoming a bag lady. . . . [In this job] I don't have to make claims . . . that I feel you really can't make. . . . My work has to do with directions that have become important. And it's marginal.

Just as there are consequences in choosing to leave one job for another to escape a values conflict, rejecting one's traditional gender role has consequences. By refusing to conform to the expectations of supervisory employee behavior, Sara Brach's future security is in doubt. By refusing to conform to traditional adolescent female behavior, Brach separated herself from some of the traditional expectations of human relationships:

The fact of refusal to behave like an adolescent girl was frightening. It meant no love in my life. It was so important not to be [something I wasn't]--if what I have to do in order not to submit is be alone, it's a lousy bargain, but I'll do it.

As a young person and as an adult Sara Brach actively and consciously constructed herself as "marginal" in the context of a reality that has had little room for the person she is. With the arrival of the union at Yale, she welcomed the opportunity to locate herself among

²⁹ Brach's desire "to avoid being in any position of power over people" echoed feminists' rejection in the early 1970s of leadership as domination. See Hartsock (1983, especially 160-62). Brach was old enough to have been influenced by the analyses of power and domination that supported this position, and her work experience prior to coming to Yale was in likely settings for exposure to feminist theorizing about power.

others who were similarly situated in opposition to the status quo. On the picket line in particular she remembers "acceptance, unquestioned acceptance on a certain level":

You were alright because you were there. That habit, of evaluating everybody else, was put into another context. There was an automatic "here we are together."

Pam Norden, like Sara Brach, was a single woman who actively supported Local 34. She first mentioned gender and childhood in her self-description:

I tend to think of myself as, and it's a hard thing to lose, since so many other people type me that way and have since I was little, but I think of myself as an intellectual. . . . I think I'd really rather write novels. That part of my life has been something of a burden, because when you were growing up it meant you were of no sex whatsoever.

In her comments on the meaning of being a woman, Norden both linked her childhood experiences to her present identity and separated her adult self from her childhood. She distanced herself from earlier negative feelings:

I'm afraid that I have an awful lot of negative feelings about it [what being a woman means], but the negative feelings are somewhat, they don't feel like they're attached to me. When I was growing up the older women around me were housewives, not very well-educated, and led completely boring lives. . . . I just thought it was the most boring existence in the world. . . . But I always thought that men talked about more interesting things, even though it wasn't like all the men I knew were college professors or anything--but they talked about the outside world, where women seemed only to talk about recipes.

The values conflict Sara Brach experienced on her job echoed her feeling as an adolescent that "being a woman means being something you're not." Pam Norden's childhood response to unexciting gender role models was to think about being something else:

Basically when I was growing up it [being a woman] meant all sorts of negative things. Like when I had to wear silly taffeta dresses with crinolines--I mean, being the age I am [mid-thirties], it meant I couldn't go out at night and the reason was never explained. It was clear boys could do things and you couldn't. . . . I knew what was socially expected in the course of my life, I knew I didn't want it, I knew that I was not going to be good at it, and I guess I said, "Well fine, I'll go and be something else."

As a graduate student Norden learned that gender could limit the possibility of being "something else." She attributes her present political understanding of the meaning of gender to experiences in graduate school:

I have much more of a sense of consciousness of what being a woman means politically. Obviously one comes to political awareness as one grows up anyway, and my late teenage years coincided with the second wave of feminism. I guess some of the implications didn't hit me until it really was too late, when I realized as a graduate student. Things change. You're not, you know, one of the undifferentiated undergraduates, you're professionals in the field and the coming generation who will be the competition and so on and so forth, and I learned what being a second class citizen was. I had gone through my years at --- without noticing very much that there was not a single tenured woman in [her department], which was a "women's" field. There was one in the humanities. When I came to --- there was one, exactly one in the graduate department, and she was a "Miss." So it was pretty clear what you had to give up and sooner or later it started to sink in . . . If you sat down and thought about it, you know the odds are against you but you always think you will be the exception, you will be the one person who will get in out of sheer brilliance or sheer hard work or whatever. And then you find out that no matter how bright you are or how hard you work you are still falling in the ninety-three percent.^x

Pam Norden's frustration with the constraints of socially constructed possibility grounded in gender may have contributed to her receptiveness to Local 34. Even more significant was her growing consciousness that the system was failing to deliver for her, that her

^x This is a reference to Norden's expectations of finding academic employment, based on her estimate that seven percent of the Yale faculty is female.

experiences were not so different from those of other Yale employees, and that no one was necessarily guaranteed any special favors. Experiences of gender and class intersected and her identity as an individual started to change. Her story suggests the negotiation of several subject positions:

I think that one of the hardest things for me to do, and for many other people I know, is to accept the fact that they're not unique. . . . I could say, "hell, I'm a scholar, what have I got to do with a bunch of secretaries?" It didn't take me long, and it certainly didn't take the union to make me aware of it, because I suddenly realized I had managed to do the one thing I was never going to do, which was work in an office. . . . you start noticing there are people being paid much better than you--not overpaid but paid much better for jobs that involve fewer skills. You say, "hey, what's going on here?" . . . That kind of knowledge has to sink in over time, that you know you may think you're special, and someone may think you are special, but really statistically forget it. And for some people you are nothing more than an aggregate of your sexual organs and perhaps you look cute to them, but that's about it. It's a very--it's a hard thing to come to grips with because you don't think of yourself that way but you have to realize that other people do. And that--in the face of that, maybe it's time for a little group action instead of individual action.

From an early age Pam Norden had been encouraged to think of herself as an individual with special qualities. She got the message "without being told" that "what's wrong with you is you have your father's brains," and she was set apart by this knowledge. Norden described herself as having "always been something of a lone wolf":

I stayed out of, couldn't stand, [university] radical politics. I couldn't feel like I was a part of it, although point for point down the line I probably believed in what they were doing. Or at least agreed. . . . I didn't know that you could do something really good and constructive.

To position herself now in a collective movement meant rethinking the idea of individuality:

I think some people seek refuge in their individuality, their supposed individuality when--in the face of oppression, because it's the only thing left. Someone is taking it away from you by saying, "You belong to X class, you don't deserve to live," then you cling very fiercely to it.

Whether one perceives room for individuals or one's self in an alternative reality (like that presented by the union) has to do with what being an individual means. The meaning of individuality can change, conditioned by various cultural, social and institutional relationships and responsibilities. Norden recognizes this when she attempts to describe "the person I've become":

I don't quite know what the person I've become is. Because the one--although I know there's a core that remains pretty firm, I feel like the outermost boundaries are pretty flexible and still changing. . . . part of me can say, "I don't know where I'll end up in ten years." I think I'm kind of lucky. A lot of people my age know where they're going to end up in ten years, or they've already settled themselves down. Ten years is your kids are going to be teenagers and you're going to have X far along to paying the house off. I don't have any of that, and I think that lack of--at least in some way--social definition is kind of liberating. Although also kind of frightening.

Unlike Laura Morrison and Jane Bevins whose material realities and identification with individualism conflicted with their perceptions of what a union meant, Pam Norden felt there was room for individuals in

Local 34:

I think that the union is a wonderful thing. It is the best thing that ever happened to me in my work life, short as it is. . . . I think it reflected, both reflects and feeds upon movements I was making in my own life. . . . I think a union is--it should be demystified. It's not a cult. I've been treated as if I were a religious fanatic of some kind, usually by people who are religious fanatics of another kind. It's--the stereotypes are wrong. It's a simple organization. I don't want to denature it by saying something very blah, but it's an organization of people who are working together for a common goal. And in that it's not exactly like the Junior League, but it's less different from the Junior League than might appear. I happen to like this union because . . . there is room for individuals in the union. There's as much room for individuals there as anyplace else.

Although she hesitated to commit to words her sense of the person she had become, Pam Norden's story does offer one example of how her consciousness of the intersection of gender and class had changed through her association with the union. Given her earlier experiences with the limitations of gender roles, it is especially fitting that this example is of positive female role models:

When I think of seeing "Babies and Banners"³¹ I remember thinking--these women, they're real heroines of labor. And months later I thought, I'm a real heroine of labor too. I feel kind of honored. I never thought I'd be a heroine of labor.

Norden's identification with labor took shape along with a newly-perceived reality encompassing her place relative to the social construction of gender and class. Other women at Yale shared Norden's identification with labor, in which the intersection of gender experience with class dynamics gave the union a meaning compatible with their realities. For some women, this identification with labor expressed a consciousness of oneself as a subject for whom gender (and race and class) could be constraining forces and for whom gender, class and race identity offered negotiable possibilities.³² With this consciousness, the ability to negotiate the options depended upon cooperation, not isolation.

³¹ "With Babies and Banners" is a documentary film about the Women's Emergency Brigade and the Great General Motors Sit-Down Strike in Flint, Michigan in 1937. Available from New Day Films.

³² For others, the questions asked in the interviews may have suggested for the first time this way to formulate the issues. See Chapter Four for a discussion of the implications of research methods for the construction of meaning.

The women who opposed the union as an unnecessary and undesirable constraint upon their individual liberty saw no positive role for the union in their lives. Few of these women identified their circumstances as structurally determined, nor did they perceive limitations (other than surmountable personal ones) to their potential realization of individuality. Consequently, they did not consider how the union might mitigate the effects of gender and class, nor did they believe that it should. Many of these women organized together, as had the members of Local 34, using what they perceived to be the best means to protect their personal objectives and their right to act alone. In contrast, Norden and other union supporters came to believe that one escapes the boundaries of gendered, class and race possibility neither single-handedly nor by denying them, but by organizing with others to transform them.

Race

I've been Black all my life. I don't know what it's like to be anything else (Arlene Hamilton).

In my mind I always saw these two issues as integrated: women, minorities, are always . . . marginalized, people who are manipulated and used to set a certain standard, usually a low standard for pay, for entry (May George).

People in New Haven deal with race by ignoring it (Stella Brandes).

Discussion of race as a factor in the events at Yale, as a social issue in general and as an element of identity occurred almost exclusively in conversations with the four Black women I interviewed.³³ The exceptions were Marty Gilmour, who identified herself as a white woman in her self-description and referred to the civil rights movement as a formative influence; Laura Morrison, who also mentioned the civil rights movement when recounting previous involvement in social issues; and Stella Brandes, quoted above.³⁴

³³ Because white women said so little about race, this discussion of race as a feature of identity and a factor in the meanings made of the events at Yale is fundamentally deficient and, one might even say, racist. By presenting here the words of Black women about race and their responses to Local 34, the discussion implies race is part of identity only for Black women. This is true only in one sense: race is part of conscious identity for these four Black women, and unconscious or at least unspoken for most of the white women I interviewed. To discern the contribution of race to identity for the white women I interviewed would have required a more directive form of inquiry than that which I undertook.

³⁴ Certainly the presence of a white interviewer influenced the dynamics of each interview. As Dolores Janiewski points out, there is no way to estimate how interviews with a Black interviewer, or one of another sex or class or in another setting, might have yielded different

Most white women interviewed did not include race when describing themselves, nor did they identify race as a factor in the material conditions of their lives or in their experiences of and responses to the events at Yale. Nonetheless, the identities of white women are constructed within our experiences as white women in a cultural and temporal location where to be white means an experience of material reality and a place in the dominant ideology that are different from those of Black women and Black men. It would be a mistake to infer from a lack of mention that race does not figure in all women's identities and their generation of meaning. The construction of identity and the generation of meaning are social as well as individual processes, and race is a factor in American social life.³⁵ Rather, the omission is evidence of an unconsciousness, or a less immediate awareness, about the relationship between race, privileges and possibilities.

Equally important for the creation of meaning, the absence of talk by these white women about race is a reminder of the general absence of race consciousness among members of the dominant race in a racist society. As Bell Hooks notes,

In a racially imperialist society such as ours, it is the dominant race that reserves for itself the luxury of dismissing racial identity while the oppressed race is made daily aware of their racial identity (1981, 138).

Even without apparent race-consciousness, the identities of white women--who we think we are, where we belong--have foundations in race. The realities the women's accounts depict, however lacking each may be

results (1985, 180).

³⁵ For one discussion of the historical nature of the category of race, see Omi and Winant (1986).

by its omission of the significance of race, is the reality they perceived: one in which race at the very least is not part of a self-description, one for which the discourses chosen to make sense of experience did not expressly account for race, and one in which the events at Yale did not effect any transformation in their perception or awareness or consciousness of the dynamics of race in their lives.³⁶

Where the absence of a discourse of class makes talking about class awkward, the existence of racism can make talking about race, and acknowledging who benefits from race oppression, threatening for members of the dominant group. In "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," Audre Lorde gives an example of habitual cultural avoidance of the subject:

Women responding to racism is a topic so dangerous that when the local media attempt to discredit this conference [National Women's Studies Association 1981] they choose to focus upon the provision of lesbian housing as a diversionary device--as if the Hartford Courant dare not mention the topic chosen for discussion here, racism, lest it become apparent that women are in fact attempting to examine and to alter all the repressive conditions of our lives (1984b, 128).

The construction of identity is a dialectical process for everyone, not just members of minority groups for whom the contradictions between material experience and ideology may be particularly brutal. As members of the dominant race, white women confront contradictions between our material experiences and the ideology of race less often

³⁶ See Hooks (1988) for a discussion of white women's unconsciousness of their race as an attitude of white supremacy. Stanback (1988) considers the same attitude among white researchers. Palmer (1983) notes that race and class were "unexperienced elements in white feminists' oppression" (154) in the 1920s, and elsewhere suggests that middle class white feminists' ignorance of race and class issues during the feminist "revival" of the 1960s was rooted in this history (1988, 452).

than do Black women and men and other people of color. Occasions requiring some articulation of a racial identity are therefore less frequent for white people. On those occasions when we negotiate (by choice or necessity) between the reality of racism and the ideology of equal opportunity, we rarely assume a permanent risk to our well-being: whatever we may say or do in such circumstances, afterwards we are still white. This is not to say that silence on race as a feature of one's identity and failure to acknowledge its significance are justified. Rather, both take place within a culture that makes such silence and omission more than possible; it is a normative behavior for which there exist few incentives to change.

Bonnie Thornton Dill proposes that the consciousness of Black American women should be explored by "examining the lives of particular women and searching for patterns in the ways in which they describe themselves and their relationship to the society" (1983, 181-2, emphasis in original). To seek a pattern on the basis of interviews with four women is hardly defensible, but their stories do provide individual perceptions that illuminate the ways in which these particular women made sense of the events at Yale. Even more so than gender and class experience, race experience and race identity are fundamental to the lives of these four Black women and their relationships with and responses to the union.

The reality of race experience as part of the foundation of identity for Black women means that these women scrutinized the representations of reality made by the university and the union from a race-conscious perspective. This is a perspective white women did not appeal

to share, and perhaps cannot share. Bell Hooks describes this perspective as a way of seeing "from margin to center," a perspective that could be a pattern in the words of these four Black women, especially (but not only) as they differ from the white women's accounts:

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

This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world view--a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity (1984, ix).

Arlene Hamilton, May George, Geneva Oakley and Linda Wilson spoke of the intersection of race, gender and class in their lives. As they did so, each woman was describing her reality, one in which the union's oppositional stance was one of several oppositional devices necessary to her life--or in Hooks' words, necessary to her survival. Seeing from margin to center aptly characterizes how each woman made sense of the events at Yale. Local 34 touched their lives but not did not define them; rather, these four women made sense of the union from the perspective of individual realities, as did all women interviewed. But in comparison with white women (both supporters and opponents), these four Black women appeared in general to understand the union and the workplace struggle it engendered less on its terms and more in their own terms of race-conscious experience. Their support of the union varied in degree and in kind, as did what they believed Local 34 could or

should do regarding race issues. Their range of commitment to the union certainly equalled and in some cases surpassed that of white supporters, but these four women did not endow the union's struggle with the power to determine their issues.

Who these women were and could be was not defined by the union's agenda, successes or failures. The separation between their possibilities and the issues addressed by the union reflected in part Local 34's relative inattention to minority issues, in comparison with the union's commitment to more traditional concerns of organized labor. Why would Black women identify fully with the union when it did not specifically address them nor acknowledge the full dimensions of their realities? The condition of existence Linda Wilson described as "double jeopardy," the combination of being both Black and female, made the meaning of the events at Yale for Black women and the nature of their responses to the union different from those of white women.

Arlene Hamilton's arrival in New Haven coincided with her first exposure to racism and the early stages of Local 34's organizing. Her new consciousness of racism and the difficulty she experienced supporting herself came together in her response to Local 34. The prospect of union representation meant protection as a worker and as a Black person:

I've been Black all my life. I don't know what it's like to be anything else. It makes me--anybody--special, always noticed. In my job, whatever happens, they notice me first. Since coming to New Haven, being Black is harder. It's the first time I experienced racism. I never noticed, no one talked about it. I couldn't understand it, still don't understand a lot of things about racism. . . . I hope eventually people will band together. In New Haven, Blacks are treated bad, especially at Yale. There's no support. It's important to support each other. Our union supports us.

Hamilton was involved with Local 34's Affirmative Action Committee. She regarded this group of six women as a vehicle for generating community support for minority concerns and increasing minority hiring at Yale. The Affirmative Action Committee was formed after the Black Caucus pressured the leaders of Local 34 to address minority concerns in a more systematic way.³⁷ According to Hamilton, Local 34 provided a necessary means of protection for Black workers, and it was this image of the union she thought important to present to other people of color:

I do tell other Black folks at Yale and outside. I think the union is the best thing for somebody who doesn't have protection. When you do join, find out all you can. If you think the paid [union] staff is not telling you anything, go to someone else. Sometimes you need to go higher. . . . I encourage Black people to do it because without a union, we don't have any help anyway. At least with a union, if you want more education, better working conditions, you have somebody to support you. Because we really can't do it alone. I've learned that--you can't do it by yourself. You need the support of co-workers, union representation.

Hamilton's sense of the role of Local 34 and the Affirmative Action Committee had little to do with her own identity as a woman. For example, she saw the purpose of an upcoming forum organized by the Com-

³⁷ According to Fred Meager, an active Black union member, hesitation on the part of the Black Student Alliance to support Local 34 was the impetus for developing the Black Caucus. When the Black Student Alliance was reluctant to assist Local 34, several women approached Meager and asked for his help in getting support from the Black Student Alliance and minority faculty members. According to Meager, these women first approached minority students and faculty to ask for their support and were told that the only people who had approached them had been white. Minority students and faculty expressed their concern that no Black people appeared to be involved with the union, and they were therefore reluctant to lend their support. At a meeting at the union office arranged by Meager and others, the union leadership was challenged to "mention this [contract] is going to deal with the problems of Blacks or Hispanics or whatever," and not to make of minority concerns "an appendage, off on the side someplace," but to integrate them into the focus of organizing (Fred Meager). The Black Caucus grew out of this meeting

mittee as building community support for pressuring Yale "to hire more minorities--Yale has a problem with that." While she acknowledged the union's role in "helping some women rise up," and described personal experiences illustrating the cultural meaning of being female, Hamilton didn't appear to relate the union's strength as a force for change in the workplace to changing the dynamics of gender, in the workplace or anywhere else. For Hamilton, Local 34 represented a potential positive contribution to the realities of life at Yale for all minority workers regardless of gender.

The formation of the Black Caucus and its relationship with and eventual absorption by Local 34 is part of the context within which many people of color became informed about the union. May George located the origin of her response to Local 34 and her involvement with the Black Caucus in her work with the Black Student Alliance:

I remember people coming to our group [the Black Student Alliance] around the second semester of [my] junior year, saying they wanted to give us information about the union. It was big news to us. We didn't know about the organizing efforts that were going on, about five years before that time. It was quite an eye opener to hear this kind of activity was taking place right around me. Here I was going into the community trying to do things and here was something right at Yale, something that directly involved at the time students in examination of the university, governing policies, attitudes towards people who come there to work. . . . At the same time I remember going through the literature, having members of the Black Caucus come to speak, on issues of the organizing effort, the fact that Yale paid minority men and women much less than white males and females.

The Black Student Alliance did not immediately join forces with the Black Caucus. First, members discussed whether or not they should support Local 34 and--if a strike occurred--honor the picket line. The historic racism of unions concerned them, as did previous experiences

with campus groups that had requested the assistance and support of the BSA.

The mobilization of minority union members in the form of the Black Caucus occurred after Local 34 had been organizing for almost two years, and the priority issues for the first contract had already begun to take shape. Dealing with racism and affirmative action was apparently not among those priorities, at least in the beginning:

I think part of it was, they [union leadership] had set out their own goals, the negotiation was taking place. I think because the one group in the union [the minority student support group] that we tried to work with more than any other, the Black Caucus, was so marginalized in the whole effort. I mean, they were used when it was advantageous to have a minority speak, or when it was necessary to get people of color to go into the New Haven community to speak at churches and so forth, or when it came to organizing minority [employees] to join the union . . . or whatever the particular situation was (May George).

In discussions with the union leadership, George and other members of a minority support group offered to help organize around minority issues. George and several friends were concerned about the effects of comparable worth on minority women. They formed a support group to address their questions about whether comparable worth was "something that would translate into real gains in the workplace for that set of workers" (May George). Later, these women came to see comparable worth "as an affirmative action issue--affirmative action [meaning] not only hiring, promotion, recruitment, but also equal wages" (May George). According to George, union leaders "definitely expressed their concern about [minority issues]," but there was little in the way of an active response:

I think because the issues had been so clearly laid out--they knew they wanted to negotiate for a better pension plan, better medical benefits for retirees and their dependents, they knew they wanted to negotiate for a wage system--and all these sorts of things that were [already] going on. And it was sort of hard to stop and say, "OK, we're going to try to figure out how to get this issue on the table." . . . [One leader] admitted that, in the whole process of negotiation you deal with some things and you hold other things off until the next negotiation period, or you deal with it in the interim. . . . I guess part of the problem is everyone working on a particular program that had been defined from the beginning, and when new elements [the concerns of minority members] came into play, the union not being able or equipped to deal with those new issues, those concerns, questions about how are we going to get this, what steps do we take, what people do we enlist?

After May George graduated from Yale and became a university employee, she increased her involvement with union activities. As a member of Local 34 George was able to advocate attention to issues that the union leadership was overlooking or assigning a low priority to--like minority concerns. Even as a union member, George encountered resistance within the union to making minority concerns a priority:

It wasn't until I actually began working at Yale and joined the union, got involved with various committees, this whole issue of affirmative action began to solidify within the union. . . . There have been very definite problems working with the union--our membership is predominantly white--on this issue, and also because the visible indicator in our bargaining unit is gender. Gender has sort of overridden race in this whole organizing effort and efforts to secure the goals that we set out for ourselves. I remember a while back wondering if in fact lip service was being given to the issue of race discrimination, because it's a very serious challenge, something that was documented and could be documented again, because we still have some gains to make. But it was something that a clear strategy hadn't been developed on, and something that a clear strategy still needs to be developed on.

Once Local 34's Affirmative Action committee was created, George and others had a place within the union structure to organize on behalf of the local's minority membership. George assessed the Committee's accomplishments during its first year:

We're still--we've been working as a union committee for a year, and we're still at a point where not much of the information, and not much of the organizing efforts we'd like to see take place, have taken place. . . . in our [recent] meeting we did a sort of assessment of where we had come in a year, given that negotiations [for the second contract] would take place in September and whether or not this would be a paper issue in the contract that Yale violates on and on as they do with health and safety issues. . . . And we didn't want to see affirmative action become the same kind of committee and have the same kind of effect that health and safety language has had, which is pretty nil in terms of the contract.

George identified three areas in which the Affirmative Action committee had not had much impact on the union or the university. These areas illustrate her sense that the union had a role to play in political education--local and global--in addition to its role as an arbiter of relationships and power dynamics in the workplace. The first area was overcoming the leadership's resistance to issues of minority concern; the second was addressing the systemic, daily occurrences of racist behavior minority workers were subjected to at Yale; the third was broadening the context of organizing from labor issues to other political issues "to see how all of these things relate" (May George).

George admitted feeling somewhat cynical about the prospects for real progress in all three areas, but was nonetheless hopeful about changing the attitudes of the union local's Executive Committee. "I think part of the problem might be the skepticism of some of the leaders," she said:

I've had really serious discussions, detailed discussions [with the leadership] about this issue. Their whole line is, "We're never going to get any change from the university on this," maybe a sort of skepticism, sort of an attitude that it's not worth fighting.

A philosophy of organizing around "winnable issues" and seeing race issues as fundamentally unwinnable contributed to the attitude of the

leadership. George intended to work on developing more minority leadership within the union as part of an overall strategy on minority concerns.

George was also disappointed about the ongoing accommodation, on the part of the union and the university, to race-discriminating behavior:

The everyday problems, the systemic problems, are not being addressed. Out and out discrimination, hiring of supervisors, is not being challenged--not only by the union, but the university [also] seems to be very passive about the whole thing. Not wanting to offend any of the hiring supervisors, not wanting to step on their toes. In their estimation, really powerful faculty members, "we don't want to offend them and tell them who to hire." We've had a number of grievances and arbitrations. But it's really hard to say this person's been motivated for racial reasons unless they come out with that. . . . there's sort of an attitude they can select who they want to, the person they feel most comfortable with, usually that's someone who resembles them, resembles their background, the person feels they can somewhat more easily manipulate.

George used her own history at Yale to illustrate the problem. Her experiences as a student at Yale foreshadowed those she had later as a Yale C&T. George enrolled with the intention of majoring in engineering, but changed her mind. Her reasons illustrate how race, gender and class experience intersected in her decision to change her major:

I decided not to do engineering, for not only academic but attitudinal reasons. The stress and competition in the university; there weren't supportive communities for minority women who were interested in the natural sciences. I felt I was good at literary studies, and wanted to go into it despite not being able to make any money [in that field] and despite my family's protests.

George's experiences as a Yale employee contributed to her assessment of an accommodation of racism. After graduating, she was hired by a Black professor:

And I think the motivation for him was, here's a Black woman who graduated from the university, and he wanted to fulfill his affirmative action commitment. It was really ironic, because he'd just gotten rid of a Black female C&T who he felt was ungrammatical, did not work out, had a very acerbic personality and he just didn't get along with her at all. Here I was, a person with the Yale degree, and I guess he felt he could use my skills and talents but at the same time mold a personality and have someone conform to his way of acting--which didn't happen. And we ended up parting on very bad terms.

Raising the awareness of non-minority union members regarding the experiences of minorities was an area where George felt the Affirmative Action Committee had made some progress. "But translating that sort of consciousness-raising into some kind of conscious action is the next step, and something we need to address," she said. Union members would ask George, "well, how do I organize minorities?" to which she replied, "You do it the same as you do your white members":³⁸

The departments [with a higher concentration of minority employees] are not a separate breed of individuals or anything like that. Usually the problems are very similar. They may be magnified for a minority worker . . . but they're basically the same. We realize that given the fact that we have the same employer, we know how Yale behaves, we know how supervisors and a number of the managers behave towards us and their attitudes towards us as workers--it's pretty arrogant, it's hostile, untrusting, and minorities go through that thing not only in a work situation but in a social situation, walking the street and so forth, people being hostile and not trusting--so it's the same thing but more amplified and I guess a bit more perverse for minorities.

In addition to specific workplace problems Local 34 needed to address, George perceived a role for the union beyond protecting the rights of Yale employees. George wanted Local 34 to take a place in the global struggle for workers' rights, and she acknowledged that the diversity in the union's membership might make consensus on such issues

³⁸ Fred Meager described being asked a similar question about how he, as a Black leader in Local 34, could organize white members.

difficult to achieve. "[T]he struggle did not begin, did not end, with Local 34 organizing, negotiating and winning a contract," George insisted:

I think we sort of get stymied, we limit ourselves when we just deal with a labor issue in a small limited context and don't try to broaden that context to see how all of these things relate. I've had struggles trying to get the union to take more political stands on issues to support, for instance, workers' causes in El Salvador, where the trade unions are getting more active and questioning the Duarte regime. Before, it always was "we negotiate with our employers, we're not going to get involved with other issues," and I think that's something Local 34 has gotten into-- some of it for reasons that are external to the union." . . . [I think we should work towards] just having a consensus that we will work for the rights of working people wherever they are, whatever situations they are taking on. And that's something I see as fundamental. It's something, because we're all from different political, religious, and so forth, backgrounds, we've had to struggle [with] as a union.

For May George, the union was both a means of personal, individual protection and an organization that could contribute to the movement for social responsibility beyond the university. The intersection of race, gender and class in the possibilities she perceived for her own life informed her understanding of the relationship between minority issues and comparable worth:

In my mind I always saw these two issues as integrated: women, minorities, are always . . . marginalized, people who are manipulated and used to set a certain standard, usually a low standard for pay, for entry. . . . My seeing comparable worth itself as an affirmative action component made it really clear to me how these things could fit together.

This understanding made her sensitive to how the two issues were separated in Local 34's organizing and bargaining strategies. George offered

³³ George was referring to a lawsuit filed by a group of anti-union employees, with the support of the National Right-to-Work Committee, challenging (among other things) Local 34's involvement in organizing workers in New Haven who were not Yale University employees.

an example of how Local 34's attention to gender issues overrode attention to race issues. At the time of our interview, members of Local 34 were engaged in an enormous project interviewing every bargaining unit employee in order to develop job descriptions for each of the 2700 jobs in the bargaining unit. The objective of this undertaking was to accumulate data to argue for a new, more equitable pay system that reflected the comparable responsibility and comparable worth of widely different jobs. As George noted, the job description project wasn't designed to document race discrimination. As a result, any argument the union might consider making to address the concrete resolution of minority concerns--such as altering the concentration of minority employees in certain departments and the lowest labor grades--might not be sustained by the job description data.⁴ In George's eyes, the deferral of any attempted resolution of minority issues would continue until a coordinated strategy targeting them--like the job description strategy to address comparable worth--was developed:

⁴ According to one press account, Local 34's second contract (January 1988-January 1992) contains an agreement "to reclassify jobs to redress economic discrimination against women and minorities." This agreement followed the release in the fall of 1987 of "an independent union-funded study . . . [that] documented that Yale pays Black women as much as \$1980 less per year than white men doing comparable work" (Tuhus 1988, 10). As described, such a contract provision is a considerable achievement, but does not resolve two of George's concerns: racist behavior and affirmative action. The second contract also provided for a community training and hiring program aimed at Latinos and Blacks. See McClure (1989) and Tynan (1988).

We had a situation where the Black Caucus and the union stewards, chief stewards, were sort of at odds, because they felt that the Black Caucus was outside the union, was not integrated on "the program."⁴¹ Many of these people were here during the union drive and the strike and felt the whole issue of racial discrimination and the problems of minority workers at the university were given lip service, was not something that was seriously dealt with. They felt very burned out and hurt because this problem wasn't addressed at the time and it didn't seem like it would be addressed subsequent to the contract negotiations and settlement of the contract. We met with the staff members, the paid organizers,⁴² about this particular problem and ways of integrating this into "the program." . . . But then things sort of fell by the wayside, because this job description committee had taken more of a, it's played more of an important role in the things that we're doing right now.

In George's view the leadership of Local 34 did not share her understanding of the relationship between advocating affirmative action and establishing a more equitable wage structure, nor did they demonstrate her equal commitment to both. George did not see the union as the solution to her concerns, but hoped that attitudes would change and concrete developments would follow:

We're not going to find any sort of panacea, but maybe something that will alleviate the problems that are out there. And something that moves beyond a mere p.r. [public relations] strategy for the university and the union, into something that is concrete and begin to show some real successful changes . . .

The actions of the leaders of Local 34 betrayed a vision that did not assign a priority to what mattered most to May George. The union promised a different workplace reality, made possible by members working together, but there appeared to be little commitment on the part of the

⁴¹ This is organizing jargon, as in "to get with the program," meaning to be loyal to and act in solidarity with an agreed-upon strategy or agenda.

⁴² In addition to organizers from the International Union's paid staff, people who worked on the organizing drive included a group of Yale employees known as "unpaid organizers" who assumed specific organizing responsibilities much as did the paid organizing staff.

leadership to transforming the dynamics of race experience, either in the workplace or beyond it.

George's experience trying to get Local 34 to address minority issues highlights the differences between organizing and negotiating for wages and organizing and negotiating for affirmative action. Organizing for equitable wages and organizing for affirmative action have different histories and invoke different, though not necessarily incompatible, assumptions about what is possible and what is right. The demand for equitable wages has a constant place in the history of U.S. labor organizing; this demand was often made at the expense of equitable wages for white female and non-white female and male workers.⁴³ More recently, campaigns for pay equity have meant a rethinking of the definition of an equitable wage. Most comparable worth arguments propose wage equity on the basis of the work done, not the worker.⁴⁴ Organizing for affirmative action has a much briefer history and assumes the necessity of restructuring opportunities, arguing in the discourse of social responsibility but proposing solutions in the form of individual rights. Even more important, affirmative action insists upon making reparations for an injustice to the person or class of persons, where arguments for pay equity are generally about the comparable value of the work.⁴⁵

⁴³ See, for example, Baron (1983, especially 54-56), S. Eisenstein (1983, especially 26 and Footnote 40) and Marshall (1971).

⁴⁴ See Evans and Nelson (1989) for a discussion of the contested meaning of comparable worth.

⁴⁵ Economists Nancy Folbre and Heidi Hartmann relate the rise of pay equity campaigns historically to the failure of affirmative action for women: "Affirmative action . . . rewarded women who could take advantage of opportunities to enter male-dominated occupations but offered little to women stuck in 'pink collar' jobs as secretaries, receptionists and

The union's reluctance to address with equal vigor the more inflammatory of these two issues, affirmative action, may have been a strategic decision to avoid confrontations over race issues; it may also have indicated the leadership's own discomfort with race issues. Whatever the reason, the result was that May George did not perceive the union as promising change in this area, but instead saw Local 34 as one of several possible strategies of resistance in her life. Indeed, George did not see how Local 34 could successfully resolve the concerns of minority workers at Yale, given that "affirmative action is a can of worms and something white workers don't feel comfortable with, no matter how liberal their tendencies." She wondered what the next steps would be:

especially at a point where we as a [Affirmative Action] committee are very comfortable talking about instituting quotas at the university, quotas on hiring, quotas on promotion, and really having that as a thing we can enforce, and grieve Yale on, and take to arbitration or to the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board]. And that's something I know a lot of people in our bargaining unit are not going to be comfortable with until they hear the rationalizations of why we want those quotas, why we want tracking [of minority workers into and along designated career paths], and so forth.

Of the four Black women I interviewed, Geneva Oakley had been employed at Yale the longest. Her age and her tenure at Yale gave her a different perspective on the union and its significance. After sixteen years at Yale and the completion of an Associate's Degree in Business Administration, Oakley was still in the same salary grade as when she was first hired. Her particular perspective on looking "from margin to

center," specific to her individual experiences, underlay her response to the union.

Although several other unions had tried to organize C&Ts at Yale during her years there, Local 34 was the only one Oakley joined:

At that point, I was receptive because I knew that I had been treated unfairly at Yale and I felt the need. They had been trying to get a union for C&Ts from the time I was on the grounds. But I could never see it because I had nothing for comparison. After the unfairness I was exposed to, I could see myself going nowhere.

The unfairness to which Oakley referred included two specific experiences. First, a supervisor made no effort to change the salary classification of Oakley's job until she transferred to another department after thirteen years, and then the supervisor sought a man to fill the higher-paying position. Second, Oakley endured a year of part-time employment during which she applied for and was not offered numerous Yale job openings in her salary grade. "I know some jobs are not wide open," she remarked. Oakley was most angry about situations where the person interviewing her had less work experience than she did, but she would not attribute the situation to race alone:

I should have been interviewing them! How do you take a kid out of high school, can't spell, can type 75 words per minute, put her in--and take a seasoned employee and say "No, you can't [do this job]?" Like I say, I don't care how you package it, it's discrimination, age-wise, color-wise, whatever otherwise, there is no reason for me to be here, at a [salary grade] six, after sixteen to seventeen years.

In contrast with May George, who worked actively trying to get Local 34 to develop a strategy on affirmative action, Oakley was more inclined to trust the union leadership to "find out some of the problems people are having [and] work towards those ends." Where George spoke of the union in the first person plural, Oakley used the third

person: "I think they've got a good cross-section of the university . . . and they do listen to everybody. . . . They try to get everybody's opinion." Oakley believed the Black Caucus served a purpose, informing others about the specific experiences of minority employees. At the beginning of our interview she handed me a flyer produced by the Affirmative Action Committee documenting the concentration of people of color in certain departments and salary grades.⁴⁶ Later she said:

I know there's a need for it [the Black Caucus] because nobody knows your problems like yourself. I don't think they're [sic] being overlooked as union members, but a lot of people don't realize, until you show them a sheet like this . . . they have been shunted to the bottom or whatever. Some people figure if you don't elevate yourself, it's your fault. Because the university says, "after you make your six months [probation] you can go into this or this," and we know it isn't true.

Oakley's perception of what the union could do for minority employees and what she would do for the union was shaped in part by an encounter she had with several union organizers. When she joined Local 34, Oakley asked that organizers not use her name in their efforts. But her name was "bandied about" anyway, and soon afterwards her work hours were cut from full-time to half-time. Consequently, she understood the hesitation of minority workers to get involved with the Black Caucus, for fear of appearing too visible:

I feel there is a need for a Black Caucus, but there are a lot of people, they know they need it, but they don't want to stick out like a sore thumb. You make yourself too visible and you're going to get zapped. And it happens. There's a lot of people feel it. They'll feel it as it gets closer to the contract deadline and pay a little closer attention to the meetings.

⁴⁶ Local 34's Affirmative Action Committee analysis, "The state of Black employment at Yale, October 1986," documented discrimination on the basis of earnings relative to years of service.

Oakley expected the union to incorporate minority issues into negotiations in general, and seemed confident this would happen. She thought the union had been doing a good job; under the first contract her salary went up \$5,000 and she anticipated receiving another increase, though not quite as substantial, over the life of the second contract.² Clearly Oakley welcomed the union and the personal benefits it brought her, but she did not see a place for herself as an activist for the union on race or any other issues. She characterized herself by saying:

I don't try to be a leadership person; I prefer being a good, supportive person for the things that I believe in, being supportive of other people, my fellow co-workers, union members, whatever. I just see myself that way.

As a "good, supportive person," and perhaps also because she was within eight years of retirement, Oakley was less occupied than was May George with thinking about the meaning of the union, its place in her life and its impact on her future. She wasn't inclined to compare Local 34's agenda with what else might be possible and necessary; she hadn't held any particular expectations beyond what had already been accomplished. Oakley had witnessed the vicissitudes of Yale's personnel policies; she was living in New Haven more than ten years earlier when the university was pressed for workers and sponsored a training and hiring program for local people, including people of color. Later, she observed the tightening of job qualifications at Yale when local unemployment rates were higher. Anything the union could do was an improvement over being without one, but the meaning of the union for

² The second contract (1988-1992) contained six percent pay raises for each of the four years it covered.

Geneva Oakley did not contain the possibility of dramatic changes in her reality nor in the exercise of power with which she was familiar.

Referring to the university's hostile stance towards the union, she commented, "These are the ways of the world."

Race identity was key to Linda Wilson's first thoughts about Local 34. Because of the exclusionary history of unions, Wilson was initially very opposed to Local 34. Even after she changed her mind and joined, she maintained a distance from union activities. Wilson described herself as a loner; her sense of herself was changing, as was her need for a support system. The individualism she expressed echoes that of some of the union's opposition:

I'm going through something where now it's important to me as a Black woman to be my own friend, not to have to have a buddy to stroke me. To do things for myself. . . . If you wait for an external support system, some very important things . . . too many valuables are lost if you do that. There's not always going to be someone there. Not even to be liked--you have to go beyond that.

The organization of Local 34 coincided with Wilson's questioning of beliefs she was raised with, and she extended this questioning to the union's decision-making mechanisms. Wilson's perspective, another version of seeing from margin to center, explains her distance from union activism:

At a meeting not too long ago, . . . I became aware that certain people come across as leaders. . . . If the majority hush and let one group have their way, that's a big fear of mine. If you have a group of people that are willing for you to hush and say "we'll run the show," and you're willing to be complacent and just sit back, there's a danger. . . . the leadership not wanting ideas they themselves haven't originated. . . . They feel they have to be in control all the time, of everything. They block it, aren't ready for it. That's dangerous and I don't think any one group should have that kind of power.

When Wilson expressed her concern to union leaders that they were excluding rank and file input and limiting dialogue on a particular issue, she was told the issue had been resolved. "How could it be?" she asked, since as far as she knew the discussion ended at the meeting she attended. Under these circumstances Wilson was not inclined to be very active in the union. Given her initial misgivings about union racism and her later experiences with a concentration of power, she saw little more in Local 34 beyond personal protection and benefits. In her view the union did not welcome input from rank-and-file members such as herself and there was no particular reason to invest her time and energy where she would have to struggle to be heard.

Arlene Hamilton, May George, Geneva Oakley and Linda Wilson had in common their race and their membership in Local 34. Each perceived the union and the possibilities it represented somewhat differently, reflecting her specific history and reality. Likewise, the extent of their participation in union activities covered a range, including a combative leadership role (George), supportive involvement for collective interests (Hamilton), acceptance (bordering on resignation) that whatever transpired would be beneficial (Oakley) and discomfort but not engagement with the means employed to achieve desirable benefits (Wilson).

Despite differences in the meanings made of the union as a potential agent of social responsibility and a means of collective or individual protection, there is a shared foundation in these four perspectives from margin to center. Each response to the union was an affirmation of the possibility and desirability of an alternative workplace reality, as represented by the union. These four Black women

(and perhaps others) measured the union against the reality of their lives and found it wanting, in ways that white women who supported and opposed Local 34 did not. When considering what the union might mean for their lives, Arlene Hamilton, May George, Geneva Oakley and Linda Wilson were also considering whether this organization would or could speak to the interests of people of color. Though the conclusions they arrived at varied, their expectations of what the union could make possible were expectations reflecting the continuing condition of female minority experience, the condition of existence Linda Wilson described as "double jeopardy." The knowledge and experience of a reality in which race (as well as gender) matters grounded the meaning of the events at Yale for these four women and their responses to the union.

Class

NG: Have you ever thought of yourself as belonging to any particular class?

Hell no! That's funny, because class being unstructured and undefined in this country, you can make up a different set of criteria (Pam Norden).

I'm a working class woman. I am working, that's what I'm doing. What is middle class? . . . I suppose people who are middle class are people who've got time to think. Because when you're working [class] you don't have time to think. . . . it's having time of your own, that's what makes the difference (Margaret Connolly).

Class identity was not easily discussed in the interviews, perhaps because class identity in the United States is not simple to locate. The ideological assumption that democracy and capitalism work together to make possible unrestricted social mobility encourages impermanent class distinctions.⁴⁸ As a result class identity, where it exists, is transient both conceptually and materially. And where the meaning of

⁴⁸ The literature on the question of whether an American ideology of social mobility is an obstacle to the development of working class consciousness is abundant. See, for example, Oppenheimer (1985) and Poulantzas (1974). Oppenheimer notes, "[M]obility in the US is no more noteworthy than that in several other industrial countries. Nevertheless, accompanied by an ideological position that has been inculcated from the cradle, the perception of mobility has had real--and basically conservative--consequences. Both blue and white collar Americans are thus steeped in an ideology that is an obstacle to looking at the world in class-oriented political terms" (196).

class is confused with status, discerning a specific meaning for class identity is even more difficult.⁴⁹

By class identity I mean where or whether one locates one's self in a class system. The significance of class is further complicated by our tendency to conflate class identity with behavior; that is, whether one acts in one's class interests. When class identity is assumed to be dependent upon behavior, the importance of consciousness disappears. The importance (for identity) of awareness of the power relations of class is precisely the independence of consciousness from behavior. Class consciousness need not produce class identity nor class-identified behavior. The women at Yale arrived at answers to competing representations of reality from identities composed of multiple components, of which class was but one.⁵⁰ Gender, race, and ethnic experience intersect with class experience in the composition of an identity that is both a social and an individual construction, accommodating material experience, desire and perceived possibility.

⁴⁹ Reeve Vanneman and Lynn Weber Cannon attribute the confusion between class and status to a number of causes, one of which is the lack of precise language about class. Citing the work of Mann (1973) and Marwick (1980), Vanneman and Cannon note, "In the US, to be sure, the popular culture is largely bereft of class categories. Neither the dominant American cultural institutions (the media and the schools) nor working-class oriented organizations (unions and the Democratic Party) supply workers with the vocabulary they need to articulate the class divisions that surround them" (1987, 107, Footnote 5).

⁵⁰ Also pertinent to any discussion of class identity is the extensive literature on the development of the concept of the individual. The relationship of self to social institutions is an issue of the "social deployment of power" (Heller and Wellbery 1986a, 4). For a discussion of women's relationship to social institutions, see Linda Kay Kerber (1988), who addresses the construction and maintenance of boundaries of women's place through the changing concept of "separate spheres."

Behavior or the outcome of conflict are inadequate bases from which to infer class consciousness. As Vanneman and Cannon put it, in order to discuss class consciousness "we must study workers' ideas directly" (1987, 39).⁵¹ Continuing the process begun in the preceding discussions of gender and race, this section presents material from the interviews that demonstrates a relationship between identity, the understanding and experiences of class, and the meaning of the events at Yale.

Beginning with Juliet Mitchell's "Women: The Longest Revolution" (1966), feminist scholars have illuminated the complexity of the experience of class for women and the function of that experience for identity.⁵² Mitchell, Lydia Sargent, Mich  lle Barrett and other theorists worked through the inability of Marxist formulations of class to explain the situation of women. Such work established that women

⁵¹ How to do this is the subject of considerable debate. The argument over whether words or deeds reveal the more accurate representation of worker consciousness or culture is extensive. For a recent overview of how historians are addressing these issues, see "A Round Table: Labor . . ." (1988). In communications, this debate is framed somewhat differently. Content and textual analyses address words and images; cultural, consumption and policy studies are more concerned with "deeds," that is, behavior; still other types of research (such as conversation analysis and organizational behavior studies) encompass both. In both disciplines the reliability of the data--in the case of words and images, texts of one sort or another; in the case of deeds, actions and accounts of them during or after the fact--and the credibility of interpretation are suspect. In the present case, women's accounts of their thinking about and responses to the events at Yale function as both words and deeds; often the words (accounts) are about deeds (behavior). All accounts are taken as truthful. Even if some accounts are not entirely honest, this would not affect the interpretation, since in this case "what matters" is whatever the women say matters. These issues are discussed more fully in Chapters Two and Four.

⁵² See also Davis (1983), Hooks (1984), Janiewski (1985), and Jones (1985).

experience what Rosalind Petchesky calls "a gender-specific relation to the class system and a class-specific relation to the gender system" (1983, 225). More recently, the writings of Black women scholars have forced acknowledgement of the race-specific relation of women to systems of class and gender.⁵³ Dolores Janiewski, writing about factory workers in Durham, North Carolina in the early part of the twentieth century, notes that:

these women's identities were rooted in three co-existing sets of relationships: sex, race and class. Each relationship conditioned the others and, as a consequence, the boundaries between "them and us" were elastic (1985, 117).

What Karen Brodtkin Sacks calls the "plural foundations" of class consciousness--gender, race, and ethnic experience, to name three--contribute to identity in overlapping and sometimes contradictory ways.⁵⁴ For my purposes here, I want to explore where and how women express awareness of social and workplace power relations, an awareness based in personal experience and sometimes, but not always, located by them within a class system. It is the meaning made of such experiences for answering the autobiographical question "where do I belong?" that is the basis for action.⁵⁵ By attending here to the relationships between class

⁵³ See Davis (1983), Dill (1983 and 1988), Hooks (1984), and Lorde (1984a). Two recent critiques of the inclusiveness of feminist scholarship are Stanback (1988) and Zinn et al. (1986).

⁵⁴ Sacks writes that "class consciousness has plural foundations," asserting that the "take-off point" for consciousness is "a gender-specific and racially-specific identity" (1984, 7). I do not wish to enter here into the discussion of the primacy of gender or race experiences over class experience, but rather to underscore the point that all three intersect.

⁵⁵ Gunn (1982) argues that the question addressed in autobiographical stories is not "who am I?" but rather "where do I belong?"

consciousness and identity, I broaden the discussion of how plural foundations of identity, including gender and race experience, contribute to the meanings made of the events at Yale. Taking a cue from Leon Fink, rather than "enshrine" the events at Yale as a triumph of class consciousness, my purpose is "to explore the multiple meanings and intentions" to which those events "gave voice" (1988, 31).⁵⁶

I use Vanneman and Cannon's (1987) analysis of the differences between status identity and class consciousness to help explain the multiple meanings and intentions voiced in the interviews. As is the case with gender experience, the meaning one gives to class experience sustains worldviews in which one's reality is confirmed and one's identity has a place.

Vanneman and Cannon use the term 'class placement' to describe a person's selection of class position, distinguishing such a response from class identity or consciousness that may be experienced or acted upon but difficult to articulate. The authors suggest that placing one's self on a status scale (lower, middle or upper class) does not

⁵⁶ Fink's appeal for this kind of exploration appears within a "round table" on new labor history. Although the present study is not a history of the events at Yale, my emphasis upon the generation of meaning is echoed in the issues taken up by the "round table" historians. For example, Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle write, "While historians have once more been slow to respond to a mode that has fairly swept (and, in many cases, invented) sections of the academy, the scholars of gender, race or class formations have begun to explore the possibilities of the new disciplinary admixture. Such historians have revealed in their very scholarly language a discernible shift in perspective, from the historicity of context toward a study of the processes by which meaning is created" (1988, 154; emphasis in the original). See also Toews (1987).

preclude consciousness of or identification within a class system (working class, middle class, ruling class):⁵⁷

Each way of looking at the world--as ranging along a continuous status ladder or as divided into opposed classes--may be useful in its own context and does not necessarily interfere with the use of the other model in other contexts (1987, 46).

Class consciousness traditionally requires awareness of a power relation; class placement does not.⁵⁸ Vanneman and Cannon remind us that the "continuous rankings" of social stratification or status "minimize awareness of class conflict. . . . No class relation exists between positions on this scale" (1987, 41). Thus female clerical workers may simultaneously see themselves as middle class (in status), especially when compared with manual laborers, but as working class in relation to supervisors who exercise control over the labor of others.

Perception of more than one image of class is possible, and therefore one's class position may in fact be multiple. In the context of the Local 34 organizing campaign, clerical and technical workers at Yale had before them the example of HERE's Local 35, made up of Yale's maintenance and food service workers. Given this basis for comparison,

⁵⁷ Vanneman and Cannon argue that what has been called class identity in social science research is, rather, where subjects place themselves when asked to do so. Class consciousness and class identity/placement, then, are not necessarily interdependent. The authors also discuss the methodological limitations of asking unstructured questions about class, noting that "open-ended questions that denied respondents any clues about the categories of interest . . . produced middle-class majorities" and that "perception and articulation are distinct processes" (1987, 48 and 102).

⁵⁸ In E. P. Thompson's classic definition, "Class happens when some men [sic], as the result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men [and women] whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs" (1964, 9-10).

some members of the Local 34 bargaining unit resisted classification with these predominantly male, occupationally lower-status, blue-collar workers.⁵⁹ Here we have the issue of class identity complicated not simply by the equation of class with status, but also by the experience of gender. The intersection of class with gender is inescapable in a largely sex-segregated labor force. Women's class identity, then, is structured also by the cultural construction of gender.⁶⁰

Discussion of class must also consider the ways in which race mediates class experience and class consciousness. While the limitations of the interview data preclude specific conclusions about any determining relationships between status, gender and race, we can

⁵⁹ Local 35 acknowledged the lower status of blue-collar workers in a brochure they circulated in April, 1983: "As blue-collar employees, we are a minority and looked upon by many as the lowest in status among the University's 7,000 employees." In the next sentence, Local 35 challenges that perceived status by describing themselves as equal to the Yale University administration: "We have been the only Unionized group--the only group on campus to insist that the Yale administration sit with us and bargain as equals" (Local 35, 1983).

⁶⁰ Vanneman and Cannon offer an interesting explanation of the differences between women's and men's class perceptions, and in so doing illuminate how the social, cultural and economic construction of gender infuses class identity. First, they note (along with Glenn and Feldberg (1977)) that "the division between managerial and non-managerial positions may be quite distinct among men's jobs but is more blurred among women's jobs" (1987, 193). Second, they propose a partial explanation for "why working women seem to perceive their work less in class terms than men do" (besides "the interpersonal attachments of women's jobs"): "Two factors are important: the first individual, the second more structural. Women married to managerial husbands do not use their own jobs in determining their class placement; men married to managerial wives do. It is mainly among this subset of men and women that men are the more 'class-conscious.' For the remaining types, who are the bulk of the labor force, the differences between men and women are accounted for largely by the differences between men's and women's jobs, not by anything intrinsic to men and women themselves" (196-97). The interview data contain several examples of this "subset," but I do not have information about the occupation of every husband.

theorize (along with others) that the subordinate positions of female and male racial minorities to whites, both male and female, and women to men contribute to status consciousness as well as to class consciousness.⁶¹

Vanneman and Cannon's study was motivated in part by their observation that the success or failure of working-class action is an inadequate indicator of working-class consciousness. The possibility of resistance depends on material circumstances in addition to consciousness.⁶² For example, women whose union support or opposition reflected the pressure of a husband's opinion may have simply been practical, given the reality of economic dependence.⁶³ Women whose workplace resistance took the form of individual action--Laura Morrison wheeled her supervisor's computer into her own office after waiting months for

⁶¹ Vanneman and Cannon point to scholarship that "suggests that Black people see themselves and others as middle class on the basis of criteria that are relatively independent of the material realities of their lives" (1987, 227). According to the authors, such scholarship illustrated how "Black people validate themselves and their people, in the face of racist assaults on their culture, by setting internal community standards for evaluating worth" (229). Vannemann and Cannon's own findings contradict this view; their results show that "class identity is quite strong among Blacks" and that it is shaped by a division between mental and manual labor, not by income, education or prestige (233).

⁶² For example, see Deniz Kandiyoti (1988), who argues that women's resistance to the exploitation of their labor takes forms grounded in the realities of their worlds, including kinship networks and the division of labor by sex.

⁶³ See Purcell (1979) for a discussion of the contribution of material context to the militancy and acquiescence of women workers. Gerda Lerner documents moments in history when women "exchange submission for protection, unpaid labor for maintenance," negotiating socially constructed boundaries of acceptable behavior and possibility (1986, 217). See Porter (1978) for a study of spouses' responses to labor militancy grounded in material conditions.

promised computer instruction--asserted power against authority, acknowledging that "management did not hear the support staff in all areas" (Morrison).

The interviews demonstrate how perceptions and experiences of class contribute to the women's perceptions of possibility. As is the case with gender and race experience, class experience is often interpreted and acted upon in ways that confirm and support identity. I discuss class identity as articulated by the women who placed themselves in a class. This discussion makes use of interview data in which many of these women acknowledge the dynamics of class in the organization of social and political life. Next, I consider status claims and awareness of class dynamics as expressed in the interviews and the relationship of such claims and awareness to the meanings made of the events at Yale. The concept of class has cultural currency--it means something, although that something may be many things--and in the interviews, discussions of the events at Yale were also discussions of class identity and class experience.

Class identity, class placement and consciousness of class dynamics

Just as gender identity is more complicated than acknowledging the biological distinction between two sexes, class identity is more fluid than locating one's self within designated income ranges, occupations and lifestyles. Time and place make of class a shifting category. By naming ourselves members of a class, we locate ourselves in cultural and social positions--positions that assert or determine status, privileges, rights and legitimacy. The language of class placement--lower

class instead of working class, or upper-middle class in place of an unqualified upper stratum--bears considerable weight. Few would choose to label themselves lower-class, with its implied meaning of crudeness and questionable morality.

In the context of labor organizing, the popular meanings of middle, upper and lower class in income and status terms may become extended to accommodate the concept of a working class. At the same time, the boundaries of middle class status are vague enough to include a wide range of incomes and lifestyles, while "working class" implies a certain political perspective different not only from that which is dominant in the United States, but also from the more common status-orientation of class placement. Gender, race, family history, culture and time may determine the experience of class and the meaning we make of such experience.⁶⁴ In stories about their experiences at Yale, most women expressed consciousness of class dynamics but did not always use the terminology of class or relate this consciousness to their own class positions.⁶⁵

While self-placement in a class position was occasionally problematic for the women I interviewed, awareness of class dynamics was not.

⁶⁴ A friend tells me that her conflicts over career advancement have roots in a Baptist upbringing, in which poverty was more righteous than wealth. Now, ambivalence about economic security and her reluctance to take the steps necessary to attain it reflect a deep-seated sense that she is a better person if she is poor--even though she acknowledges the destructiveness of this ideology and has rejected the faith-based origin of this belief.

⁶⁵ Not only is the discourse of class less familiar than the discourses of gender and race (due in part to the civil rights and women's movements and popular reactions to both); it is also a discourse made largely by men. As Janiewski asks, "Why are class issues defined in male terms?" (1985, 177)

This awareness was apparent in a variety of forms, including talk about the concentration of political and economic power in a small elite, descriptions of one's own standard of living compared to more or less comfortable others, and reflections on positive and negative personal experiences with the exercise of authority and autonomy in the workplace.

Material conditions clearly figured in women's thinking about the union. Even before we discussed the subject of class, most women talked about money as a consideration in their daily lives. They mentioned the (in)adequacy of their incomes, concerns about retirement benefits, and the desirability of merit pay. For some supporters, the union was seen as a way to get more money to meet basic needs. For some opponents, a union threatened their belief that more money would come only to those (including themselves) who merited it. For several women the meaning of the events at Yale as reconstructed in their telling had to do with identity apart from class. Few women associated their identity exclusively with material conditions; that is, who these women are is not determined by money, even though what they may be able to do is often conditioned by available financial resources. In several cases a woman said her income was a reason for identifying as working class; among other reasons was a worldview described as us (working people) versus them (an owning or ruling class).

Nearly everyone hesitated about which class to place herself in, and a few women did not place themselves in a class at all. There were exceptions, however, one of whom is quoted at the beginning of this section. Margaret Connolly's remarks regarding class, discussed ear-

lier, stand out in part because of her absolute conviction and lack of hesitation.⁶⁶ Katherine Hecht, a retired technical worker, was the only person to identify herself as working-class with the same assurance as Connolly. Connolly was an anti-union activist; Hecht was a union supporter.

Hecht was employed from the time she left school after finishing the eighth grade, working first in a rubber plant, then in a munitions factory. She took a second job when her husband became ill, supported three children after his death, remarried and went to work at Yale, where she remained until her retirement. To my question whether she thought of herself as belonging to any particular class, she replied.

I went to work when my father [a bricklayer] wasn't working. You just go on from there. . . . I think when I was young, I'm going to work. Just knew that as it. I was always working class. When I was young, I started to work. I've been working ever since.

Connolly noted that the middle class has "time to think." She also distinguished managers' and professionals' opportunities for mental or creative labor from the manual or prescribed labor of workers. Explicit in Hecht's recalling the circumstances surrounding going to work in her early teens is the certainty that working would be her future; she "just knew that was it." Her support for the union was equally certain:

⁶⁶ Connolly's experience in her country of origin, discussed earlier in this chapter, partially explains her response to the class placement question. She also mentioned that as one of five children, her earnings were essential to maintaining the family.

My family are all union people. My husband, when he was alive, says, "you get a union, join it." The union tries to help people. Not for myself--who did I have to think of, when it was myself [husband died and children grown]? . . . It made me feel good to know I could go out and picket. Fighting for what we wanted! Since I retired, three granddaughters and a grandson are working at Yale. They won't forget the [family] name!

Hecht's and Connolly's explanations of class placement are exceptional in these interviews in their assertion of the relationship between the kind of work one does, the necessity of working, and class identity. In addition, Connolly and Hecht had always known themselves to be working-class. When other women identified themselves as working-class, theirs was a new understanding of their place in the world, an understanding arrived at through involvement with Local 34.

Most women placed themselves in the middle class on the basis of income and education. Despite evidence in the interviews of their awareness of class dynamics and a relationship between class and values, standard of living, the work one does, and future expectations, these women do not place themselves in a class position that reflects opposition or a power relation. That is, their selection of middle-class placement belies their experience and, for union members in particular, their behavior. The ideas each expressed in the interviews about her location in a class structure do not always correspond to class consciousness.⁵⁷ Three union supporters newly identified themselves as

⁵⁷ This situation confirms Vannemann and Cannon's assertion that American exceptionalism is due to something besides lack of class consciousness. Vannemann and Cannon argue that Americans perceive the class system but may not acknowledge, when asked to place themselves in a class, how the class system may be determinant for them (1987). In another context, Pat Aufderheide notes that "the battle against meaninglessness makes what people believe far more powerful than what they perceive" (1988, 21). This is an example of ideology (belief) overriding perceptions of reality.

working-class, but this was not true of all union members. Two women defined middle-class as an ideology rather than a material condition, but they were exceptions in making this distinction.

An explanation of the disjuncture between class consciousness and self-placement lies in how identity and status function in the perception of class, just as each does in the perception of race or gender. The perception of class, or class-consciousness, does not necessarily translate into a class identity. Who we think we are and where we position ourselves in (a perceived) reality may have more to do with what we (want to) believe rather than with what we perceive. In the case under study, finding a place for one's identity within available representations of reality meant finding a compatible representation of one's status as well as, and maybe more than, a compatible representation of one's experience in an actual class position. If the only way to identify with class diminishes status, a person may choose to deny or overlook her class-based experiences. Consciousness of class dynamics does not ensure placement of one's self within those dynamics, especially when such consciousness includes the narrowing of possibilities that loss of status usually entails.

Evaluating competing representations of reality in the situation at Yale raised serious status and identity questions. The social and cultural norm for most Yale clerical and technical workers (C&Ts) was to identify themselves as different from the blue-collar, union-represented, (mostly male) maintenance and food service workers on the Yale campus. The presumed status of C&Ts relative to other university employees had never been in the public eye until the possibility of

union representation was raised. Now, college-educated women with white-collar jobs were being invited to locate themselves against or within a reality embracing blue-collar workers (many of whom they knew) as equals in status, intelligence and social possibility. Allying themselves with this group was a controversial and potentially threatening proposal that met with predictable resistance, since such an alliance had serious consequences for claims of privilege and beliefs of personal possibility. Identity was not the only issue; also at stake was which group the C&Ts would identify with.

By telling stories about the events at Yale, these women were recapturing an earlier moment, a past act of reconciling the contradictions of ideology and reality. They were telling where they positioned themselves in the past and in the future. Telling stories is simultaneously a recounting of the past and a present act of putting oneself in a position that makes life meaningful and tolerable. This narrative of the self resembles what Janet V. Gunn calls the autobiographical perspective:

What is made present [in autobiography] is not merely a past that is past. What is presented is a reality, always new, to which the past has contributed but which stands, as it were, in front of the autobiographer. . . . And just as placement must be understood as placing, an ongoing rather than a settled process, the autobiographical effort at possessing one's life must be understood as a movement toward possibility as much as a turning around to the already achieved (1982, 17-18).

Locating one's self within the events at Yale and identifying one's self by gender, race or class, however different such "placings"

may be, share this past and future perspective on "where do I belong?"⁶⁸ Placing one's self and one's identity into the present with its promise for the future is an assertion of "what is and will be possible for me."

Pam Norden, quoted at the beginning of this section, declined to describe herself as a member of any class, but then used the concept of class to explain her support of the union. In Gunn's terms, Norden's "effort at possessing [her] life" accounts for the past and looks to the realization of the future:

I do see myself as one of the educated poor. . . . I find myself more and more thinking like a part of the working class, the radical working class, as opposed to the conservative working class.

I asked Norden to explain the distinction:

[T]he Reaganites and those who figure they could work their way up by the Horatio Alger method as opposed to those out organizing unions. There's no hope. You're not going to make it this way, the only way you'll make it is if we all get together and do something.

Norden was one of several women whose class consciousness changed during the events at Yale. Union supporters, Norden included, stressed how exposure to and participation in the organizing campaign enabled them to think about class, and themselves, in a new way. Hillary Greene had been working at Yale since before the UAW organizing drive, but Local 34 made a different impression on her:

⁶⁸ Gunn reminds us that bringing the past to language is an act with a perspective, "from a world whose meanings and codes and even whose burden of unintelligibility serve to locate and ground that perspective" (1982, 9). See also Probyn (1989) for a discussion of the relationship between autobiography, reality and ethnography.

I kept thinking I was going to convince my boss in my own way to do something about my job, to recognize my value. Then 34 came along, reached in behind closed doors, and I was ripe. . . . [My boss] earns very little from the university; he doesn't need it, he's independently wealthy. [He] was from another world. How can you even know what it is to be a worker, to live on--I started out at \$4,000 a year.

Even though Greene said "[I] can't think of myself as any class," her awareness of the power relations of class is evident in the issues she raises and the way she raises them:

I started [working with the union] thinking if you do something you should be paid. Now, much more, I think people should be entitled to a decent standard of living. That's a big change: I am more and more convinced it's us versus them. They use you, exploit you, are nice and pleasant and you work together, but you have your interests and needs and they are the boss--that's the end. I'm more radicalized.

Greene's awareness of conflicting interests extended beyond her workplace. Relations of power at work parallel social and economic relations and, for this former social worker, raise issues of need. In another job, she worked for a social service agency in a large city. Greene reinterpreted that experience using a broader understanding of the political and personal implications of class dynamics:

I worked in slums of ---, and can still smell it. I don't think that should be. People shouldn't have to live in that kind of housing, lack of schools, job opportunities.

Within Greene's world view, there is a solution to the appalling living conditions she witnessed: redistribution of society's resources. Politically, this means more income tax to meet the needs of "the underclass--blank people in most people's minds." Personally, this means thinking and feeling in new ways about friends who have professional careers and earn nearly five times what she does:

Part of what I'm saying--they earn \$80,000 to \$90,000. Give up \$2,000 and add it to the pot. . . . I'm surprised to see they can't be my friend in some ultimate way, because I will fight to the death to take that money away from them. They don't think I'm after them, but I would be. . . . I earn \$20,000. If there were some fair way to redistribute \$2,000 of that, it would kill me, but I would go along with it.

At the same time that Hillary Greene articulated this thorough understanding of what is at stake in a class system, she could not comfortably place herself in a class. Her experiences and her background are part of her identity, and that identity is not one of any available notion of class. "My boss's wife went to the same college [I went to], but there are status differences. Some people on the union staff see themselves as working class, but I came out of the upper middle class."

To locate herself as a member of the working class would be inappropriate: "I know their view of the world is different from mine," Greene said. The reality she knows as a working person, before coming to Yale and since, is one in which class matters--but the available discourses of class cannot accommodate both her family background and work experiences. Although she perceives a class system and its presence in her own life, it is not a class identity that drew Greene to the union.

The available discourses of gender, including those of feminism, make possible certain positions relative to gender identity, as the discussion earlier in this chapter shows. Likewise, the cultural meaning and experiences of class make possible certain positions relative to class identity. Within the contemporary discourses of class (with their dependence on economic status, occupation and family his-

tory) Hillary Greene cannot answer what Gunn says is the real question of the autobiographical self, "where do I belong?" (1982) Greene enjoys the material comfort of moderate economic security and perceives the wrongness of gross inequities in basic standards of living. Her support of the union is based on an identification with concerns and issues that address gender and class, but it is class consciousness, not class identity that motivates that support. By asserting that her class position is not working class, Greene acknowledges her personal history and projects an autonomous self who cannot be easily stereotyped and whose experiences do not fit into any single class category. She also maintains possibilities for herself that may not be available to a member of the working class. Her class reality is one of plural foundations and middle class opportunity.

Greene personalizes the meaning of the events at Yale when she creates a place for herself within them. In her account the events at Yale are neither a working class struggle nor a women's struggle. These events are part of "making the mountain move" and moving herself:⁶⁹

from feeling I was inextricably, irrevocably caught, stuck in some kind of mire that was pulling me down. . . . I could fight and . . . there was no point in just being angry but you could go out and change things, too.

Like Greene, Pam Norden's response to the union reflected a newly developed class consciousness. "I don't think I had much of a concept of unions" before Local 34 began organizing at Yale, Norden said. She continued,

⁶⁹ The brief quotation is from the first of two interviews with Greene. Two other women (in addition to myself) were present at this interview. The quotation that follows is from a second interview with Greene alone.

If I did I'm afraid it was pretty much the upper middle class view. . . . So what I heard about unions was what I guess you heard over the radio or something, which was they go out on strike, and the usual stuff about union corruption.

Local 34's message of "standing together"⁷⁰ displaced Norden's prior image of unions because she knew that individual effort and merit were not producing social mobility for her:

I had been working here for about 3 months when I turned 30. Everyone sits down and like New Year's you think about your life and what's going on and what will go on. And there I was pulling in \$7500 a year before taxes, and I thought--I could conceivably work for the next 35 years, I could live alone in marginal neighborhoods, I could approach entertaining myself on weekends as though it were buying a car, and I could retire into deepest poverty. What kind of a life is this? . . . I might get a succession of typing jobs for the rest of my life . . . and I didn't see it getting any better.

The representation of reality projected by the union--that Yale clerical and technical employees were underpaid and unappreciated by the institution--coincided with Pam Norden's experience. Her consciousness of the intersection of class and gender in graduate school (discussed earlier) carried over to her experiences as a worker:

When I first started working I decided right away, I hated the notion of being a secretary, which was what I was called. I was totally embarrassed by it. It sounds like pure snobbery, to come from [graduate school], fall off the class ladder, and I thought--by God, if they're going to mistake me for anyone they might as well mistake me for a grad student. And so I learned that if I dressed too well people would just assume I was a secretary and start walking into my office any old time and asking me if I knew where the bathroom was. But if I looked like a graduate student they might have thought I was really working. And not a personal servant, which is the way Yale students tend to approach clerical workers.

⁷⁰ "Standing Together" is the title of a declaration signed by over 1500 Yale clerical and technical workers and circulated around the Yale campus in March 1984, ten months after the union election. Pam Norden was one of the declaration's signatories.

Norden, like Greene, came to a different understanding of class and herself through her involvement with the union. It was not class identity that attracted her to the union, but a frustration with her financial situation and the belief that things could be different. She had attempted, unsuccessfully, to get a university job more suited to her skills. Norden described a letter to the staff from A. Bartlett Giamatti, Yale University President at the time, as an example of the way staff were treated:

When he addressed the staff, he wrote in one-sentence paragraphs, thereby implying we all had attention spans of five seconds or less. It was that combination of feeling both trapped and insulted that made me think seriously not so much of getting out, because where could I go? It wasn't that I wanted just to get even but I wanted to do something about it. . . . So when I heard about the union . . . it sounded pretty good to me, but the deeper memory was the memory of sort of like walking into a cold shower: this is the way it's all been set out for you unless you do something about it.

Norden also knew she was not alone in her frustration and did not blame herself for her circumstances. The identification with individualism that enabled women opposed to the union to believe they could singly overcome structural and systemic injustices sustained their opposition. Union support from workers like Norden and Greene depended upon, among other things, their sense that while the occasional individual could budge the system, and while a variety of forms of resistance were available, many Yale employees were in similar positions:

you start noticing there are an awful lot of people who are having trouble making it on their salaries. And you start noticing there are other people being paid much better than you--not overpaid but paid better for jobs that involve fewer skills. You say, "hey, what's going on here?" (Pam Norden)

Common among union supporters was the belief that changing the conditions of Yale employment was beyond any one individual's control.

The women whose identities stressed individuality and independence-- Laura Morrison, Liz Perpich, Barbara Neil, and Margaret Connolly among them--were less likely to support the union, since accepting the concept of collective representation meant recognizing that the future possibilities for individuals were limited. Claiming to be a member of a middle class--as most union opponents did--was equivalent to professing a belief in the American dream and its promise of all things to all (deserving) people. For these women, the placing of the autobiographical self in opposition to the union (and what it represented) preserved those promised possibilities.

For union supporters, neither the university's picture of reality nor the promise of the American dream meshed with experience. They made sense of the events at Yale more in terms of experience than ideology. Pam Norden, Hillary Greene, Julia McKinney and Marty Gilmour identified with a collective body of workers opposed to another, sometimes unnamed, class or group of people with more power than any one of them possessed individually.

Even more so than for Pam Norden or Hillary Greene, Julia McKinney's awareness of class changed in the course of her involvement with Local 34. McKinney came to New Haven in 1981 with her husband, then a Yale graduate student. She supported both of them for several years by working at Yale. At the time Local 34 began organizing, McKinney was dissatisfied with her pay and the favoritism her supervisor exercised over raises and promotions:

I was very depressed about my salary. I think that was the first major thing. When I first joined, to me the union represented a way out of the low salary I was in. . . . I was making \$10,800 and was having a hard time supporting myself and putting my husband through graduate school on that. . . . I thought the union was going to get in right away and change that! In fact I was really shocked when it didn't happen after the first year [of organizing].

McKinney maintained her involvement with the union even though she later changed jobs and was no longer in the bargaining unit. The way she saw the world had changed, and the personal motivation for her original involvement--dissatisfaction with her salary--was replaced by a broader concern for the needs of other workers. One of the reasons for her continued participation, she said, was on behalf of a co-worker who was near retirement age. The co-worker, who had been in Yale's lowest salary grade, retired with an improved pension, provided under the first Local 34 contract.

When she changed jobs, McKinney was hesitant to discuss the union with bargaining unit members. She saw problems she would have fought as a C&T, but felt they had to "do it for themselves"--it was "inappropriate" for her to try to organize them. After a few months, however, frustration got the best of her:

I thought that just by casually talking to these clericals [workers] I work near, about the problems they were having and what they could do to change things--I thought that they would start doing some of those things. And they weren't doing them and still aren't doing them. Simple things, like going to the boss and explaining there's a problem with something. They're just too scared or too unsure of themselves to do that. I got to the point where I was totally frustrated with them. . . . I am starting to . . . have lunch with all the C&Ts in the department, mostly clericals . . . and talk about why I joined the union, why they should, and things that are going on in the university now.

McKinney's new world view was evident in her continued commitment to the union, even though she was no longer covered by the Local 34 contract. She had a new consciousness of class dynamics and class power:

I just realized, suddenly realized how important working people are all over the world and I think I have a more working person's sense of the world and attitude. Sometimes I even wonder, well, maybe I'm becoming a socialist. . . . Also through the union I have become aware of social injustice. At first I saw it in the workplace and now I begin to see it, I tend to look at things in that light, seeing the big powerful company or the big powerful political machine crushing the poor. . . . I'm certainly more liberal in my politics than I ever was. . . . For instance, there's a guy [I know] who belongs to the Communist Party. Prior to my knowing him and my being in the union, I think that really would have put me off. Now I find that interesting and I'm always anxious to know how he feels about certain things. Not that I'm going to join the Communist Party, but that it's opened my eyes to more liberal ideologies. . . . It's just not right to make money on the backs of people or further yourself at the expense of people.

McKinney's class consciousness is also a class solidarity that enables her to place herself in the working class:

I think of myself as working class. [Before] I was supported by my parents, and my parents were pretty middle-class, upper middle-class even. And now that I'm on my own and working and supporting myself and trying to make ends meet and in a crunch, I definitely feel myself to be working class.⁷¹

NG: So it's based on income level?

It's an income level but also I feel, like if I were somewhere and there was a custodial person, a janitor or a maid and a lower-level management person, I would feel more kinship with the maid or the janitor than I would with the manager.

While McKinney came to a new understanding of class power and her position within class dynamics, neither she nor most other white women acknowledged any relationship between their class experiences and their race. Consciousness of the intersection of class with race was much

⁷¹ McKinney obtained a divorce some time after the first Local 34 contract was signed.

more acute for Black women, given social reality and the intersection of race and gender identity discussed earlier. For Linda Wilson, placing herself in the working class was as much a response to the experience of working at Yale as it was to the organization of Local 34. At first, Wilson said she didn't think of herself as a member of any class, but then she qualified her answer:

More and more things happened. I've been reading about it [class]. Now I do, I think of myself as working class. If you never thought about it, working here at Yale certainly brings it out.

Wilson's work life at Yale and readings in Black feminist theory mediated her family's experience with racism and unions. The association of "working class" with white organized labor was problematic for Wilson; personal experience was necessary for the subjectivity of class to be identifiable alongside that of gender and race.

When I asked Geneva Oakley about class, she recounted her experience of staying in the same salary grade for over fifteen years. A perceived relationship between class and race was apparent in her analysis of the situation. "It wasn't until the burning and so-called rioting in New Haven that jobs started to open up," she said, adding:

My experiences didn't all take place in the South, where they would like to believe all discrimination is taking place, and we know that it isn't.

Like others who addressed class in terms of financial resources, Oakley talked about how the union has made a material difference in her life. As a child, "we had much of nothing," she recalled; "the big thing then was to finish high school." But recently she has been reminding herself that her circumstances have changed:

I can remember always questioning, "can I afford this?" I did this--it hasn't been two months ago. A skirt was on sale, I liked it, thought I should put it back and think about it, and come back tomorrow. Then it dawned on me--why should I put it back and think about it and come back tomorrow? I can pay for it now and I did.

Oakley supported Local 34, even though she had not been in favor of previous organizing efforts. Personal experience changed her mind, as it had for Linda Wilson. "After the unfairness I was exposed to, I could see myself going nowhere," Oakley explained. Later, when her work hours were cut--because of her support of Local 34, she feels--Oakley still supported the union, despite organizers' use of her name when she had requested confidentiality. She considered her status at Yale compared to that of much younger employees who had come to work at Yale after she was hired, and decided having a group that could speak together was desirable:

If you have unity, you have strength. If you have a number of people you stand a far better chance for whatever you're after than if you go it alone. . . . There were people that hadn't had their teeth fixed for years, because they could not afford to, and various other things they could not afford. I worked here [nearly fifteen years] and was making \$13,000.

While talking about class, Oakley brought up her sense of cultural identity, which owed much to her childhood. Here she suggests a relationship between race, ethnicity and class, describing growing up in what she called a mixed, working class neighborhood:

We had much of nothing. Nobody in the neighborhood had a lot of money. . . . It was a mixed neighborhood. Talk about a melting pot--when people say melting pot, many times it's not: it's ghetto. But we had Chinese, we had Greek, it was predominantly Polish and Italian. We had Blacks--we just had everything. Everybody had their own cultures, and some of the cultures would rub off on you. You cannot be in an environment and not pick up some of the culture from other people. We respected each other . . . and I still have friends from the same neighborhood. But you just knew, when the kids graduated from high school, they were going to go their own way. . . . You just knew that the Polish women were going to sweep their stairs down. They were going to take the broom and scrub them down, pour the water right out on the stairs and scrub them. You were learning from these people. You knew that the Italians were going to make their wine in the fall and they were going to invite you to sip. You knew there were certain holidays . . . they would take their baked goods to the church and have it blessed. There were certain things that just took place in the neighborhood.

Although Oakley didn't place herself in a class, she talked about the oppositional relationship between the university and its employees. A form of class identity appeared as she spoke of her awareness of power relations and competing interests. The language she used evokes an oppositional class consciousness: "Ever since the union has come through," she said, "and ever since the contract has been signed, the university has spent its time working around it [the contract]":

They have been giving it to us since the contract has been signed. They have never stopped meeting. They have been meeting to learn how to combat us, instead of learning how to work with us. That does not make sense, but it is typical. . . . They have done some awful things to people. The answer is not always throwing people out. It's awful. If it were me, I would rather believe I have avoided a strike, "we had a meeting of the minds," I mean--everybody's not going to get what they want, they're not going to deny us everything they want to deny us, because we are going to ask for what we want, and we are not going to be able to get everything we ask for. But to sit and talk.

For Oakley, the union situation was a "them vs. us" relationship, with the university, not the anti-union employees, as the opposition. When I asked why she thought the university took such a combative stance toward the union, she answered, "It's power, power, power."

Oakley hoped Yale would "do the right thing" in the negotiations for the second contract, but her understanding of the power relationship between the two parties kept her from being naive. "I would like to believe people are a little bit wiser now," she admitted. "Communication is greater now. [Before] they were able to stay within their own little whatever. They did not know by satellite over in Europe what was going on here."

But they [the world beyond New Haven] knew when the strike was going on here. They got the news just like [we] got it in our living rooms here in New Haven. [Before, Yale] could tell people all over the world that they were this and so, and they can't do that anymore. It's a shame you've got to carry a big stick, but sometimes it happens. But I mean it would just be nice--well, it would be nice if the U.S. was everything they say they were. It would just be nice if people learned in general how to treat other people. But these are the ways of the world.

Oakley laid out a number of reasons why Yale should behave differently, including living up to the image the university projected to the world:

I feel they ought to do right, because it's the right thing to do. But that's like utopia. We always have to want that, and always have to practice some part of it. But if they can't see this is something they should be doing, and it would be a feather in their cap if they would do it, then they will have to see that the union is going to ask for these things. . . . They're supposed to be setting an example. Here you've got this great big institution of higher learning. How can they have people, retired people working around here who can't even [afford to] take care of themselves? It would be so much nicer to live up to what they have been leading people to believe they are doing.

Then she explained why the university probably would not behave

differently:

But I don't think they're going to do too much better. Because they consider it a challenge--not for us, not because they care about us, although they should.

Geneva Oakley was not involved with any other advocacy or interest groups. Her support of Local 34, while informed by knowledge and experience of an unequal balance of social power, was not paralleled by any other activist identifications. She described herself as "a good supportive person for the things that I believe in," and mentioned that her home life, including spending time with her 80-year old mother, occupied her after work hours.

May George, who was nearly thirty years younger than Oakley, was another Black woman who supported the union. George, a Yale graduate, was unequivocal about the relationship between race and class. George first became aware of Local 34's organizing on campus while she was a student. She became more involved in union activities after she graduated and took a job at Yale. As a student and as an employee George experienced institutionalized discrimination. She thought the union provided a vehicle for change, beginning with what she called consciousness-raising:

It's a process of continuing to build confidence. I think part of it has to do--a number of people who never questioned the system, never questioned Yale University, knew things were wrong, but "that's the way it's always going to be" was their attitude. . . . I think because many of the people--I guess it's wrong for me to say working-class, but it's the only way I can describe it--feeling totally powerless to deal with these problems [such as race discrimination in hiring and promotions] they see as so pervasive, so systemic, something that you don't even know what the root is, of these problems, where do you begin attacking?

The possibility that things could be different was part of May George's consciousness. She grew up in the South and witnessed the

impact of the civil rights movement there. For George, this was an example of the possibility of social change and the power of organized resistance. Her sense of history put the events at Yale, and her place within them and her future, into perspective. As a subject of the struggle for civil rights, George was able to associate the continuing nature of that struggle with an ongoing class struggle:

Seeing the way a sort of compromise is met between the powers that be and the people on the receiving end of that power. Realizing that the system bucks at some point. And that [with] mass organization and action you can challenge, you can--if not change the thing overall--at least derive some concessions from that effort. . . . I guess not having a limited historical view of history taking place in years and months, but that there is a continuous process that moves beyond us, simultaneously with the actions that we're doing but I guess larger than all of us put together--and the fact that moments aren't contained in a particular struggle, the thing kind of moves beyond itself--the fact that the struggle did not begin, did not end with Local 34 organizing and winning a contract.

Arlene Hamilton said her experience with the union "opened [her] eyes," but in contrast with May George and Linda Wilson, she did not associate this new world view with class placement. For Hamilton, who was about the same age as May George, membership in the union eventually became only one of several new activist affiliations. Perhaps because her awareness of racism was relatively new--dating from her arrival in New Haven just a few years earlier--Hamilton did not associate class with race. Like many others, she was brought up to think of herself as middle class, and did still. Her initial support of Local 34 was not particularly class-conscious:

I didn't know what a union was about. I had to learn, by talking to people, older people on my job, my parents. My father had been in a union. We needed the protection just in case something happened. And I wanted something better--I knew we'd never get it, the way things stood.

Hamilton's later activism as a member of Local 34 and in support of other groups--anti-apartheid marches, rallies for other organizing campaigns, and similar solidarity activities--was a result of her new consciousness, achieved through her union involvement:

By talking to people, I knew through a union salaries were better, working conditions, medical benefits--I needed all that and didn't have any of it. . . . At least with a union, if you want more education, better working conditions, you have somebody to support you. Because we really can't do it alone. I've learned that--you can't do it by yourself. You need the support of co-workers, union representation. I hear some people, they don't want to get involved, they're happy with what they have. But they don't have anything, they really don't! Every time they get paid, all they do is bitch and moan. They don't have anything.

Just as personal history contributed to May George's and Linda Wilson's quite different perceptions of class identity, personal history provided a context for the Local 34 campaign for Sara Brach as well. Brach, a white clerical worker, described her initial response to the union as "automatic kneejerk sympathy." She recalled her mother saying to her as a child, "we don't cross picket lines," when they encountered striking workers at a Macy's department store. Brach's decision to leave a professional job for one in the bargaining unit in order "not to be in a position of dominance over anyone" resulted in a better fit between her work life and her class consciousness.⁷² About this same time, Brach was bicycling around the area when "the shortness of the history of the country and the connectedness of the period began to come home to me":

⁷² As mentioned elsewhere, Sara Brach was another woman whose explanation of her actions could be supported by feminist principles. The language Brach used when talking about wanting to avoid possessing individual power is the same as that used by some feminists in the early 1970s. See Hartsock (1983, especially 160-164).

It was before the so-called Reagan recovery; it was a very depressed time economically. . . . You could ride through Connecticut . . . and see decay from four centuries around you. . . . you'd see rundown eighteenth century houses, abandoned nineteenth century factories, twentieth century malls. . . . And I got interested in Marx. So a sense of being connected historically became stronger . . . and seemed to mitigate this business of me, individual me, trying to establish my worth, looking to the powers that be to bestow it on me.

Brach was making a reverse status claim when she elected a job demotion. She identified herself as middle class, "to be honest, economically," but added, "but I wouldn't have thought in these terms: upbringing, immigrant parents who were poor when they were young, and their child did better than they did." Her response to the autobiographical question "where do I belong?" was to locate herself materially as well as ideologically with workers on the receiving end of the exercise of power. By doing so, she was refusing the status and the privileges associated with her educational background and professional training.

Class identity, class status and the meaning of the union

Negotiating the competing realities represented by the union and the university compelled each woman to affirm her status in a world of real (even if denied or unacknowledged) differences in social standing and power. Involved in the events at Yale was a spectrum of groups with whom employees could identify on the basis of having a certain status or being a certain class. Most union supporters who described themselves as working class asserted a new status within a new world view (Katherine Hecht being one notable exception), as did those who identified with "other working people" or Local 35 but did not use the working

class label. Women opposed to the union affirmed their status by differentiating themselves from union members (and sometimes allying themselves with the university); sometimes this differentiation was also on the basis of appropriate gender behavior.⁷³ Characterizing union supporters as women "with a chip on their shoulder" or engaging in behavior (on the job or on the picket line) which was offensive or unacceptable enabled those opposed to the union to maintain their own status as reasonable and worthy members of a rational society.⁷⁴

By setting themselves apart from their union-supporting co-workers, women opposed to the union also rejected any suggestion that their claims of middle-class status were misguided. Union supporters, whose consciousness of the power relations of class dynamics now informed an oppositional world view, could no longer assume that the privileges, possibilities and acceptance connoted by middle-class status were permanently theirs. But as long as women opposed to the union rejected that world view, they could still believe in the promise middle-class status conferred upon those who professed allegiance to,

⁷³ See Hall (1986) for a discussion of women's labor militancy in the Appalachian South as a case of "disorderly women."

⁷⁴ The use of difference to create a class of "Other," affirming the legitimacy of one group against another, is a continuing subject for feminist theory. See Hartsock (1983) for a discussion of the relationships between difference, Difference and domination. Hartsock cites Ursula Le Guin's observations on the use of differences to construct Difference: "If you deny any affinity with another person or kind of person, if you declare it to be wholly different from yourself, as men have done to women, and class has done to class, and nation has done to nation, you may hate it or deify it, but in either case you have denied its spiritual equality and its human reality. You have made it into a thing to which the only possible relationship is a power relationship and thus you have fatally impoverished your own reality" (158). Seyla Benhabib (1987) and Eisenstein and Jardine (1980) offer additional perspectives.

and behaved in conformity with, standards of acceptable middle-class behavior.

According to this line of thinking, making sense of the events at Yale conformed to the sense made of one's place in the world, using difference to affirm identity and sustain a world view that kept identity and its status and possibilities intact. The meanings generated were self-creating and sustaining for both union members and union opponents. Women opposed to the union managed to keep their location secure; women who supported the union made new places for themselves in new world views. But such locations and places are not the same as class identity.

Among union supporters, Marty Gilmour (who associated the women's movement with her development as a leader in the union) was the most certain about the relationship between class identity and her experiences with Local 34. She said she now understood the issue of class "a lot better" and recounted a situation where a supervisor "lied . . . because the system forced her into it." Gilmour said formerly she would have thought "bosses are bosses."

The issue of class became "crystal clear" for Gilmour when the Association of Yale Alumni held a meeting of its largest donors. Local 34 staged a rally outside the meeting place:

Eleven hundred people were at that rally. The difference--guys with permanent suntans, in early May, and all the white people [in the crowd] were pale. I could smell the money, feel the difference in the air. I'd been thinking about it [class] for years, and there, on that day, I understood.

This more personal understanding of class complicates Gilmour's class identity much as it did Hillary Greene's. Greene was unable to

find terms in the discourse of class to account for her privileged background and her present-day consciousness of class dynamics. Gilmour described her background as middle-class, listing the assumptions that term evoked for her: "college, education is important, the American dream is possible, children do better than their parents." But she was quick to elaborate on her answer:

That's American ideology, not just middle class. How much money you make. And a way of looking at the world: individualistic and competitive. I've rejected a lot of that, being brought up a white middle-class woman in the South. [Now] I identify with working people. I have a white-collar job, but I'm still working for the same employer as [do] blue-collar employees.

Susanna Folsom, the single parent who saw Yale as one of many institutions exploiting women, described herself as "constitutionally against management." The events at Yale put institutional power into clearer perspective for her:

I don't express anger as much as I used to. . . . It isn't as clear to me where it should go these days. It seems like we're all in this together and there's no target for it. . . . Lately I'm more in awe of what there is to fight out there, and I used to feel large enough to take it all on, and I don't anymore. Maybe some of this is my experience with the union and Yale. . . . the things that make Yale what it is are so strong. . . . Sometimes things are bigger than people. . . . I'm more in awe of the odds. . . . Yale is just the perfect symbol of so much that is wrong with our society . . . for me the thing was even larger than unionism and taking advantage of women.

The presence of Local 35 on the Yale campus was a factor in the assessment each woman made of the university and union positions and her place relative to them. Local 35 represented blue-collar workers, most of whom were men, who had struck the university four consecutive times,

and sometimes those strikes were accompanied by violence.⁷⁵ Union supporters described overcoming feelings of being different from or better than blue collar workers, reconstructing their identities (and their future possibilities) in class terms. Pam Norden talked about revising her assumptions about "men's unions":

Clearly there are white collar unions, and the people in them are slightly different from the people in blue collar unions, but they [the unions] still do the same things. . . . I had a prejudice broken at a rally I went to. . . . They had someone from the machinists' union speaking there. A woman from the machinists' union, which sort of surprised me, and she's somebody's grandmother. And saying--"we want to stop the arms race." And I thought--wait a minute, machinists in Connecticut want to stop the arms race? And I thought: this is noble, and another person--I forget what local they were with or what the title of the union was, but they were the people at Colt, I mean armaments makers--and they were saying "we want peace," too. I guess they could go back to making hunting rifles. And I thought: gee, I thought these guys were all into Rambo. . . . I guess I grouped those men's unions together as being somewhere else out there.

Union supporters perceived a new relationship to management as well as to blue collar workers. Marty Gilmour, who above explained her new identification with working people, talked about her feelings towards management, the members of Local 35 and their example of working class solidarity:

⁷⁵ The first strike occurred in 1968, the year Local 35 was organized. Additional strikes took place in 1971, 1973, and 1977. The 1980 and 1982 contracts were negotiated without a strike. See Local 35 (1983). Since the organization of Local 34 and that local's strike in 1984, Local 35 negotiated two new contracts, without striking either time, in 1985 (after Local 35 members honored Local 34's 1984 picket lines) and 1988 (Tynan 1988).

I have a different [from management] way of looking at things. I have a hard time identifying with management. Some of my friends are put in horrible positions--they do what they're told. I have a way of standing up, fighting back, when something's not right, same as the guys in Local 35. I feel a real identity with those guys. They're the ones who first showed us what could be done. They did it first. They're mostly men--and didn't, or weren't, offended by comparisons we made between truck drivers and administrative assistants.⁷⁶ . . . We want stuff, they want stuff, let's get stuff together. The strike really helped solidarity. We always crossed their picket lines [in the past], but they didn't cross ours.

In contrast with Norden's and Gilmour's new sense of where they belonged in relation to the differences between blue-collar and management workers, women opposed to the union reinforced a perceived status difference between themselves and workers who supported Local 34. Some contrasted themselves with blue-collar workers to justify their opposition to the union. Others created a status difference tied to the moment, securing their own identities by criticizing the behavior of union supporters on the job and on the picket line. Liz Perpich, a white clerical worker, had opposed all three attempts to organize Yale C&Ts. "I'm not a union person," she explained. "My beliefs really are against unions. They're not really necessary in the U.S. anymore, not in the type of work I do, anyway." Perpich pointed to her experience of going up three salary grades in a year and a half by "working myself up." She objected to the advances of union organizers whom she thought

⁷⁶ To support their demand for a re-evaluation of jobs and compensation, Local 34 circulated a document comparing the qualifications, duties and salaries of truck drivers in the Local 35 bargaining unit with those of administrative assistants in the Local 34 bargaining unit as an example of inequities in compensation among Yale workers. The focus of the comparison was the higher educational qualifications and more complex duties (in working independently, making decisions, and level of responsibility) for administrative assistants who were paid on the average \$5,000 less per year than truck drivers. See Federation of University Employees (1984, 8-9).

wanted to use her promotions "as an example," when she felt her accomplishments were her own doing.

Perpich also found the confrontational attitudes of union organizers offensive, saying "this isn't the caliber of people I want representing me." Her husband was a union member elsewhere and initially thought Perpich should support Local 34. "But when he saw what they were doing, what they wanted and represented in the beginning, so far out of line, he felt my decision was right," she said.

The individualistic perspective of other union opponents is present in Perpich's reasoning as well. Perpich objected to the union's negotiating position that years of service automatically merited raises, since she saw herself as someone who had achieved promotions and recognition by her own efforts on the job at Yale. She was conscious of income stratification, but distinguished herself from people she perceived as using the union "as a crutch" and did not acknowledge a power differential in which working people might be at a disadvantage:

I'm tired of hearing people say "Yale is rich and they can afford it [raises for C&Ts]." Well, many of us come from families where there are rich people. Do they share their wealth with us? They don't. People should work for their money, give a fair share, be concerned instead of always "I want, I want." The people who cry the most have done nothing to improve their own situation.

Perpich described interpersonal relationships--with her husband and her daughter, with co-workers and clients--that gave her life meaning and value. Getting along with people and helping them out, not "changing things," was purposeful activity. She described herself as "not actively [involved] in changing things," she said, "but helping with their [organizations'] programs, and with their meetings. I've never been on a board where they have been trying to change or fight for

something." The union's view of the status quo as problematic and in need of change was not Liz Perpich's reality, and the union's confrontational style was not her style. Perpich saw the situation as one in which she was exercising the right to make a decision based upon her own values. When that decision was challenged by union supporters, Perpich felt they were not respecting her individual rights. "The day I have to join, I'm not sure I still live in the United States," she said. "They should respect my wishes."

Criticism of the behavior of union supporters by women who did not join and of the behavior of union opposition by union members was noticeably different from references to conflicts over values and principles. In the latter case, most people accepted differences of opinion; acknowledgement of different realities and ways of thinking was a form of tolerance, adhering to a democratic principle of "freedom of expression." In the case of behavior, where status is more clearly at stake, women on either side were much less forgiving; status-threatening behavior did not qualify as a form of expression that merited protection.

Rita Kushner, a white clerical worker, also secured her place by focusing on differences between herself and women who supported the union. Kushner began working at Yale in order to help pay for her children's college educations.⁷⁷ She had put herself through college, and described her family background as working class. Several relatives had been union members, but she felt strongly that an organization "isn't

⁷⁷ Kushner's husband was also a Yale employee, in the managerial/-professional (M&P) classification, which was not represented by a union.

always the answer for a group of people." In this case, the group involved was one to which Kushner did not want to belong.

Kushner labelled most of the women in her workplace who supported Local 34 "people with difficulties." In particular, she mentioned "people with a chip on their shoulder, almost a paranoia about authority of any kind." She volunteered that she did not know the details of their individual lives, but wondered "why they haven't found recognition without the banners and the buttons."

One of the consequences of the Local 34 campaign Kushner found "most objectionable [was that] only at the strike did I learn the [job classification] levels of some people." Status differences suddenly became visible when managers crossed picket lines and C&Ts did not, inevitably making Kushner's own status as a C&T more apparent.⁷⁸ When she said, "I feel I'd lose my sense of self if I approached my problems that way [the way union members do]," Kushner expressed the degree to which she perceived a difference between herself and union supporters, and the significance of that difference for her identity:

⁷⁸ Kushner's reasons for opposing the union were among the most specific and thorough of all those I heard. She objected to what she regarded as the purposeful manipulation by the International of the situation at Yale for their own benefit, giving as one example the image of the organizing campaign as grassroots and women-identified. Kushner challenged this image by referring to the use of "professional" male organizers and the large number of male leaders, instances of sexist comments made by these male leaders, and AFL-CIO national lobbying efforts to prohibit computer home work, much of which is done by women. Another example, mentioned by other non-members, concerned confusion over sign-up cards. Several women said they had been told they would not be able to vote in the union election if they did not sign cards, only to discover later that the cards were membership cards.

I have had problems at Yale, but I have never had difficulty in dealing on my own with the powers that be. I don't find the administration difficult to deal with. I don't always get what I want, but that's not intolerable--it's a reality of life.

Rita Kushner's concerns about preserving an autonomous identity and sense of self echo Laura Morrison's desire for maintaining control over her life. Laura Morrison also compared herself and her accomplishments to the behavior of certain union supporters:

I know a number of women who have a chip on their shoulder. They're worth this much and they won't take anything below what they think they're worth, and they're missing out. In the three years I've been here I've had five pay raises and two promotions.

Morrison told of hearing a co-worker say, "That's not my job." Morrison's response, which she offered as an example of the difference between herself and some union supporters, was that the refusal to do work was newly legitimate "because of the barriers the [union-stipulated] job description sets up. . . . you'll never find me in that situation, refusing to do something, especially if it's new."

Like Perpich, Morrison was put off by the aggressiveness of union organizers and strikers. Eight months after beginning her first permanent job at Yale (Morrison had previously worked at Yale on a temporary basis), she was approached by a union representative:

I almost laughed at her. She thought I was brand new. And I said, "No, I've been here almost eight months." That spoke loudly. And she was aggressive, and not pleasant, and I just listened. . . . And then I transferred to the other side of the campus, and a week later the strike began. And I was one of nine C&Ts [in her new workplace] and I was the only one who was not a member.

Morrison's observations during the strike reinforced her sense that union members' approaches to their lives differed from her own.

Once again, behavior deemed to be inappropriate elicited less tolerance than did differences of opinion Morrison acknowledged in the abstract:

They behaved very badly, as far as I'm concerned, during the strike. I talked to people over here who wanted to come to work who couldn't. People who were verbally abused, people who were physically abused. There's no place for that, absolutely no place. The flip way in which they picketed, it didn't say "serious" to me at all. People did go on strike but did not picket, had money, and it was a big vacation. And they were no different before or after, and I [asked]--"Why did you join? Why bother?" Because it was easier for you to join than take a stand, was my conclusion.

Working together again after the end of the strike required adjustments by all parties. Morrison's attitude towards returning strikers was more accepting than the above comments would suggest. Two factors contributed to this acceptance. First, Morrison was willing to regard as accurate co-workers' accounts of how they had been mistreated on the job, therefore justifying their striking. Second, Morrison had an image of Local 35 against which the current situation could be favorably compared. "No one knew how to adjust from anywhere," she said, adding:

No one had experienced it before, except from Local 35 and they're, you know, the rough and tough, you'll get your car windows broken and your tires slashed kind of behavior. . . . And it was just as awkward for them coming back to work [as it was for her], and I did not like things management did to them when they came back to work. Making accusations about their honesty and integrity.

Morrison said she'd always thought of herself as middle-class, with some fluctuation between upper-middle and lower-middle class positions. Like Geneva Oakley, who joined the union, Morrison (who did not join) characterized her general attitude towards advocacy activism as one of support:

Probably the closest I came [to working with advocacy or change groups] was support on a very local level for the civil rights movement and the get-out-of-Vietnam [efforts]. And a very personal mourning at the loss of, you know, the famous three [JFK, MLK, RFK]. And I suppose my advocacy group really is just me, because if I can raise my kids to be responsible, open-minded citizens who examine issues and don't direct their lives on their opinions, then my advocacy group has done a good job, if I can put that kind of adult into society. Making them aware of what's going on in South Africa [for example].

Morrison offered an example of the kind of support she gives. She talked about a situation in her church, where the congregation was being encouraged to underwrite the education of a man from another country and the living expenses of his family during his schooling. After completing his training, the family would return to their native country. "I did not get directly involved," she said, "and I had trouble with it:"

I believe philosophically the best way to get to this [situation in the man's native country] is through education, and this is all wonderful and everything. But New Haven is the seventh poorest community in the United States. I never had one call from my minister while I was going through the worst part of my divorce. You've got problems to treat on your own doorstep and charity begins at home. And I was basically very opposed to this project. . . . My pattern is not to join the masses, but my pattern is not one of non-support.

Despite her objections to the union, Morrison was supportive of union members in several ways. When the strike started one week after she began a new position in a new department, she told her new co-workers that:

I would not be going out on strike, but that I would go out the first three days because I wanted them to know I supported their effort and I did not want to get into any details because it wasn't anyone's business why I had to do what I had to do.

This gesture of support was in response to having heard about "lack of recognition for work done, both in wages and in other ways, . . .

stories I heard about lack of respect from faculty. . . . I haven't experienced it and yet I have no reason to disbelieve what I hear."

Even though Morrison condemned the behavior of some union members and distinguished herself from them, her opposition to the union was more complicated than a status claim or an act to sustain middle-class identity. The practical necessity of preserving her ability to act in her individual interest (discussed earlier in this chapter), a necessity that directed much of her life after her divorce, was the major factor in the decision not to strike. Indeed, Morrison's reasoning, in terms of economic resources, was class-based:

. . . the real basis for that [not staying out on strike] was survival. If I had gone out on strike I would have lost the one thing I had left for my kids' future, which was a house. And I wasn't willing to take that risk on their future.

Compared to the perceived economic imperative against striking, the major factor in Morrison's resistance to joining the union was not a desire to preserve her independence from the constraints of solidarity. Like Rita Kushner, Morrison saw herself as a person who was different from union members because of what she witnessed and heard about their behavior, including strikers' behavior towards workers who crossed the picket lines. She interpreted this behavior as a sign of intolerance, because she knew people may have had good (class-based) reasons, as did she, for not striking.⁷⁹ Preservation of her identity as a person who would have been more tolerant than union members kept her from joining

⁷⁹ Morrison apparently did not see a contradiction between her criticism of strikers' "intolerance" and her own refusal to explain why she was crossing the picket line. She may have expected striking workers to respect co-workers' privacy.

the union, despite her support of individual members' choice both to join and to strike:

. . . the intolerance [by union members] of people who did not strike on the part of the union--you know, I simply really don't care about those people, and probably those are the kind of people that will keep me from joining the union.

For Barbara Neil, a white clerical worker who was promoted out of the bargaining unit after the strike, opposition to the union was also more than a status claim or the assertion of class identity. Neil had been in favor of union representation in another workplace. In comparison with her previous experience, Neil thought working conditions and benefits for clerical and technical workers at Yale did not warrant a union. She explained that her support of unions was situationally specific:

I'm not against organizations of employees, because often that's the only way to get a point across. And I'm not against unions. I went to school in Pennsylvania. Many of my friends, their parents were coalminers, steelworkers, and I know, without unions, these people would be terribly taken advantage of, miners working in terribly bad, unhealthy conditions. So it's not really unions in general that I'm against; this one was so antagonistic.

Neil's encounters with hostile union supporters and organizers reinforced her opposition, as they did that of Laura Morrison. More important, though, was what she perceived to be a violation of standards of fairness in the union's approach to the wage issue. Local 34 was arguing that C&Ts were not compensated fairly for their work and years of service. Neil felt what was unfair was the union's demands:

Granted, you weren't paid the best at Yale. Money is not the most important thing for me in terms of a job. I would rather be paid less and be comfortable in what I do than have a great salary and work in an antagonistic environment. That's ridiculous! I thought that the people who were organizing for the union were being very unjust to Yale and unfair. And that's a big deal for me, being fair. . . . Every time the union said something, asked the university, it was this demand: "We demand you do this. We don't ask you to do this for these reasons, we demand it because it is our right. You have no rights. We have the rights," and that was the way it was.

As a participant in the organized opposition to the union, Neil also objected to Local 34's success in keeping the opposition isolated:

We started having meetings, they had to be clandestine because the union people would crash them--which was another thing, it wasn't fair. I think people should be free to express themselves, they shouldn't be intimidated, and the union was constantly intimidating us out of meetings. . . . I always said people have a right to do what they feel is right for them. And I was getting mad at the union because they were trying to take that away from me.

Like Connolly, Kushner and Morrison, Neil saw the consequences of a union presence as a personal affront, restricting her freedom and her possibilities. But even though Neil appeared to separate herself from others in her labor class on the basis of behavior, she also made a distinction between herself and management during the strike. Neil positioned herself in such a way that she was neither worker-identified nor management-identified:

It's different when you're crossing the picket line if you're a manager. Everyone knows you have to, you don't really have to re-examine your beliefs or anything. But if you cross it and you're a member of that body that is striking, that's a very intense experience. Because then you're a traitor, the lowest of the low to these [union] people.

Neil identified a moral code of situational ethics to justify her position. This permitted her to preserve her identity and her status in any context, without confronting competing interests and power relations beyond the immediate situation. The acknowledgement of power relations

that class consciousness entails was present nowhere in Neil's negotiation of the events at Yale; her theory that oppositional stances are "what's wrong with the world" underscored this absence. The position Neil assigned herself in the meaning of these events is one where the status quo is acceptable, at least for the time being. Her reality, where she was located in a comfortable workplace with decent pay, frequent breaks, and adequate vacation, was a reality that confirmed her past and the promise of her future. It was also the only reality the discourse of liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights and potential, would sanction. Indeed, the persistent claim to individualism and variety of individualistic assertions made by all these women--their positions towards the union almost notwithstanding--demonstrates the multiple and often contradictory positions and ideologies that each negotiated in order to make sense of the events at Yale.

The essential ingredient of class consciousness--articulating one's interests as shared with one group and opposed to those of another group--does not have to take verbal form to be acted upon and does not have to be acted upon to exist. Nor does action in the interest of one's class ensure class consciousness: even though union members were acting upon interests opposed to those of the Yale administration, not all members described their activism this way. The women who organized opposition to the union were acting upon interests they perceived to be threatened by Local 34, but few of them perceived their opposition in class terms nor did many have a strong identification with a class. Neither form of activism permits or denies a pronouncement of the class identity of participants, if identity means who each woman knows she is,

and where or whether she places herself in a class system. "Identification usually connotes an affective attachment to a class," caution Vanneman and Cannon (1987, 49, *emphasis in original*); women with such an affective attachment to a class were in the minority in these interviews.

What does this mean for the contribution of class to identity, when identity governed these women's responses to the union and the meaning each woman made of the events at Yale? Certainly class experience contributed to the meanings made of the events at Yale. More important than class consciousness was how class experience was incorporated into a more complex identity, for it was in terms of its significance for identity that the meaning of the union for each woman took shape. For example, for Hillary Greene and Barbara Neil (who were on opposite sides regarding Local 34), life experience mediated the meaning of class. Each rejected the discourse of class because it could not express the specificity of her experiences; the category of class as they understood it could not accommodate who they were. Neither woman was able to identify herself as a member of a particular class, but both were conscious of class interests at work in their lives. Their responses to the union secured their identities, but those identities were not primarily ones of class. The positions each woman came to were responses to what this union (not necessarily any union) would mean for who she was: the concrete reality of her life, her place in a social and political community, the worldview that sustained her and the possibilities she perceived for herself and others.

Conclusion

The women's accounts excerpted in this chapter are stories about reality. By translating experience into words, each story situates the speaker and her experience in a place where beliefs and ideals are played out in concrete circumstances with concrete consequences. The stories show that a woman's identity is wherever she places herself, accounting also for ways in which she is structurally placed, using her life experience and whatever discursive configurations enable her to discern its meaning. While the concrete reality of one woman may certainly differ from that of another, each of these women found a way to explain her particular circumstances--a way that would verify individual experience and confirm opportunity--as well as explain and justify, upon reflection, her response to the union within the context of those circumstances.

When we "study workers' ideas directly," as Vanneman and Cannon urge (1987, 39), we find that class experience is but one of several elements of identity and may not be a determining one. Class status and class identity intersect with gender and race experience in the meaning-making we engage in to negotiate reality and secure our places in it. In creating the meaning of the events at Yale and taking positions with respect to the available options each woman perceived, the women exercised their whole selves, not exclusively a class self, a gender self, or a self of a particular race. The identity the union's alternative representation of reality had to accommodate was one for which plural foundations existed. The experience of class, like that of race and gender, may be specific, but not necessarily more important than any

other dimension of human experience. The familiar socially constructed groups of which people are members--gender, ethnic, race or age groups, for example--are more commonly expressed features of identity, and as such these identifications often mediate class identity itself (Petchesky 1983, 229).

The original question motivating this study--how did the women at Yale make sense of and evaluate the possibilities indicated by the union and the university?--embodies two concerns. First, understanding the creation of meaning in this context may reveal something of how and why social change is (or is not) perceived to be possible. Second, understanding how social change is (or is not) perceived to be possible in this context may be instructive in organizing for social change. This chapter establishes the significance of identity and subjective experience for answering the original question. In so doing, another issue emerges: We need more than appropriate language in order to talk about women's experiences. What is needed is a discourse that accommodates experiences of class, gender, race, status, age, and other multiple and shifting foundations of identity.

While the analytic categories of gender, race, and class permit discussion of certain features of everyday life, each imposes conceptual and ideological boundaries that belie the complexity of human life and the meanings made of it. Within these limiting conditions, using the categories of gender, race, and class to explicate the women's stories encourages attention to themes and similarities, such as the meaning and importance of individualism and maintaining a social location where one's realities are confirmed and possibilities may be realized.

Despite the differences between union supporters and opponents, one underlying commonality is apparent. Distinctions between pro- and anti-union women, between women of color and white women, between working class and middle class women are bridged in light of each woman's attempt to affirm her realities and future possibilities.⁸⁰

For the purposes of this study, the limitations of the analytical categories of gender, race, and class usefully underscore whatever does not fit within them. If we hope to build productive theories and to engage in effective organizing practices, we have to be able to account for experiences whose meanings defy easy categorization, and to understand the meaning of locating one's experiences outside the boundaries of authorized discourses--including the authorized discourses of social theory and research.

Documenting the details of women's experiences can help explain the forces that construct those experiences. Such research can also demonstrate the potential for the transformation of women's lives, illuminating other possibilities, including more liberatory ones.⁸¹ The publication of studies of women as workers, professionals, students,

⁸⁰ This attention to commonality does not mean the considerable differences are not important, nor that this commonality is the only one. Rather, this particular commonality is what the research process, using these categories, has produced.

⁸¹ By looking to social conditions and experiences for insight into the construction of women's lives, such studies contribute to what Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen call "the historical-social constructivist perspective" on gender, in contrast with an essentialist paradigm evident in some recent feminist theorizing (1988, 23-24). On the limitations of both perspectives and a proposal for a third, see Alcoff (1988).

mothers, and activists has been one result of these endeavors.⁸² Descriptions of the various conditions of women's lives have been necessary to understand the intersecting dimensions of those lives and to identify the construction, maintenance and interdependence of specific forces and conditions.⁸³

The form of these descriptions is itself an issue for feminist research. Oral histories and first person testimonies seem to possess an authenticity interpretive, ethnographic and third-person narrative work must make claims to hold.⁸⁴ The authority of women's words is magnified by the silence these words have begun to fill, the ellipses in history and literature that occasionally tell of women in men's voices but often have not told of women at all. Now, feminist work in research methodology and post-modernist theory is raising anew questions about the construction of knowledge and the status of the knower and the

⁸² For example, on workers, see Benson (1986), Bookman and Morgen (1988), Gannagé (1986), Gerson (1985), Kim (1983), Milkman (1985a and 1987), Sacks (1988), and Statham, Miller and Mauksch (1988); on students see Belenky et al. (1986), Lather (1991), and Luttrell (1984); on mothers see Barber and Skaggs (1977); on activists see Ridd and Callaway (1987).

⁸³ This attention to material conditions is also a response to feminist critiques of traditional research methodologies which abstract from lived experience a conceptual, nonmaterial reality; for one germinal critique, see Dorothy E. Smith (1979). Understanding difference (between women and within woman) is one purpose of the inquiry into material conditions; see for example Bulkin, Pratt and Smith (1984), Joseph and Lewis (1981), and Martin and Mohanty (1986).

⁸⁴ See, for example, Ascher, DeSalvo and Ruddick (1984), Barrios de Chungara (1978), Burgos-DeBray (1984), Elasser et al. (1980), Kim (1983), Kuzwayo (1985), Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981), Probyn (1989), Ruddick and Daniels (1977), Seifer (1976), and Sterling (1979).

subject in the research process.⁸⁵ I take up these issues in Chapter Four.

⁸⁵ On these issues see Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983), Bowles and Duelli-Klein (1983), "Forum" (1988), Garry and Pearsall (1989), Gergen (1987), Harding (1987a and 1987d), Jaggar and Bordo (1989), Malson et al. (1989), McRobbie (1982), Probyn (1989), Roberts (1982), Stanley (1990), Stanley and Wise (1983), and Tonn (1989).

Chapter Four

Methodology and the Politics of Inquiry

While feminist scholars are not alone in placing discussion of the means of research in a position comparable to discussion of research ends, we appear to have taken up the problems of method as "our" problems. As Mary Hawkesworth wrote in a recent issue of Signs,

Rather than privileging one model of rational inquiry, feminists must first consider the level of analysis, the degree of abstraction, the type of explanation, the standards of evidence, the criteria of evaluation, the tropes of discourse, and the strategies of argumentation that would be appropriate to feminist investigations of concrete problems (1989, 552).

Research methods are examples of the construction and constructedness of knowledge and the generation of meaning. By examining traditional research practices feminist scholars have been able to demonstrate the limitations of authorized ways of knowing and authorized knowledge. For example, Lorraine Code notes that "the ideal of objectivity . . . is one whose stringency disqualifies a good deal of what our pre-philosophical intuitions tell us must surely count as knowledge" (1988, 65). By developing alternative research practices feminist scholarship simultaneously makes possible and seeks to legitimize alternative ways of knowing and being, and alternative knowledges.

This chapter reviews some of the questions feminist scholars are raising about research practices and discusses several researchers'

encounters with those questions in practice and their attempts at resolution.¹ These questions address what Sandra Harding has called the politics of inquiry (1983, 27).

The chapter begins with a general discussion of areas in which a politics of inquiry operates in research and the context of feminist attention to method. A discussion of the politics of interviewing as a research practice and method of knowledge production follows. Finally, I consider the issue of "right of reply," asking who controls the meanings and representations made of interviews and what purposes are served by the "final products" of research.

Feminists' renewed interest in social science research practices in general coincides with the raising of similar questions in more traditional fields of academic research. For example, within anthropology a reevaluation of the purpose and practice of ethnography is yielding revisions in the claims made for the knowledges² produced by this method (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fischer 1986). Learning from literary theorists' attention to the relationship between texts and their readers, some social scientists are asking themselves

Throughout this chapter my intention is the explication of some issues raised by a feminist perspective on method and the implications of those issues, not the elaboration of "a feminist method." Patti Lather (1988) accomplishes a parallel review and describes her research on students' resistance and response to feminist perspectives. The design of Lather's research study embraces a feminist politics of inquiry (in asking about consciousness) but appears to end before asking about the implications of such resistance and response for political action.

² As previously noted, I use the plural "knowledges" to underscore questions raised by feminist critiques of what counts as knowledge and who decides. See Garry and Pearsall (1989), Jaggar and Bordo (1989), and Keller (1985).

how one tells the story of the "other." In telling such stories, what role is played by narrativity and its construction of self and time?³ How do language and silence confine the doing of research (techniques for gathering evidence), its interpretation and its afterlife?⁴ (The term afterlife already assumes that what happens after the research is completed isn't part of the research; this is itself a contestable assumption.)

The transformation of research methods is of particular significance for the field of communication and feminist communication research. This transformation encompasses more than the development of new techniques for doing research. In discussing feminist research in general, Kim Blankenship makes the important distinction between research that "addresses familiar questions in different ways" and research which "confronts existing assumptions and addresses entirely new sets of questions" (1987, 594). The transformation of research methods in feminist research is in the latter category: changing the meaning of method to include ontological, epistemological and political foundations of research, the relational dynamics and effects of research practices, and the generation of new kinds of questions.

As communication researchers and scholars, our interest in the generation and circulation of meaning should require us to look at how we engage in and represent those processes, through our theorizing, our

³ See, for example, Patai (1988) and Personal Narratives Group (1989).

⁴ For one historian rethinking what counts as evidence, see Gordon (1986); on seeing oneself (the researcher) as a creator of meaning, see Buhle and Buhle (1988, 155) and Paget (1983, 69).

research practices, our reporting of our work and our own everyday lives. For feminist communication researchers in particular, feminism's analysis of the theoretical and material power of knowledge can inform our choice of methods and the claims we make for them. This is a political issue, and Sandra Harding states it baldly: "what should be the political relationship between the inquirer and those she studies?" (1983, 28).

Most of us are neither in the habit of nor particularly well-equipped to take ourselves and our practices as subjects in this way. Indeed, much of our education has discouraged us from such endeavors.⁵ By illuminating the relationship between contexts, methods and conclusions, feminist criticism of mainstream social theory and the academic research practices it supports has provided us with reasons to change our habits and the tools to begin doing so. As is the case with much feminist theory, at stake in feminist transformations of method is a much larger transformation of possible ways of knowing and living.

In Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking Glass, Alice asks Humpty Dumpty "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," Humpty Dumpty replies, "which is to be master--that's all"

⁵ See Shotter and Logan, who discuss the limitations "in the current structure of academic knowledge" and "in our academic ways of gaining knowledge: they lack in their very nature the resources required if we are to account for the reproduction of even our patriarchal selves" (1987, 71). Students in my 1989 Senior Communication Seminar provided ample evidence: they accounted freely for their own subjectivities (when requested to do so in independent research projects) and repeatedly qualified their analyses as "subjective" and "only my opinion," but just as freely accepted published work as more reliable and freer from subjectivity than their own (Gregg 1990).

(1960, 186). The question of who is to be master⁶ of meaning can be construed as a question of method: the determination, by the relations of knowledge production as constituted in research practices, of what matters and who decides. Feminists' attention to method is compelled in part by our experiences with products of the relations of production of traditional research and their limitations, distortions and assumptions regarding women's lives.⁷ Transformation of methodology and method is necessary to overcome habits sustaining the exclusion of women as knowers and our experiences as sources of knowledge. As Code notes,

neither practical measures nor theoretical challenge alone will do. The former will have no lasting effects until they come to reflect a loosening of the stranglehold of entrenched theory; and that theoretical stranglehold will not be broken without practical measures to show its inadequacy⁸ (1988, 73).

Feminists' attention to method is also grounded in the commitment to doing research for women--research contributing to a political purpose which requires remaking knowledge to reflect and change women's lives--and by the desire to conduct oneself (in doing the work of research and reconstructing/reconstituting knowledge) in ways that cor-

⁶ I use "master" to refer to the exercise of traditional male power to determine, in this case, what counts as knowledge and how knowledge is to be ascertained.

⁷ The history of medical research is one example; for recent accounts, see "AIDS: Rethinking" (1989), Rosser (1989), "Sexist research" (1990), "Sexual bias" (1990), and Squires (1989).

⁸ Helen E. Longino makes the same point about science: "A discussion of alternative ways of doing science or of thinking about nature is not enough to dislodge entrenched philosophical views about knowledge. And a critique of those views will not show us how science can be done differently or why it should be. In order to answer the questions about rationality and objectivity that trouble us as we remake the world, we must distinguish the sciences from their philosophies" (1988, 573).

respond to feminist principles (however inexactly articulated⁹). We attempt to do research in ways that do not objectify or universalize women; to use methods that can account for difference, accommodate anomalies and include knowledges that defy traditional measures. We seek research practices that embody relationships of respect and integrity. In short, we want our research practices to reflect our moral and political values. As Harding explains with reference to the relations of production in science research,

whatever the moral and political values and interests responsible for selecting problems, theories, methods, and interpretations of research, they appear at the other end of inquiry as the moral and political universe that science projects as natural and thereby helps to legitimate (1986b, 250-51).

Harding is making an argument for replacing the continuum of traditional criteria for judging the adequacy of research practices with one that privileges "morally and politically emancipatory interests" (250). Her proposal is a convenient example to illustrate the theoretical conditions of feminists' preoccupation with writing and talking about how one does research.

Any research method conforms to a particular theoretical or epistemological stance. Indeed, the possibility of research assumes that

⁹ The inexactitude of descriptions of "a feminist perspective" is a topic too large to take up here. For overviews, see Mitchell and Oakley (1986), Spender (1985) and Treichler (1986). See Haraway (1988) and Harding (1986a) for discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of multiple, flexible, fluid, inexact categories and values. Also see Woodward and Chisholm for an account of their experiences of the realities of the research process, about which they write: "No single unitary 'feminist perspective' can be (a) identified and then (b) applied in the research situation. Rather, we had a certain imperfectly articulated view of society and how it operates and changes. Parts of this view were implicit rather than explicit, the view changed and developed according to what we had been reading or our own experiences, and we by no means always agreed in attitude or perception" (1981, 183).

something can be discovered, that there is some verifiable quality of knowability, accessible by structured or formal inquiry. Dominant models for academic research, grounded in a framework of beliefs regarding what is knowable and how one goes about discovering it, support particular relations of knowledge production by authorizing some methods and techniques and rejecting others. Research methods construct specific relations between the knower and the known and the researcher and her subject(s). The conventional forms of these relations are familiar to us as features of the traditional stance of objectivity.

Harding's privileging of morally and politically emancipatory interests defines what she calls an alternative paradigm of objectivity. In place of the familiar ideal of value-neutrality in research (which feminist and other critiques have shown to be shot through with the biases of gender as well as those of race, class and other cultural experience), Harding would substitute a theoretical stance that is explicitly value-oriented. The model for objectivity would become:

those studies explicitly directed by morally and politically emancipatory interests--that is, by interests in eliminating sexist, racist, classist, and culturally coercive understandings of nature and social life. . . . A maximally objective science, natural or social, will be one that includes a self-conscious and critical examination of the relationship between the experience of its creators and the kinds of cognitive structures favored in its inquiry (1986b, 250).

Within this model researchers would identify and examine the subjectivities they bring to their work, as Lana Rakow does in her study of women's relation to the telephone (1987a). In place of attempts to discover, and then represent, the "truth about reality," research could be directed towards acknowledging and legitimizing a variety of knowledges and the many ways in which they are generated and acquired, as

Wendy Luttrell has done in her study of working class women's experiences with education (1984). In place of research possibilities defined by an epistemology of abstraction and uniformity, parameters of the possibilities and limits of multiple realities can be transformed by the discoveries of grounded and personal inquiry, as in Victoria Leto DeFrancisco's recent work (1990).

It is not necessary to agree with Harding's proposal in order to understand how defining research practices themselves as subjects of inquiry and experiment relates to the feminist critique of epistemology and knowledge making. However, it is necessary to admit that traditional rules for research eliminate many opportunities for knowledge and disallow many sorts of data. The epistemological reasoning that has historically classified women's experience as not knowledge¹⁰ (on the grounds that neither women nor experience are legitimate sources of knowledge) is but one example of how the location of the master of meaning influences what is possible to become known and what mechanisms are considered likely to give access to that knowledge.

Turning method into a subject of inquiry is a step in the direction of "getting"¹¹ and legitimating other kinds of knowledge, where formerly they would have been ignored, overlooked or dismissed. This

¹⁰ Code uses the comparison of nurses' "experience" with doctors' "knowledge" to discuss the epistemological history of excluding women and experience from the "honorific" category of knowledge (1988, 70). As noted elsewhere, the habitual exclusion of women as subjects for medical research derives from the same source: if male is the norm and therefore the legitimate perspective for determining knowledge, male physiology is also the appropriate focus of medical research.

¹¹ "The Getting of Knowledge" is the title of Luttrell (1984); "Getting Smart" is the title of Lather (1991).

problematizing of method also responds to postmodernist perspectives on reality as an endless play of surfaces, partial and shifting, never totally knowable, known or fixed.

As promising as alternative paradigms of objectivity may appear for resolving feminists' (and others') theoretical critique of the traditional construction of knowledge through research, the practical dilemma remains. Feminist epistemological critiques require more than an alternative paradigm of objectivity in response; also required are consistent methods. How does one do research within such an alternative paradigm? If new intent cannot adequately alter old methods, where to begin? Who or what replaces Humpty Dumpty as master or mistress² of meaning?

Donna Haraway reminds us that "struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see" (1988, 587). As tools of the relations of production of knowledge, methods institutionalize ways of seeing. Methods that can be used to see in more than one way and are equipped with changeable lenses are most likely to satisfy feminists' assertion of the validity and necessity of new ways of seeing--a point also made by other subjugated or "muted" groups.³ For example, feminist researchers have favored qualitative

² I use "mistress" in its original sense of "a woman who rules or is in command," (Kramarae and Treichler 1985, 278), and wish also to suggest the sage's role in the generation of meaning, comparable to what is often meant by "master" status in the practice of a craft.

³ The concept of political "muting" is developed in Ardener (1975).

methods for their flexibility and accommodation of data falling "outside" quantifiable categories.¹⁴

If this discussion of methods seems misplaced, consider that traditional models for research place formulation of research questions before the selection of a research method.¹⁵ But this assumption regarding reliable research practices is one of many undergoing transformation. Research questions are subject to the same epistemological standards of knowable-ness as are research methods. Too, research questions are typically those that appear problematic from the point of view and experience of the questioner. The questions we seek answers to are shaped in part by what we think it is possible to find out, to come to know by acceptable and reliable means for doing so. When traditional and authorized methods are unable to arrive at answers to feminists' questions, we can change the questions, change the methods--or both. The task before us is one of devising research practices capable of constructing new relations of production for new kinds of knowledge.

¹⁴ H. Leslie Steeves notes that socialist-feminist researchers have favored qualitative methods for media studies (1987, 109). For a discussion of qualitative research as a critique of positivism, see Reinharz (1984). In addition to the question of whether to quantify aspects of women's experience, how to do so is a problem, contributing to preferences for qualitative methods. For example, Bookman discovered in her study of unionization in an electronics factory that "many of the most important and interesting changes that occurred defy quantification" (1988, 172). For a feminist argument in support of quantitative research, see Jayaratne (1983) and Jayaratne and Stewart (1991).

¹⁵ Barbara Du Bois describes how "methods differ, or should, according to the question at hand" but qualifies this ordering of the "phases of science-making" by writing that "these 'phases' are of course not strictly linear in relationship, but rather circular, interactive, and reflexive" (1983, 107).

Interviewing and the politics of inquiry

In a recent issue of Women's Studies in Communication (1988), twelve feminist communication scholars address the question "What distinguishes/ought to distinguish feminist scholarship in communication studies?" This collection goes a long way towards identifying issues and objectives of interest to feminist communication research, and most contributors acknowledge the importance of method. However, this collection contains only one selection that could be considered providing an example of feminist method in practice--and it appears in an article that is not a direct response to the question.¹⁶ A ready explanation for this omission is that method alone does not distinguish feminist scholarship in communication studies.¹⁷ Still, we cannot sustain feminist scholarship in communication without bringing to our own inquiring practices the kind of scrutiny that has been so instructive when applied to the inquiring practices of others. We cannot afford to treat lightly the relations of production of our own knowledge-generating activities.

¹⁶ Diana Brown Sheridan describes briefly the use of interviews and grounded theory (1988, 38). Other issues of Women's Studies in Communication contain articles with more comprehensive discussions of method and methodology; see, for example, Rakow (1987b).

¹⁷ While Harding (1987) argues that it is not feminist method that distinguishes feminist research but instead the ways in which the results of feminist research challenge epistemology and ontology, Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss write that what distinguishes feminist research is not methodology but the objective of the research (1988, 9). However, they later include within a feminist perspective "formulation of new rules for how knowledge is constructed" (*Ibid.*), which arguably means changing methodology. See Carter and Spitzack (1989) and Stanley (1990) for more comprehensive discussions of feminist perspectives on research methods.

When we look critically at the relations of production of knowledge in academic research, a number of issues arise that are directly implicated in method. Among these issues are the dynamics of consent, the ethics of disclosure, the influence of setting, context, and status, the roots of criteria for evidence, and rights of control over evidence and interpretation. These issues have received attention from feminist scholars. For example, Barrie Thorne discusses the possibility that requiring signed consent may entail risk to the signer, and the context in which consent is asked influences the meaning of consent to the persons from whom we are asking it (1980).¹⁸ Lana F. Rakow analyzed her decision initially to disclose some, but not all aspects of her interest in the women and community she was studying (1987a). In particular, she was cautious about displaying "her feminist self" and worried about how "to resolve the conflict . . . between our interpretations of the world" (106; see also 100).¹⁹ Wendy Luttrell and Janet Finch discuss what counts as evidence and the ethics of gathering it; Luttrell occasionally crossed her original boundaries between research and social settings--sites where data were and were not to be collected--when casual conversation began to suggest implications for her research objectives (1984, 49-51), and Finch writes about the development of trust and the potential for exploitation when women choose women as

¹⁸ As noted elsewhere, Catharine MacKinnon explains the ways in which women's ability to consent is compromised in a male-dominated culture (1983, 648-49). See also McConnell-Ginet (1989, 47-48).

¹⁹ I attempted to resolve a similar problem by expressing my feminist views without labelling myself "a feminist." Acker et al. evaded the problem entirely by showing their interpretations only to women whom they expected would share the researchers' views (1983, 428-29).

research subjects (1984).²⁰ Sue Scott has written about the status of information and what counts as data, describing how gender and status influenced the data she was able to collect compared with that accessible to, and therefore meaningful for, other members of her research team (1984, 171-73). Dolores Janiewski discusses the effects of the investigator's race and class on research (1983, especially 179-80).²¹

One research method that appears to satisfy many feminists' concerns about the political relationship between the researcher and her subject(s) is interviewing.²² Although certain styles of interviewing may be chosen by researchers to minimize interaction, interviews are by their nature interactive. Interviews can help fulfill the objective of taking seriously women's concerns as expressed in their words,²³ depending on the degree to which the expression of those concerns is encoura-

²⁰ See also Westcott (1979).

²¹ A broad critique of the social sciences in general has raised similar concerns about privileging the position of the social scientist to interpret and pronounce truth(s). What distinguishes a feminist perspective on method from the earlier non-feminist critique is feminism's fundamental challenge to rationality as a masculinist basis for knowledge and, by extension, for the entire social structure.

²² On interviewing in general see Mishler (1986). The classic text on focused interviews is Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1956); on in-depth interviewing see Oakley (1981); on life history interviews, see Bertaux (1981), Geiger (1986), Janiewski (1983), Jones (1983), Personal Narratives Group (1989, especially 199-264) and Snoek (1985); on interviewing as a survey method, see Graham (1983); on story-telling see Graham (1984). See Ribbens (1989) and Stacey (1988) on the dynamics of power inherent in interviews.

²³ Belenky et al. (1986, 249), D. Smith (1987, 35) and Tilly and Tilly (1981, 15) are among many scholars who stress the importance of taking seriously the beliefs and words of research participants. Costello (1987, 286) discusses the lesser importance of the accuracy of individual participants' statements when compared with their shared understandings as displayed by those statements.

ged. And depending upon the particular situation an interview may approach a conversation between equals (putting participants on the same plane with researchers) who are together trying to find a way to understand what the other means.²⁴ Where restatement and clarification are possible, an interview can offer the opportunity to arrive at shared understandings. Interviewing is a familiar mode of information-seeking behavior in our culture: an interview "is discourse shaped and organized by asking and answering questions. An interview is a joint product of what interviewees and interviewers talk about together and how they talk with each other" (Mishler 1986, vii).

But the interview method is not nearly so transparent nor simple, as communication researchers have long known.²⁵ The familiar give and take of questions and answers in everyday life is confounded in the research interview precisely because it is not everyday life. To take interviews as sources of data without accounting for the everyday life situation of the persons speaking and without accounting for the dynamics of the interview situation itself (for example, the topic, the race, gender, and class of participants, the location, the style, the

²⁴ Reinharz argues for experiential analysis in which perceiving the 'subject' of research as a collaborator "produces 'communication through dialogue with others to determine how they experience reality'" (1983, 181). Her quotation is from Denis Collins, Paolo Freire: His Life, Works and Thought, Paulist Press (1977, 63). Mishler argues for regarding a question in an interview as "part of a circular process through which its meaning and that of its answer are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other" (1986, 53-4).

²⁵ See, for example, Lazarsfeld (1935).

interviewee's expectation of 'how interviews are conducted'²⁶) is to misrepresent and misunderstand, through a double de-contextualization, whatever it is we are asking people to talk with us about when we interview them. If we use interviews as tools for understanding how people make sense of the world, we need at the very least to modify the usual claims made for the method by examining the relationship between talk and meaning in the interview itself. This is where feminist researchers' attention to the politics of inquiry in the use of interviews can be particularly instructive for feminist communication research.

In 1981, Ann Oakley called interviewing women "a contradiction in terms." Oakley rejected traditional sociological guidelines for interviews in part because of the exploitative and hierarchical politics of inquiry they established. In her research, she discovered that:

the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity into the relationship (1981, 41).

Oakley developed a research practice more likely to satisfy her objectives: finding out about people and documenting women's own accounts of their lives (1981, 41 and 48). It is a practice that transformed method and methodology and identified a new mistress of meaning, incorporating

²⁶ Janiewski discusses her experiences as a white academic woman collecting life histories from white and Black respondents, different responses to interview styles depending on the gender of the participants, and the influence of respondents' awareness of the "particular audience" to whom they were speaking. Janiewski comments that "the gender, race and class of the interviewer shape the informant's responses in ways difficult to measure. . . . There is no way to estimate how the result might have differed given another approach, another interviewer, or another setting" (1985, 179-80).

"a new awareness of the interviewer . . . as a tool for making possible the articulated and recorded commentary of women on the very personal business of being female in a patriarchal capitalist society" (48-9). The political relationship of the researcher to her subject(s) was transformed as the interviewer's role changed "dramatically from being a data-collecting instrument for researchers to being a data-collecting instrument for those whose lives are being researched" (49).²¹

Hilary Graham raises several questions about the extent to which feminists' (including Oakley's) modifications to traditional methods of interviewing can tell us what we need to know in order to construct an adequate analysis of women's position (1983). While the politics of interviewing may be preferable to those of some other research methods, Graham is concerned about the kind of data survey interviews are able to produce and, by extension, the value of such information for the political purposes of feminism. First, she notes how interviews, because they document individual experience, tend to close off from analysis the structure of social processes of gender relations that are particularly significant for women's status.²² Graham asks whether interviews can get at the structure of these social processes by recording their impact on individual women (140). One consequence of the interview-based survey

²¹ Jane Ribbens (1989) responds to Oakley's representation of reciprocity in interviewing by pointing out that the researcher is still present in the research, and that "we are not data collecting instruments for anyone, but are data creating social beings" (590, emphasis in original). I am indebted to Cheris Kramarae for drawing my attention to Ribbens' article.

²² Others have noted the contribution of an individualistic culture to the interview paradigm; for example, see Mishler (1986, 23) who cites David Riesman and Mark Benney, "Asking and Answering," in the Journal of Business of the University of Chicago 29, 225-36 (1956).

method, then, is the way it treats as individual properties dimensions of social structure such as gender, race, class, and the nature and patterns of power (140-41). Second, Graham demonstrates several problems for data collection and analysis: the survey method implies individuals can be treated as equivalent units, thereby minimizing the very issues feminists wish to study (141); survey research may represent a more harmonious reality than actually exists, since the method requires a cooperative relationship between researcher and subject, and one in which gender, class, and racial conflicts in the interview context itself are not ordinarily explicitly addressed (142); interviews assume experiences have an 'external' ontological status that is stable and can be articulated verbally (143); data acquired from surveys typically have been measured in ways that, because of their origins in male perspectives of the world, are unlikely to be able to capture or represent women's lives (144).

Feminist researchers have identified additional problems with interviewing. Who is likely to be a subject of communication research when interviewing is the method? Our access to potential "subjects" and their access to us impose limitations on what is knowable through interviewing. Without culturally shared assumptions about "how to express and understand beliefs, experiences, feelings and assumptions" (Mishler 1986, 7), knowledge we acquire by interviewing may say more about the interviewer than the interviewee. And language confounds the interview process: feminist research documents how women's experiences and use of language differ from those of men. It has become necessary to learn to listen differently, for example hearing hesitation and si-

lence as meaningful parts of women's speech.²² The sources and means of contact between interviewer and interviewee, the location of the interview, the desire of subjects to cooperate with researchers or their suspicion of researchers' motives, expectations regarding how interviews are to proceed, and constraints of time on interviews and distractions during them are additional and familiar considerations feminist and other scholars express regarding the use of interviews. No simple disclaimer can resolve these concerns, but a number of them can be minimized by adjusting the claims we make for our research to reflect more fully our understanding of the partial and situation-specific nature of the knowledge produced by it.

For example, the passage of time between interviews and transcripts or interviews and publication can be problematic. People may feel differently and have different understandings at different times and during different interviews; the story told at one moment and in one place may differ in another time and place as audience, material conditions and social relations change.²³ If the researcher intends to return to her subjects with transcripts of interviews or her interpretations of them, interview participants may wish to correct, edit, amend, or take issue with the accounts they gave at an earlier time. If we acknowledge that one's construction of meaning is neither static nor permanent, and that our representations and interpretations are necessarily partial and

²² On women's use of language, see Spender (1980), Thorne and Henley (1975) and Thorne et al. (1983); on silence see Rowbotham (1973); on hesitation see DeVault (1986) and Paget (1983).

²³ Acker et. al describe the significance of this process for the question of validity (1983, 432-33).

to a degree artificial, then we can overcome some of the problems that follow from using interviewing as a research method. This is a theoretical stance advocated by Shulamit Reinharz as the basis for experiential analysis:

Since throughout the project meaning is assumed to be a constructive, ongoing process, there is no final interpretation valid 'for all time' but simply an adequate interpretation which is endorsed by participants, confirmed by readers and cognitively satisfying [to] the researcher. An adequate interpretation, ironically, does not give definitive answers but keeps the dialogue going (1983, 183).

Despite this catalog of qualifiers, feminist scholars continue to use interviewing as a research method, publish analyses of interviews and portions of or entire transcripts, build theory and propose policy grounded in interview-based research. One reason interviewing seems so appropriate for feminist research is because in an interview we can establish relations for the production of knowledge in which an object of study has room to be a subject; as Haraway writes, "an actor or agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource" (1988, 592). In an interview, we can engage in conversation as and with agents of partial and situated knowledges (593). Interviewing can accommodate Haraway's prescription for feminist objectivity, which "makes room for surprises and ironies at the heart of all of knowledge production" (594). The way we conduct interviews and our interpretations of them can be open to surprise and irony, admitting with Haraway that "we are not in charge of the world" (*Ibid.*).

I turn now to several examples of feminist research using interviews. These are examples of research particularly attuned to the politics of inquiry, research that self-consciously questions who is the

master of meaning and examines the fit between feminist principles and the practices and objectives of research. These examples suggest possible resolutions for some (but not all) conflicts over the politics of inquiry and also raise new questions, taking us further along the way to research practices that resemble the kind of social relations we wish to create and sustain.

Interviewing as feminist research practice

Victoria Leto DeFrancisco's study of married couple conversations is an example of how a transformation in method altered the traditional politics of inquiry and changed what counted as data (1990). DeFrancisco sought a better understanding (than traditional conversation analysis provided) of "how women and men negotiate relationships in their on-going interactions" (1). She followed a (more or less) standard procedure of random taping of conversations by leaving audio-taping equipment in participants' homes. She then invited each partner to review, in private interview sessions, a selected portion of the twelve hours of tape accumulated from each couple. She asked participants "to point out anything they liked or disliked about the conversation" (5). In so doing DeFrancisco enabled participants to show her the location of their conversations in a personal relationship with a history, in a spatial environment, and as more than a verbal exchange. Because she did not regard the tapes as the only available or legitimate data for analyzing conversations, DeFrancisco was later able to:

develop more complex, context dependent criteria for assessing conversation components in actual conversations. The initial definitions I had adopted from previous research proved inadequate. . . . Instead, the information gained from the interviews became central in making these assessments (5).

Confronted with a research tradition that offered inadequate tools for her study, DeFrancisco looked to participants for better explanations. By incorporating participants' experiences into her analysis, DeFrancisco enlarged the universe of and criteria for meaningful data. Participants were subjects, both agents and sources of knowledge. DeFrancisco discovered valuable correctives to traditional methods of conversation analysis. As a result, her interpretation is a rich representation of the relational dimensions of couple conversations, one in which she allows "people and their conversations to speak for themselves" (1990, 20).³¹

Marianne A. Paget's study of artists' experiences of the creative and commercial dimensions of their work is an example of how the researcher's consciousness of herself as a subject informs her research practices and her analysis (1983). In conducting and analyzing in-depth interviews with artists, Paget paid particular attention to her "involvement as an interviewer in the construction of the 'data' [she] later analyze(s)" and "the contextually embedded and changing meanings of the data" (69).

Within the structure of the interview itself, Paget's aim was "encouraging her [the artist's] speech rather than my own. This means, as often as possible, that the pace and developing content of the inter-

³¹ In DeFrancisco's text this quotation is credited to McRobbie (1982).

view is hers" (77). However, Paget acknowledges that "practices of questioning shape the evolving discourse" (78). As a participant in the interview, Paget assumes a degree of responsibility for what transpires: "The specific person interviewing, the 'I' that I am, personally contributes to the creation of the interview's content because I follow my own perplexities as they arise in our discourse" (78). As an example, Paget describes how she noticed a particular quality in an artist's work and asked the artist about it (78).³²

Paget's transcripts display many details often omitted from representations of talk, preserving speech "as dialogue and discourse" (87). Her reproduction and analysis of these transcripts demonstrates how understanding is arrived at interactionally and knowledge accumulates over the course of an interview. Apparent disparities between questions and replies offer insights into the shared construction of understanding; the meaning of earlier remarks becomes clearer when combined with later responses.

Paget regards in-depth interviewing as a search procedure, not "simply a technique or a vehicle for acquiring information" (88). The meaning of answers to interview questions develops within an "accrued history" (85) over the course of the interview. The knowledge thus arrived at is an understanding that illuminates human experience: "it does not provide a causal explanation of art work" (88). Paget's

³² By attributing her question to something she noticed in a work of art, Paget avoided a problem described by Reeve Vanneman and Lynn Weber Cannon. Vanneman and Cannon found that open-ended questions (in their example, about class) are ambiguous and undemocratic, denying respondents any clue about the categories of researchers' interests (1987, 48 and 102-3).

sensitivity to the intersubjectivity of in-depth interviews answers some of Hilary Graham's criticisms of the survey method. Paget's research practice reflects her theoretical stance on how meaning emerges; consistent with this transformation in methodology, she does not position herself as the only mistress of meaning.

A third example comes from a specifically feminist approach to analyzing interview data. Marjorie DeVault's research transforms the politics of inquiry indirectly--by taking women seriously, as knowers, and by listening and writing in new ways--without substantially changing the researcher-subject relationship (1986).

DeVault began her study of the work women do within families without a term to describe precisely what interested her. "I knew what I wanted to study," she writes, "but I didn't have a label for my topic" (3-4). DeVault initially used many words to describe what she eventually called "the work of feeding a family": she opened her interviews by telling respondents that she "wanted to talk with them about 'all the housework that has to do with food--cooking, shopping, planning, cleaning up'" (*Ibid.*). Beginning from a troubling minor difficulty--finding an accurate label for her topic--DeVault demonstrates how feminist topics go beyond standard labels (4).³³ More significantly, she argues that when women interview women, unarticulated and unlabeled aspects of women's experiences--she includes among them "activities that are typically only partly conscious . . . that women have learned to engage

³³ DeVault also avoided the difficulties identified by Lorna McKee and Margaret O'Brien, when a researcher labels a research phenomenon and expects "her respondents both to recognise the label and be able to talk about it out loud" (1983, 151).

in without noticing" (5)--became more visible, pointing "toward a new way of seeing the world" (*Ibid.*). DeVault proposes "a kind of interviewing that allows the unarticulated to surface," interviewing in which labels or topics from particular disciplines are not only unnecessary but impediments. She offers strategies in three areas: listening to women's speech, preserving women's speech, and writing about women.

Arguing that women bring to the interview "a tradition of 'woman talk,'"³⁴ in which women "know how to help each other develop ideas" (6), DeVault listened "around" and "beyond" words for the ways in which this tradition was evident in interviews (5). She listened for "the various ways that women manage to deal with the incongruence of language in their everyday speech" (*Ibid.*). Among the examples she gives are cases in which women use familiar words, like "housework," that approximate meaning, relying on listeners to understand from their own experience. Another example is "translating" when available words are inadequate to express more complex meanings or an interview question isn't quite appropriate.

DeVault also paid particular attention to the ways her respondents talked. When women had difficulties in expression--groping for words, hesitating, and stating that something was "hard to explain"--DeVault heard clues to unarticulated aspects of female experience. Noticing comments that seemed tentative or lacking in content, DeVault used women's speech "not as straightforward accounts of 'what happens'" but rather "hints towards concerns and activities that are generally

³⁴ DeVault cites Spender (1980) as her source for the concept of "woman talk."

unacknowledged" (8). Extending this attention to ambiguity, DeVault found places in interviews where, in the context of answering a particular question, respondents would comment about seemingly unrelated issues. To make sense of these "odd" remarks, DeVault relied upon her own experience as a woman. In all instances--respondents' use of approximate terms, announcing or displaying difficulty with expression, contributing contextual but unrequested information--DeVault looked to see where these words and talk occurred. The expression "you know" took on significance as meaningful information, an indicator of a request for understanding when standard language couldn't describe what women actually do (10-11).³⁵

DeVault's suggestion that women's speech itself offers directions for analysis has clear implications for the production of transcripts (11-12). Like Paget, whose notation system preserved intonation and emphasis, DeVault saved portions of respondents' talk--she calls them "the 'messy' parts" (12)--that have often been treated as superfluous. DeVault advocates a parallel approach when writing about women's lives. Again learning from her own experience, she proposes "a kind of strategic imprecision" in place of the habit of searching for one term to label a complex phenomenon. Building on the notion that standard language doesn't provide words adequate to describe women's experiences and perspectives, DeVault suggests that:

³⁵ DeVault's experience concurs with what many feminist interviewers describe as the ease with which women will talk to them. Finch (1984) raises the concern that women are likely targets for exploitation by researchers precisely because of their willingness to talk to other women.

instead of agreeing on labels for women's activities, we should make our talk richer and more complex--we should use many words, and put them together in ways that force readers to imagine the reality we're describing in a new way . . . Terms like "work" and "emotion" are words that channel thinking--that lead the mind down old familiar roads. And that's not what we're up to (13).³⁶

Control over the generation of meaning is at issue in all these examples and in the reproduction of talk in written transcripts, quotations and other interpretations. As McRobbie notes, "'uncommented on' text carries particular connotations" (1982, 51). While we cannot represent "pure speech," there are ways to represent speech more fairly. Lana Rakow accomplishes this by presenting separately the stories of five participants in her study "so that the women's stories are seen as a whole," in addition to what she calls "a stream of different voices" elsewhere in her text (1987a, 108-9).

In my recent experience with interviewing, I attempted to counter the tendency of interviews and transcripts to "freeze" time and meaning. Since the generation of meaning is not a static process, I incorporated into the research opportunities where the continuing process of the generation of meaning could be represented. I conducted follow-up interviews to see how and if impressions and memories changed with the passage of time and the occurrence of significant events related to my topic. I sent nearly forty copies of a draft manuscript to the women I interviewed. Over the following months we negotiated how to represent in writing their interpretations along with my own. Once set into

³⁶ DeVault's approach, along with a growing consensus that interview transcripts, when published, should appear in their entirety, resembles Gleick's (1987) account of the role of chaos in generating scientific knowledge.

motion, the idea of a "right of reply" raised additional issues for a feminist politics of inquiry, and it is to those issues I now turn.

Reproduction, representation and the politics of inquiry

Establishing rights of reply to researchers' interpretations is especially appropriate for a feminist politics of inquiry. If feminist objectives for research and politics include taking women seriously, creating opportunities for women to speak in their own voices and naming and validating their experiences, what is the responsibility of the researcher to participants' accounts? When the time arrives to write, present, publish or otherwise "make talk walk" (McRobbie 1982, 57), whose stories are these? Beyond the debt of acknowledgement, what do we owe our sources?³⁷ Whose ability to know gets validated in "the final product" (Rakow 1987a, 305) when the research is done, written up, presented or published--the researcher's or the subject(s)'s? Can it be both? (I have not even mentioned the constraints and expectations imposed by one's academic peers, department, discipline, advisor/committee, evaluators, institutional affiliation, funding, and career hopes. The politics of inquiry live elsewhere besides the relation between self and subjects; they are also inevitably embedded in the relation of the project to its institutional and historical context.)

For many years feminist researchers have been writing about the emergence of the academic product of knowledge, the point in the research process where the knowledge production process that is research

³⁷ As "sources" rather than fellow conversationalists, participants are no longer on the "same critical plane" with researchers (Harding 1987c, 8-9).

has an institutionally recognizable product, the interpretation of findings.³⁸ Rather than focus here on the institutional question (what counts as research), I want to emphasize the equally material (and perhaps more tactical for feminism) issue of who controls evidence, interpretation, meaning, and reproduction in feminist research. For the moment I want to distinguish between how the research attains a "final" form (and who determines when it is "finished"³⁹) and what becomes of that "final product." Who will be the masters and mistresses of meaning?

Feminist researchers' experiences with sharing their interpretations--taking the material back to subjects--are widely varied in intent and practice. Even the idea that one "takes the material back to the community" is instructive, implying that the research is not from or in the community, does not belong or reside there, but comes from elsewhere geographically and conceptually. (We might want to look at how some historians are doing "history from below," research initiated in communities on topics on which members of the community desire information, for reasons that matter to them, and research conducted, written, and controlled by them.⁴⁰) The following brief review of examples demonstrates a variety of feminist practices responding to structural and theoretical factors contributing in combination to this particular

³⁸ For one example, see Spender (1981).

³⁹ See Reinharz (1983, especially 183) for a discussion of the impermanence of interpretations.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Book Committees (1985) and Brecher (1986). For a now-classic example of community-directed feminist research, see Mies (1983).

aspect of the politics of inquiry. It is not a critique of individual researchers' ways of grappling with these issues.

In an attempt to involve subjects in the production of knowledge and improve validity, Barbara Laslett and Rhona Rapoport encouraged interview respondents to "collaborate" to some degree in the interview portion of their research project (1975). However, respondents did not collaborate in writing up the interviews, a final version of which was produced for each participating family.

In contrast, Joan Acker, Kate Barry and Joke Esseveld explicitly designed a research project "that might contribute to the liberation of women" incorporating several "principles of feminist research" (1983, 425-26). Like Laslett and Rapoport, they similarly sought collaboration in an interview-based research project, and continued to request collaboration at later stages.⁴ Applying concepts from the qualitative method known as grounded theory,⁴² Acker et al. intended "to let the concepts, explanations and interpretations of those participating in the study become the data we would analyse" (426). Like Rakow (1987a), they confronted differences between their interpretations and those of the women they interviewed. On occasion they introduced questions on subjects of interest to themselves that did not emerge in the interviews. Unlike Laslett and Rapoport, Acker et al. showed their written material to some of the women they wrote about, including them as "active participants in the analysis of our research" (428). Acker et

⁴ Note that the researchers requested collaboration from participants once the project had been designed by the researchers; this is collaboration after conceptualization.

⁴² See Charmaz (1983), Glaser (1978) and Glaser and Strauss (1967).

al. chose not to share their written material with participants they expected would disagree with the researchers' feminist interpretations. In assuming "the power to define" (429), Acker et al. legitimized their own subjectivity but lost the opportunity for a dialogue (albeit one loaded with potential negative as well as positive consequences) with women whose interpretations of their lives are important elements of any strategy to "contribute to the liberation of women."

Rakow took a different approach; she arranged two coffee and discussion groups to share an oral summary of her interpretations with women she interviewed (1987a). She also explained how she had used material from interviews (305). Rakow was prepared to reconsider her interpretations and provide in her dissertation a written forum for disagreements, but the coffee discussions did not generate any disagreements.

When the women requested that copies of "the final product" (Rakow's term) be made available to them, Rakow complied, despite her concerns about a breakdown of anonymity and anticipation of the women's reactions to "alien and potentially alienating" language (1987a, 305). Rakow returned to the community after the written study circulated--creating the opportunity for participants to express their responses to her written interpretations--but learned that while participants had attempted to read her study, they had not recognized the text as being about themselves or their community.⁴³

⁴³ The use of a pseudonym for the community in which the study was based confused some local readers, and others read only those sections of the text that were about themselves (personal communication with author).

Karen Brodtkin Sacks combined aspects of Rakow and Acker et al.'s approaches (1988). Sacks repeatedly shared with workers, in writing and conversation, her observations and interpretations of a union organizing drive she was both aiding and observing.⁴⁴ In doing so, she discovered that the vantage-point of academic disciplines was not privileged, and learned "even among activists there was neither one perspective nor a privileged perspective" (vii). Even more valuable for a feminist politics of inquiry, Sacks' openness generated anger and confrontation from women who read her drafts. As a result, one woman asked to be taken out of the book (and she was), and ongoing critiques from others enabled Sacks to write an analysis that she termed "accurate in a way that was meaningful" to the women who were its subjects (ix).

The expectations and habits that create conflicts between the relations we want to establish in doing feminist research and the relations our institutional and disciplinary connections require also raise problems for a feminist politics of inquiry when we get to "the final product." Most of us--and I include myself--who do research while affiliated with academic institutions, assume, like Acker et al., "the power to define." Within the boundaries of written versions of research projects and the representations those documents make to other scholars, researchers and policy makers (whose occupations permit them to be masters of meaning and legitimators of ways of knowing) lie additional unresolved issues for a feminist politics of inquiry. I want to

⁴⁴ Sacks was an active union supporter during one of two organizing campaigns she analyzed, and acknowledges how her position limited her ability to observe and learn the perspectives of anti- and non-union women workers and management (1988, 9).

rephrase the problem in language that acknowledges the culture and the economy within which I ask it: who owns the interview or whatever interaction is the basis for research?⁴⁵ Is there a way out of positioning oneself as the final arbiter of jointly constructed meanings?

One way out may be in answer to a second necessary question, one I deferred earlier. (This question is entangled with a third necessary question, regarding what becomes of "the final product" produced within a feminist politics of inquiry.) If the researcher alone does not "own" the research, how is shared ownership exercised or experienced? Could there be joint custody of research projects, or does informed consent function as some type of pre-nuptial agreement?⁴⁶

Obviously we must and do assume responsibility for the final work, not simply because academic tradition requires this but also because when we initiate research, the determination of knowledge is inevitably skewed our way. We know that our interpretations are most likely not the same as those of people we interview. As Paget says, we bring our own perplexities to the interview. Rakow reminds us of the subjectivities we bring to our work (1987a); she urges recognition of how we are drawn "to study certain questions and certain people, usually questions that affect us the most and people most like ourselves"

⁴⁵ Determining the ownership of research data took on science fictional dimensions recently when a California man sued a California research hospital for using tissue taken from his cancerous liver to manufacture an antibody the hospital then sold, for profit, to pharmaceutical companies (Specter 1989).

⁴⁶ Oakley describes how interviewing is like marriage: "Everyone knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets" (1981, 31).

(1987b, 81). Still, to what interests is the researcher accountable?

What is accountability in any given research project?

No degree of "right of reply" absolves my responsibility to protect the participants in my study from breaches in confidentiality or employer retaliation for their participation. (For this reason I cannot make a single copy of the final text available to the community to share, as did Rakow, since reader-participants who wish to remain anonymous may, by borrowing the text, become known to each other.) What we can and I think must do is acknowledge up front--in those confessional preambles and epilogues that have become so popular--how our own subjectivities, perplexities and discomforts structure the origin, shape and meaning of our work. We can account for power relationships in the production of knowledge extending beyond concrete interactions between researcher and human subjects, addressing the issues of conceptualization of research questions, control over the direction of the study, the determination of what matters, what counts as data and who decides, how data are gathered and preserved, what constitutes analysis, what form analysis takes, who does it and how and where it happens, when the research "ends" and what final form it takes. If we are self-conscious of the "I"s implicated in our research practices⁴⁷ and the exercises of power engaged in, we can identify what we have left out, overlooked, or discounted, and do it differently, and perhaps better, the next time.

⁴⁷ On the different "I"s we bring to our research, see Paget (1983) and Peshkin (1985).

In the present case, before a single interview took place, important constraints on the knowledge generated and its capacity to be useful or harmful already existed: the locale of this study, the players in the local drama of the organizing of a union at Yale, and the exercises of power within the union, between union and university, between individual employees and their supervisors framed the conversations. The more global dramas of town-gown relations, the political economy of higher education, and a troubled labor movement also imposed constraints on the meanings generated by the women, in interviews, and in any "final product." As Pam Norden pointedly reminded me, "I'm censoring even before I speak the words."

The third necessary question concerns what becomes of "the final product" of research. This is still a question about the masters and mistresses of meaning: feminist scholars' commitment to doing research for women implies a life and purpose for the research beyond binding or publication (a life it may have even without such a commitment, for few of us can control the meanings others will make of our work). If our research--undertaken in the context of academic careers, disciplinary expectations and departmental and personal exigencies--is to be research for women, what happens to this work, this new knowledge, the fruit of these transformed and transforming methods?

One possible answer is to create several "final" products for different audiences. Ann Oakley wrote and published two books based on her study of women and housework. One was addressed to academics, the other to the women it was about (1974a, 1974b). This solution assumes literacy and the availability of other resources, such as money and

time, that make books and journal articles accessible and desirable sources of information. Janice A. Radway advocates using the mass media to make our ideas and interpretations accessible to a broader audience (1986, 115-16).⁴⁸ Rakow wrote of her hope that her study would "create some small space and opportunity for alternative interpretations of women's experiences in Prospect and new understandings of how and why the community and its residents have changed" (1987a, 308).

As well-meaning as these gestures may be, I confess to finding them ultimately unsatisfying, both personally and politically. They do not adequately address the political objective of feminism, which is social change. How do we, finally, merge the political practices of feminism with feminist research practices, as long as research is constrained by institutional expectations and structural reality and feminism's own self-conscious partiality? This is not the place to review the positions of different feminist scholars on the nature of feminist activism, but I will mention two.

Janice A. Radway argues our responsibility to give the people we study the opportunity to hear and reject our interpretations and political messages (1986, 119), and she proposes seizing the occasion for a political conversation (114). But she admits the difficult questions of how these conversations "might be initiated, where and in what form they might take place, or who ought to take part in them" (*Ibid.*). The difficulty is compounded if the researcher's feminism, among other poli-

⁴⁸ Radway (1986) also writes about problems controlling more popular and non-written representations of her work (115), and urges learning "how to converse with" the people who enjoy the culture mass culture critics take as their subject (108).

tical positions she holds, is unknown to participants, or if she or they do not live in the same community. Angela McRobbie disagrees with Radway's projection of feminist research directly into feminist activism or recruitment (Radway uses the words convince (107) and persuade (108)), saying that feminist research "should first of all be directed towards existing feminist assumptions and practice" (1982, 52).

McRobbie is not advocating an insulated self-criticism, but instead the necessary project of learning what non-feminists "are thinking about and how they experience a patriarchal and sexist society" (52). This is, of course, politically necessary, but begs the question of whether we can have honest political conversations with women who are our research subjects and who may not share our feminism, and if we can, to what purpose?

In both Radway's and McRobbie's positions--which are not nearly so opposed as I have just implied--appears the necessity for feminism of finding out the discontents (McRobbie, 52) and dissatisfactions (Radway 1986a, 111) of women whose lives and beliefs differ from our own. Can we hope to do this if we reveal our feminist selves, which regarding other women as positioned on the same critical plane would seem to require? Can we hope to do this if we hold back our feminist selves until we no longer "need" the participation of other women in our research, and risk not only closing off discussion with these participants but also reducing possibilities for future collaboration (perhaps even non-scholarly) when people learn to think we can't be trusted? Must we do research only where we live, where we can be personal political activists? Must we undertake research only on topics

identified by women (and if so, which women?) as those they (we) want to know about? Can we be satisfied with the hope that our work creates space for new thoughts, or are there ways to ensure, without coercion, that the spaces exist and get used? How do we "pick right" (Amesley and NeSmith 1989)?

I have no ready answer to this conflict, which takes the concrete questions of how to construct a feminist politics of inquiry into the world beyond the artificial boundaries of practices engaged in for the purposes of a discrete research project. And there is no one answer that will satisfy all of us nor accommodate the different circumstances and different feminisms encompassed by "feminist research." I want for myself a commitment to research for political change that not everyone will share and not every institution will authorize. The idea of a feminist politics of inquiry invokes a knowledge-producing process bounded by a beginning and an end, but the visions of feminism are not contained within those boundaries.

Looking over my shoulder while turning over stones

I began this study interested in what women employed at Yale University thought of recent union organizing there (in 1982 and later), the concept of comparable worth and its significance for their situation. Mass media coverage of the union struggle at Yale suggested an association with the growing U.S. movement for comparable worth. Most mainstream news accounts of the clerical and technical workers' union and related activity at Yale offered the opinions of legal, management, financial, policy and labor analysts. The stories that interested me,

and the voices of the participants, were notably and typically absent. While the actions of the participants were newsworthy, the participants did not often appear as news sources or authoritative "knowers." In the parlance of recent feminist and cultural theory, the women who were the intended beneficiaries of the organizing campaign were represented as subjects but not agents in most mass media coverage of the events at Yale. Their subjective concerns and lived realities fell outside the dominant institutional newsframe. I wanted to know what the women working at Yale thought. I went to New Haven hoping to find out.⁴⁹

My original research proposal focused on the meaning of comparable worth as a feature of employed women's experiences of union activity at Yale University since 1982. I hoped to explore women's responses to the union, the meaning to them of the concept of comparable worth, and any relationship between their responses, the concept, and their actions. However, few in the first group of people I interviewed independently raised the subject of comparable worth in our conversations about their experiences. Those who did say comparable worth was a factor in the situation at Yale did not regard it as a primary one. Thus I discovered early in my research that what drew my attention to the situation at Yale--the association in news accounts between events there, the issue of comparable worth, and comparable worth activism elsewhere in the United States--was not necessarily the story participants would choose to tell.

⁴⁹ As Rosalie Wax has written about fieldwork, we do not know what we are going to do; all we know is what we hope to try to do (1971, 370).

Over the course of the research I changed focus, shifting from investigating the meaning of comparable worth for the women at Yale to exploring the relationship between their subjectivities, their generation of meaning and their actions.⁵⁰ This shift resulted from my attempt throughout the project to construct a feminist politics of inquiry, a process whereby the concerns of the women I was studying, combined with my own interests, shaped the research. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I describe some of the steps in that process.

I brought to the study a collection of experiences that made its undertaking personally meaningful. I grew up in the Northeastern U.S., and my undergraduate education took place at an institution similar to Yale, a small elite university long identified with white, male, upper-class privilege and power. I had been employed as a clerical worker in several settings, including the library at my university and a multinational corporate headquarters in which some employees (but not I) had union representation. In two different settings, I had held jobs in which I worked to improve women's work lives.⁵¹ My identification with feminism cast into relief the potential significance of the events at Yale for the lives of working women, the future of organized labor, the movement for pay equity, and prospects for social change. I had a long-

⁵⁰ This shift reflects a response to the research process, not a rejection of the potential merits of my original proposal. I remain convinced that such a project could fulfill its original purpose: exploring the generation of meaning by documenting women's perceptions of the meaning and value of their work in response to conflicting representations of its worth.

⁵¹ I was co-director of a non-profit organization whose purpose was to secure training, employment and equitable compensation for rural women, and I taught in a program designed to prepare unemployed youth to join the workforce.

standing interest in the relationship between what people thought was possible, the bases upon which they arrived at such judgements, and what they did to realize those possibilities.⁵²

My graduate education in the theory and philosophy of communication, combined with my feminism, informed my perspective on the events at Yale as a "contest to set the terms of speech" regarding the meaning of the union and women's work at Yale (Haraway 1981, 471). When I began the study I did not know whether or if feminist theory would be of use in arriving at an understanding of the experiences of the women at Yale (although my feminist perspective undeniably shaped my conceptualization of the project), and I was determined to allow issues and themes to develop during and from the research process instead of imposing them at the outset, as an outsider.⁵³ I planned to interview women employees at

⁵² In my "work journal" (field notebook) I wrote about the connections between my choice of topic and my personal history. I questioned why I had selected a project located so far from my then-current home in Tennessee, when ample opportunity existed there to explore women's experiences of union organizing and strike activity. "I think perhaps I settled on this one [site and event] because I suspected I would find [at Yale] people more like me, and it would be easier to work without regional and class barriers, than for example doing a similar project with the members of a manufacturing plant local at home," I wrote. Indeed, the fact that participants in my study were able to respond to my written interpretations underscores the degree to which I chose "people like myself" as the subjects of my study. And as already noted, the implied connection between the Yale events and comparable worth contributed to my selection of the events at Yale over women's labor disputes in the South that did not apparently address comparable worth.

⁵³ The position of the researcher as "the outsider within" is addressed by Collins (1986). See Lugones and Spelman (1983) for a lucid discussion of finding oneself in the position of outsider with regard to class, race and ethnicity.

Yale, using an oral narrative or life history approach rather than a structured interview or survey.⁵⁴

Even before the clerical and technical workers' strike in 1984, a stream of news reporters onto the Yale campus had accustomed students, staff, faculty, administrators and townspeople to the inquiries of outsiders about Local 34. I did not want to interview people who had already been subjects and sources of news accounts; many of them were "leaders" with clearly defined pro- or anti-union stances, and their experiences with news interviews had hardened those stances into repeatable formula responses. I wanted to talk with women whose positions were neither so clearly nor so publicly formulated and women who were less likely to be selected or promote themselves as spokespeople.⁵⁵

My decision to use interviews as a data-gathering method and to interview women who had not otherwise been heard from publicly had several motivations. First, I was responding to the idea (developed in feminist theory) of the historical silencing of women's voices and the absence of accounts of their lives in their own words. As Lugones and Spelman argue, "the articulation of experience . . . is among the hallmarks of a self-determining individual or community" (1983, 574). As I discuss in Chapter Two, women's generation of meaning in their own

⁵⁴ In fact I actually used a combination of interviewing methods. On oral narratives and life histories, see Frontiers (1983), Jones (1983), and Note 22 (this chapter).

⁵⁵ This is in marked contrast with Kristin Luker, who established criteria to identify the pro- and anti-abortion activists she would interview. Luker argues that activists are the ones who shape and define the movement because they do the work (1984, 250; see also her Chapter 5). I wanted to understand the women, not the pro- or anti-Local 34 movements.

words and voices, (while problematic in feminist and communication theory) makes a claim to women's experience-based knowledge. Second, I hoped to be able to create an atmosphere in which interviews would be dialogues between people working together "to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other" (Mishler 1986, 53-4). I expected we (the parties to the interview) would be constructing ourselves and shared meanings over the course of the interview and later stages of the research. Third, I wanted the project to be interactive and person-based rather than text-based. I was interested in what our everyday lived experiences can tell theory, rather than in what theory can tell us about our everyday experiences.

Because the mass media had given such attention to the events at Yale. I was able to use their coverage as a basis from which to find women who had not been given any such attention. I asked two local journalists (whose Yale coverage I had read in an independent newspaper) to suggest people with whom to talk. As I anticipated, they named union leaders whose stories had been amply covered by the press.⁵⁶ They also provided me with an introduction to a Yale faculty member supportive of Local 34; this person was one of four people who had conducted and taped a number of interviews with union supporters and organizers.⁵⁷ In

⁵⁶ Even though these leaders' stories may have been inadequately reproduced (misrepresented or incomplete), and I might have elicited a different story from the media "stars" than that presented in the press, for the most part I used my brief interviews with people about whom I had read in the local, regional and national press for referrals to other women.

⁵⁷ These interviews and other research were the basis for Gilpin et al. (n.d.), eventually published in 1988 by Charles Kerr, Chicago.

addition, I asked personal friends in the New Haven area for suggestions of people to meet.

With these contacts my entry into the Yale community was surprisingly easy, but the reasons for this ease were not without consequence. My fears that no one would be willing to talk with me dissipated as I was quickly identified as "another person here to study Local 34."⁵⁸ My status as a graduate student engaged in research afforded me instant legitimacy with nearly everyone affiliated with the university (a legitimacy I was occasionally at pains to dispel, when my research practices did not conform to expectations about my role). I told people I was not associated with either the union or the university, and that I wanted to know about their experiences at Yale over the past several years.

From the start, women I contacted were open and enthusiastic about their experiences and my interest in them. They were used to being "subjects" and eager to tell their stories.⁵⁹ Some were also curious about my personal life and why I had chosen them to interview.⁶⁰ A few suggested I talk with better known pro- and anti-union leaders. I

⁵⁸ One person described the attention paid to Local 34 as "an industry."

⁵⁹ Nearly every woman expressed pleasure at being asked for an interview. The positioning of women as research subjects and their willingness to talk about themselves is discussed by Finch (1984) and Oakley (1981).

⁶⁰ The ways in which I made contact and introduced myself produced different responses. When the referral was from an acquaintance or friend of theirs, women were unlikely to question my intentions. When I had no personal referral or could not reveal my source, women asked more questions about who I was, how I had gotten their names, and what my purposes were.

explained that I was interested in the experiences of people who had not been in the forefront, and nearly everyone with whom I requested an interview agreed to meet with me.⁶¹

In the interviews I asked the women what was important or significant to them about their experiences at Yale during the organizing campaign and later. In relinquishing the traditional researcher's role of determining what was important to study about the events at Yale, I was pursuing a feminist politics of inquiry that encouraged participants to define the breadth and boundaries of the research project. I planned to sustain this feminist politics throughout the project by discussing emergent themes with participants, providing each one with a draft copy of my written work and meeting with any who wished to discuss my interpretations and make changes if necessary. I was working from the perspective of qualitative research, allowing themes to emerge from the data and continuing the dialogue with participants until each of us felt we had reached an "adequate" interpretation (Reinharz 1983, 183). In place of my early anxiety about finding women to interview, a new problem quickly emerged: selecting which women to interview.⁶²

Using the initial contacts from the local journalists and my own friends and names from newspaper articles, I developed a list of over

⁶¹ On the telephone, two women--both anti-union--refused to meet with me. One insisted that the woman who had given me her name could tell me her position better than she could (the referral had come from an outspoken opposition leader). The other told me the union "had no effect on my life. Some people were crazy. I ignored it."

⁶² During my first stay in New Haven I commented in my work journal how massive and diverse the group of women in the bargaining unit was, and the necessity of arriving at criteria for selection that would preserve that diversity.

one hundred women in the Local 34 bargaining unit. I contacted union leaders and the pro-union faculty member and asked them to suggest women who were not leaders, had not been particularly visible during the campaign or the strike, and had not been the subject of significant press coverage. To balance these suggestions from pro-union sources, I developed from news accounts a list of women opposed to the union and asked them for names of women who had not joined the union and had not been involved in organized opposition to the union. This "snowball sample," in combination with more directed "theoretical" and "creative" sampling resulted in forty-six interviews, of which twenty-nine were with white women, four with Black women, and three with men (one Black, two white).⁶³

Some of these women had worked at Yale for over twenty years; others for less than one. They worked in a variety of settings on the campus and in widely differing jobs. They ranged in age from 28 to 64, and the group was roughly representative of the racial and education mix of the bargaining unit as a whole. The women I interviewed took different stands regarding the union, covering a spectrum from active

⁶³ Ten people were interviewed twice. I refer nearly exclusively to "the women" who participated in the research because they were the majority and because the interviews with men did not significantly enter into my interpretation. Cannon et al. (1988) discuss how using volunteer subjects can produce samples that inadequately represent race and class diversity and the need for recruitment strategies that produce broader participation by commonly underrepresented groups. On "snowballing" (chain-referral) to collect a sample, see Taylor and Bogdan (1984); on "theoretical" sampling (using emerging categories to guide selection), see Glaser and Strauss (1967, 49); on "creative" sampling (continuing to interview new subjects until new truths stop appearing), see Douglas (1985). Many writers use these terms without citing sources; I am indebted to Lana Rakow for the Taylor and Bogdan and Douglas citations.

support to active opposition. Several changed their minds and positions over the course of the organizing drive and subsequent contract negotiations.

The interviews took place in homes and workplaces, campus dining facilities, local restaurants, empty classrooms, a neighborhood park, a local shopping mall--wherever was convenient and accessible. Interviews varied in length from forty-five minutes to over three hours. In most cases I asked for suggestions of preferred places and times to meet; as a result nearly all interviews occurred on workdays, at breakfast, lunch or right after work. When we met in their homes, nearly every woman offered me something to eat or drink, from an entire meal (to which I contributed dessert) to a cup of tea. One woman insisted on paying for my lunch after we had eaten at a restaurant near her workplace. When the interview took place at a restaurant but did not include a meal, I frequently offered to pay for the participant's beverage. This seemingly casual exchange of food and money made me uneasy; I worried about "buying" these women's cooperation (even though my offer to pay came at the end of the interview) and their treatment of me as a guest who was, nonetheless, a stranger taking up their time with my questions.⁶⁴ I was

⁶⁴ The feeling that I was imposing did not diminish over time, even though women assured me they wanted to talk with me (and most thanked me for the opportunity) and even though my friends reminded me that participation was by invitation and anyone could refuse. The power dynamics of this kind of research, the social meanings and status of research and being a research subject, and the limited opportunities many women have to speak about their experiences to the socially valorized academic knower kept me attuned to the unclear distinction between courtesy and imposition. Even the familiarity and caring that developed between many of these women and myself did not reduce my sense that this closeness had come about as the pleasant effect of an "unnatural" encounter of researcher with research subject.

aware that these pleasantries, the mannered gestures of a particular culture, were also signs of a certain class standing--despite wide disparities in the financial resources of the women I interviewed. For most participants, there seemed to be an operating assumption of a common middle-class background, with the exceptions being several (but not all) of the women who came from poor and working-class families.

As I note elsewhere, my gender and race certainly contributed to the research experience and my interpretations. While I felt that both Black and white women were forthcoming in our talk about gender, race, and related experiences, there is no way of knowing, as Janiewski has written, how the interviews or interpretations might have been different if the researcher were a Black woman or man, a white man, or a person of another racial-ethnic group (1983, 180). The Black women and man I interviewed had much more to say about race than did any of the white women or men.

I opened each interview with the question "Looking back over your life the past five or so years, what stands out for you?" We then pursued the answer to this question, touching on the reasons particular events stood out. I later learned that requesting detailed descriptions of past events in interviews is known as "guided recall" (Robins and Adenika 1987, 195, Footnote 2). In one-to-one interviews, with my inquiry focused on the experiences and thoughts of each woman, her point of view framed our interaction. In the talk that followed we discussed her personal and family history, education, health, work experiences at Yale and elsewhere, gender, race, and class experiences, exposure to the organizing campaign, responses to it, past and current relationship to

the union, other community or political activities, and future plans. I also asked each woman where she would look for information on an issue of interest to her. This question became a way to talk about the bases for her reasoning and claims to knowledge.⁶⁵ Throughout each interview, I listened for indications of topics or issues not directly addressed by my questions.

In explaining to me recollections of events, responses to them, and understanding of these events as part of her life (and occasionally allowing me to witness or participate in a working out of still unresolved responses and connections), each woman told me who she was, how she came to be that person, and how she had integrated recent events at Yale into her life. I began to understand that each woman was describing reality by telling me a story, and the reality she was describing was one that made sense in terms of her identity and her sense of self. As I met and talked with these women, a relationship emerged between how each of them saw events and where she placed herself with respect to them: a relationship between identity and the possibilities for or threats to that identity perceived in one's surrounding and experienced reality.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ This line of inquiry was suggested to me by my reading of Belenky et al. (1986).

⁶⁶ As mentioned in Chapter Three, Alcoff (1988) and Gunn (1982) consider the relationship between location or position and women's identity. Gunn makes a case for the function of autobiographical stories in answering the question "Where am I?" Feminist philosopher Alcoff argues for positionality as a feature of women's identity: ". . . the position women find themselves in can be actively utilized . . . as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning is constructed, rather than simply the place where a meaning can be discovered (the meaning of femaleness)" (1988, 434; emphasis in original).

I was not prepared for what I heard. I had begun the study as an attempt to understand how meaning is generated, more precisely with regard to what women believe to be possible, how women's claims to knowledge are made, and how and where changes in the social construction of gender occur. I had hoped to learn how some women at Yale had come to take part in claiming the legitimacy of realities that were at odds with the ideological status quo, challenging the control and definitions of the meaning and value of their work. I had also hoped to learn how other women had chosen the legitimacy of the status quo when presented with an alternative picture of reality.

The details of these women's lives--their struggles, hardships, losses, triumphs and convictions--and the openness with which they told their stories forced me to re-evaluate my expectations for the entire study. I did not expect to come to care for, empathize with and be prepared to defend every woman's position, regardless of conflicts in our values, beliefs and judgements. I began to see the study as an exploration of the complexity of subjectivities and concrete realities in these women's lives (and my own) and the sometimes precarious, sometimes assured, and always reflective continual negotiation between subjectivity and "reality." I learned from experience what is meant by "disciplined subjectivity," a term usually used to describe how participant-observer researchers "systematically empathize with the participants" of the situation under investigation. Belenky et al. describe this as a method in which investigators:

participate in the enterprise they are studying in order to undergo experiences similar to those of the other participants, placing themselves in a better position to understand the experiences of the other participants. They use their own reactions to formulate hypotheses about the other participants' reactions (1986, 226).

As they note, "subjectivity is disciplined," meaning that the investigator is careful not to "abandon" herself to the perspectives she seeks to understand (Wilson 1977, 259).⁶⁷ As the study developed, I did not adopt the perspective of any particular woman I interviewed, but I did find my own perspective changing. The distinction between "pro-union" and "anti-union" women began to diminish in importance as I came to see women's experiences of the organizing campaign as located within many other aspects of their lives, aspects that transcended the lines drawn by the Local 34 campaign.⁶⁸ Later, I considered these women's stories in the context of recent feminist theory about identity and subjectivity, and the relevance of such theory for working women and labor organizing.

I attempted to counter the tendency of interviews and transcripts to "freeze" time and meaning. This was important to me for several reasons. I was interested in documenting women's ongoing experiences of the organizing of a clerical and technical workers union at Yale Univer-

⁶⁷ This is not the place to discuss the possible merits of such "abandon," but embedded in the admonition against it (and likewise against "going native") is a presumption of a superior value in the objectivity of a distanced researcher's point of view.

⁶⁸ Several readers suggested I reorganize Chapter Three along pro- and anti-union lines. I resisted their advice because it emphasized a false distinction, diminished the significance of all the other dimensions of these women's lives that went on simultaneously with the union campaign, and disguised an important lesson for labor and other organizing.

sity. I was curious to learn how women made sense of the contradictory and changing representations of reality at the center of the organizing campaign. I wanted to do this research in a manner that would be useful to women who participated and to others who were facing similar issues in their workplaces. And I hoped to create an accurate and meaningful account of women negotiating their multiple and shifting social, economic and political positions.

Since the generation of meaning is not a static process, I incorporated into the research opportunities where the continuing process of the generation of meaning could be represented. This meant transforming (and in some cases inventing, in any prescriptive sense) method. I changed the questions I asked when participants suggested new questions for me to use and as I learned the issues participants were concerned about.⁶⁹ I conducted follow-up interviews to see how and if impressions and memories changed with the passage of time and the occurrence of significant events related to my topic. Despite my desire to allow for the transformation of meaning over time and by many masters, eventually the interviewing and analysis stage of the research had to "stop" so I could write about it.

⁶⁹ In a study of women street vendors, Roberta Spalter-Roth revised her questionnaire (to make it more open ended) when her first five respondents "spontaneously mentioned their problems with safety and sexual harassment" (1988, 274). She made further changes when the announcement of new city regulations altered the working conditions of her street vendor respondents. See also Laslett and Rapoport, whose interview guide emphasized that "If by asking questions in a standardized way the data are lost because words have varying meanings to different subjects, the wording is changed to elicit the experience and perception of the respondent" (1975, 90). Several methods of qualitative research are designed specifically to permit questions to arise out of the research process. See Note 42, this chapter.

Between March 1986 and December 1988 I made five visits to New Haven. The duration of each stay varied, with five days being the briefest and three weeks the longest. During the first four visits I conducted interviews and did other research; on the last trip, which was the briefest, I met with participants who wanted to discuss changes to the draft I had sent them. After each trip to New Haven I returned to Tennessee, where I reviewed my work journal, transcribed portions of interview tapes, and attempted to re-enter other aspects of my life. Mindful of the limitations of transcripts for capturing non-verbal dimensions of talk, I wrote from memory a descriptive account of each interview while listening to each tape. These accounts later proved invaluable for follow-up interviews, the interpretation process and the discussions with participants after they read my written draft.

Moving from interviewing to interpretation and writing was terrifying. Who was I to speak for these women, who had spoken so eloquently to me?⁷⁰ Acknowledging in an early draft that "the detection of meaning is a subjective process" and admitting my hesitation to represent my accumulated perspective of a number of women's individual reflections, I began cautiously to sift through the material. The anxiety (captured in the work journal) with which I simultaneously sought, denied and rejected the emergence of themes and issues reminds me how mystified I was by descriptions of analysis in qualitative research and how committed I was to performing it. I never doubted the

⁷⁰ My work journal contains many entries anticipating this stage, where I would argue with myself about the necessity of interpreting and analyzing the interview material and the political reasons for and against doing so.

necessity (for both a feminist politics of inquiry and my feminism) of creating a second-order interpretation that would "make talk walk" (McRobbie 1982, 57). What I did doubt was my ability to develop an analysis of these women's responses to the organizing of Local 34 that would be fair, open, useful, and caring. In the end I trusted the process I had designed: I discovered that while sifting, sorting and checking were largely solitary activities, talking about my evolving interpretation with anyone who would listen helped immeasurably, as I was forced to articulate ideas that were barely perceptible and then, having done so, return to the interviews and the participants and see where the ideas led.

To sustain the feminist politics of inquiry I had tried to engage in up to this point, I sent copies of a draft manuscript of the interview-based chapter to the women I interviewed.⁷¹ Over the following months we negotiated how to represent in writing their interpretations along with my own.

When I shared my written interpretations with women I interviewed, their responses included confrontation, disagreement and support. After reading the draft, several women provided new information that confirmed portions of my interpretation that had previously been tentative. Other women contributed updates on their personal lives and relationship to the union, and some offered valuable editorial criticisms and factual corrections. No one asked to be removed from the study, and where

⁷¹ Had I provided each participant with a transcript of her interview, the process would have been far more egalitarian. She could have made additions or changes to what she said instead of responding to my interpretation of her account.

necessary we worked together to arrive at compromises. Nearly everyone who responded expressed satisfaction with my representation of her contribution and the larger picture, and many thanked me for providing a way to see themselves and their experiences in the context of other women's accounts of the same events. We now have a text participants feel represents them accurately and I feel preserves my interpretation.⁷² Several women wanted to meet their counterparts, which I have tried to arrange when the breach of confidentiality was acceptable to the parties involved.

Still, a question remains: whose ability to know gets validated in this study? This collection of accounts and interpretations offers a resource from which we can address power and the contradictions of meaning (McGhee 1987a, 313), but all names given (except mine and those of public figures) are pseudonyms and though I give credit and accept blame, I claim authorship. For a feminist politics of inquiry, closure does not come with the last word of text. What becomes of the text, the intended and unintended uses to which it may be put and the altered forms or locations it may take up, will provide more concrete, though unpredictable, answers to the validation question.

I began this study of women, subjectivity and the generation of meaning ignorant of the degree to which fashioning a feminist politics of inquiry transforms the production of knowledge and products of research. I was equally ignorant of the extent to which my own research practices would have to undergo transformation as I experienced the

⁷² Several participants did not respond to my offer to provide drafts for their use, and a few who did receive drafts had no comments.

power dynamics embedded in them. However aware I may already have been at the outset of the exercise of power in interactive research, the elusive certainty of meaning and understanding, the apparent and hidden dynamics of class, gender, race, sexuality, and culture in conversation and analysis, the imprecision and untranslatable qualities of language and non-verbal communication, and the determinism of rationality, I am now both better informed of these and more aware of how much there remains to be considered and accounted for. There is no teacher more compelling than an encounter with realities and voices different from one's own.

Chapter Five

Women's generation of meaning, identity politics, and the politics of location

In Chapter Two, I introduced two concepts, a politics of location and identity politics, to illustrate a relationship between subjectivity and identity. In that discussion, my purpose was the exposition of a theoretical framework whose explanatory and strategic merits might be assessed against the stories women told, as presented in Chapter Three. My purpose in returning to these concepts in a concluding chapter is to sketch out some features of that assessment. Given the concerns I raised in Chapter Four regarding the politics of the production of knowledge, the proposed task is both appropriate and requisite, for through their explanatory power, theoretical frameworks also authorize meanings.

The initial motivation for this study was my interest in how the women at Yale were making sense of and evaluating the possibilities represented by the union and the university. The events at Yale offered an occasion to investigate women's generation of meaning in a context of social change, an investigation that might yield some understanding of how and why social change is (or is not) perceived to be possible. I was also interested in what the meanings generated by the women at Yale might offer to feminist and labor organizing strategies. The discussion in Chapter Two suggests that the concepts of subjectivity in general and

gender subjectivity in particular are central components of women's generation of meaning. I should now like to consider the implications of that suggestion in light of the women's stories and my initial concerns.

To what extent is subjectivity a useful tool for understanding women's generation of meaning regarding the events at Yale? Certainly the idea of subject position, as the location simultaneously created by subjectivity and within which subjectivity is experienced, seems to have some explanatory power. The women's stories show how their responses to the representations of reality and social possibility offered by the union and the university were grounded in each woman's individual experience. For example, Pam Norden's work experiences at Yale coincided with the union's representation of inequities in compensation and benefits and her realization that many of the promises of the American dream were not coming true for her. For Barbara Neil, the contrast between her previous workplace and Yale was so great that she could not fathom union supporters' dissatisfaction; moreover, having never experienced obstacles to her personal goals, her belief in her individual ability to achieve whatever she wanted remained intact.

The women's stories speak most clearly to the relationship between the generation of meaning and subject positions with regard to the assertion of identity, or whether each thought the union or the university acknowledged her material reality and offered a place for who she was and who she wanted to be. For Jane Bevins, the union represented the possibility of living without a paycheck during a strike, which was untenable for a single parent who hoped to advance her own employment

security while working fulltime to support her family. Equally important, after her divorce Bevins had learned to believe in herself as someone who "could make decisions" and could be "an independent individual," characteristics the union's appeal appeared to undermine. Similarly, the union's depiction of Yale C&Ts as exploited workers was incompatible with both Liz Perpich's and Rita Kushner's sense of themselves as people who had worked hard and accomplished a great deal through their individual efforts. These three women made sense of the union in terms that sustained their realities and whatever subject positions were then dominant for each of them, whether a dependence on weekly income, a belief in one's individual ability to achieve, or an ethical commitment to do a job, as when Bevins stated, "if I say I'm going to work for you, that's my responsibility to uphold."

Confirmation of material experience and personal identity is equally present in the meanings generated by union supporters. The union claimed that an inequitable relationship between C&Ts and their employer would change only with concerted effort and solidarity. This made sense to Susanna Folsom, for whom the union provided "a chance to express something I'd been wanting to express all my life." Organizing together, rather than relying on one's individual ability to negotiate, was an appropriate means by which to "take on something as big as Yale" (Folsom). For May George, who already saw herself as a player in the ongoing social movement for civil rights, the relationship between subjectivity and the union was inverted; instead of recognizing a place for herself in the union's vision, the union fit into George's worldview. And while Anne Proctor initially did not see her personal needs

in the union's representations, she came to understand and to identify with the positions of others that differed from her own: "I wasn't feeling as oppressed as some people were," she said, "but I became convinced." Clearly subjectivity contributes to the generation of meaning, and the concept of subject position advances theorizing (and strategizing) about the generation of meaning in any particular context. The contribution gender subjectivity makes, to meaning-making, theory and strategy, is another matter.

What do the women's stories suggest about gender subjectivity as a factor in the generation of meaning? As previously mentioned, the widespread attribution of the significance of gender for the events at Yale was not readily apparent in the women's stories, self-descriptions and accounts of the events at Yale. Nonetheless, while a number of women (particularly those opposed to the union) resisted identifying themselves by gender--asserting a preference to think of people as people--the material conditions of the lives of all the women I interviewed, pro- and anti-union, bear markers of gender dynamics: single parenting, periods of unemployment due to childrearing, few opportunities for advancement in either blue or white collar employment, difficulty obtaining jobs appropriate for their skills and training, compensation below that of comparable jobs held by men. Indeed, consciousness of social and cultural gender dynamics is present in many of the women's stories. Margaret Connolly offered an indignant analysis of the double-standard with respect to wages and the very different social expectations of men's and women's professional wardrobes, and many women

mentioned unequivocal support for equal opportunity and equal pay guidelines.

Still, there is ample evidence here to suggest that "inhabiting" a subject position constructed by gender dynamics does not guarantee that gender subjectivity directly informs the generation of meaning. The unavoidable taking up of subject positions constructed by gender dynamics is not the same thing as the conscious use of those gendered subject positions as locations from which to make sense of the world. For Susanna Folsom, Pam Norden, and Linda Wilson, for example, gender subjectivity offered explanations of some of their life experiences as well as what it would take for things to change. This suggests that gender subjectivity, when used to make sense of the world in an intentional way that accounts for gender experience and gender dynamics, may be particularly useful in understanding some women's generation of meaning. That is, both self-identification as a woman (in a world in which gender matters) and attention to one's experiences as those of a gendered individual contribute to the generation of meaning. These women's meanings differed from meanings made by women for whom gender subjectivity was not as salient, or for whom gender subjectivity signified a reality that did not have a place for who she was and who she wanted to be.

As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, gender subjectivity clearly "works" as a theoretical notion, providing one way to theorize the generation of meaning. For example, Pam Norden's realization that "for some people you are nothing more than an aggregate of your sexual organs" suggests how gender subjectivity informed her explanations of

her experiences and the meanings she gave them, contributing as well to Norden's responses to the union and what it might mean for her. In addition to the thread of gender subjectivity one could draw through many of these stories as a location from which women negotiate the relationship between experience and meaning, some women used the subjectivity of gender to explain their experiences to themselves and to explain their reasoning to others, as when Linda Wilson described a new consciousness that on occasion enabled her to think, "this is happening to me because I'm a woman."

One could certainly argue that gender subjectivity is present in the meanings generated by all women, irrespective of how we choose to identify ourselves, if the taking up of subject positions constructed by gender dynamics is inevitable. For example, several women's desire to maintain what they perceived to be independence and flexibility is in contrast with (if not an effect of) their subjective experiences as women in a culture where female independence--economic, social, political, emotional--is discouraged. In other words, absence of any articulated or direct relationship between gender subjectivity and the generation of meaning does not mean gendered subject positions do not exist; rather, negotiation of the experience of gendered subject positions could reasonably result in refusing the meanings gendered subjectivity implies.¹

¹ Paradoxically, the efficacy of gender subjectivity as a theoretical concept that works makes it suspect in the present context of deconstructionist/postmodernist theorizing. Susan Bordo (1990) offers a lucid examination of theoretical and practical risks associated with what she calls the "gender skepticism" developing in response to several trends in philosophy and social theory.

It would also appear, nevertheless, that gender subjectivity doesn't "work" as an explanatory concept for everyone or all the time. Does some women's rejection of gender subjectivity as an explanatory tool indicate that the concept is prescriptive rather than descriptive? By setting up the category of gender as its referent, does this theoretical approach simultaneously and dangerously elide and obscure other significant aspects of experience? The argument from this quarter is that looking to gender subjectivity as the way to understand women's generation of meaning is looking too narrowly and too exclusively, missing the implications of a theory of subjectivity: neither gender nor any other single subjectivity (or subject position) is experienced in isolation; as Susan Bordo notes, "gender never exhibits itself in pure form but in the context of lives that are shaped by a multiplicity of influences, which cannot be neatly sorted out" (1990, 150). As discussed in Chapter Three, race and class are among these influences, but rather than dismissing all such categories of social analysis because no one of them can provide a totalizing explanation, the political project of feminism requires that we be both sensitive to particularities and pragmatic (*Ibid.*, 153). Indeed, exploration of gender subjectivity as a theoretical concept and of subjectivity in general in discussions of methodology (as in Chapter Four) attest to the value of admitting, using and assessing partial perspectives.

The concept of gender subjectivity has also "worked" historically as part of a political strategy. Explanations of the world from the point of view of women's experiences provided a basis for the North American women's movement early in this century, and again in the

revival of feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. More recently, as feminist theorists and organizers (as well as others who are not feminists) hasten to "correct" their analyses and practices in light of the criticisms of groups who are not (primarily or exclusively) gender-identified, the question that arises is whether gender is (still) something around which an identity politics might be built.

The appeal of identity politics--the empowerment and clarity possible in naming issues from a perspective of shared identity--is somewhat thwarted in light of the instability of subject positions outlined earlier. The continuous struggle to maintain a coherent and stable identity by negotiating between subject positions requires vesting some subjectivities with greater legitimacy than others. This implies that any identity politics similarly invokes a hierarchy of subjectivities, and as such invites resistance, as we saw in women's responses to the particular "identity politics" employed by the union. As discursive constructions, identities (and the words we use to describe them) are highly contested;² consider, for example, the contested meanings of today's discourses of gender. Liberal belief in gender equity (but not equality) is widespread, but the commitment of holders of those beliefs to engaging in political activity to ensure their realization is not. The emphasis of a politics of gender identity is like any other single emphasis: it excludes additional (self- and other-)identifying characteristics. Moreover, it moves to the fore the

² See Judith Butler, who goes beyond the now-familiar assertion of gender as a social, cultural, discursive and performative construct to show how "the distinction between sex and gender is no distinction at all" (1990, 7).

(contested) meanings of gender subjectivity.³ Within the thicket of gender and other subjectivities contributing to the construction, dissolution and maintenance of identities and meanings, how can one organize at all?⁴ Donna Haraway, Linda Alcoff, and Judith Butler offer three responses to this question.

Building on Sandra Harding's alternative paradigm for objectivity (see page 206, this text), Donna Haraway assumes that no perspective is ever more than partial. In the rush to incorporate a multitude of partial perspectives into whatever theories, programs or strategies for change we design, she cautions against moving towards unqualified pluralism (and the paralysis pluralism imposes upon political theorizing and activism). An unqualified pluralism would award every partial perspective equal weight; where Harding's vision is one which privileges morally and politically emancipatory interests (1986b, 250), Haraway

³ Taking advantage of a considerably less contested ideological assumption, the successful campaign to organize clerical and technical workers at Harvard University did not appeal to a shared identity but evoked instead an individualistic ethos and the responsibility of workers to represent themselves. Shostak notes that the tone of the campaign at Harvard was intentionally not an adversarial one (1991, 97). See also "First contract" (1989), "Harmony" (1990), McClure (1988), "Special Report" (1990) and "Union Teaches" (1988).

⁴ An acquaintance who is a labor organizer asked whether the answer is to make twelve leaflets, each appealing to different "identities." This question misses the point: because of the shifting nature of subject positions, targeting any particular identities invites resistance or rejection from at least some quarters. The task, it seems to me, is to write leaflets that allow the people to whom they are addressed to be makers of the meanings of the collectivity, and perhaps not to write leaflets at all until some consensus is reached regarding what people think they are organizing about and for. Community organizers have found the latter approach to be effective. I realize, of course, that it takes time to do this, and neither the dominant models for labor organizing nor practical circumstances ordinarily allow for such a lengthy process.

reminds us that "the positionings of the subjugated are not exempt from reexamination, decoding, deconstruction, and interpretation" (1988, 584). That is, because the identities of the subjugated are not "innocent" of the conditions of their creation, identity politics is not a promising strategy for learning to "see well" (*Ibid.*, 585). By extension, identities excluded from common forms of identity politics are not necessarily better foci for "transformations of knowledge and ways of seeing" (*Ibid.*), nor are they any less likely to elicit resistance when used as the focus of organizing. One answer, according to Haraway, is to maintain "a commitment to mobile positioning and to passionate detachment" (*Ibid.*). This is a difficult (if not impossible) task in the everyday contexts of organizing for social change, which seem to require consistency in statements of purpose and objectives and have little tolerance for "mobile positioning."

Linda Alcoff proposes a synthesis of identity politics with a politics of location as suggested by the concerns raised by Haraway. Seeking to sustain some claim on the commonality of gender identity, Alcoff acknowledges that this commonality is one of position, a place from which to "act politically":

If we combine the concept of identity politics with a conception of the subject as positionality, we can conceive of the subject as nonessentialized and emergent from a historical experience and yet retain our political ability to take gender as an important point of departure. Thus we can say at one and the same time that gender is not natural, biological, universal, ahistorical, or essential and yet still claim that gender is relevant because we are taking gender as a position from which to act politically (Alcoff 1988, 422).

In theory, this looks promising; in practice, the synthesis cannot account for the multiplicity of positions, some of which are contradic-

tory, from which gender identity looks anything but common. Like Mary Poovey's description of the unitary category of "woman" as "currently both a position within a dominant, binary symbolic order and . . . arbitrarily (and falsely) unified," gender may no longer be a "legitimate rallying point for political actions" (Poovey 1988, 62). Even though Susanna Folsom, Linda Wilson, Anne Proctor, Sara Brach, Barbara Neil, and Laura Morrison all acknowledged the existence of gendered (subject) positions, they were far from agreeing whether such positions offer a place with which to identify, from which to "act politically" or even from which to speak. A politics of location was at work here, and worked against, rather than with, gender identity politics.⁵

Judith Butler, on the other hand, advocates a politics of location. She asks:

Is "unity" necessary for effective political action? . . . Does "unity" set up an exclusionary norm of solidarity at the level of identity that rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity concepts, or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption as an explicit political aim? (1990, 15)

Butler argues against a politics of identity, seeing in it a standard of unity that works against the political objectives of dismantling artificial unities such as the one described by Poovey. Butler rejects even

⁵ Despite considerable obstacles to organizing around gender identity politics (and to the credit of organizers), such organizing continues and to some extent succeeds. Other forms of identity politics are alive and well. Successes are notable in efforts which build on the legacies of social movements of the past (the civil rights movement, the welfare rights movement) in which activists explained themselves and their causes by reference to shared identities which were positional. Today, parents seeking improved schools, residents of rural communities organizing for environmentally sound industrial development, anti-abortion activists and lesbian and gay rights activists all organize out of a politics of location (sometimes geographic, sometimes discursive) that is the foundation for more visible discourses of identity politics.

Alcoff's synthesis of identity with a commonality grounded in its own construction. Whether the strategy is one of a politics of gender or some other characteristic of identity, identity politics calls for a unity that both experience and individual meaning-making challenge.

Even though Local 34's proposition of the necessity of unity for action was ultimately successful, the resistance elicited by the campaign raises important questions for organizing in general and for organizing women in particular. In terms of the theoretical framework of subjectivity and subject positions outlined earlier, identity politics turns subject positions into boundaries, reinforcing the very locations (geographic as well as discursive) that could be the subject of "a radical inquiry into the political construction and regulation of identity" (Butler 1990, xi). The women who most vigorously resisted identifying with the subject positions put forward by the union--Rita Kushner, Laura Morrison, Liz Perpich, Barbara Neil, and Margaret Connolly--did so from discursive and material locations that sustained their identities. Any social possibilities they perceived were personal; rather than representing desirable change, the union presented an obstacle. One could explain these women's opposition to the union as resistance to the identity politics of the organizing drive, an identity politics which set up barriers and distinctions among the union's own constituency. As Butler would predict, the identity politics of the

organizing campaign invited resistance by insisting on a unified identity not all members of the bargaining unit shared.⁶

What the women at Yale had in common was their attempt to maintain stability in an unstable world. Carving out a stable identity is a matter of negotiating the inconsistencies and contradictions between subject positions and everyday realities, making sense of one's self and the options available in both discourses and practices. The negotiation of subject positions, while in the service of constructing a coherent identity, takes place from and within particular locations. This positionality is not easily accommodated by an identity politics, and in this instance the exclusionary effects of identity politics meant that support for the particular social vision the union represented came only from workers who could see a desirable place for themselves in that vision.

By asserting an identity politics of "us vs. them," Local 34 organizers established boundaries between people for whom such identities were meaningful and people for whom they were not. The identities of "us" and "them" emerged within a specific historical and cultural context, but union organizers and members sharing this analysis were not sensitive to the multiple positions within and from which their constituency generated meaning and potentially very different identities. In contrast, a politics of location means seeing identity as positionality--"identity as an effect, that is, produced or generated"

⁶ This is an example of what I referred to in Chapter Two as the consolidation and subjectification of women: the attempted consolidation (by the union) of all bargaining unit members into a homogeneous identity that some women resisted.

(Butler 1990, 147). Feminist theorizing of the relationship between subjectivities, experience, and meaning makes this point, and in so doing, restores the possibility of individual agency that the union's identity politics denied. In a familiar variation of organizing themes of empowerment, women opposed to the union saw themselves as the agents of their own lives, originators and sources of meaning and possibility, while union supporters saw social forces and institutions, including Yale, imposing limitations on their ability to act. A politics of location would be a constructive application of theorizing about gender and other subjectivities, admitting many stories about reality into the arenas of political and theoretical strategizing and advancing both. By respecting and building upon women's generation of diverse meanings, we may ultimately enable the telling of very different stories about reality.

Appendix

Two Notes on Style

Feminist research on linguistic sexism has problematized a number of scholarly standards of language use, the most familiar of which may be the "generic masculine." In the words of Francine W. Frank and Paula A. Treichler, a decision about pronoun use "may proclaim a loyalty, a compromise, or a negotiation" (1989, 28). In writing this text I have repeatedly encountered instances where use of the third person plural--as in "women . . . they"--feels both awkward and dishonest, included as I am in the category "woman." In cases where the reference is to the general category, I acknowledge this inclusion by use of the first person plural "we." In cases where the reference is to a collectivity of which I am not a member--as in "the women at Yale"--I exclude myself by use of the third person plural. Although these choices may "sound" awkward to readers schooled in traditional standards of language use, the gain in clarity of meaning is considerable.

Sensitivity to linguistic sexism has slowly made possible feminist sensitivity to linguistic racism. In writing this text I capitalize Black but not white; with Catherine MacKinnon I intend by this distinction to signal:

a heritage, an experience, a cultural and personal identity, the meaning of which becomes specifically stigmatic and/or glorious and/or ordinary under specific social conditions. It is as much socially created as, and at least in the American context no less specifically meaningful or definitive than, any linguistic, tribal, or religious ethnicity, all of which are conventionally recognized by capitalization (1982, 516).

In contrast, the term white is definitive of neither heritage nor linguistic, tribal, or religious ethnicity, and functions generically in the English language, in this case as an indicator of skin pigmentation.

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