AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

<u>Sindy K. Mau</u> for the degree of <u>Master of Arts in</u>

<u>Interdisciplinary Studies</u> in <u>Women Studies, Gerontology,</u>

<u>and Sociology</u> presented on <u>February 17, 1997</u>. Title:

<u>The Resistance and Survival of Old Women: Striving for</u>

<u>Empowerment in the Face of Oppression and Violence</u>.

Abstract approved: _____ Redacted for Privacy _____

Janet Lee

Old women face a unique set of obstacles in their
quest for empowerment. In this study the concept of
empowerment is explored by politicizing issues of personal
safety. The most significant factors that impede an old
woman's sense of safety and control include oppression,
primarily ageism and sexism, along with violence and fear.

For this study, thirty-nine women over sixty were
self-selected for semi-structured interviews as a result of
their participation in a personal safety workshop.
Interviewees ranged in age from sixty to eight-three, were
of diverse cultural backgrounds, and most resided in a
metropolitan area. An emancipatory methodology was used as
a means to empower participants throughout the research
process. The study is both exploratory and interpretive,
with the subjective voice of the researcher present
throughout the project.

Acts of resistance and survival were reflected in the daily lived experiences of the interviewees, validating the premise that old women face obstacles in their quest for empowerment.

The Resistance and Survival of Old Women:
Striving for Empowerment in the Face of Oppression and
Violence

by

Sindy Kay Mau

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented February 17, 1997
Commencement June 1997

<u>Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies</u> thesis of
<u>Sindy K. Mau</u> presented on <u>February 17, 1997</u>

APPROVED:

Redacted for Privacy

_____
Major Professor, representing Women Studies

Redacted for Privacy

_____
Committee Member, representing Gerontology

Redacted for Privacy
_____
Committee Member, representing Sociology

Redacted for Privacy

_____
Director of the Women Studies Program

Redacted for Privacy

_____
Dean of Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the
permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries.
My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any
reader upon request.

Redacted for Privacy

_____   _____
                        Sindy K. Mau, Author

Table of Contents

Table of Contents (Continued)

The Resistance and Survival of Old Women:
Striving for Empowerment in the Face of Oppression and
Violence

Introduction

In my thesis I examine the quest of old women for
empowerment in the midst of oppression and an accompanying
climate of violence. For the purposes of this study, I am
defining the term old to be women over sixty. Empowerment
stems from the knowledge that individually and
collectively, old women have the right to seek and create
meaningful change in their lives and that of others. Even
though empowerment is subjective and fluid, it emerges from
critical thinking, a process that involves reflection and
analysis of how power dynamics affect all areas of one's
life.

It is the act of seeing the personal as political that
has the greatest potential to transform the lives of old
women. Empowerment occurs when old women have an awareness
of themselves as players, rather than observers. Even
though each person is unique in how they experience
empowerment, it may not be an exaggeration to describe it
as a transcendental state. The increased awareness can
bring both the motivation to initiate personal and social
change, as well as a level of contentment stemming from an
understanding of factors that have influenced one's life.

This study explores the numerous factors that may impede or support old women when seeking a sense of control and autonomy in their daily lives. The process of empowerment is likely suppressed if an old woman does not feel she has the right to speak her mind or is restricted to her home in fear of her safety. Issues of personal safety are intimately connected to the lived realities of old women, from their choice of activities and relationships, to their self-esteem and hope for the future. I have therefore focused on the politics of personal safety as the initial step in understanding how to facilitate the quest for empowerment. Heretofore personal safety has been largely conceptualized as a reaction to various forms of violence. It is imperative that this standard and seemingly objective approach to personal safety be replaced with a model that contextualizes personal safety within a political framework in order to understand how inequitable power relations have affected issues of safety and control, and consequently the empowerment of old women.

My research is based on an emancipatory model that evolved in response to the needs and interests of the old women that participated in this study. Since this particular research question does not emerge from any one academic field, the study is exploratory by nature. My subjective perspective is manifested in all areas of this

project, especially in my interpretation of the information gathered during the interviews.

I conducted personal safety workshops for women over sixty years of age, and it was through these workshops that I accessed my sample of participants. The content of the workshops emerged from my previous experience teaching self defense workshops and classes. All workshop participants were asked to be interviewed for my research project and through a process of self-selection, I interviewed thirty-nine old women. As a result of the workshops and interviews, I became aware of the diverse methods of resistance and survival used by old women in a society where their denigration and exploitation has not received widespread public attention nor corrective action. It is my goal to explore the "tough, critical and confusing stories about the ideological and discursive patterns of inequitable power arrangements" (Fine 219) as they are revealed in this study. Since there has been a lack of academic discourse analyzing how the political status of old women affects all avenues of their lives, and in particular personal safety, continued dialogue and research is needed. My study addresses this disparity.

The presentation of this research project is divided into three chapters. In chapter one issues of personal safety are contextualized within a political framework, exploring the numerous factors that impede or enable the process of empowerment. This chapter serves as a review of

the literature relevant to my research topic and provides the reader with a wide range of information from which to analyze the interviews, thus increasing the usefulness of this project. In chapter two, I explain my research process, highlighting the unique benefits and ethical dilemmas encountered when using an emancipatory methodology. The final chapter is the presentation and analysis of selected portions of the interviews, focusing on the interplay of resistance and survival and their relationship to empowerment.

In analyzing how old women are situated within a political context, I chose to use an oppression theory model as a tool to explore how issues of personal safety affect the status of old women. Oppression is the "systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of one group by another" (Yamato 59). The mistreatment is reinforced by ideologies that form the foundation of institutions and result in dominant or privileged groups having more access to power and control than other groups. Hierarchies of power based on age, sex/gender, class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, and religion are manifested in the form of ageism, sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, and anti-Semitism. All of these "isms" constitute "simultaneous and interlocking systems of oppression" (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 205).

Ideologies maintain an imbalance of power between groups by their ability to "distort reality at the same

time that they justify the status quo" (Anderson and Hill Collins 65). One example of an ideology is the assumption that every woman should and does have a man to take care of her. This ideology distorts reality by dismissing the experiences of single, lesbian, working class, and widowed women. It also justifies the status quo, i.e. the nuclear family of dad, mom, and two kids. In the "ideal" all-American family, mom stays home with the kids and dad brings home enough money to take care of the entire family. This ideal does not reflect reality for the vast majority of people. It is also assumed that in their old age, women will be supported by their husbands' past earnings and benefits. This ideology is embedded in the institutional structure of marriage and family, Social Security, pension programs, welfare, and employment.

Ideologies are woven into the structure of institutions, forming the basis for laws and doctrines. Although institutions are not monolithic nor stagnant, they often function as a means to uphold the status quo and thus erect many barriers that curtail the empowerment of old women. The major institutions that facilitate and maintain patterns of domination in society include the media, family, education, work, medical, legal, and judicial systems.

My methodology emerges from an emancipatory model which seeks to contribute to the "eventual end of social and economic conditions that oppress women and the

achievement of a free world" (Acker, Barry, Esseveld 134).
This model complements the aforementioned oppression
theory, since both focus on the unequal distribution of
power in society. I chose an emancipatory methodology
because the goal of my particular research project was not
to simply assess and report, but rather to explore, analyze
and instigate change.

The emancipatory intent of this research project is
carried out in numerous ways. I developed personal safety
workshops for old women and continually revised my material
in an effort to meet the needs and interests of various
groups and individuals. My intent was to create a forum
where old women might feel comfortable sharing their lived
experiences, while having the opportunity to explore how
personal safety issues were connected to their individual
lives and collective identity and status as old women. The
participants also had the opportunity to learn a diverse
number of personal safety tools, both from the resources I
presented and from each other.

Those who chose to be interviewed after the workshop
had the opportunity to explore issues related to personal
safety in more depth. Since the interviews were semi-
structured, many women chose to verbalize areas that were
of particular importance in their lives and often seemed to
gain clarity as they shared their thoughts and experiences.
This process was emancipatory through the validation of
their lives in relation to a topic, personal safety, that

is rarely discussed in a way that locates the empowerment of old women as central to the research itself.

My interest in this research area occurred as a result of my employment and volunteer work at a nursing home and my academic background in women studies, gerontology, and sociology, specifically in the areas of self defense and violence against women. In an effort to offset the disillusionment I often experienced as an activity director at a nursing home, I sought to become an agent of positive change in the lives of old women.

I view my research as a joint project in conjunction with the old women who chose to participate in my study. Together we explored how issues of safety and control were connected to their approach to life, exchanging our ideas and experiences. It is my hope that this research and subjective analysis will be used by scholars and activists as a springboard for creating meaningful social change.

Politics of Personal Safety

I begin this chapter by exploring the various factors that may act as barriers to the empowerment of old women. I focus primarily on ageism and sexism as the two forms of oppression that all women in my study have lived with and struggled against. In order to draw attention to the complex nature of all forms of oppression, various obstacles to empowerment are explored in the presentation of classism, racism, and heterosexism. I examine violence and fear and their role as forms of domination and control that keep systems of power in place and thereby impede the empowerment of old women. Because many of the research participants indicated an increase in attention given to the media, this institution, and in particular television, is analyzed as an agent for the dispersal of stereotypes.

In an attempt to balance the oppositional forces that work against the empowerment of old women, I have included various methods of outreach and strategies for change. I focus on the potential of various personal safety approaches in building confidence and independence. It is important to acknowledge and celebrate the diverse number of positive strides made toward the empowerment of old women. Nonetheless, the primary purpose of my research is to examine the struggle for empowerment in the midst of oppression and violence. The status of old women is often depoliticized and sugar-coated, as if their previous

experiences can be separated from their present identity, as if they no longer face oppression and violence.

Oppression

<u>Ageism</u>

Ageism is "the belief that a person's worth and abilities are determined solely by chronological age," (Doress-Worters and Siegel xxii) or "discrimination against people on the basis of age" (Nuessel n.p.). It touches every aspect of society, and yet is seldom recognized (Palmore 86) and thus rarely included by gerontologists and other scholars in their research associated with old women. The lack of discourse by academics and community members specifically addressing ageism has led to a distorted and therefore limited understanding of factors influencing the lives of old women.

Fundamental to the empowerment of old women is the recognition that differential treatment based on age is a form of discrimination and will not be tolerated. Harold G. Cox, in <u>Later Life: The Realities of Aging</u>, elaborates on the lack of recognition afforded to age discrimination: "many people are required to retire at age 70, do lose occupational roles and status at that time, are forced to live on approximately half the income they previously received, and have limited resources as they attempt to solve their current problems" (145). According to Baba Copper in <u>Over the Hill: Reflections on Ageism between</u>

Women, "Very few women recognize that ageism is the name of their emerging experience" (76). If old women do not consider ageism as one possible source of the negative or difficult experiences they are faced with, they may view problems or acts of injustice as "personal-interpersonal or physical or economic--instead of political" (Copper 85).

Progress toward social change and empowerment is lost when inequalities are attributed to individual inadequacies rather than to a system or structure that perpetuates an imbalance of power. By ignoring how various forms of oppression affect the lives of old women, meaningful change on both individual and structural levels cannot ensue. Without the recognition of oppression by all members of the community, ageism will continue to "create prejudice and misunderstandings toward elders in our society" (Fredriksen 164). Many feminist researchers have addressed the need to politicize the research process in an effort to end discrimination and oppression (Comstock; Fine; Harding; Lather; Patricia Maguire; Oakley). Maria Mies explains how this goal pertained to her research: "It became necessary to help women understand that their own experience of male violence was not just their individual bad luck or even their fault, but that there is an objective social basis for this private violence by men against women and children" (132). The "objective social basis" that Mies refers to is analogous to institutions and structures that

in this society are regarded as neutral, with their power rarely questioned.

Institutions, defined as "fairly stable social arrangements and practices that persist over time," (Knowles and Prewitt 5) are not structured to meet the needs of old women. Although institutions may seem intangible, the power they hold is very real. Aveen Maguire, author of <u>Defining Women: Social Institutions and Gender Divisions</u>, believes that "the reality of our everyday lives is conveyed to us through social and political institutions" (18). The assumption that all institutions provide equal access and opportunity to all people is a myth. Institutions arise out of a historical and political context whereby social norms and laws were erected to serve and maintain those who occupied positions of power.

The oppression experienced by old women is systematic and therefore part of the structure of the institution. Expensive prescription drugs and the rising cost of long-term care, neither of which is fully covered by Medicare, are two examples of how medical and insurance conglomerates continue to exploit old women. Another example is Social Security, a program presumed to provide a fair return on lifelong earnings. In truth, benefits are based on paid wages, with deductions calculated according to income. Many old women came of age in an era where they worked at home with little opportunity for outside employment. Even

if a job or career was possible, the wages were considerably lower for a woman than a man. Social norms, stereotypes, and sex discrimination are the basis for low Social Security payments, in addition to the lack of pension and retirement plans held by women. Institutions may appear equitable, but behind every institutional practice is a history of power relations unfavorable to certain groups, in this case old women.

Arber and Ginn argue that "it is not old age which is responsible for disadvantages later in life, but a social system in which those defined as having no productive role . . . are condemned to a relatively low standard of living" (51). It is not old age itself that diminishes the power old women hold, it is the social construction of what it means to be old, via institutions and ideologies, that negatively influences society's view and treatment of old people.

Institutions are constructed from ideologies. Ideologies provide the basis for the laws and codes of conduct that form the foundation of institutions. According to Fine, "research that breaks social silence fractures the very ideologies that justify power inequities" (221). Ideologies that are used as a means to exert control over certain groups take the form of stereotypes. Old women experience stereotypes based on age and gender, "both powerful as well as intertwined" (Troll 22). As a result of stereotypes, people are dehumanized by

a denial of what makes them unique as individuals (Pharr 59). Individual characteristics are overlooked when stereotypes are used to define all old women, providing a distorted and largely inaccurate portrayal. There are many stereotypes of old women; one example is the assumption that all old women are asexual. The harmful effects of stereotypes include the "avoidance of sexual relations, new ideas, productivity, effective activity, and social engagement" (Palmore 102). Conformity to stereotypes curtails the ability of old women to know and use their individual and collective strengths toward empowerment.

The subtle effects of stereotypes can seem invisible and consequently are rarely acknowledged, though the harm inflicted is monumental. According to Troll, "We have an entire set of negative attitudes toward old people which make those who are older feel declassed, and those who are younger feel uneasy about associating with such inconsequential individuals or about getting old themselves" (23). The community as a whole suffers from the forced separation of the young from the old and consequently opportunities to grow and learn from each other are lost.

Changing one's identity throughout life is part of the natural process of maturation, but the denial of who we were in relationship to who we are now or will be is a phenomenon embedded in a system of power relations whereby old is regarded as inferior, a status old women are forced

to grudgingly and perhaps painfully accept. Barbara

Macdonald, co-author of <u>Look Me in the Eye: Old Women,</u>

<u>Aging and Ageism</u>, describes her observations of old women:

> [s]he cannot remember who it was she used to be. She wants to show me pictures of her grandchildren as though all the answers could be found there--among the living. And I go on down the street and I know there has been a catastrophe, a holocaust of my generation of women, and I have somehow been spared. (*Do You* 17)

Macdonald points to a break in the consistency of

one's life. Not only is the present self-identity of an

old woman separated from the identity constructed during

earlier years, there is little awareness of who she is now.

All attention is focused on her offspring instead of

affirming who she is as an old woman. She has given up her

inclusion as a central character, turning the limelight on

her grandchildren while she fades into oblivion, thus

giving up any control or investment she may have in her own

life as separate from her children and grandchildren.

The denial of an identity formed during one's youth is

a survival mechanism in a culture with strict rules and

consequences for those who do not conform to ageist

stereotypes. If youth is synonymous with beauty, and

beauty means to be wrinkle free, an old woman cannot hold

onto the status and identity she had in her youth. She is

forced to cut off all ties to her youth and is left with

her new identity as an old woman. Youth and all the years

up until old age have formed the identity of an old woman.

To lose one's unique qualities in lieu of a predetermined mold is comparable to grieving over the loss of a best friend.

This forced transition represents a loss of power. According to Genevay, "an aging woman is not equal, in beauty, power or potential . . . to youth, or to the aging man" (2). Healey goes one step farther by declaring that "women are only valuable when they are attractive and useful to men" (59). This declaration reflects the dominant ideology emerging from white, heterosexual, middle-class American culture, which influences many aspects of an old woman's life.

Young women retain their semblance of power by holding onto their status as objects of beauty for as long as they can. If young women are defined by their beauty and reproductive functions, old women are defined by the attributes they no longer have. According to Copper, "Male contempt for the older woman as unfit for the reproducer/sex object roles filled by younger women (still the primary source of female power in patriarchy) is the foundation of old woman's powerless position" (16). Thus it follows that young women might intentionally separate themselves from old women, in fear of their inescapable aging, and in order to access power granted by men to young women in a misogynist society. Cynthia Rich, co-author of Look Me in the Eye, confirms this premise:

> It is not natural, and it is dangerous, for
> younger women to be divided as by a taboo from
> old women--to live in our own shaky towers of
> youth. It is intended, but not natural that we
> be ashamed of, dissociated from, our future
> selves, sharing men's loathing for the women we
> are daily becoming. (*The Women* 86).

Rich emphasizes that the contempt internalized by old women is not natural. It is not instinctual or destined, rather it is a socially constructed phenomenon which can be changed. It is not a woman's fate to feel remorse and loathing about her own old age, while a man's old age commands respect or at the very least is treated with neutral regard. These differences represent a loss of control for old women. If power and prestige arise predominantly from a youthful appearance, an old woman may find it difficult to build self-confidence and pride in who she is as a woman growing older.

The socialization old women have received throughout their lives creates a climate where self-loathing can flourish. Old women are forced to live, surrounded by "negative images (stereotyping) and messages, backed up by violence, victim-hating and blaming, all of which leads to low self-esteem in the victim" (Pharr 59). Internalized oppression and victim-blaming are essential components of a system based on domination and control. It instills in old women a belief that they are inferior (Pheterson 35) and therefore must act accordingly. When the oppression becomes internalized it operates as the "mechanism within an oppressive system for perpetuating domination not only

by external control but also by building subservience into the minds of the oppressed groups" (Pheterson 35). Ann Gerike refutes the assumptions that contribute to the oppression of old women. She asserts that "being old is not a disability; it is simply the natural outcome of living a long life" (n.p.).

Sexism

Ageism and sexism are tightly woven together, often times with no clear distinction of where one ends and the other begins. Nonetheless, it is important to address ageism and sexism separately in order to understand their complexity and detrimental effects on the lives of old women. According to Audre Lorde in <u>Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches</u>, "sexism is the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance" (115). The inferior status of females goes unchallenged by most women because they lack the tools to resist sexism. Kautzer explains, "[T]he passive, self-effacing, and subservient behavior women acquire during their lengthy playing of female roles inhibits their ability to assert their rights and protest the omnipresent discrimination they encounter" (495). Not only do women occupy an oppressed status, they grow up learning to accept their inferior position, often without question.

A lifetime of messages prescribing appropriate gender behavior influences the ability of old women to feel in

control of their lives. These negative messages about what it means to be a woman, received throughout adulthood into old age, have a direct bearing on the status of old women. As one woman from the Hen Co-op, a group formed by and for old women to explore their own aging explains: "The pressure from my mother was on us . . . to conform, to prove from then on that we were respectable, ordinary. The message was--never draw attention to yourself!" (The Hen Co-op 65). For many old women it has been men who "have run their world, who have gathered the data to feed their intellect, who have been the strong and the conqueror" (Hutcherson 71). The ability of old women to be assertive is affected by a lifetime of messages highlighting men's "natural" ability to control and dominate and women's "natural" tendencies to be passive and nurturing. An old woman's ability to take care of herself is stifled by her wish "to put others' needs before her own, to always be polite and to not make a scene" (Mauro-Cochrane 4). These social mandates, resulting from sexist and ageist ideologies, run contrary to the foundation of empowerment.

It is often mothers who role model patriarchal notions of appropriate behavior for their daughters. They may truly believe that women should conform to certain stereotypes or they may view their instruction as a service to their daughters, shielding them from the punishment unleashed on women who stray from the prescribed norms. Women grow up learning proper female etiquette, but lack a

firm foundation of self-esteem because societal messages center on the premise that women are not valued in and of themselves (Telsey 18). The female gender is largely valued for their relationship to others, i.e. housewife, mother, grandmother, and sex object. Women may not be in touch with their own feelings because they are consumed with meeting the needs of others. As a result, strides toward empowerment are stifled.

An identity as a grandmother epitomizes the complex way sexism and ageism are experienced in the lives of old women. Cynthia Rich insists that "[t]o see an old woman as 'grandmother' is to join the master in defining her as a woman whose right to exist depends on her loving and serving us" (*Cynthia's* 106). In this way a grandmother's role is narrow in its scope of serving others and consequently is in direct conflict with the freedom to make decisions suited to one's own life. Copper shares the difficulty she experienced in relating to the role of grandmother: "My struggles to make my married daughters understand that I must relate to this role differently--or not at all--have failed miserably. No one is interested in my need for negotiation" (8). In essence, an old woman must choose between receiving the social support that results from conformity to stereotypes or creating her own path and therefore experiencing the sense of empowerment that accompanies the increased control she has over her life. All forms of oppression form a link in the chain

that engulfs old women. For this reason, discerning which form of oppression has the greatest impact on issues of safety and control becomes problematic and largely irrelevant. According to Reinharz, "aging in America must be understood in conjunction with ageism, which in turn abets and is reproduced by diverse forms of sexism, racism, antisemitism, and many other 'isms' that beset us" (Health and Economic 25).

In order to clarify the role of oppression as an obstacle to empowerment, it is important to understand the unique status of old women and other oppressed groups in relation to the loosely defined terms of power vs. empowerment. By virtue of their marginalized status in society, old women do not hold power, as granted to privileged groups. Consequently when the concept of power is translated into a political context, empowerment is the form of power most accessible to marginalized groups. Empowerment is the conviction that as an old woman, you have the right to control your life. Oppression and violence act as roadblocks to empowerment through their ability to erode the self-esteem, determination and energy it takes to fight the demoralizing system of ideologies and institutions.

Classism

Class oppression, or classism, is carried out through the denial of access to economic resources. Statistics

illustrate the economic status of old women in the United

States. According to Campbell and Chauncey, "Twenty

percent of women aged seventy-five and over are poor and

another thirty percent are near poverty" (187). Hudson and

Gonyea politicize the statistics by explaining:

> When one views older women's numbers--59% of the
> older population and 19% of all adult women--or
> the legitimacy of their concerns--they are
> poorer and more isolated than either men or
> young women--their lack of political influence
> is as astounding as it is disquieting. (129-130)

Old women should be politically powerful and thus

economically secure given that they constitute a

substantial percentage of the population. The question of

whether most women are poor because they are politically

powerless or if they are powerless because they lack access

to financial resources remains largely unanswered. In the

United States, power is intimately tied to money.

Institutions and ideologies present the means necessary for

privileged groups to rise to the top, while marginalized

groups are left to fend for themselves.

Unlike other forms of oppression, one's class position

can change throughout life in terms of monetary status.

Regardless of class status during youth and middle age, it

is likely that most women will experience a decline in

economic status in their old age. It is difficult to

instigate change in the political arena if a substantial

amount of time and energy is spent meeting subsistence

needs. In general, since an old woman's wages, Social

Security, and pensions are low, she will only be able to exert minimal political leverage through financial contributions to campaigns and lobbying efforts. In terms of personal safety, an old woman's lack of economic power affects many aspects of her daily life. If she is being abused by a partner or family member, she may not be able to move out of her home because she cannot afford the expense of separate living accommodations. Transportation also has an impact on feelings of vulnerability experienced by old women. Owning and driving your own car, taking a taxi, the bus or walking all pose different personal safety risks. In addition, economic status affects access to information on personal safety if old women cannot afford to take self defense classes, purchase reading materials or do not have an address in order to check out books from the library.

Thus far my discussion has centered on how financial status influences the degree of safety and control experienced by old women, but class is more than just economic status, it is the "ability to control and influence others" (Anderson and Hill Collins 64) and consequently is "all-encompassing" (Langston 102). One's class position, upper, middle, or working class and all variations in between, influence all aspects of life from the quality of housing to the availability of a nutritious diet. The quest for empowerment is conceptualized in light of the values, goals, education, community resources, and

survival skills that are part of an old woman's personal life experiences.

Empowerment emerges from a process of analyzing how power dynamics have affected one's life. The politicization of class status can provide the impetus for empowerment, whether working or upper class. And yet, class is distinctly different from other factors that divide people into groups of privileged and oppressed. Class, especially financial status, is more fluid in present day society, more than ability, religion, sexual orientation, race, gender, or age. Expecting class privileged women to work toward equitable relationships by sharing their resources is a goal as of yet unrealized for a variety of reasons.

Since it is members of the middle and upper classes that create and control ideologies and institutions, which members of all classes are expected to adhere to and embrace, privileged middle and upper class women have seemingly little incentive to create bonds with working class women in a patriarchal, capitalist society. Class privileged women who are marginalized in other respects may be unwilling to risk being thrown farther off center as a result of even a surface alliance with working class women. In order to maintain power, class privileged women uphold a marked class division through a dismissal of ideas purporting a redistribution of wealth or possibilities for a mutual sharing of life experiences.

The blanket dismissal of working class women is supported by dismissing the role of structural barriers in preventing class progression and by the acceptance of stereotypes which conceal the real experiences of working class women. According to Leith Mullings in On Our Own Terms: Race, Class, and Gender in the Lives of African American Women:

> To underestimate class, to obfuscate the role of the constraints imposed by a hierarchical structure leads to blaming the victim. At the same time, to ignore the way in which people create strategies to deal with their condition is to underestimate the role of the struggle. (83)

Ignoring the system of institutions and ideologies that constitute patriarchy and capitalism leads to the all too familiar occurrence of blaming the victim. The creative methods of survival by working class women do not reinforce the notion that things are really not so bad; instead, the struggles should validate the premise that a problem exists.

The real experiences of working class women are overlooked when stereotypes are accepted, without question as to their accuracy. Donna Langston explains, "The idea of women as passive weak creatures totally discounts the strength, self-dependence and interdependence necessary to survive as working-class and poor women" (106). The term passivity is key because it provides permission or an excuse for class privileged women to remove themselves from any responsibility in changing an inequitable system. They

may embrace their passivity, while maintaining their privilege. Working class women would not survive if they followed the stereotypes used to describe all women. Furthermore, since many women are class privileged as a result of birth or marriage, retaining their status is reliant upon their passivity and subservience in the family structure. Expulsion from the family could equal class regression.

As long as marginalization and accompanying oppression exist based on socially constructed differentiations, there will be no guarantee of safety, no guarantee of fairness or justice. Holding tightly onto class privilege may offer a temporary semblance of security, but at the cost of stifling an old woman's quest for freedom and empowerment.

Racism

Racism, along with all other forms of oppression, is historically and culturally situated. The systematic mistreatment of oppressed groups is connected to a historical progression of events, socially constructed to ensure the continued domination and control of privileged groups.

An integrated approach provides the basis for analyzing how racism affects the quest for empowerment. Smith and Thornton contextualize the political status of one marginalized group: "The current cohort of older black Americans came of age in an era of political, social, and

economic repression and experienced a lifetime of racial

discrimination, missed opportunities, and often deferred if

not broken dreams" (42). To further illustrate this point,

Paula Dressel makes the connection between racism and

capitalism:

> Although the forms of oppression have changed
> historically with transformations of the
> economic base, shifting from slavery to
> sharecropping to low-wage labor, racism is
> nevertheless an ever-present, if increasingly
> subtle characteristic of U.S. capitalism. (246)

Patriarchy is held in place by the complex interlocking of

all "isms" including capitalism.

Irene I. Blea illustrates the importance of using a

holistic approach: "Whereas Anglos become poor in their

old age, Chicanos suffer a far less perceptible decline in

income. This is because elderly Hispanics have always been

poorer than Anglos" (84). Misrepresentation can occur when

attempting to dissect and therefore simplify the source of

inequitable treatment for marginalized groups. Even though

racism is presented as a separate category in this study,

it does not reflect the view that any method of oppression

can be disengaged from all other forms of exploitation.

Likewise, the racist violence inflicted onto ancestors

of Black, Chicana, Native American, and Chinese women

included in my research study is not removed from nor

unconnected to the present violence old women of color fear

and experience. It is crucial not to isolate individual

acts of assault or abuse against an old woman, but to

contextualize issues of personal safety within a political framework. Strides toward lasting social change and empowerment will only be possible when the complex nature of all forms of oppression are addressed.

In my study, I use a conceptual framework of oppression that assumes all old women experience a loss of power in old age. The oppression theory model does not delineate between the dominant societal views, erected by privileged groups, and the cultural practices of marginalized groups. Since no form of oppression exists in a vacuum, it is impossible to untangle the web of factors that influence the individual lives of old women.

For the purposes of this research project, general categories such as racism are used for ease of presentation and to simplify the analysis of variables that have significantly affected the quest for empowerment. Nevertheless, an acknowledgment of subcultures, if you will, that exist within and alongside the dominant culture is important not only because this inclusion provides a truer picture of the complexity of socially constructed systems, but also because it illuminates the active resistance of marginalized groups. By constructing norms that conflict with the dominant culture, marginalized groups reinforce their separate identity, not simply in reaction, but rather as a proactive method to ensure the survival of a distinct culture. In <u>Sisters of the Yam</u>, bell hooks uses the term decolonization to describe the

resistance of marginalized groups: "Here decolonization refers to breaking with the ways our reality is defined and shaped by the dominant culture and asserting our understanding of that reality, of our own experience" (1).

Old age does not equal a loss of power in many communities of color. There are many examples of the elderly being held in high esteem. In Other Cultures, Elder Years the authors explain that Mexican-American elders see themselves as vital members of their community, (Holmes and Holmes 211) while the Navajo elderly "were the recipients of the best the family could offer - good food, a place by the fire, and, most important, great respect" (Holmes and Holmes 205). Chinese women are also highly valued as is evidenced by the seemingly smooth transition of roles between a husband and wife. According to Holmes and Holmes, "Elderly Chinese women are recipients of considerable respect and affection and tend to be happier and have more authority than their once powerful husbands" (89). The reversal of roles appears to balance the degree of power experienced over one's lifespan, presenting the opportunity for equitable relations.

Heterosexism

Heterosexism is a "system by which heterosexuality is assumed to be the only acceptable and viable life option" (Blumenfeld and Raymond 244). Women who choose women for their sexual/affectional partners fall outside the norms

prescribed by the dominant group, i.e. heterosexuals.
Suzanne Pharr makes the link between sexism and
heterosexism: "Part of the way sexism stays in place is
the societal promise of survival, false and unfulfilled as
it is, that women will not suffer violence if we attach
ourselves to a man to protect us" (14). Old women who fall
outside the category of heterosexual, i.e. lesbian,
bisexual, and transgendered, are not able to rely on the
"protection" of men that is understood as part of the
marriage and partnership agreement between heterosexual men
and women. Women who are not heterosexual are targeted for
violence based on their sexual orientation, vulnerable to
harassment and assault. Even though single, divorced, and
widowed heterosexual old women experience a loss of
protection when not partnered with men, they have access to
an array of privileges attached to institutionalized
heterosexuality.

Lesbians are "excluded from protections regulating
fair employment practices, housing discrimination, rights
of child custody, immigration, inheritance, security
clearance, public accommodations, and police protection"
(Blumenfeld and Raymond 252). These examples exemplify the
role of institutions in perpetuating systems of oppression.
Basic human rights are denied to lesbians, which in turn
creates and justifies ideologies that allow and support a
full range of violent acts.

Women who are not heterosexual most likely learned basic survival skills out of necessity and thus entered old age with a different approach to personal safety, one grounded in their exposure and survival of heterosexism. Gottlieb explains that women who never married, both heterosexual and lesbian, provide an example of how to create a support system and live independently (225). Arber and Ginn concur, explaining that "the less completely a woman has conformed to the conventional ideal of domestic femininity, the more likely she is to age with pride and independence, maintaining a positive self-image in later life" (47).

Media: One Example of Institutional Power

Since all forms of oppression are held in place through the power of institutions, I examine the media as an example of an institution that influences issues of power and control in a way that is detrimental to old women. The media functions as a socializing agent, creating the culturally accepted values and behavior of various groups, including old women. Through the use of advertising, television and radio programming, and magazine and newspaper publications, the media exacerbates the vulnerability of old women by perpetuating stereotypes that provide an inaccurate portrayal of violence.

According to Richard and James Davis in their book, TV's Image of the Elderly: A Practical Guide to Change,

there are some commonly held generalities about the elderly: "Old people decline in intelligence. Old people are less productive as workers. Old people are institutionalized and dependent. Old people are senile. Old people are sexless" (55).

These stereotypes negatively influence the public exposed to television. And since the vast majority of people view television on a regular basis, these stereotypes become accepted and normalized by society at large and by old people themselves.

The media is ageist in its portrayal of old women (Lesnoff-Caravaglia 13-14). According to Myerding, "When we are not fumbling and helpless old women, we are rigid and fascistic mothers or mothers-in-law" (141). Other images include "the mythical prototypes of the Wicked Old Witch with unnatural power, the Old Bad Mother with neurotic needs, and the Little Old Lady, ludicrously powerless" (Copper 14). By allowing old women to be the target of jokes, demeaning comments and degrading images, an atmosphere prevails that not only allows, but encourages objectification and violence in its many forms. This happens because the message is: old women do not count, old women are no longer vital members of our community, old women are disposable. Psychological and physical violence against old women continues because there is no outcry against it. The public has been lulled into accepting the

natural outcome of rampant ageism and sexism in the media. Violence against old women thus remains largely ignored.

Not only are the images in the media largely degrading, concern also stems from the reduced number of old women in the media as their age progresses. According to Davis and Davis, "When increasing age equals increasing invisibility on television, the message is clear: To be old is to be without importance. When the elderly are seldom seen on television, this may translate into their seldom being seen in society" (45). The invisibility of old women decreases their ability to bring about political change. As a result, their needs go unnoticed and their personal safety becomes more tenuous.

The media also functions as an agent to report the atrocities of present day society. Crime is often exaggerated by the media (Brillon 1) and consequently an accurate portrayal of how crimes are committed is not reported. Inaccurate media portrayals may cause old women to believe they cannot or should not resist violence, reinforcing their victimization. If old women are isolated in their homes, exposure to the media may far outweigh their contact with real people. This means old women do not have access to a "reality check" that would balance the exaggerated media portrayals with information that reflects the actual risks of assault.

Many authors have documented that the threat or fear of crime restricts the lives of old women, (Chatman 27;

Cohen 145; Gordon and Riger 121) and thus has a direct bearing not only on their personal safety, but overall quality of life. According to Gordon and Riger in <u>Female Fear</u>, a high rate of fear is related to the media's coverage of rape (120). The media is an institution that financially benefits from the sensationalization of fear. It is obvious that fear and violence are profitable, as can be seen in a cursory examination of major motion pictures. As a result, the public's image of the elderly and crime, fostered by media portrayals, is that of "vulnerable and largely helpless victims falling prey to young muggers . . ." (Akers et al. 487). The image itself is not inaccurate, but out of context when presented as the *only* image. The effect of this image is significantly compounded when dramatized. By providing few alternative images of the elderly, the media purports the message that to be old is to be afraid, thereby creating and reinforcing fear.

The media decreases sensitivity to pain and suffering by exposing the public to a barrage of violent images. This sensationalization of violence and fear by the media perpetuates the powerlessness of oppressed groups by reinforcing notions of domination and submission as central to human nature, stifling efforts that seek to promote cooperation and conflict resolution.

Violence

The quest for empowerment is profoundly affected by specific violent acts such as battering, psychological abuse, harassment, and rape and by the exposure over a lifetime to a threatening and hostile environment. Violence is used against members of oppressed groups in an effort to maintain systems of unequal power. It functions as a means to erode strides toward empowerment and control by inflicting physical and psychological wounds.

According to Suzanne Pharr, "Violence against women is directly related to the condition of women in a society that refuses us equal pay, equal access to resources, and equal status with males" (13). Institutions, in combination with ideologies, create and reinforce the lack of power available to women, providing the structural basis for the perpetuation of violence. The legal and judicial systems, health care, family and the media are among the numerous institutions that form a network, thereby dramatically increasing the power of any one single institution. For example, a survivor of battering experiences pressure from her family to silently accept the abuse inflicted by her husband during their forty years of marriage. She goes to the hospital, but health professionals do not initiate questions about the nature of her bruises. She cannot afford a lawyer because all of the money is in her husband's name. The police legally recognize her temporary restraining order, but do little to

enforce it. The institutions provide old women with little recourse to the violence they face.

There are numerous theories that attempt to explain why violence against women occurs. Though based on different assumptions, all explanations are situated within a political context. There are theories based on the idea that crime results from an individual defect and other theories that locate the problem of violence within the structure of society itself. If the explanations for physical abuse are that it is "associated with psychopathic behavior, emotional disorders, drug abuse or alcoholism or other sociopathic characteristics," (Douglass 16) it is conceptualized as a problem treated by "curing" the abuser as an individual.

Myths contribute to the idea that violence is the result of individual defects. The myth that sexual assault stems from sexual desire means individual therapy is the most likely treatment. This myth leads many old women to believe they will not be the target of sexual assault. Myerding explains that most old women were socialized to think that "(1) rape is a sexual crime (2) older women are non-sexual, and therefore, (3) older women do not get raped" (141). This myth causes old women to be more vulnerable since they do not have accurate information. They may not develop personal safety skills because they believe they could never be the target of sexual assault. Awareness, assertiveness skills, and physical techniques

that might be useful in decreasing the likelihood of assault are deemed better suited for women of a younger age. This is a tragedy because "Reported rape survivors have been as old as 96 years and as young as 3 months" (Women's Action Coalition 49). If old women believe rape is a sexual act, they may be more likely to misjudge the crime (Davis and Brody 29). Consequently, they may not report it or receive the support they need as a survivor.

According to Sheffield, "Sexual violence becomes an individual problem, not a sociopolitical one" when violence is reduced to a sum of two: the assailant and the victim (14). Furthermore, "Intra/interpersonal explanations stand in contrast to sociopolitical theories of causation, which attempt to explain violence as a symptom of inequality and a form of oppression in hierarchical society" (Women's Initiative 12). Unless we shift our focus from individuals to institutions, it is only the individual who will be held accountable for rape, (Gordon and Riger 125) rather than examining the degree to which individuals carry out violence in response to the doctrines of institutions.

The military is a prime example of the interplay between individuals and institutions. Clearly, the role of the military is to make soldiers out of men by stripping away individual characteristics and replacing these with a group ethos that does not tolerate any divergence. It is important for individuals to be held accountable for their actions, while at the same time acknowledging the profound

influence various institutions have on the lives of individual people.

The contrast between the two theories has a dramatic impact on the lives of old women. The first explanation focuses only on the perpetrator of the crime, while the second theory focuses on power relations and how oppression is linked to violence. Oppression theory draws attention to the fact that violence is targeted at those who occupy an inferior status in society. Davis and Brody assert, "The prevailing belief of an older woman as physically weak, emotionally distressed, fearful and incompetent, means that she will be viewed by a rapist as an easy victim" (9). Sexism and ageism, along with all forms of oppression, create "easy victims" and work to effectively block most attempts to change the position of power old women occupy.

Explanations for any kind of abuse must involve an analysis of both societal and individual power dynamics because of the constant interplay between self and society. The individual self cannot be separated from societal influences; i.e. people do not exist outside of culture. Therefore, "Our sense of who we are, our self-image, our self-esteem have a lot to do with what society has to say about us. Our age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status aren't just labels, they interact in the self and in society" (Women's Initiative 14).

In the book <u>Surviving Sexual Assault</u>, the authors
point out that older women who are survivors of assault may
experience more anxiety regarding safety and independence,
possibly blaming themselves and restricting activities
(Grossman and Sutherland 54). Every woman has unique needs
and concerns regarding her healing process as a survivor.
Accurate information and resources should be made available
to old women before as well as after an assault in order to
increase the level of control over personal safety and to
make empowerment possible.

<u>Battering</u>

Battering involves a pattern or routine of abuse
committed by a domestic partner. Abuse can be physical,
sexual, or psychological. Other terms used to describe
battering include wife abuse or beating and domestic
violence. According to Porcino, "Wife beating cuts across
all ages, classes, races and economic levels. More and
more women married 15 to 30 years are reporting abuse"
(92). Even though the "FBI estimates that wife abuse is
three times as common as rape," (Sheffield 10) the
battering of old women has gone largely unrecognized.

The factors contributing to the difficulty old women
encounter in leaving an abusive partner are many. For
older women the abuse may take place over an extended time,
thereby making it more difficult for them to remove
themselves from the situation (Rathbone-McCuan 53). If an

old woman has lived with her abuser for many years, she may

feel more secure staying in an abusive relationship rather

than risking the unknown. Emotional and financial

hardships may stand in the way of enabling a woman to leave

a long-term abusive relationship (Women's Initiative 6).

The emotional hardships for an old woman include a

"tremendous sense of embarrassment and humiliation that

effectively silences them" (Cohen 153). The unspoken rule

is that a woman should keep her problems to herself and

solve them on her own. Survivors of abuse may experience

"isolation, reduced self-esteem, and self-destructive

tendencies" (Douglass 8) because of these messages.

According to Bernice Sisson, member of the Minnesota

Coalition for Battered Women's Ageism and Battering

Committee, "It's the most difficult between ages 55 and 65,

especially if they haven't worked outside the home. They

are not old enough for Social Security or Medicare, but

it's difficult finding living wage employment. So then we

wonder why women stay with abusive partners" (14). All

forms of discrimination create formidable barriers to

obtaining gainful employment in the later stages of life.

For some older women, the choice is between surviving the

familiar cycles of abuse presently being experienced or

struggling to survive without a secure income source,

without marketable skills, faced with complete financial

responsibility for oneself.

The silence surrounding abuse renders an old woman invisible. The abuse she suffers goes unacknowledged by society and within her own community of friends and family. Cultural standards dictate a separation between what is public and private. Sheffield explains, "For centuries it has been assumed that a husband had the right to punish or discipline his wife with physical force" (7). As a result, the private punishment of a wife by her husband was and is not a concern of the public at large. Even though the laws have changed, the ideology lags. Battering is about power, the power of the abuser and the power of institutions and ideologies which allow the victim few, if any, options to live a life free of violence.

Elder Abuse

Elder abuse generally refers to abuse committed by a caretaker or family member other than the primary partner or spouse. Eloise Rathbone-McCuan uses the term "battered mothers" to refer to those who are "involuntarily or unknowingly forced or placed into endangering circumstances by adult children" (58). According to Brillon, "In the U.S. it is estimated that 10% of all persons 65 and over are vulnerable and stand a good chance of being maltreated by the persons on whom they depend for their needs and care" (70). Abuse occurs in institutions such as nursing homes or retirement facilities, but also in day care settings and in the home of the assailant or the victim.

The victim is often isolated, (Cohen 119) with the abuse rarely witnessed by others and if it is, the witnesses are often silent (Rathbone-McCuan 59).

One woman describes the abuse she suffered from her son-in-law: "I never talked back to him or really tried to defend myself. I hoped that if I stayed very quiet and uncomplaining, he would realize how terribly he was behaving" (Cohen 115). Brillon explains why a victim of abuse might stay: "A woman, beaten by her son, for example, will not denounce him because he is the sole guarantee that she will maintain her autonomy and remain at home" (78). Her dependency on family members and factors such as poverty and feeling alone, create a climate where conflicts can lead to abuse in various forms including neglect, emotional and physical abuse (McDaniels 57). Older women may be reluctant to move out of a home or neighborhood that is familiar, (Davis and Brody 17) preferring to stay in an abusive relationship with the hope that things will change or possibly fearing that living on their own would be even worse. The dependency of old women on family members amplifies the unequal power dynamics.

Sexual Harassment

As with other forms of abuse, sexual harassment is about "power over." According to Mason, all women are potential targets of sexual harassment, calling it the "equal opportunity tormentor" (18). If still in the paid

workforce, old women are more susceptible to lay-offs because of their age and thus may fear reprisal if they speak up about the harassment. Social conditioning to not cause trouble or draw attention to oneself influences an old woman's decision about whether to report the harassment (Mason 19). If sexual harassment, like sexual assault, is associated with sexual desire rather than power over, an old woman may think it is all in her head, that no one could be attracted to her. Her fear that others will think she is vain prevents her from taking action. Sexism and ageism work together, making it difficult for old women to name and actively resist sexual harassment.

Fear

Fear functions as a means of coercion or "*sexual terrorism* because it is a system by which males frighten and, by frightening, control and dominate females" (Sheffield 3). To coerce someone is "to force to act or think in a given manner by pressure, threats, or intimidation; compel" (American Heritage Dictionary 288). The system is supported by institutions which, according to Gordon and Riger in Female Fear, contribute to the fear and ultimately the oppression of women when resources are not allocated to stop rape (47). Still, it is likely that funneling more money into programs designed to stop rape will have limited success unless the foundation of institutions are changed. This would entail a

redistribution of power and the creation of doctrines and laws that reflect egalitarian goals. In the words of Pauline Bart, "we cannot function as a true democracy as long as women's well-founded fear of rape inhibits our full participation in society" (530).

The collective fear of women sustains the political and economic system of capitalism. If women, and especially old women, are too frightened to leave their homes or fear violence at their work site, they are less likely to work during hours and at jobs where they feel their safety is at risk. Fear functions as an agent to keep women as part of the reserve work force that can be pulled into the paid work force when needed by corporate America. Capitalism requires that workers be in competition with each other for scarce jobs in order to keep wages low. When the capitalist economy is in need of the reserve work force, the media and other institutions try to create a favorable environment, encouraging women of all ages to enter the paid work force. In this way, fear is used as a tool to control and exploit women.

Barbara Macdonald describes her own experiences as an old woman:

> I saw that I lived in an unsafe world as all women do. Male violence is everywhere. But at the same time when young women are building strength to combat the violence, I am growing older and will be growing weaker. On a dark street, hearing footsteps behind me, I will be less able to call out and be heard. My fear of such a scene paralyzed me. (*Look Me* 34)

Macdonald acknowledges that all women live with the
threat of male violence, but her status as an old woman
means her perspective is different from young women. As
her age progresses she will become physically weaker. The
combination of gender and age cause old women to be or
perceive themselves as vulnerable.

Statistics regarding fear experienced by old women
provide some indication of the seriousness of this topic.
For example, "close to ½ (49.7%) of the women aged 65 and
over reported feeling very unsafe, while about 26% of men
in that category say they feel very unsafe" (Gordon and
Riger 9). In addition, "among the sixty and over group,
the percentage of fearful women almost doubles, going from
35% for the 31 to 59 age group to 60%," (Brillon 56) with
"an increasing incidence of rape of women in their eighties
and older" (Lesnoff-Caravaglia 18). Given that "[m]ore
than a million older American women are victims of violence
each year," the level of fear is based upon a real threat
(Women's Initiative 1). Moveover, "Black women were found
to have the highest degree of crime stress, followed by
black men, white women and white men" (McAdoo 40). This is
understandable given that the "risk of personal
victimization among members of national minority groups is
approximately 162% higher" (McNeely 139) than what their
white cohorts experience.

Fear profoundly impacts the lives of old women, with
emotional and physical consequences. According to Yin,

author of <u>Victimization and the Aged</u>, "Fearful elderly suffer from less happiness and satisfaction in life, feel sad more often and believe things will get worse with aging" (73). Feelings of helplessness, resignation (Brillon 18) and loss of control (Kennedy and Silverman 253) are closely linked to the fear old women experience. These psychological effects are devastating because they are not confined to a finite period of time, but rather reach out into all areas of an old woman's life, including her hope for the future.

The physical effects are no less serious. Mall maintains, "Fear can make you ill, really physically ill. Sustained fear can shorten your life" (181). When a woman is always on guard against an attack, her body becomes vulnerable to various conditions and diseases (Resnick 64). According to Lesnoff-Caravaglia, "Many women die shortly after falling victim to criminals because they could not live with the feelings of fear and shock when the attack precipitated" (18). In this way, fear functions as a form of femicide; the fear is so great that women are at risk of dying.

Consequences of assault and abuse are more serious for the elderly, (Brillon 33) even though they are victims of crime less often than women of a younger age (Akers et al. 488). The rate of victimization among the elderly may be inaccurate due to crimes rarely being reported (Brillon 40-41). For old women, assaults of any type are difficult to

report for fear of reprisal. In cases of wife abuse the fear stems from anxiety over the probability of further violence by the abuser (Porcino 93). In the case of rape, the survivor may fear the complaint or charge will not be taken seriously (Cohen 134-135; Davis and Brody 30) or that it simply is not an appropriate topic to discuss or report (Davis and Brody 15). Hanmer and Saunders in Well-Founded Fear: A Community Study of Violence to Women, found the reporting of assault to interviewers to be less than what actually occurred (21).

The lack of accurate data is a concern for some groups. Lou Glasse, [former] president of the Older Women's League, is quoted in the report A Mother's Day Call to Action:

> Far too little energy and resources have gone
> into understanding and addressing how violent
> crime, elder abuse, and fear of assault shape
> the lives of this nation's midlife and older
> women. This lack of knowledge and understanding
> results, inpart, from the fact that there is
> shamefully little data collection on elder
> abuse. Furthermore, few breakdowns of violent
> crime identify the age, gender and race of
> victims. (Jillson, et al. 1)

It is unrealistic to expect accurate statistics when many old women are fearful about reporting. A survivor may accept that her assailant will not be brought to justice, but she may hope that by telling her story, other women will be spared the same experience. Most often the statistics of crimes against old women are lumped together, with the unique circumstances of the crime, criminal, and

survivor lost. This contributes to the invisibility of old women and works as a means of silencing their voices and experiences.

Strategies for Change

The concept of empowerment is central to women's self defense. In Women's Self-Defense: A Complete Guide to Assault Prevention, the authors explain that the meaning of empowerment is to "provide information, skills, support and options so that each of us can make our own choices about how to live our lives and actively participate in our own safety" (Hill, Sutherland and Giggans 5). It is an "invitation to live fully and become the person each woman wants to be" (Hall 5). Empowerment is recognized as an important tool in the lives of old women. Myerding states, "Yet, a first step to curb our victimization is to instill a confident attitude in ourselves. We have infinite resources within ourselves to do this" (143).

Key to unleashing the potential of old women to experience a sense of empowerment in their lives is to create opportunities for them to exercise a level of control over issues of personal safety. Personal safety information and programs should provide measures to decrease susceptibility to crime, while at the same time developing the ability of old women to adapt these tools to the circumstances of their own lives. Ideally, all efforts would emerge from an understanding of how the political

status of old women affects their ability to utilize personal safety options. Davis and Brody recommend that prevention programs consider how "physical aging, social role change and ageism" are tied to an older woman's vulnerability (7). This means that information and skills would be tailored to fit the specific needs and abilities of old women, addressing the diverse paths towards empowerment.

In order to develop the ability to use personal safety options, an old woman must believe in her right to live free of violence and harassment. Self defense instructor Jeanette Mauro-Cochrane emphasizes the need for self-respect in order to defend oneself (3). Others concur. In the article *Ageism + Sexism = Old, Ugly and Worthless*, B. Genevay asserts, "If self-confidence springs from being valued by others, valuing oneself, and experiencing a functional role in society . . . then how are our aged women to experience this?" (9). Ageism, sexism and other forms of oppression play a role in preventing old women from developing a positive self-concept through the internalization of their inferior status in society. Self-confidence and self-respect have a dramatic effect on an older woman's quality of life, enabling her to learn and use the tools necessary to resist and survive all infringements of her personal safety.

Crime prevention books and programs often focus on behaviors and situations to avoid, rather than on

developing self and political awareness, in addition to
personal safety options. Solely focusing on prevention or
lifestyle restrictions reinforces the idea that women must
rely on someone or something else to protect them (Mauro-
Cochrane 55). Lynne Landau, author of Fighting Chance:
Assertiveness, Rape Avoidance and Self Defense for Women,
explains:

> In every rape prevention brochure you will find
> advice about how to avoid assault. For the most
> part, they are rules. Rules that restrict your
> life and change your behavior to fit the
> ladylike routine that supposedly makes you
> immune to violence. Needless to say, it
> doesn't. (no pg)

This avoidance philosophy increases the isolation and fear
of old women without providing tools to understand and
create meaningful change around issues of safety and
control.

The manner in which safety "tips" are given at classes
also has an impact on whether those in attendance walk away
with more options and an increased sense of control.
According to Jim Nelson from the Elder Program in Portland,
Oregon: "Sometimes people offer reinforcement that is
well-intentioned, but not always well thought out. They
talk down or overreact. Images are fed that older people
are more helpless and less capable" (Telephone interview
8/26). If prevention isn't done properly it can lead to
increased anxiety and fear (Zevitz and Marlock 12). Nadia
Telsey, author of Self Defense from the Inside Out: A
Workbook for Women, asserts that prevention measures can be

useful when acknowledged that they do not provide a guarantee of safety and that it is up to each woman to determine which measures make the most sense in her life. In this way, prevention is presented as one aspect of personal safety or self defense and does not represent the only answer. In Self-respect and Sexual Assault, author Jeanette Mauro-Cochrane explains:

> The myth that one can prevent rape through safety precautions and lifestyle restrictions promotes rape anxiety and self-blame. While some of these strategies may be effective, they can lead to a false sense of security, a decrease in self-reliance, and a decrease in personal independence. (55)

By focusing all the attention on what a woman should and should not do, the ultimate responsibility for violent acts, and specifically sexual assault, is placed on her shoulders. Only by following all of the protective strategies is she assured support and sympathy from others, (Gordon and Riger 122) and even then her character or intentions may be questioned. She may be held responsible for the assault as a result of not conforming to societal expectations of "proper" behavior for a woman. These unspoken rules dictating what is proper often translate into advice administered in a public forum. In Security for Senior Citizens: How to Make the Golden Years Safer Years, David Coverston claims: "The best defense against rape is to avoid situations where the crime can be committed" (182). It is impossible for an old woman to avoid all situations where a crime might be committed

because violence against women can happen anywhere, including her home. Other authors reinforce the myth that sexual assault is only committed in certain situations. Mall describes her own methods of avoidance: "But my bedroom windows are locked when I go to bed, and I don't roam the streets after dark" (182). Simmons, in 67 Ways to Protect Seniors from Crime, describes why older women are at less risk for sexual assault: "they are far less likely to get drunk and go off somewhere private with a virtual stranger" (97). The advice offered in these texts targeted for old women reinforces the stereotypes about how assaults happen. The advice is based on misinformation about assault, thereby confining the activities and options of old women unnecessarily.

Avoidance can be a useful defense strategy in some situations. The problem stems from the assumption that avoidance is the only defense option and the belief that following all the "rules" will ensure safety. There is no guarantee of safety. Becoming more aware of how assaults happen and acquiring a diverse number of options including prevention, avoidance, awareness, assertiveness, and physical techniques, provides old women with a firm foundation of tools to draw from in any number of situations. There is no protection from violence, rather it is the strength of an old woman to resist and survive that will carry her through any violation of her person.

An approach that is based on "power over," rather than one that enables old women to exercise the "power to" make changes, is often part of the structure and ideology of social service institutions. Baba Copper believes there is a conflict between those in the "helping" professions and the needs of old women. The agencies receive their funding based on the assumption that old people are vulnerable and needy. Copper views that characterization of old women as a barrier to their empowerment (95). By dictating what is in their best interest, social service agencies cannot, at the same time, facilitate the autonomy of old women. According to Gay Becker, "Categorizing elders as frail may homogenize them and obscure their individuality, facilitating the process of making decisions on their behalf . . ." (71). The ageism inherent in this philosophy is in direct opposition to building confidence and skills. Genevay offers advice to practitioners in their approach with old people: "we need to enable them to be more alive, real and transcendent through sharing their past and present iden- tities . . ." (9). The goal is not to make the age or sex of an old women invisible, but in the words of Betty Friedan, to achieve an "affirmation of age on its own terms" (69).

It is time to formulate new ways to approach issues of safety, control and empowerment. Hutcherson envisions an alternative: "it seems imperative that elderly women begin to look to themselves for their own prevention/protection-

from-crime measures" (75). Suggestions to increase self-reliance and autonomy include a "defensible space program" (Brillon 97) or an "empowerment seminar for girls and women of all ages" (Women's Initiative 25). The workshops should not only encourage the active participation of old women, but be designed to meet the unique needs and interests of this population. The most effective approach for improving the personal safety and overall quality of life for old women is to use a diverse number of strategies for change. The common themes of all efforts must be grounded in goals of furthering control, confidence, self-esteem, and political awareness. The possible avenues to empowerment are endless.

The Hen Co-op represents what can happen when several old women unite and share their experiences. The women of the Hen Co-op had this to say about their gatherings: "In retrospect we realize that bringing that many women together without spouses, children, lovers or bosses is a radical act, no matter what the activities" (The Hen Co-op 82). It is radical because old women are often defined by their relationship to others. During one of their gatherings, they covered the topic of assertiveness, practicing how to set boundaries (83). The Hen Co-op is an excellent example of the potential old women have when they gather together, sharing interests and needs and then actively pursuing their goals.

Similarly, old women together leaning on each other, while maintaining control over their lives, is at the heart of a group called Bag Ladies of the World. The Bag Ladies are "committed to a relationship that may require anything from simple companionship to providing shelter, to opening their pocketbooks when other group members are in need" (Leonetti 1). This alternative way of approaching old age assures a degree of options not afforded to those who choose to carry out traditional roles, "For who dares to set standards of behavior for a woman of 80?" (Boegeman 54).

Rituals, such as croning, are a way to unite the body, mind and spirit of old women by celebrating old age as a welcome transition in life. Jacqyelyn Gentry and Faye Seifert in their article *A Joyous Passage: Becoming a Crone*, describe the Croning ceremony as a "public rite of passage that recognizes for women the wisdom that comes from life experience and reclaims respect and honor for older women in American society" (229).

Becoming involved in a political group offers great potential for empowerment. The Older Women's League is the first and only advocacy organization in the U.S. focused on the needs of midlife and older women (Kautzer 495). In their 1994 Mother's Day Report, the Older Women's League outlines a call to action for policy makers, community leaders and American women and men to follow in working towards the eradication of all forms of violence (Jillson,

et al 3). Other activist organizations working to improve the quality of life for old women include the Gray Panthers, the National Organization of Women, Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, and many more. The benefits for old women include more than working for a cause they believe in. Those who become active in their communities feel safer (Brillon 19; Chatman 26; Gordon & Riger 122). Their involvement reduces feelings of fear and isolation. This may be due to focusing time and energy on a positive cause and from the opportunity to discuss concerns and strategies for change.

Ideally, all methods of outreach and strategies for change would seek to alter the structure of institutions and replace ideologies that foster oppression. Only through broad based educational efforts can there be an understanding of the negative effects that result from the unequal distribution of power in society. If it is assumed that the basis of human nature is positive and good, then it follows that ultimately all people believe everyone deserves to exercise freedom of thought and action, and to live without fear of violence. In this way, education could be used to reveal the assumptions and misunderstandings that lead people to distrust and mistreat each other. Oppression stems from a philosophy whereby individuals are only concerned with what they think is in their own best interest. Education has the potential to foster cooperation among groups and facilitate empowerment.

According to Izzy Harbaugh, facilitator of workshops addressing ageism: "we all have needs and are able to grow and change, to love and be loved, until we die. Life, for me anyhow, has been a process of learning and relearning and re-learning" (11). Her words shed hope on the possibility of change. In order to reach out into the community and facilitate the empowerment of old women, it must be assumed that all people can learn new ways of relating to each other, based on mutual respect. The community cannot be whole when the voices of old women are stifled. Old women cannot thrive without this basic human right: the power to exercise control over their lives.

An Emancipatory Methodology

The chosen methodology for this research project was an exploratory, interpretive model located within an emancipatory framework. The data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with thirty-nine women over sixty years of age on their understandings and experiences around issues of safety and control. The self-selected sample resulted from a series of personal safety workshops that I presented before the interviews took place.

It was my initial goal to engage the research participants in a series of workshop sessions, designed to address the connection between issues of personal safety and empowerment. Upon discovering that this course of action produced minimal interest and participation by old women, I decided to create a shortened version of the workshop, focusing on personal safety skills and options. Even though my research on the discourse surrounding the empowerment of old women indicated that a comprehensive approach would be the most beneficial, I could not conduct this study unless I adapted the workshop, thereby ensuring that an adequate number of women would participate in my study. Conflicts such as this, created a gap between the ideas described in my literature review and the actual study itself. For this reason, my methodology was

constantly in process, scrutinized for its effectiveness in meeting the emancipatory goals.

Components of Research Model

This study necessitates an exploratory approach because of the lack of research and public discussion focusing on issues of safety and control. The intent is to reveal and examine what may not be evident. I begin by describing my research model, followed by several theoretical and practical issues to consider when using a praxis-oriented methodology. I present the specifics of my particular research project and explore the various strategies used to further the goal of empowerment for old women. Lastly, I discuss methods used to establish validity within an emancipatory framework.

An interpretive model provides the basis for the empowerment of old women by exploring the "interpretation of the intersubjective meanings and practices which order everyday life" (Comstock 373). Participants in the study were involved in a process of interpretation, whereby assumptions were re-examined in light of continued reflection and analysis, expanding the range of explana-tions used to make sense of their day to day lives. By engaging in a dialogue where understandings and experiences around issues of personal safety are interpreted, possibilities for change emerge. An emancipatory framework posits the empowerment of old women at the

forefront, influencing all areas of the research project; including the research question itself, methods used to locate interviewees, the relationship between the interviewees and the researcher, and the process of exploration, interpretation, and analysis. The goal of social and political transformation is a central component to emancipatory research methods. Transformation can take place on many levels from the development of an individual's awareness to a change in social policy resulting from the efforts of research participants or the research itself. According to Patti Lather, "we no longer need apologize for unabashedly ideological research and its open commitment to using research to criticize and change the status quo" (*Issues* 67).

Since "an emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome," Acker, Barry and Esseveld (145) outline several strategies to decrease unequal power between the researcher and interviewee which include letting the interviewee take the lead in an unstructured interview, offering to tell the participants something about yourself, and providing information and assistance to the participants as able or appropriate (141). By intentionally using methods that directly benefit the interviewee, researchers are purposely conscious of their responsibility to the participants who make the research possible.

The goal of emancipatory research is furthered by grounding the research in the realities that are an integral part of the lives of old women. Several authors have addressed the need to make the lived experiences of women visible (Lather, *Issues*; Oakley; Smith, Everyday). Since a relatively small body of research exists which seeks to represent the diversity of old women's lives, it is crucial to seek out the voices of those whose understandings and experiences have not been recognized. Old women are made invisible through the forces of ageism and sexism, as well as by many other forms of oppression. Research is needed to make visible the stories, experiences and viewpoints of those who rarely have their voice heard.

Self Disclosure

The methodology can facilitate a process whereby research participants begin to examine their personal lives in relationship to systems of domination and control in society. Patricia Maguire, author of Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach, explains this process: "Critical inquiry is used to help people see themselves and social situations in a new way in order to inform further action for self-determined emancipation from oppressive social systems and relationships" (14). It is the connection between an individual's everyday life and society which plays a central role in emancipatory research (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 135). This research project was

designed to encourage critical inquiry, providing the impetus for change.

Several theoretical and practical issues to consider when using an interpretive model within an emancipatory framework include issues of self disclosure, ethics, interpretation and imposition. Self disclosure, in the context of emancipatory research, takes place when the researcher reveals or discloses information that is at the same intimacy level as the questions posed to the interviewees. It is one method used to create a more equitable relationship between the interviewee and the researcher, acting as a form of reciprocity (Lather, Getting 60). When the power differential is decreased, the potential for meaningful interaction is increased, thereby creating an environment where critical inquiry and empowerment is possible. However, "In the end it is the researcher's project, and there are limits to which the women researched can see it otherwise" (Ribbens 590). Self disclosure exposes the vulnerabilities and human qualities of the researcher and therefore facilitates some degree of mutual exchange and respect.

The question arises as to whether researchers should want to be close to the people they are interviewing (Ribbens 581). Reinharz emphasizes the importance of forming a relationship with an interviewee (Feminist 28) and yet, encouraging a level of intimacy may imply a commitment beyond the confines of the typical relationship.

Researchers may not be willing or able to follow through on this implied commitment and consequently it is important to be clear about one's role as a researcher in relationship to the research participants. By setting up boundaries concerning self-disclosure, a safe and respectful interview environment can be created.

Ethics

Questions involving ethics arise in relationships "where there is the least social distance," (Oakley 55) determined by the current identity and background of both the interviewee and the researcher. Variables such as age, gender, class, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation affect social and cultural connections and/or distance. A researcher should consider the ethical implications of their actions when intentionally striving for a mutual relationship with the interviewee because "many elderly persons are trusting and vulnerable particularly in circumstances where the interview relationship appears to be reciprocal" (Reinharz and Rowles 24). Encouraging a level of intimacy and resulting vulnerability may not be ethical in situations where the research participant does not have access to a support system, ultimately diminishing rather than facilitating empowerment.

Interpretation

The interpretation and analysis by the researcher is always subjective. By presenting the framework that guides

the research process, the reader is able to contextualize
the interpretation. The claim by some researchers of "one
true story" is based on their position of power (Smith
121). They are in a position to determine what will be
presented as real or true. By revealing the inherent
subjectivity in all areas of the research, the myth of "one
true story" is dispelled.

The research is also affected by the interpretation of
the interviewees. The Personal Narratives Group, authors
of <u>Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and
Personal Narratives</u>, view the narrator as "revealing
truths" (*Truths* 261). The narrators in my study are
revealing the truths about their understandings and experi-
ences regarding personal safety. Joan Scott explains,
"Experience is at once always already an interpretation *and*
is in need of interpretation" (37). The narrators
interpret their own experiences and in turn the researcher
interprets what they have shared. Both of the interpreta-
tions represent a subjective outlook.

Reminiscence is one form of interpretation. Shostak
points out, "ordinary people living ordinary and not-so-
ordinary lives weave from their memories and experience the
meaning life has for them" (239). The interviews are an
opportunity for old women to interpret and understand their
lives, reflecting on the past in connection to the present
as a means to "articulate and celebrate the uniqueness and
strength of individual women" (Lee and Carr 191).

Imposition

A concern that lies at the heart of dynamics between a researcher and participants is the issue of imposition. A researcher is expected to draw conclusions, interpret relevant themes and fit the research into their particular academic field. As a result, the imposition of a researcher's framework onto the data and narration of participants is inherently present. It is therefore imperative for the researcher to acknowledge their subjectivity rather than claiming the unattainable position of objectivity. By doing so, the researcher lessens the imposition of their voice and presence on the study.

Dorothy Smith explains that even though researchers rely on participants to tell their stories, "we cannot rely upon them for an understanding of the relations that shape and determine the everyday" (Everyday 110). In a research project with emancipatory intent, the everyday realities of the participants are contextualized within a political framework. Interviewees are encouraged to reflect upon and analyze their lives in relation to systems of domination. Patricia Maguire suggests researchers find a balance between assuming they know all about the circumstances and forms of oppression of their narrators and that they know nothing about their experiences (37). A researcher presents one possible explanation or way of viewing the world, but attempts to actively involve the participants in a collective process of interpretation and analysis.

The Study

Workshop

All of the women interviewed for my study participated
in a personal safety workshop that I designed and
conducted. The interviewees were self-selected from the
workshop participants. I conducted both individual and
group interviews; the individual interviews occurred after
the workshop had concluded and the group interviews took
place during the workshop session itself. All workshops
were held at Senior Centers, except for one workshop at a
retirement building for seniors. I led thirteen workshops,
with three of the centers scheduling successive sessions.
One hundred and twenty old women participated in the
personal safety workshops, ranging in length from twenty-
five to ninety minutes.

The workshop provided participants with the
opportunity to discuss personal safety as it related to
their life and that of other old women and to share and
learn useful tools to decrease the likelihood of assault.
It also gave them the opportunity to interact with me,
providing a basis for deciding whether to volunteer to be
interviewed individually. The discussions that took place
during the workshop sessions were not included in my
research study, unless the workshop was clearly designated
as a group interview.

The workshop served as a means of introduction, providing the time and space for the participants to be intentional about what they shared during the interview. This was an important step in preserving the integrity of the research. If I wanted to explore their understandings and experiences around issues of personal safety, it was imperative that I do so in a manner that demonstrated my respect for the boundaries and limits they had established in order to maintain control over their life. Discussing personal safety issues meant sharing their vulnerabilities and strengths. It would be an invasion of their privacy to ask old women, that I had no prior relationship with, to talk with me about the intimate details of their personal safety. I could not justify placing them in a position where they would have to determine if they could trust me, without anything to base their decision on.

The workshops were titled, "Personal Safety Skills for Women over 60." The content of the workshops focused on the hands-on application of self defense skills that could be used in the day to day lives of old women, with an emphasis on presenting an array of options for the participants. The material presented was a composite of my experience teaching self defense and a more recent overview of experts in the field of self defense and empowerment (Fein; F.I.S.T.; Hill, Sutherland, and Giggans; Jacobs; Lamb; Leung; Long and Miller; Mizell; Quinn; Telsey). I began the workshop by discussing the image the media

presents on violence, and in particular violence against old women. We countered this negative portrayal by sharing our success stories, including an article I presented that described the methods used by a 112 year old woman who resisted an attack. I then covered awareness of the environment, personal and collective strengths and areas of vulnerability, and prevention methods. Next was a discussion of intuition, followed by a longer presentation, and at times role-play, on communication skills, body language and barriers to assertiveness related to age and sex. I presented assertiveness tools, as well as ploys and tricks used by assailants. The workshop concluded with a group yell and/or demonstration of physical techniques. There was always time for questions and comments, followed by the opportunity for extended group and individual conversation related to personal safety. I gave all participants copies of several informational handouts; examples are included in the appendix.

My sample includes thirty-nine women between the ages of 60 and 85, with eleven women in their 60s, nineteen in their 70s, and nine women 80 and older. Eighteen of those interviewed were Caucasian, eleven African-American, seven Chinese, two Indian, and one Hispanic. The terms Indian and Hispanic were chosen by the participants to identify themselves. The names of the participants interviewed for this study have been changed to maintain their anonymity. All of these women resided in the cities of Corvallis or

Portland, Oregon. In addition, the workshops and consequent interviews were held in a diverse sampling of geographic locations throughout the city of Portland.

The research does not use a representative sample and therefore I cannot generalize my findings to any population. The women included in this study do not represent, nor speak, for all old women. Since my research is an explorative and interpretive study, the goal is not to generalize my "findings" to any group, but to gain knowledge on how issues of personal safety are connected to the quest for empowerment. It is my intention to treat each participant as an individual who might share similar experiences with others of the same gender, approximate age, race/ethnicity, class, etc., but whose particular life is unique and is represented as such. Even though "the *general* comes from the particular lives," (Sacks 88) I want to stress the particular in order to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of experiences and views, thereby making each participant visible. My goal is to give voice to the understandings and experiences of the thirty-nine old women in my study by exploring how they interpret and approach issues of safety and control.

Since the interviewees were self-selected from those who participated in the personal safety workshop, this study gives voice to those who chose to share their perspective. Silent are the voices of the women who did not volunteer to be interviewed. In addition, because the

workshops were held at senior centers, only old women who participated in these programs were a part of my potential sample. The voices of the women over sixty who do not venture out to attend such activities are not included here.

I did not request any specific information that would ascertain the class status of the interviewees. The geographic location of the senior center provides some clue as to the general economic status of those workshop participants. Since income levels can vary significantly within geographic areas and because participants do not always attend events at the closest senior center, I was unable to accurately determine economic status. Moreover, only through directly questioning each interviewee would I be able to document their class background and status, i.e. working, middle, or upper class.

In terms of race/ethnicity, my sample is fairly inclusive of the voices of women of color, although most of these interviews were conducted in a group setting. This decreased the opportunity for a separation of individual voices which would serve to validate the unique perspective of each participant. On the other hand, the group interview did allow for collective reflection and analysis which often encourages a deeper awareness of shared meanings and experiences.

I also did not ask interviewees to disclose their sexual orientation, although many women discussed their

relationship with their husbands, providing some indication that most of the women included in the study experienced heterosexual privilege. Several women mentioned close relationships with other women, but did not indicate the sexual/affectional nature of these connections.

Informed Consent

The process of obtaining informed consent becomes politicized when striving to meet the goals of an emancipatory methodology. The following section examines why old women might be unwilling to sign an informed consent form that allows the researcher to record the interview and use it for subsequent research and publications. This document magnifies the uneven power dynamics between the researcher and researched, while simultaneously serving as a means to safeguard the rights and privacy of the interviewee.

In the words of Reinharz and Rowles, "it is now understood that there are numerous problems in obtaining samples of older research participants . . ." (20). Obtaining a signature for the informed consent document can be a complex process. The ethical concerns surrounding informed consent focus on whether the interviewee fully understands the implications of giving their consent (Ribbens 588; Hampsten 130). The idea of "informed consent" appeared unrelated to the day-to-day lives of most of the old women I interviewed. The document only seemed

to widen the distance between myself and those I was interviewing. Rowles and Reinharz summarize this dilemma:

> T]he necessity of explaining the project in terms that may appear technical, the level of commitment implied in signing a consent form, and the fact that for many elderly participants, raised in a culture with a "white-coated scientist" image of research, this may be their first contact with investigators from a university or research institute . . . (21)

Rather than legitimizing the research project, it put the research and my standing in question. It was difficult for many old women to understand why they had to sign a consent form in order to be interviewed. I believe some of the interviewees feared the actual signing of the consent form meant I could use their words in ways they could not imagine nor comprehend. Most of the interviewees approached the signing of the consent form with caution. Even after discussing informed consent and the interview process, several women changed their mind and decided not to be a part of the study after being presented with the actual informed consent document. At their request, we talked about issues connected to their personal safety, but these discussions are not included as part of my research.

Those women who told me of their experiences in college, signed the document without hesitation. Their involvement with an academic institution provides some indication of their class status and results in middle and upper class old women being more likely to volunteer for an

individual interview, thereby affecting the diversity of voices presented in my study.

It is important for me to emphasize that some participants would not sign an informed consent and it was not my intent to convince them, but rather to explore their reasons for not signing an informed consent form and to decide together if these obstacles could be overcome. As a researcher I was constantly aware of how the uneven power dynamics between myself and a possible interviewee affected the emancipatory intent of the research and the goal of empowerment for old women. As an example of how I reached a compromise that met the needs of myself as a researcher and the woman I planned to interview, I present this scenario.

I scheduled an interview with Florence in advance, and when I arrived and presented the informed consent document for her to sign, she hesitated. Florence didn't have any questions about the research, she just wanted to know what it meant if she signed the form. She shook her head and repeated, *"I just don't understand what this is for."* I tried not to bombard her with information, but rather let her initiate the questions she had about informed consent. In the end, we reached a compromise by having her write her initials on the form, instead of signing her entire name. Florence's concern stemmed from a distrust of people she didn't know. She asked me if I knew where she lived, her last name, or her telephone number and when I said I knew

none of this information, she said she was satisfied that I
would not contact her and we could proceed with the
interview. I never felt insulted by these questions
because I saw it as a challenge to find a compromise that
met the needs of both of us. We had a wonderful conversa-
tion and interview after this and so I can safely say her
anxiety did not stem from her distrust or dislike of me as
a person, but was a safety precaution on her part.

Emancipatory methods should facilitate the empowerment
of old women, not create situations where the research
process itself is the source of anxiety and concern for
their overall sphere of control. My sample for this study
only includes women who felt comfortable and secure enough
to reveal their understandings and experiences around
issues of safety and control. Informed consent can be
viewed as an obstacle to involving old women in a process
of self-reflection and analysis or as a means of protecting
women who might be too vulnerable to expose the realities
of their lives.

Orienting Questions

The orienting questions used during the interviews
emerged from a review of the pertinent literature, my
contact with professionals in the community, and from the
old women who participated in the workshops. I was in
contact with various community members who are actively
involved with the needs of old women. I requested

suggestions regarding my research study from
representatives of the Gray Panthers, OWL, AARP, and the
Area Agency on Aging. I discussed my project with staff
members from numerous senior centers and spoke with self
defense instructors at One with Heart, Fighting Chance and
Womenstrength in Portland. I also discussed my research
with staff from Clackamas Women's Services, Council for
Prostitution Alternatives, and Portland Crisis Line.
Lastly, I spoke with a member of the Elder Safety Coalition
and the director of Elder Programs. These contacts
assisted me in framing the research questions and being
more sensitive to the diverse needs of old women.

I also engaged in dialogue with old women in the
process of conducting the workshops and interviews. I
shared my thoughts and analysis with the participants in an
attempt to discover if the research was relevant to their
lives. Through the process of self-disclosure and being
open about my political views and intentions, I have gained
insight into my assumptions regarding the research. By
sharing my views with the participants, I allowed them the
opportunity to critique and react to my comments and the
questions I posed. As a result of our continued dialogue,
I view the participants as both narrators and analysts,
with all our voices included in the text.

I approached the interviews with a flexible set of
orienting questions, adding and deleting questions in
response to the feedback I received. It became apparent

throughout the process of interviewing that any one set of questions would not be relevant to every woman over sixty. Nonetheless, it was my goal to provide questions that might resonate in some way with the lives of the old women in my study. To this end, my questions are a variety of semi-structured and open-ended questions. In addition, I encouraged all interviewees to talk about issues they felt were relevant to their personal safety so as not to be limited by my orienting questions. A list of orienting questions is included in the appendix.

Interview Variables

The participation of all interviewees in a personal safety workshop is one factor to consider when analyzing their responses. Each workshop was slightly different, evolving from the previous workshops and was adapted for the particular setting and audience in terms of content and length. This was also the case with the interviews. The group interviews took place as part of the workshop, while most individual interviews were held a few hours to several days after the workshop, and at times in a different location. These variables uniquely affected each interview. As a result, the interview was an interaction frozen in a particular time for both the interviewer and the interviewee (Shostak 232).

The content of the personal safety workshop is also a factor to consider when contextualizing the interviews.

The workshops focused on providing options to decrease the likelihood of assault, tailored to suit the unique interests and needs of old women. Even though the format for the workshops was informal, the instructor/student dynamic was present to a varying degree. These factors may have limited or predetermined the responses of the interviewees. Further, my status as a researcher, in combination with instructor and confidante, could be viewed as a complication. My position was not static and consequently there was a greater likelihood for fluctuations in what interviewees may have perceived my goals and function to be.

Regardless of my role, I occupied a central position throughout the research. My presence was intimately tied to all phases of the research (Stanley and Wise, <u>Breaking</u> 162). My status as a 29 year old, female, feminist, bisexual, European-American graduate student, from a working class farming background, certainly affected my interactions with those I interviewed. All of these factors helped to construct the direction and outcome of the research. It affected how I approached issues of safety, control, and empowerment, the style and content of the workshops, my level of intimacy with various interviewees, and my own reflection and growth throughout the research.

Patricia Maguire emphasizes the importance of a researcher clearly expressing their "values, choices, and

feelings" (7). I had the opportunity to do this through the flyers and descriptions of the workshop, during the workshop itself and through the dialogue that was inevitably part of every interview. Even though I was explicit in my advocacy of increasing the options available to old women in the area of personal safety, my selection of options reflected my subjective approach.

It was not only my background that influenced the research process, but the events of that day, my mood, what I had been reading that morning, and various other factors. My perspectives were "necessarily temporally, intellectually, politically, emotionally grounded and [were] thus as contextually specific as those of 'the research" (Stanley and Wise, Feminist 23). By acknowledging my biases and hopes for the research, I can expose the process of negotiation that inevitably takes place whenever meanings and events are interpreted.

Empowerment Strategies

In terms of other ways to further the goal of empowerment for old women, I employed the following specific strategies. As an interviewer I encouraged the narrators to talk about their unique understandings and experiences around issues of personal safety. According to Anderson and Jack, "An oral interview, when structured by the narrator instead of the researcher allows each woman to express her uniqueness in its full class, racial, and

ethnic richness" (20). Some of the old women I interviewed immediately unfolded their life history, while others were very cautious and deliberate with their responses. The topic of personal safety encompasses many areas and consequently at times I found it necessary to take the lead, while being flexible and open with the interview format. I wanted to be open to learning the various perspectives of the women I interviewed, rather than assuming I knew what was important or relevant to their lives. According to MacQuarrie and Keddy, "Neglecting the differences in life is equivalent to silencing them, and results in biased, superficial investigations" (24).

I self disclosed during all interviews, though to a varying degree. The self disclosure served my desire to form a mutual relationship where the dialogue went both directions. From the positive comments I received afterwards, I believe my self disclosing often facilitated a rewarding interview for both the participant and myself. One example of this is especially noteworthy for me. After trying several times to set up an interview, the interviewee suggested we go for a walk on the beach in the early evening. I took the bus to meet her, during which I had a confrontation with the bus driver whom I felt was very condescending to me. At one point during our interview, after walking on the beach for at least an hour, I told her (Dorothy) about my experience. She told me she was so glad I shared my experience because the *"same thing*

happens [to her] *all the time"* and she was glad to know she wasn't the only one. We shared our feelings of frustration and ways we could deal with these situations in the future. I had asked her many personal questions up to this point and my self disclosing seemed to create a balance between us.

I also offered my assistance with any personal safety concerns the research participants had by being available after the workshop or by phone. Several women approached me after almost every workshop, wanting to share their concerns and stories. At times our debriefing lasted as long as the workshop itself. I received a phone call early one morning from a woman who participated in a workshop three weeks prior. She was inquiring about assertiveness strategies. I gave my phone number out on several occasions to women who wanted to keep in contact in case they had further questions. In addition, I provided a wealth of information during my workshops and interviews, both verbally and in written form.

Validity

In her article *Research as Praxis* Lather lists several ways to assess validity, including triangulation and construct, face, and catalytic validity (<u>Getting</u> 66). Triangulation involves the use of multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes. In my research, I used individual and group interviews as data sources, as well as

my consultation with professionals concerned with the personal safety of old women. Methods used include interviewing and participant observation, and my theoretical schemes emerge from the field of women studies, gerontology, sociology, and feminist self defense.

Lather next emphasizes the use of construct validity in examining how "one's own preconceptions affect the research" (Getting 67). My assumptions regarding how issues of personal safety are negotiated was grounded in my embracement of oppression theory as a means to make sense out of the world and specifically the lives of old women in my study. I politicized the words and actions of the women I interviewed in light of this theory. The data did not change the usefulness of this theory, given the emancipatory intent of the study, and yet my approach was altered to reflect the complex nature of exploring, interpreting, and analyzing how issues of safety and control become actualized in the lives of old women. Their lives were not so simplistic as to justify the use of broad categories, with labels of privileged or oppressed to designate their position in society. My approach was expanded to include a perspective that validated their resistance, survival, and empowerment.

Face validity serves to establish the credibility of the data. Member checks are used as a way of recycling the research material back to the participants (Lather, Getting 66). This can take place at the end of the research

project by inviting a subsample of the participants to share their reactions to the research. Another method is to cycle the researcher's ideas back to the participants throughout the research process. As I previously discussed, I engaged in conversations with participants regarding my theories and analysis, asking for their reactions. Even though this process was informal, it was continual and involved the participants, rather than merely asking for their comments to a nearly finished product.

Catalytic validity takes place when participants benefit from the research process by taking steps to understand the constructs of their lives and are thus motivated to make changes (Lather, Getting 67). It occurs when a connection is made between events or experiences that seem to have no relationship and now fit together. As a result, a participant has an alternative explanation for why things happen as they do. One more perspective is added to a person's worldview that might serve to take the blame or cause of an experience off an individual's shoulders onto the larger social structure with its inherent power relations.

My desire for this kind of "mindshift" are rooted in my feminist background. I view all things in a political context and believe others will ultimately benefit from having this option at their disposal. In my interviews I intentionally made connections between the experiences of the woman I was interviewing and other women in an attempt

to move away from the assumption that the "problems" she was experiencing were hers alone and she was entirely to blame. Or I would make a statement such as, "I know a lot of women who grow up feeling that way," and then continue with, "why do you think that is?" Rather than laying out my political theories, I would try to draw the interviewees out and then offer my perspective as one explanation, but certainly not the only. The goal was to engage in a dialogue about issues around personal safety. Lather explains, "By resonating with peoples' lived concerns, fears and aspirations, emancipatory theory serves an energizing catalytic role" (Lather, Getting 61).

Since "feminism is a political movement for change," (Harding 182) I sought evidence of such throughout the research process. According to the Personal Narratives Group, "Many women's personal narratives unfold within the framework of an apparent acceptance of social norms and expectations but nevertheless describe strategies and activities that challenge those same norms" (Introduction 7). By naming the diverse ways old women have survived and thrived, notions of resistance are expanded to include small and grandiose acts of rebellion. This initiates a process whereby all old women are recognized as active agents in their own empowerment.

Resistance and Survival

The words of the women who agreed to share their thoughts and experiences are at the heart of this research. They provide insight into the barriers that impede empowerment and the avenues that facilitate an investment in oneself and the world at large.

Empowerment is a complex concept, subjectively defined by those who claim to be empowered, while used in a seemingly objective manner by researchers, such as myself, who often approach it is a broad category of classification. Empowerment is real, in spite of the difficulties encountered when attempting to pin down exactly what it is. The struggle to understand the meaning and consequences of empowerment will pave the way for all old women to be active and involved members of their communities, utilizing their knowledge and skills in ways that reflect their individuality and free choice.

I created the framework of this study with the assumption that issues of personal safety are intimately connected to empowerment. I view oppression and violence as the primary obstacles that interfere and block an old woman's ability to experience more control over issues of personal safety. I believe that feelings of safety and control provide a foundation of security which enables a woman to proactively change and influence all areas of life.

It is not realistic for an old woman, nor for anyone, to expect to be able to exert complete control over all areas of personal safety. Yet the opposite, to feel a sense of absolute powerlessness, would imply a loss of hope emerging from the total denigration of a class of people. I do not believe this is the status of old women. Even with the obstacles old women are up against, empowerment is possible.

A central theme of this study is resistance and survival, revealed again and again in the experiences shared by the research participants. Resistance is the act of opposition against any force or person that attempts to suppress an old woman's freedom of movement or thought, in essence what makes her an individual. Resistance is often ignited by the recognition that an injustice has occurred. Whether it is in response to a particular event or a more encompassing imbalance of power, resistance involves action. In the words of bell hooks, "Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story" (Talking 43).

It is the marginal position of an old woman that mandates a survival mode, a state where she is forced to predict and react to others. Survival is more than physically surviving an assault, it is surviving the daily invasions of one's emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and

physical space. In order to survive, an old woman may try to adapt or cope as best she can, making sacrifices and compromises that may last a lifetime.

In her book, <u>The Issue is Power: Essays on Jews, Violence, and Resistance</u>, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz explains the close relationship between resistance and survival: "Victims resist every way they can. To understand, look inside the experience of resistance, for survival. Learn, in the words of Meridel LeSuer: *sometimes survival is an act of resistance*" (5).

Continuum of Oppression

In my interviews, I did not include questions addressing all forms of oppression. The orienting questions focus on age and gender as factors that may affect issues of personal safety. Future studies are needed to fully explore the full spectrum of oppression in relationship to the politics of safety and control. I present the data available from my study, taking the liberty of interpreting their words in order to point out the influence of oppression as it is revealed in their daily lives.

I use the concept of continuum to highlight the interconnection that exists between all forms of violence and oppression. Oppression and violence can be viewed both in finite terms, the act either was or was not violent, while at the same time acknowledging that some forms of

oppression are more severe, with a greater impact on the lives of the targeted group. The emphasis on a continuum effectively draws attention to the wholeness of our lives, reminding the reader of the connection between the ageist greeting card and sexual harassment, i.e. between seemingly harmless acts of insensitivity and blatant forms of abuse. Rather than fragmenting individual lives, a continuum encourages a view of the larger picture by exposing the connections, thereby bringing forth possibilities for change located within a new paradigm.

Ageism

The words of the women in this study highlight the contradictions experienced when discussing their age. Alice's words highlight the contradictions many women expressed when discussing their age. Alice, a 68 year old Caucasian woman, asserts: *"I hope to live to be 100 because I don't think they will expect as much of me then. It doesn't bother me. In fact, it feels kind of neat to brag about how old I am."* And later, *"Middle age is no longer what it used to be. My mom lived to be 90 and I always thought of her as old from about 60 on and heavens to live 30 years as an old person, that's a long time you know. So I'm planning to not start for a while yet."*

Alice claims that she enjoys boasting about her age, but has qualified this through reasoning that no one would

expect as much of her at this advanced age. Alice doesn't want to live as an old person. Perhaps, to her, old signifies a lack of productivity or usefulness. Her perceptions of what it means to be old seem connected to a way of living or state of mind; it isn't chronological age that necessarily renders one meritless. She may feel comfortable bragging about her chronological age because she continues to thrive, despite the expectations or ageist stereotypes that at her age she is no longer a vital member of the community. She seems caught between the contradictions, proud of who she is at her age, given the obstacles she has faced, and yet still she struggles against the stereotype of what it means to be an old woman. It would be interesting to find out whether she has a different view of her father's old age. Are her comments gender specific or does she view all people over sixty as old, a status not desired?

Frances simply rejects an identity as an old person. She explains, "*I suppose this flies against what everybody teaches, but I don't consider myself old yet. I may be handicapped, but I don't consider myself old.*" Frances is a 76 year old Caucasian woman. She uses a wheelchair because she fractured her hip and has osteoporosis. It would seem that her status as handicapped would be as obvious as her status as old. Perhaps she has embraced her identity as handicapped because she has been able to

continue an independent lifestyle, while identifying as old is a status one is resigned to, without redemption.

Maria, a 68 year old Hispanic woman, provides more insight into the complex nature of age: *"I'm 68 years old. A lot of people think I'm younger because I don't act my age, because I don't think you should. Age is a state of mind."*

Even though Maria doesn't state exactly what kind of behavior would constitute "acting old," her goal is to act the opposite of an old person and consequently to be mistaken for a younger age. Her first statement seems to conflict with her assertion that age is a state of mind. If she believed this, it wouldn't be necessary to try to act younger than she is. Ageism runs through her words, cloaked in the false assumption that it is healthy to distance oneself from your chronological age. It is assumed that if you can convince others that you're younger than your actual age, then you have accomplished something remarkable. The pressure to convince others that you are younger than your chronological age is mainly evident among middle and old aged women. Men may be concerned about appearing in good shape, but are not as focused on eliminating all signs of aging. Generally speaking, they seem to want to age well, i.e. to hold onto their power and gain increased prestige. Consequently, the media has concentrated their efforts on women, creating and

capitalizing on their repulsion of aging. A woman can never look too young, with an ever younger woman set as the ideal.

Maria's approach to aging may have a devastating effect if and when she reaches a point when she can no longer pose as a younger person. It is in old age when loss of a partner or spouse, loss of employment or loss of one's home, *and* the loss of physical abilities are most likely to occur. It is therefore vital that women develop an age-positive foundation in order to use all their energy to resist the negative messages associated with old age. Most old women seem to cope or adapt to old age and ageism, surviving or getting through this time, rather than actively challenging the negative stereotypes.

Ruth, a 66 year old Caucasian woman, describes two women she knows, providing evidence of how diverse old people are. Her example focuses on individual qualities, with age as one determining factor in the overall makeup of a person. She explains, *"Well, I have a friend who is 89 and I respect her so much for her knowledge and her presence. There is another friend I have who is 83 and I think she feels like she is slipping a little bit. But the 89 year old woman is partially deaf and has a constitution like nobody I've ever seen. So, you can't categorize people and say that all people are going to be that way. Ya, please don't put people in categories of age."*

Stereotypes provides a narrow image of old age, ignoring the diverse experiences of the aged. Ruth points out that age is not the best indicator of one's ability and perseverance. Ageism and ableism may create barriers, but resistance is possible, as is demonstrated by Ruth's positive description of her 89 year old friend.

Sexism and Heterosexism

Sexism and heterosexism are often closely tied in the stereotypes of old women. It is assumed that all old women are grandmothers, with their prime identity stemming from this role. May's description indicates the importance of her family and ethnicity: *"I'm Indian. I was married to a Filipino for forty-nine years when he passed away. I'll be 74 in September. I've lived in Portland all my life. I have eleven kids and thirty-two grandkids and eight great grandchildren."*

Dorothy, a 70 year old Caucasian woman, describes her feelings as a single old woman in the company of other old women who have children and grandchildren. *"Whenever they come together, they always like to talk about their grandchildren and their family, which is a little bit painful for me and I'm on my own again. They seem to be so family oriented, which is nice. I envy them. Some are very nice about it, but some are very, ah, you know, just one-directional."* The identity of the women Dorothy

describes is connected to their status as wives and mothers. The conversation centers around the activities of family members, not on the activities and thoughts of the women themselves. As an old woman who is single and childless, Dorothy has little to contribute to these conversations, perhaps feeling isolated during such gatherings.

Old women who are not grandmothers or who do not wish to derive their identity solely from their status as a grandmother, do not often receive validation of who they are as an individual. The pressure on all old women to follow the stereotypical role of a grandmother is sexist and results in a stifling of human potential. Stereotypical grandmothers are expected to be selfless in their giving, focused on their offspring, often at the expense of their own needs. In order to increase the level of control over one's life, and specifically issues of personal safety, it is crucial that old women embrace all ranges of emotion, thought, and action, including anger and sweetness and acts of self-nurturing and giving to others. Empowerment is not possible without an old woman's ability to freely express and assert herself.

In addition, stereotypes associated with gender are often closely tied to assumptions of heterosexuality and traditional notions of family. Dorothy is a single heterosexual woman who feels painfully left out. If she were a single or partnered lesbian, she would no doubt feel

excluded in numerous other ways. The dominance of such
conversation, along with the assumption that all present
are heterosexual, means there is no space or possibility of
heartfelt acceptance of diverse lifestyles. It is expected
that old women will want to and will talk about children
and grandchildren as the focal point of conversations.
This assumption has strong links to heterosexism and
sexism.

I did not inquire as to the sexual orientation of the
old women interviewed, but through our conversations, I
surmised their status in their references to husbands, male
partners, and children. Several old women did comment that
they developed increased self-esteem and independence after
a divorce or the death of their husband. Ellen, an 80 year
old Caucasian woman, stated that her husband protected her
when he was living, telling her what to do and this made
her feel more scared. She explained that she felt more
independent and in control of her life after her husband
died. It is likely that the old women who were not
enmeshed in the institution of marriage experienced more
control over their lives because they weren't bound by the
constraints of an institution designed to minimize their
control, while their husbands experienced increased power
in their privileged status. Even though heterosexual women
occupy a position of privilege, their status is based on
their attachment to men. Their heterosexuality provides
some basic security, but is a layer of security with little

or no foundation because underneath lies sexism. The presence of any form of oppression means there will always be limited power and control. The only path to empowerment comes from the realization that the system of institutions and ideologies does not offer equal treatment to all people. This acknowledgment makes proactive movement possible because it is not based on self-blame, but on an integrated analysis of how power dynamics affect individual lives. This initial step paves the way for critical thinking and action.

Classism

The devastating effects of class oppression result in working class women being more vulnerable to all forms of violence. Cathy, a 65 year old Caucasian woman, describes a personal safety concern that is unique to those who live with minimal economic resources: *"We have maintenance that is pretty good. They'll fix things, but they don't have the material to fix those windows. They're gonna hopefully put new windows in pretty soon and hopefully they'll be safer and better. Our old windows are old and they just don't have the parts. They can't fix them. I put a vase or something in front of the windows, thinking well, if they pushed it out the vase would wake me up. For a while, I was even filling it with water because I thought I might find the water and it would go bang and I could tell*

someone had been in." Because Cathy resides in housing for people with a low income, she faces increased personal safety risks. Cathy is proactive in her use of safety strategies by creatively devising a method to protect herself from intruders.

Later in the interview Cathy states, *"It upsets me. If I come home and I think it looks like people were taking or getting in and taking some of my food, and of course it bothers me because food is so high priced."* Her statement is very telling about the reality of her life. It appears she is more upset about food being taken because of the price than she is about someone entering her apartment without her permission. Her class status necessitates a concern with her food supply on a level seemingly equal to personal safety issues.

Vida, a 77 year old Indian woman, points to the difference between those of a privileged class status and those who are oppressed: *"Scary when you take the bus. They grabbed my bag and ran through the shrubbery. I screamed out, oh my lordy, I could barely talk. I only had nine dollars for the entire month."* Her lack of accessibility to other financial resources means a purse snatcher has traumatized her both through the act of committing the crime and causing her financial hardship throughout the month.

Class status plays out in other ways. According to Betty, a 78 year old white woman, *"Some people won't go near Burnside, you know, because they are afraid of the appearance of people. They won't bother you. I mean, they'll say hello. They might ask you for change and all you have to say is, I'm on Social Security and I can't afford it and they'll leave you alone."* It is likely that "the appearance of people" refers to a group of people who are poor or working class and are asking for money because they have little or no income. Perhaps Betty is able to relate to their situation because she is also financially deprived and therefore does not perceive their presence as a threat. She seems to view herself as one of them, assuming that they will accept her explanation for not being able to spare any change. It is as though it is common knowledge that to be on Social Security means money is tight. It would be interesting to find out whether Betty has always approached this situation with the same feelings of kinship or if her class status is a result of old age and consequently her empathy is a recent occurrence.

The combination of several factors including neighborhood, attire, style of speech, and description of resources indicated the class status of the women I interviewed with some degree of certainty. During the informal group discussions that took place as part of the

personal safety workshop, I was struck by the contrast between those I perceived as middle class and those whom I assumed were working class. Generally, the working class women seemed more engaged in the discussions, with their comments overlapping as they shared their stories and advice with other members of the group. The middle class women appeared more reserved, listening without comment. It was as though they didn't want nor need to make the connection between the material presented and their daily lives, perhaps due to their status in regards to economic power.

Most of the working class women were not in a position to approach their personal safety as a topic for leisure discussion. Issues of personal safety were described as part of their day-to-day life. The outlook of the working class women seemed matter of fact, as if they had been dealing with issues of safety and control for years and were comfortable discussing the topic. This is not to say that middle class women are less affected by personal safety issues; it is likely that their activities are influenced in ways that do not appear obvious. Middle class women may hold more tightly to the idea of protection by men and the "state" at large because their middle class existence has reinforced these notions. Working class women may view protection as a myth since they have experienced financial hardship and may have struggled to gain access to institutional resources.

<u>Racism</u>

The continuum of racism includes both the subtle and overt forms of oppression, stemming from the combination of ignorance and hatred. During the group interview with the women born in China, ranging in age from 60 to 72, they explained, through a translator, that they seldom ventured far from home because they did not feel comfortable in an unfamiliar environment. This was due in part to the language barrier and concerns regarding their physical strength. One possible explanation for their hesitation in venturing out is the rampant xenophobia, the fear or hatred of foreigners. In the United States xenophobia has been focused on different groups at various historical junctures. Perhaps the xenophobia experienced by the women from China is subtle in nature, the effects apparent, but the source not easily located. The women from China believe certain aspects of their personal safety are increasingly at risk when they venture beyond the confines of their home. Their locus of control and comfort is mainly concentrated in areas where there are others who share a similar ethnic background. Since the number of people of Chinese descent is a fraction of the general population, xenophobia in combination with racism, means that the women from China have fewer options available. For example, if a family member was abusive, a Chinese woman may not feel comfortable drawing attention to the violent acts, in fear of possible retaliation by the abuser

or of being shunned by their small community. Concerns surrounding the language barrier and physical strength may mean an old woman who is being abused would choose to stay in that situation rather than risking the unknown by moving to an unfamiliar and possibly hostile environment.

Foundation of Empowerment: Self-esteem and Assertiveness

In order to experience a level of confidence and control over issues of personal safety, an old woman must believe in her own worth. Not only must an old woman believe she has the right to be safe, but also must possess the conviction that her opinion counts and deserves to be respected. Empowerment stems from this foundation of self-esteem, leading to the ability to be assertive.

Barriers to Assertiveness

Several of the participants in my study described the difficulty they experienced in asserting themselves. Gertrude, a 72 year old Caucasian woman, states: "*I would really like to go to an assertiveness class that gives me permission to say what I really feel to a person because I hold back and I don't. That does hamper me. I hold back a lot. I just feel like I need permission. I don't know why I feel that, but I do. When it concerns someone else I can just step right in, speak out to help someone. But when it comes to myself, it isn't there. That's kind of sad.*"

Even though Gertrude is able to speak up for others, she finds it very difficult to actively assert her own rights. This may be due to the social conditioning women receive to be caregivers and nurturers. In following a traditional woman's role, females are taught to be aware of the needs of others, while often being unaware of or ignoring their own needs. In an attempt to minimize the violent acts of an abuser, a survivor often becomes preoccupied with predicting when episodes of abuse will occur, losing the capacity to focus and act on her own needs.

Gertrude claims she needs permission, without stating exactly from whom she needs permission. Since she is not able to identify the reasons why she is unable to assert herself, her "problem" becomes personalized and attributed to an individual deficiency. Her acquisition of assertiveness skills must be grounded in an analysis of how her personal life has been affected by messages that decrease her self-esteem. By recognizing the various barriers to assertiveness, Gertrude can begin the process of developing a positive self-image, affirming her own needs, and taking more control over issues of personal safety.

Dorothy attributes her lack of assertiveness to her socialization. *"I'm not very assertive. I've never been. That's part of my upbringing. Now, you learn it right from the beginning, to be assertive. I'm not and never learned*

it really. My only defense is to withdraw and avoid these situations." She explains, *"You know, I had little things happen to me, nothing really big, but all my life. And I just learned to ignore it and to take it and to just turn back and withdraw."*

Dorothy did not learn assertiveness skills and as a result uses the only defense options she sees as available to her: withdrawal and avoidance. It is significant that Dorothy views the reactive tactics of withdrawal and avoidance as her only line of defense. Perhaps even more noteworthy is that she assumes she cannot learn new skills, accepting her lack of options as fate.

Dorothy's submission or passive acceptance of her "lot in life," i.e. to withdraw and avoid these situations, renders her invisible by restricting her freedom of movement and involvement. Building empowerment becomes extremely difficult when Dorothy doesn't even consider the possibility that she can take more control over her personal safety and daily life. Her words don't convey anger, only resignation and perhaps sadness. She is simply getting by as best she can, existing in the survival mode without faith or hope in her ability to actively resist.

In order to be assertive, an old woman must be able to use her voice and body in a way that is noticed. Perpetrators are looking for an easy target, i.e. someone who is easily intimidated and will not draw attention to

themselves. If an old woman is unwilling to assert her rights by yelling or using self defense tactics to alert others of her need for assistance, she is more likely to experience an invasion of her personal safety and a possible assault.

Joan, a 70 year old Caucasian woman, reflects on why it is difficult to be assertive: *"We grew up not wanting to draw attention to ourselves."* Joan uses the pronoun we to describe the common experience of her peers to intentionally be and remain silent and invisible by not drawing attention to themselves. It is likely that this expectation has been passed on, with each generation of women being taught behavior resembling learned helplessness. Since this state of helplessness is passed on, it becomes almost innate, with an increasing probability that what was originally placed upon women as a means to stifle their independence, will now be claimed by women as a right to be taken care of, never in the limelight without direction from a more powerful male.

According to Kaye/Kantrowitz, "Something about innocence is dangerous here. We are innocent because helpless. As long as we insist on maintaining our innocence, we lock ourselves into helplessness" (20). Innocence becomes a virtue to constantly strive for, no matter what the cost. The dichotomy of innocence/ helplessness and guilt/strength leaves little room for a woman to develop assertiveness skills. Independence and

empowerment are traded for the veil of comfort in a misogynist society. In an effort to maintain the illusion of power and free choice, women play the part of acting as though they choose to live under the protection of men. As a consequence, women are shielded from the opportunity to explore all facets of what it means to be human, alive.

Adversity Builds Confidence

Other women interviewed found it easier to be assertive. May asserts, "I get mad. I'm one of these people that I'm not afraid of anything." Frances explains, "It's not hard. I don't speak out in a group or public that easily, but I have a good principle behind me. If I feel there is for some reason an injustice or for some reason something needs to be said, I don't hesitate."

The background of these two women may explain why they are comfortable being assertive in their old age. May explains, "Well, I had a rough time growing up. During my younger years, going to school, we were the only Indian family. People used to make fun, kids used to. Kids can be cruel and I learned to fight. I fought my way all through grade school. But then as you get older and everything, people kind of accept you for what you are." May may have been exposed to the same messages as other women regarding the proper role for girls, but her day-to-day reality meant she had to learn how to be assertive and

fight back. As a child, she learned to resist and survive when faced with the violence and oppression of racism.

Frances developed polio as a child and subsequently she grew up accustomed to being the center of attention. It was not possible to conform to the proper role of a young lady by not drawing attention to oneself, therefore Frances learned to take care of herself. Her disability created barriers, but it also provided the impetus for her to learn how to overcome barriers and assert her rights when she felt it necessary. Because she was not relegated to the proper female role, she could not hide behind her gender. In this way, she was allowed a semblance of freedom not afforded to other girls. Perhaps her disability and the accompanying ableism were the first and primary hurdles she struggled to overcome and consequently sexism and ageism were approached as simply other obstacles.

Although sexism is seemingly quite obvious, its insidious nature facilitates a lack of recognition and action by a substantial portion of the female population. For reasons previously outlined, the acceptance of sexism becomes almost ingrained, viewed as fate. The presence of sexism has not laid the groundwork that would assist women in resisting ageism. In order to hold down the revolution that would surely take place if women became aware of their oppression, strategies are used to dull or stifle their protests. Violence, internalized oppression and adoption

of traits assigned by those in power perpetuates patriarchy. When traits such as docility are embraced by women, resistance becomes almost impossible.

Therefore, if women have only dealt with the effects of sexism, they may not have the conviction or skills it takes to recognize and take action against ageism. Since ageism is usually experienced most acutely in old age, it is likely that an old woman will not be fully prepared for the numerous barriers she encounters as a result of this form of oppression. In this way, sexism and ageism, for otherwise privileged women, becomes a deadly combination, with sexism instilling in women passive acceptance and ageism being the last straw that may render old women invisible and powerless.

To summarize, the assertiveness skills of old women reflect their individual life experiences. The words of the women interviewed in this exploratory study indicate that when the compound effects of oppression (racism and sexism or ableism and sexism) are experienced at a young age, they were able to develop tactics of resistance used throughout their lives. There is both pain and pride in living through and with oppression. Yet the goal should always be the elimination of oppression, rather than exalting the qualities a woman may acquire from her resistance and survival.

Continuum of Violence

All forms of violence, actual and implied, are connected and serve to increase the vulnerability of old women and therefore act as obstacles to empowerment. The women in this study have experienced a wide range of violence. Their stories validate the diverse strategies of resistance and survival.

<u>Elder Abuse</u>

Zella, a 75 year old Caucasian woman, describes a situation that involves a form of elder abuse. In this case her neighbor lost her home as a result of trusting her family and not being able to exercise control over her affairs. Zella shares this story: *"Well now, my neighbor behind me here is in a retirement home, I guess that is what they call it, but I wouldn't want to retire down there. Here several years ago she mentioned to me that she had kind of signed the house over to him and put his name on her bank account. I cautioned her about that and said well, you know, I wish you hadn't done that. I had read some horror stories, and even on television where these people had come in and they, you know - mom sign the place over to me - and the first thing you know, they are out and this is what is happening. Her house is now up for sale. And course she just couldn't believe he would do anything like that. Trust your own children. They didn't want to*

take the time to come over and see mom. They never had her over for birthdays, Christmas, anything like that, course she spent the time in her own home. Maybe the son would come, gradually the grandson moved in with her. And, uh, didn't help her financially, all he did was run up her light and water and all those bills and was always there with a grandma, I need some money, you know. Um, and she just sort of, well, the last time I saw her she was all hunched over like, you know, what can you do, she felt defeated."

It is clear that Zella's neighbor was taken advantage of by her family. The mental, physical, and emotional health and stability of an old person is at risk when children and grandchildren think they know best and forge ahead with changes that dramatically alter the lives of their (grand)parents. Zella was understandably concerned, perhaps because this case represents what can happen to all old people. If you can't "trust your own children," who can you trust? In order to retain a degree of control and autonomy in old age, it is imperative that women make their needs known and are prepared in the event their plans fall through. Financial exploitation can be devastating. Retaining a sense of empowerment is often contingent upon the presence of a support network that can assist in maintaining self-esteem and a degree of control in the face of such hardship, loss, and abuse.

<u>Property Crime</u>

One of the women from the Multicultural Senior Center described the violence of a property crime. There were eleven African American and four Caucasian women participants in the group interview at the Multicultural Senior Center, ranging in age from 60 to 85. She states, *"I went to Missouri on my vacation and I asked a young man to stay in my house while I was gone and he took his girlfriend to the show that night, shows you that they were watching my house. And when I came back and my grandson met me at the airport, he said grandma, I want to tell you that somebody broke into your house. And I said, how could they get in with the bars and everything. The woman next door said she heard a pickup in my driveway with no lights on. So this time they took my sofa and chairs. The first time they broke in, I had a man staying with me and when we walked up on the back porch, I said, we didn't leave the back door open and this crowbar, big rusty crowbar was laying on the breakfast table. They had broken the back door and when I walked into the dining room, I saw they took all of my silver. I had a china closet full of silver. The only thing they didn't get were the trays. They were wrapped in foil under the cabinet."*

The loss of property and invasion of privacy seriously undermines one's sense of safety and security. In this

case, the factors used to steal her property add to the trauma of the crime. It's as if the perpetrators of the crime will use whatever means necessary. Even though the approach of the woman telling the story seems matter of fact, she may have gone through a process of grieving and healing, uniquely experienced by all survivors of violence.

<u>Assault</u>

Ann shares the details of what led up to her assault and the aftermath. She begins, "*I was coming home from visiting my mother in the nursing home one night. I saw a car drive in. There was about three or four fellahs that got out of that car and that's when I took my purse and put it in front of me, only had $25 dollars in it, but that was money to me, you know. I had bought some sheets at Fred Meyer that night and I wish I wouldn't have stopped at the restaurant, but I went across the street to the store and I got a couple of little pies because I was going to come home and have pie and ice cream with my husband. Funny thing was, I didn't know these fellahs had followed me, but they had and so when I was walking down, I noticed a car going real slow and then I got right across the street and when I got past the corner I noticed this car, but I didn't see anybody get out of it or anything and so I didn't realize just what had happened. The next thing I know I*

was falling down and I hit my wrist on the sidewalk and I

got up and yelled for help. I didn't miss my purse then.

I didn't know my purse had been taken and a couple of

ladies told me that they saw me fall. Well, I didn't see a

car at all, but they picked me up and drove me home. Well,

in the process of driving home, I reached down for my

purse. There was a purse down there and I thought it was

mine, you know. I was so nervous about everything and she

says, that's my purse, like that to me, and I felt kind of

bad because I wasn't trying to take anybody's purse. Well,

she drove me home and of course we called the police and

they came and then my son came and took me to the

hospital."

It is significant that Ann focuses on the details of what happened before and after being assaulted and robbed, but never refers to her perpetrators; it's as if the crime simply happened, without anyone to blame. Her words display no anger, instead the assault is placed among the daily events of her life, with the actions of calling the police and going to the hospital added to her story as an afterthought. From her description, Ann seems more upset about the woman in the car thinking Ann was going to take her purse than Ann is about being assaulted just moments ago.

It is likely that Ann has told this story many times since its occurrence. Certain details of her story may have become more significant with the passing of years or it is possible that Ann never focused on the assault itself. It is difficult to determine if her lack of anger and focus on the perpetrators was or is a block to her quest for empowerment. Nevertheless, if Ann is without the firmly held belief that no one has the right to violate her personal safety, she will forever be in a reactive mode, at the mercy of others.

Gertrude's story points out the internal conflicts encountered when forced to resist an attacker. She explains, "When I was younger, I was visiting a very good friend of mine. Her husband had an office. I really didn't want to see his dumb old office. I came to visit her. That was my purpose, her friendship. He took me there in his office alright and oh boy, I had to wrestle and that was bad. I didn't like that at all. He had no purpose in . . ., but that was the only time that has ever happened. It wasn't just my wrestling, I used some four letter words. I didn't know what else to do. I wasn't able to physically ward him off, but I did. I used some four letter words that surprised me. I don't think men should take advantage of their wife's friends. That happened another time, but not like that. I felt terrible because I had to be like a wildcat and that's not me. I don't appreciate anyone putting me in a position like

that." Gertrude was uncomfortable with having to step outside of her normal persona, saying and doing things that were not in line with how she self-identified. Her ability to "act like a wildcat" most likely staved off a more severe attack, and yet the emotional turmoil she experienced as a result of her actions continues to impact her. Socially constructed role expectations become internalized, erecting lines that are difficult to cross. The identity of old women must not depend on living within the confines of appropriate gender behavior. If this happens, not only is the physical safety of women in jeopardy, but their overall well-being suffers from the inconsistencies they are forced to live with, making the quest for empowerment a most difficult challenge.

Emotional Abuse

Ruth and Maxine, a 69 year old Caucasian woman, describe how their self-esteem suffered as the result of the emotional and verbal abuse inflicted by their husbands. Their stories highlight the devastating effects of abuse experienced over a period of years. Ruth describes her situation: "I was married to a man who was dictatorial. I was kind of like a little mouse in the corner. I changed after our divorce. I had a nervous breakdown, which I think is one of the reasons why people have nervous breakdowns, because it's an escape, and I escaped for a good many years. I finally got my act together and I had

more assertiveness and initiative than when I was married

to him. I was more like I was before I married him."

Abuse experienced over a period of many years affects the core of one's identity by lowering self-esteem. Many different methods are used to survive abuse. Since viable options to resist and escape violence often appear to be and are almost nonexistent, the method of survival used by Ruth makes sense, given the abuse she suffered. Ruth describes how she felt during the time she was emotionally abused by her husband. She states, *"You're really vulnerable. Your mind is really wandering. You're not paying attention to what is going on around you. Ya, that's bad news to have that be happening."* A woman who is experiencing abuse of any kind is at a greater risk of being targeted for violence because her guard is down. She doesn't have the foundation of self-esteem to assertively stand up for herself. It is likely that she already feels isolated and may not have a support system to turn to.

Maxine shares her story: *"My husband downs me all the time for my self-esteem and that. When I worked I was an altogether different person. I know for my safety and well-being and all I have to get going again. When you are working, you are needed and worthwhile. But he's always been this way, he's a very negative person, very manipulative. You do what he wants and that's it.*

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week is too much of that, so I've really gone downhill."

Maxine worked outside of her home for a period of years after her sons were grown, but left her job because of medical problems. She seems to attribute her ailments to her emotionally and verbally abusive husband by stating, *"I've had so many tests and things and I think it's just my emotions. Somebody says something and my brain says hurt and it hurts. Yelling all the time, it's just not good."*

Living with an abusive partner has negatively affected Maxine's self-image, which in turn complicates her medical problems and makes it more difficult for her to have experiences outside of her home where she can build her confidence and independence. It is clear that her physical and emotional health are in jeopardy because of the incessant abuse she is subjected to. Maxine's survival is all encompassing, focused on adapting and coping, with little energy left to create avenues toward empowerment.

Joan emphasizes the importance of outside work in establishing her own independence and identity. She explains, *"Some people have always been timid and they aren't going to change at 70 years old. Depends on what your lifestyle has been, you know, your home lifestyle. Some women have been dominated by a husband for many years. Some have led a very sheltered life. I was lucky that didn't happen to me. I wanted to go out and work. I had*

to convince my husband it was the best thing to do, you

know. It worked out fine for us. Later, I worked in a

position that was parallel to his. But I know friends of

mine who didn't do this and feel lost now. You know, you

meet more people when you get out. I feel more comfortable

now."

Regardless of the source, it is clear that a base of
self-esteem is crucial to empowerment. The conviction of
one's right to live without violence of any kind does not
magically appear. If a woman has not grown up with this
belief, she must take the steps necessary to develop a
positive self-identity, followed by the ability to assert
and defend her rights.

Fear

Fear immobilizes, even when the exact source of the
fear cannot be named. Old women have been exposed to
violence against women for sixty or more years. As a
result, the elusive fear is not situation specific, but may
be experienced as a cloud that hovers over all activities
in one's daily life. In this way, fear is devastating
because it controls and limits all aspects of an old
woman's freedom of movement and thought. Fear is a
detriment to the health and well-being of old women.
Strides toward empowerment become bogged down when fear, in
all its forms, becomes the determining factor in whether
old women will simply react to the events of their world or

become proactively involved in creating a life of their own choosing.

Maxine shares an experience that happened many years ago. From her description, it is obvious that this event has had a profound impact on her life. She explains, "*I guess I was lucky this time, but it sure frightened me. Since we have two sons and we've never had a daughter, I learned to hunt. So when my older son was twelve we started, you know. I remember my husband would sit me under a tree; sit there with your rifle, we're going that way. I never was frightened, never had a problem, never saw any poor sportsmanship. But that was fifteen years ago in the woods and my husband said he was just going to go a couple of blocks away and I was sitting with my rifle. Pretty soon I heard some guys come shooting. And I thought, oh my and they were so close that I just sat there. They were drunk, real drunk. They just looked at me and used bad language. Scared me to death and when they walked by they said we should have shot her. When they were gone, I ran, I ran and hid in some bushes, some trees. And they came back looking for me. They were shooting and that was the most frightening thing that even today if I see some guys coming that look kind of wild with hats . . . . And it was a long time before I could go*

into the woods again. I was frightened, really frightened.

I guess a lot of men do that. What we should've done is

gone to look for the police and reported it, but we never

did. That was the same place later that I did get my only

deer and it was a trophy too."

Maxine's story poignantly describes the terror she
experienced at the hands of men too self-absorbed and
mean-spirited to relate to Maxine as another human being.
Her words instill the reality of women's second class
status from her husband's order to sit there with your
rifle to the gang of men stating that they should've shot
her, and not least is Maxine's explanation, "I guess a lot
of men do that." It is a wonder that Maxine had the
strength to return to the hunting spot and a fitting reward
that it was there that she shot a trophy deer. This
example highlights how fear is a form of violence, no less
devastating than being punched or kicked. Fear of this
nature becomes imbedded in the psyche; it is fear of the
unknown, fear of what could have happened.

Florence, an 81 year old Caucasian woman, describes
her feelings: *"It is a strange world to me. That's all I*

can say. It is a strange world. Prior to coming here, I

lived with one of my sons. He had an apartment and I had

an apartment. And it was different and I felt more secure,

but here I'm on my own. And I feel strange at times. I've

got to be cautious. Who do I meet? How far should I go,

how often, confidential, otherwise? You know, I've go to
be careful."

Florence describes a shift in her feelings. Before
she felt secure living with her son and now she lives
alone and questions everything. She doesn't use the word
fear, but it is obvious that living alone has changed her
outlook. She is cautiously adapting to a new situation,
trying to create a new life that feels safe to her. In her
own way, Florence is resisting fear, instead using caution
as her guide in determining how to live her day to day
life.

Most of the women interviewed for this study did not
explore their feelings surrounding fear. It is likely that
most of the women have dealt with their fears, at least to
the degree that they felt comfortable leaving their homes
to participate in a community workshop. Their
participation demonstrates an involvement in the community
and an ability to pursue their interests. Instead, most
women who were interviewed commented on the fear that other
women experienced. According to Betty, *"Basically, most of*
the women I've run into, they're scared. They're timid."
And Ann, *"People are so afraid now."*

Dorothy describes how fear or caution manifests itself
in the lives of the women she knows: *"They don't talk*
about safety in their homes and no, no, we never talk about
that [sexual assault]. *People probably don't think of*

that. That is another reason why I think most women just

push it away and don't want to confront this danger which

is there, somewhere deep in their . . ., well, you know it

could happen. But they don't face it, but of course they

don't expose themselves as much as I do. **And later, "Well,**

I think that most women, to my experience, at my age they

live more in a secure surrounding, either they go and live

in a retirement home or they go and live in rental

apartments. They don't go out, none of the people I know

would go downtown at night time. They protect themselves

that way."

Again, avoidance and restricting behavior is described

as a means of protection, yet this measure only provides a

safeguard against assaults that occur outside of a

residence. Dorothy states that the old women she knows

don't talk about safety in their homes and they most

certainly don't talk about sexual assault. Their personal

safety strategies fall in line with common misconceptions

about assault, i.e. that perpetrators are always strangers

who commit their crimes at night. Avoidance and

restricting activities decrease the likelihood that old

women will be the target of some forms of violence such as

stranger assaults or purse snatching. Restricting one's

behavior is a personal safety option that makes sense to

many old women, given the circumstances of their lives.

Problems occur when this method is viewed as the only option available.

From Dorothy's earlier comments, it appears that she selectively uses withdrawal and avoidance. Certain situations leave Dorothy feeling helpless, as if avoidance and withdrawal are her only options. While in other respects, she views herself as set apart from other old women in her decision to expose herself by going out. Her perspective represents the continuum of control experienced by one person, demonstrating the complexity of personal safety. Each woman is unique in her threshold of control, negotiating the circumstances of her life to suit her desired level of security.

Since most women do not share their personal safety strategies, the opportunities for misinformation to prevail is substantial. If old women were aware of the dynamics of assault, it is likely their fear would actually decrease or would be channeled into resistance strategies. Part of the way fear functions is to base it on real and/or imagined threats, therefore multiplying the harmful effects. But regardless of whether the level of fear is in line with the statistical evidence of violence, it still exists. It doesn't have to be justified or backed up by statistics to be real for old women. Therefore, the approach should be two-fold. One, to provide a forum in order for old women to give voice to their fears, in short, an affirmation of fear in whatever form it takes. And second, to provide

accurate information on how violence happens in order to begin to understand how fear is played out in the lives of old women.

The categorization of all old women as fearful feeds into a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Fear then becomes normalized with the accompanying isolation and invisibility of old women taken for granted and perhaps expected by society at large. Betty and Lois, workshop participants interviewed for this study, present their viewpoints on the subject. According to Betty, *"A great many women have never done anything for themselves. It's always been their father took care of them. They're scared to leave their homes, to leave their rooms, no confidence."* Lois, an 83 year old Caucasian woman, concurs: *"I think I'm different because I've been around. You know, some of these women have gotten out too much. I've lived in many places through the years so I've met all kinds of people. I get along with everybody. Some have been very sheltered. They are afraid or something."* As previously discussed, developing interests through social or work-related means can be crucial to the development of self-esteem and confidence in one's ability to succeed at various tasks. These positive feelings also decrease the level of fear experienced, making empowerment possible.

Several women provide evidence that issues of fear and safety can be confronted and discussed in a way that serves

to increase the amount of control experienced. Betty and Lois continue their conversation. Betty states, "*These women were terrified because of the fog. They were afraid someone would come up and grab them or something. It had never occurred to me to be afraid. And I was never attacked or approached or even; actually that San Francisco isn't as scary as they make it out.*" Lois, "*I don't think any place is. I really don't. I think like this lady says, we don't have any problems. I've galloped all over New York and not too late at night and I've gone out after dark, but I mean, I've never been afraid. I've never had anyone attack me. I never had anybody come up and, I never have. I don't act like I'm scared to death, even if I'm a little leery, you know.*"

And Frances, "*I don't believe in living in fear. I've never had problems on the street. I think if there has been problems, it's been because I'm skittish about someone approaching too close and following. No reason to really be afraid, except that it is bombarded at us too much, but I am not one who will just wait and sit fearfully for something to happen.*"

Frances describes how her "handicap" has affected her personal safety approach: "*Well, as for being vulnerable, most of us that are handicapped, wheelchairs, whatever, in*

a sense we're all lumped together and all vulnerable. But I try not to place myself where I'm alone. In the first place, my arms aren't strong enough. I can't even go around the block by myself. I generally have somebody with me that can help me uphill, up the cutaways. I know they're strong and that they can watch out for themselves. I can watch out for myself. I wore the prothesis for almost two years, then began to fracture off. Then I used crutches. At that point, I think perhaps there was a period when I was fearful. But I survived that. No, it's just not in my nature to be that fearful."

Changing Times

Many old women referred back to a time when their personal safety was not an ever-present concern. Joan, *"You know, you felt perfectly safe years ago, walking down the street, waiting for the bus, but now you don't. You have to be aware all the time."* Alice, a 68 year old Caucasian woman, describes her outlook then: *"Gad, in college, I went away to Salem and I would get sick and tired of studying at night that I'd go for a nice walk around the capitol building all by myself. I don't think it would be so smart to do right now. But times have changed, so there is a lack of opportunity to learn things and I had all kinds of opportunities because it was the*

*thing to do. Now everybody is very closed in, [they] don't
want to get involved."*

The increased level of violence in present society has
diminished the opportunity to be adventurous by placing
oneself in new situations outside of a home environment.
Alice felt safe enough to go on a walk when she desired, in
essence building a foundation of independence. It is
probable that the changing times have decreased the
opportunity for Alice to expand her world, to follow a whim
and be adventurous.

According to Maria, *"People were just different. You
could go and leave your doors unlocked. We lived in the
same neighborhood for years. We knew everybody. They
never bothered you. You could go away and leave your house
unlocked and no one would bother it. I don't know, times
are different. It wasn't like it is now. We weren't
afraid. Things have changed and there wasn't the drugs
there are now and the alcohol and people without work and
homelessness and all that. It wasn't that bad."* Maria's
words point to the devastating effects that various forms
of oppression have on society as a whole. The morale and
consequently the ability to resist is eroded by the
constant barrage of violence in its many forms.

Balancing Safety and Control

The changes occurring over one's life span have meant that issues of safety and control must continually be negotiated. Balancing the use of safety precautions with the need to exercise freedom in the realm of individual lifestyle preferences can be complex. Joan and Zella describe how these issues played out in their lives.

Zella states, *"I know a lot of people think I'm foolish because during the day, especially during the morning, I swing my front door open. Of course I keep the screen door locked. But at the same time, someone could cut that and unlock it and easily come in. But I like the fresh air and to cool the house down. So, in some respects, I'm rather careless. You know, when I do watch television I see women walking with billfolds in their hand or women walking, you know, and I think, hey, it would be very easy to grab that. They just seem so unconcerned. Are they the ones that get robbed or is it the people who try to be careful?"*

Zella seems to be comparing her own situation with the women on television. In essence, asking if her carelessness or use of protective strategies really make any difference in determining whether she will be targeted for an assault or robbery. She wonders if one approach is any better than the other. Zella's words bring forth the

question of whether it makes sense to restrict her life to the point that she can no longer enjoy some of the activities that are important in her life.

Joan offers another perspective, describing the security system her neighbor uses: *"Her house is so badly locked that it takes her 5 minutes to get all the doors unlocked just so she can get in. You know, I would be trapped. This would not be safety to me. And suppose there was a fire and you fell, and you couldn't reach the key or whatever. I would feel really trapped in that situation. I figure if they want to get in they're going to get in."*

Joan views the locks as an extreme measure that created a safety hazard for her neighbor, rather than a positive deterrence to crime. A common philosophy rests on the assumption that a criminal who wants to get in will get in, putting into question how useful safety precautions such as locks really are.

Joan's comments highlight two approaches to personal safety, located on opposite ends of the continuum. Either an old woman can buy every safety device available, abide by every precaution, restricting her life in countless ways or she can throw up her hands, leaving her personal safety up to fate. Neither of these options give any control to old women themselves. They are void of personal autonomy and empowerment. By using the first option, old women

become pawns, with personal safety measures doled out or mandated by those who claim to be experts. Old women are expected to follow every rule or risk possible blame for an assault on property or person.

The second option presented means the cessation of any active involvement in their personal safety and the right to live without violence or harassment. This approach assumes that all personal safety measures are ineffective and consequently old women will have to accept that they are at the mercy of others. It increases their invisibility and ability to actively influence the circumstances of their daily lives. They are forced to give up the right to demand safety and therefore the right to their existence.

An integrated approach has the greatest potential in fostering the empowerment of old women. Acknowledging the reality of violence, oppression, and fear is validating and a crucial first step in being able to create change. As important, is building a support network that will provide the motivation and means to increase one's locus of control. The question is not whether old women should be tightly restricted or have complete freedom, the question is how to live in this complex world in a way that is self-affirming and empowering.

Tactics of Resistance

Old women who feel hopeless can find a model of courage and inspiration in the stories of women who have actively resisted. Two women from the Multicultural Senior Center illustrate the power of fighting back. Both women were eager to share their stories with the other women. Bernice, an 81 year old African American woman, tells her story: *"I was accosted over there on 14th and I started to hit him with my umbrella and I brought it up like this and he said don't you dare. I was afraid he would take it away and really do damage to me. So I started running and they had blocked off this street and so I had to go this way and then this way, and this way* [motioning] *to get to this gate. He knocked me down and I screamed and screamed and screamed and nobody heard me. And he knocked me down and got my purse. I had to go and have my hip x-rayed because he pushed me so hard I fell down."*

And Judith, a 78 year old African American woman, states: *"This guy accosted me and he said you are the prettiest little lady I ever did see, if you just let me . . ., I won't use the word he said, I'd be the happiest man in the world. And I turned this wheelchair on high and ran over him. The chair weighs a hundred and eighty-nine, so three hundred and eighty-nine pounds. I left him laying there howling."*

By virtue of the diverse number of safety tactics used, the women in this study are creative in the use of strategies to increase their safety and security. These examples do not represent the full scope of measures used since their general awareness and assertiveness skills were not elaborated on by the participants.

Maria states, *"Well, I live by myself. My doors are locked. I keep good locks on my doors. I would call 911 if I had to. I watch, I'm very alert in that sense. Thank God no one has ever bothered me. We all have guardian angels and I love the angels and they are very helpful."* Joan, *"I answer the phone we, even when I'm alone. My husband still has people calling for him and I don't let them know he isn't here. They don't need to know."* **And** Zella, *"I sleep with my windows open, but I have bars on my bedroom windows. I couldn't sleep if I didn't have fresh air, but I wouldn't feel safe without bars on the windows."*

Ann describes the approach she takes when out on the street: *"Well, one thing I carry my purse way down low and I don't usually put all my fingers on it. I hold it maybe with a couple* [fingers] *unless it is terribly heavy. But I don't usually try to be conscious that I've got it clear behind me, unless I'm walking downtown or something like that. And I don't see real good out of my left eye, so a lot of times I bump into somebody on that side. But I've*

sometimes had people come up to me when I hadn't known

they'd been around, you know. I'm a great one to take in

everything and notice flowers and look around like that,

but I usually try not to walk too slow. I don't try to go

out in the evening at all. Once in a great while, I've

been out when it is just turning dusk or something and I

try to keep a pretty good gait that way cause they say if

you're too slow, you're kind of a target for someone to

bother you."

Several women at the Multicultural Senior Center

offered advice in describing their strategies. Their

comments include: *"Spray him in the face with mace"* and,

"When someone comes to the door, go to the door with the

phone and say I'm on the phone, what you want. If you

don't have a phone, then you tell them, you look and say,

I'm answering the phone right now, and there ain't a soul

in the house, but you say, I'm answering the phone right

now, like you talking back to somebody in the house."

Another response was, *"I think with me, though, I showed*

them the knife. Well, that was the end of that noise."

She explains, *"My father is an ex-policeman and I always*

carry a knife. I'm not kidding. I have one now." Also,

"The kids, you know, they're grown, so I don't depend on

them to be there, but I practice my roll. By that I mean,

how I'm going to roll out the bed and that sort of stuff,

and I don't hurt myself either. About two weeks ago,

somebody was by my house, sounded like a shot and I was

half asleep, not totally gone, but I've done that so much,

cause when I do, I hit the floor." **And,** *"I don't never,*

never, pay nobody cash money. I tell them I don't have no

money in the house. I could have twenty or thirty dollars

in there. I'll pay them by check. What's your name, write

them a check."

Using a translator, the women who originate from China

stated that *"they keep their doors locked and have locks on*

the windows. When they're on the street, they walk slower.

They don't want to trip. Also if there is somebody at the

door, they won't open it unless they know the person."

These safety strategies demonstrate that a significant

amount of thought and action is put forth in an attempt to

live free of violence. These safety strategies primarily

focus on the selection of a precautionary measure as a

means to increase one's safety. Although not all women

rely solely on preventative precautions, the generalized

approach is based on the assumption that most issues of

personal safety can be addressed by simply selecting a

safety precaution to fit the situation. This "solution" to

personal safety is a bandaid, a reactive measure at best,

without meaningful connection to the wholeness and

diversity of old women's lives. These precautions must act in conjunction with an understanding of other useful personal safety tools (awareness, assertiveness, physical techniques), along with an analysis of the political status of old women, in order for empowerment to be possible.

Conclusion

Old women face many barriers in their quest for empowerment. The breadth of the challenges they are up against and the way in which they resist and survive is unique to each participant in this study. Even though the experiences of old women are diverse, one theme remains constant; old women occupy a position of marginality in society. Consequently, change is needed in order to bring old women onto center stage. For this to occur, systemic change must occur across the full spectrum of institutions and ideologies. Although incremental change can have a positive influence on the individual lives of old women, a complete overhaul of inequitable power relations is needed for the emancipation of all oppressed groups to be possible.

It is a loss for all of society when the full potential of any person is diminished due to oppression or violence. Furthermore, it is indicative of a stagnant and dysfunctional society when the silence and invisibility of an entire group of people is not even acknowledged. This research is significant in its potential use as a catalyst for discussing and implementing change.

In order for change to occur we must begin to see how the lives of all people are connected. Age, gender, race, class, and sexual orientation are factors that have historically separated groups of people, often with an

accompanying distrust of traits that are different from one's own. Our differences, or the unique blend of characteristics that make a person an individual, should serve to enrich our connections, bringing us closer together through the process of learning from each other. Old women are marginalized because some of their defining characteristics, namely their old age and female gender, are socially constructed to have less value. Their marginality and resulting lack of power is taken for granted and accepted, often by old women themselves and the larger community. Old women strive for empowerment as a means to exercise some control in their lives. Their resistance and survival is in response to an oppressive, hierarchical society. A healthy, or properly functioning society with the goal of achieving the highest quality of life for all members, does not ignore the detrimental effects of oppression and violence toward any one group of its people.

I present a variety of strategies to instigate change. Inequitable power relations must be altered. Privileged groups must acknowledge their privilege and create avenues for a more equal distribution of power among all groups. Marginalized people must be granted access to power. For example, old women should be invited and given the means to become members of advisory councils, hiring committees, and neighborhood groups. They should also hold political office at all levels. Their participation must be sought

in significant numbers so that they are not treated simply as token members. The structure of policy-making boards and councils should be altered to meet the needs and skills of marginalized participants, i.e. meeting time, location, style of meeting, decision process, etc. Bringing old women into positions of power will take work and will mean that standard practices are no longer status quo.

Social service agencies, in particular, can play an important role given the present political structure in which many old women are forced to rely on these services and resources for their basic survival needs. The role of these agencies should be to make the system work for the consumer, rather than continuing to expect the consumer to adhere to a dysfunctional system where services are doled out in a bureaucratic manner with little regard for the autonomy or individual needs of old women. If professionals in this field are unable to change the system or their part in the larger system, they should acknowledge the limitations and give old women the means to increase control over their lives in whatever way possible.

The women in my study who were proactive in addressing personal safety concerns, seemed to also take a proactive approach in other areas of their lives. For old women who are seeking methods to increase their sphere of control, I suggest starting this process by exploring how they approach issues of personal safety. Enrolling in a self defense or personal safety class is a good first step.

Learning a variety of tools to increase confidence and independence can have a dramatic affect on all areas of an old woman's life. Self defense is not about following a list of do's and don't's. Rather, it includes both a recognition and analysis of factors that have influenced your daily life, along with the continued exploration of ways to create meaningful change. Creating connections with other old women may lessen the isolation and invisibility that accompanies internalized oppression and fear of violence in all forms.

The women interviewed for this study demonstrated their involvement in community activities by participating in a personal safety workshop. The resistance and survival voiced by the participants is not surprising given their willingness to discuss and learn more about issues of personal safety. Even though most of the women interviewed appeared to take a proactive approach, their ability to feel in control of their personal safety varied. Some of the old women actively resisted the barriers to empowerment, while others were not able to reach beyond mere survival. The background of some participants indicate that their exposure to various forms of adversity or oppression earlier in life may have prepared them for the onslaught of ageism experienced most acutely in old age.

Future studies should focus on the experiences of the old women not included in this study, namely those who are

isolated in their homes. Another area to explore is whether a personal safety or self defense class influences an old woman's approach to issues of safety and control and whether this in turn reaches into other areas of her life. In addition, an in-depth exploration and analysis of experiences across the life span could shed more light on why some old women are able to actively resist the barriers to empowerment.

My study is limited because the data gathered only reflects a selected number of experiences. A study with interviews, similar to an oral history, might elicit a more holistic view of an old woman's life, providing more opportunities for her to explore her quest for empowerment. The interdependence of all forms of oppression also created a research dilemma. Issues of diversity and oppression became problematic when I attempted to be inclusive, without the resources or skills to truly validate the lives of all old women. Future studies are needed to explore how interdependent oppressive forces are intertwined in the lives of old women.

This research project was both a personal journey and an academic study. Exploring an old woman's quest for empowerment can provide insight into our own lives. I found myself wanting to write we instead of they because I see my life and the lives of women I know in this study. Their stories are our stories because we are all connected. The marginalized status of old women will continue unless

oppression and violence are challenged and erased. Until then, old women will continue their quest for empowerment.

Works Cited

Acker, Joan, Kate Barry, and Johanna Esseveld.
"Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist
Research." Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship
as Lived Research. Ed. Mary Margaret Fonow, and
Judith A. Cook. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.
133-153.

Akers, Ronald L., Christine Sellers, and John Cochran.
"Fear of Crime and Victimization Among the Elderly in
Different Types of Communities." Criminology 25.3
(1987): 487+.

Anderson, Joe. Telephone Interview. 21 July 1994.

Anderson, Kathryn, and Dana C. Jack. "Learning to Listen:
Interview Techniques and Analyses." Women's Words:
The Feminist Practice of Oral History. Ed. Sherna
Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai. New York: Routledge,
1991. 11-25.

Anderson, Margaret L. and Patricia Hill Collins.
"Conceptualizing Race, Class, and Gender." Race,
Class, and Gender: An Anthology. 2nd ed. Ed.
Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins.
Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995. 56-70.

Arber, Sara, and Jay Ginn. Gender and Later Life: A
Sociological Analysis of Resources and Constraints.
London: Sage, 1991.

Bart, Pauline. "Book Reviews." Signs (Winter 1994):
527-531.

Becker, Gay. "The Oldest Old: Autonomy in the Face of
Frailty." Journal of Aging Studies 8.1 (1994):
59-76.

Blea, Irene I. La Chicana and the Intersection of Race,
Class, and Gender. Westport: Praeger, 1992.

Blumenfeld, Warren J., and Diane Raymond. Looking at Gay
and Lesbian Life. Boston: Beacon, 1988.

Boegeman, Margaret. "Teaching Creative Writing to Older
Women." Women Studies Quarterly 1 & 2 (1989):
48-55.

Brillon, Yves. Victimization and Fear of Crime Among the
Elderly. Toronto: Butterworths, 1987.

Campbell, Gillie, and Caroline T. Chauncey. "The Economics
    of Aging for Women." Ed. Paula B. Doress-Worters and
    Diane Laskin Siegal. The New Ourselves Growing Older:
    Women Aging with Knowledge and Power. New York:
    Simon and Schuster, 1994. 187-203.

Chatman, Elfreda A. The Information World of Retired
    Women. Westport: Greenwood, 1992.

"Coercion." The American Heritage Dictionary. 2nd College
    ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.

Cohen, Leah. Small Expectations: Society's Betrayal of
    Older Women. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984.

Comstock, Donald E. "A Method for Critical Research:
    Investigating the World to Change It." Knowledge and
    Values in Social and Educational Research. Ed. Eric
    Bredo and Walter Feinberg. Philadelphia: Temple UP,
    1982. 370-390.

Copper, Baba. Over the Hill: Reflections on Ageism
    between Women. Freedom: Crossing, 1988.

Coverston, David Y. Security for Senior Citizens: How to
    Make the Golden Years Safer Years. Ocala: Security
    Seminars, 1988.

Cox, Harold G. Later Life: The Realities of Aging 3rd ed.
    Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1993.

Davis, Linda J., and Elaine Brody. Rape and Older Women:
    A Guide to Prevention and Protection. Rockville:
    Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1979.

Davis, Richard H., and James A. Davis. TV's Image of the
    Elderly: A Practical Guide for Change. Lexington:
    D.C. Heath and Co., 1985.

Doress-Worters, Paula B., and Diana Laskin Siegel. "The
    Potential of the Second Half of Life." The New
    Ourselves Growing Older: Women Aging with Knowledge
    and Power. Ed. Paula B. Doress-Worters and Diana
    Laskin Siegel. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.
    xxi-xxvi.

Douglass, Richard L. Domestic Mistreatment of the Elderly-
    -Towards Prevention. Washington: American
    Association of Retired Persons, 1987.

Dressel, Paula L. Gender, Race, and Class: Beyond the
    Feminization of Poverty in Later Life." <u>Critical
    Perspectives on Aging: The Political and Moral
    Economy</u>. Ed. Meredith Minkler and Carol L. Estes.
    Amityville: Baywood, 1991. 245-252.

Eitzen, D. Stanley, and Maxine Baca Zinn. "Structural
    Transformation and Systems of Inequality." <u>Race,
    Class, and Gender: An Anthology</u>. 2nd ed. Ed.
    Margaret L. Anderson   and Patricia Hill Collins.
    Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995. 202-206.

Fein, Judith. <u>Exploding the Myth of Self-Defense: A
    Survival Guide for Every Woman</u>. Duncans Mills:
    Torrance, 1993.

Feminists in Self-Defense Training (F.I.S.T.) <u>F.I.S.T.
    Self-Defense Teacher's Handbook</u>. Olympia: F.I.S.T.,
    1988.

Fine, Michelle. "Passions, Politics, and Power: Feminist
    Research Possibilities." <u>Disruptive Voices: The
    Possibilities of Feminist Research</u>. Ann Arbor:
    University of Michigan, 1992. 205-231.

Fredricksen, Karen. "Women and Aging: Changing Our
    Power." <u>Changing Our Power: An Antroduction to Women
    Studies</u>. Ed. Jo Whitehorse Cochran, Donna Langston,
    and Carolyn Woodward. Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1988.
    164-166.

Friedan, Betty. <u>The Fountain of Age</u>. New York: Simon and
    Schuster, 1993.

Genevay, B. "Ageism + Sexism = Old, Ugly and Worthless."
    <u>Projects on Aging, Graduate School of Social Work</u>
    Seattle: n.p., March 1974.

Gentry, Jacqyelyn H., and Faye M. Seifert. "A Joyous
    Passage: Becoming a Crone." <u>Lesbians at Midlife:
    The CreativeTransition</u>. Ed. Barbara Sange, Joyce
    Warshow, and Adrienne   J. Smith. San Francisco:
    Spinster, 1991. 225-233.

Gerike, Ann. "Old' is not a four-letter word." <u>Good Age</u>
    May 1988: n.p.

Gordon, Margaret T., and Stephanie Riger. <u>The Female Fear</u>.
    New York: Free P, 1989.

Gottlieb, Naomi. "Families, Work, and the Lives of Older Women." Women as They Age: Challenge, Opportunity, and Triumph. Ed. J. Dianne Garner and Susan O. Mercer. New York: Haworth P, 1989. 217-244.

Grossman, Rochel, and Joan Sutherland, ed. Surviving Sexual Assault. New York: Congdon and Weed, 1983.

Hall, C. Margaret. Women and Empowerment: Strategies for Increasing Autonomy. Washington: Hemisphere, 1992.

Hampsten, Elizabeth. "Considering More than a Single Reader." Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives. Ed. Personal Narratives Group. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. 129-138.

Hanmer, Jalna, and Sheila Saunders. Well-Founded Fear: A Community Study of Violence to Women. London: Hutchinson, 1984.

Harbaugh, Izzy. "Fear and Hatred of OLD." The Lavender Network: Oregon's Lesbian and Gay Newsmagazine. April 1993: 10-11.

Harding, Sandra. "Conclusion: Epistemological Questions." Feminism and Methodology. Ed. Sandra Harding. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1987. 181-190.

Healey, Shevy. "Growing To Be an Old Woman: Aging and Ageism." Women and Aging: An Anthology by Women. Ed. Jo Alexander, et al. Corvallis: Calyx, 1986. 58-62.

Hen Co-op, The. Growing Old Disgracefully: New Ideas for Getting the Most Out of Life. Freedom: Crossing, 1994.

Hill, Rosanna, Joan Iten Sutherland, and Patricia Giggans. Women's Self-Defense: A Complete Guide to Assault Prevention. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women, 1987.

Hill, Rosanna, Joan Sutherland, and Patricia Giggans, eds. Self-Defense: Women Teaching Women. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Commission on Assaults Against Women, 1986.

Holmes, Ellen Rhoads, and Lowell D. Holmes. Other Cultures, Elder Years. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage P, 1995.

Hooks, bell. Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black. Boston: South End P, 1989.

Hooks, bell. <u>Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery</u>. Boston: South End P, 1993.

Hudson, Robert B., and Judith G. Gonyea. "A Perspective on Women in Politics: Political Mobilization and Older Women." <u>Gender and Aging</u>. Ed. Lou Glasse and Jon Hendricks. Amityville: Baywood, 1992. 129-138.

Hutcherson, Bernice. "Elderly Women: Crime Prevention/Protection." <u>Convergence in Aging: Older Women: Current Issues and Problems</u> 2 (March 1984): 68-83.

Jacobs, Ruth Harriet. <u>Older Women: Surviving and Thriving: A Manual for Group Leaders</u>. Milwaukee: Family Service America, 1987.

Jillson, Irene, et al. <u>A Mother's Day Call to Action: Ending Violence Against Midlife and Older Women</u>. Washington: Older Women's League, 1994.

Kautzer, Kathleen. "Growing Numbers, Growing Force: Older Women Organize." <u>Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology</u>. 2nd ed. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995. 494-500.

Kaye/Kantrowitz, Melanie. <u>The Issue is Power: Essays on Women, Jews, Violence and Resistance</u>. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1992.

Kennedy, Leslie W., and Robert A. Silverman. "Significant Others and Fear of Crime Among the Elderly." <u>International Journal of Aging and Human Development</u> 20.4 (1984-1985): 241-256.

Knowles, Louis L., and Kenneth Prewitt. <u>Institutionalized Racism in America</u>. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1970.

Lamb, Doug. <u>Tactical Use of Defense Sprays: A "Surviving the Mean Streets" Handbook</u>. Salem: Security, 1993.

Landau, Lynne J.M. <u>Fighting Chance: Assertiveness, Rape Avoidance and Self Defense for Women</u>. Portland: Fighting Chance, 1983.

Langston, Donna. "Tired of Playing Monopoly?" <u>Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology</u>. Ed. Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins. 2nd ed. Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995. 100-110.

Lather, Patti. "Research as Praxis." Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern. New York: Routledge, 1991. 50-69.

Lather, Patti. "Issues of Validity in Openly Ideological Research: Between a Rock and a Soft Place." Interchange 17.4 (Winter 1986): 63-84.

Lee, Janet, and Marylea Benware Carr. "Empowerment of Women Residents in the Nursing Home." Women and Therapy (1993): 187-203.

Leonetti, Shannon Moon. "A Circle of Caring." Oregonian [Portland] 2 Nov. 1993, Living: 1.

Lesnoff-Caravaglia, Gari. "Double Stigmata: Female and Old." The World of the Older Woman: Conflicts and Resolutions. Ed. Gari Lesnoff-Caravaglia. New York: Human Sciences, 1984. 11-20.

Leung, Debbie. Self Defense: The Womanly Art of Self-care, Intuition, and Choice. Tacoma: R & M, 1991.

Long, Kathy, and Davis Miller. No! No! No!: A Woman's Guide to Personal Defense and Street Safety. New York: Putnam, 1993.

Lorde, Audre. Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. New York: Crossing, 1984.

Macdonald, Barbara. "Do You Remember Me?" Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging, and Ageism. Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1983. 13-24.

Macdonald, Barbara. "Look Me in the Eye." Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging, and Ageism. Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1983. 25-42.

MacQuarrie, Margaret Ann, and Barbara Keddy. "Women and Aging: Directions for Research." Journal of Women and Aging 4.2 (1992): 21-32.

Maguire, Aveen. "Power: Now You See It, Now You Don't: A Woman's Guide to How Power Works." Defining Women: Social Institutions and Gender Divisions. Ed. Linda McDowell and Rosemary Pringle. United Kingdom: Polity P, 1992. 18-25.

Maguire, Patricia. Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach. Amherst: Center for International Education, School of Education, 1987.

Mall, E. Jane. _And God Created Wrinkles_. New York: Ballantine, 1988.

Mason, Debrorah. "The Pain of Sexual Harassment After 50: Why Older Women are Vulnerable . . . and How They Should Fight Back." _New Choices_ September 1993: 18-21.

Mauro-Cochrane, Jeanette. _Self-respect and Sexual Assault_. Bradenton, FL: Human Services Institute, 1993.

McAdoo, John L. "Crime Stress, Self-esteem, and Life Satisfaction." _Aged in Black America_. Ed. James Jackson, Linda M. Chatters, and Robert Joseph Taylor. Newbury Park: Sage P, 1993. 38-48.

McDaniels, Susan A. "Women and Aging: A Sociological Perspective." _Women as They Age: Challenge, Opportunity, and Triumph_. Ed. J. Dianne Garner and Susan O. Mercer. New York: Haworth P, 1989. 47-67.

McNeely, R.L. "Race, Sex, and Victimization of the Elderly." _Aging in Minority Groups_. Ed. R.L. McNeely and John L. Colen. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983. 137-152.

Mies, Maria. "Toward a Methodology for Feminist Research." _Theories of Women Studies_. Ed. Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983. 117-139.

Mizell, Louis R. _Street Sense for Women: How to Stay Safe in a Violent World_. New York: Berkeley, 1993.

Mullings, Leith. _On Our Own Terms: Race, Class and Gender in the Lives of African American Women_. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Myerding, Esther. "The Older Woman." _In Defense of Ourselves: A Rape Prevention Handbook for Women_. Linda Tschirhart Sanford and Ann Fetter. Garden City: Doubleday, 1979. 140-143.

Nelson, Jim. Personal Interview. 26 August 1994.

Nuessel, Frank. Letter. _Active Seniors_ 25 July 1985: n.p.

Oakley, Ann. "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms." _Doing Feminist Research_ Ed. Helen Roberts. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981. 30-61.

Palmore, Erdman B. _Ageism: Negative and Positive_. Vol. 25. New York: Springer, 1990.

Personal Narratives Group. Introduction. <u>Interpreting</u>
     <u>Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal</u>
     <u>Narratives</u>. Ed. Personal Narratives Group.
     Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989.

---. "Truths." <u>Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist</u>
     <u>Theory and Personal Narratives</u>. Ed. Personal
     Narratives Group. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989.
     261-264.

Pharr, Suzanne. <u>Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism</u>. Little
     Rock: Chardon P, 1988.

Pheterson, Gail. "Alliances Between Women: Overcoming
     Internalized Oppression and Internalized Domination."
     <u>Bridges of Power: Women's Multicultural Alliances</u>
     Ed. Lisa Albrecht and Rose M. Brewer. Philadelphia:
     New Society, 1990. 34-48.

Porcino, Jane. <u>Growing Older, Getting Better: A Handbook</u>
     <u>for Women in the Second Half of Life</u>. New York:
     Continuum, 1983.

Quinn, Khaleghl. <u>Everyday Self Defense: Protect Yourself</u>
     <u>with Attitude, Intuition, and Strategy</u>.
     San Francisco: Thorsons, 1993.

Rathbone-McCuan, Eloise. "The Abused Older Woman: A
     Discussion of Abuses and Rape." <u>The World of the</u>
     <u>Older Woman: Conflicts and Resolutions</u>. Ed. Gari
     Lesnoff-Caravaglia. New York: Human Sciences, 1984.
     50-51.

Reinharz, Shulamit. "Feminism and Anti-ageism: Emergent
     Connections." <u>Health and Economic Status of Older</u>
     <u>Women: Research Issues and Data Sources</u>. Ed. A.
     Regula Herzog, Karen C. Holden, and Mildred M.
     Seltzer. Amityville: Baywood, 1989. 24-32.

Reinharz, Shulamit. <u>Feminist Methods In Social Research</u>.
     New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Reinharz, Shulamit, and Graham D. Rowles, eds.
     "Qualitative Gerontology: Themes and Challenges."
     <u>Qualitative Gerontology</u>. New York: Springer, 1988.
     3-33.

Resnick, Susan Kushner. "Fear Itself: Women's Constant
     Stress Over Safety Creates Health Problems." <u>Utne</u>
     <u>Reader</u> (March/April 1993): 64-65.

Ribbens, Jane. "Interviewing--An 'Unnatural Situation'?"
     <u>Women Studies Int. Forum</u> 12.6 (1989): 579-592.

Rich, Cynthia. "Cynthia's Afterword." Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging, and Ageism. Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1983. 102-106.

Rich, Cynthia. "The Women in the Tower." Look Me in the Eye: Old Women, Aging, and Ageism. Barbara Macdonald and Cynthia Rich. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1983. 76-89.

Sacks, Karen Brodkin. "What's a Life Story Got to Do with It?" Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives. Ed. Personal Narratives Group. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. 85-95.

Scott, Joan W. "Experience." Feminists Theorize the Political. Ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge, 1992. 22-40.

Sheffield, Carole. "Sexual Terroism." Women: A Feminist Perspective. 3rd Edition Ed. Jo Freeman. Mountain View: Mayfield, 1984. 3-19.

Shostak, Majorie. "'What the Wind Won't Take Away'!: The Genesis of Nisa--The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman." Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives. Ed. Personal Narratives Group. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989. 228-240.

Simmons, J.L. 67 Ways to Protect Seniors From Crime. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993.

Sisson, Bernice. "Help for Older Battered Women." Senior Spotlight: Minnesota Board on Aging. Winter 1996-1997: 14.

Smith, Dorothy E. The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1987.

Smith, Robert J., and Michael C. Thornton. "Identity and Consciousness: Group Solidarity." Aged in Black America. Ed. James Jackson, Linda M. Chatters, and Robert Joseph Taylor. Newbury Park: Sage P, 1993. 38-48.

Stanley, Liz and Sue Wise. Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983.

Stanley, Liz, and Sue Wise. "Method, Methodology, and Epistemology in Feminist Research Process." Feminist Praxis: Research, Theory and Epistemology in Feminist Sociology. Ed. Liz Stanley. London: Routledge, 1990. 20-60.

Telsey, Nadia. Self Defense From the Inside Out: A Workbook for Women. Eugene: n.p., 1993.

Troll, Lillian E. "The Psycho-Social Problems of Older Women." The World of the Older Woman: Conflicts and Resolutions. Ed. Gari Lesnoff-Caravaglia. New York: Human Sciences, 1984. 21-35.

Women's Action Coalition. WAC Stats: The Facts About Women. New York: New Press, 1993.

Women's Initiative. Abused Elders or Older Battered Women?: Report on the AARP Forum. Washington: American Association of Retired Persons, 1993.

Yamato, Gloria. "Something about the Subject Makes It Hard to Name." Race, Class, and Gender in the U.S.: An Integrated Study. Ed. Paula Rothenberg. Second ed. New York: St. Martin's, 1992. 58-62.

Yin, Peter. Victimization and the Aged. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1985.

Zevitz, Richard G., and Dennis M. Marlock. "Senior Citizen Assault Prevention Unit." FBI: Law Enforcement Bulletin (March 1989): 10-13.

Appendices

Appendix A: Orienting Questions

1.   How would you describe yourself?

2.   How do you feel about yourself?

3.   What are you areas of strength and weakness?

4.   Are you able to be assertive when you want to?

5.   Do others listen and respect your opinions?

6.   How do you keep yourself safe?

7.   Do you have a story you would like to share?
     (success story, close-call, or when you were
     victimized by someone)

8.   Have your feelings or thoughts about personal
     safety issues changed throughout the years?

9.   Do you talk about personal safety with other
     women your age?

10. Are you fearful in any way?

11. What areas of personal safety or self defense are
     you the most interested in?

12. Do you think your age or gender has affected your
     ability to be safe?

13. What kind of messages did you receive when
     growing up on what it meant to be a woman?

14. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Surviving and Thriving:
Personal Safety Skills for Women over Sixty Workshop

As part of the personal safety workshop sponsored by the Portland Senior Center, I agree to participate in an interview about the area of crime prevention and safety. The goal of this research project is to understand what role self defense can play in increasing the level of safety and control experienced in the lives of aged women. The workshop cannot guarantee safety for any of the participants, but rather is able to offer options to use in order to decrease the likelihood of assault. It is up to each workshop participant to decide what options are the most suitable in your life.

I will participate under the following conditions:

*I will allow the interviews to be tape recorded. I understand it is being taped so that nothing is missed. I can turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interview and I can end the interview or have the tape completely erased at any time with no negative consequences or penalties.

*I agree to let Sindy Mau use the information from the interviews in her research project and any publication that might arise. However, I understand that my privacy and confidentiality will be protected by disguising names and any other identifying information.

*I understand I have a right to receive and review a written transcript of the interviews. After reviewing and discussing these with Sindy, I can suggest modifications for accuracy or clarity or add new information.

_____

Signature

_____

Date

Questions about the research, my rights, or research-related injuries should be directed to Janet Lee at 503-737-2826. This workshop is not being sponsored by Oregon State University.

Credentials of Sindy Mau, Workshop Leader

*Instructor for *Women's Self-Defense & Self-esteem, Assertiveness, & Self-Defense* at OSU
*Student of nationally known self-defense instructor Nadia Telsey
*Co-instructor for a course titled *Resisting Violence Against Women* at OSU
*Former Activity Director at South Hills Health Care Center in Eugene
*Currently pursuing master's degree in Women Studies, Gerontology and Sociology

Are You a Woman Over 60

and

Concerned About Personal Safety?

I'm a graduate student at Oregon State University and would like to discuss concerns regarding:

- ✓ walking and living alone
- ✓ obscene and annoying phone calls
- ✓ home security
- ✓ defense and assertiveness skills

- ● FREE and I'm not selling anything
- ● I can meet at your home or another convenient location
- ● Your anonymity is guaranteed

> ## If you have questions or would like to set up a time to meet, call Sindy, 292-4930

My experience includes:

Conducting Personal Safety and Self Defense Workshops for neighborhood watch groups, senior citizen centers, and university classes.

I am scheduled to lead several personal safety workshops at various senior centers in Portland. The interviews and workshops are part of my graduate thesis.

Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930   Personal Safety Sindy, 292-4930