DEVELOPING A CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF AUTHORITY WHILE FOLLOWING THE CALL OF VOCATION: A STUDY OF LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE WOMEN OF THE IMMACULATE HEART COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Developing a Critical Consciousness of Authority While Following the Call of Vocation: A Study of Lessons Learned from the Women of the Immaculate Heart Community

by

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How do 8 former Catholic nuns who are members of a traditional canonical religious community for women and who work within the patriarchal/ecclesiastical structures of the Catholic Church develop a critical consciousness of authority while pursuing the call of vocation to religious life? This study examines 4 facets of this question. First, this study focuses on patriarchy and genderism as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. Second, it focuses on some of the ways women develop a strong sense of self and agency given the realities of patriarchal tenets and traditional structures of authority. Third, it is interested in learning how women receive and construct knowledge. Fourth, it looks with a discerning eye to retrieve and preserve critical moments of history when women successfully resisted gender oppression and injustice.

This study, which takes advantage of the traditions and methodologies provided within the evolving frameworks of depth and liberation psychology, including a feminist orientation towards research, is divided into two phases: conducting 8 individual interviews to gather the participants’ oral histories and a modified critical hermeneutical participatory group process that brought together participants and members of a Witness Council in a 4-hour dialogical format.

This study answers its primary research questions by providing insight into the
internal and external factors that inspired 8 former Catholic nuns to challenge the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, to choose to surrender their canonical status within the Church, and to form a lay ecumenical community for Catholic-Christian women and men. The participants’ negotiation of these historical encounters required shifts in their attitudes and beliefs about women’s authority within patriarchal, hierarchical, and ecclesiastical systems.

Following the results, the author applies theoretical constructs to the research findings. From depth-liberation psychology, the author interprets the results through Freirian theories of conscientization and the ontological call of humanization. Through the lens of psychoanalytical social theory, the author places the models of Julia Kristeva and Kelly Oliver in dialogue with the participants’ experiences.
DEDICATION

To my parents, Gilbert Joseph Barry and Jean Reid Barry, for giving me life.

To Pope John XXIII, for convening the Second Vatican Council.

To Anita Caspary, IHM, for the leadership and vision you provided to the women of the Immaculate Heart Community. You have inspired me to be courageous.
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The style used throughout this dissertation is in accordance with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (5th edition, 2001) and Pacifica Graduate Institute’s Depth Dissertation Handbook (2009-2010).
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

What a woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as are given to her. (Fuller, 1843)

Introduction

Dissertation Focus

This dissertation is a study of the journey of a group of former Roman Catholic nuns who raised their voices in opposition to patriarchal, ecclesiastical, and hierarchical authority structures. As a result of their actions, they succeeded in wrestling physical and psychic space, thus creating alternative structures. The alternative structures were made of brick and stone, as well as the creative visions designed by and for women about the direction they desired for their lives. Their courageous struggle was not simply for their own liberation, but was also aimed at helping to create a world where gender inequality and oppression do not exist. The participants in this study were once members of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of California (IHM) which was regarded as one of the most effective and progressive Catholic religious communities of women in the United States.

The history of the IHM Community began with its inception in Olot, Spain in 1848. Its founder, Spanish priest Joaquin Masmitja y de Puig, was inspired by his own personal devotion to Mother Mary and saw the need for a Congregation dedicated to education, evangelization, and prayer for the salvation of souls. Within its first 10 years, the IHM Community had expanded its ministries to serve the needs of the poor and underprivileged in several major Spanish cities. As a result of their exemplary reputation
as educators, in 1871 10 Spanishspeaking sisters came to America to establish schools in California.

The IHMs flourished during their first two decades in California due to strong internal leadership, cooperative relations with students and their families, a good working relationship with the Bishop of MontereyLos Angeles, and a solid track record for educational scholarship. As news of the IHM’s commitment to education became more well known within California, large numbers of American women began to join the order, and brought with them “attitudes of freedom of spirit and rugged individualism” (Caspary, 2003, p. 17). The dynamics of the cultural assimilation of the Spanishspeaking sisters with the American way of life, coupled with the large numbers of American women entering the order, created strife between the California IHMs and the order’s authority structure in Spain. By the mid1920s it became very clear to the IHM leadership in California that they would need to seek separation from their Spanish roots in order to thrive as educators. After many years of personal sacrifice on the part of their members, separation and independence from the hierarchy in Spain was granted by the Vatican to the IHMs in 1924. Caspary notes that the IHM’s assimilation into American life was a pivotal step in attaining a “long desired independent status from their repressive Spanish origins” (p. 15).

The IHM Community’s blending with American culture occurred at a time in American history that was strongly influenced by the efforts of suffragettes and advocates of women’s equality and rights. We began the introduction with a quote by early suffragette and Quaker educator Margaret Fuller, who worked actively for women’s rights and social reform during the early 1800s. Fuller long questioned and challenged the
limitations placed on women’s roles and equality in society. When I imagine Margaret Fuller speaking to women today, I believe she would acknowledge the great strides that were achieved for women in America and Europe during the 20th century. Undoubtedly, she would also remind those of us who have reaped the benefits of the early women’s rights activists to continue to advocate for contemporary women struggling under oppressive governments and inside cultural contexts that silence them.

Professor of Religious Studies Susan Marie Maloney (in Caspary, 2003) notes that since the 1980s, there has been renewed interest in the assertion of authority by Catholic women religious. Maloney further elaborates that conflict with the hierarchy of the Catholic Church has been a “commonly recorded theme in the chronicles of Catholic women’s communities” (p. ix). The historical acts of engagement between the IHMs and the conservative leadership of the Catholic Church bears witness to the significant role that community plays in women’s lives as they search for belonging, meaning, and fulfillment within patriarchal cultures. I believe that the IHM’s struggles and successes in engaging the authoritarian structures of the Roman Catholic Church provide keen insight for women who elect to challenge and transform dominating power structures that silence, marginalize, and oppress.

**Overview of the Study**

Although a more detailed analysis about the IHM’s struggle with both the Los Angeles Archdiocese and the Vatican will be provided in a later section of this chapter, a brief overview is being provided now to help orient readers to the literature review that follows. Throughout the 1950s following the traumatic events of World War II, the Roman Catholic Church found itself facing tremendous challenges that were driven by
political, social, economic, and technological changes. The leadership of the Church was also embroiled in bitter conflicts that had been erupting between a growing group of Catholic and Christian theologians on how to best meet the diverse demands of the post-World War II world. Many of the key leaders sought to integrate the doctrines of Christianity with the diversity of human needs, while others sought to maintain the long-established authoritarian rule with minimal attention being placed on the needs and diversity of their followers. To meet these growing demands, Pope John XXIII gave notice of his intention to convene the Second Vatican Council, known as Vatican II, in January of 1959. Vatican II was the 21st Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church and the second council to be held at the Vatican (Vatican I opened in 1868 and adjourned in 1870).

Vatican II commenced in 1962 under the leadership of Pope John XXIII and concluded under the leadership of Pope Paul VI in 1965. The Vatican II decree that is of most importance to this study, Perfectae Caritatis (Latin for Perfect Charity), “An Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life,” mandated that all religious communities “renew and adapt themselves to modern times” (Carey, 1997, p. 12). Similar to members of other American religious orders, the IHMs were confronted with a paradoxical array of social, political, and cultural demands as a result of Vatican II. The vast majority of IHM Community members took the mandates of Vatican II to renew religious life seriously. As a result of their actions, the IHMs were regularly confronted by the relentless efforts on the part of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles under the jurisdiction of Cardinal James McIntyre to undermine their authority.

Fueled by the issues of social change that were erupting throughout American life
during the 1960s, the struggles between the IHMs and the Los Angeles Archdiocese reflect a perennial problem that has long existed for both religious and lay women living under the thumb of dominating authority structures. Confronted with a Catch-22 situation where the Vatican II mandate for renewal was seemingly giving the power of choice to the IHM Community, the members were not truly empowered by local Church authorities to assume control over their destiny. As a point of reference, a Catch-22 situation is marked by contradiction, absurdity, and paradox, where a solution to the situation is impossible to achieve.

In spite of the no-win situation in which the IHMs found themselves embroiled, they ultimately discovered a path that enabled them to assert their power, to resist attempts at silencing them, and eventually to create a new type of life as lay religious women.

Defining the Research Study

In order to orient my reader, a short overview of the study is described in this introduction, and a more detailed discussion will be presented in chapter 2. The research group for my dissertation was comprised of 8 college-educated women from middle-class backgrounds. Seven of the women are of Western European descent and one is Mexican American. I was particularly interested in learning about the participants’ experiences of persevering and engaging with the dominant power structures of the Los Angeles Archdiocese and the Vatican from 1965 through 1969. Given that the authority structure of the Catholic Church is not democratic but hierarchical, what these women were able to withstand in the face of intense opposition is both inspiring and daunting.

When the IHM leadership council presented the late Cardinal James McIntyre
with their 1967 response to the Vatican II renewal process, the cardinal insisted that the Community [continue to] submit to regulation of dress, hold specified times of community prayer rather than leaving prayer up to the individual, allow the archdiocese to approve the professional work assignments of sisters, and pledge obedience to the cardinal of Los Angeles. (Briggs, 2006, p. 113)

Furthermore, because of the intense opposition they were facing as a community with Cardinal McIntyre, the IHM leadership council attempted to secure peer support and backing from the membership of the Conference of Major Superiors. They failed to secure the backing of the Conference by a single vote (Briggs, 2006). Long viewed as “bad women” (Caspar, 2003, p. 163) by the late Cardinal James McIntyre, in 1968 the IHMs were forced by the cardinal to withdraw as teaching sisters from parochial schools in the Los Angeles Archdiocese after a protracted struggle between the cardinal and the IHM Community’s leadership. Known as superior educators, most of the IHMs were able to secure teaching assignments in the Los Angeles public school system and adult education programs. However, by 1969, following several years of interrogation by various committees assembled by the Los Angeles Archdiocese and the Vatican, these 8 women, along with close to 400 other IHMs, were faced with making a pivotal choice in their religious lives.

As a result of their decision to resist the continuing interference of the male hierarchy in their Vatican II renewal process, the IHMs were presented with an ultimatum by the Vatican which told them to stop their process or they would be dispensed from their formal canonical status. In a democratic process that was inspired by a commitment to individual freedom and communal determination, the majority of IHM Community members “elected to surrender [their] vows and status in the Roman Catholic Church to
become a lay ecumenical community” (Caspari 2003, p. xiii.).

As a result of their choice to receive the dispensations, the IHMs began imagining, designing, and creating the Immaculate Heart Community (IHC) lay religious community. Since its inception in 1970, the IHC has brought together a diverse group of Protestant and Catholic women and men who share a common desire for deep spiritual connections without a rigid hierarchical structure. Current membership is comprised of single men and women and married couples as well as nonmarried heterosexual, gay, and lesbian couples who work in such fields as education, social work, law, parish ministry, the arts, health care, and the administration of public and nonprofit organizations.

Because of the small size of this research group, I was clear at the outset of the study that I would not attempt to make sweeping generalizations to all women. Nevertheless, I learned things throughout the study that exceeded the circumstances and experiences of these particular women. This study gleaned valuable insights about the exercise of voice and agency on behalf of social justice, as well as the perseverance of women who stand up to and resist the oppressive uses of authority and power. I was also aware at the beginning of the study that women experience the effects of dominating authority structures differently due to the particular social locations in which they live. Moreover, women’s experiences of authority are also influenced by the surrounding and pervading cultural, ethnic, and class structure contexts. However, I concur with feminist poet and writer Adrienne Rich that women can illuminate each other’s paths by “expanding [their] own sense of actual possibilities” (1976, p. 24) and by knowing how to “re-vision women’s history” as an act of “looking back . . . at the self-destructiveness of male dominated society” (1972, p. 18). This study will describe and reflect on the lived
experiences of the 8 participants when they grappled with the power structures of the Catholic Church, chose to surrender their canonical status with the Catholic Church, became lay religious women, and created a lay ecumenical community for both men and women. The two questions I was interested in exploring during the study asked what were the former nuns’ experiences of engaging the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and what these experiences might teach us about how women can continue to engage patriarchy and resist oppression.

Definition of Integral Terms for the Study

1. Activism—For the purpose of this study, we will be looking at social, spiritual, and political forms of activism that are focused on creating fundamental shifts in ideological, societal, political, religious, and cultural norms that contribute to the oppression of women and other marginalized groups and individuals.

2. Dominating Authority Structures—For the purpose of this study, dominating authority structures are defined as the hierarchical and patriarchal rules and regulations that prescribe and dictate how women are to behave and how they are to define themselves in their lives. These structures also predetermine who is given access to power and who is denied access to power.

3. Engagement of Dominating Authority Structures—For the purpose of this study, engagement of dominating authority structures is defined as a conscious participative process wherein dialogue, debate, and discourse are promoted by those not in power with those in power. It includes an intrapsychic process of ferreting out internalized patriarchal attitudes and thoughts, challenging and resisting their domination, and working to free psychic space from their control.
4. Patriarchy—For the purpose of this study, patriarchy is defined as the social, religious, or political systems that promote the domination of women by both men and women who are loyal to patriarchal values, as well as by hierarchal bureaucracies that are designed to control, define, and devalue women.

**Autobiographical Origins of the Study**

I am not surprised that the topic I chose to study and research for this dissertation is focused on the ways that patriarchal structures have been challenged by women of diverse backgrounds whose efforts for women’s equality span the globe. Throughout my personal and professional development, I have been inspired by the stories of famous and not-so-famous women who crossed the threshold from being paralyzed and disempowered by patriarchal authoritarianism to successfully learning how to extricate themselves from its grip. During the time that I conducted the research for this study, I learned that although I am no longer a practicing Catholic, the ties that link me to the patriarchal voices and roots of the Catholic Church will always be a part of my internal fabric. The ways in which I view the world and the ways that I have come to understand how a woman is to be and is required to behave are deeply influenced by what I learned from 12 years of Catholic education, from attending weekly Mass well into my adulthood, and from living in a devout Catholic home that followed the teachings and traditions of the Church.

I was educated in the Archdiocese of Chicago before and during the major changes that were experienced as a result of the Second Vatican Council. I do not recall being interested in the deeper philosophical and sociological implications of Vatican II that encouraged looking out at the world and addressing the rampant injustice and
oppression of so many men, women, and children. What did strike me during this time period was seeing our teachers return to classrooms in new habits with shorter skirts and softer veils around their faces. I was also intrigued—yet intimidated—by several of the changes to the traditional Catholic Mass that were designed to create a spirit of connection among the congregants: Priests facing the congregation, the words of the Mass spoken in English, and the need for congregants to reach out and wish prayers of peace to one another after reciting the “Our Father.”

I grew up in an Irish-American Catholic home as the youngest of four children. Our mother, widowed when I was 4 years of age, was left with the responsibility of raising us on her own, and she did not remarry. One would think that a female-headed household would be less loyal to patriarchal tenets because no male is present to “head” and influence the home. However, according to feminist writer and social activist bell hooks (2004), homes in which the mothers are the head tend to promote patriarchal thinking with far greater passion than those with both a father and mother. hooks also notes that women who are raised in mother-headed homes are far more likely to idealize the patriarchal male role and be more drawn to patriarchal partners than women who live in traditional homes where the father is seen as the head. In retrospect, our deceased father’s memory was over-idealized by our mother. Out of loyalty to this memory and an allegiance to the patriarchal legacy, our family was left with an unrealistic impression of who our father was, as well as nagging thoughts of how our lives would have been had he lived. In so many ways we were haunted by the phantom presence of an idealized image of someone who was not much like our real father.

While growing up, the desire to be safe and silent outweighed the inclination to
speak up and make a difference. Looking back at the issues that affected my sense of who I could become within the familial, academic, and social dynamics that structured my life, I recognize the irony of being given the opportunity to receive a quality education, and yet at the same time being conditioned to not make waves within my family, at school, or in the neighborhood. To voice an opinion that was not in keeping with the prevalent point of view either at home or at school was not something I could typically do. Although some students rebelled, they were typically the boys, and their behavior was met with strong discipline by the nuns and priests. The influence of the patriarchal dictates of the Catholic Church was reinforced on a daily basis in our curriculum as well as in our homes. We were taught how to behave during the school year, while on summer vacation, and when in the public eye. The notion of sin and what good Catholic children did and did not do weighed heavily in our socialization process.

Attending public university for my undergraduate degree during the 1970s presented a plethora of problems and opportunities. As I moved out into the larger social arena during those years, I was regularly confronted with determining how to behave socially and sexually while keeping one foot in the Church and moving one foot out in the world. The feminist movement provided a liberating conversation that encouraged rebellion and the questioning of authority. However, its message was often muffled by the culturally driven voices that continued to dictate the historical and traditional ways that women were to look, how they were to behave, and who they needed to be in order to be viable. The intrapsychic grip of the Church’s hold on me lessened over time, supplanted by the overriding structures of patriarchy that dominate women’s everyday lives in the form of negative advertising and unfair laws and regulations, as well as
unchallenged socio-cultural beliefs. Learning that I could think for myself and speak out yet survive and thrive has required a long and delicate unraveling and unfolding of personal, familial, and cultural beliefs. As I approach my 58th year, I recognize that I continue to be a work in process.

The individuals and groups that have inspired and continue to inspire me have stood up and challenged the authoritarian structures that exist within family systems, religious communities, corporations, community organizations, and governments. We learned from the early suffragettes and feminists that women’s sense of self is greatly influenced by the societal, environmental, and cultural circumstances in which their lives are located. Although I cannot speak for all women’s experiences of the cultural mechanisms that perpetuate negative messages about them, I believe it is safe to assert that these messages are pervasive, seductive, and sustained by a wide variety of established structures. The externalized systems that filter into women’s interior worlds contain obscure and hidden messages intended to confuse and maintain domination over them while at the same time serving the interests of those in power.

*Academic Influences of the Study*

During my studies in depth-liberation psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute, I was influenced by the provocative work of Latin American writers whose writings illuminate the historically damaging effects of 500 years of European colonialization throughout Latin and Central America, as well as India, Africa, and Asia. Religious zeal played a large role in these efforts, with the early Popes having the power to decree that entire continents could be taken over by European kings. The Catholic Church gained domination and power by sending missionaries out into the world to convert nonbelievers
on other continents to Catholicism. Ironically, I would assume the early Spanish-speaking sisters I spoke of earlier who came to California to teach the poor and underprivileged in the late 1800s were in fact part of these same efforts to spread the reach of Catholicism and expand the Church’s span of control and domination.

Our studies of liberation psychology, cultural trauma, and the limitations of Eurocentric-based psychologies inspired my curiosity to study the continuing influence of patriarchal authority and domination in women’s lives. In this introduction, I have spoken about the internalization of patriarchy’s external voices and how those voices succeed in forming deep roots within women’s psyches. The work of late Brazilian author and political activist Augusto Boal (1974/1985, 1995) has provided a supportive body of knowledge and valuable insight throughout the course of this study. In particular, Boal’s writings on the interface between socio-individual-political systems and their effect on individual oppression and social suffering were helpful as I discovered the influence of these systems on women’s evolving sense of self within patriarchal cultures. Familiar with the realities of political oppression and the power of Brazil’s military junta, Boal was arrested, tortured, and “encouraged” into exile by the Brazilian military in 1971. He eventually returned to Brazil in the early 1990s after the military junta was overthrown.

After moving to Argentina and Europe following his exile, Boal (1974/1985, 1995) began to observe specific external realities such as domination and inequality and became curious about what precluded individuals from taking effective action against the injustices. He recognized a collusion between the internal fears that inhibit people from taking a stand and the external oppressions that terrorize them. Boal (1995) refers to the mechanism of internalized oppressive voices as “cops-in-the-head” (p. xxii) and argues
that these voices originate from the external world’s “real cops” (p. xxii). Ultimately, these voices terrorize people to such a severe degree that even after the real life oppressor has no actual power over them, human beings remain affected and paralyzed by fear.

In the translator’s introduction to Boal’s The Rainbow of Desire (Boal’s name for the skills needed to combat our internal police), Adrian Jackson emphasizes the importance of Boal’s work: “The implementation of oppression in our heads is not nullified because we face concrete “actual” oppressions outside—far from it: the two work inextricably together, they compound each other” (as cited in Boal, 1995, p. xxii). Boal’s theory advocates for the concurrent examination of internalized cops-in-the-head with the demands of the societal, cultural, and political contexts in which people live their lives. Boal argues that both the confidence and competence required to tackle social problems can be generated through collective confrontations with cops-in-the-head.

In Witness to Integrity (2003), Anita Caspary, IHM, PhD, former Mother General of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California and the first President of the lay Immaculate Heart Community describes the IHM’s harrowing journey with the hierarchy of the Church. In an intellectually stimulating mix of both personal memory and historical facts, Caspary provides the background story of how she and her community members continued to move forward with a “spirit of renewal and openness to new theological ideas” (p. 2) in spite of the ongoing bombardment of accusations by Cardinal James McIntyre:

“You will suffer for this,” the cardinal thundered at us. His threat to the five of us who were the elected administration of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Los Angeles betrayed years of rage. With little notice James Francis McIntyre, the Cardinal Archbishop of Los Angeles, had stormed into my office at the motherhouse in the hills of Hollywood. He was angry. There were no greetings, and the days of cordial amenities were over. The purpose of this hastily
assembled meeting was painfully evident . . . surprise, fear, and even anger at the threat hung in the air over our five veiled heads. Acting without benefit of Church law governing such matters, the cardinal had notified us that this meeting was an “Extraordinary Canonical Visitation” . . . listening to our misdeeds as pronounced by His Eminence, along with the condemnation of the Immaculate Heart Sisters . . . had become a common occurrence during my years as mother general. (Caspary, 2003, p. 2)

Caspary notes that although more than 35 years had transpired since Cardinal McIntyre uttered the words “You will suffer for this,” during the time she wrote Witness to Integrity, she found that his words still “resound[ed] in my ears . . . as a warning of danger and a promise of punishment” (p. 3).

As they moved forward with the process of renewal, the IHMs were met with consistent demands by Cardinal McIntyre to abandon their plans, and they were routinely ordered to “return to a traditional form of religious life, including a hierarchical view of clerical authority” (Caspary, 2003, p. 3). The voice and words of the late Cardinal McIntyre are examples of what Boal (1995) describes as an external voice that moves internally as a cop-in-the-head and becomes an internalized voice of patriarchal authority.

Relevance of the Study for Depth Psychology

The call of this dissertation is focused on the importance and value of women’s engagement/resistance of dominating religious, cultural, social, and political structures to the field of depth psychology. It has been inspired by my professional interests as a licensed psychotherapist and evolving community activist to more clearly understand the intra- and inter-personal mechanisms and systems that empower women and other marginalized individuals to cultivate creative Boalian responses to oppression and domination. There are countless numbers of women who in the face of extreme adversity have had the wherewithal to challenge dominating authority structures with often wide-
reaching effects. In their own ways they have interacted with the internalized and externalized voices of patriarchy in a very Boalian fashion.

It is my hope that the voice of this study will provide a vehicle to broaden the depth psychological perspective beyond the domination of its primarily Western, White, heterosexual, and male vantage points. The transformation of this perspective is dependent upon the collaborative efforts of many from a variety of collective movements: Women, gay men, and lesbians; people of color; poor and working-class people; members of interfaith communities; and Third World citizens. With an interest in understanding how women’s evolving sense of self is shaped and truncated within patriarchal and hierarchical systems and culture, this study moves beyond the traditional tenets of depth psychology in its embrace of the evolving fields of liberation and feminist psychologies.

Summary

The efforts of the IHM Community members during the 1960s can be seen from several vantage points: as rebellion against authority, as a move from religious to secular values, or as a reflection of the tumultuous times during which the efforts took place. However, their actions can also be seen as an example of the positive effects of community members working together in a collaborative spirit towards personal-communal definition and against external oppression. In light of the current nonsanctioned ordination of both lay and canonical women within the Catholic Church, the Vatican continues to prevent women from moving forward in equal ways with men. The Vatican's stance on women’s ordination is based on arguments that have been refuted time and again. In 1976, the Vatican's Pontifical Biblical Commission determined that
there is no scriptural reason to prohibit women’s ordination. However, in 1994 the late Pope John Paul II declared that the Catholic Church does not have the authority to ordain women.

Contemporary lay and canonical women religious who are following their convictions about being called to the priesthood are being stopped by the formal hierarchy of the Catholic Church whose doctrine allows only men to be ordained as priests and deacons. Recalling similar actions taken by the Vatican during the 1960s, many clergy members, lay women, and canonical women religious who are supportive of women’s ordination face being excommunicated from the Church. According to a National Catholic Reporter article “Sister’s Story Revs Up Call To Action Audience,” (November 27, 2009) Sister of Charity Louise Akers, who serves as an advisory board member for the Women’s Ordination Conference, was dismissed after 40 years of teaching in the Cincinnati archdiocese for not retracting her support of women’s ordination. The situation with Sister Louise is yet another unfortunate example in an all-too-familiar pattern of the misuse of Church authority as a way of dealing with difference and dissent. Reminiscent of Cardinal McIntyre’s threatening words “You will suffer for this” (as cited in Caspary, 2003, p. 2) uttered 40 years ago, lest anyone thinks otherwise, patriarchy in its various guises continues to thrive in the lives of women and men.

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

Although it is understood that gender oppression is deeply intertwined with such oppressions as racism, colonialism, and the destruction of the environment, the focus of my study is on genderism and the ways that patriarchy contributes to its ongoing reality.
My interest throughout the study focused on the ways that patriarchal tenets infect women’s intrapsychic spaces and content, their interpersonal relationships, and the institutions that frame their lives. The authors chosen for this study come from varying backgrounds and perspectives and provide valuable insight into patriarchy’s creation, history, and ongoing reality. Their studies reveal that although patriarchy is not a static system entirely resistant to change, its wounding of the human condition has profoundly damaged our capacity to connect to and be vulnerable with one another. There are four major categories explored in the literature review:

1. What we know in the early decades of the 21st century of the continuing effects of patriarchy on women’s personal and community lives.

2. What is known in depth and liberation psychology about women’s development of self in both individual and community contexts.

3. What enables women to question, resist, and break away from disempowering traditions and historical assumptions in order to create a new sense of intrapersonal and interpersonal self.


*Patriarchy in the 21st Century*

*Viewing Patriarchy with an Eye on the Past*

Patriarchy is classically defined as “the government of a family, church, or society by the fathers” (Audi, 1995, p. 279). For the purpose of this study, the patriarchal perspective was broadened to include social, religious, and political systems that promote the domination of women by men and women who are loyal to patriarchal values. This
perspective also reflects the efforts by the media and hierarchal bureaucracies to control, define, and devalue women through negative advertising campaigns. In order to locate ourselves inside the 21st century, it is important to return briefly to the past and identify a few of the early seeds of wisdom that were planted about genderism within patriarchal cultures.

The early work of feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir helps set the stage for how we have come to understand patriarchy in the 21st century. In *The Second Sex* (1989), de Beauvoir admits her hesitation to write a book about women: “The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new. Enough ink has been spilled in the quarrelling over feminism . . . and perhaps we should say no more about it” (p. xix). de Beauvoir defines feminism as a universal “movement [seeking] justice in equality” (p. 112). At the time she was writing, de Beauvoir found herself part of a group of early feminists who imagined the construct of “woman” beyond the cultural dictates of her generation.

Jennifer Hansen states that

> de Beauvoir is among the first feminist thinkers to develop a social construction of the portrait of gender, believing that women are not born as women, but are made into women by the pressures and expectations of a patriarchal world. (as cited in Oliver, 2000, p. 3)

Not too surprisingly, de Beauvoir’s work was met with considerable hostility from many groups who did not want to be confronted with an unpleasant critique of their sexist and oppressive attitudes towards women.

Despite her initial hesitancy in writing on the topic, de Beauvoir’s (1989) work on feminism, oppression, and women’s roles in society continues to provide valuable seeds of thought in the theoretical development of gender inequality. Challenging herself as well as the women of her generation, de Beauvoir’s writings clarify the influence of
patriarchal culture on the social construction of women and gender stereotypes. Her writings also provide a context in which to understand the historical struggles women have undergone to win freedom: “Men have shaped for their own exaltation great virile figures: Hercules, Prometheus, Parsifal; woman has only a secondary part to play in the destiny of these heroes . . . woman is defined exclusively in her relationship to man” (1989, p. 143).

As a Professor of History Emerita, Gerda Lerner’s studies during the mid-1980s and early 1990s focused on the historical origins of patriarchal systems and differentiated between a historical system of acquired power, as opposed to a process of natural power that has allowed for the collective dominance of women by men. Lerner begins her analysis of patriarchy from the vantage point that women’s history has been denied voice and that this has resulted in a history of female subordination and invisibility. Lerner notes that “patriarchy implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society, and that women are deprived of access to such power” (1986, p. 239). However this does not, she explains, “imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources” (p. 239). Lerner also argues that it is critical to discern the various ways that patriarchy appears in history and to trace the ways that patriarchy has adapted to “female pressure and demands” (p. 239).

Because “women’s history is indispensable and essential to the emancipation of women” (Lerner, 1986, p. 3), Lerner speculates that “women had a relationship to History and a historical process different from that of men [and this] relationship was denied access and inclusion in the written word” (Lerner, 1993, p. 4). Defining history as “the preservation and collection of written documents and their constant reinterpretation
by succeeding generations of specialists” (1993, p. 247), Lerner points out that these acts of preserving and reinterpreting have been traditionally carried out by elite subgroups comprised primarily of men. Historical development, on the other hand, “takes place regardless of the existence of literacy or interpretation and [is a process] in which non-elite groups participate . . . even more significantly than elites” (1993, p. 247). Lerner notes that through historical process the inaccurateness of the patriarchal perspective can be illuminated. She also believes that acts of reinterpretation of history give place and voice to women’s position within social existence.

Lerner’s (1986, 1993) work clarifies that we can learn from the ways past generations have acted in order to cause a healthy stream of re-actions in the present. Her findings stress that one must know at the outset of retrieving critical moments in history that the information from the past is best used as analogical metaphors and not as concrete directions for the journey. Although the conditions and circumstances that successive generations face vary significantly throughout history, there is something to be learned about the consequences of past actions. One of the positive roles of history is the identification of choices that were made and the consequences of those choices. In effect, choices frequently preempt other choices, and in so doing, they determine future events.

In Fear of Feminism: Why Young Women Get the Willies (2005), Lisa Marie Hogeland, a Professor of Women’s Studies, brings an interesting component to the discussion of patriarchy in contemporary times. Hogeland places particular attention on the challenges and risks inherent for women who subscribe to and adopt feminist thinking: “To stand opposed to your culture, to be critical of institutions, behaviors, discourses—when it is so clearly not in your immediate interest to do so—asks a lot of a
young person, of any person” (p. 492). Women’s fears are confirmed and accentuated by what has been uncovered by feminist studies regarding the epidemic levels of violence committed against women by men, burgeoning fears of difference between people, and fear of the consequences for social and political activism.

Hogeland’s (2005) study further identifies how reluctant women are to identify themselves as feminists for fear of not being able to find a partner due to the stigma placed on feminism. Hogeland argues that “women of all ages fear the existential situation of feminism . . . feminism has consequences . . . [sadly] fear of feminism [results in] fear of complexity, fear of thinking, fear of ideas; we live in a profoundly anti-intellectual culture” (p. 495). Paradoxically, feminist teachings encourage a broadening and deepening in the types of qualities that women will need to develop in order to overcome the adverse implications of patriarchal systems. Some of those qualities, such as curiosity, boldness, courage, and endurance, also happen to be the very qualities that men have been socialized to develop.

*Viewing Patriarchy from Contemporary Perspectives*

Feminist psychologist and writer Carol Gilligan (2003a) expands our discussion by noting that patriarchy is an anthropological term that describes families and cultures headed by fathers. She clarifies that patriarchy is also an order of domination that privileges some men over others while it strives to subordinate women. Gilligan’s reflections regarding patriarchy as a “hierarchy or priesthood in which a father or some fathers control access to truth or power or God or knowledge—to salvation” (p. 7) were particularly helpful to my understanding the interrelationship among authority, obedience, and women’s call of vocation to religious life. In its ability to physically and
socially divide men from men and men from women, as well as split fathers from mothers, daughters, and sons, Gilligan argues that patriarchy ultimately succeeds in creating “a rift in the [individual] psyche, dividing everyone from parts of themselves” (p. 7).

Sociologist and writer Allan Johnson defines patriarchy as a “system organized around an obsession with control” (2005, p. 226) and “a legacy [that] we are trapped inside of” (p. 4). The legacy Johnson describes moves beyond what has been typically synonymous with the word “men” to a phenomenon that extends beyond people. “[Patriarchy] is a kind of society [and] a society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified, and male centered” (p. 5). Johnson further clarifies that a “fundamental change” (p. 8) is needed in the way that both women and men, as members of society, understand, challenge, live, and interact within patriarchy. This is a change that will require adeptness in critical thinking, political awareness, and the ability to interact within groups of people who both understand the patriarchal terrain and are dedicated to disentangling society from its web.

Similar to what was described a bit earlier about Simone de Beauvoir’s (1989) hesitancy to write about women’s experiences as the “second sex,” I routinely questioned my interests in a study that focused on women’s engagement of patriarchy. I was regularly challenged by colleagues, friends, and associates about the relevance of this topic at this point in history. Many stated emphatically and snickered that the word patriarchy is obsolete, meaningless, and out of step with the 21st century. Others asked, “Isn’t it time to move forward from this talk of the 1960s and get on with contemporary life’s more serious struggles?” I doubted my curiosity and interest in the topic of
patriarchy and feared that I would be wasting my time on an irrelevant subject. I learned that this behavior of self-doubt, fear, and frozen curiosity is often one of the ramifications of patriarchal thinking and socialization in women’s lives.

Johnson (2005) clarifies what I was witnessing: “Even the mildest criticism of men or mention of patriarchy is enough to elicit angry—and worried—charges of male bashing” (p. 226). bell hooks (2004) shares a similar observation: “Even in those circles [of well-educated elites], the word 'patriarchy' is regarded as passé . . . in my lectures when I use the phrase ‘white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy’ to describe our nation’s political system, audiences laugh” (p. 29). Similar to Johnson’s and hooks’ experiences, I became aware of the high levels of discomfort that exist for both women and men when discussing patriarchal oppression. There is widespread resistance to wondering, questioning, and challenging patriarchy’s continuing influence in both women’s and men’s lives. I discovered through this study that patriarchy is more than a word, a concept, or a feminist slogan from the 1960s; metaphorically speaking, it is the water in which we swim.

Lori Jo Marso (2006), a professor of Political Science and Women’s Studies, describes the disturbing position she regularly experiences teaching contemporary university students who believe that we have evolved to a postfeminist time in history. The students believe that “feminist battles have been fought and won and the advances made by feminism solidified” (p. ix). Because women’s personal, professional, and political lives continue to be shaped by the gendered thinking inherent within patriarchal systems, Marso emphasizes the need to establish clearer understandings of the ways that genderism thwarts and compromises women’s commitment to feminist principles. She
states, “To be promised the possibility of having it all, and then to have those possibilities closed off, puts women at the heart of an unfinished revolution” (p. x).

Marso’s (2006) analysis of contemporary women’s relationship to feminism focuses on the diversity of women’s experiences. She frames her discussion around the cultural, social, historical, and political contexts that shape women’s lives. Her analysis includes a description of the lived experiences and dilemmas of a diverse group of feminists, from 18th-century writer Mary Wollstonecraft and 20th-century writer Simone de Beauvoir to contemporary Latina writers such as Ana Castillo and Gioconda Belli. Citing several strong examples of women’s struggles from different historical and cultural perspectives, Marso succeeds in demonstrating the value that is derived by women learning from one another’s histories. In looking at the ongoing revolution between femininity and feminist thinking that grips many contemporary women, Marso argues that women’s access to freedom is a diverse and critical piece of the work needing to be done by contemporary activists and feminists.

In her memoir, *The Country Under My Skin*, Gioconda Belli (2002) describes her experiences as a militant and revolutionary and provides a rich examination of the multilayered nuances inherent in sexist cultures where the image of what defines a woman is frequently held in a static state. Belli left her marriage to join Nicaragua’s Sandinistas movement in their efforts to overtake the Somoza dictatorship in the early 1970s. Belli defines the challenges and contradictions she regularly confronted as a cultural-militant revolutionary. She also poignantly describes the disillusionment she experienced as a woman fighting next to her male comrades during the revolution.

Belli (2002) recalls her lofty postrevolution dream to be a different kind of
woman than what conventional models of femininity prescribed:

I had exposed myself to bullets, death; I had smuggled weapons, given speeches, received awards, had children—so many things, but a life without men, without love, was alien to me, I felt I had no existence unless a man’s voice said my name and a man’s love rendered my life worthwhile. (p. 290)

Interestingly, we can return to what Simone de Beauvoir discovered in the early 1950s to frame the memories Belli is describing retrospectively about her experiences during the 1970s. de Beauvoir argued that patriarchal tenets define and in turn limit women in terms of deficiency and dependency upon men. The confinement of these definitions result in women wanting “to serve; for in responding to her lover’s demands, a woman will feel that she is necessary . . . she will share his worth . . . and be justified” in her existence (de Beauvoir, 1989, p. 650). Within this patriarchal perspective women are seen as appendages to men’s power. Moreover, when viewing women’s lives from such a narrow perspective, we discover how women are precluded from knowing and owning a true sense of freedom. In effect, this particular aspect of women’s socialization and enculturation with men stifle their ability to struggle and fight, as well as to claim their freedom and independence.

**Viewing Patriarchy and Feminism in Relationship to Men**

Marso’s (2006) discouraging reflections on contemporary student attitudes towards feminism are not limited to college-age women. Many mature adult women and men believe that the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s was a passing phase that captured national attention and resulted in legal changes but is no longer relevant. To fail to reflect on the ways that past injustices were challenged and to be indifferent to current injustices are inherent dimensions of patriarchy’s ability to silence and discourage curiosity. Although it is easy to recognize overt examples of injustice, it is
the silent nonreflection and nonquestioning of systems of power that both generate and fuel the fire of patriarchy.

Feminist writer bell hooks (2004) identifies a major stumbling block in healing patriarchal wounding to be the result of patriarchy being equated “with women’s liberation, with feminism, and therefore [men] dismiss it as irrelevant to their own experiences” (p. 17). What is valuable about hooks’ point of view is that, as a feminist, she identifies the importance of healing men’s suffering at the hands of patriarchy. She argues that cultural healing will be found in men’s spiritual realignment along with a liberation of their inner emotional lives and that through the healing of the male psyche, women’s lives can improve. Furthermore, by helping to extinguish the age-old paradigm of woman versus man, hooks looks to models of inclusion and education in ameliorating the societal and cultural design of male domination. hooks notes that there is a logical explanation for the dearth of research being done by women about men living within patriarchy. The paucity in research is due to the ways women “have been so well socialized in patriarchal cultures to be silent on the subject of men” (p. xiii).

hooks (2004) identifies the role that progressive feminist research is playing to expose outdated and unrealistic theories of male development. She also stresses that healing from the effects of patriarchy cannot be accomplished by women and feminist research alone. hooks acknowledges work being done by relational therapist Terence Real (2002) as a critical piece of research that is geared to heal the masculine wounding in our culture. Real describes his approach to relational psychotherapy as one that examines the political and psychological dimensions of gender:

At the political level, men throughout history have claimed rights for themselves that have, in most cultures, been loath to grant women—the right to vote, to have
access to education, to own property, to not be someone’s property. But at the psychological level, the dynamic of patriarchy stretches beyond the oppression of women by men. Psychological patriarchy defines the relationship between two sets of human qualities. (p. 73)

In its ability to diminish all things feminine, including the importance of healthy relationships, psychological patriarchy creates a contemptuous division in human qualities as being either masculine or feminine.

Real (2002) states that the dividing of human qualities into masculine (i.e., strength, power, logic, and anti-dependence) or feminine (i.e., weakness, emotion, yielding, and process-oriented) translates into larger cultural and societal divisions which predicate what men and women can or cannot do within relationships. In noting the paradoxical nature of psychological patriarchy and the tightly woven web that encases it, Real further argues that this face of patriarchy severely injures males at an early age because it disconnects them from their ability to be relational with themselves and others. Moreover, psychological patriarchy places unrealistic demands and expectations on women to be the source of nurturance in relationships. Despite the importance placed on relational skills for women, the ways that women are socialized within patriarchal cultures impedes them from having a sense of knowing what they want and being able to ask for what they need in relationships. Because of a socialization process that pulls boys away from their feelings and sensitivity to others, they grow into men who are emotionally disconnected and whose masculinity is equated with separation.

Both Real (2002) and hooks (2004) advocate for a process of “relational recovery” as a way to counteract the disconnecting effects of patriarchy in the lives of both women and men. Neither author underestimates the depth of commitment needed to motivate and inspire individuals to pull together with others who share a vision of healing
the wounds of patriarchy, nor do they overlook the ways that unhealthy American
cultural values contribute to male gender domination. A culture “in recovery” from
patriarchy is dependent upon a collaborative model where the focus on a “battle between
the sexes” is replaced with actions that lead to the “healing of the sexes.”

*Patriarchy and the Evolution of Human Rights*

Looking at the evolution of human rights during the past century in America, one
cannot deny that progress has been made in the status of women. There have been
considerable gains made through the progressive stages of the women’s movement
beginning with the suffragettes at the turn of the 20th century. During this time period,
we have witnessed greater equality for women in the work force and more tolerance for
the relinquishing of rigid gender roles. Despite the gains, “patriarchy as a system remains
intact, and many people continue to believe that it is needed if humans are to survive as a
species” (hooks, 2004, p. 29). hooks describes patriarchy as being “the single most life-
threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation” (p. 17). The
seriousness of this social disease is that most men and women do not realize how
embedded and damaged they are inside of patriarchy’s cultural tenets.

Analyzing the political theories that structure patriarchal thinking and imbue
American political beliefs, philosopher and feminist thinker Kelly Oliver (1997) states:

Implicit in [political theories and patriarchal thinking] are the *contradictory*
claims that the authority of political society is based on right and not might, that
only in nature does might constitute authority, that civil society supersedes nature,
that the father’s authority is based on natural strength, and yet it becomes the
basis for a legitimate patriarchal government that is based in right and not might.
(p. 164)

In her examination of a diverse range of classic and contemporary texts, Oliver re-
conceives such issues as woman and man, nature and culture, and maternity and paternity
through an analysis of science, research, philosophical suppositions, and psychoanalytical theory.

Turning her discussion back in time, Oliver (1997) provides a careful examination of philosophical traditions that substantiate patriarchy: “From Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Jacques Lacan, from John Locke to John Rawls, [it is a matter that] ‘father knows best’ ” (p. 162). The power of the paternal has been acquired and maintained through the strategic analyses of law, politics, and power by those in positions of authority, by those whose thoughts are published and read by those in power, and by those whose spoken and written word are sanctioned as credible. Moreover, land is amassed by the mighty and strong and is often passed down through the male line. In effect, rules, laws, and regulations are put into motion by those who can push the hardest within political systems and whose power is legitimized within patriarchal systems.

Oliver (1997) notes further irony: “Paternal authority, founded in might, takes on the tender maternal role of nourishing and nursing political society” (p. 163). The power inherent in political society demands skills of nourishing and nursing, but the domain of political society is reserved largely for men, thus leaving the maternal skills of these activities to men. Nourishing provided by women for family, children, and home are diminished to the domain of “women’s work” and are not regarded as critical skills for civic duties. Reporting on the varied ways that sexual difference underscores definitions and understandings of nature and culture, Oliver extends her argument to include the ways that both biology and psychology sustain the stereotypical roles of mothers and fathers.

The paternal authority of culture is founded on the father’s naturally stronger body: might makes right. After grounding the father’s authority in nature, our
philosophers and psychoanalytic theorists have disassociated the father from nature [which is solely the woman’s domain]. (p. 5)

By identifying the significance and ensuing confusion that has been created by the contradictory claims in the writings of 17th- and 18th-century philosophers, Oliver (1997) demonstrates through an articulate analysis of the issues why there are such deeply entrenched difficulties in the ways women understand themselves as individuals and in relationship with others. Furthermore, Oliver shows that there is a long recorded history of thought that has documented and justified the adage that “might makes right.” A particularly strong argument presented by Oliver that is germane to the discussion of patriarchy in the 21st century is the legitimizing of the “quintessential virile subject . . . the patriarchal father” (p. 162).

Oliver’s (1997) analysis of the steady legitimizing of men holding the power clarifies what Gerda Lerner (1986, 1993) determined in her analysis of how the recording of history has ignored women, and Real’s (2002) and hooks’ (2004) identification of the unfair and unnatural division of human qualities into masculine and feminine. In a system that legitimizes the notion that might makes right, it is easy to understand how patriarchal authority first emerged and has been sustained during the past 5000-plus years. In response to the legitimization of patriarchal authority, Oliver suggests creating viable alternatives to current thinking that will allow for broader definitions of who men and women are, while at the same time not denying the reality that generally men are physically stronger than women. It is too simplistic to assume that all men who are physically strong are also capable of the intellectual and mental acuity to run a fair government, or are spiritually acute enough to envision a future based on dignity and justice. Conversely, it is also over-simplistic to assume that all women are born to be
nurturers and mothers or that all women are relational.

Oliver furthers her argument for the broadening of how women and men are defined in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001), where she looks to history as the holder of seeds of possibility for the future. Through a careful reviewing and witnessing of actual survivor accounts of oppression and injustice, along with a concurrent recognition of what transpired, Oliver speculates that it is possible to transform current forms of injustice. She argues that the contemporary focus in the social sciences, philosophy, and humanities is limited by a cultural obsession with subject-object and same-different hierarchies. Seeing the possibility of shifting from the constraints of these dualistic negotiations, Oliver looks instead to the successes of the past as a conduit to the future:

> Future justice exists only by vigilantly returning to the past, reinvestigating the past over and over again in order to find places and moments of resistance to oppression that might open up a better future . . . [in effect] we need to rethink history. (pp. 135-136)

Oliver clarifies that “history is of the actual, while the future is of the possible . . . while historians work in past tenses—*it was, it had been*—justice works in the future anterior—*it will have been*” (2001, p. 135). This distinction in terms of the tense and intensity required to secure the success of future initiatives for justice helps to decipher the types of critical analyses that can resurrect the past in order to provide access to information that is currently obscured from view. Oliver’s analysis points to a place in today where one can well assess that, in spite of the pending struggle, *it will have been* worth the effort to advocate for a collaborative existence between the sexes, between cultures, and between nations.

In *Inventing Human Rights* (2006), Lynn Hunt, a professor of European history,
queries into the types of social, political, and economic factors that may have contributed to the development of a human rights mentality:

We should not forget the restrictions placed on rights by eighteenth century men, but to stop there is to miss the point . . . how did these men, living in societies built on slavery, subordination, and seemingly natural subservience, ever come to imagine men not at all like them and, in some cases, women too, as equals? (pp. 18-19)

Hunt encourages an analysis of history that fosters curiosity and provides direction in the overcoming of current dilemmas with human rights. Focusing on what transpired during the 1800s that may have contributed to an awareness of human rights, Hunt looks at interrelated pieces of history that resulted in higher literacy rates because a wider cross section of the population was given access to education. Hunt suggests that in giving individuals opportunities to learn how to read, to reflect, and to then challenge beliefs that had before gone unquestioned, the cultural and social parameters defining who had access to human rights and how access to human rights was acquired began to take shape.

In an effort to inspire reflection on the nature of individual rights, Hunt (2006) looks to the individual mind—along with social interaction and dialogue—as possible sources for the transformative social and political changes that were conceived and birthed during the late 1700s and early 1800s. “For human rights to become self-evident, ordinary people had to have new understandings that came from new kinds of feelings” (p. 34). Hunt’s premise is reflected in the philosophy of Paul Wellstone, the late Senator from Minnesota, that social change is a result of a bottom-up flow of power and one that allows the wheels of corrective action to turn (Lofy, 2005). The role of education in encouraging critical thinking cannot be underestimated in its ability to empower oppressed and marginalized individuals to question activities in their personal, familial,
and community lives. Through a growing awareness of the suppression of human rights, an opportunity arises for individuals and activist movements to pull together in the continuing fight for human and social justice.

Hunt’s (2006) assertion that throughout history there have been key moments when patriarchal authority has been challenged reflects Oliver’s (1997, 2001) notion of returning to the past in order to find places and moments of resistance to oppression. Interestingly, in their analyses of the same 17th- and 18th-century texts of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oliver (2001) notes the solidifying of patriarchal thinking, while Hunt finds pivotal moments that contributed to a later awareness of how humans think, how they decide for themselves, and ultimately how they move towards an understanding of individual human rights. In stressing the role that both literacy and literature played in the development of empathy towards others, Hunt argues that human rights exist as a result of an interdependent emotional-rational process that connects empathy with reason and logic.

In Hunt (2006) we find an additional advocate for learning from the past in order to understand the present and enhance the future. She is passionate about preserving the history of the emergence of human rights and for educating subsequent generations about the privileges associated with those hard-earned rights. Many whose lives are privileged with regular protection and enhancement of personal rights frequently assume that others share in the same luxury. Hunt challenges her readers to be interested in thinking beyond the safety of their immediate lives and to undertake developing a critical consciousness of human rights for others.

Section Summary
According to British sociologist Sylvia Walby, “patriarchy is not a historical constant” (1990, p. 173) and, as a result, patriarchy changes form and morphs in response to the socio-political-historical demands of the times. Moreover, theories of patriarchy do not suggest that patriarchy is dependent upon a single factor or condition that leads to every man having power over every woman in every context. Instead, these theories reflect a complex overlapping and intersecting of patriarchal interests with multiple power-generating systems that sustain genderism, racism, and classism (Dragiewicz, 2008). In effect, the interwoven web of patriarchal interests and oppressive systems succeed in keeping the balance of power between men and women in a continuous cycle of contraction and expansion.

Gilligan (2003a) describes her trepidation in using the word *patriarchy* because of its limited association with “men’s oppression of women and also because many patriarchal forms and practices have been effectively contested and replaced with more democratic structures and ways of living” (p. 7). Nonetheless, she emphasizes that patriarchal systems continue to succeed at sacrificing the quality of relationships that women and men can create among one another. In her most recent work with co-author David Richards, a constitutional law expert, Gilligan argues that patriarchal systems of power continue to fuel racism and genderism and condone societal violence. Because patriarchy “precludes love between equals” (Gilligan & Richards, 2009, p. 19), the authors suggest that patriarchal systems are powerful enough to preempt the emergence of a sustaining love among equals that is required for the unfolding democratic process. Through their ability to normalize political domination, civil defiance, and continuous cycles of discord and disruption within democratic societies, Gilligan and Richards
content that patriarchal systems may preclude the evolution of the democratic process.

In the next section of the literature review we will examine what is known about women’s personal and communal subjectivity from the perspectives of depth and liberation psychology. Depth psychologists have traditionally looked to personal history, interpersonal family dynamics, and archetypal dynamics when tending to women’s wounded psyches. The liberation psychology perspective widens our discussion to include the social, historical, economic, and political dynamics that oppress and marginalize women’s sense of self while living within gendered systems and patriarchal cultures.

**Depth/Liberation Psychologies and Women’s Subjectivity**

**Overview**

Feminist writer Elizabeth Janeway begins *Man’s World, Woman’s Place* (1971) with a telling comment: “If there’s nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come, there is nothing more ubiquitously pervasive than an idea whose time won’t go” (p. 7). Janeway’s study of the influence of social mythology on women’s place in the world highlights the ways that mythology is sustained by cultural desires, needs, and fears, and the manner in which social mythology uses, ignores, or changes facts.

Janeway’s reflections left me wondering about the comings and goings of patriarchy and my imagination was taken towards the image of the two-faced Roman god, Janus, known in mythology as the gatekeeper of thresholds. I was not surprised by this image coming to my mind, as I had written an academic paper on the image of doorways, thresholds, and crossroads and had done a great deal of research on the image of Janus.

According to historian Barbara Walker in *The Woman’s Encyclopedia* (1983),
prior to the Imperial Period in Rome, one of Janus’ two faces had been that of a woman, the goddess, Juno. “Every Roman woman embodied a bit of the Goddess’ spirit, her own soul, a juno, corresponding to the genius (soul) of a man. Later patriarchal vocabularies dropped the word juno but retained genius, thus depriving women of their souls” (p. 484).

At the time I conducted my research on Janus, I was not aware that he and Juno had once guarded the crossroads of time together. The information regarding patriarchal vocabularies’ elimination of juno from language was not referenced in the materials I examined. Moreover, Professor of Literature and Women’s Spirituality Patricia Monaghan states in The Goddess Companion (1999) that Juno’s domain originally reflected a broader range of feminine reality that encompassed diverse qualities of nurturing, kindness, ferociousness, and anger. Once viewed as a “complex goddess who ruled all of women’s energies” (p. 200), Monaghan states that Juno was eventually stripped of her complexity and broader influence in women’s lives. No longer serving as a guide for women in the resolution of human conflicts, in later mythology Juno’s role was reduced to one of an overbearing and jealous wife.

In an analysis of the feminine from a pre- and post-Jungian perspective, Jungian analyst Beverley Zabriskie (1990) discusses the significant role gender has played throughout history: “Gender informed and shaped the understanding of the universe . . . and was then extended into mythology, theology, philosophy, history, sociology, and psychology” (p. 267). Since the advent of patriarchy, Zabriskie describes the ways that the positive attributes of the feminine (e.g., receptivity and caring) have been harnessed and ultimately suffer in service to the needs of patriarchal demands. Zabriskie does not settle for a pessimistic outlook on the continuing influence of depth psychology in the
lives of women. She stresses that progress in the field is due to the feminist movement’s challenge of long-held assumptions about gender and subjectivity.

Beginning this section on women’s subjectivity, I cannot help but wonder about the number of words that have disappeared from various languages that could describe, illuminate, and define the essence of a woman’s sense of self. Because language is one of the primary vehicles through which we engage with the world, the compounding influence of the loss of words associated with a feminine sense of self has a significant effect on a woman’s ability to understand who she is while living within patriarchal cultures, as well as to challenge the patriarchal tenets that govern her life.

*Starting Where We Are*

To “start where we are,” the subject of a book by American-Buddhist nun Ane Pema Chödrön (2001) encourages embracing and understanding, rather than denying, the realities of the world in which we live. This theme provides grounding and direction for understanding how women develop a sense of self given the confines of patriarchal views on human development and the limitations of gendered language that obfuscate the experiences of women. The terms *sense of self* and *subjectivity* will be used interchangeably through out this dissertation. Both terms reflect the ways in which a woman comes to know who she is within the social, cultural, political, and legal contexts of her life. The notion of self/subjectivity is an inherited and evolving concept that has filtered down through history and has been analyzed by philosophers, social critics, sociologists, feminists, and psychologists. The ways in which a woman learns to understand and know who she is within herself, as well as in the external world, reflect complex and oftentimes contradictory processes that are influenced by a variety of
internal and external conditions.

Psychologist Barbara Esgalhado (2003) describes in “The Ancestor Syndrome” the ways that one’s sense of self can be discovered and revealed through writing and auto-ethnography. Because a sense of self is informed and formed through an evolving sense of awareness and an emerging ability to construct knowledge about one’s life, Esgalhado emphasizes the breadth and depth of the process of subjectivity. She states that the “process of the formulation of a subjectivity . . . [includes] its personal, social, historical, political, metaphoric, lived—and reminisced—aspects” (p. 487). In effect, subjectivity is a multilayered and multidimensional phenomenon rooted in traditions and customs and is frequently constructed without conscious awareness. It is a process that is regularly influenced by external messages fabricated and seeded in the psyche by advertising, media campaigns, authority figures, and laws. The various influences referenced by Esgalhado reflect the beliefs, values, and assumptions that women depend upon to know themselves, others, and the world at large. Unless questioned and challenged for continuing relevance in the lives of individuals and groups, outdated beliefs and values silently influence the direction of social, cultural, and legal systems.

Chödrön (2001) advocates for an opening of eyes and hearts to the fear, pain, pleasure, and joy that inhabit life. Starting where we are at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century in the West finds us in a disillusioned postmodern world that has been heavily informed by two world wars, cultural and social revolutions, technological advancement, and widening globalization. Postmodernism as a form of critical social theory questions the outdated authority of traditional guarantees of meaning, such as beliefs in rational human progress, universal standards and values,
singular truths, and meta-narratives that reflect patriarchal androcentrism (Code, 2000). Our discussion of depth and liberation psychology’s influence on women’s postmodern sense of self will identify how subjectivity is an in process phenomenon that is continually negotiating between the past and the present.

*Laying the Groundwork for a Woman’s Sense of Self*

We start with the work of German psychoanalyst Karen Horney because of her groundbreaking efforts to establish a theory about women’s subjectivity that extended beyond the confines of Freudian thinking and theory. Horney’s research spans a 30-year period beginning in the early 1920s until her death in 1952. Although nearly a century has passed since her research began, Horney’s work continues to have relevance and bearing on contemporary discussions about women, relationships, culture, and psychological development. A particular strength inherent in Horney’s work is its ability to intersect the effects of life’s struggles, strivings, and growth on the development of realistic, nonstatic definitions of self. Of particular interest to this study are Horney’s early attempts to establish a theory of feminine psychology, her identification of the influence of cultural values on women’s sense of self, and her professional engagement of psychoanalytical theory as well as patriarchal standards and thinking.

The first phase of Horney’s research from the early 1920s to the mid-1930s raised the issue of the debilitating consequences of masculine civilization on human behavior, but did not discuss the role of culture on the formation of subjectivity. Instead, she focused her attention on women’s psychological problems and substantiated the need to understand women as separate from men. In a paper originally presented in 1926, “The Flight from Womanhood” (in *Feminine Psychology*, 1967), Horney states that
psychoanalysis [is] the creation of a male genius, and almost all those who have developed his ideas have been men. It is only right and reasonable that they should evolve more easily a masculine psychology and understand more of the development of men than of women. (p. 54)

By starting where she was at the time of her writing in the mid-1920s, Horney acknowledges the male perspective and genius that were instrumental in developing the beginning pieces of psychoanalytical theory. She also recognizes the inherent flaws in a logic that assumes that the totality of human behavior could be defined by examining part of the human equation, that is, the male psyche. In this move, Horney established a critical foundation in the study and understanding of women, not in comparison to men, but as separate and unique: “The psychology of women has hitherto been considered only from the point of view of men . . . [and] women have adapted themselves to the wishes of men . . . [as if] their adaptation were their true nature” (1967, pp. 56-57).

In a July 1935 talk, “Woman’s Fear of Action” presented to the National Federation of Professional and Business Women’s Clubs, Horney challenged the ongoing reinforcement by cultural ideologies, including psychoanalytical thought, that described women’s nature as innately weak, emotional, dependent, and masochistic. Noting that it was difficult for women to escape the negative influence of cultural messages, Horney successfully challenged simplistic explanations of female behavior and psychology as being due to penis envy. Instead, she focused attention on the ramifications of cultural determinants on women’s subjectivity.

Horney recognizes the importance of distinguishing a feminine psychology. However, by the mid-1930s she found the cultural constraints of patriarchal thinking to be too large an obstacle in her attempts to solidify the essence of the female psyche. “Our whole civilization is a masculine civilization. The State, the laws, morality, religion, and
the sciences are the creation of men . . . we can see how difficult it is for . . . the individual woman to shake off this mode of thought” (1967, p. 55). Through the late 1930s and into the early 1950s, Horney’s efforts moved towards a non-gendered model of psychology with a focus on the neurotic conflicts of both women and men with an undercurrent of interest in social theory.

In a 1939 essay, “Can You Take a Stand?” Horney clarifies the inherent difficulty in taking opposing positions on social issues because of the culturally reinforced preference for objective, analytical, and unemotional thinking. Horney also suggests an interplay between an internal voice/aspect of subjectivity that frequently inhibits taking action in a perceived effort to be objective and open-minded. Hidden within the idealized state of objectivity is a mechanism that restricts the ability to stand up and question unfair and discriminatory conditions. To question and object to unfair conditions is often interpreted as an emotional, subjective response, and is generally labeled as a woman’s way of responding.

With her focus shifted towards understanding the potentialities that exist within the individual regardless of sex, Horney’s later work moved towards the development of a mature non-gendered theory of human behavior with a focus on how individuals learn to overcome defeating behaviors. In Neurosis and Human Growth (1950), Horney writes that fleeting states of self-realization could only be attained when individuals learned how to cope with anxiety and neurotic behaviors. Seeing subjectivity as a non-fixed state of self “freed of the crippling shackles of neurosis” (p. 158), Horney envisioned a developing self that is influenced by a variety of genetic, cultural, and environmental factors for its growth and realization. Within this framework, Horney identified a process
of subjectivity that reflects an unfolding of potentialities, a building of character, and one that is influenced by the environment. Interestingly, in her later work, Horney did return to the notion of culture’s influence on sense of self—a move that effectively united her early and later work.

Janet Sayers (1991), a professor of psychoanalytic studies, notes that while Horney’s work inspired future generations of feminist thinkers, Horney herself was “far too much of an individualist ever to engage in collective political struggle—feminist or otherwise” (p. 93). Conversely, Founder and Director of the International Karen Horney Society, Bernard J. Paris (1994) states that Horney’s decision to discontinue research on the distinctively feminine was due to her feminist orientation and her commitment to promote the emancipation of women in more efficient ways. Regardless of whether Horney was or was not a feminist, the progression of her arguments with Freudian theory and her provision of alternative explanations for women’s ways of being provides a viable structure for women’s engagement and challenging of patriarchal thinking and tenets. Horney’s personal engagement of the professional world in which she lived reflects an analytical process that challenges what has been established as “fact” and provides solid arguments to dispute those facts. In this respect, Horney had an advantage over many if not most women of her time due to her educational background, personal fortitude, and seeds of independent thinking from childhood.

*Planting Seeds for a Strong Sense of Self*

*The role of language.* Feminists have long argued that the exclusive use of terms like *he* and *man* to describe and define human behavior has contributed to obscuring women’s importance and distracting attention from women’s existence. The ways in
which language makes one less likely to think of women has also contributed to women feeling invisible in both the personal and public sectors. Important efforts have been made since the 1960s to use nonsexist pronouns in textbooks and to teach students alternatives to sexist language. However, despite these advancements, women’s identities continue to be negatively affected by the media and advertising, through the negative lyrics in popular music, and in stereotypes about women that are continuously represented in movies.

Oliver (1998) states that feminists have long been concerned that “the ideal of an autonomous self-determined subject as a male serves patriarchy” (p. xi) and believes that the political climate encasing discussions about the process of subjectivity frequently limits more comprehensive understandings of how identity is formed and who one becomes. She argues that feminist discourse needs to include an analysis of how both femininity and masculinity are constructed within language and patriarchy. Oliver also asserts that without such an understanding “man continues to operate as a norm, standard, or natural category” (p. 87) even within feminist theory and thought. By ignoring the natural state of “man” (p. 87) as the agreed upon norm of human development, women’s subjectivity appears to be “constructed” as a response to the norm. Similar to positions taken by Horney (1967), Real (2002), and hooks (2004), Oliver emphasizes that as a collective, humanity continues to be trapped inside the patriarchal legacy. Oliver suggests that in order to detach from its grip, ongoing efforts within feminist discourse will need to embrace the affect of societal factors on human subjectivity through a continuing deconstruction and reconstruction of assumptions regarding feminine and masculine psychologies.
French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (1995) argues that although time and language have been understood in a linear context where events progressively move towards the future, female subjectivity is an in-process phenomenon that reflects a cyclical nature. Within the language of cyclical rhythms, Kristeva describes the essence of a woman’s nature through the themes of menstruation and pregnancy, and proposes a subjectivity that moves, changes, and transforms in and with time. In this sense, developing of self is dependent upon a process that reflects a multiplicity of expressions and pathways and is continuously in varying states of transitional identities. Moving beyond a universal and linear definition of subjectivity to that of “subject-in-process,” Kristeva (1980) challenges traditional philosophical definitions of static subjectivity and masterfully draws attention back to feminine/maternal themes of rhythm. In addition, Kristeva emphasizes that we have reached a time in history when a “multiplicity” of female perspectives and preoccupations can be recognized and celebrated.

Although Kristeva’s work has been criticized for being too narrowly framed within a psychoanalytic Western narrative of father, mother, and child, she successfully employs the language of psychoanalysis to describe the repercussions of denying the feminine in language. By placing emphasis on where the feminine resides inside cultural understanding and language, Kristeva suggests that “the fundamental difference between the sexes arises out of the network of these differences” (1995, p. 206). She does not embrace an equality of the sexes, preferring to envision an ability to embrace and accept difference as a fundamental building block in the construction of meaningful lives and communities.

In a study of the lives of three women, Kristeva (in Oliver, 2002a) challenges the
paucity of interest to locate “female genius” within a patriarchal world. Reflecting back on the loss of Juno/woman’s soul that was described at the beginning of this section by Elizabeth Janeway (1971), Kristeva’s desire to resuscitate the feminine soul in language is relevant to understanding what might preclude and inspire an engagement of patriarchy by women. By re-reading the traditional masculine understanding of genius, Kristeva determines that “the work of a genius culminates in the birth of a subject” (as cited in Oliver, 2002a, p. 400). Through an analysis of the lives and works of philosopher Hannah Arendt, psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, and writer Colette, Kristeva provides a hint into “the sparkle of female genius” (as cited in Oliver, 2002a, p. 403) by recognizing the contributions made by three women who dared to imagine and think beyond the status quo inherent in patriarchal cultures. Aware of the obstacles that frequently prevent women from realizing and vocalizing their gifts for the world, Kristeva challenges women to glean the wisdom inside of the work of women who questioned and challenged authority and accepted the risks inherent in their rebellion against oppression and injustice.

A study conducted by feminist researcher Christy Rishoi (2003) furthers Kristeva’s hypothesis of the ways women’s subjectivity is influenced when reading about or connecting with the spark of female genius. In her study’s examination of a diverse group of American women writers, Rishoi explores the ways women’s subjectivity and identity can be transformed by writings that reject the traditional heroine’s narrative ending in romance. Making a bold claim that women have long known that their nature was complex and contradicted dominating views of feminine identity, Rishoi identifies the relevance of French poststructuralist Michel Foucault’s work on the historical rules of
exclusion, discourse, and language in understanding how women’s identities are shaped by non-inclusion. The exclusion of women’s voices reflects an oppression of diversity by dominant social and cultural forces and views that have minimized the value of women’s ideas and knowledge. Rishoi concurs with prevailing feminist thought that the exclusion of women’s ideas and writings was and continues to be sustained by patriarchal forces that dominate the literary and publishing worlds.

Encouraged by the increasing number of women writers who are helping to voice what women have long known, Rishoi (2003) recognizes the importance of the reader’s identity on the interpretation of texts. She also clarifies the inherent difficulties in creating flexible genres that avoid a one-size-fits-all description of development. Through a mélange of themes that address awakening sexuality, experiences during puberty, and socialization into feminine gender roles, Rishoi makes an interesting observation about the conflicting forces that influence women’s subjectivity at any given time. She states:

   Many feminist theorists have noted the irony in the fact that, at a historical moment when women finally began to be recognized as subjects, poststructuralists such as Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault were declaring the death of the author and the fallacy of individual agency. (p. 44)

Similar to the discussion in the last section regarding Linda Hunt’s (2006) study of the paradoxical emergence of human rights despite the prevalence of oppression and injustice during the 18th and 19th centuries, Rishoi argues that contemporary women’s writings can and must support the continuing evolution of women’s subjectivity regardless of such bold claims made by both Barthes and Foucault regarding the death of the author.

   Because subjectivity is heavily affected by language, historical context, and culture, there is a degree of optimism in Rishoi’s (2003) analysis. The emergence of literature that mirrors the diversity and complexity of contemporary women and their
experiences is important to this dissertation for two reasons. First, the introduction of this literature reflects the influence of engagement of and a continuing shift in the hierarchical tenets that have precluded a diverse expression of women’s experiences in the publishing and literary fields. Second, when women are exposed to literature that includes and mirrors a diversity of experiences of being, feeling, and thinking, they are provided with alternative views on what it means to be a woman in the 21st century. In effect, the exposure to alternative points of view can help to broaden and deepen women’s sense of self beyond the limitations imposed by patriarchal definitions.

The role of relationship with others. Studies conducted by Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, and Surrey (1991) at the Stone Center of Wellesley College critically examined the traditional hallmarks of human development expressed in the pioneering works of Erik Erickson, Daniel Levinson, and Jean Piaget. In contrast to these earlier theories of human development based on models that claim separation and autonomy as the signature characteristics of human experience, many of the Stone Center’s women clients were describing the importance of relationship and support from others as crucial ingredients in leading meaningful lives, in raising children, and in working effectively at their jobs. The findings of the Stone Center studies strongly suggest that women’s subjectivity is affected by factors such as connection and collaboration with others and relationships within and beyond the nuclear family, as well as the significance of being engaged with community. Their research also shows that women and men fare better in their lives when they work in relationship with others. Through collaborative engagement with others, women and men are reminded that there is something inherently good about belonging, joining, and receiving meaningful support. The Stone Center research findings
widen the psychological perspective of human development and subjectivity beyond linear fixed states of beings destined for autonomy and separation. Moreover, their work expands the traditional focus of human development and subjectivity towards theories that embrace flourishing and relationship-oriented terms and definitions.

In her Stone Center essay, “The Development of Women’s Sense of Self,” feminist psychiatrist and writer Jean Baker Miller (1991) suggests that our inherited understandings of self do not adequately reflect the ways that women develop, learn, and grow. In this essay, Miller challenges the separating and individuating models of Erik Erikson and Daniel Levison, as well as Margaret Mahler’s object relation theory of fusion and merger, as being totally representative of the human being’s developmental experience. Furthermore, Miller provides sound arguments in her engagement of traditional psychological theory and presents an alternative framework that places the human journey towards self as one that begins in infancy and carries on throughout a lifetime as one of a “being-in-relationship” (p. 13). From the perspective of being-in-relationship, the nectar of human experience is derived by what is created between people. Instead of being seen as islands unto ourselves, human beings have an inherent proclivity towards relational learning from and within experiences of engagement and belonging.

Miller (1991) also proposes that growth-fostering relationships are a central human necessity and that disconnections are the primary source of psychological problems. Particularly interesting is Miller’s challenge of Erikson’s second stage of psychosocial human development (ages 1½ to 2½), whose fundamental learning objective has been traditionally defined and legitimized as a time when the child learns
about autonomy through early developing stages of self-reliance. Miller suggests that it is far wiser and more realistic to think of this time period as being one where the child is developing a sense of self not through separation but more within an interactive, interconnected dynamic with others.

Looking at development of one’s sense of self from the perspective of an active-interactive process of being and doing whereby the child is utilizing both her personal resources and interpersonal engagement towards growth, Miller links the notion of “being-in-relationship” (1991, p. 13) with one of “agency-in-community” (p. 17). Furthering the definition of agency from that posed by psychologist David Bakan, Miller advocates for a term that includes a sense of an interactive doing-being rather than one that reflects movements towards an autonomous subjectivity. In Miller’s analysis, subjectivity is inspired through a simultaneous intrapsychic and interpersonal learning process that finds the child navigating in both worlds—within herself and in relationship with others. From this perspective, the evolving and maturing of internal dynamics provides the young girl with increasingly more sophisticated options of behavior that are not the result of an increased ability to separate and think for herself. Instead, the young girl is experiencing a simultaneous growth within herself and between herself and others.

Feminist psychotherapist and writer Janet Surrey (1991) in her Stone Center essay, “The ‘Self-in-Relation’: A Theory of Women’s Development,” questions the implications of developmental theory that affirms differences between the needs of women and men and that normalizes the validity of disconnection. Noting the importance of Miller’s “self-in-relation model” (Miller, 1991, p. 13) as a way to ameliorate the inherent problems in women’s development of self, Surrey argues that traditional views
of relationship narrowly limit our understandings to definitions and theories of a separate self that internalizes the loving object as a conduit to separate from others. In her analysis, relationship reflects more than a mere subject-object experience where the infant looks to the caretaker as an object to whom she attaches. Instead, Surrey suggests that during developmental growth there is an internal ability that inspires an infant’s relating to caretakers as both influencing and influential subjects in the world. From this perspective, a relational subject-in-process is better equipped to engage with the world around her because attention is placed on an internal potential towards relating and connecting with others rather than separating from them.

Surrey (1991) expands the notion of subjectivity beyond Kristeva’s (1980) subject-in-process to reflect a knowing and related subject who is both dependent upon a well-differentiated sense of self and is also able to navigate alongside other interrelated subjects. Within Surrey’s subject-in-relationship process there is “an experience of emotional and cognitive intersubjectivity” (p. 61) where difference and sameness are both appreciated. Surrey’s interactional model of development ultimately reframes the traditional views of the object relation model towards a “subject relation” model where the processes of “being understood” and “being understanding” work in tandem. More so, empathy plays a critical role in Surrey’s model because of its influence in calming the waters of separateness within connection.

Psychoanalyst Marcia Westkott (1997) challenges aspects of the Stone Center’s relational theory and suggests that women’s need for affiliation, while positive and important in their ability to live meaningful lives, also reflects a survival response to patriarchal conditions. Westkott argues that the historical devaluation of women’s ways
of being has placed unrealistic expectations upon women to be the sole source of nurturance within relationships, families, and culture. Because of these unrealistic expectations, many women experience the collapse of a relationship as a personal failure for not having cared enough for others. They also find themselves thrown into states of self-hatred and self-loathing. I agree with Westkott’s observations that a woman’s choice to respond relationally can be a defensive position when threatened by physical, psychological, or emotional abuse. However, I believe that the Stone Center’s focus on the human need for affiliation is not about psychological defenses to patriarchy, but reflects the deep human need for interrelationship that is thwarted by patriarchal approaches to individuation.

The role of learning. The Women’s Way of Knowing Project (WWK) conducted by feminist psychologists Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) looks at the affect of male-dominated educational systems on the ways that women learn and acquire knowledge. Stressing that a great deal has been learned about abstract critical thought, autonomy, and the morality of human rights, the authors state that less has been learned about the role(s) that “interdependence, intimacy, nurturance, and contextual thought” (p. 7) play in intellectual development. Belenky, Clinchy, et al. concur with the findings presented by the Stone Center that the universal trajectories of human development that are espoused in male-only research such as Jean Piaget’s studies on child development, William Perry’s model of ethical and intellectual development, and Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory on moral development do not adequately reflect women’s experiences as learners, knowers, and moral reasoners. Concluding that women’s thinking and experience did not fit into the categories established by Perry’s study on ethical and intellectual
development, Belenky, Clinchy, et al. set out to uncover the ways that women receive, pursue, and construct knowledge.

The WWK Project identified critical distinctions in women’s acquisition and holding of knowledge that provide valuable insight to women’s engagement of patriarchal systems. In order to engage in an activity, an individual needs to understand the dynamics, rules, and context of the activity and have an awareness of her strengths and weaknesses before she embarks on the engagement. The WWK study as well as Belenky’s later work with the Listening Partners Project (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997) amplifies the importance of dialogical engagement in the ways women receive and construct knowledge. Both of these studies identified that women’s evolving episteme and sense of self are dependent on the ability to question, listen, wonder, and construct alternatives to the received information. In order for women to question the very systems and rules that govern their lives, they particularly need to develop the intrapsychic ability and capacity to imagine and wonder beyond the existing patriarchal conditions that frame their lives.

In *A Tradition That Has No Name* (1997), Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock note the positive effects on marginalized women when given the opportunity to see themselves as “potential agents of their own history” (p. 310). Identifying the cost to communities when women are silenced from themselves and others, as well as when their acts of leadership are measured against male models, the Listening Partners Project also points to the influence on men’s lives when women speak up about issues. The authors speculate that when a mutual process of posing questions and dialoguing about issues is encouraged, the long-term benefits could affect future generations. To pass on traditions that encourage
an appreciation and respect for the differences between women and men will require the planting of very special seeds. Jane Sapp, a multicultural educator, has developed techniques to help the silenced find their voices through community-based cultural development programs in the arts and music. She believes that human beings have forgotten that they are an evolving species:

We haven’t begun to explore our capacity to care, to be concerned, the capacity to feel, to think, to know, to be open, to be connected, to be moved, to be just, to be aware of the light that radiates on everything. (as cited in Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997, p. 311)

By remembering that we are linked in an evolving process that has seen equal rights for women become a possibility, Sapp’s insights suggest that we have an obligation to ensure that current efforts to engage patriarchal structures both support and embrace diversity of equalities and that the practices of engagement continue to evolve for future generations of women.

Brabeck and Larned (1997) challenge the findings from the Women’s Ways of Knowing Project, claiming that there is insufficient evidence to support the claim of an acquisition of knowledge that is unique to women. Although they agree that ways of knowing and the construction of meaning reflect experience and maturation and should not be limited to a patriarchal/masculine bias toward rationality, Brabeck and Larned do not concur that “there is a form of epistemological development that is distinctly associated with women to a greater degree than men” (p. 261). Preferring to view the acquisition of knowledge from the perspective of “epistemological development,” the authors argue that knowing cannot be “privileged along gender lines” (p. 262) unless the results can be established from quantitative analysis.

Noting that the findings from the Women’s Ways of Knowing (WWK) study
were reached through qualitative research methods, the authors suggest that Belenky, Clinch, et al. (1997) defend a position that has not been made relevant through a quantitative study based on statistical findings. Brabeck and Larned (1997) further note that the WWK findings were established from "a theory of origins [that states that] because women are more devalued, more likely to experience abuse, more oppressed . . . [then] they must think, know, and understand the world differently" (p. 267). The authors infer that the qualitative nature of the WWK study renders the findings insignificant, and they also appear to normalize the efficacy of quantitative studies that can prove validity through statistics.

In a rebuttal to Brabeck and Larned’s (1997) analysis, WWK researcher Nancy Goldberger acknowledges that she and a handful of her colleagues are influenced by a belief in a natural separation of the sexes, and reaffirms that “in an ideal world, gender would not matter, but in this world, gender does matter—and it will continue to matter as long as social power and influence are inequitably distributed” (1997, p. 259). By encouraging an ongoing dialogue that both acknowledges and engages differences, Goldberger supports feminist efforts that embrace what has long been associated with the feminine. Moreover, Goldberger encourages the valuing of women’s ways through the expression of women’s relational capabilities and the ways that women accrue a sense of power.

Psychologist and educator Carol Gilligan’s hallmark study In a Different Voice (1982) challenged the masculine bias of her colleague and mentor Lawrence Kohlberg in his study on the six stages of moral development. Gilligan’s work is important to this discussion on the significance of gender in the formation of subjectivity because her
study argued that young girls approach moral reasoning from a different set of skills than young boys. Gilligan found that young girls were being measured against standards that did not reflect the role of community, caring, and relationships with others in their process of moral reasoning. She states that girls’ sensitivity to relations with others is as viable an approach to moral reasoning as young boys’ dependence on abstract principles in moral reasoning. Moreover, Gilligan asserts that the implications for young girls to be measured against norms appropriate to young boys are an example of how patriarchal approaches are privileged in models of moral development.

Looking at the difference in outlook from the perspectives of several women researchers brings to light the diversity that exists between and among women on the topic of subjectivity, knowledge, and gender. In spite of their differences, they model behavior that is important for women as they encounter others who either agree or disagree with their point of view. At various times, each of us experiences feeling like an “Other” when in relationship to another human being because of differing beliefs and values. As members of a world that is filled with difference, diversity, and various forms of “otherness,” it seems that the ability to differentiate ourselves from prescribed reactions to otherness is an inherent quality in the work of engagement. We are being called to find and strengthen our voices and to learn to hear the voices of others who are different from ourselves.

*The role of multicultural contexts.* When we think of empowering women and engaging patriarchy, the ideas and values that are held within a multicultural context are valuable in creating critical shifts in basic assumptions about diversity and difference. Jungian analyst and psychotherapist Christopher Hauke (2000) states:
The feminist challenge these days . . . is not only enlightening and emancipatory, but, like post-modernism itself, it also contains implications for pluralism, for the acknowledgement of difference without hierarchy, and for the questioning of a unitary self—a self that has been consistently based on a fixed gender identity. (p. 119)

Hauke’s perspective on feminism and pluralism provides a valuable bridge as we move our discussion forward to reflect the importance of multicultural perspectives in the ongoing deconstruction of patriarchal assumptions about gender.

Including a discussion of subjectivity from a multicultural perspective also provides a dialogical link towards broader understandings of self-in-relation because multicultural perspectives continue to shatter the White male hegemonic interpretations of women’s subjectivity. I have chosen the work of a select group of Latina/Chicana and African American writers whose research has enabled me to question the ways my learning to be a White woman of European descent informs my subjectivity and the ways that I look at the world. These writings reflect the ongoing strength that is being created by discourse between and among diverse individuals, groups, and communities about prevailing beliefs and attitudes that inform their lives and rights.

Professor of Women’s and Mexican-American Studies Yolanda Broyles-Gonzales clarifies in *Re-emerging Native Women of the Americas* (2001) that one of the most pronounced effects of the Raza Movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the “re-emergence of indigenous consciousness among Chicanas . . . to understand and re-appropriate [their] pre-colonial indigenous heritage” (p. viii) into contemporary life. Connecting the notion of women’s domains of autonomous self-power that are rooted in women’s traditions, Broyles-Gonzales amplifies the pejorative implications in the notion of traditional knowledge. In her perspective, the term *traditional* has been relegated to reflect that
which is mindless, rural, and backwards, and as a result traditions are deprived of their historical and cultural efficacy. Ironically, the term traditional is also associated with nonfeminist oriented perspectives, that is the White male traditional point of view.

Broyles-Gonzales (2001) attempts to liberate the shackled sense of traditional by bridging the gap that separates traditions from their ancestral reverence and relevance within communities and cultures. Noting that experiences and voices of native women serve as a foundational element in American society, she believes that despite the negative repercussions of colonization on native women in America, they “continue to this day [to] bear and transmit an eloquent humanist testimony: in words, colors, dreams, and actions” (p. xiii). The range of sources of women’s wisdom spans the continuum from rural practices to alternative healers to academic researchers studying women’s issues. Regardless of its origins, the inherent knowledge that has long resided within women’s traditional roles in history and community is entitled to respect, voice, and a place in the postmodern psyche.

Broyles-Gonzales shares her experience of patriarchal structures from her perspective as an academic scholar of Mexican-Indian descent:

Through my own [bi-cultural] lens, I see my life permeated by women-centeredness . . . as well as the more recent colonial patriarchy [yet] most of my women colleagues have absolutely no idea that women have a long history of holding power and authority on this land, in what is now called the Americas. As I see it, patriarchy is new upon the land, but it is in contest with older systems. At least in my life. Not necessarily White women’s lives. (Broyles-Gonzales, personal communication, February 3, 2008)

Broyles-Gonzales’ reflections on patriarchy are inspiring in their ability to open the imagination back to a time when women’s roles were valued, as well as to establish a place from which native women’s subjectivity has spawned. Although I cannot speak for
all White women, I believe her words provide a space of liberation in their directness about the variant ways patriarchy is understood and experienced. Often like a suffocating mask, this white skin that encases my feminine subjectivity is frequently a barrier between me and women of color. Broyles-Gonzales’ words extend a hand that opens a door towards meaningful dialogue about difference, sameness, and uniqueness.

Latina writer and activist Ana Castillo shares in *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1994) her experiences as a brown-skinned woman in America. She states:

> I cannot say I am a citizen of the world as writer Virginia Woolf, speaking as an Anglo woman born to economic means, declared herself . . . as a mestiza born to the lower strata, I am treated at best as a second class citizen, at worst, as a non-entity. (p. 21)

Describing her experiences of being silenced because of her gender and the color of her skin, Castillo attempts to raise consciousness through a simultaneous process of fighting against the paralyzing realities of the past and fighting for the seeds of wisdom that are housed in the past. Writing for Latinas and other caring hearts, Castillo encourages moving beyond individualistic isolation towards relational inclusiveness.

Similar to Belli (2002) in her criticism of revolutionary movements’ failures to consider the reality of women’s lives, Castillo (1994) challenges the Raza movement and describes how it failed to live up to a feminist ideal of taking women’s issues seriously. Castillo criticizes the static nature in which women are represented in both Chicano and Chicana culture. Along with Broyles-Gonzales’ (2001) search for a liberation of meaning associated with tradition, Castillo argues for a body of work that reflects the social, cultural, historical, and political realities of the Chicana experience—which she calls Xicanisma: A Chicana feminism. Castillo states:
On a pragmatic level, the basic premise of Xicansima is to reconsider behavior long seen as inherent in Mexican Amerindian woman’s character, such as patience, perseverance, industriousness, loyalty to one’s clan, and commitment to our children . . . simultaneously as we redefine (not categorically reject) our roles within our families, communities at large, and white dominant society, our Xicanisma helps us to be self-confident and assertive regarding the pursuing of our needs and desires. (p. 40)

We have discussed that subjectivity is an in-process phenomenon that is experienced differently by women depending on a variety of factors, for example, religious affiliation, cultural heritage, race, socio-economic status, and sexual identity. Noting that racism has generally been viewed as a Black-White split in America, Castillo (1994) addresses the limitations of this dualism on the emerging sense of self for brown-skinned women. Faced with a choice of either assimilating into the dominant White culture’s values or remaining invisible and viewed as nonparticipatory, Chicanas struggle with a unique set of circumstances not experienced by other women.

As her contemporaries Broyles-Gonzales (2001) and Castillo (1994) demonstrate in their writings about the ways cultural differences influence subjectivity, Chicana activist-writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1987; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002) supports an emerging identity that is characterized by hybridity, flexibility, and plurality. In Borderlands (1987), Anzaldúa recognizes the differing influence of physical, psychological, sexual, and spiritual “borderlands” on diverse populations who occupy the same terrain. Taking aspects of depth psychology and filtering them through the cultural lens of the Chicana experience, Anzaldúa provides an enhanced narrative that allows for a breaking down of predetermined understandings and beliefs about what is truth. Jewish-American psychologist and philosopher Helene Shulman-Lorenz identifies this as a move beyond a master narrative and towards a “re-creation of a kind of performance style practiced in
many oral traditions where multiple voices and tellings of the past build up a many-sided and ongoing dialogue about provisional truth-in-perspective-for-the-moment” (as cited in Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 497). Shulman-Lorenz demonstrates the ultimate malleability of knowledge based on a subjectivity that embraces dialogue, relationship, and realignment with one’s ancestral dynamics. I believe within this potential of malleability we can cultivate seeds of hope for the ongoing engagement of patriarchy by women.

By naming the dynamics of oppression that exists within the dogma of Western depth psychology as well as within the male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture from which she descends, Anzaldúa (1987; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002) reconfigures and reestablishes the place of evolving woman. Given her personal complex identity as a woman—Chicana, mestiza, lesbian, and former Catholic—Anzaldúa provides this discussion about subjectivity, culture, and the construction of identity with yet another layer of understanding. Shulman-Lorenz views this as a “reflexive subjectivity . . . as a self-in-dialogue-and-community” (as cited in Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 503), a view that allows for a rupturing or breaking apart of pre-formulated constructions of self. Anzaldúa notes that because the “world is not safe [and] we shiver in separate cells in enclosed cities” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 42), she extends an invitation to both rupture and re-create senses of self that allow inner dialogue as well as external connections back to the communities that have been feared in our postmodern isolation.

Based on her personal experiences as a Nicaraguan activist and militant, Giocandí Belli (2002) writes about the power that historical definitions carry about women’s and men’s roles. We learned earlier in this chapter that Belli fought side by side with male
comrades during the Nicaraguan revolt against oppressive governmental regimes during the early 1980s. She clarifies that fighting together in battle for a cause aimed at ameliorating social injustice was not enough of a force to break down the barriers of conventional thinking about women’s and men’s roles. Belli’s ongoing struggle for equality with her male counterparts provides telling insights into the need for both internal structures that recognize external oppression as well as external structures that help support a steady transformation of patriarchal and gendered systems. Through an ongoing process of self-reflection and questioning, Belli unravels the tightly wound knot of unrealized awareness that unknowingly motivates her actions and conditions her belief systems. Towards the end of her memoir, Belli shares a poignant revelation, “How could I, who was the feminist militant, have not thought [about the] prejudices [towards] women that dated from the time when Adam bit the apple?” (p. 385).

Feminist Jungian analyst Polly Young-Eisendrath (1999) provides an interesting analysis in her study of women and desire that perhaps provides insight into Belli’s question. Young-Eisendrath states that due to the double bind of patriarchal systems that prevents women from being fully enfranchised human beings, women’s emerging desires for self-determination and knowledge, as well as for equality, are frequently redirected towards wanting to be wanted by men, wanting to be beautiful, and wanting to be desirable. As a result of the double bind, women need to understand the assumptions and beliefs generated by patriarchal systems. Moreover, women need to understand the assumptions that patriarchal systems generate about women. They also need to learn how to decipher the ways that patriarchy preempts women’s engagement of prejudice, oppression, and domination.
As an African American educator and feminist, bell hooks regularly explores themes of reconciliation, community, and communion in her writings on gender, race, and class differences. In *Communion: The Female Search for Love*, hooks states, “my search for love led me to freedom” (2002, p. 33) and proceeds with a thought-provoking examination of the ways in which feminism, women’s participation in the workforce, and the advent of self-help movements have transformed views about women, men, and love. Reflecting on the importance of meaningful dialogue between men and women, hooks states that mass-media has continually pigeonholed feminism as a man-hating movement. Through a methodology that embraces parallel efforts by women to understand where they shut down in fear about men and by men to understand the ways in which they ignore their own power, hooks imagines a culture of reconciliation where power structures (not men or women specifically) can be challenged and transformed.

Perhaps it is her personal ability to reconcile the wounds of her own past that makes hooks’ (2002) approach to healing the wounds of patriarchy so compelling. Pointing her reader towards educational models of reconciliation which provide for continuing engagement in the face of difference, hooks continually looks for ways to think beyond current dualities:

My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness. As teachers we believe that learning is possible, that nothing can keep an open mind from seeking after knowledge and finding a way to know. (p. xiv)

In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), hooks explores the ways that educators and academia need to expand their span of influence in the liberation of individual and communal psyches. Noting that White male hierarchical
structures continue to dominate academic institutions, hooks clarifies the specific challenges women of color face from those that White women confront. While White feminists played a key role in the feminist movement, hooks believes there was a pivotal moment in feminist history during the 1970s when Black women feminists spoke up and insisted on the need to further “deconstruct the category of woman [with an] insistence on recognition that gender is not the sole factor determining constructions of femaleness” (p. 63). In hooks’ opinion, the breaking down of arbitrary definitions made by White women for all women created a necessary portal towards the development of broader theories of women’s subjectivity. hooks endorses an on-going evolution of theories that can enhance women’s abilities to collaborate and forge relationships based on diversity.

In keeping with earlier references in the opening of this section of the literature review vis-à-vis the transformational power of language, hooks similarly embraces a process of feminist thinking that will evolve over time, and one that is affected by historical, social, and cultural factors. hooks (1994) describes this process, seeded in “healing words, healing strategies, healing theory” (p. 75), as a capacity to remember and recover the painful struggles experienced by women and men. By remembering and recovering the painful struggles, individuals are empowered to respond to current struggles within the patriarchal web. Moreover, hooks believes that through a collaborative learning about one another’s struggles, people can participate in a liberating process that reveals the “frightening and embarrassing truths” (2004, p. xii) that keep us separate from one another.

In this section, we have learned about the interaction between cultural-social factors and their relationship to a woman’s internal world and her sense of self. We have
looked at ways that individual, group, and educational systems have evolved in their ability to empower women to look beyond the inherited patriarchal definitions that inform their ways of looking at the world. We have also noted from a broader perspective how patriarchy negatively influences the lives of men. We will now focus our attention on the development of a psycho-political consciousness and the role it plays in confronting internal and external sources of oppression.

The role of psycho-political awareness. As a psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva (2002) discusses the notion of “intimate revolt” as a liberatory process that calls life, values, and systems into question. Through her reflections on lessons learned from the 1789 French Revolution and France’s 1968 democratic uprisings, Kristeva clarifies that history’s earlier lessons can fuel contemporary questioning of injustice and tyranny. Intimate revolt is a form of revolt that is mandatory for both individuals and societies:

The telling moment in an individual’s psychic life, as in the life of societies at large, is when you call into question laws, norms, and values, it’s by putting things into question that values stop being frozen dividends and acquire a sense of mobility, polyvalence and life. (p. 12)

Normalizing the ongoing role that prohibition plays within human existence, Kristeva argues that “there is no revolt without prohibition . . . if there weren’t prohibition, whom [sic] would you revolt against?” (2002, p. 31). Kristeva’s emphasis on the importance of looking at the influence of outer conditions on the inner self through the process of intimate revolt provides valuable insight into this dissertation’s study. If we are to assume that social and cultural prohibitions will continue to manifest in the human experience, then successive generations of individuals and society must be conditioned to think proactively to take action to assure that measures are in place which both question and respond accordingly to those prohibitions.
Kristeva (1980, 1987, 1995) inspires her readers to question and push through the density of patriarchal thinking through the liberation of feminine dignity. Although she remains loyal to her psychoanalytical roots and believes for the most part that the amelioration of social malaise is primarily achievable through increasing the freedom and self-awareness of individuals, Kristeva is sensitive to the cumulative societal and cultural influences on women remaining in the role of outsider. In her attempts to liberate both body and language, Kristeva strives to uncover the ways in which social oppression and discrimination are intimately connected to the oppression of the feminine voice and genius.

As a post-Jungian analyst, Andrew Samuels (1993) passionately addresses the need for depth psychology to extend its wings towards the development of theories that better reflect the interface of the social, political, and personal dimensions of experience. Acknowledging the role that “an accelerating cultural process” (p. 186) has on contemporary gender debates, Samuels notes the implications of the “political development of the person” (p. 51) with movements toward social action. Citing that politics and psychology can learn a great deal from one another, Samuels describes the ways that social and political factors can help revolutionize clinical work. An interesting question posed by Samuels asks what affect political awareness has on the work of psychotherapy. Furthering this question a bit, I ask what influence political awareness has on subjectivity as well as on an individual’s commitment to engage factors that result in social injustice. Moreover, how do we go about reconciling the injustice that has been caused by corrupt politics and intentional disregard for constitutional rights? I wonder how and whether these issues can become part of depth psychology’s evolving role in
cultural and social amelioration.

In the 15 years since publishing *The Political Psyche* (1993), Samuels’ work has developed towards further refinement in understanding the continuing effects of citizenry, social justice, and politics on subjectivity. He also addresses a concern that is not often discussed: “In today’s Western-style societies, all the injustices that flourish with respect to the Others in their midst perform a terrible distorting violence on the souls of the powerful majority as well” (as cited in Alschuler, 2006, p. xi). Samuels’ comments are relevant when we wonder about the influence that social justice inspired engagement will have on the intra- and inter-psychic spaces of individuals, groups, and organizations dominated by patriarchal tenets as they awaken to the oppressive injustice propagated by the legacy of patriarchy.

From the perspective of cultural psychology, Phillip Cushman (1995) stresses the need to see depth psychology as an evolving tradition that requires continuous questioning and renewal. Addressing the complex relationship between psychotherapy and culture, Cushman also points out the paradoxical connection between the principles that underlie tradition and the visions of change that alternative movements create in reaction to tradition:

Some forms of feminism, through their critiques of the arrangements of gender and class, have developed an understanding of the negative effects of individualism . . . and yet it is important to notice that feminism grows out of aspects of the same traditions that it critiques. (p. 351)

Cushman clarifies the conflicting messages and understandings that inhabit the seeds of tradition, history, and culture—seeds which both preclude and inspire the need for change. On one hand, these seeds provide a context and sense of what Cushman refers to as the “givenness” (p. 350) of cultural landscapes; conversely they also provide the
germinating force that propels an awakening to the need for change.

Believing that the refinement of gender issues is part of a larger corrective response to patriarchal tradition, Cushman imagines an approach that “might be able to affect a significant shift in the social terrain, one that is both understood and supported by the communities of citizens that make up the nation” (1995, p. 352) and will lead to the redefining of traditional roles. Similar to Broyles-Gonzales’ (2001) discussion regarding the inherent value in traditions, Cushman includes in his discussion the ways that “there are seeds of the past inherent in each dimension of creativity and revision” (p. 2), as well as valuable interconnections among psychotherapeutic theories that can support the construction of improved social ideologies and values.

Merging certain ideas of liberation psychology (e.g., Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire and social activist and Tunisian-Jewish writer and essayist, Albert Memmi) with those of Carl Jung, political scientist/Jungian analyst Lawrence Alschuler (2006) applies tenets of both fields to elucidate the connection between oppression of psychological and political consciousness. Studying the ways that change occurred in the lives of four indigenous people from Canada and Guatamala, Alschuler reveals the diversity of political consciousness and describes the psycho-socio dimensions that are integrated within political awareness. Alschuler’s research provides insight into this dissertation’s study of the ways that liberating of subjectivity can enhance the potential for engagement of patriarchal thinking, systems, and structures. His work also elucidates the role that political consciousness plays in the empowerment of the individual woman and for women as a whole.

Alschuler (2006) lays the groundwork for understanding the emergence and
development of a psycho-political subjectivity by juxtaposing Jungian and post-Jungian constructs (designed to liberate the individual psyche from ego complexes) against the constructs of liberation psychology (geared to ferret out the socio-political factors of oppression). From the perspective of depth psychology, a psycho-political subjectivity would reflect Jungian stages of individuation where the personal ego progresses throughout the life cycle with an increasing ability to move beyond self-involvement and towards a transcendent connection with Self. Within this transcendent connection an individual begins to be aware of the needs of others, the world, and the *anima mundi*.

Alschuler’s (2006) study also integrates critical aspects of Paulo Freire’s (1970) work regarding the interplay between political conditions and internal oppressive states of the disenfranchised and the marginalized. Similar to Augusto Boal’s theory of “cops-in-the-head” (1995, p. 15), Freire negotiates the dialogical interplay between external sources/voices of oppression with the internal voices of oppression that inevitably begin to populate an individual’s psychic space. Striving towards a process of developing critical consciousness, *conscientization*, Freire identifies three stages leading to the development of skills that can combat internal oppressors and empower individuals to confront external sources of political and social oppression. During each of these stages we find three recurring themes: naming, reflecting, and acting. These themes are relevant to women’s process of engaging the patriarchal oppression by value of (a) needing to know how to identify and describe the oppression, (b) being able to step back and observe the oppressive systems, and (c) knowing what effective action can be taken to stop and ameliorate the conditions of oppression.

Freire’s (1970) schema reflects a process that is designed to develop an emerging
capacity of consciousness which begins with a stage of “magical consciousness.” Within this stage, individuals confront reality as an “awe-inspiring powerful, irresistible force that changes or maintains things according to its will” (Alschuler, 2006, p. 18). The crisis is framed/named within a context of personal survival or even minimized to a type of thinking that concludes “that’s life”—where catastrophe just happens and there is nothing anyone can do about it. In this phase people feel powerless and overwhelmed by the circumstances that are confronting them. Through reflection about the crisis, people attribute the cause of the problems to be beyond their control—to be a matter of fate or the will of a supreme being. The ensuing sense of powerlessness inevitably leads to a malaise of spirit and resignation which precludes taking action.

In the second phase of developing consciousness, Freire (1970) recognizes a period of adaptation that follows magical consciousness—which he names “naive consciousness.” During this phase individuals begin to develop a limited understanding of what is causing the crisis. Not yet able to correlate the acts of oppressors/unjust systems with the condition of being an oppressed individual, individuals are able to identify/name the source of the problem in terms of personal failure or the failure of others. Freire recognizes that although people are not yet able to differentiate how their internal psychic spaces have been populated by negative messages from external sources, they have begun to move beyond a fatalistic attitude of “that’s life” and towards one that begins to identify themselves or others as being part of the equation. The actions available at this point reflect what individuals have identified/named as the source of the crisis, for example, a personal failure to measure up, inability of peers to provide support, or the unfair practices of individuals towards them.
In the third stage, “critical consciousness,” individuals begin to develop an understanding of the socio-political systems that create oppression. During the initial stages of conscientization they begin to differentiate the source of problems to be due to the way systems work and name the source of the problems to be the result of socio-political problems such as genderism or racism. They also begin to discern how their personal identity has been shaped through an absorption of oppressive messages from external sources. Eventually recognizing and reflecting on the ways that external messages continually play within their minds with thoughts not entirely of their own creation, individuals begin to act in empowered ways. At this point in the process, individuals have developed an ability to respond to both their internal oppressors as well as to engage the external socio-political factors that impede their lives. Through parallel movements of collective connection and collaborative action, Freire (1970) hypothesizes that individuals and communities are better equipped to move from acts of dehumanization towards ones of humanization.

Oliver’s discussion on the liberation of psycho-political subjectivity moves towards an understanding that “is founded on the ability to respond to, and address others” (2001, p. 15). She refers to this process as one of “witnessing” (p. 16) where the ability to witness embraces the double sense of bearing witness as an ethical responsibility towards others and that of an eye-witness “seeing for oneself” (p. 16). As noted earlier in this chapter, Oliver proposes alternative understandings to the notion of subjectivity due to the limitations imposed by contemporary philosophical and psychological theories remaining locked in a traditional subject-centered notion of relationship. In order to liberate subjectivity from the locks of traditional thinking, Oliver
encourages constructing models that put political agency and ethics at the heart of subjectivity. In effect, an evolving and emerging state of subjectivity is dependent upon both the freedom and capability to respond and one where “response-ability” serves as the potential source for responsible ethical obligation towards and in society.

We find in Oliver’s (2001) evolving theoretical model a sense of subjectivity that reaches beyond static subject-object, same-different hierarchies where the attainment of personal identity is the crowning feature of success. More so, Oliver proposes subjectivity as a dynamic/in-process phenomenon where tension plays a decisive role in “connecting history, psychoanalysis, testimony, and witnessing” (p. 18). In Oliver’s conceptualization of a dynamic/in-process subjectivity, the definition of witnessing is expanded to include not only that which one has seen and witnessed with her own eyes, but also acknowledges that which one has not been able to see with her own eyes. Inside this second form of witnessing we discover an element of faith that inspires accepting that even though one has not experienced injustice personally, she will be response-able to the suffering and injustice experienced by others. In this sense, the structure of subjectivity is deconstructed in an effort to move it towards a subject-agent who is mobilizing and compassionate. From this wider perspective, the subject-agent is in a critical process of relationship where what others are experiencing is relevant and witnessed. Contrary to states of “false witness” that ignore and deny responsibility for injustice, “witnessing in-process” is a dynamic intra-interpsychic state dependent upon imagination, expansion, and affirmation for expression of responsibility.

Oliver’s analysis moves towards understanding and defining what obligates a response from an individual or community, a response that “nourishes the possibility of
response . . . [where] the question is how to respond to false witnesses in a way that reopens the possibility of witnessing, of responsibility” (2001, p. 108). Citing American historian and critic Dominick LaCapra’s work on who has the right and obligation to respond to atrocities, in particular the sense of who occupies the subject position and how self-identity is formed, Oliver argues for a subjectivity that, when in “relationship to others, even—maybe especially those we claim to disregard” (p. 109), is capable of demanding responsible reaction, dialogue, and responding to injustice. Subjectivity is thus freed from a self-indulgent acting out/in-response-to position that perpetuates discrimination and is replaced with a sense of working through and towards possibility. Oliver further notes that “acting-out . . . can be especially painful to women insofar as it is a repetition of the denial of [women’s] experience . . . and frustrating for anyone committed to response-able dialogue” (pp. 109-110).

Through the inclusion of what she identifies as varying and differing subject and social positions and moving beyond a universal and single understanding of subjectivity, Oliver (2001) allows for a broadening of psychic and social space so that acts of witnessing can begin to unfold. Oliver maintains that women must have access to both psychic and social space in order for them to witness the Catch-22 cycle within patriarchal thinking. Proposing the position of witnessing subjectivity as the conduit towards attaining a liberated connection between psychic and social space, Oliver states, “what the process of witnessing testifies to is not a state of facts but a commitment to the truth of subjectivity as address-ability and response-ability . . . witnessing is always bearing witness to the necessity of its process” (p. 143).

*Patriarchal impediments to women’s sense of self.* The late feminist philosopher
and theologian Mary Daly (1985) notes that the patriarchal strategy of divide and conquer confuses women by encouraging them into an “illusory identification with the categories and ideologies of the male run culture to keep female bonding from being effective” (p. 137). Daly explains that women are not only socialized to depend upon powerful men for support, they are also taught to play against each other in order to keep them on opposing sides. When women play against one another, it is difficult to reach out towards social space (community) where approximately 50% of the individuals comprising that social space have been constructed to not be trustworthy. From this vantage point, any movement towards the larger community on the part of women is essentially discouraged because danger exists out there.

Feminist academics and cultural critics Jill McLean-Taylor, Carol Gilligan, and Amy Sullivan (1995) explain that differences and tensions among women are often reduced to psychological terms that label women as being “envious and competitive [by nature] and therefore unable to work effectively together” (p. 7). Because women’s developing subjectivity is heavily influenced by patriarchal dynamics that teach them to distrust their own curiosity and authority, they learn to be distrustful of other women. The authors stress that contrary to these limiting patriarchal stereotypes, women continually demonstrate how strong alliances and friendships can develop which transcend class, culture, and sexual differences. Moreover, the authors argue that women know and have often forgotten that conflict and fighting are integral dimensions of relationships and that speaking openly about difference, race, and anger is necessary. Relationship means connection and being friends means working through problems: “Not being able to work together is itself a stereotype” (p. 7) attributed to women.
Within patriarchal systems, women’s emerging subjectivity is further compromised by these systems’ advocating for both detached and analytical approaches to learning. According to Oliver (2004), women’s intrapsychic spaces are “infected with patriarchal drives and desires that turn them into objects and undermine their agency” (p. 128). In order for women’s psychic space to be liberated of these patriarchal drives, Oliver argues for an expansion in theoretical understandings of subjectivity that would lead to an internal awareness of the oppressive conditions. Moreover, as the internal awareness of the colonization of psychic space augments, subjects-in-process begin to acquire the ability to construct thoughts about those conditions and to gain access to external/social spaces where the expression of rage and anger relative to the oppression is both encouraged and supported.

*Cultivating intra/interpersonal subjectivity.* Regardless of theoretical orientation and perspective on how gender inequities can be resolved, there is both overlap and difference in the views discussed in this section on subjectivity. I believe our discussions suggest that the bridging of understanding between men and women, races, cultures, and even remembrances of historical events requires a paradoxical respect and curiosity for difference and sameness. Judaic scholar and theologian Martin Buber’s fundamental concern with the ways human beings encounter one another provides insight into how understanding between and among diverse individuals and groups is dependent upon intimate respectful encounters within the very heart of patriarchy.

For Buber, an *encounter* is an event or situation in which relation occurs. By learning to live in relation to others we are able to grow, develop, and acknowledge the possibilities between us. In *I and Thou* (1923/1958, 1923/1971), Buber argues for an
ethic that does not use other people (or animals, nature, or a Higher Power), nor does it consider them objects of one’s own personal experience. He draws a distinction between two fundamental orientations to life that reflect an in-relationship with other as subject (Thou) from an in-relationship with other as an object (It). Within an I-Thou encounter resides the potential of meaningful dialogical engagement based on seeing one another as subjects deserving of respect. I-Thou relating is dependent on a deepened connection to one’s own personhood, as well as an awareness and appreciation of another’s personhood. Within this connection, one would consider everything around her as a “Thou” speaking to an “I” and requiring a response.

The primary word I-Thou can be spoken only with the whole being. Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me. I become through my relation to the Thou; and as I become the I, I say Thou. All real living is meeting. (1923/1958, p. 11)

From Buber’s perspective, an I-Thou relating involves a sense of being part of a whole. The “I” is not experienced or sensed as singular or separate; it is the “I” of being.

Interestingly, in a 1971 revision of I-Thou, editor Walter Kaufman transitions from the use of Thou, a term considered too archaic for modern readers, and replaces it with the contemporary form of You. By making this shift from its ancestral/historical roots, I believe Kaufman’s translation loses a depth of wisdom and historical perspective. Employing a term that has both linguistic and cultural history calls attention to the very distinction that an “I-Thou” encounter with the world entails. There is something foreign and at the same time familiar in saying and hearing the word Thou in relationship to other beings and oneself. Within the heritage of the word Thou resides a sacred wisdom that draws our heart and ears towards reverence. Buber would call this a reflection of the
“divine spark [that] lives in everything and being” (1964/1994, p. 5). Noting that humans are responsible for taking advantage of moments that can liberate these sparks, Buber’s theological overview of the world ultimately finds every I-Thou relationship as a potential encounter with the divine forces of life.

Buber’s reflections on an I-Thou sensitivity raises important questions about the ways that an evolving notion of subjectivity can be influenced from spiritual and sacred dimensions. We are left to imagine how individuals can be socialized into the ways of a Thou inter-subjectivity. What would be required to develop educational methodologies that teach ways to inspire encounters where one is received as a Thou and is also able to see another as a Thou? Perhaps connecting the sacred and spiritual connotations of an “I-Thou” relationship could allow for deeper intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships between genders and among community members.

What Women Need in Order to Question, Resist, and Transform Systems of Oppression

Overview

In the first two sections of this literature review, we discovered that before women who are oppressed can begin to assess the events in their lives and powerfully question internal and external messages of patriarchal/hierarchical oppression, they need to understand how patriarchy informs and structures their lives. We then learned that women need to develop the capacity to imagine and create an empowered sense of self within patriarchal cultures. In this third section of the literature review, we will discuss what women need to know in order to effectively question and resist historical definitions that predefine who women are and who they can be. We will also spend time addressing what enables women to move beyond historical definitions and traditional structures in
order to create an empowered sense of personal self, as well as to enhance the communities in which they live.

*Recognizing Habitual and Historical Responses to Oppression*

*Disassociation and disconnection.* Author and educator Carol Lee Flinders (1998) notes that throughout history a recurring strategy of the oppressed is to mentally remove themselves from the source of affliction in order to better endure pain, grief, and humiliation. Flinders writes that these habitual and historical responses to oppression reflect simultaneous processes of psychological disassociation that extinguish thoughts, feelings, and desires. Expanding on this sense of mentally removing oneself from oppressive conditions, Gilligan (2003b) notes that a patriarchal social order is dependent upon disconnection from women in order to sustain itself. The consequences of this disconnection causes intrapsychic divisions for women that results in women being unable to know what they know and causes them to lose touch with their experience and sense of reality. This type of psychological dissociation process not only results in the erasure of personal experience and memory, but eventually has negative repercussions on the unfolding of women’s collective cultural history and memory.

Terrence Real (2002) explains that disassociation is the central disorder that troubles and hinders women. He describes this as a disorder of knowing but not knowing: “As related to trauma [women dissociate] because there is no safe place for them to stand in the truth of their own experience” (pp. 101-102). Freire (1970) expands the process of disconnection to reflect the socio-political experiences when an individual feels powerless to confront the challenges that are bearing down on her life and in turn adopts a fatalistic outlook about life. Before oppressed women can engage patriarchal structures
and systems, they need access to personal skills that can intercept the tendency to adopt fatalistic attitudes. By developing skills of critical consciousness (e.g., naming, reflecting, taking action) within a safe participative process women can circumvent the pull towards disconnection and disassociation. Moreover, through the developing of a critical consciousness of patriarchal authority, women can strengthen their intrapersonal and interpersonal states of psychological and emotional resilience.

Unwanted assumptions about sense of self. Oliver (2004) writes that physical and psychological oppression leads to depression, shame, anger, and violence. She argues that the continuing irresolution of both physical and psychological oppression impedes the development of active agency. Active agency is of central importance in feminist theory in identifying the causes of women’s subordination and oppression, as well as in determining the impediments to their self-realization and freedom. Oliver reports that the paralyzing effects of physical and psychological oppression can be transformed through acts of individual/social witnessing and acts of forgiveness that lead to the achievement of active agency, empowered individuality, and connection to community. By challenging the unquestioned and privileged position of dominant cultural beliefs and group dynamics, a process of decolonizing or ferreting out of unwanted assumptions can begin. “Diagnosing the colonization of psychic space demands a close analysis of the affects of oppression and how those affects are produced within particular social situations” (p. xx). Oliver offers insight into the benefits that can be gained by culture and society when oppressed women gain access to social support and social discourse in an effort to unravel the binding knots of shame, guilt, violence, and anger.

Secrets, silence, and denial. In Chorus of Stones, feminist author Susan Griffin
(1993) discusses the power of secrets, silence, and denial and their ability to keep women and communities trapped inside destructive and unarticulated circumstances. She writes:

There are many things that we know but we are not supposed to know. Sometimes there is a conspiracy to silence us. But at other times it may be that what we have to tell is something no one wants to know because what we say does not fit into the scheme of things as they are understood to be. A child tells a doctor she has been raped by her father. She may even have signs on her body of this rape, a tear or a fissure. But the doctor refuses to see. A young woman remembers that she was raped, but the doctor hearing this story tells himself he hears only her fantasy. (p. 46)

Griffin points to the no-win situation that many women encounter in cultures where their voices are suppressed and their unspoken traumas are denied. On one hand, women are frequently forced to feign ignorance in order to survive. On the other hand, what they know is often dismissed as unreliable or irrelevant. Developing an ability to discern and distinguish between fact and fiction is a fundamental stepping stone in women’s epistemological development as engagers of oppressive systems.

*Women Learning to be Holders and Creators of Knowledge*

For the purpose of this study, we are most interested in learning how deepening women’s episteme influences their ability to challenge and question external authorities and oppressors. Belenky, Clinchy, et al. (1997) identify five orientations to knowing that typify women’s experiences of accessing and gaining knowledge and explore how these approaches to knowing influence women’s development of mind and voice. The authors were also interested in identifying factors that continue to silence women in their families, work, and lives, despite the progress that has been gained from the suffragettes and women’s rights movements. When looking at the five positions of knowing, it becomes easier to understand how women living within the legacy of patriarchy cannot or do not challenge oppressive power structures. The five ways of knowing are as
follows:

1. **First there was silencing.** The first way of knowing identified by the authors is given the name of *silenced knowing*. By “silenced” the authors do not mean an absence of speech but rather a state of being intellectually voiceless due to a paucity of awareness of “mental acts, consciousness, or introspection” (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997, p. 25). Not having had opportunities to cultivate a sense of mindful awareness, silenced knowers are cut off from a conscious sense of self as well as from directive internal dialogue. In silenced knowing, words are not experienced as bridges leading to empowered communications, but more so as weapons that harm and separate.

   Silenced knowers are easily manipulated by external authorities because they view them as being all-knowing and overpowering. From this position of knowing, women gain knowledge through tasks and observation, but not from experiences involving language. The authors note that while this position of knowing is rare, it serves as an “important anchoring point for our epistemological scheme, representing an extreme in denial of self and in dependence on external authority for direction” (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997, p. 24). Women who are ready to move beyond the hopeless and fatalistic state of silenced knowing would benefit from safe group therapeutic approaches utilizing both nonverbal and verbal healing modalities. Within the safe group environment, silenced knowers can begin to link their experiences of personal suffering with the experiences of other women who are also suffering at the hand of oppression.

2. **Then there was reception.** The second position of women’s knowing is termed “received knowledge.” In this way of knowing, women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving and often reproducing knowledge from external authority sources.
They do not know they have the capability to look inward for self-truths to create knowledge independently of external authorities. Unlike those who are silenced knowers who experience words as weapons, received knowers “think of words as central to the knowing process. They learn by listening” (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997, pp. 36-37).

Intolerant of ambiguity, the authors describe received knowers as “dualists” because they see things in terms of black and white, right and wrong, and one of the two is seen as superior to the other. Living within a framework of learned helplessness where the expression of voice is curtailed, received knowers rarely share their opinions or speak up to others. Belenky, Clinchy, et al., (1997) note the disadvantages received knowers face in a rapidly changing technological world that demands an ability to look inward for direction, competency, and clarity. Stretching beyond the confines of received knowing requires an evolving ability to listen and hear one’s self-truths, as well as overcoming complete reliance on others for guidance. Women who are ready to move beyond dependence on external authorities for direction would gain considerable benefit from creating reciprocal relationships with other women with whom they can experiment with articulating their thoughts, being heard, and being valued for their knowledge.

3. Then there was response. “Subjective knowers,” the third type of knower, recognize a relationship to personal truth and knowledge that is separate from external authority. Due to a developing sense of self-reliance, subjective knowing is achieved from an awareness of private and subjective experiences. In this relationship to knowing, a woman has developed a relationship with an internal source of authority to guide behavior and frequently depends upon a “gut” feeling for making decisions about situations. With a deepening awareness of and reliance upon an internal sense of self,
subjective knowers face controversy in a “matter-of-fact” manner that is highly reliant upon intuition and sensory experiences. Although the voice of authority has shifted from an external to internal position, subjectivists continue to adhere to authoritarian and dualistic perspectives on issues.

At the core of subjective knowing is a sense that each person’s opinion has relevancy. Due to fears of being misunderstood, in situations of disagreement where multiple “truths can converge . . . subjectivist women’s own experience and inner voice are the final arbiters” (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997, p. 70) in resolving conflict. Skeptical of logic, analysis, abstract thought, and even language itself as adjunctive tools to creating knowledge, in situations where subjectivists lack personal experience and the internal authority remains silent, they frequently experiment with a variety of approaches until they discover one that works the best. Because they distrust logical and analytical thought as a conduit to knowing, subjectivists prefer acquiring knowledge through intuitive means rather than through rational processes.

Reflecting back on Carol Flinders’ (1998) study regarding women’s habitual and historical survival responses to oppression, subjective knowing represents a critical crossroads in women’s capacity to disagree with outside authorities and to respond proactively to oppression. However, a limitation for subjectivists is an underdeveloped capacity to broaden personal perspectives through dialogue and discourse with others who present opposing points of view. To move beyond the highly independent orientation of the subjectivist position would require dialogical opportunities for being heard by sympathetic listeners and learning how their knowledge can benefit others. They would also begin to recognize that they can benefit from others’ knowledge and
experiences and not be solely dependent upon themselves for information.

4. *Then a moving towards connection.* The fourth way of knowing, “procedural knowing,” reflects an epistemological position that enables women to adopt objective insights and analytical tools to obtain and communicate knowledge within themselves and with others. Unlike their subjectivist counterparts, procedural knowers have begun to engage in conscious and systematic analyses of complex issues because they have learned that “truth is not immediately accessible, that you cannot ‘just know’ . . . truth lives hidden beneath the surface, and you must ferret it out. Knowing requires careful observation and analysis” (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997, pp. 93-94). Similar to experiences at Freire’s (1970) stage of conscientization, procedural knowers experience a sense of self that can witness and observe the complexity and ambiguity of the world. The authors note that women who gain access to procedural ways of knowing begin to observe the external world in more realistic ways and become more capable of engaging with the ideas of others.

In the movement towards procedural knowing, women frequently struggle with a sense of loss and confusion while disentangling from the familiar voice of their internal authority. Belenky, Clinchy, et al. (1997) state that during this journey of dis-identification from the internal voice, procedural knowers “in process” will experience their internal authority becoming increasingly critical of their new attempts at being and reasoning. Throughout this pivotal stage of broadening awareness, women will greatly benefit from the guidance of mentors who can expose them to alternative ways of listening, observing, and understanding what is happening to their internal world and external views. Mentors would not assume the role of an external authority, giving direct
answers, but would instead provide access to options.

It is important to point out that Belenky, Clinchy, et al. (1997) distinguish two modes of procedural knowing, “separate” and “connected.” They draw upon the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and Nona Lyons (1983) who identified separate and connected to define different experiences of the self in relation to others. Gilligan’s and Lyons’ studies identify a separate sense of self as one that experiences autonomy and differentiation from others. When faced with a moral dilemma, the separate self will refer to abstract principles in order to establish justice. Conversely, the connected self depends upon experiences of being-in-relationship and interdependent connection with others. When facing moral challenges, the connected self refers to modes of caring rather than establishing justice based on universal and impersonal rules.

As a point of reference for our current discussion on the topic of knowledge, Gilligan’s (1982) and Lyons’ (1983) studies focus on the relationship between the self and another person. However, Belenky, Clinchy, et al. (1997) employ the terms separate and connected to distinguish relationships that are created between “knowers and the objects (or subjects) of knowing—which may or may not be persons” (p. 102). The authors note that Western culture is particularly attuned to the voice of separate rational knowing because it is a voice that has been established and normalized through the works of developmental theorists Lawrence Kohlberg, William Perry, and Jean Piaget. A separate knowing encourages abstract and analytic thinking from an impersonal stance where the object of knowing is placed at a distance. By placing the object of knowing at a distance, the evaluation of new ideas is relatively unaffected by feelings and relationships. The goal of separate knowing is to construct truth in order to affirm,
invalidate, and to persuade others about ideas and positions on issues. At the core of separate knowing is the need for critical thinking, questioning, and doubting of the object of knowledge in order to assess its value and validity.

Belenky, Clinchy, et al. (1997) discovered the need to adjust the ways they listened to study participants in order to distinguish and hear the voice of connected knowing which strives to achieve harmony with others despite difference and distance. From this connected orientation, there is an equality between self and object that requires that the knower strive to be-in-relationship with the subject of a differing perspective or an opposing perspective from her own. A core value of connected knowing comes in the awakening of an often dormant capacity to imagine oneself in the shoes of another and depends upon a deep caring for the emergence of truth. Ultimately, connected knowing is dependent on developing skills of compassion and empathy and aims for dialogical exchanges where self and others are understood and heard. Such exchanges, especially those that engage differing perspectives, would lead to an increased capacity to critique knowledge and strengthen skills of empathic listening and understanding. These exchanges would also provide opportunities to speak from a personal sense of confidence and authority.

In an essay entitled “Reason’s ‘Femininity’: A Case for Connected Knowing,” Professor of Philosophy and Feminist Studies Sara Ruddick writes that the Women’s Ways of Knowing (WWK) Project attempts to “make audible a voice that is difficult . . . to hear . . . a voice of reason that is cast as ‘feminine’ ” (1996, p. 266). Ruddick notes that even though the WWK Project has been met with varying degrees of acceptance and rejection in academic circles, it has served to disrupt and challenge separate and
impersonal procedural forms of knowing that have been legitimated and identified as masculine. Asserting that connected knowing constitutes an alternative type of knowing, Ruddick substantiates its ability to bring the knower into relationship with personal emotions and body sensations, as well as a capacity to reach out and emphatically connect with the lived experience of other knowers.

Ruddick (1996) argues that because of patriarchal cultures’ loyalty to a masculine epistemology, connected knowing could be viewed as an oppositional epistemology because of its relational perspective. Noting that separate knowing disallows for inter-relational knowing, Ruddick provides convincing arguments for the ways that reason is conceived and birthed in relationship with others and is given voice or silenced within community. For the purpose of this dissertation, Ruddick’s insights on connected knowing point to the value of engagers of patriarchy learning to deepen and broaden their ways of knowing to include relational knowing. Moreover, engagers of oppressive systems could benefit from integrating separate and connected knowing into a single, more balanced voice.

5. And then there was a sistering of voice and mind. In the design and construction of buildings, the term sistering reflects a practice of reinforcing beams to support a floor or ceiling. For our purposes, a “sistering of voice and mind” leads to the fifth and final position of knowing—“constructed knowing.” Through this way of knowing, women are in a position of viewing knowledge based on circumstance and context. They also experience themselves as generators and synthesizers of knowledge and as constructors of new information and understanding.

Although constructed knowers will experience efforts to silence them, they are
adept at moving from the paralyzing grip of shame and silencing and towards generative re-action. From having honed their internal psychic structures through long periods of intense self-reflection and self-analysis, constructed knowers “show a high tolerance for internal contradiction and ambiguity. They abandon completely the either/or thinking so common to the previous positions” (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997, p. 137). Women in this position of knowing have learned the value of cultivating relationships with external resources who may hold differing perspectives from their own and with whom they can dialogue because of an internal fortitude to tolerate contradiction.

The sistering of mind and voice towards the construction of knowledge is a critical step in women’s ability to envision and imagine how they can transform the patriarchal structures that imbue their lives. When engagers-in-process learn that they can depend on a sense of self that is capable and competent to negotiate the multifaceted structures that shape selfhood and reality, they have undergone a critical integration of internal voices that can reason, intuit, sense, feel, and wonder about the world in which they live. It is from this position of knowing that women can begin to imagine the role they will play in resolving external issues that restrict their lives and those of other community members.

It is important to note that Belenky, Clinchy, et al. (1997) do not propose that the five ways of knowing are progressive states that build upon one other. Nor do they suggest that they are discrete ways of knowing. Instead, they propose that women will more than likely shift between particular ways of knowing, in any given order, depending on the situations in which they find themselves, the types of people with whom they are interacting, and the circumstances that frame these interactions. For example, a woman
may experience herself as a procedural knower in the workplace where she easily participates in methods that create knowledge. In contrast, within her family of origin she may experience herself as a received knower where she does not have an opinion independent of others nor does she have the means to arrive at an independent opinion.

Knowing when to choose silence. Beginning to hear the internal dialogue of one’s thoughts and reactions requires an ability to adopt self-imposed quiet in order to listen and hear oneself think. The ability to enter a state of self-imposed quiet allows an individual to tolerate hearing and listening to others’ thoughts and perspectives. In an essay “Speech is Silver, Silence is Gold,” feminist literary critic Patricia Schewickart (1996) writes that a knowing and empowered sense of self is dependent upon the development of self-quieting skills that are receptive in nature and developed through reading and listening. She differentiates self-quieting skills from those that are externally focused, assertive in tone, and emerge through acts of speaking and writing.

Schewickart (1996) argues that developing a discipline for internal reflection and self-quieting is fundamental to women’s ability to construct personal and interpersonal knowledge. This discipline also encourages critical refinement of understanding, listening, and thinking skills. “The silence of the listener does not mean that she is doing nothing and producing nothing . . . [similar to the act of reading a book], she is actively engaged in producing the meaning of the other’s utterance” (p. 319). Because self-quieting could be experienced as an act of self-repression, choosing to not express themselves could be a difficult impasse for women who have been silenced for most of their lives. Teaching women about the development of a strong sense of self, an awareness of their personal way(s) of knowing, and the ability to adopt the choice of
silence and reflective listening would be dependent upon didactic and experiential learning modalities that facilitate a gentle and progressive unfolding of personal and interpersonal growth.

*Women Cultivating the Ability to Interface, Dialogue, and Create*

Watkins and Shulman (2008) write that the processes of liberating internal psychic space and external social spaces go hand in hand towards supporting personal and community recovery. Women who are developing their personal skills to oppose injustice and violence in the dominant culture can benefit from joining together in smaller group settings in order to think through approaches of engagement creatively and collectively:

> As individuals become stronger in their abilities to articulate concerns and build solidarities, the communities of which they are a part become more able to resist oppression because they have a firm footing on which to build encounters with oppressive institutions . . . for psychic decolonization to occur we must restore or create several types of communities of resistance . . . liberation of psychic space goes hand in hand with the creation of social spaces that support the development of critical consciousness. (p. 210)

In their description of the importance of restoring and creating a public space fueled by a shared commitment, Watkins and Shulman stress the importance of awakening personal and communal awareness of the historical, social, political, and economic conditions that contribute to the oppression of individuals and to the decline of communities.

We have discovered that women’s sense of self as questioners and challengers of patriarchal structures is dependent upon learning the value of being a creator and generator of knowledge. We have also established that the ability to create and generate knowledge relies upon an internal safe haven for personal and silent acts of critical thinking, reflection, and imagining. To become an engager of patriarchal systems is also
dependent upon receiving nurturing forms of support and leadership from others who have walked in similar shoes. In the next section we will discuss the virtues of learning within safe public homespaces where women meet to listen, dialogue, and build social support. We will also look at the role that building community can play in helping to awaken oppressed women’s awareness about the external conditions that affect their lives.

*The Listening Partners Project*

We will begin with a discussion of a follow-on to the Women’s Ways of Knowing Project (WWK) that was conducted by Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997). The authors were interested in uncovering how women break through the demeaning stereotypes that result in their withdrawing from the social fabric of their communities. The Listening Partners Project (LPP), an action research project designed by the authors to empower and mobilize socially isolated and economically disadvantaged mothers from Vermont focused on a simple question: The authors asked whether being a member of a group where people listen to each other with the greatest of care would enable isolated mothers “to gain a voice, claim the power of their good minds, and break out of their seclusion” (p. 4).

The LPP determined the importance of the collective discovery process in empowering women to move out of internal and external spaces where they were silenced and to move towards the creation of more formidable internal and external dialogue structures that supported the development of mind and voice. The participants discovered through problem posing and collaborative learning situations that failures they had previously defined as resulting from personal inadequacy were experiences widely
shared by other women in the study. The authors ascertained that when women’s internal
psychic connections are strengthened to support a sense of self that can question the
circumstances that define their lives, many women find themselves in a stronger position
to challenge and to transform oppressive beliefs that prevent them from taking responsive
action. This releases them, in part, from internal blaming. Furthermore, as the internal
experience of psychic strength is fortified and interpersonal connections develop, women
can begin to engage with others on community projects aimed at helping others who are
similarly oppressed.

Public homeplace environments. Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997) employ
the term “public homeplace” (p. 156) to describe an environment that is nurturing,
mothering, collaborative, dialogical, and supportive of women’s self-awareness. The
authors note that the term evolved from the efforts of academic researchers and
nonacademic organizations interested in the growth and development of women,
children, families, and communities. Because the public homeplace setting is devoted to
the betterment of both personal and community development, its physical and relational
environment provides an ideal learning experience for women. In this safe space, women
learn the value of knowing themselves as well as the value in building networks of
relational support beyond the nuclear family.

In tandem to developing the Listening Partners Project, as well as an interest in
learning about traditions that have a “commitment to the common good and active
involvement in reshaping public life” (1997, p. 9), Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock also
undertook an additional study of four grassroots community organizations in the United
States and Germany. Mary Belenky individually interviewed the founders of each
organization to determine how the organizations began and evolved, as well as to define the underlying principles that guided the organizations towards success. During these interviews, Belenky learned that the organizations shared three common themes: (a) They were founded and led by women, (b) they were led by women who had devoted considerable time and energy to study the experiences of women and their roles in society, and (c) the facilitators were committed to bringing the silenced voice of the marginalized into public awareness.

Through a combination of interviews, observation, focus groups, and participation, the researchers learned that the public homeplace educational approaches are often referred to as nontraditional leadership models and are based on maternal rather than traditional paternal practices. While developmental leadership models based on paternal metaphors and ideologies have been substantiated throughout history, those steeped in maternal practices and orientation remain unnamed, similar to the ways that women’s traditional work has been unaccounted for in governmental assessments of a nation’s wealth (Waring, 1988). Because maternal models are inspired by metaphors of raising up rather than paternal practices and metaphors of ruling over, the thrust of educational models based on maternal practices are more apt to provide relational learning experiences where women who have been silenced and oppressed can begin to build internal safe spaces of awareness. Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997) clarify that the art of raising people up in both private and public homeplaces is not an inherited skill based on gender, but is a gender-neutral skill that women develop through continuous adaptation and revision within both the private and public domain.

Educational philosopher Maxine Greene offers an interesting perspective to our
discussion of public homeplaces. Through a delineation of the philosophical underpinnings of society’s need to encourage the development of authentic public spaces, Greene addresses the role of education in helping to define and nurture a sense of social responsibility. In *The Dialectic of Freedom* (1988), Greene writes that the cultivation of social responsibility is achieved through a personal process of self-awareness, as well as a public process that helps develop responsible community members. She describes the interconnection among personal fulfillment, interpersonal dialogue, and the evolution of democracy:

This book arises out of a lifetime’s preoccupation with quest . . . with pursuit . . . the quest has been deeply personal . . . it has been in some sense public as well: that of a person struggling to connect the understanding of education . . . to the making and remaking of a public space, a space of dialogue and possibility . . . an *authentic public space* where diverse human beings can appear before one another . . . such a space requires the provision of opportunities for the articulation of multiple perspectives in multiple idioms, out of which something common can be brought into being . . . it requires, as well, a consciousness of the normative as well as the possible: of what *ought* to be, from a moral and ethical point of view, and what is in the making, what *might* be in an always open world . . . my hope is to remind people of what it means . . . to achieve dialogue with others for the sake of personal fulfillment and the emergence of a democracy dedicated to life and decency. (pp. xi-xii)

Greene’s views on the role of education, authentic public spaces, and the human striving for freedom and social justice shed light on the complex nature of human beings and their capacity or incapacity to take collective action within diverse groups. She describes a setting where community members are encouraged to imagine beyond the expectation of what ought to be and whose voices are trained to speak about the fruition of a democracy dedicated to resolving moral and ethical dilemmas that impede social justice.

Greene (1988) argues that within authentic public spaces, humanity’s capacity must be stretched beyond normalized attitudes that predicate who has access to power
and who does not. She writes that a just and fair democracy can flourish only through citizens’ consistent challenging and transforming of intolerable conditions that generate indecent behavior and unjust social conditions for human beings. Greene brings to our discussion further clarity on the ways that engagement of oppressive structures requires an internal fortitude to question, evaluate, and take action. She also substantiates the need for public safe spaces where community members can join together to dialogue and debate about unjust socio-political, cultural, and economic conditions that exist within and around their community.

_Remembering how to belong_. Cultivating women’s readiness to respond to patriarchal oppression is dependent upon an ability to create collaborative and interdependent relationships with others who share in a similar vision. Because many in North America live in highly individualized and privatized communities, inspiring women to join in the activities of public homespaces will have its inherent challenges. In *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World*, developmental psychologists Parks-Daloz, Keen, and Daloz-Parks (1996) state that within the human psyche is a deep-seeded desire to belong and join communities with others with whom they share similar views. Citing the long human history of belonging to closed tribes and clans in order to survive in nature and to be protected from harm by others, the authors note that attitudes and behaviors towards acts of belonging are informed by ancient behavioral and tribal codes. A key teaching offered by Parks-Daloz et al. is the value of exploring with women how they understand and define experiences of belonging and to identify how they create opportunities to belong.

Within the safety of the public homeplace setting and through educational models
designed to break through normalized responses to remain separate, women would learn to move beyond definitions that limit their understanding of belonging. Participation in personal and collective exercises designed to challenge unquestioned assumptions about what it means to belong, who is invited to belong, and listening to others describe experiences of exclusion would serve to expand women’s ways of knowing and deepen their capacity for empathy. By striving to imagine themselves in another’s shoes, learners are not only provided with intentional and imaginal experiences of understanding another’s position, they are also given the opportunity to cultivate personal skills of compassion and interpersonal skills of connected knowing (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997; Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997).

Section Summary

Women as engagers/subjects-in-process would benefit from identifying where they experience themselves as subjective, constructive, and procedural knowers and determine how those skills could be transferred to situations where they may feel less able to interact and dialogue with others. Ultimately, to engage with individuals and external systems of patriarchal authority will require that women develop a relationship with themselves as the holders and constructers of knowledge. Engagement will also demand that women learn how to sustain a sense of confidence in their ability to participate in the co-construction of new ideas without the risk of losing themselves or their perspectives in the process.

Moreover, the process of developing critical consciousness is dependent upon the ability to hold and construct knowledge as well as to break through/down many of the social structures that normalize the status quo. Because of its concentration on breaking
through prevailing mythologies that define women as second-class citizens and objects of others, developing personal and interpersonal critical consciousness can empower women to understand the social and political contradictions that infuse their worlds.

We have learned that women’s engagement of patriarchal structures requires the recuperation of internal psychic space and the development of a sense of competency and capability to construct knowledge. We also discovered that public homespace environments provide women with critical exposure to educational and social engagement that strengthen their personal and interpersonal abilities to interface and dialogue with others. Ultimately, the journey of engaging and challenging oppressive systems reflects simultaneous processes of building up, taking down, and creating new definitions of what constitutes personal and collective human, civil, and economic rights.

Historic Struggles and Successes of Catholic-American Women Religious

Overview

Avita Bloch, a Professor of Social Research, and Lauri Umansky, a Professor of History, note that history tends to marginalize the efforts and contributions made by women, particularly those made during the 1960s towards cultural transformation. In their analysis, this marginalization has kept the varied voices and faces of the women’s movement segregated from the larger picture of history. Although the authors acknowledge the amount of attention and focus that has been given to the contributions made by women within the political domain, they believe that successes in other arenas of women’s lives have been minimized and ignored. In a series of essays about the lives of a diverse group of women singers, poets, tennis players, and religious members, Bloch and Umansky (2005) recover important dimensions from these women’s efforts that
reflect a pulse of inquiry, curiosity, and imagination. In the authors’ opinion, pulling the pieces of the puzzle of women’s history together to include the successes and efforts of women beyond the political arena contributes to a more accurate depiction of women’s resistance to oppression.

The works discussed in this section of the literature review identify some of the ways that women religious have contributed to American feminism through the challenging and questioning of patriarchal/hierarchical tenets that call for the exclusion of women from full and equal participation within the Catholic Church. For the purpose of this dissertation, the struggles and successes of Catholic women religious in America have played a crucial role in the legitimization and recognition of women’s roles in history.

*Pre-Vatican II Era*

We will begin with a study conducted by Laura Ann Quiñonez and Mary Daniel Turner (1992), both members of religious orders, educators, and self-declared feminists. Citing the value that women have brought to the making and shaping of the American people, the authors believe that the stories of women religious’ struggles for equal voice within the Catholic Church can provide valuable insights into contemporary women’s struggles for equality. Quiñonez and Turner undertook a series of interviews with key women religious leaders and observers of the post-Vatican II movement. They also conducted the first systematic review of archived materials of critical events that transpired prior to Vatican II. Their study concluded that the initiatives undertaken by women religious during the 1950s strongly influenced the momentum towards positive change made by women religious following Vatican II’s call for renewal in the mid-
The 1952 Sister Formation Movement (SFM) was conceived by the American women religious themselves and uncovered the need for better professional and intellectual preparation among teaching sisters. The impetus for the SFM came as a result of a doctoral dissertation written in 1941 by Sister Bertrande Meyers, a member of the Daughters of Charity, whose study concluded that teaching sisters were ill-prepared to meet the increasing demands of students and families in the post-World War I environment. As a result of Sr. Meyers’ study and the efforts of the SFM movement, American women religious during the 1950s transformed into one of the best educated group of nuns in the history of the Church. According to Quiñonez and Turner, the SFM was successful in broadening the lives of women religious to reflect “a conceptual shift in theology and spirituality [and] in worldview” (1992, p. 11).

Despite protests by parish priests and bishops about the nuns being allowed to leave parish schools for educational purposes as a result of the SFM, many women religious were able to participate for the first time in theological and social-behavioral studies as a regular part of their educational training. Belenky, Clinchy, et al. (1997) and Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock’s (1997) respective studies on women’s ways of knowing and the role of public homeplace learning environments suggest that the SFM gatherings provided safe learning environments for the women. During the SFM gatherings the women were able to wonder about and question the traditions that continued to shape their religious lives but were no longer viable in meeting the needs of the modern world. Given the opportunity to cross-pollinate with members of other religious communities provided women religious with exposure to critical theological, philosophical, and
sociological studies about life in the 20th-century modern world.

_Vatican II Era_

A journalist for the Catholic Press, Ann Carey (1997) provides a different perspective from the views offered by Quiñonez and Turner (1992) on the positive influence of Vatican II in the lives of women religious. Carey outlines the ways that women religious in America were adversely affected by the waves of social and cultural changes during the 1960s and 1970s. She notes that religious communities suffered extensive losses in their sense of identity and unifying missions for their future as a community. Once the backbone of the Catholic Church, Carey states that the numbers of American Catholic Sisters decreased dramatically between 1965 and 1995 due to “the chaotic renewal in women’s religious institutions post-Vatican II” (p. 15). Carey believes that the levels of discord and division among women in the same order were often too unbearable for many to withstand or overcome.

Carey (1997) suggests three primary factors that may have influenced the levels of discord, turbulence, and rebellion within women’s religious communities during the Vatican II renewal process: (a) The widespread influence of the secular women’s liberation movement, (b) the usurping of leadership roles within religious communities by feminist thinkers, and (c) the overpowering and dominating of women who were not feminist in thinking by leaders who moved to the frontlines with a personal agenda of revolt. Unlike Quiñonez and Turner’s (1992) study that describes the readiness of women religious communities in the 1960s, Carey argues that most communities were in a very vulnerable state rather than an empowered state at the time Vatican II called for renewal. She speculates that the state of vulnerability was the result of a combination of factors,
primarily the rapid modernization of society and culture and the hierarchy’s slow response to the demands of the modern world.

Carey (1997) emphasizes that women religious found themselves polarized between those desiring radical changes and those wanting to stay aligned with the traditions of their communities. As a result of the polarization and the destabilization of traditional community life, members were left demoralized, disempowered, and uncertain of what steps to take to plan for their futures. Carey concludes that contemporary efforts towards the reestablishment of religious communities can only succeed if they are carried out by the women religious themselves. She also clarifies that while re-founding efforts can be supported by other groups of people, they cannot be mandated or directed by the hierarchy, clergy, or laity.

We glean from Carey’s (1997) study valuable insight into the inevitable difficulties and breakdowns that will be experienced by individuals and groups during transformational times of social and cultural change. However, her analysis of the Vatican II era does not include a discussion of the historical domination of women’s religious communities by the male hierarchy of the Church. Although the women’s movement and feminist thinking may have had a role in the unfolding of events, it may be that their influence inspired a movement towards self-determination and away from outdated patriarchal traditions.

As we continue our exploration of the engagement of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church by women religious, we will next look at the activism of women religious of color whose paths of engagement were filled with obstacles that were distinctly different from those that White women religious confronted. For these women,
the hierarchy of the Church was not only patriarchal, it was also White and predominantly Western European in its orientation. The treatment of women religious of color was similar to the discriminatory treatment that members of color of the Catholic laity had historically encountered in the Church. It is also important to point out that although the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California did have women of color as members, their overall membership was predominantly White women of Western European descent.

Experiences of Latina/Chicana American Women Religious

We will begin with a study undertaken by Lara Medina, Associate Professor of Chicana Studies (2004) in its examination of the racist and patriarchal realities that Chicana/Latina women religious have faced in the Church. As members of religious communities that were largely dominated by White women of Western European descent, Chicana and Latina nuns regularly faced exclusionary practices. Within these communities, they were viewed as second-class citizens and disallowed their cultural heritage. Moreover, advancement within the communities was typically reserved for Euro-American members rather than Latinas and Chicanas. Yolanda Tarango, a member of the Sisters of Charity, describes the racism and alienation that she and others endured as an “experience of being violently torn away from our Latina/Chicana cultural heritage” (as cited in Medina, 2004, p. 14). With no sense of belonging to the ways of the religious communities they had joined, these women frequently felt detached from their call to the religious life.

Medina’s (2004) study identifies the ways that Euro-American women religious succumbed to the power of the dominant culture’s privileged position. In order for
women of diverse economic, social, racial, and cultural backgrounds to work together to engage patriarchal oppression critically, they will need to explore the ways that their personal and interpersonal beliefs and attitudes are shaped/misshaped by dominant cultural ideologies. They will also need to determine how these ideologies prevent them from recognizing one another’s suffering. In light of this dissertation’s focus on women’s engagement of patriarchal structures, Medina’s study underscores the necessity for women to ferret out their personal biases and assumptions about others who come from different socio-economic and racial backgrounds than themselves.

Similar to Quiñonez and Turner’s (1992) substantiation that reform efforts were well underway in America by women religious prior to the Vatican II decrees for renewal during the mid-1960s, Medina (2004) carefully details three Latin American social reform movements that were carried out by sisters, priests, and members of the laity during the 1950s. The relevance of these movements to this dissertation’s study is twofold. First, their historical unfolding had a direct influence on later acts of engagement of the Catholic Church by Latina and Chicana women religious in America that will be discussed later in this section. Second, oral and written history must adequately credit the actions taken by women and other marginalized peoples and recognize their right to self-determination. The Vatican II calls for renewal were a major force in helping to begin a transformation of rigid hierarchical structures of the Church worldwide. However, the pre-Vatican II efforts of so many Latin American sisters, clergy, and laity were equally—if not more—effective in responding to the cultural and social needs of Latin Americans.

The movements birthed and nurtured in pre-Vatican II Latin America were
(a) The convening of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops in 1952, which identified the need for comprehensive social change throughout Latin America. (b) The Movement for Grass Roots Education, a national and regional organization of lay people committed to social justice, which developed literacy programs that brought the poor together to learn about poverty, malnutrition, and illiteracy. Utilizing the Bible and the early work of Paolo Freire’s (1970) popular education technique and literacy campaign, community members learned of their rights and responsibilities as citizens to transform the social, political, and economic sources of oppression. (c) The emergence of *comunidades eclesiales de base* (community-based groups) that were led by the laity and promoted by individual clergy and sisters. These small community-based groups, as well as the Movement for Grass Roots Education literacy circles, provided homeplace environments where community members were exposed to a form of faith and dialogue that critiqued systems of oppression.

In their dual call for a structural change of oppressive social institutions and the development of a new kind consciousness of liberation, these movements helped to prepare the soil for the later emergence of the grassroots Liberation Theology movement in Latin America. The Liberation Theology movement which sprouted and grew during the 1960s was influenced by the political, religious, and social justice initiatives discussed above and came at a time when the need for change in Latin America had become widely established. These grassroots efforts for change were not only ill-received by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, they were also met with formidable resistance by leaders of other Christian-based churches in the region. The grassroots efforts were also met with violent forms of opposition by the militaristic governments that controlled
much of Latin America at the time. With many nuns, priests, and members of the laity arrested, tortured, and killed, the movement that was inspired by social justice, grassroots democracy, and love was besieged by continual threats, anger, hatred, assassinations, and defrocking.

The experiences of the Latin American Church had a worldwide effect on Christian thought and praxis. These experiences also inspired North American sisters, clergy, and laity to address how the needs of the poor were being met in America. According to Catholic historian Mary Jo Weaver (1985), over 20,000 American women religious traveled to Latin America during the 1960s to be educated in the tenets of liberation theology and to minister to the poor. In particular, returning Latina and Chicana women religious were forever changed by their experiences of working with the liberation theologians, ministering to the poor, and becoming aware of the role the Church played in sustaining systems of oppression throughout Latin America and the United States.

Of importance to this dissertation is the subsequent formation of Las Hermanas (The Sisters) by American Latina and Chicana women religious after their return from Latin America. No longer isolated from the secular world, members of Las Hermanas began to engage the patriarchy of the American Church by openly defying racism, genderism, and poverty, and by challenging ecclesiastic discrimination within the Church. Medina (2004) states that Las Hermanas laid critical groundwork for the articulation of a Latina/Chicana feminist consciousness that countered patriarchal tenets and Eurocentric perspectives that imbued U.S. Roman Catholic Church doctrines. This feminist consciousness allowed for a chipping away of stereotypes that cast
Latina/Chicana nuns as dutiful and obedient servants under the authority of the clergy. It was a form of feminist consciousness that also provided an alternative space for Latinas and Chicanas to express their spirituality as women.

Medina (2004) notes that Latinas and Chicanas sustain their dignity and self-esteem in oppressive cultures through a sense of the divine that inspires justice for struggling women. A fundamental tenet of Las Hermanas’ spirituality defines women’s engagement of struggle as a transformative act rather than a mode of passive victimhood. Through struggle, women not only survive but learn to prosper spiritually, culturally, and economically. “Faith in women’s creativity, supportive relationships, and intuitive and cognitive abilities enable Las Hermanas to express a spirituality and theology beyond the boundaries of the institutional Church” (p. 125). The efforts of Las Hermanas to undermine and reorient the male dominant structure of the Catholic ministry and break through stereotypes of Latina/Chicana Catholics describe some of the ways that women choose to engage patriarchal structures. Moreover, the efforts of Las Hermanas empowered Latina and Chicana Catholic women to move beyond the boundaries of patriarchal oppression by creating alternative spaces where their ways of being, thinking, and doing were cultivated and respected.

*Experiences of African American Women Religious*

African American women in religious communities suffered in similar and yet more strident ways than their Latina-Chicana sisters. Professor of Religious Studies Cecilia Moore (2006) writes that until the beginning of the 20th century, African American women were not allowed to join White religious women’s communities because they were considered unchaste and immoral. As a result, from 1828 until 1916
many African American women worked tirelessly to challenge these distorted views, attitudes, and perspectives by founding three alternative communities for African American women. Still considered historic feats, the founding of The Oblates of Providence, The Sisters of the Holy Family, and The Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary reflect acts of engagement that challenged racist and sexist attitudes and practices of the Catholic Church and the American public.

These women were not invalidated by racial and gender discrimination that excluded them from belonging. Instead, they were inspired by the Church’s teachings of love and justice. These early engagers of patriarchal structures established what bell hooks (1990) describes as sites of recovery from the pain of humiliation:

Historically, black women have resisted white supremacist domination by working to establish homeplace. It does not matter that sexism assigned them this role. It is more important that they took this conventional role and expanded it to include caring for one another, for children, for black men, in ways that elevated our spirits, that kept us from despair, that taught some of us to be revolutionaries able to struggle for freedom. (p. 44)

Noting that homeplace sites in African American communities have been historically organized by the women, hooks argues that homeplace environments are not simply places for women to be of service. These environments also provide the requisite physical and psychological space for women to resist the debilitating assault of dominant authority structures. Within the physical structures of safe community sites, African American women learn to affirm one another and to withstand the pull of psychic numbing. They also develop the necessary skills to resist withdrawing from social connections when confronted by the voices and faces of dominating authority structures. “We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy . . . in ‘homeplace’ . . . we had the opportunity to grow and develop and to nurture our spirits” (p. 42).
Professor of History and African Studies, Diane Bates-Morrow (2002) writes that the historic beginnings of the Oblates of Providence in 1828 reflects the dedication of four free women of color of Caribbean descent and one White clergy member of French descent. The story of the Oblates is important to this dissertation’s study because it validates the criticality of recording the oral and written histories of women who challenged oppressive systems and developed alternative responses to discriminatory practices. Interestingly, Morrow began her research on the Oblates after reading comments made by African-American scholar and priest Cyprian Davis, who stated that “no adequate history of any of the black Catholic sisterhood exists” (as cited in Bates-Morrow, 2002, p. 11). The Oblates’ legacy has thrived over the past 180 years in 25 cities in the United States, Cuba, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and most recently in Africa. Through example and leadership they demonstrated the need for power, determination, and courage when living in perilous times. By challenging dominant authority structures, they proved that virtue, intelligence, and sacredness were not defined by the color of one’s skin. Additionally, the Oblates’ acts of engaging patriarchal authority contributed to the history of Black Catholics in America.

We learn from Anderson (1996) and Bates-Morrow (2002) that the founders of the Oblates, Elizabeth Lange, Rosine Boegue, Marie Madeleine Balas, Almeide Duchemin-Maxis, and Rev. James Joubert, fled to America from the French colony of Saint Dominique at separate times following the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804). Upon arriving in Baltimore, they discovered an intermingling community of French-speaking biracial Haitian Catholics, a type of safe space environment that provided them with an alternative to the White, English-speaking Baltimore establishment (Anderson, 1996).
The four women shared a cultural heritage that had been colonized by French traditions in the 1600s but one that also retained aspects of ancient polytheistic beliefs and African traditions that were matriarchal in orientation. In contrast, Rev. Joubert originated from a traditional aristocratic French family that had fled to Saint Dominique during the French Revolution. The five visionaries of the Oblate community shared, however, a broader commitment to educate the disadvantaged, to provide a religious community for African American women, and to spread the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Despite strong attempts to discourage Black education in antebellum Maryland, Lange and Balas successfully opened and operated the first day school in Baltimore for the city’s French-speaking Black immigrants in 1827. Rev. Joubert, who had been assigned pastoral charge of the Caribbean refugees at St. Mary’s Seminary Chapel, soon discovered that the children had difficulty learning their catechism because they were unable to read French or English. Lange and Balas had already considered establishing a teaching religious community to serve the needs of Baltimore’s African American and Caribbean refugee children when Rev. Joubert approached them with a similar idea.

On July 2, 1828, the four women pronounced their simple vows in a ceremony officiated by Rev. Joubert. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the first religious community composed of free Black women came into being in Maryland, which at that time was still a slaveholding state. While the legacy of patriarchy historically gives primary credit to Rev. Joubert for the Oblates’ founding and ensuing success, women’s oral history tells us that it was the tireless efforts of the four women of color that guided the order in meeting the needs of their constituents. The Oblates’ mission strategically embraced the Church’s social justice teachings while challenging the Church’s
antebellum ideas, attitudes, and practices regarding race, gender, religion, and immigration. By identifying the importance of caring for the needy, the Oblates vocalized an intolerance for the rampant expression of racism, prejudice, discrimination, and violence that belittled the dignity of Baltimore’s African American community and desecrated the lives of women and children (Anderson, 1996; Bates-Morrow, 2002; Oblate Sisters of Providence, 2009).

It is important to point out that there were major advantages to the women and the hierarchy of the Church in establishing the Oblate Community in Baltimore. The Oblate Community provided the women with opportunities for religious life and the women were prepared as teachers at a time when vocational opportunities for women were restricted, especially for women of color. Moreover, the Archdiocese of Baltimore was provided with a continuing supply of prepared teachers to run its Catholic schools for African American children. Interestingly, the engagement of patriarchal structures often reflects the creation of alternative structures for the oppressed while working within the patriarchal framework that creates the oppressive conditions. In effect, the women who joined the Oblates were provided with educational opportunities and the Church was provided with an efficient and low paid workforce to educate African American children—children who were kept segregated from the benefits provided by the Church to its White members.

The Oblates’ acts of engaging sexist and racist attitudes during antebellum America is valuable to this dissertation’s study because these acts reflect how a slow but steady developmental process within a safe space environment can result in women moving from passive roles of personal disengagement towards active positions that
challenge racist and gendered thinking. According to Bates-Morrow (2002), the Oblates’ challenging of the 1800s dominant cultural beliefs that defined African American women as ill-suited for the religious woman’s life later proved invaluable in laying the groundwork for future acts of social justice and engagement by African American women religious. During the 1960s American Civil Rights movement, African American women religious frequently marched alongside demonstrators and civil rights workers. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, African American women religious emerged from within the Catholic Church with voices and visions of justice in response to the rampant rage and dismay spreading throughout American communities.

A one-hour PBS documentary, “Sisters of Selma: Bearing Witness for Change” (Hart, 2007) describes the experiences of six women religious who arrived in Selma, Alabama to take part in the second of three historic civil rights marches that began in Selma on March 7, 1965 and concluded in Birmingham on March 23, 1965. The documentary details the influence that a half-day march on March 10, 1965 had on the lives of these women. It also describes the far-reaching influence on the psyche of the American public when seeing American women religious participating in the civil rights demonstrations. At a time when many American church leaders were reluctant to address the treatment of African Americans in the South, it was paradoxically women religious who took the first steps towards defying the authority of the Church and following the call of their own heart.

Of particular interest to this section of the dissertation are the experiences presented in Hart’s 2007 documentary about African American Sr. Antona Ebo (formerly known as Sister Mary Antona). In 1965, Sr. Ebo was a medical librarian at St. Mary’s
Infirmary in St. Louis during the time that the civil rights demonstrations were taking place in Selma. Sr. Ebo’s descriptions provide insight into the unfolding of critical consciousness that led her from being a medical librarian towards becoming a community activist in the African American Catholic community. The unfolding of critical consciousness began as Sr. Ebo reacted in horror to the news coverage of “Bloody Sunday,” March 7, 1965, when Alabama state troopers and local police brutally beat unarmed African American citizens. She recalls Martin Luther King, Jr.’s requests immediately following the events of Bloody Sunday that people from across the country join him in a second march on March 10, 1965. Sr. Ebo remembers thinking that if she weren’t a nun, she would be able to respond to this call for help. Troubled when she went to bed that evening, she was troubled in a very different way the next morning when she received a call from her Mother Superior requesting that Sr. Ebo accompany her to Selma to participate in the march.

Sr. Ebo describes her immediate reactions to this phone call to a cacophony of inner voices arguing and dissuading her from going to Selma while other voices told her to “put up or shut up” and to take action. Within a 48-hour period, Sr. Ebo boarded a chartered flight bound for Selma and began a critical chapter in her life. Invited to address the pre-march gathering in the early hours of March 10, 1965, Sr. Ebo found herself in an unfamiliar role as a spokesperson and a leader. In telling the marchers “I am here because I am a Negro, a nun, a Catholic, and because I want to bear witness” (Hart, 2007) to the unfolding of American history, Sr. Ebo crossed a critical line that moved her from a state of passive personal resistance to one of active community resistance in challenging racial and gender discrimination.
As the formal march began, Sr. Ebo and three other women religious found themselves at the front of the line, walking side by side with Martin Luther King, Jr., his advisors, and members of the Catholic clergy. They had not gotten further than a city block before they were met by helmeted policemen standing shoulder-to-shoulder, three deep, with billy clubs in hand. It was into Sr. Ebo’s hands that a microphone was thrust by a camera-person and she said, “I am here today because I have the right to vote in St. Louis” (Hart, 2007). These are powerful words coming from a woman of color who had experienced voter discrimination in America and the segregation of women of color in the Catholic Church.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s reflections on this experience are also telling: “As I stood with them and saw White and Negro, nuns and priests, ministers and rabbis . . . enjoying a rare comradeship, I knew I was seeing a microcosm of the mankind of the future in this moment” (King, 1967, p. 10). While history tells us of the critical role Martin Luther King, Jr. played in the success of the civil rights movement, it has failed to tell us of the countless numbers of women of color who also contributed to the movement’s success. In the patriarchal legacy, the historical contributions by men of color are acknowledged, while those of women of color are typically silenced or ignored.

Sr. Ebo’s experiences clarify the process of developing critical consciousness as one that begins with recognizing one’s personal suffering, moves to an awareness of the suffering of others, and is then followed by a crossing over into a stance of active resistance to ameliorate the suffering of others. Beginning with despairing thoughts of no possibility to participate because she was a nun, followed by an invitation from her superior to participate and go to Selma, Sr. Ebo found herself besieged by personal
resistance and terror when thinking of the real risks involved: ultimately being killed,
beaten, trampled, or separated from her White companions in a segregated jail. Despite
an initial response not to get involved because of the inherent dangers, she notes that she
was also aware of thoughts that not only encouraged but demanded that she take action.
Sr. Ebo was fortunate to have the encouragement and participation of her Mother
Superior, as well as the active support of the Archbishop of St. Louis. However, it is
important to recognize Sr. Ebo for the personal decision she made to step out of the
safety of the world she knew and to become actively involved in the American civil
rights movement.

If we were to imagine the antebellum environment in which the Oblates of
Providence established themselves during the mid-1800s, we can also begin to
understand how the engagement of patriarchal structures by women is a historical process
that has unfolded over time and links women through time. Because of the efforts of
those who came before her, today Sr. Ebo is a pastoral associate for a church in St. Louis
where, like most Catholic Churches, there is an image of Jesus at the altar. In this case, it
is a Black Jesus. Because of Sr. Ebo’s response to the 1965 invitation that encouraged her
to cross from a state of personal resistance to one of active resistance in the face of
oppressive structures, she later played a key leadership role in the founding of the
National Black Sisters Conference following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
in 1968.

Author and religious historian Cecilia Moore notes that the founding members of
the National Black Sisters Conference were inspired by a hope that “Catholicism could
make a positive difference in these circumstances” (2006, p. 166) by tending to the
educational and spiritual needs of the African American community. Conference members also focused their efforts on furthering the education of “White clerics and religious about the causes of racial problems in the United States” (p. 166) with a concentration on African American history and culture.

The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California

In the beginning of this chapter we were briefly introduced to the struggles experienced during the Vatican II renewal process by the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart (IHM) of California with the late Cardinal James McIntyre, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and members of the Vatican. As a result of the continuing interference of the male dominant authority structures of the Catholic Church to their Vatican II renewal efforts and the IHM’s resistance to that interference, the IHM Community was presented with an ultimatum by the Vatican. The ultimatum demanded that the IHMs stop their renewal process or they would be dispensed from their formal canonical status. Former IHM Mother General, Anita Caspary (2003) recalls:

It was not a single cardinal who forced us to abandon canonical status. [Instead] it was a vast ecclesiastical system that for centuries has used every ploy to keep women beholden to its curiously antiquated rules and regulations. Bishops, cardinals, [and] priests have inherited the legacy of domination over women, especially over women religious, who by built-in dependencies of their lifestyles were made subservient to male clerics. This is not to say that some priests and bishops are not fully appreciative of the inequality and, whenever possible, try to relieve the immediate pressures on women, especially religious women. But the system itself remains intact. (p. 220)

By 1970, approximately 350 of the 400 IHM Community members chose to receive dispensations from their canonical status and to relinquish their formal ties to the Catholic Church. In Caspary’s view, the move to noncanonical status was a decision that offered new life and freedom to IHM Community members who had learned the value of
democratic forms of self-communal determination.

A critical dimension to Caspary’s analysis of the IHM’s engagement of the hierarchy includes an informative biographical background on the personal, cultural, and socio-political dimensions of Cardinal McIntyre’s upbringing and education. By knowing and understanding what influences an oppressor’s behavior and belief systems, students of engagement may be better prepared to confront the complexity of perspectives that inform positions taken by individuals, family members, and groups in times of power struggles, confrontation, and negotiation. Born in New York City in 1886, James McIntyre came from a modest family. His parents were born in Ireland and had both died by the time he entered the seminary when he was 21. The seminary he attended, described as a “Catholic Annapolis,” placed considerable emphasis on militaristic virtues in their teaching of seminarians “heroism, patriotism, discipline, obedience and loyalty to the ‘corps’ ” (Caspary, 2003, pp. 55-56).

Cardinal McIntyre’s journey into the priesthood began in 1916 at a time when severe and rigorous attitudes about education and behavior had been in full force following a 1907 papal decree by Pope Pius X “whose purpose was to combat the perceived unorthodoxy of the modernist movement in Catholic intellectual circles” (Caspary, 2003, p. 56). The 1907 papal decree was far-reaching in its establishment of rules and structures. It influenced an approach to education that discouraged curiosity and pride within Catholic schools, seminaries, nunneries as well as Catholic homes. Long viewed as authoritarian and harsh in his dealings with subordinates, Caspary notes that McIntyre’s enemies were those he had been taught to see as “liberal—in the political, social, artistic, philosophical or theological sense” (p. 59). His allegiance and loyalty to
the hierarchy of the Church says something of his character, as well as of the far-reaching influence of an educational system that quelled intellectual curiosity and academic scholarship.

Sociologist and Catholic priest Andrew Greeley noted that throughout the 1960s Cardinal McIntyre resisted every step of progress in the Church. In a 1968 news commentary, Greeley shared his views about the struggles between Cardinal McIntyre and the IHMs:

The decision of the Congregation of the Religious to support the reactionary Los Angeles chancery office in its battle with the Immaculate Heart Sisters is one of the greatest tragedies in the history of American Catholicism. It will not destroy the Church in the United States if it is not revoked, but it could easily cripple it for the next century . . . the men who made [this decision] either do not know what is happening in the United States or do not care, or [they] wish to do possible harm to the Catholic Church. I can see no alternative explanation and I would not want to be in their place when they must stand before God to answer for this decision. (p. 10)

A long-time advocate for the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart, Greeley recalls Cardinal McIntyre as someone who “gave orders. That was his job as a Churchman, to give orders and to be obeyed” (Greeley, personal communication, February 22, 2008).

The Immaculate Heart Community was firmly established in the Los Angeles area by the time Cardinal McIntyre arrived to assume the reins of the Archdiocese in the 1940s. They were respected for their intellectual savvy as well as for being extraordinary educators in several Los Angeles grammar schools, the Immaculate Heart High School, and the Immaculate Heart College. The struggles between the IHMs and Cardinal McIntyre began during the 1950s, a full decade prior to the convening of Vatican II. The early struggles primarily reflected Cardinal McIntyre’s views that the IHM’s approach to education was too progressive. McIntyre was a product of an educational system that was
heavily informed by the theological teachings of Adolphe Tanquerey, who was considered an authority on spirituality in the Catholic Church during the 1800s. Tanquerey’s teachings remained at the core of Catholic religious training well into the first half of the 20th century.

Tanquerey defined obedience “as a supernatural, moral virtue which inclines us to submit our will to that of our lawful superiors, insofar as they are representatives of God” (as cited in Kugelmann, 2005, p. 358). This form of obedience requires both a submission of personal will and a deference of judgment to one’s superiors. A Catholic educator and psychologist, Robert Kugelmann speculates, “No doubt this is what the cardinal expected from the sisters, for their sakes as much as his” (p. 358). Obedience from the cardinal’s perspective in the aftermath of Vatican II was equated with the nuns who were teaching in his schools: (a) Continuing to wear traditional habits (despite Vatican II’s call for renewal in dress from medieval-styled habits), (b) maintaining a traditional schedule for daily prayers and Mass (despite Vatican II’s decrees to religious communities to redefine what constituted prayer life in modern times), and (c) obeying Cardinal McIntyre (which the IHMs believed they were doing in the spirit of the Vatican II decrees that requested modernizing all aspects of religious life—including defining terms such as obedience).

Looking at the IHM’s History from Multiple Views

Carey (1997) presents a different view of the IHM’s disputes with Cardinal McIntyre. She states that unreliable and untrue information was distributed by the press that portrayed the IHMs as victims who were “dutifully complying with the directives of Vatican II to renew their order” (p. 185). Carey argues that these problems “were hardly the fault of an intransigent hierarchy determined to preserve the pre-Vatican II model of
religious life” (p.185), but was more a case that the IHMs went beyond the guidelines established by Vatican II. Carey states that the IHMs “skillfully solicited support from sympathetic American Religious and laity . . . claiming that Cardinal McIntyre and Rome were trying to prevent them from following the Vatican II mandate to update” (p. 185).

Carey’s (1997) analysis includes descriptions of the adverse affect on religious communities by lay professionals (e.g., legal, psychological, and business expertise) who were hired as consultants to help in the task of rewriting charters and reformulating chapter decrees in response to Vatican II. In 1967 the IHMs agreed to participate and co-sponsor an organizational communication study proposed by humanistic psychologists Drs. Carl Rogers and William Coulson of the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute (Caspary, 2003). While Rogers and Coulson were not hired to help with the IHM’s renewal efforts, the project’s conception occurred at approximately the same time that the IHM Community was involved in their Vatican II renewal proceedings. Because of the synergistic relationship that developed during the 1950s between Carl Rogers’ concentration on the essential goodness of human nature and progressive Christian thinking that challenged the tenets of repressive moralism, Catholic philosophers and theologians had already begun to take an interest in Rogers’ work (Kugelmann, 2005). By the 1960s, Rogers’ humanistic orientation emphasizing the individual search for meaning reached a broadening base of Catholic philosophers and theologians and alliances were created with several Catholic institutions.

The influence of Rogers and Coulson’s organizational study on the events that transpired among the IHM Community, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and the Vatican is mired with differing points of view about the process and outcome of the research
(Carey, 1997; Caspary, 2003; Coulson, 1973, 1994; Kirschenbaum, 1991; Kugelmann, 2005; Rogers, 1974; Thorne, 2003). Under the guidance of Rogers and his project coordinator and associate, psychologist William Coulson, the project was designed to help “stimulate self-directed change in the educational system operated by the Immaculate Heart Community, in Los Angeles, and other towns” (Rogers, 1974, p. 172), with the ultimate goal of enhancing skills sets for change and communication.

Dr. Coulson originally concurred with Rogers that the changes made by the IHM Community and their subsequent departure from the Catholic Church was a positive step in personal development and growth for the IHM women: “They are experimenting with new forms of freedom and self-determination within institutional life” (Coulson, 1973, p. 75), whereas in later writings Coulson (1994) describes the events as damaging and destructive to the IHM Community: “We [i.e., he and Carl Rogers] thought we could make the IHMs better than they were: and we destroyed them” (p. 14). Although he did not reject the client-centered approach in psychotherapy, Coulson reached the conclusion that the IHM encounter groups promoted a distorted view of authority and that, because of the groups, the IHMs “did not want to be under anyone’s authority, except the authority of their imperial inner selves” (p. 13). Coulson further states that the encounter groups contributed to a sense of alienation from tradition which tempts individuals “into abandoning their responsibilities to one another” (p. 14). Dr. Coulson infers that but for his work with Rogers, the IHMs would not have stood up on their own to the oppressive attitude and behavior of Cardinal McIntyre, the L.A. Archdiocese, and the Vatican. Moreover, Coulson concludes that the encounter groups played a major role in the breakup of the order in 1970.
The 1960s encounter group approach proposed by Carl Rogers represented a new form of human interaction that straddled the fine line between education and therapy. According to existential psychiatrist and group psychotherapist, Irvin Yalom,

Carl Rogers understood that the intensive group experience contained enormous potential for change. He plunged into the encounter group movement and made significant contributions to the technology of group leadership. Taking a stand against coercive and manipulative leadership styles, he urged that the same person-oriented approach so essential to individual counseling was equally essential in the group experiences. (as cited in Rogers, 1980/1995, p. xii).

Yalom notes that group leaders were required to be both a participant and a leader because they could best influence a facilitating environment through their own example.

Yalom and Leszcz (2005) clarify that there were inherent risks for many individuals who participated in the early phases of the encounter groups, especially groups that did not provide a safe container for self disclosure and where excessive behavior was encouraged by the leader. While many groups were led by non-clinically trained individuals and often presented risks to psychologically fragile participants, Yalom emphasizes that the responses made during those years by traditionally-oriented mental health professionals that called for the termination of encounter groups were irrational and alarmist.

Anita Caspary (2003), who was Mother General of the IHM Community during this time period, worked closely with the project participants, as well as Drs. Rogers and Coulson. She offers her views on the effects of the client-centered approach and the encounter group project within the IHM Community:

Through the years many have speculated as to the direct influence of Rogers’ theory of change and communication, his staff, and the workshops had on our ultimate decision to change our status with the Catholic Church. If there was any influence, it was indirect. . . . [The decision to surrender canonical status] was rooted in a deep commitment to the gospel, the directives of the Second Vatican
Council, and the urgent need to educate the sisters in order to continue the IHM tradition of excellence in education at all levels. (p. 240)

Caspary further clarifies that statements made by Dr. Coulson “convey a boastful knowledge about the IHM Community that is false and inaccurate” (p. 241).

Rogers’ biographer, Howard Kirschenbaum (1991), challenges Coulson’s allegations that Rogers later had a change of heart about his client-centered approach and the work conducted with the IHMs. Robert Kugelmann (2005) also examines Coulson’s charges by situating the crisis the IHMs were confronting within a broader context of the changes occurring in religious life, society, and culture in the late 1960s. Moreover, he concludes that the departure of approximately 350 IHM Community members in 1970 was a result of the long-term conflicts between the IHMs and the male hierarchy of the L.A. Archdiocese and the Vatican—conflicts that preceded the encounter group experimentation by more than 10 years. Brian Thorne (2003) further explores Coulson’s claim that Rogers repudiated his client-centered approach. He suggests that Coulson’s fervor may in part be due to his own loyalty to the Roman Catholic religion and tradition. Thorne believes that this loyalty may have fueled Coulson’s fears that Rogers’ philosophy had become a “modern-day religious system” (p. 111).

Conflicting Views of History in the Constructing of Knowledge

We have four different versions of a particular time in history: One from a Catholic News Press journalist inferring that Cardinal McIntyre was mistreated in the press and that the IHMs elicited pity. Another from one of the psychologists on the project who initially championed their work with the IHMs and later recanted the positive influences while at the same time attempting to diminish the actual engagement taken on by the IHMs. We also have Carl Rogers’ writings about the experiences with the IHMs
which he describes as both positive and challenging. And, ultimately, we have from the former Mother General of the Order an analysis of how she saw reality from within the eye of the storm which includes a powerful description of how moments of resistance to oppression can be robbed of their authority and power in the process of post-analysis.

Through this analysis, we can witness the construction of knowledge from varying perspectives and the power of knowledge to sort or distort history: where what was seen as creative is viewed as destructive, where power from within is seen as power from above, where what has a long history of struggle and insight is reduced to the effects of an external cause—in the case of the IHMs, the encounter group experiences. The history of the struggles between Cardinal McIntyre and the IHM Community holds a great deal of emotion, pain, and valuable learning about resistance to oppression, the engagement of patriarchy, and the paradoxical processes that lead towards resolution of struggle. Caspary (2003) states: “Change holds both pain and possibility, fear and freedom . . . we chose possibility and freedom. Today we exist and celebrate our future which is the present. Our freedom gifts us with laughter at the hurts of the past” (p. 220).

The history of the IHM’s struggle with hierarchical oppression provides insight into the potential value of returning to history when the oppressors claim others’ work as their own or deny that the oppression ever took place. Cardinal McIntyre never acknowledged the role he played in the IHM’s ultimate decision to receive dispensations from their canonical status. However, in 2000, the current Archbishop of Los Angeles, Cardinal Roger Mahony, offered the semblance of an olive branch to the IHM Community. During a Lenten homily, he offered a public apology to those “who felt hurt and rejection by the church during those years” (Caspary, 2003, p. 220). Caspary states
that Cardinal Mahony’s apology does not adequately compensate for the years of oppression that the IHM Community endured with Cardinal McIntyre and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. However, she believes Cardinal Mahony’s apology 30 years after the historic events occurred is a recognition of the powerful stand taken by the women of the Immaculate Heart Community.

Summary

Gerda Lerner (1986, 1993) notes that the historical emergence and rise of patriarchal domination and authority has enabled and empowered men to control positions of power within society. However, she points out that the rise of patriarchal domination and authority cannot render women completely powerless nor deprive them of their rights, resources, and ability to influence their lives. Caspary (2003) substantiates Lerner’s claim:

What is worth noting in the IHM history is the bonding of male power figures so that once the patriarchal system is in operation, every activated link cooperates with every other . . . [and yet] out of this experience of disempowerment was to come empowerment. Out of a predicted demise there was to come unexpected life and growth. Out of an unjust condemnation of our renewal was to come a renewed commitment to the works of justice. (p. 221)

Caspary’s insights indicate that when women engage and resist oppressive hierarchical systems they must expect and prepare for a domino effect of reactions to emerge. These reactions will produce myriad of sudden, forceful, and often unimaginable degrees of backlash and punishment.

A critical analysis of the past with an eye on the future has been at the heart of my interest in the history of Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California. Similar to a relay race where the baton gets passed between runners, we need to imagine the engagement and healing of patriarchy as a movement that has spanned—and will continue to span—
multiple generations. It is in fact a race that is dependent on those running in the present to receive, hold, and pass forward the baton of change and possibility from yesterday through to today and on to tomorrow. The cases presented in this chapter illustrate the varied ways that lay and religious women have effectively challenged, engaged, and transformed hierarchical systems.

In chapter 2, I will present the organization of the study, the methodology, and the research procedures that were used to gather and analyze the data with the study’s 8 participants. I will also present a summary of the study’s ethical procedures, limits, and concerns.
CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGY

We face the future fortified with the lessons we have learned from the past. It is today that we must create the world of the future . . . we ourselves can make experience valuable when, by imagination and reason, we turn it into foresight. (Roosevelt, 1963, p. xv)

The Research Questions

The purpose of this research project was to explore how the experiences of 8 former Catholic nuns’ engagement of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church during the 1960s can affect contemporary and future engagement and transformation of patriarchal structures. This study first explored the personal experiences of 8 women when they took a stand both individually and collectively to denounce injustice and patriarchal oppression within the Catholic Church. Second, using Oliver’s (2004) premise to rethink and reinterpret historical moments of resistance to oppression, the study also explored the relevance of actions taken 40 years ago on contemporary women’s continuing engagement of patriarchal systems.

The two questions I explored in the study asked what were the former nuns’ experiences of engaging the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and what might these experiences teach us about how women can continue to engage patriarchy and resist oppression.

An Overview of the Study

The study included 8 individual interviews and a larger group interview with the participants and 7 individuals chosen by the participants to bear witness to their history and experiences. The first phase of the study was devoted to conducting individual interviews with the 8 participants to gather their individual oral histories from within the
larger context of the history of the IHM Community. The second phase of the study included aspects of a modified critical hermeneutic participatory group process where the participants came together in a dialogical format to discuss their experiences of engaging the hierarchy of the Catholic Church from the perspective of 40 years later. A more thorough discussion of the two phases of the study is provided later in this chapter.

Before arriving at that discussion, however, we need to spend time identifying the building blocks that went into structuring the framework of the study. Those building blocks are: (a) The framework of depth-liberation psychology, (b) the choice of a qualitative research methodology, (c) the role of feminist research methodologies and feminist scholarship, and (d) the alignment of philosophical traditions with feminist-oriented research.

Depth-Liberation Psychology Framework

This study took advantage of the traditions and methodologies provided within the evolving frameworks of depth and liberation psychology, including a feminist orientation towards research. The richness of the depth psychological context enabled the study participants to describe their experiences in terms of their intrapsychic life and personal memories. The liberatory framework allowed the participants’ collective experiences to come forward by sharing their interpersonal dynamics and experiences of resisting oppression, leaving the formal structure of religious life within the Roman Catholic Church, and in turn creating an ecumenical lay community. A feminist approach to research is committed to establishing collaborative and nonexploitative relationships between the researcher and participants (Creswell, 1998). This approach facilitated a participatory element to the overall design of this study and also grounded it within
research perspectives that neither perpetuate stereotypes about women nor objectify the participants.

The pioneering efforts of Freud and Jung at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century were essential in the construction of theoretical frameworks that have influenced depth psychology’s methodologies and approaches towards intrapsychic well-being. From Freud’s work with free association and dream analysis to Jung’s work with active imagination and dream interpretation, the field of depth psychology is rich with applications to access the individual unconscious. As discussed in chapter 1, many contemporary depth psychologists including Samuels (1993), Cushman (1995), and Alschuler (2006) have stressed the criticality of depth psychology seeing itself as an evolving tradition. Rather than a legacy that stays loyal to outdated historical understandings and uncritically examined assumptions about human behavior, depth psychology needs to work in tandem with the continual diversification and needs of subjects-in-process.

Watkins (2000) notes that while the strengths afforded through depth psychological approaches may contribute to the well being of an individual’s inner life, she also argues that depth psychology has not placed sufficient attention on “the total context that is needed for human liberation” (p. 218). With an over-emphasis on tending to the suffering of the individual psyche, Lorenz and Watkins (2001) describe the paralyzing disconnect that has developed in North America’s highly individualistic cultures. As a result of this disconnect, many privileged individuals are unaware of many communities’ suffering. One of the results of this disconnect has been the creation of mental health systems that fail to sufficiently clarify the connection between social and
economic conditions and psychological distress.

The developing of critical awareness and the design of social applications that will lead to the healing of community suffering is at the heart of linking depth psychological theories with those of liberation psychology. Ultimately, the desire of this collaboration is to identify, understand, and give voice to what has been historically silenced as well as to what has not yet developed within the intrapsychic life of the individual and the interpsychic spaces we inhabit. To conduct research in a 21st-century depth-liberation psychological context reflects an expansion in understanding of psychological healing and addresses the larger context of the socio-political and psychosocial traumas that haunt individuals and communities. Watkins and Shulman (2008) explain that the individualistic and interpretative lenses of depth psychology can be enhanced and critiqued by liberation psychologies emerging from Latin America, Africa, and Asia, as well as parts of Europe and America. These psychologies of liberation “teach that environments of injustice, violence, and repression have powerful psychological effects on everyone” (p. 53).

Justification for Using a Qualitative Research Approach

Researchers typically choose approaches and methods based on what they hope to uncover during the study and the kinds of experiences they want to create with the participants throughout the study. They also choose approaches that will provide the best format for presenting the study’s results and conclusions. They enter the research study with a particular framework of ideas, beliefs, and interpretations of the external world. Quantitative research studies are traditionally designed to test hypotheses and to make predictions based on statistical analyses. These types of research studies tend to place the
researcher in a detached relationship from the participants. Qualitative studies, on the other hand, are influenced by a basic set of philosophical guidelines that question the nature of reality. These philosophical guidelines define the relationship of the researcher to what is being researched and the chosen research approach. They also clarify the role of values and biases and the choice of language to frame the research process (Creswell, 1998). Because both qualitative and quantitative research approaches have been influenced by the dominating views of patriarchal constructs and tradition, for this study I chose a qualitative approach framed within a feminist perspective. A significant objective of the feminist perspective in research is directed at ending all forms of oppression against women. The feminist perspective provided this study with a nontraditional yet viable framework to discover how women describe their experiences of living within patriarchal cultures.

The ongoing debates in the social sciences about qualitative versus quantitative research (QQD) have been critical to reformulating conceptual models that describe individual and social behavior (Rabinowitz & Weseen, 1997). Because the quantitative approach is privileged by history and tradition, the QQD debates have been essential in clarifying the ways that quantitative research models have dominated psychological studies of women and gender. In addition, the QQD debates have helped to elucidate the ways that traditional models of knowledge have adversely influenced women’s psychological lives.

A key benefit of a qualitative study is the importance placed on the act of listening throughout the research process by both the researcher and the participants. The researcher is required to pay attention to what is said and not said, to notice and interpret
silences, and to listen for pauses in narratives. Furthermore, the researcher is also required to notice when there is a lack of language to describe particular aspects of a lived experience (Marecek, Fine, & Kidder, 1997). As the role of researcher moves towards one of bearing witness to an unfolding of history rather than one of a detached observer, participants are liberated from the role of a passive observer providing details about events that no longer have bearing on the larger historical context. Instead, participants begin to have an experience of being heard as active players in the making of history. The origins of the word *witness* are rooted in the word *knowledge*; thus, to listen and bear witness to another’s history is an act of gathering and giving expression to people’s knowledge and experiences.

Throughout the individual and group interview processes I was deeply attuned to my dual role as researcher and witness. Creating collaborative relationships with the 8 participants took time as they developed confidence in my ability to organize the study, learned to trust that I was respectful of the IHM history, and recognized that I was indeed flexible in my role as researcher. As a witness to their stories, I learned to listen from a very sacred and respectful place to the unfolding of their personal histories and to bear witness to the relationship of that history on who they are today.

Qualitative research that is inspired by the bridging of depth and liberation psychology requires particular rigor and diligence on the part of researchers. Watkins and Shulman (2008) state that researchers must be clear about the critical differences between planning studies inspired by themes of liberation and those that are more traditional in focus and approach. The journey away from the confines of historical definitions that frame the role of researcher as one of a detached authority figure and towards definitions
that describe the role as one of a collaborator with co-researchers generates a particular set of demands. These demands can be particularly challenging for those of us who have been raised and educated in traditional systems of the West where the tendency to remain independent and detached from the participants is continually challenged. “We are asked to sort through as consciously as possible, with input from an interpretative community, what values we represent and what ethical responsibility we bear in each research setting” (p. 310).

As the design of this study unfolded, I was mindful of the role that social action was going to play throughout the various phases of the study. From conceptualizing the study through conducting the study and creating the final three chapters of the dissertation, I maintained focus on which directions this study could head in terms of helping to improve the quality of women’s lives. This type of interdisciplinary research model looks for meaningful applications of the knowledge constructed from the study to meet the needs of community. More than a dissertation that will sit on the shelves of an academic library or a publication written by the researcher, the outcome of the study is geared towards ameliorating social injustice at the level of the individual, the community, and the world. We will discuss the ideas for the future direction of this research study more fully in chapter 5.

Feminist Methodologies in Social Science Research

The evolution of the feminist perspective in social science research developed in direct response to the continuing discrimination of women politically, economically, ethically, and socially. Criticism of the domination of the White male perspective in the social sciences, as well as in quantitative research methods, can be directly linked to the
advent of the first and second waves of the women’s movement. The feminist response has provided valuable direction in the social sciences towards understanding the relationship between the personal and political, and the role of history in linking the past and the present (Parker & Hook, 2008). Feminist methodologies have helped to identify that theories of psychological, moral, and epistemological development are not hypothetical concepts. They are in fact the building blocks that construct the knowledge base for determining how women are raised, educated, and regarded throughout their lives.

Feminist research is not merely about women’s experiences, but is intended to serve as a catalyst towards the transformation of conditions that oppress women living in a sexist society (Cooke & Fonow, 1986). Moreover, the refusal to acknowledge women’s experiences, a reflection of androcentrism in its purest form, is at the very heart of what inspires feminist-oriented research (Code, 2000; Klein, 1983). As a result of androcentric assumptions in the design and application of research projects, as well as the over-generalization of research findings based on male-only samples, feminist research practices were designed based on the recognition that women’s experiences, ideas, and needs are valuable and valid in understanding human behavior. The feminist perspective in research is grounded in a critique of the traditional theories and methods of empiricism, objectivity, and rationalism. This alternate perspective ultimately provides researchers with sound arguments to withstand the marginalization of Other that has been perpetuated by the androcentric point of view.

Although there is no one kind of feminist research or method, in general, feminist approaches to research are influenced by a desire to establish collaborative and
nonexploitative relationships between the researcher and participants, to avoid objectification, and to conduct transformational research (Creswell, 1998). Feminist approaches have also contributed to the design of relational modes of research that value the kinds of knowledge that come forward through relationship (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997; Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Jordan et al., 1991). To create changes within sexist societies, feminist-oriented research strives to understand and challenge the socio-political conditions that frame women’s lives.

Philosophical Foundations of the Study

Because this study is nestled within the interdisciplinary perspectives of depth-liberation psychology and feminist theory, it was important at the outset of its design to understand the philosophical assumptions that have driven the development of mainstream psycho-social theories about the nature of personhood, language, and knowledge. Overall, empiricism and rationalism have long dominated the West’s philosophical and intellectual cultures, and their influence has long been accepted as truth and largely left unquestioned (Packer & Addison, 1989). As noted in the works of Gilligan, 1982, Miller, 1991, and Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997, the long-term effects of blindly accepting theories of human development based on male only studies has adversely influenced theoretical models pertaining to women.

When examining the origins of empiricism and rationalism, Packer and Addison (1989) note that their lineage can be traced back to the writings of Aristotle and Plato. The authors further clarify the influence that writings by philosophers from the 17th- and 18th-century (e.g., Hegel, Kant, and Locke) had on the development of male-dominated 19th- and 20th-century psychological theories (e.g., Freud, Jung, Kohlberg, and Piaget).
Fidelity to this narrow focus has resulted in the de-legitimization of diversity and difference among and between people, with “Woman” being constructed as the “Other” in a long line of male-authored “phallologocentric” works. “Phallogocentrism refers to the way in which, in patriarchal societies, discourse is organized in reference to the idea of maleness or masculinity which tacitly functions as the normative gender” (Code, 2000, pp. 283-284).

The philosophical study of knowledge, epistemology, is of fundamental importance to women’s position in the world. Because Western culture has associated rationality with masculinity and emotionality with femininity, traditionally oriented epistemologies have concluded that women are less human than men (Audi, 1995). Feminist philosophers, skeptical about “mainstream” knowledge, which they interpret as being “malestream” knowledge (Tanesini, 1999), argue that reason and emotion are both viable sources of knowledge. Distinguishing between malestream and feminist epistemology, feminist philosopher and educator Alessandra Tanesini clarifies that gender plays a key role in the construction of knowledge and has far-reaching influences on the social and political factors that inform women’s lives. Feminist epistemology is an outgrowth of both feminist theorizing about gender and traditional epistemological concerns. Feminist theory challenges Western philosophy’s empirical/rational worldview which links the acquisition of knowledge with the senses and experience, and posits that reason has precedence over the attainment of knowledge.

The meeting of feminism, philosophy, and history includes the efforts of interrelated projects aimed at correcting the multiple limitations of Western philosophy. This meeting reflects the far-reaching influence of topics such as the representation and
status of women within the traditions of philosophy and history and the continued underrepresentation of women in both fields. Moreover, the correcting of Western philosophical traditions is geared at eliminating sexist descriptions of women and the “feminine” in the Western philosophical tradition. These efforts have resulted in the birth of a branch of feminist philosophy that critically challenges and questions the Western philosophical tradition (Code, 2000).

Because feminism is also rooted in a historical context that is associated with the White women’s democratic revolutions in the West, its future is dependent on a critique process that shifts back and forth between the diverse needs of contemporary women and the historical context within which the feminist perspective is embedded. Feminist scholar and philosopher Drucilla Cornell likens the critique process to an “unleashing of the feminine imaginary—an imaginary made possible, paradoxically, by the lack of grounding of the feminine in any of the identifications we know and imagine as Woman” (1995, p. 147). Noting French psychoanalyst/psychiatrist Jacques Lacan’s influence on her notion of a recollective imagination where what is remembered is envisioned differently when recollected in the reading of history, Cornell suggests that feminism continue to reinvent itself and to imagine possibilities of the future beyond simply an accommodation of past understandings of difference. In Cornell’s analysis, there is an ongoing interdependency between the historical past, the present making of history in process, and an imagined future time where the social category of Woman continues to reflect action towards emancipation.

The context of the times in which one lives predisposes an individual to perceive the world around her from particular vantage points. It is the confrontation of outdated
limitations and vantage points throughout time that is most critical for creating social change and transformation. I learned during the study that the historical efforts of the IHMs were inspired and influenced by the widespread confrontation and deconstruction of traditional values and beliefs that were hallmarks of the social change movements during the 1960s.

Design of the Study

*Phase 1: The Individual Interviews*

*Oral History Methodology*

The method that was most appropriate for the individual interviews was the feminist practice of oral histories framed as heuristic portraits. Oral history is a critical research method for feminist scholarship and one that has fostered interdisciplinary dialogue as well as substantial discussion about feminist epistemology, that is “whose knowledge are we talking about?” (Code, 2000, p. 170). The individual interviews were designed as an opportunity for the 8 participants to express, explore, and dialogue about their histories, experiences, and memories. Because the history of women has been denied a voice in the recording of written history, the oral history method also provided the participants with an opportunity to have their words recorded, archived, and given a place in the process of history.

A fundamental strength of the oral history method comes in its loyalty and fidelity to the experiences of the participants. The interviews for this study were grounded in memory, with memory serving as a critical tool for recording reflections of the past that are shaped both by the present moment and individual experience. The oral history methodology has played a critical role in the women’s movement because of its ability to
delve deeply into topics that have psychological and historical relevance for women as well as to produce findings in ways that are meaningful to women. In many ways, oral history and feminist consciousness have evolved alongside one another with a shared objective of strengthening how women learn and know about themselves inside a gendered patriarchal world view. Sociologist Shulamit Reinharz (1992) notes that oral history, unlike written history, is often helpful in acquiring information about people who may be less likely to engage in creating written records. Because of its ability to repair historical records about women’s experiences, oral history research as a feminist practice provided a valuable format to conduct this study.

Gluck and Patai (1991) address the over-simplified assumptions that initially inspired feminist research during the early 1970s when the pervasive thinking was that “gender united women more powerfully than race and class divided them” (p. 2). Just as the diversity of women’s experiences has begun to be given space inside the framework of feminism, so has oral history as a methodology begun to take into account how diversity influences the ways women experience their lives within patriarchal cultures, societies, and histories. The oral history process is concerned with capturing the unique experiences of the participants and is dependent upon the researcher being prepared to do the following: (a) Determine whose story the interview is asked to tell, who interprets the story, and the theoretical framework to be used during the study. (b) Probe deeply by listening to the various levels from which the participants respond during the interview. (c) Listen for what is said and not said during the interview by watching facial expressions, hearing intonation in voice, and noticing long moments of silent reflection. (d) Provide a forum for the participants to discuss their lives in the context of telling the
story about who they are, in their own words, without an enforced agenda on the part of the researcher.

In their description of how “listening for meaning” influences their work with women in oral interviews, Anderson and Jack (1991) examine three modes of listening that were essential during this study’s individual interviews and group process. The authors state that the ways researchers listen is critical towards creating studies that have meaning, influence, and relevance. Listening to the participant’s story from her vantage point required that I, in the role of researcher/witness, do these things: (a) Pay attention to each participant’s moral self-evaluative statements in an effort to examine the relationship between self-concept and cultural norms. (b) Notice the moments when the participant suddenly stopped speaking to go back to something that she said earlier. These refining “meta-statements” often alerted me to a possible discrepancy between what was she was saying versus what the participant believed was being expected of her. (c) Tend to both the consistencies and contradictions in the participant’s narrative vis-à-vis dichotomous thinking about experiences and assumptions about those experiences.

**Heuristic Research Methodology**

The term heuristic originates from the Greek word heuriskein which means to discover or to find. Heuristic research as a methodology in service to the discovery and re-discovery of human experiences allows for the creative exploration of “new images and meanings regarding human phenomena” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9) through a process of internal reflection and dialogue between researcher and participant. Heuristic research is traditionally autobiographical with virtually every question having relevance on a personal level to the researcher. However, the influence of the feminist perspective in the
design of this study required a shift from a mere interest in the ways that my self-understanding as researcher was affected to focus being placed on delineating the meanings of the participants’ experiences and presenting their histories.

A primary objective of heuristic research is to continuously delve into the heart of human experience and to create studies of human meaning. Because this study was interested in discovering the history of the former IHM’s experiences within the Catholic Church, the etymology of heuristic supported this endeavor. Framing the oral histories as heuristic portraits provided a viable approach to this study because of its ability to synthesize the lengthy narrative of an oral history into a condensed format for both the reader’s ease and for purposes of the final version of the dissertation. However, to remain loyal to the participants’ oral histories, the heuristic portraits include ample quotations from the oral history text.

Questions for Individual Interviews

The following questions were designed to identify the ways that the participants understood their lives as religious women within the larger context of culture, society, and history. It is important to note that the questions for the individual interviews were not designed in a participatory manner. The meanings that are important to me as the researcher about the engagement of patriarchal and hierarchical structures are implicit in their design. More detailed information about the interview questions is provided in chapter 3.

1. How would you describe your calling to be a Sister of the Immaculate Heart?
2. How would you describe your experience of “taking vows”?
3. How would you define patriarchy?
4. How would you describe the influence of patriarchal thinking in the design of vows for women religious communities?

5. What would you say are other areas of religious life that were affected by patriarchy? Can you give examples that illustrate these experiences?

6. Prior to the decrees of Vatican II for renewal, were there internal movements being experienced within the IHM Community regarding the need for modernization and change? How would you describe your understanding of these movements?

7. Prior to the decrees of Vatican II, how did you experience the power structure within the IHM Community?

8. How would you describe the path that led you away from the community religious life towards the construction of a new sense of self in a lay community?

9. How would you describe the experience of surrendering your vows?

10. What were the most critical parts of the journey towards the decision to surrender your vows?

11. How was your prayer life affected during this period? Can you share examples of shifts that occurred in your prayer life?

12. What psychological and spiritual challenges did you face in building the lay ecumenical community following the departure from the formal structure of the Catholic Church? Can you share stories that illustrate these challenges?

13. How would you describe the impact of the collective actions taken by the IHM Community on the Catholic Church?

14. Who were your champions at the time the IHM Community was engaging with the patriarchal/hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church—who inspired you to
keep going?

15. In what ways do you believe your personal, as well as the collective experience of the IHM Community, could inspire and guide contemporary and future women to engage patriarchal thinking, structures, and to take a stand against oppression and domination of women?

16. Please share any additional comments or reflections you believe are needed at this time.

The 8 portraits presented in chapter 3 reflect the participants’ self-understanding of the personal, cultural, political, and social factors that influenced their decision to engage the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Because the design of this study was committed to a spirit of collaboration and participation, the participants were free to edit, change, and eliminate any material from their oral history transcripts that they did not want included in the creation of their portraits. The participants also reviewed, edited, and modified the final version of their portraits.

*Data Collection for Individual Interviews*

The data collection process for the individual interviews process included the following steps:

1. Choosing participants for the study. The criteria for participation in the study required that the individual had been a member of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California, that she chose to be dispensed from canonical status, and that she became a member of the lay Immaculate Heart Community. Because I have been engaged in a variety of volunteer opportunities with the Immaculate Heart Community during the past 4 years, a strong and trusting foundation had already been established with most of the
participants prior to commencing the study.

2. Once the study was approved, I contacted each of the participants and invited her to my home for a 2-hour kick-off meeting. Prior to the meeting, I mailed each of them a Letter of Introduction to the Study (see Appendix A), which outlined the two phases of the interview process. I also mailed each of them a summary of the oral history and heuristic portrait process (see Appendix B). Sharing coffee and bagels on a cool morning in mid-June 2009, we discussed the design of the study and the time commitment that would be required of each of them. During the meeting I explained my personal relationship to patriarchal oppression and how that history inspired this study. The participants discussed some of their memories about their experiences with the hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church and were free to ask questions they had about the project.

3. I then scheduled the 8 individual interviews and budgeted 90 to 120 minutes for each interview. In advance, I mailed each of the participants a set of the interview questions to help them prepare. All but one of the interviews were held in my private office in Montecito, California, and the other was held at the participant’s home. Each interview was audiotaped and videotaped. On the day of the individual interview, each participant received and signed an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C) that outlined the nature and purpose of the study and gave permission to audio- and videotape the interview.

4. During the interview, I primarily listened to each participant and made notes when necessary. Because the interviews were videotaped, I was able to go back through the recordings to watch for facial expressions and hand gestures when needed.
5. Each interview was transcribed by a professional transcriber. I sent a copy of the interview transcript to each participant to review, edit, and delete any material that she did not want used in creating her personal portrait.

6. I created the portraits by first analyzing the data from the oral history transcript. I followed the methodology described in the first two steps of the “Listener’s Guide” presented in Lyn M. Brown and Carol Gilligan’s *Meeting At the Crossroads* (1992, pp. 25-39). More detail about the “Listener’s Guide” is described in the following section on data analysis.

7. I forwarded each participant the first draft of her personal portrait. She was able to edit, make changes, and delete material that she did not want included. Those changes were returned to me and a final portrait was created. The final versions of the 8 portraits are presented in chapter 3.

8. In order for my readers to see how one goes from an oral history transcript to a heuristic portrait format, one oral history transcript in its entirety is provided in Appendix H.

*Data Analysis for Individual Interviews*

I chose the methodology presented by Brown and Gilligan (1992) to analyze the data from the individual interviews because of its focus on listening and hearing the voices of women describe their life experiences of living in a predominantly male-voiced culture. This approach calls for a minimum of four listenings/readings of the material contained in each interview. Evolving from Gilligan’s earlier work (1982) on the ways women speak in a different voice than men, Brown and Gilligan’s use of the word *voice* is not simply referring to the sound that emanates as a woman speaks. More so, the
authors suggest that *voice* reflects the multidimensional ways that one can speak about human experience “in a manner that re-sounds its relational nature . . . and the ever-changing . . . quality of the sense of self” (p. 21).

The approach offered by Brown and Gilligan (1992) worked effectively in capturing information from the participants’ oral histories in order to create the individual heuristic portraits. For the purpose of constructing the portraits, I followed the guidelines offered in the first two steps of the Listener’s Guide. The first time through the oral history transcript, I listened for the *voice* of the participant’s story and identified the plot of the story. The goal of this listening is designed “to get a sense of what is happening, to follow the unfolding of events, to listen to the drama: the who, what, when, where, and why of the narrative” (p. 27). The second time through the oral history transcripts, I listened for each woman’s voice of self, the “I” in her narrative, in order to learn how she spoke about herself. The authors note that the second listening “allows us into relationship with that person, in part by ensuring that the sound of her voice enters our psyche and in part by discovering how she speaks of herself before we speak of her” (pp. 27-28). A more detailed description of how the listening process unfolded is provided in chapter 3.

The last two listenings were used for the thematic analysis of both the individual and group interviews that is presented more fully in chapter 4. Because this study is interested in the participants’ experiences of engaging/resisting the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, in the third listening I paid particular attention to the ways in which the participants described and discussed how they resisted/engaged authority structures in their individual interviews as well as in their personal reflections shared during the group
interview. I listened for what was resisted, why it was resisted, how it was resisted, and the implications of the resistance. To discover how the participants’ experiences of engagement and resistance have helped and continue to help women to challenge oppression, in the fourth listening I focused on how the participants described the creation of a new sense of personal and communal identity after choosing to receive dispensations from their canonical status. I then concentrated on dialogue that described women’s reactions to the IHM’s actions during the 1960s and 1970s as well as dialogue that reflects how the IHM’s actions continue to bear fruit in contemporary times. In the fourth listening, I was also interested in dialogue that described shifts in the participants’ personal and collective views as women religious during the 1960s.

During each of the four listenings of the individual and group interviews I used a different colored pencil to trace the participants’ voices from the typed transcriptions that were derived from the video recordings. This approach allowed me to follow the movement of each participant’s dialogue in response to the questions and to hear/listen to each of their individual voices. Through the various colored tracings of voices on the transcripts, I was also provided with a strong visual of the overall flow of the oral histories’ polyvocality. I then documented each listening onto worksheets that I created for each participant by recording in one column the participant’s voices (dialogue) and in the other column my interpretation of their words. From these worksheets I created the heuristic portraits presented in chapter 3 and the thematic analyses presented in chapter 4.

**Phase 2: The Group Interview Process**

**Introduction**

The group phase of the study was particularly inspired by Maria Mies’s (1983)
feminist critical inquiry, Paulo Freire’s (1970) work on the dialogical tenets of collaborative inquiry, and a modified version of Ellen Herda’s (1999) Critical Hermeneutic Participatory Research method. By interweaving critical pieces of these methodologies into a participatory and dialogical group process, aspects of the participants’ experiences were able to be brought forward in ways that were not achieved through merely taking their individual oral histories. Because dialogical exchanges cannot happen in individual interviews, the group format of this study was designed to contribute to the conscientization of women (Mies, 1983).

Influence of Feminist Critical Inquiry

Of particular interest to this study on women’s engagement of patriarchal structures is the work of German sociologist and feminist researcher Maria Mies (1983). Mies’s efforts represent a leap of imagination as described by Professor of Women Studies Renate Klein (1983) and provide a viable link between social change and feminist research. Over a quarter century ago Mies identified the need for a theoretical orientation of “feminist critical inquiry” as one that would enhance the ways that feminist research is conceptualized and conducted. Noting the limitations of positivist-quantitative methodologies to the study of women’s issues, Mies addressed the need for methodological guidelines and approaches that are congruent with the socio-political needs of women’s issues. Mies’s work was influenced by the efforts of social theorists at the Frankfurt School in their development of a critical theory of society which argued that social phenomenon could not be understood solely through the use of scientific methods. The school’s interdisciplinary research efforts employed action-oriented approaches to social analysis and delineated the ways that knowledge is the product of socially—and
historically—located subjects.

Using a Freirian framework in developing the objectives of a feminist critical inquiry orientation, in particular Freire’s (1970) notion of critical consciousness, Mies (1983) was interested in exploring the uniqueness of women’s experiences in perceiving and exposing the oppressive socio-political circumstances in which they live. Mies and her research associates learned through an action research project with women who were subjected to domestic violence that the women’s sense of self was influenced by the group process, discussions, role playing, and interviews. Through dialogical acts of sharing their experiences with one another, the women recognized that their personal experiences of domestic violence were not due to individual failures and limitations. Instead, the women discovered that domestic violence was influenced by myriad of societal and cultural factors that failed to protect women’s rights. By sharing their stories with one another, as well as making them public, the participants took action together and opened a safe shelter for women in their community.

Mies’s (1983) research found that dialoguing with other women who share similar experiences plays a fundamental role towards empowering women to depersonalize their experience(s) of oppression. Communal dialogue also enables women to take steps towards social action to help other women who are oppressed. The women in her study entered as battered women in need of inspirational feminist guidance and leadership. They ultimately learned how an awareness of social action and the development of leadership skills result through dialogue and collaboration with other women. The participants of my study, feminist leaders in their own right, are very different from the participants who entered the domestic violence groups. However, Mies’s communal
dialogue design was instrumental in constructing the group process for my study. More details about my study’s group process are presented in chapter 4.

Influence of Dialogical/Collaborative Inquiry

Participatory research was strongly influenced by the educational methodologies developed by Paulo Freire (1970) that encourage learners to engage in a dialectical relationship with knowledge and society, as well as in dialogical process with one another (Herda, 1999; Klein, 1983; Mayo, 2004). As discussed in chapter 1, Freire argued that because many learners are traditionally denied access to dialogue, discussion, and debate with educators, they are indoctrinated from an early age to adapt to a world of unquestioned oppression. Additionally, Freire examined the ways that traditional educational models dominate the thinking of learners through a one-way distribution of facts and knowledge. As a result of his examination, Freire advocated for a dialogical approach to knowledge where teacher and student learn from each other through a co-investigative process.

Freire’s approach to social transformation through liberating education has provided valuable direction to dialogical and collaborative inquiry in social science research (Herda, 1999). His dialogical and collaborative model of education (Freire, 1970, 1974) is steeped in a process of critical thinking (praxis) where learners are taught how to develop an awareness of the ways personal suffering is influenced by societal, historical, and cultural factors. Moreover, research projects that are structured according to dialogical and collaborative models are designed to lead towards the liberation of the participants, as well as the implementation of social action projects.
Influence of Critical Hermeneutic Participatory Research

Studies designed from a critical participatory foundation share in the Freirian philosophy that social change is more than a personal process of intellectual pursuit or insight. Beyond action, social change requires deep and meaningful reflection created through critical and liberating dialogue with others. When researcher and participants co-create an environment where a critical distance from the world’s oppressions is achieved, there is potential to work together in a spirit of critique/critical thinking. From a position of critical distance and through communal dialogue, learners can collectively reveal societal contradictions and find openings for social action.

Professor of Education and Research Ellen Herda (1999) explains that an essential characteristic of critical participatory research is its ability to serve as a process for critiquing existing social realities and helping to create new realities through language, understanding, and action. I chose Herda’s approach because of its interest in recovering meaning from historical experiences and to engage history in an interpretative analysis with an eye on aiding the future social well-being for women. This approach also allowed for an active relationship between the participants and me throughout the study. In its efforts to move away from observation, interviews, and categorization of data, Herda’s approach to research is geared towards participatory experiences. As a result, the researcher and participants are enabled to move toward “living in relationship . . . in an attempt to hear each other and to work out new contexts in which to live” (1999, p. 53).

With an interest in creating a potential to bring forward new relationships and understandings, Herda’s (1999) research design provided this study’s participants with an opportunity to delve more deeply into their collective history. There are four primary
dimensions to Herda’s methodology:

1. Critical dimension: It is critical to know that we live in a political, social, and cultural context and are always in a historical process. Knowing how these dimensions influence our personal and cultural perspectives is critical for living meaningful lives dedicated to social change. In Herda’s estimation, it is vital that the group process allow for an “emergence of critique, reinterpretation, and creation of new meanings that can inform current activities and future possibilities” (1999, p. 82).

2. Hermeneutic dimension: This dimension reflects the ability to interpret and reinterpret one’s history and one’s self in relationship to others. A hermeneutical dimension also provides a study with the capacity to understand the role of knowledge and the bringing of new realities and understandings into being for both researcher and participants.

3. Participatory Dimension: Researchers, along with participants, are part of a transformative process, where researcher is not in the role of neutral observer. Together, researchers and participants are part of a collective, and together they align towards attaining change, freedom, and equality. In effect, everyone is working together as a participant.

4. Collaborative Dimension: Contrary to traditional approaches, in the Critical Hermeneutic Participatory Research model, the researcher does not control the research study, nor does she exclusively design the interview questions. From the outset, the researcher and participants collaborate together in determining the nature of the study, they agree upon the best approach to the study, and together they identify the dimensions to the study. My study reflects a modified version of Herda’s methodology because the
participants and I did not collaborate together in the overall design of the study.

Although Herda’s (1999) participatory-hermeneutic methodology provides a new direction for social science research, its origins are rooted in the older tradition of hermeneutics. According to Palmer (1969), hermeneutics is the study of understanding and is devoted to deciphering and understanding the meaning of a text. The focus of hermeneutics can be a study of books, works of art, narratives, and interviews. In examining the roots of the word *hermeneutic*, Palmer returns us to its Greek origins, *hermeios*, and the messenger-god Hermes. The term *hermeneutics* may be derived from the name Hermes. Because hermeneutics is associated with bringing understanding to a situation, Palmer reminds his readers that the ancient process of understanding traditionally associated with the god Hermes is one where “something foreign, strange, separated in time, space or experience is made familiar, present and comprehensible . . . it is interpreted” (p. 14).

To understand Herda’s methodology, it is important to recognize how it has been influenced by the works of philosophers Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricouer, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. For the purpose of this discussion, we will look at their works through the writings of Palmer (1969) and Herda (1999). In his study of hermeneutics and the human activity of understanding, Heidegger introduces us to the notion of hermeneutics as a philosophy of interpretation. Palmer explains that Heidegger saw clues to the nature of being in its historicality and temporality and hoped to release being from the static categories derived in the West: “Being as it discloses itself in lived experience escapes the conceptualizing, spatializing, and atemporal categories of idea-centered thinking” (p. 125).
Heidegger states that language is not merely grounded in human thought and suggests that the Cartesian influence of splitting subject and object locks man into seeing a world that simply reflects his concerns and place in history (in Herda, 1999). Moreover, Heidegger suggests that the interpretative process of language gets trapped within circular and repetitive acts of rehashing what has already been reviewed with nothing new being learned. To move outside the mode where language and thought are trapped within circular and repetitive acts will require that human beings move from the static role of removed spectator towards the active role of engaged listener. “It is in words and language that things first come into being and are” (Heidegger, 1959, p. 13).

In Heidegger’s view, it was imperative that philosophy move beyond traditional subject-object relationships and more towards the perspective of “understanding is being” (as cited in Palmer, 1969, p. 131). He states that “understanding is the power to grasp one’s own possibilities for being, within the context of the life and the world in which one exists” (as cited in Palmer, 1969, p. 131). Heidegger also argued that the act of interpreting the world is influenced by social context and proposed that the world’s history, events, and actions could not be solely dependent upon the meaning provided by individual subjects. “Man stands in relationship . . . we must use social actions, not individual actions, as a starting point in understanding intelligibility and even existence” (as cited in Herda, 1999, p. 26). The three perspectives from Heidegger’s work that contributed to the design of this study were: (a) The dialogical nature of individual and language together in a social context, (b) the interpreting of history as a communal act, and (c) the temporal nature of human beings with a focus towards the future.

In Ricouer’s hermeneutic model, the process of interpretation helps to imagine a
possible world for human existence, where understanding “is not concerned with grasping a fact, but with apprehending a possibility of being” (as cited in Herda, 1999, p. 29). Ricouer states that hermeneutics is not an inquiry into hidden meanings of text that are discovered through understanding the intentions of the author or speaker. Instead, he proposes that hermeneutics is an “explication of being-in-the world displayed by the text. What is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my own-most possibilities” (as cited in Herda, 1999, p. 75). Herda (1999) clarifies that Ricouer’s analysis of understanding moves towards one that includes a phase of critique which allows for social change—“where social change is the text in front of us” (p. 59).

In order for the analysis of text to be feasible, Ricouer argues that the spoken word must be situated or fixed within a text in order to create distance between the texts and its readers. These texts can be oral histories, dreams, transcripts from interviews, dialogues, or any form of communication that can be captured in written word. Through acts of “fixation” and “distanciation,” the intention of the speaker can be separated from the meaning of the text, and “the written text transcends its own conditions and opens itself to unlimited readings” (Herda, 1999, p. 87). Herda explains that Ricoeur’s emphasis on text provides the researcher with the capacity to find explanation embodied in the text as a whole, rather than in the limited terms of its author. From this perspective, constructing the meaning of a text is not limited to the privileged role of author and researcher, but extends to “text as social action” (p. 14) where a responsible reading of text enables a recovery of its meaning.

Gadamer extends Heidegger’s theories by focusing on the relationship between
human beings and language and lends a hermeneutic consciousness to the journey of participatory research. He addresses the question “How is understanding possible?” (as cited in Palmer, 1969, p. 164). Whereas both Heidegger and Gadamer challenge the limitation of positivist thinking and believe that interpretations are grounded in understanding, Gadamer suggests that knowledge is not something that is acquired as a possession. Instead, he holds a pre-Cartesian philosophical viewpoint that sees thinking as a part of being. “Truth is not reached methodically, but dialectically; the dialectical approach to truth is seen as the antithesis of method to pre-structure individual’s way of seeing” (as cited in Palmer, 1969, p. 165).

Gadamer looks at the relationship among humans, language, and understanding, where language is not merely a set of tools for communication, but is in fact a living process in which the community of life can be experienced (in Herda, 1999). Because language provides the medium for understanding in the world, Gadamer determines that the human community is a form of linguistic community. Both language and history are integral dimensions of the human experience with researchers and participants located inside linguistic, cultural, and historical traditions. Gadamer discusses the importance of understanding the “tyranny of hidden prejudices” (as cited in Herda, 1999, p. 90) and how these prejudices can speak more loudly than the language that is spoken within particular traditions. Herda extends Gadamer’s perspective on prejudice by pointing out that researchers at the outset of a study must be clear about their prejudices. Researchers also need to be aware of how the cultural and historical perspectives in which they are situated influence the ways that they listen to the participants.

We have been introduced to a brief overview of the transformative building
blocks of critical hermeneutic research based on the philosophical works of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricouer. The design of the group process was influenced by their writings in the following ways: (a) Human beings and their behavior are better understood in a social context rather than an individual context; (b) knowledge is not a possession of the individual, but is more a product of arriving at the truth through an exchange of logical arguments among and between people; (c) both language and history are integral dimensions of the human experience; and (d) it is through dialogue about the history of the present that new understandings and possibilities can emerge and the revitalization of the role of history can occur.

Data Collection for Group Interview Process

1. As stated earlier, the group process reflected a modified version of Herda’s research approach because the research participants did not collaborate in the overall design of the study. In order to add an element of collaboration, I asked each participant to offer a question or theme that she wanted to explore during the group process. Three of the 8 participants contributed the questions that guided the first 3 hours of the group interview.

2. The group interview was filmed by a professional film production company. I proposed this option to the participants on the day they came to the kick-off meeting at my home in June, 2009. I recognized that the future creation of a professional documentary regarding women’s engagement of hierarchical structures would require more sophisticated filming equipment than what I had used for the individual interviews. Each of the participants agreed to the professional filming of the group process.

3. The first 3 hours of the group interview were divided into three rounds of
council process. In council process, because there is no cross talk, council participants sit quietly and listen to one another share their thoughts and do not provide feedback. This allows each individual an opportunity to freely share her thoughts, feelings, and ideas about the theme. At the completion of the formal council process, time was allowed for a round of cross-talk dialogue among the participants. During this part of the group process the study participants discussed what they had gleaned during the first two rounds. A more detailed discussion about the group process is presented in chapter 4.

4. To deepen the group process, a Witness Council dimension was added to the format. A Witness Council is generally made up of individuals personally invited by the participants to sit outside the circle and listen during the group process. Seven women were invited to participate as witnesses, and the last hour of the group process was dedicated to them describing to the participants what they witnessed, what they learned, and what they would apply to their own personal situations. Each of the witnesses was informed at the time of being invited to participate that the group process would be professionally filmed for a future documentary.

5. After the members of the Witness Council presented their feedback to the participants, additional time was available that allowed the participants and witnesses to dialogue with one another about what had transpired during the group process.

6. On the day of the group process each of the participants signed a Release of Information Form (see Appendix D) and an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E). The Witnesses also signed a Release of Information Form (see Appendix F) as well as an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix G).

7. Following the group interview, the videos were transcribed. I did not have the
participants review the group interview transcript before I began writing the first draft of the thematic analysis presented in chapter 4. However, they were each given a copy of chapter 4 to review and were free to edit, change, or delete any of their personal dialogue that was used in the thematic analysis and to make recommendations on how the material was presented.

8. The making of the educational documentary will be a participatory process and the participants will have full editing privileges for the content and flow of the documentary. The 7 witnesses and 8 participants will be invited to preview the documentary upon its completion and will be asked to contribute pertinent insights about the documentary based on their experiences. The focus of the documentary will be to illuminate the historical legacy of patriarchy and to demonstrate how women can teach and support one another in overcoming and transforming oppressive systems that entrap their lives.

Questions for the Group Process

1. What were the factors that prepared us for or contributed to our making the decision to surrender our vows and therefore disobey the hierarchy?

2. How have our attitudes and relationships towards clergy and men changed since we went through this trauma?

3. How does an individual or a group follow the call of the spirit and still belong to a religious tradition whose hierarchical structure demands obedience?

Data Analysis of Group Process

As noted earlier, the heuristic portraits were created from the transcripts of the individual interviews by following the first two steps of Brown and Gilligan’s “The
Listener’s Guide” (1992). The goal of the first listening was to get a sense of the voice of each participant’s story and to identify the plot of her story. The second listening was focused on hearing how each participant spoke about herself and to allow the reader into a relationship with that person. I did not go through the group interview transcript using the guidance of the first two listenings because that information is fully contained in the heuristic portraits presented in chapter 3.

The process for analyzing the data from the group interview followed the last two steps of “Listener’s Guide.” Similar to the steps taken for creating the individual portraits, I went through the group interview transcript (as well as the individual interview transcripts which is described more fully in chapter 4) several times following the guidance of the third and fourth listenings to discover examples of the voices of resistance and creation. I used colored pencils to highlight key words or phrases that denoted a spirit of resisting, questioning, challenging, and creating. In the third listening I paid particular attention to the ways in which the participants discussed and described how they resisted or engaged various authority structures. In the fourth listening I focused on how the participants described the creation of a new sense of personal and communal identity/authority following their decision to receive dispensations from their canonical status.

After the highlighting of the transcripts with the colored pencils was completed, I created separate worksheets for each of the two voices and transferred the highlighted portions of the dialogue from the group interview transcripts onto the appropriate worksheet. I also transferred corresponding dialogue from each of the individual interviews that reflected the voices of resistance and creation in the appropriate column.
on these worksheets. Next I spent a considerable amount of time determining how those portions of dialogue demonstrated the voices of resistance and creation and added that information to the appropriate column on the worksheet designated for my reflections as the researcher. I then integrated the reflections from the group interview with those from the individual interviews to create the thematic analysis that is presented more fully in chapter 4.

Limitations and Ethical Assurances

Limitations

Although the feminist underpinnings of the individual format and the participatory hermeneutic methodology for the group format were geared towards openness and equanimity, my subjectivity as researcher was inherent throughout the process of the study. As a lay woman and former Catholic, I entered this study with a predisposition about the roles of nuns and priests, as well as the hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church. I also embarked upon this study with attitudes and prejudices about the Catholic Church and its influence on my personal life, as well as its influence in the lives of women, men, and children. To address these concerns, the transcripts were carefully reviewed and edited by the participants to ensure that their experiences were not overshadowed by my attitudes and predispositions. Each participant had the right to review, edit, and delete any information she did not want included in the study from the individual and group interviews. I also asked the participants to feel free to make recommendations on how the ideas, thoughts, and conclusions discussed in chapters 3 and 4 could be better presented.

Because this was a participatory and collaborative study, I did not seek objective
knowledge or work in a detached manner with the participants. The design of this study invited creative dialogue about the ongoing existence of patriarchal and hierarchical authority in the Catholic Church. When I had questions or concerns about a particular dimension of the study, I contacted the participants for direction and clarity. The design of the study also encouraged thoughtful reflection by each participant about her memories and experiences of hierarchical authority and oppression within the Church, as well as in the external culture and society. Each participant played a key role in helping to create the knowledge that has been generated from this study.

The small size of this study provided the ideal conditions for a depth analysis of the 8 participants’ experiences. However, it is important to clarify that the participants’ experiences are not representative of the other IHMs who also surrendered their canonical status. Moreover, the results of this study cannot be generalized to reflect the experiences of all women living within patriarchal cultures and systems.

*Ethical Assurances*

This research study included individual and group interview formats where personal histories, emotions, dreams, and longings were shared, audio/videotaped, transcribed, and distilled into relevant themes. The participants were fully apprised of the personal and subjective nature of the study during the 2 hour pre-meeting that was held at my home before the interviews were scheduled. They also were sent a packet of information about the study well in advance of the individual interviews. The group interview included four professional cameramen taping the process, a soundperson, and a production assistant. I spoke privately with each participant to be certain that having these individuals at the group process would be comfortable for her. Each participant
agreed to the inclusion of these individuals at the group interview.

Each participant signed an informed consent form that described how the data collected during the study would be used. They were fully apprised of their right to confidentiality and that they could keep their identity anonymous. Participants were advised that they could withdraw at any point during the study. They were also advised that they could change how their names and personal information were to be treated within the research. None of the participants requested anonymity or asked to withdraw from the study.

We discussed my responsibility as researcher and their responsibilities as participants that are consistent with the APA Ethical Standards of Research and Pacifica Graduate Institute’s dissertation requirements.
CHAPTER 3
PRESENTATION OF INDIVIDUAL HEURISTIC PORTRAITS

Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can’t remember who we are or why we are here. (Kidd, 2002, p. 107)

Introduction

The 8 heuristic portraits presented in this chapter are an oral history of each participant. According to its Latin root, a portrait seeks to reveal, expose, and draw forth its subject (Palmer, 1969). As stated in chapter 2, the heuristic research process identifies themes that are garnered from the individual interviews. The heuristic portrait retains the language of the interviewee and uses as much direct quoting as possible. The contents of the 8 portraits were distilled through slow and careful readings of the individual interview transcripts based on Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) voice-centered feminist methodology. This voice-centered methodology is designed to “transform the act of reading into an act of listening, as the reader takes in different voices and follows their movement through the interview” (p. 25). The authors co-mingle the terms “listening” and “reading” to demonstrate that this method requires active participation by both the one telling the story and the one listening to and reading the story.

Creating the Heuristic Portraits

Brown and Gilligan (1992) suggest that a story be listened to a minimum of four times in order to gain access to the “complexity of voice and relationship . . . and listening for the polyphony of voice” (p. 26). For the purpose of constructing this study’s heuristic portraits, the first two listenings enabled me in the role of researcher (a) to hear the voice of the participant’s story and to identify its plot, and (b) to hear each woman’s voice of self, the “I” in her narrative and to learn how she speaks about herself. The
second two listenings focused on the ways the participants talked about their relationships and how they experienced themselves inside the relational dimensions of human experience. The second two listenings are discussed more fully in chapter 4 when the thematic analyses from the individual and group interviews are presented.

The 8 portraits range from 10 to 15 pages and have been written in the third person. They have been reviewed, revised, and approved by each of the respective participants. The portraits reflect the participants’ self-understanding of the personal, cultural, political, and social factors that influenced their decision to take the formal vows of the religious life and to later engage, question, and resist the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. The 8 participants were asked the same 16 questions and were free to digress from those questions at any time during the interview process. It is important to note that the questions for the individual interviews were not designed in a participatory manner. Instead, the questions were designed solely by me as the researcher. The questions directly reflect my particular research interests about the engagement of hierarchical and patriarchal authority structures.

After the 8 interviews were completed and I had read through each of the oral history transcripts, I decided to categorize the 16 questions into five overarching themes. These themes reflect my personal and professional interests for the study. The five themes and corresponding interview questions are

**Theme I: The Call to the Religious Life: Becoming a Sister of the Immaculate Heart:**

1. How would you describe your calling to be a Sister of the Immaculate Heart?
2. How would you describe your experience of “taking vows”?
Theme II: Encountering Patriarchal/Hierarchical Structures of the Roman Catholic Church:

3. How would you define patriarchy?

4. How would you describe the influence of patriarchal thinking in the design of vows for women religious communities?

5. What would you say are other areas of religious life that were affected by patriarchy? Can you give examples that illustrate these experiences?

Theme III: Questioning and Engaging Patriarchal/Hierarchical Structures:

6. Prior to the decrees of Vatican II for renewal, were there internal movements being experienced within the IHM Community regarding the need for modernization and change? How would you describe your understanding of these movements?

7. Prior to the decrees of Vatican II, how did you experience the power structure(s) within the IHM Community?

Theme IV: Moving Away from the Confines of Patriarchal/Hierarchical Structures:

8. How would you describe the path that led you away from the community religious life towards the construction of a new sense of self in a lay community?

9. How would you describe the experience of surrendering your vows?

10. What were the most critical parts of the journey leading towards the decision to surrender your vows?

11. How was your prayer life affected during this period? Can you share examples of shifts that occurred in your prayer life?

12. What psychological and spiritual challenges did you face in building the lay
ecumenical community following the departure from the structure of the Catholic Church? Can you share stories that illustrate these challenges?

**Theme V: 40 Years in Review—Looking Back and Casting an Eye out Towards the Future:**

13. How would you describe the impact of the collective actions taken by the IHM Community on the Roman Catholic Church?

14. Who were your champions at the time the IHM Community was engaging with the hierarchical/patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church—who inspired you to keep going?

15. In what ways do you believe your personal, as well as the collective experiences of the IHM Community could inspire and guide contemporary and future women in continuing to engage patriarchal thinking, structures, and to take a stand against oppression and domination?

16. Please share any additional comments or reflections you believe are needed at this time.

**The Individual Interview Process**

Prior to the interview, each participant received a copy of the questions to review in order to prepare for the interview. Every step was taken to translate the study’s two research questions into open-ended interview questions that encouraged open, spontaneous, and thoughtful answers. The two research questions that directed the formulation of the interview questions asked what were the former nuns’ experiences of engaging the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church, and what might these experiences teach us about how women can continue to engage patriarchy and resist oppression?
The length of time for conducting the interviews lasted from 1½ to 2½ hours. Each interview was tape recorded, video recorded, and transcribed by a professional transcriber. Seven of the 8 interviews were conducted in my private therapy office located in Montecito, California. My office has been described as inviting and relaxing and is decorated in soft shades of rose, teal blue, and cream. Tea and water were offered to each participant upon arrival, and she was encouraged to relax and take her time when answering the questions. Intermittent breaks were taken in order to allow time for stretching and relaxing. The single interview that was not conducted in my office was held at the participant’s welcoming and quiet home in Cambria, California, which is located approximately 120 miles north of Santa Barbara, California.

The Participants

Upon entering the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California, the participants aligned themselves with the traditional religious structures of the Catholic Church. Each of the participants lived through the acrimonious interactions with Cardinal James McIntyre, the Los Angeles Archdiocese, and the Vatican during the mid- to late 1960s. Seven of the 8 participants received the 1970 ultimatum from the Vatican that demanded that they return to the former structures of traditional religious life or they would receive dispensations from their canonical status. One participant voluntarily left the IHM Community approximately 18 months prior to the issuance of the ultimatum from the Vatican due to significant changes in her attitudes about religious life. She willingly surrendered her vows and canonical status with the Catholic Church. The 7 participants who received the Vatican’s ultimatum chose to receive dispensations from canonical status rather than return to the traditional structures of religious life. None of the 7
participants who chose to receive dispensations from canonical status believe they ever
surrendered their vows. However, the participant who voluntarily left the IHM
Community believes she did give up her formal vows.

The 8 participants had been professed Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of
California for a minimum of 10 years prior to making the choice to leave canonical status
within the Catholic Church. As a result of this choice they entered a new and unfamiliar
stage in their lives as lay religious women. On a personal level, each participant was
required to find employment, to secure a place to live, and to assume financial
responsibility for herself. On a communal level, the participants entered an interactive
process geared towards designing and creating the structures for a lay spiritual
community that would be open to women and men. Each participant has been an active
member of the lay Immaculate Heart Community since its inception in 1970.

It was a privilege to engage in such intimate and meaningful discussions with
these 8 formidable women. The participants for this study were Carol Carrig, Ann
Chamberlin, Joann Connors, Anita Daniel, Mary Fay-Zenk, Julie Friese, Stephanie Glatt,
and Maria Inez Martinez.

The Portraits

Carol Carrig, IHM

The Call to Religious Life: Moving from Independence to Dependence

Carol was 17 years old and a senior in high school when she became aware of a
“sense” that she wanted to “devote my life, as closely as possible, to Jesus. I thought it
was the way, the highest way that I could serve.” Clarifying that she had a “normal kind
of high school life,” and enjoyed dancing, partying, and dating, “the normal things that
high school girls do,” Carol was also drawn to a life of dedication and a commitment to
being of service. Furthermore, she chose the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of
California because of their “outgoing, active, contemporary,” approach to religious life.
The night before she entered the Novitiate, Carol had a date with a boy she had been
seeing, and even though she did not “look forward to [telling him],” she was very excited
about her decision. He, on the other hand, was “startled” by her news. While her mother
was very supportive of her decision and passively “encouraged” her all along the way,
Carol’s father cried when she told him. “He was very upset and told me he would leave
my mother if I did this.” Carol realizes that being their only child made it particularly
difficult for her father. She never believed his threats, and he “came around eventually”
to accept her decision and he did not leave her mother. When she entered the Novitiate in
September 1950, Carol was 17 years old.

Despite the severe changes to the independent lifestyle Carol had begun to
experience prior to entering the Novitiate (e.g., driving her parents’ car, dating boys,
getting together with girlfriends), she emphasizes that “strangely enough, I loved the
novitiate life . . . I found it interesting and enjoyable and challenging.” Beginning with
her entrance to the IHM Community as a postulant, Carol’s connection to the outside
world was greatly reduced as she “immersed [herself] in the spiritual life,” and into her
coursework in theology, scripture, and liturgical music. Having been an “achiever” in
high school, Carol focused on trying her “hardest to do the best” throughout her time as a
postulant and novice. She particularly recalls receiving a strand of “Examine Beads” that
were used “by pulling them when you did something, not bad necessarily, but went
against whatever you were trying to work on [such as] humility; I was always trying to be
better.” Thinking back on those times, Carol recognizes that the transition from “independence to dependence” transformed her way of life. One of the most challenging transitions as a postulant/novice was the reduced contact with her family and parents. Carol was limited to receiving weekly letters and seeing her family on one “designated Sunday a month, called Visitation Sunday.”

As she describes her memories from the preliminary vow ceremony, known as “taking the veil,” Carol recalls that “we went out of our black postulant dresses, and wore white, like bridal dresses, and then got the formal habit with the white veil.” The ceremony took place in the auditorium of the Mother House in Hollywood, California. Carol recalls that this day was an “act of dedication,” and even though it was not a “traumatic [experience],” she became very ill afterwards. When she returned to the Novitiate in Montecito following the ceremony, she was allowed to stay in the “mezzanine guest room, which was unheard of,” and was tended to by Mother Regina, which was a very “special experience.” Shortly after the ceremony, Carol was required to shave her head in order to accommodate the new veil. Shaving her head was also symbolic of “leaving the world” and proved to be a major transformational experience for Carol.

*Encountering Patriarchal and Hierarchical Structures: A Mix of Visionaries and Authoritarians*

Carol clarifies that during the 20 years she was a Sister of the Immaculate Heart, the IHM Community was led by three different women, each of whom was an extraordinary leader and visionary. These women were Mothers Eucharia, Regina, and Humiliata (a.k.a. Anita Caspary). Although each woman was a compassionate and strong leader, often their “hands were tied” when it came to the selection of superiors the young
sisters would be placed under when leaving the Novitiate. Ultimately, the quality of their lives and work experiences were heavily influenced by the superior’s personality and management style. Carol’s first mission “out” into the world in 1952 was a positive experience with a “very benevolent superior.” However, for her second mission, she was assigned to a new school where the Irish-American superior was a “terror,” because she was “repressive, she wasn’t fair, she was mean, and she had her favorites of older sisters.” During her time under this superior, Carol went into the hospital requiring treatment for an ovarian cyst and the removal of her appendix. She believes much of that physical illness was due to the “psychological pain” of living under such repression.

Carol recalls with great satisfaction how refreshing it was to have this superior replaced by a “wonderful” new woman who was “like a breath of fresh air, she gave me life . . . and she is who introduced me to [internationally renowned artist and former IHM], Corita [Kent].”

When Carol took her final vows in 1957 she did not view them as being mired in patriarchal thinking and undertones. “The vows were the given, and that was the way this life of dedication was structured. I did not question who designed the vows at that time.” It was when she decided “to give up her vows,” that she began to question their design and continuing validity for her life. In retrospect Carol acknowledges that patriarchal thinking was woven into the vows’ overall design. She also recognizes that the influence of patriarchal thinking in women’s vows and religious life must be seen from the “larger [societal and cultural] context.” In her estimation, the IHM’s decision to challenge the hierarchal structures of the Church was a process that took place over time and one that was influenced by the external dynamics of the increasingly changing world of the 1960s.
As a result of the external dynamics, she and the others were faced with internalizing the cultural and societal changes into their sense of themselves as individuals, as community members, and in their relationship to the changing world.

A pivotal experience in Carol’s religious life was when she received permission and a monetary grant to attend a linguistics program at Michigan State University in 1965. Until this point, Carol’s primary academic experiences had been limited to coursework at the Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles where she received her BA. Carol recalls that her time at Michigan State, her first experience of “being away,” was when the IHMs were experimenting with their habits and she had begun wearing a navy blue suit and a “modified veil.” Carol found that showing her hair for the first time in approximately 15 years was both “awkward” and “embarrassing.” In many ways the exposed hair was harder to adjust to than the change from the traditional habit to wearing a modern suit.

Despite Cardinal McIntyre’s ongoing interference in and obstruction of the IHM’s decision-making processes, Carol notes the stronger influence of the theologians and philosophers who lectured at the Immaculate Heart College during the early and mid-1960s. In particular, Carol identifies Father Adrien Van Kaam from Duquesne University, who spoke about the relationship between spirituality and psychology. She also recalls Father Noel Mailloux, a Canadian psychologist, who presented cutting-edge thinking on “psychology and religious life, how theology and psychology were inseparable.” Carol believed that the progressive thinkers were providing the true thought and direction of the Church. Moreover, the progressive thinkers often helped Carol maintain an enduring sense of optimism that the Catholic Church was evolving.
Moving Away from the Patriarchal and Hierarchical Structures: Making Choices

From 1960 to 1967, Carol worked as the Superior, Principal, and as a teacher in a Los Angeles parish. She describes the mixed “love-hate” relationship she had with the parish pastor, an individual she liked and admired, and may have even “felt a little attraction to,” but because he was the pastor, it was he who was ultimately “in control [and] the buck stopped with him.” During those years, Carol work actively to implement the Vatican II changes within the school and parish. She recalls getting “upset and angry” when the pastor did not want to follow through on her ideas, mostly regarding finances. Even though she understood that in his role as pastor, “he had to be the one to control us [the sisters and the parish],” Carol did not equate his authority with “the patriarchy, [but] he certainly represented that, because he had to have the last say.”

Despite the pastor’s authority and presence, Carol recounts some of the key moments from those “vibrant times,” most notably her friendship with her “good friend,” the late artist and former IHM, Corita Kent. “Her way of being in the world influenced me and all of us. She opened our eyes in more ways than one and helped us see the beauty in the ordinary world.” Among her famous works of art, Sr. Corita worked on the design for the 40-foot Beatitudes mural for the Vatican Pavilion at the 1964 New York World’s Fair in Carol’s school basement. She also designed “Power Up,” a smaller mural that was installed over the altar in Carol’s convent chapel. Corita’s brother, a Maryknoll priest, would celebrate “liturgies in our [convent] dining room; this was a no-no because he would not use the exact words of the Mass and wrote his own version of the Our Father.” Another occasional celebrant of the Mass in Carol’s convent dining room was Sr. Corita’s close friend, social activist Father Daniel Berrigan. In many ways, Carol’s
parish convent became a safe place for alternative ideas to emerge and where some of the Immaculate Heart College instructors would come to change their clothes during their experimentation with secular clothes.

During the time that she was assigned to this parish, Carol and the other Sisters were visited by the “men appointed by the Archdiocese (of Los Angeles) and by Rome,” who came to question them about their Vatican II experimentation processes. “We would have to go into the parlor and close the door and get interrogated.” Even though she found these actions to be an “imposition” and “ridiculous,” Carol remained “an eternal optimist,” expecting that in the end things would turn out well because “we were doing what we were supposed to be doing out of the Vatican II Council; we were following the directives of implementation.”

At the conclusion of the 1967 school year, Carol recognized that she “had completed what needed to be done,” at both the school and parish and was satisfied with what she had accomplished. She realized that she had reached a pivotal time in her vocation as a religious woman because of the Vatican II renewal process and the IHM’s active response to the process. She recalls that at this point of the IHM’s renewal process, she and the others “were beginning to have some say as to what we would do with our lives, instead of being totally assigned [to our positions].” Believing that she wanted to spend a contemplative year with the Trappistine Nuns at Redwoods Abbey in Whitethorn, California, Carol approached Anita Caspary, who was still the Mother General for the IHM Community, with her idea. Carol recalls that Anita “kind of looked at me, listened, and suggested instead that I apply to the Master’s program in Religious Studies at UCSB [The University of California, Santa Barbara].” Carol did apply, was
accepted into the program, and now knows “that was the best thing that could have happened” to her.

In order to attend the graduate program at UCSB, Carol moved from Los Angeles to Montecito to live in the IHM Community’s former Novitiate house during the summer of 1967. She began living with a group of other religious women without the presence of a superior and recalls feeling like a “free spirit.” By then, she was fully “out of habit,” and the experience was both “awkward and exciting.” At this point, the IHMs had also begun their collaboration with humanistic psychologists Carl Rogers and William Coulson and agreed to have them establish several encounter groups at La Casa de María Retreat Center in Montecito. Carol describes her encounter group experience as positive and one of the primary “influences” on her decision to leave the religious life in 1969. “I really liked the openness [of the encounter groups] and being able to say what you feel.” However, not everyone had the same positive experience as Carol: “They found the experience to be hard and difficult. I did not experience the hurt that some people did.”

At this time, Drs. Rogers and Coulson were also invited to conduct encounter groups at St. Anthony’s seminary in Santa Barbara. Carol muses that perhaps “they wanted some women to be there to kind of stir things up with the men,” so she and a few of the other women living with her agreed to participate in these groups with the Franciscans. Looking back, Carol believes that the encounter groups created “a bit of a sexual awakening for her.” She became close friends with a priest who was also participating in the groups and while “there certainly was a sexual attraction” between them, they did not act upon it. Carol remembers an emerging and “developing sexuality
that had been suppressed for all the previous years”; however, at that time she “didn’t reflect on it or articulate it as such.” In retrospect, Carol is aware that the process many women religious went through, which led to them to surrender their canonical status, was influenced in “part [by] our own emerging sexuality, and [a] desire to not have vows of chastity.”

The opportunity to commence a full-time program at a public university in the fall of 1967 was a major change in Carol’s life. When she began her program, the late Walter Capps, a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, was then a leading theologian in the Religious Studies program at UCSB.

Walter Capps became my mentor and I was so fortunate that he took an interest in my work. At that time he was involved in process theology and philosophy and the “Hope School,” so I too became immersed in [those subjects].

Carol was particularly interested in learning about the “finding of community in new ways,” and was greatly inspired by the focus of process theology to “respond to whatever exists in the world . . . because this was the 1960s [and] everything was changing.” Her perspectives were also influenced by the progressive thinking and writings of German Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz in the area of political theology; Jürgen Moltmann, a German Protestant theologian interested in the theology of hope; and the work of the late French philosopher and Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin, who challenged the traditional interpretations of creation.

Carol was chosen to go to London in 1968 to conduct research for Walter Capps at the British Museum. This experience proved to be a pivotal factor in Carol’s ultimate decision to surrender her vows in 1969. The culmination of this opportunity, along with the experiences of living a freer life in Montecito, attending graduate school at UCSB,
and participating in the encounter groups, ultimately contributed to Carol’s undergoing profound internal shifts. With the traditional structures that had defined and directed her life as a religious woman changing, Carol recognized the need to make serious adjustments in her personal life. Because the “thinkers” from the Immaculate Heart College were regularly convening in Montecito at La Casa de Maria to create and write their responses to the Vatican’s ultimatums, Carol had the opportunity to dialogue with them about their views. In early 1969, she made an appointment to talk with psychologist William Coulson with whom she had developed a close friendship as a result of her 1967 participation with the encounter groups.

Carol remembers “sitting on the lawn on a hill at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], just talking with Bill Coulson. As I was talking with him, I knew that I was going to request to give up my vows.” Clarifying that Dr. Coulson did not persuade her to make the decision, Carol stresses that it was more an experience of him “allowing me to make my decision to enter into a thought process, [one] that would result in a real change in my life.” Recognizing that the decision to leave the IHM Community had been building up over time, she was struck by how sure she was “in that moment—I knew I was to going to request giving up my vows.” So taken with this “in the moment” experience, when later enrolled in a confluent education doctoral program at UCSB, Carol focused her thesis on the study of “how people make decisions in the presence of another.”

After her meeting with Dr. Coulson, Carol went to see her mother (her father was already deceased) to discuss her plans. She feels that, although her mother was saddened by the news, she also accepted Carol’s decision. Having told her mother of the decision,
Carol then made an appointment to see Anita Caspary to discuss her plans and learned that Anita was also supportive. In May, 1969, Carol signed the papers surrendering her vows, an experience she found to be “very freeing.” She left the order roughly a year and a half before the other IHM Community members received their formal dispensations from the Vatican in 1970. Remembering the party and celebration that Mothers Eucharia and Regina McPartlin had for her in Montecito after she signed the formal papers surrendering her vows, Carol recalls that getting her ears pierced was the first thing she did for herself at the age of 38.

*40 Years in Review: Moving Towards Growth in Relationship with Others*

Carol believes that the collective actions taken by the IHMs had a strong affect on the Catholic Church in Los Angeles. She feels the removal of hundreds of IHMs from Los Angeles schools caused a bigger ripple effect than the later dispensations because Cardinal McIntyre had to find replacements quickly in order to keep the schools going. She also thinks that other women’s religious communities were influenced by the IHM’s experience. Several years after the events, the IHMs received numerous apologies from canonical religious community members who “wished they had stood with us” in a more profound way and had not agreed to take the IHM’s places in the schools when they were forced to leave.

Carol notes that the process leading to her decision to leave the professed life as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart was inspired by Mothers Regina McPartlin and Anita Caspary and by the women who taught at the Immaculate Heart College (e.g., Corita Kent and Dorothy Dunn) as well as by the visionary thinking provided by so many theologians who had been advocating for change in the Church since the 1950s.
Describing herself and the other IHMs as “products of the times,” Carol re-emphasizes the imprint that was made on her ways of thinking by her studies in process theology and philosophy. Carol also recalls the ways that the religious life protected community members while simultaneously putting them in positions with high levels of responsibility. The traditional convent life also kept them “psychologically and sexually immature.” In many ways, Carol believes that the IHM’s levels of “immaturity” and their lack of experience in the outside world may have adversely influenced how they arrived at their Vatican II responses.

Despite the progressive women leading the IHM Community and the influence of avant-garde thinking coming into the IHM Community from the external world, there were internal mechanisms that managed to keep most of the women “in line and subjugated.” Because the world had changed so dramatically in the aftermath of World Wars I and II, Carol clarifies that the Church needed to change, as did the women’s corresponding attitudes and behaviors to the changing world. Recalling that “the 1960s were not the 1950s nor the 1940s,” Carol argues that remaining static was not an option for her or the other IHM Community members. They had to “go in the direction” of the world in order to identify the correct path for their personal lives within that world.

Carol would tell contemporary women who are living under oppressed circumstances to learn to “look within, and then around,” and to receive help from support systems around them, not just above them. She believes that her experiences and those of the other IHMs can help women recognize that it is not advisable to rely on what they are “told from above or on high” when making decisions for their lives. Moreover, learning to make decisions for oneself in the world requires responding to the “world as it
is [and] to the needs of the world.” Although she did highly regard the late Pope John XXIII and his efforts to invoke change through his leadership of Vatican II during the early 1960s, Carol no longer feels “any allegiance to Rome.” In retrospect, Carol believes her experiences have taught her that “just because a person is in charge or a male” does not mean that people have to rely on that individual for direction. Ultimately, Carol believes that we need to learn to respond to what is “in our heart and what we know.”

Ann Chamberlin, IHM

The Call to Religious Life: Awareness and Belonging

Looking back on how she recognized that she was drawn to the life as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart, Ann identifies several precipitating events that influenced her decision to enter the Novitiate in 1957 at the age of 17. Because Ann’s mother was plagued by persistent health issues as a result of tuberculosis, and because her parents divorced when Ann was 4 years old, she; her older sister, Rose; and their mother moved into their maternal grandmother’s home in Lancaster, California when Ann was in grammar school. As a result of their mother’s chronic health problems, their grandmother played an important role in helping to raise them. Growing up in this environment, Ann believes she and her sister “grew up in a very matriarchal family.” Describing her grandmother as a woman who modeled strength and courage, Ann believes her grandmother provided her with a prime example of “a woman who did what she had to do. I was never stuck in [thinking that] this is a man’s job and this is a woman’s job.”

Ann does not remember that she had a call to the religious life or that her decision to join the IHM Community was something “God wants me to do”; it was more of an unfolding “awareness” that began when she was in fifth grade. During that school year,
Ann became a student at the newly opened Sacred Heart School in Lancaster, California which was staffed by the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart. As a result of being taught by the IHMs, Ann recognized that teaching “was something I wanted to do. And, in my own mind, that’s what I was going to do, even through high school.” At the time their mother died in 1955, when Ann was 15, both she and her sister were boarding students at the Immaculate Heart High School in Los Angeles. Because they were not “an overly communicative family,” Ann had not discussed her plans about joining the IHM Community with anyone in her family. She was caught completely by surprise when her sister Rose, who is just a year and a half older, “suddenly announced that she’s entering the Community. I [was] very mad at her because that was what I wanted to do.”

When Ann decided to talk with Mother Regina about joining the IHM Community during her senior year, Rose had been a member for a little over a year. During the meeting with Mother Regina, Ann recalls that the two of them “had this little discussion. And [Mother Regina] says, ‘dear, I think you should wait. Your grandmother is by herself and she needs you at home.’” Ann remembers feeling “very disappointed” when she heard Mother Regina’s response. Because she was a boarding student at the Immaculate Heart High School, Ann’s grandmother picked her up for the weekend and during the drive home, “tried to find out what Mother Regina said.” As they drove away from the school, Ann shared her disappointing news. Before she knew it her grandmother turned the car around, returned to the school, and marched into Mother Regina’s office, saying “‘I don’t need being taken care of!’” Ann recalls “standing there like an idiot. [Then] Mother Regina gave me the papers to fill out. I entered the following September.”

Having the opportunity to transition from a matriarchal home to a matriarchal and
“educated” community was an extremely meaningful experience for Ann.

Taking her preliminary vows in 1959 “was a big day [and] a wonderful [experience],” because Ann found the vows to be “beautiful.” In addition, she knew her decision to take them was the right thing for her to do. When the time came to take her final vows in 1964, Ann was aware of many “good and capable” people who were deciding to leave the IHM Community. Wondering if she were being naïve to assume that she was truly meant to join the IHM Community, Ann met with Anita Caspary and asked her whether she thought Ann was in fact ready to take her final vows. Anita responded in the affirmative, saying, “If you didn’t belong here, you would have known it before now.”

*Encountering Patriarchy and Hierarchy: Obedience, Duty, and Experimentation*

Acknowledging that she enjoys asking questions and explaining herself, one of Ann’s greatest challenges working under superiors was learning to avoid “being bawled out for talking back, [because] you don’t question the superiors.” Ann discovered through time the value of not talking, as well as how “to keep a poker face,” in order to mask her facial reactions. Because she was not allowed to explain herself, Ann eventually learned how to respond with “Yes Sister, No Sister.” She notes that it “took roughly 20 years to unlearn [this technique and] to be emotionally responsive again.”

Having grown up in a strong matriarchal family, Ann explains that she has a “really different feel [about] patriarchal dominance,” and didn’t begin to get a flavor for it until the IHM Community started to go through their experimentation and changes following Vatican II. She describes patriarchy through images of Rome and recalled the influence of hearing the voices of varying Church patriarchs telling the IHMs what to do:
The patriarch of Rome says do this, which is what Vatican II said, “Do this—
update your decrees, your customs, your dress, the way you do things—update all
this.” Which we felt we were doing. We had meeting after meeting after meeting
on how to do all of this. And then somebody in Rome says, “Stop. You can’t do
that anymore.”

For Ann, who describes herself as a logical person, none of this behavior made any sense,
and she eventually reached the conclusion, “If you expect the hierarchical Church and the
patriarchy to be logical, forget it.”

Ann recalls being asked by a member from another religious community who had
recently completed reading Anita Caspary’s *Witness to Integrity* (2003) why Cardinal
McIntyre had “such authority” over the IHM Community, a Pontifical Institute that
reported directly to the Vatican, not the Archdiocese. Ann replied, “Are you looking for
logic? Theoretically, the cardinal should have had no control over us. The problem was
that Cardinal McIntyre had influence in Rome.” Because he was not an educator but a
“financier,” Cardinal McIntyre succeeded in opening many schools and then finding
sisters, prepared or not prepared, to teach in them. “Los Angeles was one of the largest
archdioceses in the United States; they sent a lot of money [to Rome].”

Ann knew that although everyone understood that it was advisable to do “what he
wanted,” for many years the Immaculate Heart College was embroiled with the cardinal
in differences about the type of courses that could be taught and which professors and
visiting theologians had permission to present lectures at the College. The IHMs were
educators, not financiers. They were extremely successful as educators and were very
progressive in their teaching approaches. Nonetheless, in time, Ann and the other IHM
Community members slowly began to realize just how much influence being a financier,
not an educator, had in Rome. As the Mother General of a Pontifical Institute, Anita
Caspary flew to Rome to seek counsel about the precarious position in which the IHMs found themselves with Cardinal McIntyre. She waited for close to a week for a meeting, but, as far as Ann knows, Anita “never got past the secretary.”

*Questioning and Engaging Patriarchy and Hierarchy: Education, Persistence, and Forward Thinking*

Because of their commitment to education, former IHM leaders Mothers Eucharia and Regina were determined to send IHM Community members “away to study” for advanced degrees in a variety of areas [e.g., theology, sociology, history, and music]. In order to adequately staff the Immaculate Heart College and maintain high levels of academic standing, they both knew the necessity of having qualified and strongly prepared instructors to teach college-level courses. Moreover, as early as 1959 and prior to the issuance of the formalized decrees of Vatican II in 1963, Mother Regina began to have the IHMs experiment with softer headgear. She also switched from Latin to English during chanting of group prayers. Because Pope John XXIII had given notice of his plans to convene Vatican II in January 1959, the IHM leadership was aware that changes would be coming and took steps that they thought would help to modernize their community.

From her experience, Ann believes wearing the formal habit had both advantages and disadvantages for religious women. In her first teaching assignment in 1959, with a class of 60 3rd graders, Ann recognized the benefit of parents putting the fear of God into their children to listen to “the good Sisters.” However, the parents also believed that the good Sisters knew how handle any situation that came their way because of the authority associated with the habit. Ann remembers when a mother came to see her “in despair, asking, ‘what am I going to do with my child?’” While Ann thought to herself “how would I know?” she also knew that she couldn’t react to the woman harshly, because “the
habit gave you a certain authority or a certain presumption of knowledge.” In that case, Ann did not have the answer, but spent time talking with the mother about different options, which in the end may have been all the woman really needed.

When the IHMs went “out of the habit,” Ann believes that many of the parents missed the familiarity of the habits because they were uncertain about how to behave around women, who were still nuns, but were no longer hidden under 18th-century-style clothing. Noting that “major changes in society are always difficult [and] society changes so fast,” Ann feels that religion is one area that people want to be able to depend upon during times of social change because “you want some place that stays the same, and to me that has always been religion.” Looking back, Ann thinks many Catholics during the 1960s “were already having a hard time in their lives and in the world,” and could not handle the continuous changes to their religion as well. After Vatican II, two significant changes were instituted in a relatively short period of time involved the Catholic Mass. The first change was the direction of the Mass celebrant who began to face the congregation rather than having his back to the people. The next change was the Mass being spoken in English rather than Latin. In Ann’s estimation, to then have the “good Sisters” no longer in 18th-century-looking habits may have been too big of a tipping point for most Catholics to endure.

Moving Away from the Confines of Patriarchal/Hierarchal Structures

Ann is clear that the path that led the IHMs away from the traditional structures of the Catholic Church was facilitated by “walking with others, with like-minded people. The decision was certainly each individual’s but, for me, I never thought of not going forward.” From the initial 1963 Vatican II call for renewal through to 1970 when they
chose to receive dispensations from their canonical status, the IHMs underwent a considerable amount of soul-searching both as individuals and as members of the IHM Community. They listened, learned, dialogued, and debated with one another about the most appropriate paths to follow. Ann recalls the encouragement of many priests and bishops who supported them, in particular the late Franciscan Father Virgil Cordano, who told them they “were on the right path.” Because of his actions, Father Cordano was “always being called down” to the Chancellor’s Office in Los Angeles, but “his salvation was that he was a Franciscan; and unless his Provincial told him to stop, he didn’t have to stop [criticizing Cardinal McIntyre’s actions].”

Reflecting on how she and the others were able to get through those times, Ann remembers that each morning we got up and we put one foot in front of the other, and we did our teaching that day, and we came home, and the next morning we got up and put one foot in front of the other, and did our job.

She is certain that most of them didn’t believe at the time that they were “doing something momentous, [that] this is going to be known world-round; [instead], we were doing what we thought [was required]—with integrity, honesty, and spirituality.”

When it came time to surrender her canonical status, Ann describes the experience as “awful [and] unrealistic.” She remembers that the dispensation papers were delivered by a bishop; they were to be signed and returned to him with no dialogue taking place among the community members. She recalls in particular that the paperwork began with the words “I hereby willingly surrender” my vows and that she crossed out “willingly” and inserted “unwillingly.” After the papers were submitted to the bishop, she and the others learned that without speaking to one another, they had each made similar
alterations to the wording of the dispensation paperwork.

When I think back now, it was like [they were telling us] “You’re not worth it. We’re taking this away from you.” And they were taking something that they had no right to take, because my promises were to God, not to the man sitting next to me.

Even though the IHMs surrendered their relationship with the “legal Church,” their actions have been viewed as ones that resulted in their leaving the Church. Ann clarifies, “We did not leave the Church. We left canonical status with the patriarchal Church. We became lay members, just like all the other people in the Church. With the same rights.”

Ann is grateful that neither her mother nor grandmother was still living when she and her sister were forced to surrender their canonical status in 1970. Because their grandmother was “so proud of us in the habit,” to have tried to explain the changes that the two of them were undergoing would have been painful and difficult to do. Their father, on the other hand, was supportive of their courage and “proud of their actions” because he knew “a lot of what went on in his [own] parish,” and about the inappropriate actions of one of the priests in that parish. Many IHM Community members, however, did not receive support from their families and were “disowned” because they were seen as “leaving the Church.” Ann draws a comparison to what is currently happening to gays and lesbians whose parents reject homosexuality and thus cut their children out of the family. The Church similarly rejected the IHMs, and while cutting them out of the Church’s formal structures, the hierarchy did not succeed in disconnecting them from one another and from those with whom they shared a more progressive vision for the Church.

40 Years in Review: Sophia, Spirit, Relationship

For Ann, the steps taken by the IHMs were inspired by “the spirit of Sophia [the feminine face of God] to further God’s work for everyone, not the just the work of the
Church, [because] the Church is really the people; not this group of men up there [ruling everyone].” She also believes the actions taken by the IHMs have “been freeing for many Catholics who want and need change; [however], for those who are afraid of change, it’s scary.” To move the spirit of Vatican II forward required the guidance, leadership, and support of many individuals. Within the IHM Community, Ann highlights the guidance that was provided through the years by Mothers Eucharia, Regina, and Anita Caspary. She remembers in particular how Mother Eucharia, who was 70 when they became a lay community and had been in the habit for close to 50 years, discovered anew how to buy skirts, blouses, shoes, and stockings. These actions inspired Ann, who was considerably younger, to know that if the older IHM Community members could “do it, [then] I can do it.”

The support provided by Father Virgil was an enduring source of strength for Ann. She recalls the focus he placed on the importance of relationships and that “life is all about relationships—with yourself, with God, and with others.” She believes the IHM’s actions could be a source of inspiration for contemporary women who face abuse in their relationships and marriages. Ann emphasizes that although physical abuse is very serious, many women also confront emotional, psychological, and verbal abuse, and these are equally as detrimental to them and their children. A woman in this situation needs to know how to trust her inner authority because “women have very valid instincts about what is okay behavior. And sometimes in relationships we don’t listen to that [instinct], and we get in trouble.” Specifying that “relationships need to be equal, where there is give and take,” Ann believes that the IHM’s experiences taught them that they and the others in the “formal religious Church” needed to “grow up” in order to better
evaluate whether actions and behaviors taken by the Church authorities were appropriate.

Ann thinks that the IHM’s actions have helped to encourage “other religious women to look at their life, not necessarily to change it,” but to question how their lives have become dominated by routine. If what they are doing seems “rote,” they need to reflect on how they might consider altering or updating their attitudes and thinking.

“Many, many religious communities have [apologized] to us in the last 40 years, saying ‘We’re sorry we did not stand up for you.’ ” She adds that a few women religious communities currently being visited and investigated by the Vatican in the United States have said “we will no longer let them do to us what they did to you.” In Ann’s opinion,

We have taught the world, or the American Church anyway, that there are consequences to standing up, but there are also rewards. We would not be where we are today, with all the different works that the Community does, had we still been in the habit.

*Joann Connor, IHM*

*The Call to Religious Life: Certainty and Direction*

After finishing high school, Joann lived in Casper, Wyoming with her mother and sister, and worked as a secretary for a local oil company. In 1959, at the age of 23, she became aware of an inner feeling or sense that she wanted “to do something more than what I was doing.” When she was attending Sunday Mass, soon after becoming aware of this inner sense, Joann recalls “it just became clear to me that the religious life would be what I was searching for.” So definitive was this experience, Joann decided to quit her job, pack up her car, and drive alone for three days from Wyoming to her brother’s home in Ventura, California. During the drive to California, Joann recognized a growing sense of inner trust—a sense that told her “I was doing what I was searching for.” Upon her arrival in California, she secured a secretarial job and lived with her brother and his
family, waiting a little over half a year before speaking with a priest about the religious orders he would recommend in Los Angeles. Of the three orders suggested to her, Joann was most impressed by the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California. She was particularly inspired by the IHM Community’s devotion to the Blessed Mother because of her personal devotion to Mary.

Joann scheduled a Sunday afternoon meeting with Mother Regina at the Immaculate Heart Novitiate in Montecito, California. She recalls being struck by Mother Regina’s presence, as well as the behavior of the young postulants and novices who were outdoors having a picnic: “They seemed very happy to me.” Although she doesn’t describe how she arrived at her final decision, Joann remembers the exact date of her entrance into the IHM Community: September 15, 1959. Thinking back to that day, she recalls the car ride to the Novitiate and being accompanied by her brother, sister-in-law, and then 6-year-old nephew. Upon arrival, Joann was directed to the dormitory that would become her living quarters and where she was told to change from her lay clothes into the postulant habit. She remembers feeling strange as she put on the habit, noting that it felt different from what she was accustomed to wearing. Returning to her family to say goodbye, and feeling somewhat tentative about her decision, Joann was very touched when her young nephew recognized her in the habit and exclaimed, “‘Joann you look purtty.’”

Joann embellishes on this particular memory of her nephew—recalling the sweetness that emanated from his face and recalling the affect these four words had on her decision to move forward. Saying goodbye, and leaving the lay life behind her, Joann crossed the threshold to her new life, entering through the main wooden doors of the
Novitiate, where she was greeted by three powerful women within the IHM Community: Mothers Eucharia, Regina, and Noreen. Throughout her process of assimilating into the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart Community, Joann was deeply inspired by each of them: “They were all genuinely happy women, and that so impressed me. I kept thinking if this isn’t for me, God will let me know . . . I don’t have to stay here.”

One can hear strength in Joann’s descriptions of how she came to recognize and respond to her call to the religious life, as well as the importance of joining an order where the women seemed happy. Her experiences characterize an emerging sense of self that encouraged her to look towards the future of her life and to travel independently over a thousand miles to find a resolution to her search. The call to the religious life was a collaborative effort, one requiring that she hear, listen, and respond to an internal questioning of her life, as well as the ability to recognize the journey she needed to take to find an answer to the call. She shares, “I think that is where God [comes in]—we have to trust that God is with us through the journey and that we’re not making decisions that aren’t for our betterment, for our growth.”

Periods of doubt and uncertainty presented themselves to Joann as she adjusted to the religious life. She recalls the rhythms and activities that filled her daily life, including theology classes, lectures on scripture, contemplative time, and regular physical work around the grounds and buildings of the Novitiate. Remembering that the regimen was strenuous at the time, as she looks back Joann recognizes that it was “doable.” She conveys with great fondness her initial exposure to the late Father Virgil Cordano, a Franciscan priest from the Santa Barbara Mission, who regularly taught scripture courses during her 2 years at the Novitiate. His insights, and frequently those of the other priests
who interfaced with the IHM Community, allowed her to reach a place of trusting that “life unfolds for us at different stages in our growth—that’s where the trust comes in for me.”

*Encountering and Engaging Patriarchy and Hierarchical Structures: Support from Others; Resting in Vision and Authority of Vatican II*

Joann admits that she was not aware when she entered the IHM Community that the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were influenced by a voice of patriarchal or ecclesiastical authority. She was “delighted” to take her vows and emphasizes that in her experience the vow of obedience did not imply “blind obedience [but] was obedience to God’s will as well as to your own gifts.” Moreover, because she “didn’t particularly think of the patriarchy” during the years leading up to the Vatican II Council, she had assumed that the rules and regulations guiding her life as an IHM had been designed by the hierarchy of the IHM Community. Thinking back on how her awareness was heightened about patriarchal authority following the calls for renewal by Vatican II, Joann provides particular insight into the voice of authority that was ruling the Los Angeles Archdiocese under the jurisdiction of Cardinal James McIntyre in the years leading up to Vatican II. The year was 1961, and Joann had just completed the initial 2 years at the Novitiate and was being driven by Mother Regina to her assignment at Queen of the Valley Hospital in West Covina, California. Accompanying them on the trip was Mother Regina’s niece, who was visiting from Ireland.

On their way to Joann’s new post, Mother Regina was required to stop at Cardinal McIntyre’s office in Los Angeles and invited her niece to accompany her into the building while Joann waited for them in the car. When the two returned to the car, Mother Regina briefly quipped to Joann, “‘You know, this is the first time I’ve talked to
him that he hasn’t shouted at me.” In retrospect, Joann assumes the presence of Mother Regina’s niece influenced Cardinal McIntyre’s behavior that day. However, it was not until several years following the incident that Joann was able to put Mother Regina’s comments into a broader context of understanding the history of Cardinal McIntyre’s behavior towards the IHM Community. Because she worked in one of the two hospitals that the IHMs opened and staffed, and which were both located outside the vicinity of Los Angeles, Joann did not experience the tight grip that Cardinal McIntyre had on the daily lives of the teaching sisters who were under his jurisdiction. She recalls frequent visits being made by Cardinal McIntyre and several of the L.A. Archdiocese bishops to the hospital, but overall believes that the Catholic Church had “nothing to do with what we did [in the hospital environment] . . . [like they did] in the schools . . . our situation was quite different than the teaching situation.”

Cardinal McIntyre’s vision was focused on opening as many Catholic grammar schools and high schools through the Los Angeles archdiocese as possible regardless of whether the nuns had experience as teachers. “He wanted us to take over more schools and we were not qualified. The older sisters could not retire when they wanted to. It was unjust. And he wanted more students in the classrooms, which was [also] unjust.”

Although Joann heard snippets of information about the problems in the Los Angeles Archdiocese from IHM Community members visiting the hospital, it was “Vatican II that brought it all to a totally different aspect of what we were dealing with, and what our community [the teachers in particular] had been dealing with for many years.”

Despite Cardinal McIntyre’s continuous threats and opposition to their Vatican II renewal efforts, Joann remembers that the IHM’s renewal process was carefully thought
out, planned, documented, and implemented. In particular, she remembers the liberating experience of no longer needing to secure a companion when attending appointments outside of the convent. Prior to Vatican II, women religious were obliged to have another nun accompany them on appointments, and if no one could be found they had to cancel their plans. “When you couldn’t find a companion to go with you to any kind of appointment, like the doctor’s office, you had to put things on hold. That was so restrictive.”

Sprinkled throughout Joann’s interview are distinctive moments when the late Father Virgil’s words and thoughts spring forth into her imagination and dialogue. Throughout her years as a professed Sister of the Immaculate Heart and later as a lay member of the Immaculate Heart Community, Joann was particularly guided and reassured by his reflections because they challenged the authoritarian attitudes and behavior of the Church. These interactions served as positive opportunities for her to engage with a member of the clergy in meaningful dialogue about her uncertainties and to question actions being taken by the hierarchical authority of the Catholic Church.

Joann describes the great respect that she had for the IHM leaders who pushed for educational opportunities for their teaching sisters despite protests from the Los Angeles Archdiocese. She also acknowledges the women who taught at the Immaculate Heart College for their work in designing the IHM’s responses to the Vatican II calls for renewal. Joann commends them for “their knowledge, and for their heart. They were good, holy women” who did not disobey the Church authorities, but who did what “they were supposed to be doing” in response to the Vatican II decrees.
Following the dispensation from canonical status, Joann’s adjustment to the lay life was different from that being faced by the IHM Community members who had taught in the Los Angeles schools. Not recognizing just how “safe” she was at that time, Joann has recognized through the years just how fortunate she was to secure employment with the hospital and to have been able to continue living in the same convent that she had been in since 1961 until relocating to Santa Barbara in 1981. Despite the uncertainty and hard times the teaching sisters went through, Joann is certain that in the end they found “better jobs and places to live. They were professional women and they had great reputations as teachers.”

One of the primary challenges Joann faced in the aftermath of choosing to be dispensed from canonical status was a concern that without the formal structure of the religious life that she and the others would go their “own way.” She recalls knowing that the transition would be difficult, but felt great uncertainty about whether there “would be a community left or not.” She smiles with appreciation that in her experience they ultimately “became much more of a community” despite the challenges they faced personally and collectively, and others’ beliefs that they would not survive as a lay ecumenical community. Joann states that the IHM Community may not have succeeded “if God hadn’t been with everybody, [as well as] the prayerfulness of everyone.” Although she “couldn’t quite figure out how we’d all get along and come together as an ecumenical community,” she affirms that her prayer life played a critical role in her ability to “wait and see how it would unfold.” She adds that “prayer doesn’t change the situation, but it changes us.”
Joann is clear that she and the others did not surrender their vows with God, but that they surrendered their formal canonical status within the Church. The failure of the Church to implement the progressive visions of Vatican II continues to sadden Joann:

“Vatican II should have been in the parishes, [being spoken about] instead of making it sound like it was something that it was not . . . it was meant to vitalize and revitalize the Church.” Even though the Vatican II changes were strongly supported by a large number of powerful and progressive-thinking clergy members (e.g., Father Virgil Cordano and Canadian Bishop Remi de Roo), Joann believes that “power” was at the heart of its limited implementation throughout the Church. She states, “Cardinal McIntyre was very influential . . . he sent a lot of money [to Rome]; he did not want the changes.”

The IHMs were confronted with a great deal of national media coverage about their actions and were routinely questioned by friends, family members, and members of other religious communities about their choices. Joann remembers her repeated efforts at Queen of the Valley Hospital to assure patients and their families that what she and the others had done did not mean that they were no longer a part of the Church. While many individuals remained unconvinced, Joann believes these attitudes were fundamentally “their problem, not ours.”

40 Years in Review: Moving beyond External Control, Reaching Towards Spiritual Growth

Joann believes that Sr. Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun, best describes the influence that the IHM’s actions have had on the Catholic Church. Joann refers to a letter sent to the Immaculate Heart Community several years ago by Sr. Chittister in which she acknowledges,

You are all doing a very important thing for the rest of us. You are stoking the
flames of the four great things that must be attended to in this century: community without walls, spirituality without infantilism, the poor without prejudice, and the planet without exploitation. I urge you to go on.

Joann grins as she recalls the recent threat of excommunication by the Vatican and their attempts to forbid Sr. Chittister to speak in Ireland about women’s ordination.

[Joan] told her community and they said, “well, if she’s excommunicated, we’re all excommunicated.” And so the Vatican backed down. She went to Ireland and spoke about women[‘s] ordination; that there’s no reason not to have it. You can have it.

Joann feels that the IHM’s pulling together and standing by one another during the last 5 years of the 1960s provided a viable role model for the Benedictines in 2008.

Joann describes the influence of the late Father Virgil’s insights and the way that his words put her “mind at ease” regarding the recent ordination of IHM member Jane Via. An attorney, theologian, wife, and mother of two grown sons, Jane was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in Switzerland in 2008. Fearing that Jane would be faced with excommunication, Joann approached Father Virgil, who told her “Joann, there’s no such thing as excommunication.” Joann needed to hear these words three times because she had “never heard that expression in my life.”

Joann shares the positive influence of another clergy member, a Franciscan priest from Arizona, who came to her dying niece’s bedside to administer a blessing. Joann’s niece, Pat, had been married in the Church, but later divorced her husband because “he was not around to take care of their children with her.” As a result of the divorce and a second marriage, Joann’s niece was not able to receive Communion. When the Franciscan arrived at Pat’s home, he offered an apology “for what our Church has done to you,” and then administered Communion to her. This apology made an impression on Joann, as well as on her niece’s children. Overall, Joann believes “that patriarchy [of the
Catholic Church] is being ignored . . . and that Christ didn’t intend our Church to have the Pope walk around with red shoes on and sit around the Vatican.” Stating that she believes Christ would find the current structure and activities of the Church as “foreign,” Joann emphasizes that “We [the people] are the Church; it isn’t Rome. We are the Church.”

Joann recognizes the uniqueness of the IHM Community in how they challenged the patriarchy of the Church and how they stood together 40 years ago. She also thinks her personal experiences could provide insight to contemporary women who are oppressed by hierarchical authority. In addition to a “rich spiritual life, with good spiritual readings,” a young woman particularly needs “to follow her heart” when taking a stand for her future. Joann frequently shares the role that prayer played for her personally during the challenges with the Church’s hierarchical authorities and the role that prayer continues to play in her life today.

I don’t set aside time for prayer . . . when I walk around I’m especially grateful for all of God’s beautiful creation[s]; the birds and the flowers and all. I think that is a prayer in and of itself. I think we have so much prayerfulness . . . our work and our meeting people, talking to people, our interaction with people, with dogs, with anything today is a treat.

Joann recently celebrated her 50th anniversary of having entered the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart in September 1959. During this half century, her journey as a woman in the Roman Catholic Church has changed and evolved in extraordinary ways. She muses that people need some form of community to get through life’s challenges and notes with great fondness that she continues to find community in “the Immaculate Heart and the Catholic Church. [But] not all of it, not as Rome would have us; that is not acceptable to me.”
Anita Daniel, IHM

The Call to Religious Life: Safety and Belonging

Anita’s journey to the Immaculate Heart Community may have begun when she was a very young girl living with her parents in Germany in the early 1930s. Because they were Jewish, her parents recognized the signs of inherent danger that were beginning to surface and decided to leave Germany in 1933. In the ensuing years, she and her parents were “forced to wander” from Paris to Spain and then to Portugal before making their way to the United States in 1941. Their decision to leave Portugal was precipitated by Hitler’s menacing presence in Spain and the sense that he would also move into Portugal. Before moving to America, Anita made a personal decision to convert to Catholicism when she was 8 years old.

By the time she was ready to attend high school, Anita and her parents had settled in Los Angeles and she had enrolled at Immaculate Heart High School. During her senior year, she wrote a paper on Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement, and as a result “became enamored of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin and all the people from the Catholic Worker.” As graduation approached, she began to imagine working as a social worker with Dorothy Day, but also “had this feeling that God wanted me to go to the convent.” Knowing that she needed to determine whether the life of a nun was her true calling, Anita decided to enter the Novitiate in September 1950 following her graduation from high school and despite the fact that her mother was “absolutely against my going.” When she entered the Novitiate at the age of 18, Anita was aware that she would leave “if it wasn’t for me.” She also knew that if her calling wasn’t as a woman religious, she would become a social worker in the Catholic Worker Movement.
As a new postulant, Anita recalls snippets of a conversation that she had with Mother Regina about the role of thinking. Anita found herself not wanting Mother Regina or anyone else to “have any power” over what she thought, and that she would “keep [her] own counsel.” She also knew that she didn’t want to “do anything overtly that would result in my getting kicked out,” figuring instead that “somebody would decide that maybe I wasn’t supposed to be there.” Ironically, Anita truly enjoyed living at the Novitiate because the experience “actually gave me back my childhood. I didn’t have to worry, I didn’t have to be afraid.” Throughout her childhood, Anita had held onto the hope that “when I grew up, I wouldn’t be afraid, because [as a child] I was always afraid.” Adding that “kids often think that their parents are all powerful,” Anita had already discovered as a 4-year-old living in a country governed by a political dictatorship that her parents did “not have much power.” Living in the Novitiate, Anita recalls the freedom of not looking “at newspapers; we didn’t read the current news—it was great.”

During her second year at the Novitiate, Anita and the others needed “to make up our minds whether or not we wanted to make our first vows.” As she pondered her decision, Anita had an informative dream:

My father and I left the Novitiate, and Mother Regina said to me, “If you get back before 5:00 tonight, we won’t even count that you’ve left all day.” I remember saying to my father, “we have to get back before 5:00, we have to get back by 5:00.” I was just trying and trying to get back by 5:00. I don’t remember if we got back by 5:00.

Waking from this dream, the first thing Anita saw was her habit hanging in a corner of her room. She recalls being “so grateful that my habit was there and I hadn’t left. And I thought, isn’t this the strangest thing. How come I’m so glad?” Anita believes the dream and her experience of feeling grateful when she awoke to see her habit were positive
signs to make the commitment to take her preliminary vows.

Anita explains that as a novice she renewed her preliminary vows annually for a period of 3 years before she was required to take her permanent vows. This 3-year period provided her with the time to regularly reflect on whether becoming a Sister of the Immaculate Heart was the right choice for her life. Thinking back to her earlier conversation with Mother Regina when she determined that she’d need to “keep her own counsel,” the decision to take her vows never interfered with her basic belief that “freedom of conscience has always been a fundamental right.” Anita’s choice to remain in the IHM Community never wavered even after her first year teaching in downtown Los Angeles, which was a “very hard and difficult year.” Once Anita recognized that she didn’t want to leave and because “no one was asking her to leave,” she came to the conclusion that becoming an IHM “was God’s will.”

_Encountering Patriarchy and Hierarchy: Observing Power and Authority_

Anita frames her experience of patriarchy by returning to powerful images from her childhood that clarify how she came to know about power and authority at too early of an age. Recalling that she felt unsafe and like a “foreigner,” for most of her life, she also learned who held the power by closely observing the world around her. After she and her family left Germany in 1933, they spent a short time in Majorca before her father found work as a Civil Engineer in Salamanca, Spain where they lived for roughly 4 years.

We were [in Majorca] for 9 months during the Spanish Civil War [which lasted from 1936 until 1939] before we were able to get out. It was very dangerous in those days, because [the government officials] were killing like 10 people a day at the local jail. [In the early days of this war, over 50,000 people who were caught on the “wrong” side of the lines were assassinated or executed.]

One day, Anita observed members of The United Spanish Proletarian Party
(UHP) demonstrating with raised fists chanting “UHP.” Once the demonstration was over, she returned to her home with a group of young friends and proceeded to lead them up her apartment building stairwell chanting “UHP.” She still remembers the image of that stairwell. As she and her young friends mounted the stairs, Anita suddenly looked up and I see this man in a three-cornered hat, the Guardia Civil, coming out of what I am pretty sure is our apartment. I remember stopping stock still. I knew—even then, I knew this was not something I should be doing. I didn’t realize how serious it was. [The Guardia Civil, the Spanish Civil Guard, was accused of war crimes, torture, and atrocities during the Spanish Civil War.]

Anita notes, “They took my father. I saw it all. So I knew that [my parents] were powerless in that situation.” Somehow her mother helped secure her father’s release and he returned home physically unharmed.

Following this incident, Anita took the opportunity to ask her father, “Who has the power—who rules the most—who has it?” because she realized by this point in her young life that the “government had nothing to do with the people.”

Anita’s unique background living as a child in pre-World War II Europe taught her about physical and psychological “borders,” what it meant to be a “foreigner,” and how these variables affect one’s ability to challenge and question authority structures. Understanding patriarchy and power from this vantage point, Anita explains that at the time of taking her vows, she thought of them as “promises to God, that you lived this kind of life, and this was God’s will. I don’t think I thought [taking the vows] was the Church’s thing.”

In general, Anita found her teaching experiences in the parish schools to have been rewarding and positive. “In most cases we were given free rein [because the IHMs] were really good school teachers and we were pretty much free to teach the way we
thought.” The parish priests were easy to get along with and most of them were “very involved with the kids.” If there were challenges, she and the other IHMs “figured out how to deal with [them].” Anita recalls a particular experience to illustrate how the IHMs typically went about handling difficult situations with the parish priests. During the mid-1960s, the school where she was teaching was invited to participate in a Knights of Columbus-sponsored catechism contest. Unbeknownst to the parish pastor, the IHMs teaching at that school had decided long before the contest to not use the conservative Baltimore Catechism system to teach their students about the Catholic faith.

The kids from our school answered the questions in their own words. However, the students who won the contest had been strictly taught from the Baltimore approach and answered directly from the book. Our priest was so upset and asked, “Where are the Baltimore Catechisms? Where are they?” Well they were in the closet, so he insisted on having them put out. That’s a different kind of patriarchy because he insisted on [us] putting them back into the kids’ desks. Well they [went] back into the kids’ desks, but the teachers didn’t change the way they taught.

The Baltimore system was based on rote memorization of facts rather than discussion and the creation of meaning about Catholicism. However, the IHM’s approach to education was one that encouraged their students to both think through and to formulate personal understandings of the class material.

*Questioning and Engaging Patriarchy/Hierarchy: Knowing History, Receiving Education, Corruption of Power*

Anita emphasizes that even though the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart Community was founded by a Spanish cleric, its history “started with women [who] carried it on; they were the ones who went forward with it.” When she entered the IHM Community in 1950, Anita recognized that “our Community had strong women” as members and they were typically exposed to “a lot of creative thinking,” and in regular
“contact with people who were thinking.” Moreover, the “[IHM] Community was always ahead” of the curve when it came to education, teaching, and encouraging their members and students to think for themselves and to reach their own conclusions. Anita believes that American women religious typically tended to take stronger advantage of educational opportunities than the clergy who remained “stuck in whatever education they got at the seminary.”

Anita acknowledges the historical roles played by the first bishops (both immigrants from Europe) in the United States, John Carroll during the 1750s and John Newmann during the 1850s. Both men worked tirelessly to steer the American Catholic Church away from becoming a national Church. Because of their knowledge of the American Constitution and Bill of Rights, both of the bishops understood the movement that was underway in the United States for “a new kind of country.” Anita explains that the history of the Catholic Church in the United States has been strongly influenced by America’s fight for democratic ideals. Moreover, the IHM’s confrontation with Cardinal McIntyre and the Vatican during the 1960s was ignited by the continuing movement towards attaining gender equality within the Church. Because of their access to education and exposure to the forward-thinking ideas of so many of the theologians at that time, the IHMs were knowledgeable about their rights as a Pontifical Institute and were inspired to move forward in questioning the traditional thinking of the Church.

Because “power is such a strange thing,” Anita believes that people can be ruined by its effects in their lives. She clarifies that the role of the Pope is intended to be “The Servant of the Servants of God,” and to be the “servant to everybody.” Adding that popes often “forget” that this is their role, they incorrectly presume they “have the power and
therefore everybody has to obey them.” Reflecting on Cardinal McIntyre, Anita recalls that prior to being made a cardinal, then Archbishop McIntyre would often visit the downtown Los Angeles school where she taught and would take the time to stop by to talk with the students.

He was just coming in at that time [to the Los Angeles Archdiocese], and I think this happens to all of them, while they still have some contact with the real people they’re one way, then all of a sudden they get in these ivory towers and it becomes a whole other thing.

Anita remembers the cardinal being “good with the kids” and because they had a difficult time greeting him as “His Eminence,” they instead greeted him with “Hello Father.” She does not recall the cardinal taking exception to the less formal greeting. In Anita’s opinion, the situation in which Cardinal McIntyre became embroiled with the IHMs is somewhat understandable when seen from his perspective. As cardinal, he “was looking out for his schools; he wanted his schools to have teachers; he had worked very hard to build up the school system [in Los Angeles].” Moreover, because “he wanted religious [women teaching] in his school, in his interpretation, a [traditional] habit was essential for that.”

Anita underscores a frequent dynamic that often arises between context and power, and the consequences of that dynamic on the ways that people choose to interface with one another. She recalls when the cardinal’s chancellor, Monsignor Benjamin Hawkes, “was just a parish priest,” who she first met through her own father when he worked as a Civil Engineer during the construction of the Church where then Father Hawkes was assigned. Knowing him in the “context of just [being] a parish priest working in a parish,” he seemed like a good person. However, Anita specifies that people are “never all the same on one level; it’s possible to have a good experience with
somebody who isn’t all that good.” In his later role as the cardinal’s “right hand man”
during the historical events with the IHMs, Anita remembers Monsignor Hawkes
routinely delivering threatening ultimatums from the cardinal to the IHM Community as
they experimented with the Vatican II decrees.

Anita points out that “some of the women” who were placed in IHM leadership
positions “did forget” that they had also been placed in roles of service. She attributes
their behavior to not being “ready for that kind of leadership.” One of the ways Anita
dealt with individuals who misused their power was to “to go around [them].” Pointing
out what she learned when she was a child living in Portugal, Anita explains,

If you looked at [then dictator] Salazar, the government and the police structures,
that was one thing; but if you looked at the people, it was a whole different
[experience]. The people were very nice and good. As long as you didn’t have to
deal with the government and Salazar, you were okay.

Anita further clarifies the paradoxical nature of power and what happens to people who
become jaded by power:

When Salazar first came in as an economist, he was an okay guy. And I suppose
as dictators go, he was benevolent in some ways. But because there was not a
huge army, I don’t know what you had to do to run afoul of [the government’s
authority], but you learned how to live with that. Compared to Hitler and Franco,
Salazar was pretty good.

*Moving Away from the Confines of Patriarchal/Hierarchical Structures: Power within
Community, Politics, and Prejudice*

Anita explains, with a somewhat wry tone, that having lived in three countries
with dictators, the IHM’s experiences during the 1960s with the hierarchy of the Catholic
Church were far worse than any of her earlier experiences. She duly noted her
observations in a written report that was submitted to the Los Angeles Chancery and that
remains stored in the diocesan archives in downtown Los Angeles. Anita points out that it
was not only the IHM Community members who were hurt by the crisis that erupted with Cardinal McIntyre. The students in the schools where the IHMs taught as well as their families were also painfully affected. Anita recalls the particularly difficult time in 1968 when Cardinal McIntyre forced the IHMs out of their schools and replaced them with other religious communities. At that time, Anita was teaching at Our Lady Queen of Angels parish in downtown Los Angeles. This is the only parish school that Cardinal McIntyre closed.

Anita believes the cardinal’s decision to close Our Lady Queen of Angels was the result of “politics” and “prejudice,” because the membership of the parish was comprised of predominately low income Mexican-American families who “in those days” weren’t inclined to challenge the cardinal’s authority. Describing the school’s lay and religious faculty as excellent, and the students as “really good kids,” Anita still remembers how much she “loved those kids.” She also recalls with pride and a soft smile that, unbeknownst to the faculty, the student body officers “picket[ed] in front of the cardinal’s place,” about the closing of their school.

Anita clarifies that until they became members of a lay community, she and the other IHMs had not been responsible for their own finances, housing, and meals.

You never saw your paycheck [because it went into a common pool]; you were fully taken care of, you ate three times a day, you had a roof over your head, the parish gave the convent a car along with a card for gas.

During the process of moving away from the traditional structures that had defined their lives as religious women, she and the others often struggled to “keep body and soul together.” Because of the types of challenges they faced when evicted from their schools in 1968 and after receiving their dispensations in 1970, she and the others did not have
the luxury of

think[ing] too philosophically at that point. We were trying to get a job, find a car, [find] a place to live, [learn] how to dress ourselves . . . [be responsible for] our prayer life. All the nitty gritty things of life came together at one point and we had to figure out how to deal with them.

Once they became lay women and were faced with the personal task of securing employment and housing, Anita emphasizes that staying together as a community remained at the forefront of their personal and communal decisions (e.g., planning schedules to have some meals during the week together, as well as budgeting time for communal prayer and personal prayer).

Anita recalls the point when she and the other IHMs recognized that that “there was no way out” of their dilemma other than to surrender their formal canonical status. In her opinion, reaching this unfortunate decision was painful and agonizing due to an illogical sequence of events generated by individuals telling the IHMs how to live their lives and what to do with their vows to God. Moreover, Anita believes that because members of the hierarchy were afraid of a negative turn of events, they made the repercussions to the IHMs as “drastic as possible so that other [religious] communities wouldn’t follow” in the IHM Community’s footsteps. Despite the hierarchy’s attempts to control the course of history, by the early 1970s droves of women religious left their communities to pursue lives as lay women.

40 Years in Review: The Paradox of Freedom

Anita does not believe that the results of the IHM’s actions can be viewed from the perspective of the “whole Catholic Church.” Instead, she thinks it is more advisable to look at the repercussions, both negative and positive, felt inside the homes of the parishioners and the families of the IHM Community members. She explains that for
many Catholic families whose children were receiving a good education and had been happy with the schools, losing the entire teaching faculty elicited a wide range of emotions. From her experience, Anita found the laity’s reactions ranged anywhere from supportive and understanding to resentful and angry because the IHM’s actions were seen as “selfish.” Similarly, the reactions of IHM Community members’ families were equally diverse and often influenced how the IHMs navigated through the various phases of the crisis.

In Anita’s experience, it was very helpful to receive the support from “anyone on our side,” and she acknowledges the influence of German theologians Bernard Häring, who encouraged a “new approach to Catholic moral theology,” and Hans Küng, who served as an expert at Vatican II. She also recalls the influence of reading the books by American priest and sociologist, Andrew Greeley. Anita particularly recalls how nice it felt when somebody [from outside the IHM Community] could step back and give you a different perspective, [because] when you’re in a situation like this it’s almost like you can’t see the forest for the trees; you go forth and think you are doing what’s right, but not everything you think is necessarily right.

Noting that she is uncertain how the IHM’s actions can influence or transform “patriarchal” structures, Anita does believe that their actions can help individuals understand how to question “oppressive systems” and to challenge hypocrisy. She begins by identifying the hypocrisy of current members of the Christian Right who identify themselves as Christians yet act in very un-Christian ways, as well as members of the Family Values movement who [preach the Christian message] but are “doing everything terrible in their homes.” Through their personal/communal experiences, the IHMs discovered the value of looking at what others
are saying, [i.e., how they may twist things around], and [then] take a look at those individuals’ lives. If you have a democracy, you have to be very careful that freedom is really listened to and protected because democracy ultimately demands looking at the human condition.

In the case of Cardinal McIntyre, Anita believes that there was no room for the IHMs to question his perceptions “because that was how he saw his authority.” Instead, they were forced to confront the cardinal’s view of reality, a view that “allow[ed] him to question what was being told to him [at Vatican II],” and to then reach the decision of saying “No” to the Pope’s authority. Moreover, while the cardinal attempted to usurp the IHM’s newly sanctioned authority, no one at the top of the hierarchical structure chose to challenge or stop the cardinal’s actions.

Mary Fay-Zenk, IHM

_The Call to Religious Life: Community, Independence, Integrity_

Mary does not describe her decision to become a Sister of the Immaculate Heart (IHM) to have been due to “the kind of calling that other people talked about,” as in a “religious vocation.” In her experience, her desire to join was “more of [a] yearning to be part of something bigger than yourself, where you could really contribute and not be a cog in the wheel.” When she weighed the options that were available to young women at that time, namely to go to college and then to marry, Mary felt “they were surrendering their own lives and I did not want to do that. I wanted to be more of an individual. I wanted to do something with my life that was worthwhile.” By choosing to become an IHM, Mary found herself joining a “community of women who were really making a difference in many people’s lives.” In retrospect, she was particularly impressed “that these women were all individuals.” When Mary entered the Novitiate in 1961, she was “just short of turning 18 years old.” Even though her mother felt Mary was still quite
young to be making this kind of decision, “she would never have stood in my way [and] she probably thought I was unduly influenced by the people that had taught me in high school.”

Because she loved school, was a good student, and enjoyed working with people, Mary saw a natural fit with the dreams for her life and what she saw available as an IHM. As the fourth of eight children, Mary had grown up in New York before she and her family moved to Los Angeles when she was 13. Living in Los Angeles provided Mary with the opportunity to attend Immaculate Heart High School, where she became intrigued by the IHMs who taught her. Mary remembers being “happily shocked” during a religion class when her teacher asked the class to “think about” the issues that were being presented. She found the school’s principal, Mother Eucharia, to be “gracious, welcoming, and she modeled camaraderie, warmth, and hospitality.”

Overall, Mary found the IHMs to be “real live people who had their own personalities and [yet] they still worked as a whole.” Mary was particularly impressed by their ability to be individuals and to live together in community. Having been encouraged by her parents to be independent, Mary discovered at a young age how to manage the complex dynamics that were integral to the large family environment where “you have all these [different types of] relationships to your brothers [and] sisters as well as to your parents.” Perhaps because Mary had grown up in a large family, fitting into the community life and maintaining her independent nature was not an overly difficult transition for her.

Mary remembers the experience of taking her preliminary vows in 1963 as one that confirmed her choice to “to continue in this community; of committing” herself to
living inside of community based on a simpler life working for the common good. She
did not feel she was committing to the Catholic Church, but more so to the Sisters of the
Immaculate Heart of California. Mary describes how she understood the vows of poverty,
chastity, and obedience. The vow of poverty was about “living simply, not claiming [or]
accumulating things for your own.” In order to have the needed focus for the life of “a
community member, as an individual,” the vow of chastity was a conscious choice to not
be married and distracted by the demands of marriage. The vow of obedience was mired
in the idea “of working for the common good.” Mary emphasizes that she did not find
anything “denigrating” about the vow of obedience, nor did she “worry” that the leaders
of the IHM Community would insist that she do anything “foolish.” In her experience,
the vow of obedience was not a “vow to any bishop; it was a vow to God,” that would be
realized as a member of the IHM Community.

Encountering Patriarchal/Hierarchical Structures: Preparation, Disappointment, Awareness

Unlike the experiences of many women who entered the IHM Community before
her, after 2 years at the Novitiate, Mary went to Immaculate Heart College for 3 years
and completed her BA degree. As a result of extensive planning, the IHMs had succeeded
in instituting their long-term vision of educating and preparing IHM Community
members prior to entering the classroom setting. Unfortunately, this vision was short-
lived because the IHMs in Los Angeles were forced to leave their schools in 1968 and
later received their dispensations in 1970. One of a small number of IHM Community
members who were able to graduate prior to teaching, Mary considers herself “lucky” to
have had the opportunity to enter the classroom so well prepared.

Thinking back on the internal power structures of the IHM Community, Mary did
not find them to be imposing because of their focus on the “good of the whole.” She found the structures to be “orderly and understandable,” and basically what she “expected” they would be before entering the Novitiate. Although Mary knew there were many “harsh” superiors, she was not personally subjected to any difficult personalities or abusive behavior. Other than one principal whom Mary found to be “less creative and less daring” as an educator, her overall experience with superiors was “very positive.” Mary felt supported and encouraged to be creative and to plan interesting activities for her students.

Because the term *patriarchy* can be used “pejoratively,” Mary is mindful in how she describes her experiences of the power structures of the Catholic Church. She explains that “patriarchy in 1950 did not have the negative feel it does today.” When thinking of a “capital ‘P’ patriarch,” Mary describes the image of “supposedly wise men [from] the Old Testament, who held things together for the group.” From a more contemporary perspective, Mary views the system of patriarchy “as a negative system, where the power is in the hands of a few who make it a club, and they don’t share. This club happens to be almost exclusively male in the Church.” However, Mary recognizes that “some women [also] belong to that patriarchal club. They just join with the guys.”

By the time Mary took her final vows in the summer of 1968, the IHMs were in the process of making changes in response to Vatican II’s call for renewal and had been wearing lay clothes for almost a year. However, amidst the semblance of a post-Vatican II desire for renewal within the Catholic Church, in 1968 Pope Paul VI also issued the infamous encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* (Latin for Human Life). The encyclical reiterated the Church’s long-standing teaching that condemned artificial birth control. This
encyclical clearly stated that it was intrinsically wrong (i.e., a sin) to use contraception to prevent new human beings from coming into existence. As a result of this decree, the bishop who came to celebrate the Mass for Mary’s final vow ceremony based his homily on the topic of birth control. Presuming that the clergy’s choice of topic reflected an expectation that she and the others would support the decree, Mary remembers that “one of the young women just started to laugh and the bench started shaking. It was pretty awful. It was a sight.” While the laughter helped to “relieve the pressure of the discomfort and the irony of the situation,” Mary ultimately found the choice of homily topic to be a “sad” reflection of disconnection and unawareness on the part of the Church.

Because there were more positive and relevant topics that could have been chosen for their final vow ceremony, Mary defines this as her “worst experience of patriarchy at that time, because [the topic] was on his wavelength, not ours.” Instead of being aware of the needs of the newly professed women, [the bishop] was completely immersed in his own world [and he] was a thousand steps removed.” In her opinion, this pattern of behavior is a “big part of patriarchy [where] their club’s agenda is the only agenda.” She and the others were greatly relieved that their families were not present to witness the clergy’s inability to “dignify anything about the choices we were making.” Despite this experience, Mary made her final vows because they “were promises that were required to make me a full part of the community, not the bishop’s club.” Mary further notes that these were the kinds of mistakes being made by the hierarchy of the Church that inevitably prepared the IHMs for what was to come in 1970 when they had no other choice but to surrender their canonical status.

Mary offers valuable insights on how the encyclical for “natural birth control”
caused many Catholics to leave the Church because “it didn’t make any sense [nor] did it jibe with real life for people, especially women,” who were faced with the choice of leaving the Church or staying but ignoring the decrees. Ultimately, the Church lost its connection to many members of the laity and religious communities because it was no longer serving or involving them in making critical decisions about activities that affected their lives. By losing so many members, Mary believes the Church lost its “influence [because] having influence is where you want to use your power and use it for good.”

Recalling the influence of Vatican II on issues of social justice and ecumenism, Mary regrets that its full potential was not realized.

Mary describes another formative experience that occurred in 1968 when she attended a mandatory group interview with 125 to 150 other IHMs who had flown to Los Angeles from as far as Canada, Arizona, and Texas, or had driven from several locations within California. The interview was with “three bishops and the Apostolic Delegate [who] were sent to do a group interview with us,” regarding the IHM Community’s continuing changes in response to the Vatican II decrees for renewal. The meeting was held in a large parlor, and Mary recalls the “placating, condescending tone” of one the bishops who began the interview by saying ‘We’re so grateful that you all came. We’re gathered here to see if we can’t work things out. We want to know what you think. We want to know what’s going on. We all came here to listen to you.’ ” When he queried if there were any questions, Mary was one of the few to raise her hand. She asked, “Well, the thing I don’t understand Bishop, is that as a Pontifical Institute, do we have the authority or don’t we have the authority to make these changes?” Her question was followed by a “stunned silence in the room,” and then the bishop answered, “Oh, Sister,
you are so naive.’ ”

From this experience, Mary realized that the IHMs did not truly have the power to make the changes they were suggesting despite their status as a Pontifical Institute. As a Pontifical Institute, they would not be required to report to the local authority of the Archdiocese, but instead report to the authority of the Vatican. Because the decrees for renewal were issued by the Vatican, it had always been the IHM’s assumption that they were in fact adhering to the appropriate chain of command. Remembering that “everyone in the room couldn’t believe” the response that Mary had received from the bishop, Mary acknowledges that she was “very naive [to have] thought that what the Vatican II documents said on paper was what they meant.” Recognizing that she “should have known that they had or wanted all the power,” Mary realized that “they weren’t really going to give any Pontifical Institute any independence or authority. It was naive of me to think that authority is different from power.” Because Cardinal McIntyre had such extensive power and authority in Los Angeles and in Rome, “nobody was going to question his right to exercise his power.”

Looking back on who or what could have possibly challenged Cardinal McIntyre’s position, Mary offers two possibilities: (a) Should he have been committed to rectifying the IHM’s plight, the Pope would have had enough leverage to counter the combined authority and power of Cardinal McIntyre; or (b) a collaborative tour de force by a majority of the American bishops telling the cardinal “This is not wise,” may also have been a strong enough block to his grab for power. The situation may have been different had Pope John XXIII still been the Pope, but Mary is cognizant of the role that fear played in the inevitable outcome. This was a fear that promoted strategic thinking
What would happen if we let this one group, who didn’t kowtow, remain canonical? If we had this instance where we didn’t support the cardinal in this difficulty with a group of women, what would happen next? And that’s a fear.

Recognizing that even though she was quite young during this time period, Mary also knows that the IHMs were not “upstarts; we were simply taking the next step” in their evolution as a community.

*Moving Away from the Confines of Patriarchal/Hierarchical Structures: Sadness, Betrayal, Determination*

Mary describes the experience of surrendering their canonical status as a mixture of sadness and betrayal “because it was an acknowledgement that the Church was not the Church we wanted, that we thought we knew where we were; [yet] it just really wasn’t there, and we didn’t have the power.” Mary sheds light on the Catch-22 situation that the IHMs found themselves in as a result of the Vatican II decrees. On the one hand, they were encouraged to imagine, design, and improve the ways in which they worked as a religious community within the modern world. Yet, on the other hand, the experience was similar to being “led down one path, and then being told no, there’s a closed door there; you can’t do that; you can’t go there.”

What was particularly challenging for Mary was bearing witness to the older IHMs going through the changes. For example, Mother Eucharia, who had been such a strong vibrant woman when Mary attended Immaculate Heart High School, “never really recovered” from the experience of losing canonical status. Once it became clear that the situation had escalated and was no longer in their control, Mary and the others knew that it was inevitable that “they had to let it go.” Because Mary did not teach in the Los Angeles Archdiocese, she wasn’t forced to leave her school, nor did she lose her job like
the women in Los Angeles who “were completely uprooted. They had no jobs; they had no place to go.” Even after receiving her dispensation and surrendering her vows, Mary was able to continue working at the same parochial school in San Luis Obispo, California, where she had been teaching for a few years. Perhaps saved by her age and youth, Mary did not “have anger directed at the institutional Church,” thinking instead that the cardinal’s actions reflected that he “was elderly, afraid, and powerful.”

Because she did not find the act of letting go of her canonical status particularly difficult, Mary was mostly intrigued by the IHM’s plans to form a lay religious community which she found “adventuresome . . . to be part of something so totally new.” By surrendering their canonical status the IHMs also took themselves out of the power structure of the institutional Church, an act that enabled them “to move toward forming the new [lay] community.” In Mary’s experience there was always an underlying sense of continuity as she and the others moved away from the canonical form of religious community and towards the formation of the lay religious community. The dual actions of moving away from tradition and then moving towards change ultimately helped to facilitate an evolving sense of a lay self and a lay community.

Mary is clear that most of the psychological challenges of constructing a lay community were positive, but concedes that dealing with the reactions of family members was very challenging for many community members. Although Mary’s father had already passed away by the time she received her dispensations, her mother did not like [our actions] much. She was more critical of the IHMs than my dad would have ever been. My dad was much more liberal-minded and my mom was a very traditional Catholic. She was tolerant of [our actions], but she didn’t like it. She would have been happier if we hadn’t done these things . . . it was hard building a connection that she would understand about why I would stay part of the [lay] community [which she felt] flew in the face of the Church.
The Church that Mary loved when she entered the IHM Community was similar to her father’s voice that promoted “a grace-filled life, to be a happy person, [to] do good for others.” Being told by the bishop in 1968 that she was “naive” and later learning that she would not be able to exercise her “own authority” helped Mary recognize that although she still wanted to be “part of the Church,” she did not like “this voice [saying] ‘we want you to do whatever we want you to do.’ ” This voice interfered with the goals that were important to Mary and what she had learned from her father when she was 10: “The purpose of rules is much more important the rule itself [and] the rule is less important than doing the good thing.” In Mary’s experience, Vatican II was asking people to do the good thing through questioning, challenging, and changing practices that were preventing others from “reaching their own dignity.” If someone was being prevented from achieving their dignity because of a condition, rule, or practice, then change was required.

Noting the value and importance that one of her personal champions, Anita Caspary, played in her life and the IHM Community, Mary was inspired by Anita’s conclusions about the IHM’s experiences. “In order to be comfortable with who we are, who we thought we were, and who we wanted to be, we had to remove ourselves from their power.” Mary also acknowledges the vigilance and support provided by the late Father Virgil Cordano, who she believes “shared every bit of our sadness, maybe more of it,” as well as Father Martin, who was the chaplain at the high school when Mary attended Immaculate Heart High School. She describes Father Martin as a “very conservative man” who had previously served as a prison chaplain. When the IHM
Community began to go through their “tough times, he [also] stuck with us.” Both Fathers Virgil and Martin were “profoundly affected” by the IHM Community’s experiences, they “thought this is not right,” and thus decided to “walk this tightrope [with us] and it was very difficult [for them too].”

In the end, Mary and the other IHMs learned that Cardinal McIntyre had much more authority and power than they were aware of at the beginning of their journey in 1963. Recalling a paper she wrote in college on the topic of authority, Mary explains that “authority is when you choose something [by becoming] your own author; that is how you claim who you are. No one else can claim it for you.” While the bishop officiating at the mandatory meeting in 1968 inferred that she was “naive” to think she could exercise her own authority, Mary in fact acquired the wherewithal to be the author of her own life because of the IHM’s experiences. Reflecting on how their experiences can help contemporary women, Mary notes that while a woman may not know at the outset what she will gain from actions that she takes, she believes that the uncertainty is “part of the excitement, and it’s part of the challenge.” In Mary’s case, leaving the formal structures of the Church and surrendering her canonical status provided her with the freedom to later marry her husband, Joe, with whom she has created a fulfilling life.

Although she is not entirely certain that the IHM’s experiences ultimately affected the authority of the Church, Mary is hopeful that their experiences can help guide contemporary women who are encountering patriarchal thinking and structures. She points out that it is critical for women to know at the outset of a crisis that they will survive . . . you can survive although it’s hard to keep tackling things. Now 40 years later, many of the things [we were confronting] have been tackled. But there are always new challenges that arise. Every time you move to a different stage there’s something else that needs to be dealt with. But that’s life and living; it’s
nothing different from what people have to deal with all the time.

Adding that contemporary women encountering authority need to “be in tune with their own power,” Mary is clear that they also need to “affirm what [they] are [going] after,” by remaining conscious and aware of their goals and dreams. “I think this is very important, because [women] submerge so much.”

When reflecting on the current Vatican investigation of women’s religious communities in the United States, Mary wonders what could inspire Mother Mary Clare Millea to head the investigation. It is reported that by mid-2011, Mother Millea will submit a confidential report to the Vatican on the state of each of approximately 400 women’s religious orders and provide her recommendations. Mary muses that in order for Mother Millea to undertake this type of investigation, she “must be part of the [patriarchal] club”; otherwise why would she take on that job?

Mary concludes that if women “want to be part of a hierarchical type of Church structure,” the IHM’s experiences may be able to lend insight on how not to do it. If [women] want to claim their own space within the Church, there’s a way to do that, even if you are not part of the formal structure of the Church . . . it’s [about] redefining what it means to be part of the Church.

Adding that the current Pope (Benedict XVI) and some of the new priests emerging from seminaries are “not bad people,” Mary clarifies that “they are [however] in the club. They may have very good reasons for being in the club, but they’re in it [nonetheless].”

Julie Friese, IHM

The Call to Religious Life: Confidence and Excitement

When Julie entered the IHM Community in September, 1952 at the age of 19, she had completed her freshman year at the Immaculate Heart College and had known since
grammar school that she wanted to be a Sister of the Immaculate Heart. She equates her
calling to the religious life to a feeling that “God had given me many gifts, many talents,
and that I should return them to Him, and use them, in a sense, for others.” Julie’s
decision was reinforced when she met with Mother General Regina McPartlin to discuss
her desire to join the IHM Community and who acknowledged that Julie indeed had a
“vocation to the religious life.” Because Julie had been educated by the Immaculate
Hearts beginning in kindergarten and on through college, “it never entered my mind that
it would ever be another community” that she would join. She was particularly drawn to
the IHM’s “modern” approach to religious life; and because she wanted to be a teacher,
their commitment to providing quality education also influenced her decision.

Julie characterizes her parents as “remarkable” people who both supported her in
pursuing what she wanted to do in her life. She was encouraged by her father, whom Julie
describes as a “feminist advocate,” to look beyond the more traditional careers available
to women at that time (e.g., teaching and nursing) when planning for her future. He told
her “anything you want to do, you can.” Her mother was “not really too happy” with her
decision to enter the religious life because she “felt I could do a lot of other things [that]
would have been better [choices].” Julie knew, however, that she wanted to be a nun and
a teacher, and from the day she entered the Novitiate on September 15, 1952, she never
doubted her choice. Because she had a sense that she was a “natural teacher,” Julie could
“hardly wait” until she was in the classroom even though she had not received any formal
training as a teacher. Falling back on her aptitude as a student and her love of school,
Julie began teaching as she had been taught. In retrospect, Julie realizes her initial
approach “was pretty old fashioned,” but one that she was able to change very quickly as
she acclimated to her role as the teacher rather than as a student in the classroom.

In her experience, taking the preliminary and final vows followed a “very logical” process. Most importantly, when Julie took her final vows she realized that she had made the “final commitment” to God through the Immaculate Heart Community—a commitment to be a “point of service to the laity.” At that time, she did not view the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to be infused with patriarchal thinking, but that they more reflected “a wonderful [Church] tradition.” Julie explains that during the early 1950s, we [the IHMs] weren’t really much into reading the signs of the times. We kind of looked at it backwards rather than forwards; [yet] we were very forward thinking as an educational community . . . and were very much in demand.

*Encountering and Questioning Patriarchal and Hierarchal Structures: Demanding Education and Preparedness*

While Julie originally equated patriarchy to the “patriarchs in the Bible, who were the heads, and always men of course,” she recognizes now that it clearly “denotes an exclusion of women in terms of things that affect them.” She also recognizes that the Catholic Church has been traditionally ruled by men “as a closed society, a kind of closed corporation,” that has excluded religious women. When she entered the order, Julie was aware of patriarchy in an “indirect way,” but came to understand it differently as a result of the IHM’s experiences during the late 1960s. However, it was very clear from the beginning when she taught at little mission houses and in parochial schools, that the pastor was the person in charge. And that man—and what he said—went. If your classroom was already overcrowded, and he wanted to put three more kids in it, he just did it.

Although these experiences were not necessarily “bad” in Julie’s opinion, she quickly learned how the power structure worked “in terms of the archbishop, and the bishops, and
then the pastors. That was the way the structure [worked].”

Julie notes that the IHM leadership and Community members “wanted to change things within religious life” well in advance of the Vatican II decrees for renewal in 1963. Because it had been “par for the course at that time” to place sisters in classrooms regardless of their preparation as teachers, the IHM’s “risk-taking” behavior questioned and challenged the traditional approach of filling teacher “slots with bodies [when] some bodies could teach and some bodies couldn’t.” The IHM’s approach was designed to send their members for the necessary education before placing them in classrooms so that they were “fully prepared with a credential, with a BA [degree],” and had acquired familiarity with teaching theory and procedures. The ramifications of the IHM’s plan, however, directly challenged Cardinal McIntyre’s grander vision to build more schools in the Los Angeles area and to fill those schools with as many sisters as possible. Unfortunately, the IHMs were only able to implement their plan for about 2 years before the problems with Cardinal McIntyre began to augment. At that point, the IHMs were forced out of their schools because the cardinal opposed their educational preparation plan, as well as their changes to and experimentation with the structures of religious life. Having already been placed in several teaching positions by the time the IHM’s education plan was finally implemented, Julie jokes that it ultimately “took 26 years to get my BA,” even though she was teaching full time. In order to help community members who were struggling with their assigned classes, the better prepared sisters who lived in the mission houses or convents would often provide needed tutoring to those who were struggling. “In those days [the ill-preparedness of teachers] was one of the biggest problems that we wanted to change.”
Looking back, Julie recognizes that the IHM Community faced a plethora of challenges beginning in the late 1950s as a result of their vision to provide their teaching sisters with the proper training. By the time they were ready to implement their educational preparedness plan, the IHMs were regularly confronted by many “Catholics in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles” who resented them for not doing “what the cardinal said.” Julie found that many people naively assumed that once “you put on a habit, you automatically got by osmosis all this knowledge, ability, and techniques for teaching; but it doesn’t happen that way.” She speculates that the IHM’s vision to not send ill-prepared teachers into classrooms also meant that the Church authorities “didn’t have all this cheap labor, and there’s no question, we were cheap labor for the Church.” According to Julie, at that time the IHMs typically earned approximately $100 per month in salary, but did not receive the money directly. Instead, the monies were sent to the Order’s procurator who was responsible for managing their finances and budget. Half of the money was dedicated to the maintenance of the Mother House and the continuation of the Immaculate Heart College, with the remainder being allocated to the parish or schools where they taught. “You never saw the money; you didn’t have it. The pastor provided [access to] a place to live, the convent, and [the use of] a car.”

In the beginning, Julie and the others did not realize they were a cheap labor force for the Church because their work was seen as “part of the gift [that] you’re here to serve.” Only later did they begin to recognize the disparities: “There’s all kinds of things we never had—Social Security, retirement, health benefits.” While the IHM Community’s long-term philosophy was that “no one was going to be without being cared for in their old age . . . because you had given your life to the Community,” their
decision to challenge the cardinal’s authority placed them in a precarious position for their then current livelihood and in providing for their future financial security. Ultimately, when the IHMs received their dispensations in 1970, each woman faced the reality of being on her own and responsible for herself: “It was overwhelming to some people, absolutely overwhelming; while [others] did very well” in learning how to plan for health care, to set money aside for retirement, to attend to personal finances, and most importantly to secure employment.

Moving Away from the Confines of the Patriarchal and Hierarchical Structures: Tenacity, Conviction, and Community

Julie notes that when the time came to surrender their canonical status, “everybody knew it was coming . . . we had talked about it for so long and had been constantly meeting about all the changes that we were [making].” She recalls a pivotal moment when former Mother General Anita Caspary “stood up at a whole Assembly and said this is what it means to challenge the authority of the Church: “The cardinal will force us to give up our vows.” At that time, Julie was teaching in a San Francisco parish and remembers that the papal delegate who delivered the official dispensation papers to the IHMs in that area stayed at her parish’s Rectory. He also requested permission to say Mass at her convent prior to handing out the papers. “I talked to him for a little bit after Mass and then I had to catch a plane, because I was on my way to L.A. for [an IHM] Board meeting” as part of the IHM Community’s ongoing discussions about the pending changes and dispensation from their canonical status. Julie describes the synchronicity and timing of these events as having been “an experience and a half.”

When the time came for Julie to sign her dispensation papers, she recalls sitting quietly at her desk and being fully aware of the ramifications of her decision to sign
I saw it not as a terrible change, but a good thing. I didn’t see myself not wanting to be of service or to be helpful in the future. And [there] was a clear understanding that [we] were breaking away from the canonical structure of the Church. And there was no question about that. Our Community was making the changes for modernization that the Church had asked for.

Julie describes the irony in what transpired for the IHMs, because had their Mother House and major administrative offices not been in Los Angeles, under Cardinal McIntyre’s jurisdiction, but had been in San Francisco, for example, “there never would have been any problem at all.” From her experiences in San Francisco parishes and from dialoguing with members of the local clergy and her relationships with the Archdiocese of San Francisco, she knew that the members of the male hierarchy in San Francisco supported the changes that IHMs were making. They were very unlike Cardinal McIntyre, “who wanted to be in control and to make sure everybody was under his thumb.”

Julie recalls how the IHMs went about experimenting with their traditional prayer structures, which had required that approximately 2½ hours of their day be dedicated to prayer. In the traditional convent life, a typical day began by rising at 5:20 a.m., showering, followed by morning meditation and Mass, breakfast in silence, teaching the morning classes, lunch, returning to teach afternoon classes, then followed by afternoon meditation/prayer, and dinner in silence. After dinner they attended evening Vespers, said the Rosary, and then if there was time, they also corrected papers, prepared lesson plans, and concluded the day at 9:30 p.m. with mandatory bedtime. Many IHM Community members complained to one another about the rigorous time and prayer schedules, but for Julie the structured time for prayer “made sense and provided special times with God,
when you could spend time with Him, thinking about your life and what you were
doing.” Because of the challenges they began to face during the experimentation process,
Julie believes most of their prayer life became “concerned with the changes we were
about to make, considering what was going to happen, [and] whether we’d give up the
vows or not.”

Although she taught in San Francisco during most of the acrimonious times the
Los Angeles IHMs were embroiled with Cardinal McIntyre, she nonetheless experienced
“unhappiness with the cardinal [because] of the [IHM’s] loss of schools. I felt very sorry
for the people who were put out of the schools and lost their pupils. That had to be a
traumatic experience.” Julie senses that “there were a lot of psychological problems for
everybody in the IHM Community, [particularly] packing up classrooms, moving all the
[materials] out, [and] saying goodbye to the kids, the parents, and the parish.”

Reemphasizing that the IHMs had agreed as a community to accept and implement the
decrees they had designed in response to the Vatican II call for renewal, Julie feels that
“part of being risk-takers” inevitably demands making difficult choices. Julie is clear that,
in the end, receiving the dispensations and surrendering their canonical status “is what
had to happen and [in some ways] was the best thing we did—now we had a whole
different status; we had a lay community status.” This change in status both required and
provided IHM Community members with the opportunity to “think about their lives and
activities differently from when they first entered.”

40 Years in Review: Change, Resilience, and Gratitude

Julie is confident that the collective actions taken by the IHMs “against the
Cardinal of Los Angeles had a huge impact [on religious communities], even though
other communities were very afraid to stand with us . . . because of fear of the cardinal.”

She notes that 25 years after the events, the Immaculate Heart Community received an apology from a women’s religious community in Los Angeles for not having been more supportive of them during their conflicts with Cardinal McIntyre. She also recognizes that the evolving design of the lay Immaculate Heart Community has been seen by many as a “harbinger of the future,” because their actions encouraged people to think about how they “could work for God and for the Church in different ways . . . in a future world that maybe wouldn’t have vowed Sisters.” Knowing that the IHM’s choice to form a lay community has had positive implications for the “the future of religious communities,” Julie is also aware that not everyone will follow in the IHM’s footsteps. Nonetheless, she is hopeful that the future will avail itself to more openness, diversity, and an ability to look at different ways of serving people and their spiritual needs, “not just Catholic and Christian communities, [but] with the whole interfaith perspective.”

Julie believes that the actions taken by the IHMs are illustrative of what can be done when women are willing to be “risk-takers” and have developed a fundamental understanding that change is inevitable: “It will come whether they want it or not, whether they like it or not, and there is nothing you can do to stop change.” Similarly, Julie believes that in order for oppressed women to challenge authority, they need to “understand that they are oppressed, marginalized, and looked on as second-class citizens, whether it’s from their husband, the men of their [culture], or the Church.”

Because of her love of teaching, it is not surprising that Julie would identify education as the best conduit to prepare women to be capable of understanding “the nature of change, of visioning change, and [in developing] the willingness to be a risk-taker.”
Looking back over her years as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart, Julie does not remember feeling personally oppressed by the systems that structured her life. Because she says she knew what to expect when she entered the IHM Community, “I just accepted that as being part of the historical structure of women’s religious communities. I certainly recognized that I lost a lot of freedom [but] I didn’t view things in a negative way.” In terms of superiors who “made bad mistakes or [used] bad judgment,” Julie remembers learning “to live with it and offer it up.” Julie points out that “offer it up” is a “famous phrase” in religious life.

Despite the negative behavior of some superiors, Julie found many personal champions within the Immaculate Heart Community. Her champions were the forward-looking women who led the IHM Community with vision and who educated community members so that they would be better prepared to make the right decision for themselves (e.g., Anita Caspary, Elizabeth Ann Flynn, Helen Kelly, Mary Gerald Shea, and Mary Mark Zyen). In particular, Julie recalls the positive role model presented by their “forerunner” Mother Eucharia Henry “who exuded the spirit of the community—of hospitality, love, and relationships with people,” when she served as Third Mother General from 1939-1951.

After receiving her dispensation and becoming a member of the lay Immaculate Heart Community, Julie continued working in the San Francisco Archdiocese at the same school where she had been teaching for several years. She eventually relocated from San Francisco to Los Angeles in order to be closer to her aging mother. This move not only proved to be a change in physical location, but also provided an interesting shift in her teaching career because she was offered a position within the Los Angeles public school
system and decided to leave the Catholic parochial school system. She remembers that
this type of transition from the parochial system to the public school system was very
unusual and “was unheard of in this district. This principalship was also the first contract
I ever signed.” Julie clarifies that prior to securing the public school position, she had
never been principal of a school serving more than 400 students. The public school
assignment placed Julie as the head of a school with over 750 students and approximately
100 faculty and staff. When she took the public school position it was commonly
believed “that a woman could not run a school with 750 students.”

Unlike the parochial school setting that had a dominance of women, Julie found
herself in the public school setting as the only woman administrator “sitting around the
cabinet table with the Superintendent and 12 men.” She recalls with pride that because of
her placement in the public school’s highest administrative position, many women
eventually were placed in higher level positions in the school. Other than one “male
chauvinist,” Julie found her male colleagues to be “very respectful, listening to the
contributions I had to make. They all stopped swearing at meetings, [but] every once in a
while somebody would catch themselves and then look at me.”

When thinking about the current Vatican-ordered investigation into Roman
Catholic women religious communities in the United States, Julie believes the “Church is
[attempting to execute] another of its old hierarchical functions.” Because the
investigation has been shrouded in much speculation and mystery, Julie is curious about
the underlying motives that are prompting the Vatican visitations. Although she has heard
that “they are coming to see if older sisters are being well cared for,” she is doubtful that
this is Rome’s primary interest. Relieved to no longer be subjected to Vatican
investigations at this point of her life, Julie considers herself to have been “very lucky and blessed in many, many ways.” Because she was raised in a positive home environment as the oldest of four siblings by “remarkable” parents who were not “oppressive,” she believes that the type of home in which an individual is raised in plays a significant role in how she will later relate to the world.

In Julie’s case, she knows that the type of parenting she received as a young girl and adolescent strongly influenced her ability to make the decision to enter the religious life. Julie also believes that her upbringing helped to prepare her for the various challenges that she encountered as a professed Sister of the Immaculate Heart, as well as later when she became a lay member of the Immaculate Heart Community.

*Stephanie Glatt, IHM*

_The Call to Religious Life: Uncertainty and Longing_

Stephanie’s journey to become a Sister of the Immaculate Heart began in the late 1950s when the patriarchal and hierarchical structures of the Roman Catholic Church were solid and strong. Her tenure as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary spanned a dozen years from 1957 to 1969. She describes the process that led her to enter the Novitiate in 1957 at the age of 19 as a postulant until the day of taking her temporary vows in 1959 as one filled with ambiguity, uncertainty, and self-doubt. Having grown up in the Catholic faith and educated in Catholic schools during the 1940s and 1950s, Stephanie clarifies that the traditional understanding of a vocation to the religious life is not what drew her towards becoming a Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary: “I always thought of a vocation as God up there calling to a person, and I never heard that kind of a call.”
Stephanie’s inspiration to enter the Order began during her freshman year of college when she was a resident student at the Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles. She remembers observing “an incredible environment with these beautiful nuns who were young and smart and happy and holy. And I thought, ‘Wow! Whatever it is they have, I want it.’ . . . They seemed to be really balanced between holiness and real life.” Despite the richness of the women’s lives that she observed within the structure of the Immaculate Heart College, when she returned to her personal life outside the school, she was besieged by self-doubt. As is typical of a young 18-year-old freshman in college, Stephanie found herself “in love with this guy. I really wanted to be with him. I did not want to be a nun . . . but found that when I was with him I kept thinking about being a nun.”

During her second year of college, Stephanie recalls a memorable encounter that occurred during in her English class with Anita Caspary, a teacher and advisor whom Stephanie had “placed on a pedestal” and who continued to be a powerful role model for Stephanie during her years as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart. When Anita read from Alan Tate’s poem, “Again the Native Hour” to the class, Stephanie was struck by the words of this verse “His eyes, fierce shuttlecocks, pierced the close net of what I failed.” She remembers feeling that it was like I was in that badminton game, and God’s eyes, the shuttlecocks, went through my net. And I don’t know why but I looked up then—I was sitting in the front row—and Anita was right in front of me, looking at me. . . . If there was a call that can come through another person, it was then. I saw Anita almost as an intermediary for God.

Shortly after this encounter, Stephanie set up a meeting to talk with Anita about the classroom experience, her conflicting feelings and thoughts about being a nun, and to
substantiate once and for all that “I didn’t want to be one.” Anita listened to Stephanie and, despite her uncertainty, encouraged Stephanie to meet with the Mother General of the Order, Mother Regina, whom one went to see if she was thinking of entering the convent.

Stephanie describes her meeting with Mother Regina as one filled with confusion and a concurrent longing to know if she was meant be part of the IHM Community.

She asked me why I was [t]here. I said, “Because I don’t want to be a nun.” I was hoping that she could tell me I didn’t belong there. So I gave her all my reasons for not wanting to be a nun.

Stephanie experienced a moment of relief when Mother Regina responded,

“Well, you definitely don’t belong here now. If you did join now you wouldn’t make it. . . Just go back to college, go back to your boyfriend. Enjoy life. But [emphasis added] if ever you find yourself wanting to be a nun, come back.”

Mother Regina seemed to have recognized something in her that Stephanie was not yet able to recognize for herself. Although she does not clarify exactly how she arrived at her decision to enter the Novitiate in 1957, having made this choice Stephanie concluded her life as a college student and commenced a 7-year journey towards the day of taking her permanent vows as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart. During the first 2 years, Stephanie lived in the IHM Novitiate located in Montecito, California—the first year as a postulate and the second year as a novice. Stephanie recalls,

I loved the novitiate year. I loved all of it. I loved the discipline. I loved praying together. I loved the singing. I loved the environment. Even the work we had to do. They were 2 great years. I felt like I was a monk in a monastery.

Stephanie remembers the dread she felt during her second year when those in positions of authority within the Order began to discuss how the women’s journeys would unfold once they left the contemplative life of the Novitiate. Because the Sisters of
the Immaculate Heart was a teaching order, Stephanie was destined to be “missioned” to a teaching position at one of the many grammar schools or high schools throughout California where the IHMs were assigned to teach. At this point of her path, Stephanie had completed 2 years of college but had no formal training as a teacher. Recognizing that she “was more drawn to the contemplative than to the active life, and this is a fairly active community,” about halfway through her novice year, Stephanie again doubted her journey towards the religious life. She began to feel,

“I don’t think I can do this.” It was like I wanted to stay in the Novitiate. I didn’t want to go out there and do whatever—live in a convent in some city and teach a gang of kids. But I still wanted the God part.

Eventually arriving at the decision to take her temporary vows, Stephanie participated in a symbolic ceremony that signified the departure from the lay life to commence the life as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart. During the ceremony she became aware of an internal questioning of whether she was truly “worthy to step into a whole different culture. I was stepping into it as though I belonged.” Correlating her sense of unworthiness with fear, Stephanie notes that she knew she had a good relationship with God, but was not absolutely certain of her decision to commit to the religious life. Stephanie muses, however, that perhaps “there’s no absolute answer to anything in life.”

Encountering Patriarchical/Hierarchical Structures: Assimilation and Certainty

Looking back at her life as a nun during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Stephanie states that she was not consciously aware of the influence of patriarchal oppression in the design of religious life in the Catholic Church. She does recognize retrospectively, however, that patriarchal thinking was inherent in the design of the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The vow of poverty was inspired to “divest yourself of things to
which you would be attached and that which would keep you from being close to God.” Poverty involved not having any money and not owning anything. Clothing, toiletries, and other things regularly used by the Sisters were thought of as “to my use,” not “mine.” By not having money, Sisters were freed up, but also not empowered to make choices in regard to anything that involved money. Poverty also involved the use of time; all of it belonged to God. Stephanie shares that while Sunday was “kind of a day off,” the demands of her life as a teacher, duties within the convent, and time committed to prayer life did not leave much time or energy to venture beyond the structure of the daily schedule.

The vow of chastity was designed to “free your heart up to be with God, and to love in a detached way the people you served.” With complete focus on creating a relationship with “God as a ‘tremendous lover,’ ” the vow of chastity instructed the Sisters to strive towards a spiritual loving relationship with a hierarchical God, but to remain emotionally detached in their relationships to people. Stephanie notes that the third vow, that of obedience, was the “worst one” in respect to structures of oppression because the theology of the vows taught that the “voice of the superior is the voice of God.” Because this vow demands complete obedience—unless what is being ordered is a sin—there was ample opportunity for superiors to abuse their authority, and the sisters were caught on the horns of a dilemma: If they did not obey their superior, they would be disobeying God, but obeying the superior could result in psychological damage.

Stephanie confirms that’s part of the whole patriarchal/hierarchical thing—because who is over the superior? Well, the Mother General is over the superior. And who is over the Mother General? Well the Sacred Congregation for Religious in Rome, and ultimately the Pope.
Looking back with the knowledge she has garnered during the past 50 years, Stephanie recognizes that the three vows were ultimately designed as “restrictions of freedom” with the “inevitable result of a lot of people staying immature. When it came time to make a decision, you ran and asked the superior.” Stephanie shares that, overall, the life of women religious was highly regimented by both the patriarchal authority of the Church and the hierarchical authority of the Order, leaving many of the more unassertive women under abusive superiors in disempowered states.

Stephanie compares the process of assigning the women to their missions to “like being in the army.” The Mother General and her council would convene, take account of the 50-plus schools staffed by the IHM Community, identify what positions needed to be filled, determine who had been at one school long enough and was ready to be transferred, and then began to place the superiors and teaching nuns in their assigned locations and positions. While some women challenged the Mother General on convents or positions where they were placed,

other people were terrified, did not want to go, [and] felt that they could not do the work. But it was the will of God. They would never think of going to the Mother General and saying, “Please change my mission.”

Because she was drawn to the contemplative aspects of the religious life that structured her life at the Novitiate, Stephanie describes her experience of being placed into the active life of a teaching community and convent life as a “little schizophrenic because we had a deeply contemplative training. The idea was if you were deeply spiritual, deeply contemplative, that would translate into your work out in the world, even if you were busy as anything teaching.” Stephanie recognized that the contemplative training did not prepare her and many others to meet the demands of the external world as
a teaching member of the IHM Community. Due to the vow of obedience, Stephanie did not overtly question the authority structure’s premise regarding the transferability of skills. However, Stephanie personally experienced the disparity between the contemplative teachings and what she needed to know to teach students who, in her early teaching assignments, were only 3 years younger than she.

Summarizing the pecking order that existed within the IHM Community and its influence on the women’s access to freedom and mobility, Stephanie distinguishes the experiences of the women who were assigned to convents located in the “hinterlands,” from those who taught and lived at the Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles. Those who taught in the College had the most access to freedom and mobility. The women who taught in the “hinterlands” typically experienced the least amount of freedom and mobility. The degree of restriction and immobility was also greatly dependent upon the attitudes of the local superior, the parish pastor, and the clergy assigned to the parish. Even though Stephanie was assigned to posts in the “hinterland,” she states that, for the most part she had “pretty good superiors. I did not feel that restricted.”

According to Stephanie, many of the IHM educators and leaders she so admired for their intellectual acuity, brilliance, and wisdom may have also “bought into” the patriarchal system and hierarchical thinking of the Roman Catholic Church. Nonetheless, while the women in key leadership positions may have subscribed to the patriarchal ordering that structured their lives within the Church, they also provided a forward-focused vision through the educational programs offered at the Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles. The Archbishop of Los Angeles, Cardinal James McIntyre, continually forbade progressive lecturers to appear at the College, believing that the school was
becoming dangerously liberal. Regardless of his objections, during the 1950s and 1960s many of the preeminent male theologians and Catholic scholars (e.g., Bernard Häring, Hans Küng, and Gerard Sloyan) were frequent presenters. They were well known for voicing their discontent with the Church and actively challenged the Church’s traditional definitions of morality based on archaic notions of sin. In addition, they identified the need for modernization of Catholic doctrine and strongly advocated for women being given leadership positions within the Church.

Despite the many male theologians and Catholic scholars who voiced the need to widen the opportunities available to women religious, Stephanie recounts how very different the life of a nun was from that of a member of the male clergy. For one, there was a structured format provided by the Los Angeles Archdiocese that routinely identified members of the clergy for opportunities to pursue higher education. Women religious, on the other hand, “were always second-class citizens compared to the men,” and were dependent upon the leadership and financial ability of the Order, not the Archdiocese’s funds, to budget the needed monies to send members for continuing education. Secondly, the clergy were able to own and wear street clothes when they were not “on duty” in the parish. However, the vow of poverty dictated that women religious could have no personal clothing or property other than the habit and other items provided by the Order.

Because women religious did not have street clothes and were required to wear the habit at all times, even when on vacation, Stephanie emphasizes that these conditions severely restricted the nuns’ privacy. Stephanie also notes that because women religious were required to shave their heads or to cut their hair back significantly in order to
accommodate the head veil, their physical appearance was drastically altered. Furthermore, Stephanie notes that even if Catholic nuns had been able to acquire secular clothing, this alteration in their physical appearance would have precluded their privacy and anonymity.

*Questioning Patriarchal Structures: Movement towards Critical Thinking*

Most religious orders in America did not experience the degree of dictatorial oppression that Cardinal McIntyre inflicted on the IHM Community for a period of 2 decades. Despite his continuous attempts to control their destiny, the IHMs were heavily affected by the religious, cultural, social, and political climate of the 1960s and knew they had an obligation to respond to the demands of modern times. Stephanie, who took her permanent vows in 1964, describes the influence of the Vatican II decrees: “When Vatican II came along [in 1963], I was content with traditional religious life. I liked wearing a habit; I liked living in convents; I liked praying all together. I was pretty happy.” She recalls the irony of arriving at the destination point of taking her final vows, only to find herself within a few years thrust onto a new path that would lead her away from the traditional religious life, a life she had so seriously questioned at the outset.

In the beginning phases of change, letting go of the habit and finding civilian clothes, Stephanie recalls that the changes “seemed like such a pain. I didn’t come here to do this. I didn’t like it.” In time, however, Stephanie discovered that changing the style of their habit from a medieval look to a 20th-century look allowed for barriers to be taken down. She learned that the former style of habit impeded the nuns’ capacity to minister “because people didn’t feel free to be really open with us.” However, because Cardinal McIntyre adamantly opposed the modernizing of the traditional habits, he forbade any
women religious teaching in the Los Angeles archdiocese to wear anything but the traditional habit. Nonetheless, in response to the Vatican II Decrees for Renewal, the IHMs unanimously voted for modernizing their habit. They experimented with various styles of habit—most looking like navy blue business suits—and ultimately elected to go out of habit. In 1968, as a result of these steps, Stephanie and the other IHMs teaching in the Los Angeles parochial schools were removed from all schools and replaced by members of other religious orders.

Not surprisingly, the IHM experimentation with the structures of their prayer life was also ardently challenged by Cardinal McIntyre. Assuming the authority for when and how they would pray, the IHMs attempted to create flexible options that better supported their 20th-century style of life. They explored other approaches to prayer life, including individual private prayer if work schedules did not allow for participation in group prayer. Cardinal McIntyre demanded that they return to the hundred-year-old tradition of structured group prayer times, but the IHMs declined to do so. Stephanie notes that there were advantages to the traditional schedule of prayer life. Having a regular schedule provided

a sense of togetherness, of community, a time when everybody is praying together. It’s so easy when you’re . . . on your own to think, “Well I ought to say my prayers, but I’m tired this morning; I’m not going to do it.”

Discovering herself unwillingly thrust into a state of questioning and uncertainty, Stephanie once again sought counsel from her mentor, Anita Caspary, who by that time was Mother General. She was surprised to learn that Anita, who had played such a key role in her decision to enter the Novitiate so many years earlier, believed change was needed because “the old way didn’t work.” After spending time reflecting on the implications of Anita’s feedback and searching for her own answers, Stephanie began to
recognize that she and the others had arrived at a “turning point, a step along a new path.”

This turning point enabled her to question the traditions that had shaped her life as a religious woman. Stephanie reflects, “I either didn’t know the facts, or if I knew the facts I didn’t understand the implications.”

Moving Away from Confines of Patriarchal Structures: Endings, Beginnings, and Liberation

Although Vatican II mandated that change, experimentation, and modernization begin to take place within all religious orders, and that this directive did “much good,” Stephanie emphasizes that it was “thanks to the College that the Immaculate Heart Community went as far as it did. It was mostly the College Sisters who were elected to the Assembly that made all the changes.” Stephanie also recognizes the positive influence of a few of her personal champions who exposed her and the other IHM Community members to progressive thinking: The visionary leadership provided by Regina McPartlin in her role as Mother General; Corita Kent in her role as the director of the Immaculate Heart College Art Department and whose spiritual artwork was internationally renowned; and Anita Caspary in her roles as an English teacher at the Immaculate Heart College, as Mother General during the Vatican II calls for renewal, and later as the first president of the lay Immaculate Heart Community. Stephanie explains the importance of the College and the women who taught there:

While this may sound “classist,” I think if only the grammar school sisters, and even the high school sisters, had been elected to the Assembly, rather than the College teachers, we would not have done the things that we did.

Stephanie clarifies that the IHM Community was strongly influenced by the thinking of the 1960s—questioning authority, personal empowerment, embracing of differences, the power of love. She states: “By the time the choice came [to surrender
their canonical status], enough of us—350 out of 400—felt that this was the way we
should go.” Finding herself on a path leading towards critical thinking and away from the
“precious ideal life that ensures that I am right with God,” Stephanie entered a formidable
process of questioning the “structures that I had been trying to uphold—the culture, the
philosophy, the theology.” These structures normalized obedience to hierarchical
authority and patriarchal dictates. Stephanie’s experiences, as well as those of the other
IHMs who surrendered their canonical status, speak clearly of the inherent risks that are
involved when individuals engage patriarchal and hierarchical authority structures. They
face punishment, expulsion from community, termination of employment, and the scorn
of the media, family, and friends.

As the conflict between the IHMs and patriarchal authority structures escalated
towards the end of the 1960s, Stephanie remembers receiving a pivotal letter from the
Church authorities in late 1969:

The Church gave us an ultimatum . . . we had been told to get back into our
habits, pray this way, go to daily Mass all together at the same time, and obey our
Bishop [even though the Community was directly under Rome, not under
Cardinal McIntyre], or we couldn’t be nuns.

Checking with other communities who were also experimenting with the Vatican II
decrees to see if they had received a similar letter, the IHMs learned that no other
community in America had received an ultimatum letter. Stephanie clarifies how it felt to
be in this role as the only community in America to receive such an ultimatum: “It was
like the Marines. We were the first ones to land on the beachhead. We held our ground,
so the Vatican was afraid to send letters to the other communities.” Stephanie and the
other Sisters of the Immaculate Heart who stood firm in their convictions received
individual letters of dispensation from their canonical status in the early days of January,
Leaving the traditional life of a nun and the age-old structures that had given her life meaning, value, and context was a daunting challenge for Stephanie. She explains that within the hierarchal structure of the Church, the Pope was viewed as “the highest human being, then the cardinals and the bishops, then the priests, and then the nuns. The lay people were at the bottom, right above the animals.” Having been taught that a life dedicated to God as a nun had great value in God’s eyes, and then to no longer to be one, “you get brought down a level—to that of ordinary people. You’re no longer so sure of your place.” By October, 1970, this group of women, newly dispensed from their canonical status and no longer having ties to the Sacred Congregation for the Religious, took as its legal name The Immaculate Heart Community.

40 Years in Review: Growth-in-Process

Because the IHMs said “No” to the ultimatum delivered by the Vatican, Stephanie believes their actions were responsible for the Church not going any farther than they did with other religious communities. We drew a line and said “No. We will not go back. We believe in the way we followed Vatican II. And we won’t go back.”

Stephanie believes that, had a larger percentage of women religious communities stepped forward and actively supported what the IHMs were doing, instead of waiting to see what would happen to the IHMs, “Catholic women wouldn’t still be groveling around, trying to get ordained as priests. If all the religious women had followed Vatican II and said no when they were told to stop, the Church would have changed radically.”

Stephanie does not characterize the actions taken by the IHM Community during the 1960s as grand movements toward change. She also clarifies that the transition from
the religious to lay community structure was not “radical” in nature. Instead, it was a slow transition inspired by “constant little” seeding(s) of alternative thoughts and perspectives as the IHMs challenged the patriarchal and hierarchical authority structures. Becoming aware of the psychological and spiritual costs to women remaining obedient to outdated traditions and tenets of the Catholic Church required time. The familiar structure of the hierarchical Church had worked for Stephanie “to a degree—but not totally—but I had signed on whether it worked or not. All of a sudden I knew it didn’t work and it didn’t have to work. I felt really freed up.” Without the familiar structures to provide context and direction for their daily lives, Stephanie clarifies that the IHM’s “thinking needed to change—to know that just because we don’t have the structures, we’re not less effective, of less value as persons.” In time they began to understand the values of living within a lay community where they no longer needed formal “vows to be pleasing to God.”

In the late 1980s, Stephanie returned to the Immaculate Heart College Center (successor to the Immaculate Heart College, which had closed as a result of having lost support of many Catholics because of the Sisters’ changes) for a Master’s degree in Feminist Spirituality. Through her studies, and the influence of its directors, Pat Reif, IHM and Margaret Rose Welch, IHM (two additional champions), Stephanie developed “a critical way of looking at things, which I think is healthy for women—not just to accept things.” Noting in particular the influence of Harvard University Professor of Scripture and Interpretation Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza’s work on the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” Stephanie learned that in order for women to assume a sense of authority, they cannot accept the ideas and opinions of others at face value, but need to know how
to question and think through divergent perspectives. Stephanie emphasizes that the risk of accepting things at face value interferes with noticing that “there are factual things that have been there, all around us, which we haven’t seen.”

Armored with the knowledge and education she was receiving in her studies, as well as the influence of the relationships she was creating with the women in her graduate program, Stephanie found herself emotionally distancing herself from some of the members of the Immaculate Heart Community who, although they had made the changes in the 1960s externally, still clung to the traditional ways of religious life. In their attempt to protect their preferred lifestyle, they resisted the values of inclusivity that were a part of the new Immaculate Heart Community. In her graduate studies, Stephanie was being exposed to critical thinking and theories that contributed to an emergence of a feminist perspective—one that continues to influence the way she views the role of women in the 21st century.

In light of the current Vatican-authorized investigations of American women’s religious communities, Stephanie clarifies:

Here it is 35 years later and they’re having another investigation of women religious. I think our affect on the Church was to make them realize that women are a force to be reckoned with, but it could have been a real revolution. Women could have stepped up to equality 35 years ago. I feel sad that so many communities have been trying to walk a tightrope for 35 years, being true to Vatican II, but keeping their heads down for fear of retribution by the authorities. And now they’re being investigated.

Although she feels personally relieved to be no longer under the thumb of the Church’s patriarchal authority, Stephanie regrets that more women’s religious communities did not challenge the actions taken by the Church during the 1960s to undo the effects of Vatican II. She believes that the IHM’s “actions enabled some progress forward,” but in the end
the IHM Community was not influential enough to create widespread change within the hierarchical authority structure of the Catholic Church.

In her professional life as the director of La Casa de Maria Retreat Center in Montecito, California, Stephanie strives to include feminist values, “while not using the ‘f’ word [for feminism],” in the Center’s decision-making processes. She believes her personal experiences and those of many of the other IHMs have relevance to contemporary women’s ability to develop pragmatic skills in order to assess the cultural, social, and political structures that frame their lives. The influence of her personal journey, coupled with the collective experiences of the IHMs, has allowed Stephanie to move beyond the absolutism that framed her view of the world at the beginning of her sojourn as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart. Stephanie ponders over what term best describes her evolving view of the world: “I don’t know. The opposite of absolutism is relativism. That’s a bad word; the Church doesn’t like relativism.”

Stephanie concludes that perhaps moving beyond absolutism has led to pragmatism: “Being pragmatic about what works best—always to act in a way that’s best for me, best for you, and best for the world.” Stephanie reflects that while she believes in God and the primacy of love, she also recognizes that there are no absolutes that define either one. For her, knowing God is a process, one of staying loving while looking out at the world; of being critical from a feminist perspective, yet not judgmental.

Maria Inez Martinez, IHM

The Call to Religious Life: Desire and Clarity

Maria Inez remembers that her calling to the religious life began in the 7th grade—the year she transferred from the Los Angeles public school system to a private
Catholic school. At that time, she became aware of “a desire to be one of the Sisters, but I would brush it aside . . . [however] this desire continued throughout high school.” Having been raised in a very close Mexican-American family as the youngest of eight children, Maria Inez enjoyed meaningful relationships with both of her parents, her siblings, and extended family members. There were frequent dinners at her home when “after everyone ate, [we’d] turn on the music, and everybody danced. I loved to dance.” She enjoyed dancing not only at family parties, but would regularly drive with her friends to attend *tardeadas*, late afternoon dance matinees, which began at 5:00 p.m. and ended at 8:00 p.m. At one of these tardeadas, she met a young man whom she found attractive and “we got along well.” When he took Maria to see homes and asked if she’d like to live in one of them, she thought: “Hmm this is very different . . . I got the feeling of where this was heading . . . and thought I better make a decision fast . . . about entering the [IHM] Community.” Maria Inez began to pray about whether she should enter the religious life.

The year was 1952 and her family was “adamantly opposed” to her desire to enter a religious community, but Maria Inez was 21 years old and they could not stop her from making this decision.

Despite her family’s resistance, Maria Inez recognized that she needed to clear her conscience about whether the religious life was for her before she could seriously consider getting married. After spending time with one of her Immaculate Heart High School teachers, Maria Inez learned what she needed to do to pursue her interest and set up an appointment to talk with Mother Regina, the Mother General of the Immaculate Heart Community at that time. At this meeting, Mother Regina asked her to discuss her likes and dislikes and what she enjoyed doing for recreation. “I said I liked to dance . . .
Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. And I remember her looking at me and saying ‘okay, we’ll find something else for you [to do].’ As she looks back, Maria clarifies that dancing was one of the many things she gave up when she decided to become an IHM. Joining a religious community also required that Maria Inez give up the emotional and physical closeness with her family and that she have reduced contact with them.

Other than a trip to Texas for a friend’s wedding when she was 19 years old, Maria had never been “away from home.” Although she worked full time as a secretary, had her own car, and enjoyed an active social life with a close-knit group of friends, it was expected that she would live at home until she got married. Once married, her Mexican-American family tradition dictated that she and her husband would reside within close proximity to her parents and family, and that while she would start her own family, the emotional and physical connections with her parents and siblings would remain intact. So adamant that she not join the religious life, Maria Inez recalls that her father offered her a trip to Acapulco hoping that she could be dissuaded from both entering the order and from leaving home. Having reached the conclusion that she needed to clear her conscience and determine the best environment for her “to have a closer relationship with God and to do God’s will,” Maria Inez asked her father to apply the trip money towards her dowry to join the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California. Maria Inez acknowledges that her ability to follow her desire and make the decision to enter the religious life came from the strong example set by her parents: “They had told me, ‘we’ll teach you right and wrong; you make the decision, but you must live with the decision.’” She learned from her mother and great aunt the value of religion and spirituality; and from her father, who “respected” her intelligence, the importance of thinking through and
analyzing situations, which she acknowledges as a “precious gift” in her life.

When Maria Inez entered the order in September, 1952 at the age of 21, her mother “went into formal mourning for a year . . . [as though] someone [had] died. Within the Mexican-Hispanic tradition you wear black and do not socialize [when mourning].” When her parents would drive from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara to see her at the Novitiate for monthly family visits, her mother would tell her that it felt as though she were going to a mortuary. She remembers when her father called her on the first Thanksgiving that she was away from her family. At this point, she had only seen her family twice since entering the order that September. Maria Inez was delighted to hear his voice on the phone because “I missed my family tremendously. And when I got on the phone and I heard my mom’s voice and then my brothers’, I started to cry. Because I was so happy to hear them . . . and I missed hearing my mother’s voice.”

A couple days after this phone call, Maria Inez learned from the Novice Mistress that her father and one of her brothers were waiting to see her. Her father told her, “‘You will not leave your mother in tears again.’” Knowing that he wanted her to return home, Maria Inez told her father that she was not yet ready to leave, and he reluctantly accepted her response. Her decision to enter the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart Order was a bittersweet process—one that brought Maria Inez closer to God, but also took her away from the close family connections she had grown to depend upon.

In Maria Inez’s experience, the process of taking vows to enter the religious life was similar to a woman taking marriage vows, except she became “the bride of Christ and belonged to God,” rather than becoming a spouse to a human being. She recalls the excitement of having her family join her at the ceremony when she wore a wedding dress
prior to receiving her formal habit. She remembers thinking that similar to her girlfriends “[who] got married and had their wedding dresses,” that she too had a celebratory experience for the life she was choosing for herself. Even though her decision forced her to leave her home and family, she knew that the religious life was what “God wanted me to do.”

Approximately 5 years after taking her vows, Maria Inez recalls receiving a phone call from her mother and sensed that something was “on her mind.” She called to see how Maria Inez was doing and proceeded to tell her of the sadness she felt in learning that a Franciscan sister she knew had decided to leave her community. She told Maria Inez, “‘It cost me so many tears to have you go. And I cried so many tears thinking you’d come home.’” In this conversation, Maria recognized that her mother had finally accepted her decision.

Encountering Patriarchy and Hierarchy: Oppression and Conformance

In retrospect, Maria Inez recognizes that the vows of the religious life were infused with patriarchal thinking, as were the marriage vows that normalized the submission of wives to their husbands. At the time she took her vows, however, Maria Inez did not correlate the submissive quality of the vows to a “system of male dominance,” a system that she describes as being “so pervasive that a lot of times we didn’t even notice [it].” She clarifies, however, that there was a noticeable matriarchal power structure within the IHM Community that required submission and obedience. When Maria Inez thinks back to when she entered the Novitiate at the age of 21, she had already been working since graduation from high school as a secretary, she had been responsible for the car that her father had bought her, and she had also been managing her
own finances. Entering the IHM Community, “you left the world, [and it was like a] tabula rasa . . . [where you] just wipe the slate of who you were and what you did.” She often found it “crazy” to be required to ask the Novice Mistress for “permission to throw away an empty toothpaste tube.” Because she had been raised by her parents to think and analyze, Maria Inez would frequently be called a “bold young nun” if she questioned the way things were done or suggested other approaches. She believes this term was a way to “keep you in your place.”

Before she left home to enter the Novitiate, Maria Inez remembers her mother discussing the different types of people she would meet and telling her to “be kind to everyone; even if you can’t get along, you’re not going to agree, but you have to learn to be kind and try to accept it.” She believes her parents were aware of the problems that she would encounter as a young Mexican-American woman. “When I entered the Community, it was dominated by Irish and Irish-American nuns. They had all the leadership.” While Maria Inez clarifies that the majority of these women were not racist or terribly difficult to interact with, roughly “10% were extremely painful to deal with,” because they dominated others and came from a “better than thou” type of attitude. Maria Inez often braced herself by remembering her “mom’s pearls of wisdom” to “deal with” racism and discrimination by being kind, not talking about it, and recognizing that “everybody has a different opinion.”

Maria Inez notes that there were internal movements for modernization within the IHM Community prior to Vatican II because the IHM leadership recognized that their members needed to receive college educations before going into the classrooms to teach. Mother Regina began to send different Community members to universities to study. We had the [Immaculate Heart] College, so they had to be prepared to
teach in the college. They would come back and share with us what they were learning.

Maria Inez remembers that it “bothered her” that she was expected to teach when she was better prepared to do administrative work because of her earlier training in secretarial work. She would have preferred to have been assigned as a “lay sister,” in order to serve those who taught. However, by that point in time, “Mother Regina was saying no more to lay sisters. We were expected to attend Saturday classes [to earn a BA degree and teaching credentials]. I would often tell others that I was on the 40-year-plan to get a degree.”

In 1961 Maria Inez was sent to teach in a San Diego grammar school. The superior to whom she reported tested Maria Inez’s strength and her mother’s pearls of wisdom to be kind. It was a “horrendous experience,” because she feared the superior was going to “destroy me, because I’d say something, she’d ignore it; I’d walk into a room, she’d walk out. It was open hostility.” Maria knew that she could not tolerate the “open hostility, discrimination, and personality clash.” At mid-year, she contacted Sr. Elizabeth Ann Flynn, who was the IHM’s Vicar General, and told her that “you have to get me out of here; otherwise I’ve got to go home.” In retrospect, Maria Inez recognizes that while challenging situations can encourage “the tough to get tougher,” there are times that are far too destructive and one simply needs to “withdraw, [because] you cannot allow anyone to destroy you.”

The following school year Maria Inez was sent to teach in Canada and remained in this assignment for approximately 5 years. She recalls how positive and valuable her Canadian teaching experiences were to her sense of self following the discrimination and adverse challenges she encountered when she taught in San Diego. Maria Inez describes
the “dignity and respect” that she garnered by working with one of her personal champions Canadian Bishop Remi de Roo, who at that time was one of the youngest bishops at Vatican II. She particularly enjoyed the fact that Bishop de Roo took the time to visit each parish and convent in his Archdiocese—often staying for dinner—to share what was happening at the Vatican II proceedings.

Maria Inez recalls a pivotal experience in 1968 following her assignment in Canada when she was appointed as a school Principal and convent Superior at a Los Angeles parish. Upon arrival she was introduced to the pastor, who was a close friend of Cardinal McIntyre’s. He demanded that she fire a young sister who was implementing “collaborative education” models that allowed the students to be placed in small groups to “share and learn.” Having just arrived at her assignment, Maria Inez replied that she needed time to ascertain what could be done in order to help correct the problem. She was told by the pastor, “‘No. You fire her [or] I will report you to the cardinal [McIntyre].’” Maria Inez did not fire the teacher and does not mention any direct repercussions to her actions.

During her time in this parish, Maria Inez quickly learned that she was not only the school Principal and convent Superior, but she also served as the “school secretary, nurse, yard monitor, janitor, substitute teacher, and counselor to the children. . . . I felt overwhelmed to have to try to juggle all of [these duties].” Although Maria was supported by the PTA membership who eventually hired a secretary to help ease her incredible work load, the pastor was adamantly opposed to this idea. When he learned of the hiring, he was furious. He sent his Assistant who came in to my office at the lunch hour and he was irate. He came in and started berating and battering me verbally. And I
remember saying to him, “Yes, Father. Could we talk another time as I have to go and teach at 1:00?” He said “No” and [proceeded to] blame me for all the problems in the parish, with the community; the problems in the school—everything. This went on for over an hour. And finally I broke down and started to cry. Then he left.

The next day, Maria made an appointment to see a doctor and received a prescription for tranquilizers.

Maria Inez states that,

It took me many, many years to admit that I had to end that year on three tranquilizers a day because of the combined hostility and pressure of the pastor, the assistants, the seminarian, the people in the parish, and all the experimental changes we were going through due to the Vatican II directives.

Recognizing that often “nothing bad happens that good won’t come from it,” Maria Inez recalls the irony that at the end of that school year, she and the other IHMs were “evicted” from the school and convent because of Cardinal McIntyre’s 1968 decree that women religious teaching in Los Angeles parochial schools needed to wear traditional habits. By this time in their Vatican II renewal process, the IHM Community had elected to wear secular clothes.

Moving Away from the Confines of Patriarchal/Hierarchical Structures: Experimentation, Daring, and Despair

Maria Inez describes the journey that led the IHMs away from the patriarchal and hierarchical structures of the Church as one that was “tortuous, traumatic, and painful, [particularly] in terms of relationships with other sisters and with other clergy.” During their experimentation process with the Vatican II decrees, she and the other IHMs were often discriminated against and rejected by other women religious communities and clergy members. Maria Inez recalls the painful experience when she encountered a former teacher, a member of another religious community, when she and the other IHMs
were experimenting with their habits. This former teacher had helped to prepare Maria Inez as a young girl for her First Holy Communion and was someone she had been very fond of as a student. On this particular day Maria Inez was not wearing the traditional habit but a navy blue suit, and remembers feeling happy when she saw her former teacher. “But she looked at me, looked me up and down, turned up her nose, turned around, and walked in the opposite direction. That was so painful.”

On another occasion, Maria Inez was rejected by a priest she had known in high school who had “been very kind to me,” and whose counsel she sought in order to discuss the painful and personal challenges she was facing. After ringing the rectory’s doorbell, she was greeted by an assistant priest who answered the door with a “drink in his hand.” When she asked to speak with the priest, she gave her name, and the assistant went to find him. Upon returning to where she was waiting outside, Maria was told by the assistant that the priest could not see her.

Maria Inez understood that the decisions the IHMs were making were not seen as “acceptable” by many religious communities, as well as by some IHM Community members. The influence of the media coverage and newspaper headlines referring to the IHMs as the “rebellious, disobedient nuns,” often put the IHM Community in a negative light and on opposing sides with others. Thinking back to the trials and tribulations of those times, she clarifies that even now “the tears [still] come,” and yet she also remembers the many personal champions who helped her endure. “There have been wonderful, supportive men,” (e.g., Canadian theologian and sociologist, Gregory Baum; the late Franciscan priest from the Santa Barbara Mission, Father Virgil Cordano; the Bishop of Canada, Remi J. De Roo; and Peruvian theologian and Dominican priest,
Gustavo Gutiérrez). Maria Inez also identifies several of the intelligent and brave women who inspired her and guided the IHM’s experimentation process with the Vatican II calls for renewal: Sisters Anita Caspary, Elizabeth Flynn, Helen Kelly, and Regina McPartlin. Maria Inez describes Former Mother General Anita Caspary as “outstanding” and someone who treated her as an equal. She recounts a memorable experience when she went to Anita’s office and, upon entering the office, noted that Anita was sitting behind her desk. When Maria Inez entered, Anita “got up from behind the desk, came around, and there were two chairs. She asked me to be seated, and she sat down next to me.” She characterizes her relationship with Anita as a “discipleship of equals. She has always treated me with respect and dignity.”

40 Years in Review: The Losses and Wins of Engaging Hierarchy and Patriarchy

Because “her vows [were made] to God,” and not the patriarchal authorities of the Catholic Church, Maria Inez believes that she “still has her vows.” She explains that the Vatican chose to issue dispensations to each IHM Community member who had said “No” to the authority of their ultimatum. However, Maria Inez did not willingly choose to surrender her canonical status and the act of dispensation was not one that she actively pursued of her “own free will.” As a result of her experiences, Maria Inez learned that “pain brings you to a whole different place in your life,” and draws a constructive correlation between the experience of having the Vatican dispense her canonical status to that of a woman whose husband abandons and divorces her. She also believes that painful experiences can teach individuals that it is possible to learn to be faithful to God and to oneself, and to be who one is meant to be. In the aftermath of the dispensations, Maria Inez evolved into several leadership positions as a teacher, an administrator, a Licensed
Educational Psychologist, a Licensed Marriage Family Therapist in California, and a director of retreats for Spanish- and English-speaking women.

From the late 1970s through to the 1990s, Maria Inez served as a national board member for Las Hermanas, USA, a Chicana-Latina Religious/Political Activist Group in the U.S. Catholic Church. She recalls being asked in the early 1990s to represent Las Hermanas at a nationally televised conference for women religious that was being sponsored by the New York National Pastoral Council. At first Maria Inez declined the invitation to be a representative because the conference would be attended by predominantly canonical sisters. Because she was “not in that club anymore . . . and many canonical orders do not consider our Community as being Sisters,” Maria Inez did not want to cause a problem because the topic of the conference was concerned with women religious. The leadership of Las Hermanas countered her reluctance with “‘You are not going because of them; you’re going because this is going to represent us.’” After much soul-searching and prayer, Maria Inez elected to attend the conference, which turned out to a “wonderful” experience.

Because of her varied experiences as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart, Maria Inez finds that as a Marriage and Family Therapist she is effective in supporting women who struggle with oppression and domination in their marriages. What she learned through her struggles and triumphs of engaging the hierarchical structures of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart and the Roman Catholic Church is that frequently one needs to “sit there and take it.” However, at the same time it is also critical to develop a plan to get out of destructive situations. “You realize that you’re taking it because you have another plan . . . and you don’t need to let [the destructiveness] penetrate your soul.”
Maria Inez acknowledges that she has found tremendous joy from the many opportunities she has encountered in her life: her participation with Las Hermanas, serving on the Board of the National Catholic Council of Hispanic Ministry and having “her say” in organizing their national conferences, as well as starting the Hispanic Women’s Retreat at La Casa de Maria in Montecito, California. She reflects that,

There are things like this that I think I would never have done had we stayed in the [traditional] structure . . . there is a sense of joy of having been able to contribute, where I would not have been able to do it otherwise.
CHAPTER 4
THEMATICAL ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP INTERVIEWS

When there is personal darkness, when there is pain to be overcome, when we are forced to renew ourselves against all the odds, the psychic energy required simply to survive has tremendous force, as great as that of a bulb pushing up through the icy ground in spring, so after the overcoming, there is extra energy, a flood of energy that can go into creation. (Sarton, 1997, p. 10)

Introduction

Throughout chapter 1, reference was made to the intention that this study will extract seeds of wisdom from the participants’ experiences that can be replanted and cultivated for the continuing transformation of oppressive systems. I believe that depth psychologists can understand the cultivation of women’s intrapsychic space in a similar way as plant physiologists understand how dormant seeds planted in the earth can eventually mature into fruit-bearing trees when properly nurtured and cultivated. Inside every dormant seed is an embryo and within that embryo exists a potential root that will grow down into the ground in search of nutrients, as well as a shoot that will grow visibly above the ground in search of sunlight. Nestled inside the small embryo is an “on” and “off” mechanism that is dependent on the right soil and weather conditions to activate the rooting and sprouting stages of the seed’s life process.

With this rudimentary understanding as a backdrop, we can appreciate that a mature fruit-bearing tree is dependent upon its young seed being exposed to the right conditions in order for its growth process to be put in motion. In terms of depth psychology and the liberation of women’s sense of self, we can begin to imagine the psychological, cultural, and social conditions that are needed to nurture and cultivate seeds of resistance to ageism, genderism, and racism in women’s psyches. Seeds of resistance that are properly cultivated through familial patterns, education, personal
enrichment, and interpersonal support systems can begin to firmly take root. With sufficient rooting, these seeds have a strong chance of bearing fruit in the form of constructed knowers (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997). Similar to the way that nature’s cycle of seeding, rooting, sprouting, and bearing fruit is followed by stages of withering, dying, and death, I believe that constructed knowers-in-process are in a continuous cycle of seeding new ways of being and knowing as less viable and personally detrimental ways of being and knowing wither and die. When women learn to question, challenge, and resist cultural standards that predefine who they are, they become adept at recognizing patriarchal drives and desires that are continually recolonizing their intrapsychic space and attempting to annihilate their subjectivity (Oliver, 2004).

The development of this chapter’s analysis has been guided by the study’s two research questions: (a) What were the participants’ experiences of engaging and/or resisting the hierarchy of the Catholic Church? and (b) What can their experiences teach us about women’s continuing engagement of patriarchy and resistance of oppression? In this chapter we will discuss the themes that were revealed by listening to and reading through the transcripts of the individual and group interviews following the third and fourth steps of the Listener’s Guide (Brown, 1997; Brown & Gilligan, 1992). The authors emphasize that listening for and identifying voices inside interview narratives and determining the relationship(s) among the voices is a pivotal part of thematic analysis. The voice-centered relational method provided access to the ways this study’s participants learned to create and maintain their individual and collective humanity while living within the hierarchical and, for some, the often oppressive structures of the Catholic Church.
Through the third and fourth listenings two primary voices were revealed—a voice of resistance and a voice of creation. These two voices emerged by listening deeply into the participants’ recollections of the events that led them to enter the IHM Community, about their love of traditional religious life within the IHM Community, about what enabled them to resist the authority of the Church, and about what led them to later make the choice to receive dispensations from their canonical status. I found that the voices of resistance and creation often dovetailed into one another where acts of resistance to traditional structures led to the creation of alternative approaches to being women religious and to the eventual creation of the lay religious community.

As a result of the extensive format of this study, including 8 individual interviews and a lengthy group interview that brought together the participants and 7 witnesses in a Council Process, there was an extraordinary amount of rich data to choose from in creating this chapter. In the following sections, we will navigate between the individual and group interviews. The transition between the individual and group interviews will be clearly identified for the reader’s ease. At times dialogue that was highlighted in the individual heuristic portraits will also appear in this chapter’s thematic analyses.

The Voice of Resistance

*Overview*

Because this study is interested in the participants’ experiences of engaging the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, in the third listening for the Voice of Resistance I paid particular attention to the ways in which the participants discussed how they resisted/engaged authority structures. I was also interested in learning what they identified as critical stepping stones in their sense of self as an engager in or resister of
dominant authority structures. I listened for what was resisted, why it was resisted, how it was resisted, and the implications of the resistance. When tending to the voice of resistance, two subthemes emerged: (a) Planting seeds of resistance, and (b) cultivating seeds of resistance. Tucked within these themes we discover how and where many of the participants learned to question and challenge authority, both personally and collectively. We also hear about the deep respect they hold for both men and women in positions of authority who are progressive in their thinking and respectful of others’ rights. The participants depended upon the strength of education, prayer, and community to undertake Vatican II’s calls for renewal, as well as later when they reached the decision to say “No” to the ultimatum presented to them by the male hierarchy.

As they began to encounter resistance to their renewal process efforts, the participants found themselves facing criticism, disregard, and opposition from a wide array of individuals: Family members, Cardinal McIntyre, the Los Angeles Archdiocese, the Vatican, and discontent members within their own IHM Community, as well as members from other religious communities. They describe how they learned to cultivate the ability to resist and challenge this form of counter-resistance to their progressive thinking. In effect, they did not succumb to being divided and conquered (Daly, 1985) because of the relationships they forged with one another, the visionary women in key leadership positions, and the far-reaching support of many theologians and clergy members.

Subjectivity in Process: Planting Seeds of Resistance

The Role Fathers Play

The individual interviews. Although none of the interview questions in the
individual or group process specifically asked about the participants’ family of origin, during the interviews I was particularly struck by the relationships that several of the participants described as having had with their fathers as young girls and adolescents. They spoke about the ways their fathers influenced their sense of self through modeling behavior that encouraged them to be decisive and independent thinkers. Joann recalls how valuable it was to learn from her father that she could think for herself and challenge external authority structures. In high school she was sent away to school in Nebraska for one semester because her older sister, Cleo, insisted that she have the experience of attending a Catholic boarding school. Returning home for a holiday break, Joann told her father she was homesick, unhappy at the school, and did not want to return.

And my Dad, he was so dear—he said “Joann, you never had to go. Cleo talked you into that.” And I was so relieved. He said “No, you do whatever you want.” I just assumed that I had to go [to that school]. But when my Dad said I didn’t have to [go back] to that school, I was so relieved.

The seeds of resistance that were planted by her father taught Joann that it was permissible to think for herself despite the authority of an older sister within the family system.

We learn that Joann’s father also encouraged her to question teachings of the Catholic Church, such as the belief in “indulgences.” Indulgences were thought to mitigate the wages of sin and provide protection from punishment in the afterlife. Joann had returned home from catechism one day and told her father, “‘Dad let’s go to this new Church—we can get indulgences; so many indulgences.’” Her father responded, “‘Joann, don’t get caught up in superstitions like that,’ and I thought ‘Poor Dad, he just doesn’t understand.’ Well, he understood perfectly. He wasn’t having any of that.” The practice of indulgences was one of the many traditions decoupled from mainstream Catholic
practice by the Second Vatican Council during the 1960s.

Julie’s father regularly told her, “‘You can do anything you want,’” and she found him to be “very wide open with the idea that you had all kinds of possibilities that were always yours.” Her father’s steady encouragement that she had the right to choose what she wanted to do in her life ultimately enabled her to make the choice to enter the IHM Community—a choice that neither of her parents had envisioned for her. In both her personal and professional life as an IHM, Julie was able to create strong relationships with her peers and realize steady progression in her vocation as a teacher and school administrator. Moreover, after leaving canonical status, Julie was one of the first women hired as a principal in the Los Angeles public school system.

When she remembers how her father parented her, Maria Inez recalls that he would often “sit me down when he had time, and he would ask me ‘What did you learn in school? What did you learn?’ And then we would have a discussion.” During the time of crisis with Cardinal McIntyre, Maria Inez’s father, who lived in Los Angeles with her mother, continued to be a voice of reason, support, and encouragement:

As we were going through the trauma—it was in all the newspapers, in the national news. We were being called the disobedient nuns, rebellious nuns . . . I remember this one Sunday when we were getting ready to go to the Mother House to have another meeting about what was happening. The phone rang and I heard my mom say, “Your father wants to talk to you.” And it’s like the principal wants to see you in the office. The basic message my Dad was saying [was] “what the hell is going on? . . . I’m looking at the news, I’m reading these papers.” So I said, “Dad we are making these changes.” And he said, “Didn’t I teach you a damn thing about unions? How come you all don’t get together to do this?” So I said, “Dad, they’re not ready to do this.” [To which he responded,] “Well I just want you to know you can get the hell out of there, because you don’t have to be cheap labor for anybody. You come home—your room is still here. You don’t have to go through this.” I thanked my Dad and told him I would let him know when I was ready.

Even though Maria Inez was raised in a family system where she was encouraged to
think and her intelligence was valued by her father, her personal experiences of engaging with and eventually choosing to resist the authority of the Catholic Church were traumatic and unsettling. She became adept at confronting issues and facing hostility by stepping back from the circumstances and context of the ensuing struggles with Cardinal McIntyre through self-reflection, dialogue with other IHM Community members, and prayer.

Similarly, Mary describes a formative experience she had as a young girl with her father:

Often, by the time I was about 10 years old, my parents simply didn’t wake up any more to feed the baby in the middle of the night. My youngest brother, Johnny, was sleeping not far from where I was sleeping. I woke up and went downstairs to heat up the bottle and feed the baby for my mom. When I did that, I tasted the milk, made sure it wasn’t too hot, and fed Johnny his bottle.

In the morning one of my sisters came around, woke me up, and said, “Mary, do you want to go to Church?” I said, “Okay, but I can’t go to communion because I fed Johnny and tasted the milk from the bottle.” So my sister told my Dad, “Mary can’t go to communion because she tasted the milk from the baby’s bottle.”

My Dad said, without a moment’s hesitation, “Mary, that doesn’t make any sense. Of course you can go to communion.” I said, “But, Pop, I drank something after midnight.” And he said, “The point is you don’t eat or drink out of reverence. You didn’t eat or drink really. You just tasted the baby’s bottle so that he wouldn’t be burned or scalded. We wouldn’t want a God who was interested in that kind of picky stuff. Your intention was to feed the baby. That’s a good intention.” He wanted to make sure that I felt comfortable. So he took me in to see the parish priest, and he said, “Mary tasted the baby’s bottle. May she go to communion?” And the priest said “Oh, sure.” That was a very formative experience for me.

This experience with her father taught Mary that “if there are rules, the purpose of the rules is much more important than the rule itself . . . if they don’t make sense in context, then the rule is less important than the doing the good thing.” Mary’s father gave her practical advice about not blindly adhering to the rules of external authority. He also allowed her to hear from a representative of the Church’s authority structure that his word
could be trusted and that she and her question were important enough to be presented directly to the person in authority.

Carol notes that her father taught her when she was a young girl that she was capable of doing whatever she wanted to do. As a result, during adolescence Carol enjoyed high degrees of independence and self-reliance:

I had been an only child [and I] had quite a bit of freedom, I started driving—well, I got my license at 16 but I had been driving with my parents since I was 14. And I’d had the use of the car—I didn’t have my own car, but I had use of our car to drive to school sometimes. And I was pretty independent.

The group interview. During the group interview, the theme of father also appeared in several of the participants’ responses. The group interview brought the participants together to share their reflections on questions that they had submitted for the process and which guided the discussion. Other than Carol and Ann (who was not in attendance because she was sick), the theme of father appeared in responses to the question submitted by Maria Inez, which asked, “How have your attitudes and relationships toward clergy and men changed since we went through this trauma?”

Stephanie recalls:

As a girl, as a teenager, and even as a young nun until we went through the changes, I think I inherited from my family the attitude that men were superior. And it didn’t come from my father . . . there was just an assumption that men were smarter.

Stephanie introduces to our discussion the idea that fathers are not necessarily implicit within family systems in promoting the patriarchal rule of thumb that states men are superior to women. Instead, the voice of patriarchy is extremely adept in its ability to silently pervade individual, cultural, and societal values and assumptions about women’s roles.
Different from Stephanie’s experiences, Joann recalls:

Growing up as the youngest of six children in the family, three boys and three girls, I always had a great respect for my Dad and the boys. They were always so very protective of their little sister. And I think my Dad probably insisted on that. Joann is enthusiastic and open in describing her relationships with her father and brothers and confirms that she holds them in high regard. Having had a positive relationship with men as a young girl later allowed Joann to respect those members of the clergy who were mindful of their power and how they treated others.

Similar to Joann, both Mary and Julie elaborate on the impressions they shared about their fathers during their individual interviews. Mary begins her response to Maria Inez’s question, “It’s always been very hard for me to just kowtow to what somebody else says. I think that came primarily from my father.” We learn that Mary’s capacity to know herself, and to not silently obey external authority, had been encouraged by her father “who always asked me to think and he always told me that the most important thing was to have that primacy of conscience.” Through formative experiences with her father as a young girl, Mary was later prepared as an adult woman “to look at things as an individual and to step back if I needed to.”

Julie reconfirms the importance of her father as a young woman: “Like [Mary’s father], my father was also a wonderful man, way ahead of his time man in terms of thinking that women could do anything they wanted.” She recognizes that her father’s attitudes regarding women’s right to pursue their dreams were very positive for her: “Now in that day and age that wasn’t exactly the common thinking . . . so I had a very positive experience in terms of paternity from my father” Julie brings to our discussion once again the role that good fathering can play in how women imagine their futures and
the types of choices they make to pursue their dreams. She also clarifies that her father’s outlook about women was not typical of his generation.

Similar to what she described during her individual interview, Anita recalls the imprint that the early years of her relationship with her father has had on her views of authority:

I was very aware that authority was never necessarily good . . . and that my father didn’t have a lot of power in some of those particular cases, because [the] police would come and they couldn’t say anything. So we always had to figure out how to go around it.

By witnessing the ways her father was treated by and in turn responded to political and governmental forms of authority, Anita learned the value of knowing how to evaluate structures of authority. These experiences taught her in a valuable way that the choice of silent resistance is often the wisest choice to be made when confronted with oppressive authority.

In response to question 2, which she contributed to the group interview, Maria Inez states:

I feel that growing up in my tradition, an Hispanic [sic] culture, men are treated very special, from the perspective they are served first. In my family, I had five brothers so I had to make their beds, help with their laundry. Although my father did help with dishes. So there was that dichotomy of men being treated different, with special privileges . . . I grew up with that distinction of privilege. And I believe, as others have shared, I did learn from my brothers and my Dad that I was expected to be able to think and to discuss.

Maria Inez explains that her ability to think and to dialogue were behaviors that were encouraged in her home despite the cultural standard that placed men in a more privileged position. Her father and brothers provided positive role models by demonstrating behavior and acting in ways that went beyond cultural stereotypes of how women are viewed in relationship to men.
Although Carol does not directly reference her father in response to question 2 of the group interview, we do learn about her attitudes toward men and authority:

Clearly our attitudes toward men, in general, and hierarchy are very different according to our own experience. And that’s how I see this whole study, really. That our early years, and then even our formative years, and those years when this great change was happening depended on where we were and who we were with at the time. . . . Because I didn’t think of systems, I just thought of individuals. Like I liked some men and I didn’t like other men. And clearly Cardinal McIntyre represented someone who could not hold authority over me. And so it’s very much how that person, man or woman, is holding their authority and exercising their authority. And so I like some men and I don’t like some other men.

Although she recognizes that he was a powerful male authority figure in the Los Angeles Archdiocese, Carol did not believe that Cardinal McIntyre had authority over her.

The Role of Mothers and Fathers

In describing how they came to be resisters of external authority, Anita, Ann, and Carol identified in their individual interviews the influence of both their fathers and their mothers. As the only child of Jewish parents living in dictatorial countries, Anita learned at a very young age that neither of her parents had enough personal power to thwart authoritarian leaders and governments:

I asked my father when I was probably 4. I asked the question, “*Que manda mas?*”—Who has the most power—who rules most—who has it? . . . I don’t know what [my father] was talking to me about, but I know the question [I asked him]. And I think I understood it at the time, because I realized that my parents didn’t have that much power either. In Spain, we had the Guardia Civil who came to the house, asked questions. They took my father one day. I saw all that. So I knew that they were powerless in that situation.

Different from the reflections of Joann, Julie, Maria Inez, Mary, and Carol, who saw their fathers model behavior that overtly encouraged them to think, question, and challenge authority, Anita routinely describes what she learned by observing her parents in situations when they could not overtly resist authority. She discovered that mothers and
fathers are not always invincible in the face of authority:

[Because] we were foreigners [living in Spain] . . . I don’t know when my mother
told me that I couldn’t say anything outside [of our home]. My father was
listening to the BBC in the closet . . . so the result of that was that for most of my
life, I didn’t say anything . . . when we were [later settled] in Los Angeles, my
father was talking about something or other, and I said, “Oh, I remember that.
And he said, “No you don’t.”

Anita learned the value of avoiding imprisonment and death by observing her parents
display non-overt forms of resistance. Her perspectives on resistance describe the value
of observation and quiet discernment when consciously avoiding the undesired attention
of authorities.

We learn from Ann’s descriptions of her early childhood that her parents divorced
when she was 4 and that she did not have a relationship with her father until they
reconnected following her mother’s death when she was 15. Growing up in her maternal
grandmother’s home, Ann discovered that both her mother and her grandmother were
very strong and tenacious women. As a result, Ann learned to appreciate that women did
not need to be limited by social and cultural standards that dictated what women could do
or not do:

When we moved up to Lancaster [after my parents’ divorce], my grandmother,
who was also divorced, had gone to the desert and cured herself [after contracting
tuberculosis]. She was a single woman raising her daughter; had come out from
Iowa as a single parent, raised her daughter—my mother, and had done whatever
jobs she needed to do in order to make a living. And that was back in the 1920s
and 1930s. So, by the time we moved in with her, I had this example of a woman
who did what she had to do. I was never stuck in that, this is a man’s job; this is a
woman’s job. My grandmother at one time ran a newspaper. She took it down
every week to put it to bed, as they said. . . . My mother actually did some radio
work. She also worked in a paint store. There were a couple times when she was
healthy enough [to work].

Reconnecting with her father after her mother’s death provided Ann with an opportunity
to develop a closer relationship with him. She notes that their relationship later proved to
a source of support when she and her sister, who was also an IHM, were going through the 1960s Vatican II experimentation process and the ensuing crises with Cardinal McIntyre and the Vatican:

My Dad always knew that my sister and I had feet of clay. So that wasn’t too much of a shock [that we would take the steps we did] when the IHMs were embroiled in the conflict with Cardinal McIntyre. And we could talk—he knew a lot about what went on in the parish, and the parish he was in had one of those priests who did all sorts of bad stuff, and he knew about it. He was very proud of me [and my sister].

Additional comments offered by Carol provide a narrow glimpse into the nature of her relationship with both her parents:

[While] my mother was behind the scenes encouraging [me to enter the Order]; my father was very upset when I told him—he cried when I told him. I remember [being] in my bedroom when I sat down and I told him. And so that was hard—because I was like the light of his life. Both parents, really.

Carol describes a strong sense of self-awareness in her ability to know at the age of 17 that she wanted to become nun, as well as an internal fortitude to resist the pull of her father’s reactions in response to her decision. Undoubtedly, her mother’s support was enough for Carol to rely upon in order to withstand her father’s emotional response and make the choice for the future direction of her life.

Stephanie makes just one mention of her parents in her individual interview:

It’s interesting. My mom was really ill. I had been in Encino, and I got missioned to San Diego. I told my parents. And, unbeknownst to me, my dad came up and met with Mother Regina. He said, “You know, Stephanie’s mother is very ill. And we live here in Los Angeles. It would be a real hardship if she were in San Diego” And I got switched to Long Beach [to be closer to my family].

It is not discernible from Stephanie’s reflections the type of relationship she had with her mother and father. However, it does appear that it was important to Stephanie to let her parents know of the decision to be missioned to San Diego. It also seems that her father
was aware of the benefits to both Stephanie and her family that she remain closer to home because of her mother’s illness.

Section Summary

Because I grew up in a home without a father’s presence and guidance and learned very little about the relationship my mother had with her father, I had not imagined that women born and raised during the 1930s through to the 1950s would describe their fathers as being progressive in their thinking about women. From personal experience, I knew the role that mothers played in either encouraging or discouraging their daughters to dream for their future, to think for themselves, and to succeed in school.

I learned in different ways from each of the participants about the role that fathers play in their daughters’ lives. Girls who are encouraged by their fathers to question, think, and dialogue are often better equipped to develop into future constructed knowers and resisters of authority. They are also more adept as adults to question and critique the environments in which they live. Many of the participants shared in very powerful ways how the empowerment of their personal sense of self was affected by the positive influence of their fathers.

Engagers in Process: Cultivating Seeds of Resistance

The Role of Education, Dialogue, and Community: The Individual Interviews

During the individual interviews, participants identified the important role that individuals within the IHM Community, as well as outside, played in nurturing and cultivating the early seeds of resistance that had been planted when they were young girls. Choosing to become members of such a forward-thinking religious community with
well-educated and progressive women in the top leadership positions exposed the participants to positive role models for women’s creative and intellectual development. Although one might conclude that choosing to be a nun is not a forward-thinking choice, at the time they entered the IHM Community there were very few options available to women to foster careers or lifestyles that were independent of men. Inside the IHM Community, the participants were provided with opportunities for education and creative expression as well as for forging meaningful relationships with their peers. They also enjoyed degrees of independence that most women of their generation whose choices were to get married and have children or remain single and be typecast as old maids were not able to establish. Coming from homes where many were revered as daughters by fathers or mothers, the participants’ choice of a progressive community reflects a characteristic they share in common: In many ways they were ahead of the times in which they were living.

In order to get a sense of the ways the seeds of resistance were nurtured and cultivated and supported an emerging sense of self, I have chosen dialogue from Joann’s, Julie’s, Mary’s, Ann’s, and Stephanie’s individual interviews that offer representative insights into the types of experiences that helped nurture them, as well as the other participants. Joann explains that she has “great respect for the IHM Community’s leadership—for their knowledge, but also for their heart. They were good, holy women . . . they were educated and they wanted all of us to be educated too. That was what they really wanted.” As we learned in the last section, Joann was unwillingly sent away to attend a Catholic boarding high school that was run by a less progressive religious order than the IHMs. Encouraged by her father to make the choice for herself to not return to
that school, and not succumb to her sister’s apparent authority within their home, Joann was later able to discover a religious community where she respected the leadership’s intellectual astuteness and also revered their devoutness and prayerfulness.

Similar to Joann, one can hear the respect Julie holds for the IHM Community’s long-standing commitment to education:

I’d say that one of the things that the IHM Community has always done was to bring in for college classes [many] wonderful people, professors, priests. As a result we knew long before [Vatican II] that there were needs for change . . . not only did we read books, we would discuss them and dialogue about them . . . both in the convents and in groups.

The seeds of resistance that had been planted by Julie’s father when she was a young girl and adolescent were nurtured and cultivated within the academic environment of the Immaculate Heart College, as well as within the convent setting.

Mary notes that what drew her to the IHM Community was not only her love for education, but was also her experience of being “encouraged to do my best thinking and to think, not simply to study, but to think,” first as a student at Immaculate Heart High School and later as a IHM Community member. She adds, “That was a very important piece of my being an IHM.” Having learned from her father the value of being an independent thinker, Mary was given permission both as a student and later as a member of the IHM Community to think critically and deeply.

Ann shares that because “the people in the Community [and] the leadership in the Community were always, always forward-looking,” she and the others were nurtured and encouraged to think beyond the tenets of the traditional structures of religious life. We learn that she values the quality of the relationships that was shared among IHM Community members, as well as the ingenuity of the IHM’s leadership team. Having
being raised by her mother and maternal grandmother who were strong female role models, and educated by Sisters of the Immaculate Heart in grammar school and high school, Ann sought after and found her place within the IHM Community. The seeds of resistance that were planted by witnessing the strength of her mother and grandmother later found healthy soil in which to take root and grow within the IHM Community.

Stephanie points out that even though IHM Community members were presented with the opportunity to attend classes on weekends and during the summers in order to finish their BA degrees, she and most others had not been adequately prepared to teach in a classroom environment after leaving the Novitiate’s contemplative life. Even with 2 years of college experience, Stephanie still felt ill equipped to teach high school students. For a long time she could resolve these challenges through prayer, which was the advice given by the convent superiors

[whose] voice was the voice of God . . . [and] everything you do is the voice of God. It’s like people who open the Bible for an answer. If you believed that—and I did—it was comforting because you didn’t have to worry about whether what you were doing was really helping you be closer to God.

While critical of those superiors who misused their authority when serving as the voice of God, Stephanie nonetheless garnered inner peace from this dimension of religious life. Being a very practical individual, Stephanie knew to take advantage of the convent’s internal resources rather than solely depending on the voice of the superior for direction: “Other people also helped me and we took practical classes about how to survive in the classroom.” Despite what she observed as a misuse of authority by certain superiors, Stephanie discovered meaningful ways to nurture her spirit inside of those traditions. The Role of Internal Visionaries: The Group Interview

During the group interview, we learn more about key individuals who helped
nurture and cultivate seeds of resistance that were initially planted during girlhood and sowed after the participants joined the IHM Community. The group process began with the question submitted by Carol: “What were the factors that prepared us for and/or contributed to our making the decision to surrender our vows and therefore disobey the hierarchy?” In response to this question, we learn not only about the progressive leaders and scholarly academics within the IHM Community, but also about the value that was placed on internal community dynamics and the support offered by many progressive clergy members during this period.

Carol and Stephanie describe the value and importance of the training they received during their earlier years in the IHM Community as key ingredients in their later decision to surrender their vows. It is important to note that Carol chose to leave the IHM Community roughly 18 months prior to the other 7 participants. Carol recalls, “Even in our [early] training I think we were encouraged to think for ourselves [and] to be creative. Although we had a vow of obedience, it was understood in a way that I felt encouraged to think for myself.” Carol clarifies that while she took a vow of obedience, the progressive attitudes of the IHM Community encouraged a degree of independent and creative thinking on the part of its members.

Stephanie’s comments reflect what she shared during her individual interview:

From my standpoint, there was a lot of beauty in the traditional life. I loved having the assurance that God was smiling on me and on everybody else, and [that] we were held in God’s hands and doing what God wanted. You know, I always had that—having made the vows, it was very comforting.

We learn that Stephanie discovered a rich and meaningful quality of life within the traditional structures of religious life. Despite her earlier comment regarding the voice of the superior being equated with “the voice of God,” one can sense that Stephanie
succeeded in finding a way to cultivate a personal connection with the voice of God through her devotion to the religious life.

We learn from Joann that she not only appreciated and respected the IHM Community leaders’ “sincerity, prayerfulness, and their whole character,” she also valued their business savvy. Joann recalls Mother Regina McPartlin’s remarkable acumen in finance and real estate investments: “Mother Regina was very influential, and she was the one that was responsible for building Queen of the Valley Hospital, for building a chapel at Montecito, and for purchasing the Immaculate Heart Center.” Through Joann’s observations about Mother Regina, we get a sense of the breadth and depth of the women who were holding the leadership positions of the IHM Community. At a time when American women were not associated with building hospitals and acquiring valuable real estate in Montecito, California, we discover that the IHM leaders were innovators in both business and academics.

Following the same line of thinking as the others, Anita recognizes that prior to Vatican II the IHM Community’s leaders participated in The Leadership Conference for Religious Women (LCRW). The LCWR, founded in 1956, is an association of the leaders of congregations for Catholic women religious in the United States and assists its members in carrying out their service as leaders in the contemporary world.

We had been, over the years, part of the Leadership Conference of Religious Women—and that in the United States was really very forward-looking—it was already looking for being sure that young sisters had a new theology and that they were educated.

Because of the leadership’s commitment to exposing their members to progressive theologies, Anita comments that this also affected their approaches in their classrooms: “When you taught in our schools, we were all thinking the same way about
[progressive] education.”

*The Role of External Visionaries: The Group Interview*

In addition to the strength and focus of their internal leaders, Julie recognizes in the group interview the influence of Cardinal Suenens, a Belgian prelate, who was an early champion of the IHMs. He also advocated for the renewal of women religious during Vatican II:

I think the community prepared all of us in many different ways—what stands out for me was when we all read some of the books of the times. I remember Cardinal Suenens’ book which was dealing with the nun in the modern world and how religious life should react to people in the modern world. And even though there were wonderful traditions . . . there were still things that needed perhaps to be changed. So there was this reading that we did all together, where everybody had a same basis for discussion.

In her description of the shared reading and analysis by IHM Community members of Cardinal Suenens’ book about the role of nuns in the modern world, Julie alludes to a building of critical consciousness among IHM Community members. As we learned in chapter 1, developing critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1974; Mies, 1983) reflects an approach to learning that creates an ability to discern, perceive, and expose social and political contradictions. Mies further identified that women’s conscientization is a critical parameter in enabling women to stand in their rightful place in history and society.

Maria Inez reconfirms what she described during her individual interview regarding the personal inspiration she received from Canadian Bishop Remi de Roo, who was known for his progressive outlook on the Church’s role in the modern world:

He would go to the Vatican Council [and] come back . . . to explain what was going on. He would say [to me] “well what do you think” . . . I hadn’t had that experience since I had been a child at home and my Dad would say “come and sit down, what are you learning, what do you think, and how do you think?” So it was a whole new experience to be able to say to a bishop, “I don’t agree with you.”
Maria Inez dialogued and debated with Bishop de Roo in ways that required her to reflect on, critique, and analyze her thoughts and opinions as a mature and adult thinker. Moreover, Bishop de Roo provided a positive male role model of how men with authority in the Church could interface and dialogue with women.

Similar to Maria Inez, Joann describes Bishop de Roo as an ally to the IHM’s renewal efforts and a major proponent of Vatican II. “He knew that Vatican II was being hampered by many clergy members, like our Cardinal McIntyre, because it was a threat to their power.”

Joann also acknowledges the sincerity and deep kindness that the late Father Virgil Cordano brought to her life for close to 50 years from her time as a novice until his recent death in 2008. Having attended Yale University’s Divinity School to study pastoral counseling, Joann provides spiritual direction to individuals on retreat at the Immaculate Heart Center. She often sought Father Virgil’s counsel on spiritual issues.

Because of Father Virgil’s inexhaustible support of the IHMs during the crisis with Cardinal McIntyre and Rome, Mary also believes that these experiences had a very profound effect. . . . In fact, I think Virgil shared every bit of our sadness, maybe more of it. There were a lot of people like Virgil . . . they thought this is not right . . . and they had to walk a tightrope, and it was very difficult [for them].

Mary acknowledges other clergy members as well, such as Fathers Wachowski and Martin, who “stuck with us during the tough times.”

Anita was drawn to the IHM Community’s “social thrust for justice and all that entails.” Her exposure to the thinking of moral theologian and German priest Bernard Häring, who frequently lectured at the Immaculate Heart College was highly valuable and akin to her personal view of the world. Anita notes that Häring’s study of the
morality of human actions “signaled a new approach to Catholic moral theology” (e.g., the causes, characteristics, consequences, and degrees of sin and wrongdoing.)

Section Summary

Framed within the metaphor of planting and cultivating seeds of resistance, we learn in this section that the participants’ sense of self as questioners of authority and resisters of injustice began as young girls within their family home and as elementary school students. Many of the participants who attended Immaculate Heart High School in Los Angeles also acknowledged the quality of the education they received as high school students. The nurturing and cultivation of those early seeds of resistance were encouraged by (a) aspects of the traditional religious life that offered sustenance and nurturance (structure and direction, prayer, and silent reflection); (b) progressive forms of leadership and approaches to teaching; (c) opportunities for dialogue among IHM Community members; (d) exposure to forward thinking clergy members and liberal theologians; and (e) the development of social capital, good will, and solidarity with similarly minded individuals and groups outside of the IHM Community.

In addition to nurturing and cultivating seeds of resistance from girlhood, the IHM’s journey of renewal into the modern world was also dependent upon the seeding of new approaches to resistance. These new ideas enabled them to resist the backward pull of historically male-dictated definitions of traditional religious life while outdated pieces of the IHM’s hierarchical structures began to wither away and eventually die. The liberation of ideas and the creation of cultural and social change are dependent upon the death of outdated theories about women’s ways of being and knowing.
The Voice of Creation

Overview

In nature, the movement towards growth is a slow and gradual process with much growth occurring before anything becomes visible. A seed swells slowly; the inner processes have been triggered, yet no root has reached down into the earth, nor has a tiny shoot appeared above the ground. As we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, once the seed of a future fruit-bearing tree has been properly nurtured and cultivated, its “on” switch is activated which allows the seed to take in water, expand, and break through its protective coating. Many weeks can pass before any visible proof that the seed has broken through its coating can be witnessed. Once it has broken through the coating, however, the seed begins to create sugar and protein which enables its roots to grow and deepen into the earth. As the roots strengthen and become established in the earth, small green shoots begin to emerge above the ground in search of sunlight.

I believe that a similar unfolding process occurs within a woman’s psychic space as she emerges from what Belenky, Clinchy, et al. (1997) refer to as received states of knowing through to subjective knowing and onto procedural and constructed knowing. There may be long periods of time when it is hard to determine whether she is growing or moving in the direction of procedural and constructed knowledge. However, these are often the times when deep internal growth is occurring through states of internal stillness and silent reflection. Schweickart (1996) argues that developing a discipline for internal reflection and self-quieting is fundamental to women’s ability to construct personal and interpersonal knowledge. Ultimately, the breaking through to an expanding sense of self is a slow process that requires sustained patience and hope on the part of women being
mentored and those serving as mentors.

To discover how the participants’ experiences of engagement and resistance can help women continue to challenge oppression, in the fourth listening I focused on the Voice of Creation. To capture a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences of the events that supported them through the Vatican II renewal process and their eventual decision to say “No” to the ultimatum presented by the male hierarchy, I first listened to what was being expanded and broken through in terms of shifting beliefs about their relationship with the Catholic Church. I was also interested in dialogue that described shifts in their personal and collective views as women religious living in the 1960s. Next, in order to discover how the participants’ experiences have helped women to resist and engage hierarchical structures, I initially concentrated on how their actions bore fruit during the 1960s. I then focused my attention on how the participants’ actions continue to bear fruit in contemporary women’s lives. In tending to the Voice of Creation, two subthemes emerged: (a) Taking Root: Seeds of Resistance Expanding and Breaking Through Protective Shells, and (b) Harvesting Seeds of Resistance: Bearing Fruit Then and Now.

**Taking Root: Seeds of Resistance Expanding/Breaking Through Protective Shells**

**Setting the Record Straight on Patriarchy: The Individual Interviews**

The theme of an expanding seed of resistance breaking through its protective coating, taking root, and sprouting life became readily apparent at the onset of conducting the individual interviews. When a seed of resistance takes root and begins to expand within women’s psychic space, one of the signs of the rooting and sprouting process would be in the ways that women describe their sense of self within a historical-cultural-
social context. Because the participants in this study are seasoned constructed knowers (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997) in their own right, I recognize that a newly sprouting constructed knower in process would not have the same depth of awareness as represented in the following portions of narrative. During the individual interviews, one of the first questions asked the participants to describe their understanding of the influence of patriarchal thinking in the design of their religious vows.

Anita, Carol, Julie, and Mary each challenged and questioned the relevance of the term patriarchy as an overarching theme of their experiences with the authority structures of the Catholic Church. When asked to discuss her understanding of patriarchy, Anita frames her response from pivotal childhood experiences when she observed how authority was used and misused in pre-World War II Germany and Spain. She says:

I don’t know how I would define it, but the thing is that in patriarchy you have—well it reminds me of something I asked my father when I was probably 4 years old [about power]. . . . And of course you know that when I was little I was living in countries where this was really important.

Anita resists framing the IHM’s experiences within the context of a continuing conflict with patriarchal and male hierarchical systems of authority. She states that “the truth of the matter is that it is not that straightforward. I mean, things happened . . . they weren’t necessarily ongoing. Sometimes it was one person or one incident or several incidents, and you’d figure it out.”

Anita asserts that her personal experiences do not fit inside a “straightforward” formula of women resisting systems of patriarchal authority. Instead, Anita explains that while incidents occurred with particular individuals in positions of power, she and the others were able to find their way towards viable solutions. She frames her understanding of engaging authority and power from a perspective of healthy discernment and
I always knew that you took authority with a grain of salt. I mean, I didn’t know it in those words, but I knew that they [in government] had more power—and I think I knew very early on that we were all under that [power].

Because authority and power are given realities that individuals need to accept and understand, Anita describes the value of learning to step back and critically discern who has the authority and who has the power.

In response to the question about how her vows were influenced by patriarchal values, Carol was very direct and forthright: “That question. I didn’t think of it at all at that time, of patriarchy.” She remains resolute in her views later in the interview when asked if any area of religious life had been affected by patriarchy:

Other areas of religious life? Well I suppose everything was affected, but I really—hate to—I don’t want to throw cold water on your dissertation. But I was not thinking in terms of patriarchy as such. I was at Good Counsel [parish] when we got visited by the men appointed by the archdiocese and Rome . . . and how did I take that? That was definitely an imposition that I thought, this is ridiculous.

While initially attempting to go with the focus of the question, Carol retains her authority and describes how she personally experienced the crisis with male representatives sent from Rome and the Los Angeles Archdiocese to interrogate the IHMs. She brings to this discussion the value of seeing herself as an individual in relationship to other individuals (e.g., members of the clergy appointed by Rome) rather than an individual confronting a system of patriarchal power.

Carol held tight to her belief that the progressive thinkers and theologians of the Catholic Church would prevail as the true voice of the future Church. Clarifying that she was “much more influenced by all the positive thought, that I didn’t dwell on the patriarchy,” Carol was not concerned that Cardinal McIntyre and other members of the
Church’s hierarchy could prevail in their attempts to block the authority of the IHM’s responses to the Vatican II renewal process. Nor was she concerned that they would have any lasting influence on the implementation of the overall vision of Vatican II.

“Certainly, looking back, in the larger life, I could see that yes, the men were controlling too much.” We can hear the strength of Carol’s sense of self in her ability to hold on to her experiences of those times. She did not succumb to my role as researcher or the overall view of this dissertation regarding the role that patriarchal systems of authority play in women’s lives.

We learn from Julie that she had “an indirect” understanding of patriarchy in the 1960s: “I have since come to see it in how the community viewed it . . . while it was very clear to me that the pastor was the person in charge . . . those experiences of mine were not bad.” Julie is clear that she did not encounter any negative experiences with the clergy and pastors with whom she worked in the parish schools. She recalls when the parish pastors were faced with financial shortfalls that precluded purchasing new books for their students that she and the other teaching sisters were often directed to use old textbooks. “I don’t even consider that as a patriarchal decision; it was probably more financial than other kinds of things.” Julie does recognize that other IHM Community members sorely struggled under oppressive women superiors as well as under members of the clergy. She also understands that the IHM Community’s leadership came to view the IHM’s conflict as one that involved patriarchal authority. However, she is reticent to homogenize the hierarchical system of the Church as one that is essentially patriarchal and oppressive.

When thinking about the role of patriarchy within the Church, Mary states that
she has “reservations about that word [patriarchy] because sometimes it’s used very pejoratively. And I do think that a patriarchal system can be very destructive [but] I did not experience that whole sense of the power structure in a negative sense.” When reflecting on the patriarchal influence in the design of religious women’s vows, she explains that she “never did think about that,” adding “I’m not sure I can describe that . . . partly because the vows for men’s religious communities are the same as the vows for women’s religious communities. I never thought of that as a patriarchal thing [but it’s] definitely part of the historical picture for sure.” She believes that when “things get systematized by either men or women, they don’t allow anybody else to have a thought. That is not good. That’s the same bad system.”

Mary does not use the words patriarchy or matriarchy to define her experiences of the power and authority structures of the Catholic Church or the IHM Community. In her opinion, both of these terms are too loaded with negative inferences. Like Carol, Mary believes that, rather than a system of patriarchal authority, the IHMs were confronting a group of individuals who misused their power.

Looking at History of Patriarchy in Another Way: The Individual Interviews

In retrospect, Ann, Maria Inez, Stephanie, and Joann acknowledge the relevance of the term patriarchy in light of their Vatican II experiences when they were interfacing with multiple levels of the Church’s hierarchical, ecclesiastical, and patriarchal authority structures. When she first sat down to begin her individual interview, Ann stated that she had “a really different feel for the patriarchal dominance. I did not feel that growing up, but I certainly felt it in the IHM Community during all of our changes.” In the next portion of her narrative, Ann provides a clear description of a hierarchical top-down flow
of authority where individuals and groups are “told” what to do from someone above them. “Rome would say ‘Do this’ and we started doing this. Then they would say, ‘No, don’t do this,’ and we would say, ‘But you said do this.’” Ann clarifies that the IHMs frequently received mixed and conflicting messages from Rome about the IHM Community’s interpretation of the Vatican II decrees.

As a community, the IHMs also received conflicting messages from various components of the Church’s male hierarchical structure. There were the progressive thinkers and theologians who wrote about and envisioned the implementation of Vatican II decrees that called for women religious to be empowered in the modern world. There were also the members of the local and national clergy who stood by the IHM’s side and voiced their concern, often at risk within their own communities. However, it was those who remained loyal to the traditions of the Catholic Church and did not subscribe to the visions of Vatican II who proved to be the most powerful factions of the male authority structure. Ann notes that, in her experience, neither logic nor reason prevails within patriarchal authority structures.

When reflecting on the influence of patriarchy in the lives of women religious, Maria Inez clarifies the challenges that women will confront if they attempt to uncover the pervasiveness of patriarchal thinking when living within male-dominated authority systems. Pointing out that the vows of obedience often required that the nuns be submissive to those in authority, Maria Inez further explains that a matriarchal form of power frequently pervaded women’s religious communities. “It’s a woman instead of a man [in control] . . . it’s saying women can also be chauvinists.” Maria Inez points out that power can be misused by both men and women.
It was not until Vatican II that Joann became cognizant of the struggles the IHM leadership had been enduring for several years with Cardinal McIntyre.

I didn’t begin to see patriarchy until Vatican II brought [the problems with the cardinal] to a totally different aspect of what . . . our [IHM] Community had been dealing with for many years, as far as the College was concerned . . . it was unjust.

The first phases of the conflict between the IHMs and the Los Angeles Archdiocese were contained among the women in IHM leadership positions, Cardinal McIntyre, and various members of his staff. When the IHM Community members began to meet and engage with one another and to respond to Vatican II’s call for renewal, the knowledge of the conflict began to be spoken about and known within the larger IHM Community.

Joann describes a critical ingredient in the developing of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; Mies, 1983). In order for critical consciousness to come to fruition, the knowledge about and reality of oppression must extend beyond those in positions of authority and into the hands of those who are oppressed. In other words, the power to resist oppression is dependent upon the awakening of awareness at all levels.

Stephanie begins her response to the question of patriarchal influence with a tongue in cheek exclamation noting that “the ‘p’ word” has been spoken. She clarifies what the others have shared, that when she entered the IHM Community in the late 1950s she was unaware of the term patriarchy. However, when looking at patriarchy from a 21st-century perspective, Stephanie describes it as “an institutional system of oppression of the powerless by the powerful,” adding that “the word [patriarchy] has an unfortunate connotation because it sounds as though, since these institutionalized systems were the work of men, men are free of oppression, whereas patriarchy affects men as well as women.” Because Stephanie has a graduate degree in Feminist Spirituality from the
Immaculate Heart College, she recognizes the influence that her graduate studies and education have had on her current points of view about the Catholic Church and the domination of hierarchical/patriarchal authority throughout its long history. Stephanie also points out that using the term patriarchy continues to be a challenge because it is negatively linked to male-bashing.

*The Evolving Spirit of Resistance: Keeping the Record Straight: The Group Interview*

The same spirit of resistance that was so well demonstrated during the individual interviews regarding the term patriarchy was similarly reflected in the group interview. The group process began with Carol’s question: “What were the factors that prepared us for and/or contributed to our making the decision to surrender our vows and therefore disobey the hierarchy?” Each of the participants, except Joann, responded to the phrase “disobey the hierarchy” and expressed a clear resistance to the use of this type of terminology to describe the IHM’s actions and experiences. This discussion also led to additional dialogue about power and authority.

Mary was the first participant to challenge the term disobey. She also took the opportunity to further discuss her views on the differences between authority and power:

“I didn’t feel that I was disobeying anyone. I had never promised them anything about how I was going to live. So the phrasing is difficult for me to accept or internalize. What happened was they contradicted what they set out [to do]—what they told us to do as they set out with Vatican II reforms, and we just went beyond them. I didn’t feel that I was disobeying—they didn’t have the authority over me to tell me that I couldn’t do these things. Especially the local hierarchy [in Los Angeles].

Later in the interview, Mary clarifies:

From my perspective, I think that the experience [was one] of coming up [against] power grabbers. [That] small group of the cardinal and the people in power in Los Angeles has made me more careful not to do that to other people. . . . It’s not just men who hold the power—many women hold power also . . . it’s not something
about gender, it’s about how respectful you are of other people . . . in terms of allowing them to author themselves, which is what I really believe authority has at its root. And so I think it’s much more than a gender thing . . . we have to be careful to honor other people in our everyday lives.

Mary is clear that the actions she and the others took were not acts of disobedience. She also provides insight into her perspectives on genderism in the Church. Rather than categorizing authority structures by gender, she finds it more useful to look at how authority is used, for example, those who are power grabbers versus those who help others to become the authors of their own lives.

In response to Mary’s comments regarding “power grabbers,” Stephanie offers additional insight into the misaligning of patriarchy with male-bashing:

I agree with Mary about this “small group” that wanted to undo what we had done. But the disturbing thing to me was that small group was powerful enough to go back to Rome and the power structures in Rome to stop us. Because the local Cardinal-Archbishop really had no authority over us. So he could say he didn’t like what we were doing, but he could not do anything about it until he went to Rome and got the backing of Rome. So that was an extension of the abuse of power. In terms of men—unfortunately men have been in the power positions throughout history. So when there’s an abuse of power, most of the time it’s been done by men. If you stand up to power and it’s being done by men, you get a reputation for being men haters when it’s not that. I remember people used to joke that IHM meant “I Hate Men.” I see our experience as part of a historical phenomenon—hopefully it’s changing and it will get better.

After listening to comments others have made about displeasing the hierarchy, Stephanie adds:

This is just another reflection. I was listening to Carol saying about displeasing the hierarchy and my philosophical self was looking back and saying “I grew up Catholic” [and] one of the things we learned was the highest authority in the Church is an Ecumenical Council. And here is Pope John saying “Open the window; there’s a whole new way of looking at life.” It was really exciting and we took that seriously. We saw the Ecumenical Council to be above the hierarchy. And so the thing that saddens me is that some of the hierarchy supported the Vatican Council, but maybe the majority didn’t. I can’t make a judgment on that. But in our case, where we were trying to answer to a higher “authority,” we were being kept from that by a lower authority.
Stephanie offers insight into a curious dynamic of hierarchical systems where different levels of authority/individuals within the system disagree on a direction to take. More often than not, one faction of the system is strong enough to dominate the other. In the case of the IHMs, the highest authorities of the Catholic Church, that of the Pope and the collective power of an Ecumenical Council, had provided a progressive direction for change and renewal within religious communities. However, factions within the hierarchy of the Vatican, in concert with Cardinal McIntyre, were able to create a counterforce of resistance.

Following Mary and Stephanie’s comments, both Anita and Maria Inez similarly debated the validity of the term *disobey*. Anita stated,

> We didn’t feel that we were being disobedient to anybody because the first call to change came out of the Pope’s encyclical in which we were asked to . . . look at our Community. . . . So that thing keeps bothering me—that little thing about disobedience.

Maria Inez commented:

> I didn’t feel that we set out to do anything to disobey the hierarchy. I think that what we were doing was trying to be faithful to God who brought us to this Community, to be faithful in listening to God.

Later in the discussion, Maria Inez adds

> I remember being in Los Angeles and we had to be in line while we waited to speak with the priests and bishops who were sent to interrogate us about what we did. It didn’t make sense. I remember saying to one bishop, “I don’t understand, do you do this [interrogation and investigation] to your sisters?” And he said, “No, but you’re a test case.”

In response to the question she submitted for the group process, Carol does not make reference to whether the IHMs did or did not disobey hierarchical authority. Instead she states:
For myself, in that parish where I was in the 1960s, I remember we did some things that were irregular, the hierarchy would not have approved. But I became convinced at that time that change happens before the law approves it; that change precedes whatever is approved by the law thereafter.

Carol’s reflections highlight that creative responses to acts of resistance begin with individuals or groups of individuals taking the necessary steps that will lead to meaningful changes in both legal and political structures. Later in the discussion, Carol adds, “I learned from all the persons who taught me, my reading and so forth, that ultimately I am the person who has to decide. So the locus of authority is within myself, not in the hierarchy.”

With the opportunity to share additional thoughts on the first question of the group process, Julie spoke again about her views on “disobeying the hierarchy” after hearing the others’ comments. Julie explains the type of encounters she had with many of the bishops in the Archdioceses of San Francisco and Oakland who were supportive of what the IHMs were doing:

They saw our Community as the leader in terms of the vision for the future, of what the Pope had asked religious communities to do. . . . Like most everyone else here, I didn’t see it as an act of disobedience. I simply saw it as continuing on with this group of people who was going to be different.

In addition to not seeing their actions as ones of disobedience, Julie provides constructive insight into the multi-layered nuances of the IHM’s experiences: (a) Despite the support of the clergy and bishops in northern California, Cardinal McIntyre and his team of supporters succeeded in thwarting the IHM’s efforts to retain their canonical status as modern women religious; and (b) even though she was living in a more progressive archdiocese that did not view the IHM Community as one comprised of rebellious nuns needing to be corralled, Julie aligned herself with the progressive visions of the IHM
majority. She chose to receive her dispensation and to lose her canonical status within the Church.

Section Summary

We discovered in this section that the successful cultivating and breaking through of its embryonic state allows the young seed of resistance to mature into a voice of resistance and an empowered sense of self. In the individual interviews, each participant offered differing impressions of the relevance of patriarchy in their lives as women religious. For some the term did not fit with their experiences of those times and they offered alternative perspectives on what was at play. Others were able to concede that, in retrospect, a system of patriarchal authority was at work throughout the progressive stages of the IHM’s crisis with Cardinal McIntyre, the Los Angeles Archdiocese, and the Vatican.

In hindsight, I recognize that the participants’ questioning of the term patriarchy makes perfect sense. It was not until the publication of feminist writer and social activist Kate Millet’s Sexual Politics in 1970 that the term patriarchy was inserted into feminist discourse. In what has been described as the first feminist “manifesto,” Millet argued that when one group rules another, the relationship between the two is political; and when such an arrangement is carried out over a long period of time it develops into an ideology (e.g., genderism and racism). Millet clarified that all historical civilizations are patriarchal and outlined how patriarchy is steeped in the ideology of male supremacy.

The participants would not have framed their experiences of religious life in the 1950s, or even their interactions with Cardinal McIntyre and the Vatican in the mid- to late 1960s from the feminist perspective of engaging patriarchal authority. By taking
issue with the relevance of the term patriarchy, as well as challenging the validity of
whether they disobeyed hierarchical authority, the participants demonstrated in both
interview formats a sense of personal and communal authority. Moreover, the same
independent spirit that inspired them and the other members of the IHM Community to
take the actions they did during the 1960s was evident throughout the various phases of
the study.

We also learned in this section that many of the participants’ personal attitudes
about resisting and challenging authority had been “seeded” by early childhood
experiences within their family of origin and as high school students. In the years
preceding Vatican II, the seeds of resistance were cultivated and tended within the IHM
Community through (a) self-reflection, (b) engaging with forward-thinking women and
men, (c) valuing and deepening their relationships with one another, and (d) responding
to the widespread cultural, social, and political unrest that framed the 1960s.

When the crisis with Cardinal McIntyre and Rome began to manifest more fully
in the later part of the 1960s, the participants’ sense of themselves as individuals and as
IHM Community members had evolved and deepened beyond who they were upon
entering the IHM Community. While they may not have known that they were resisting a
system of patriarchal authority as those in the IHM Community’s leadership positions
were keenly aware of, the participants successfully resisted (a) the sanctioning of unjust
uses of authority by many male members of the hierarchical structure, (b) repeated
attempts to silence and control the IHM’s authority and destiny, and (c) the obscuring of
Vatican II’s vision for a renewed Catholic Church.
Seeds of Resistance: Bearing Fruit During the 1960s

Overview

When a seed’s embryo breaks open and its roots begin to take hold in the earth, a green shoot will eventually appear above the ground. The young tree is in the process of moving towards its maturing state of bearing fruit. The participants’ journey of responding to the changing times in which they were living during the 1960s, including their experiences with the Vatican II call for renewal, required moving beyond the traditional structures of religious life. The forward momentum included experimenting with new and often unconventional ways of understanding themselves as women religious living and teaching in the 20th century. The following section will present information gathered during the individual interviews. Each woman shared her personal impressions of how the IHM’s acts of resistance led to the creative bearing of fruit at both an intrapersonal and interpersonal level.

The Influence of Personal, Social, and Cultural Transformation

In the Classroom

One area that was influenced by the swiftly shifting times of the mid- to late 1960s was how the participants who were teaching sisters presented and discussed current events with their students. Anita notes that the IHM Community’s progressive leadership and sensitivity to cultural and societal dynamics always inspired her. “The [IHM] Community was always ahead [in its views and approaches to education]. Because there were so many things going on at that time—the Vietnam War, for instance . . . we were exposed to a lot of creative thinking.” Anita recalls the progressive approach she took to teaching her students about the Vietnam War. She encouraged them to question
and discuss the events with one another, rather than simply receiving information from her about the events. “This program [I used] gave the background about Vietnam . . . it presented the history of Vietnam . . . that it was invaded by the French, it was invaded by the British, and it was [being] invaded by us.”

Anita’s approach to teaching her students about the Vietnam War reflects aspects of the educational methodologies developed by Paulo Freire (1970), who argued that students are traditionally denied access to discussion and debate with educators. Freire stated that the design of traditional teaching models was severely limited by a one-way distribution of facts and knowledge. He also argued that the one-way distribution of knowledge not only dominated the thinking of most learners, it also impeded the students’ ability to question, critique, and successfully change the world around them.

Anita soon learned that there were repercussions to a critical approach to teaching:

One of the Birchers [teaching at the school] went to the principal, and said, “Do you know what your Social Studies department is teaching?” [The principal] tried to find me, but I was at a party. The Dean of Students came to me and said “I’m taking you home.” . . . I had no idea what was going on, but she told me the principal had been screaming and yelling outside of my classroom. But I wasn’t in it . . . I was leaving the school anyway, it was my last year. I already knew I was going someplace else.

Anita confirms that many Catholic priests during the 1960s were members of the conservative John Birch Society. The Society had gained a large following in America during the 1950s when its members opposed the United States’ affirming of the human rights principles of the United Nations.

Anita recalls her meeting with the school’s principal following these events:

He told me “I’m sorry you have to go.” And I said, “I choose to go.” He was pretty upset with me about that [comment]. So this was like the last straw . . . he almost had a heart attack that day . . . he actually ended up at the doctor’s office.
As demonstrated during the individual and group interviews, Anita has long been able to set the record straight about the circumstances surrounding her life’s experiences.

**Within the Community**

Maria Inez points out that during their experimentation process with progressive phases of modern habits, she and the other IHMs were regularly confronted with rejection and disapproval:

I had experienced a lot of discrimination and rejection from other communities because we took the step we did, [when] we began to wear lay clothes . . . the decisions we made were just not acceptable [to them]. . . . I was shunned by priests and sisters because of the steps that our Community was taking.

While she describes these painful experiences as essentially “private,” Maria Inez also recognizes the emergence of a deeper sense of understanding and compassion that began to develop among the IHM Community members throughout the shared journey.

We all knew that we were all going through something . . . we were all suffering in one way, shape, or another. But we all knew that this was a decision we made and God was going to help us through it, and bring us to a better place.

Maria Inez describes an emerging sense of shared rather than personal suffering that was being experienced by IHM Community members. As stated earlier by Joann, prior to the IHM Community’s wider involvement in the Vatican II renewal process, the acrimonious struggles with Cardinal McIntyre had been contained to the members of the IHM Community’s leadership team and key members of the cardinal’s staff.

**Creating Alliances with Others**

Ann points out how the IHMs were resilient and creative in the face of external pressures exerted by Cardinal McIntyre and his supporters, as well as with lay members of the parishes who disagreed with the IHM’s actions. Their resilience and creativity were nurtured from within the IHM Community and also cultivated through the strong
support offered by a large number of clergy members:

It was done with others—it was walking with others—with like-minded people. The decision was certainly each individual’s, but for me I never thought of not going forward . . . we talked a lot with each other . . . we always had the support of many bishops who told us we were on the right path.

Ann describes not only the value of developing strong internal relationships, she identifies the necessity of creating connections to individuals (both lay members and clergy) outside of the IHM Community—individuals who often helped brace the IHMs against the retaliation in the press and within the parishes where they served.

Responding to Vatican II

When Vatican II convened in 1962, the IHMs had already been reviewing the effectiveness of many of their internal operations since the late 1950s. They were particularly interested in updating the educational requirements for their teaching sisters, experimenting with various parts of the traditional habit, and exposing IHM Community members to the writings of progressive Catholic theologians. By the time they received the call for renewal the IHMs were in a strong position to sit, listen, and dialogue with one another in co-discovering the issues that they deemed relevant to their lives as modern women religious. Julie recalls:

When Vatican II came along, we watched and read all the documents, had people come and explain them and talk to us about that. Now everybody didn’t like Vatican II. In our Community, I would say most people certainly did [agree], but there were a lot of [members] who thought taking Latin out of the Mass was not a good thing to do . . . it was losing the tradition . . . all of that was going on through the 1960s; the discussions, the readings, the commissions, the community workshops, and meetings were all things that helped prepare people for what was going to come when the time came to make the change.

While the majority of the IHMs were supportive of the vision of Vatican II, there was a small minority who were adamantly opposed. Julie alludes to the internal discord that
was beginning to unfold among IHM Community members as they deepened into the renewal process. As the IHMs became more immersed in a participatory process and the traditional top-down authority structure began to dissolve, multiple expressions of resistance and creation began to emerge inside the community-wide meetings. As a community, the members responded to the emerging differences through dialogue and a democratic process designed to provide each member with the opportunity to voice her concerns.

As she looks back at the Vatican II experimentation process, Joann explains that from the outset of their renewal process most IHM Community members worked together in productive participatory meetings. These meetings provided a creative forum for discussion and dialogue: “We took about three years I believe to study the decrees . . . we had a lot of dialogue at that time.” Similar to Julie’s earlier reflections, Joann also mentions the smaller group of IHM Community members who were resistant to the changes being recommended by the majority of members:

In our [IHM] Community there was a group of women that didn’t want to change at all. They were very vocal about it too . . . at our meetings in Hollywood [at the Mother House] there was a lot of disagreement between Sisters; they [the leadership] wanted everybody’s opinion—because we were all in this together. You had to make a decision—do we want to go along with Vatican II, which was what all these Bishops and our Pope John XXIII [were asking us to do]—to be updated. There were also a lot of people leaving [the IHM Community] . . . some of whom shouldn’t have been there in the first place. They wanted to get married . . . they were doing things that they didn’t feel they wanted to devote their whole life to. These were very tough times for everyone.

Joann offers our discussion a view of the IHM’s creative process that reflects the concurrent breaking down of past traditions while in the process of redesigning and imagining their future(s). Approximately 50 in number, the members who did not agree with the new visions went directly to Cardinal McIntyre with their concerns because they
were alarmed by the tone and direction that the majority was planning to take (Caspary, 2003). As a result, those IHMs committed to a spirit of renewal faced increased scrutiny within the archdiocese as well as expanded exposure in the media’s coverage of their struggles. Despite the heightened surveillance of their activities, those in favor of renewal continued to respond to the visions that had been offered to women religious through the Vatican II process.

Mary expands our discussion to include her views on the deeper implications of the IHM Community’s experiences while creating their Vatican II decrees:

We did many things beyond what the cardinal objected to, in my view. There was a big shift in looking at person in community, for example. He didn’t care about that—the only things he cared about were those things that impacted his way of running the archdiocese. But that wasn’t the crux of our thinking. Our thinking wasn’t about trying to upset the cardinal. Our thinking was “what should we do to improve the way we work as a religious community in the modern world.” The decrees [that we created as a community in response to Vatican II] came from an attempt to take the way we were living as Sisters of the Immaculate Heart and moving that into a more modern world.

Mary’s reflections place the IHM’s experiences into a broader framework than merely a power conflict with Cardinal McIntyre and the male hierarchy. Although the full affect of this historical conflict cannot be minimized or ignored, Mary offers constructive insights into the IHM’s story that are overshadowed by the conflict. To overlook the deeper implications of the IHM’s activities would in fact be a disservice to all that they learned as a result of the renewal process:

At that time in the 1960s there had been a lot of talk about individualism and a need for the individual to assert himself or herself . . . one thing our decrees tried to do was to acknowledge that if you choose to be part of a community, there are certain things that you have to have as a give point as well . . . trying to balance [and] to connect the salient points of each side, person, and community . . . they don’t have to be opposites . . . they have to be integrated.

Mary’s comments help to integrate various pieces of the IHM’s history: They not only
struggled with powerful members of the male hierarchy, they also engaged in a meaningful process of creating new visions for their role as women religious in modern society. She continually brings the IHM story back to what they did and what they created while facing their struggles.

*Heading Towards the Modern World*

Similar to Mary’s reflections on the influence of the 1960s, Stephanie explains that she and the others could no longer deflect the dynamics of the 1960s away from their everyday lives. She states that

> the majority of the [IHM] Community was affected by the thinking of the 1960s so that by the time the choice came [to return to a more traditional form of religious life or receive dispensations from their vows] enough of us, 350 of us out of 400, felt that this was the way we should go—so movements [that] were exterior to the [IHM] Community—we were connected enough with them, and aware enough of them, that they changed us.

No longer separate and detached from the pulse of the outside world, the traditionally private world of religious life was being deeply penetrated and changed by the demands of the external world.

Taking things to a pragmatic level, Anita clarifies that the path leading to their new lives did not leave time for philosophical ruminations:

> I’ll tell you when we got to that point, there were just too many things you had to figure out. You didn’t think too much philosophically at that particular point. Because we were trying to keep body and soul together, which meant that you had to figure out how to get a job. If you needed a car, you had to figure out how to get a car. You had to figure out how to dress yourself. You had to figure out how to get a place to live. So all the nitty gritty things of life came together at that point—you had to figure out how to do that.

Anita’s reflections provide a bird’s-eye view into the realities that one will confront as a result of engaging, resisting, challenging, and subsequently leaving traditional structures. Those structures could be a family of origin, an abusive relationship, or a job where
sexual harassment prevails. There are both positive and negative outcomes that need to be factored into the process of personal and communal transformation.

A decision she qualifies as “choiceful,” Carol left the order roughly a year and a half in advance of the others because of profound intrapersonal changes that she had been experiencing throughout the 1960s. Those experiences culminated with her entrance into a religious studies graduate program at a public university.

I just became so taken and immersed with [my studies] in process theology . . . I didn’t have any question that I was going in the direction that I needed to be going—at this time in my life and the life of the world.

Because women religious were traditionally sheltered from the outside world, Carol states that the cost of that protection resulted in the women being “psychologically and sexually” immature. Carol recognized a personal longing to be liberated from her vows of celibacy in order to explore her sexuality, begin dating, and have the option to marry.

Immediately after voluntarily surrendering her canonical status, Carol went to La Jolla, California to participate in a 2-week encounter group training with humanistic psychologists Carl Rogers, William Coulson et al. at the Center for the Study of the Person:

I was wearing mini skirts . . . and I remember the first night down there. I was feeling awkward, I didn’t quite know [what to do] because there were a lot of men around. And our first night we were—I don’t know if it was a bar, but I remember sitting on a bar stool. It was a social—and I remember I had a black and white top and a black skirt. And I could still see myself in that instance and feeling very awkward. It was a great experience, but at least four men [were attracted to me]; three of them were married, I think. And so this was very affirming and interesting—so just imagine the whole encounter scene . . . I was enjoying it. But I was pretty naive. I was very naive. And fortunately I managed to stay okay.

Carol notes that having the opportunity to explore personal relationships with men for the first time “was a great [yet] unfamiliar” experience for her.
Responding to the Changing Times

During the group interview, the participants offered additional views of their process of emerging into the external modern world as lay religious women. In response to the first question of the group process regarding the factors that prepared them for making the decision to surrender their canonical status, Joann recalls what she learned during the various stages of experimenting with the habit. She notes the reaction of the patients in the hospital setting where she worked: “They were much more open when we came into their hospital room [without the full habit]. . . . They were freer to talk, and it was very noticeable.” Enjoying a personal liberation from the traditional habit as well as observing the positive responses of patients in the hospital influenced Joann’s ultimate decision:

Those experiences really determined that I would want to be a part of the new [lay] Community that was evolving because of Vatican II. I want[ed] to make sure that I was a part of the new group that was doing what I thought the Church was preparing for . . . it’s too bad that it wasn’t universal.

Stephanie and Julie recognize the imprint that was being made on their views of religious life by the penetration of the external world. In turn, they began to recognize an emerging need to move beyond what they had originally envisioned for their lives upon entering the IHM Community. Stephanie addresses what was particularly difficult for her during the multi-stage process of transitioning away from the traditional structure of religious life:

When I think about it now, I think there were two parts: there was the intellectual understanding of what was happening, and there was the emotional part—I really loved traditional religious life . . . and then the 1960s came along and we started questioning everything. And that’s where the intellectual change started happening. I started being more analytical about what was going on—what were the issues of the 1960s, both in the world and in the Church . . . . So although in my heart I didn’t like the changes, I wanted to maintain the traditional way; in my
mind it was clear we needed to change. So I think what changed my heart was when we started meeting as a group and talking about what this would mean. Through the process of community-wide meetings that encouraged participation and dialogue by all members in planning the future of their personal and vocational lives, Stephanie was able to move from resisting the changes to the life she loved to embracing the participatory process of re-visioning her life. She adds that, in the end, when the IHMs received the edict from the Vatican to either shape up or leave, I realized that my heart wanted to be with this group of women more than it wanted to be a member of established religious life in the Catholic Church . . . it was at that point that both the mind and the heart came together.

Acknowledging the “wonderful traditions” that Stephanie described, Julie knew nonetheless that “there were things that needed perhaps to be changed” in how the IHMs were going to be viable in the 20th century vis-à-vis the visions of Vatican II. Because the IHM Community was recognized primarily as a teaching order, Julie states that the process of undertaking the call for renewal was for some a time of trying to begin to look at something besides teaching that they could be doing in the religious life . . . all of that background going on through the 1960s; with the discussions, the readings, the commissions, the Community workshops, and meetings [these] were all things that helped prepare people for what was going to come when the time came to make a change.

Julie is the only participant to mention that part of the IHM’s visioning process was interested in exploring forms of vocation other than teaching and hospital work that could be available to IHM Community members. One gets a sense through Julie’s description of the IHM’s multifaceted renewal process that it was inclusive, transformational, and creative.

Carol clarifies that while she took a vow of obedience, the progressive attitudes of
the IHM Community prior to Vatican II encouraged a degree of independent and creative thinking on the part of community members. “I felt by the end of the 1960s that I was not the same person as I was in 1952 when I took the vows. I had changed as the world had changed.” Due to the dramatic changes she encountered within herself, as well as within the IHM Community throughout the 1960s, Carol’s decision to leave ahead of the others was precipitated by a deep sense of a changing self that could no longer be contained within the traditional structures of religious life.

Helping to Construct Knowledge to Move Ahead

In response to Carol’s question for the group interview regarding the decision to surrender their vows, Mary, Anita, and Maria Inez describe what they learned from observing the brilliant leaders of the IHM Community respond to the crisis of authority while receiving conflicting messages from opposing factions of the male hierarchy. Mary explains that the vows she made were not to “any bishop. . . . I made my vows with the understanding that they were to be lived out through this Community, The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart.” When the time came for Mary to choose to continue with the “main charisms of the community [who] were going to join the new [lay] community,” she did not hesitate or question moving in that direction. “I never thought of it as surrendering anything. I thought of the excitement of working with this group of women—at that time—and working for the betterment of our society.” Because of how she personally understood her vows of religious life and their role in her life as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart, Mary experienced the transition to becoming a lay member of the Immaculate Heart Community as an extension of her vows and the continuation of her relationship within the IHM Community.
Emphasizing the significance of the Vatican II pastoral constitution, “The Church in the Modern World,” which declared that the “Church is the people of God,” Anita explains that its intention of turning the “triangle of the hierarchy . . . upside down . . . so the people became the authority and the hierarchy was at the bottom” made enormous sense to her. As they began to prepare for the inevitable consequences of engaging hierarchical authority structures, Anita comments on what made the engagement plausible:

We were together in community, we’d been having all kinds of meetings, we had been praying and being educated, and we were prepared. We had no clue what was going to happen afterwards. But the thing was we were in it together no matter what. And so we took it step by step.

Visionary leaders need interested and motivated advocates to support the design and implementation of their progressive imaginings. Anita acknowledges the influential role that working together within the participatory teams played in the members’ ability to face the uncertainty of their personal and communal futures.

Moreover, when Anita and the others were given the ultimatum by Rome to return to pre-Vatican II status or they “would no longer have vows,” they were confronted with the power of a traditional hierarchical structure whose authority had remained at the top of the triangle. Anita clarifies that we [the IHMs] didn’t ask for [the dispensations] . . . so we put down “is not a willing thing that we are doing here.” We are doing it because we’re being asked to do it. I mean, in some ways [they] put us against the wall, and we were responding to that.

From this portion of Anita’s narrative, we learn about the Catch-22 situation that she and the others were confronting. On one side, we find the competing factions of the male hierarchy who differed on the validity of Vatican II. On the other side were the creative
responses being generated by the IHM Community that envisioned a new future for themselves, despite the male hierarchy’s disagreements.

In the year leading up to the issuance of the dispensations, Maria Inez was teaching in a Los Angeles area school where the pastor was a close personal friend of Cardinal McIntyre. She recalls that

most of the year I had to find a way of following what we in community believed we were doing was the right thing to do, and having to meet up daily with this power structure; with the priests, and some of the people in the parish, and some of the members of our community that ultimately decided to join the group that separated. So it was daily, daily struggle and contradiction.

Maria Inez was entangled in the crossfire between factions of the male hierarchy and an evolving sense of herself within the IHM Community. Her experiences encapsulate the bearing of fruit to her personally, as well as to other IHM Community members, in their vocation as liberated educators:

As others have mentioned, I didn’t surrender my vows [and] I feel that I too, in the years that have passed, I have realized that we’re free, we’re liberated to do the work God calls us to do in the way that God wants us to do it, with the people who also want to work with us. And from that perspective I feel that we continue the spirit on which we were founded to help in education.

Maria Inez notes that the IHM’s individual and community struggles can help others to face and overcome oppression: “There are many ways to educate and help and to enlighten people, to empower them to go ahead, and to do the things that they feel called to do—and to get out of destructive situations.” These insights offered by Maria Inez will help us move to the final section of this chapter on the ways that seeds of past resistance are bearing fruit in contemporary times.
Seeds of Resistance: Bearing Fruit in the 21st Century

Overview

As discussed in chapter 1, this study’s interest in looking back at the history of the IHM’s accomplishments and struggles has been framed within feminist poet Adrienne Rich’s (1972) belief that acts of re-visioning require seeing the past with new eyes, as well as feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver’s (2001) argument that a rethinking of history requires both curiosity for and a passionate reinvestigation of past moments of resistance to oppression. Rich describes re-visioning as a process of “looking back . . . of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (p. 18). Through re-visioning with new eyes, Rich believes that women can begin to understand the societal and cultural assumptions in which they are mired. They can also push for access to self-knowledge and identity by orienting themselves to what Rich describes as “the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society” (p. 18). Believing that women must “expand their own sense of actual possibilities” (1976, p. 24), Rich states that women can help illuminate one another’s paths towards knowledge and identity by sharing their past struggles and successes of overcoming oppression.

Oliver (2001) argues that the successes of the past can serve as conduits to the future—where critical moments of resisting oppression are reinvestigated and reviewed. “Future justice exists only by vigilantly returning to the past, reinvestigating the past over and over, to open up a better future . . . to rethink history” (pp. 135-136). By standing up for the reality of future justice where a collaborative existence between the sexes, cultures, and nations exists, Oliver encourages resurrecting the past in order to gain access to potentially valuable information that is obscured from view. With the
inspiration of the writings of both Adrienne Rich (1972, 1976) and Kelly Oliver (2001) serving as our guides, we can look back at the IHM’s history with a focus on re-visioning how their experiences continue to bear fruit in women’s lives today.

While the earlier parts of this chapter meandered between the individual and group interviews, in the next section we will focus on dialogue solely from the group process. During the group process, 7 of the 8 participants and 7 witnesses met together for 4½ hours. The only participant who could not attend was Ann, who was sick on the scheduled day. The group process was held in Montecito, California in the Terrace Room of the Center for Spiritual Renewal. Interestingly, the Center is the IHM’s former Novitiate House and the Terrace Room is the location of the Novitiate’s former chapel. It was a privilege to hold the group process at the location where each of the participant’s journey as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart originally began. Moreover, filming the group process in this historic location was a moving experience for the participants, the witnesses, and me. I later learned that it was equally as meaningful for the six men who did the filming and for those who maintained the sound system on that very hot summer day in late August, 2009.

As stated in chapter 2, a Witness Council was added to the group format in order to deepen the participants’ experiences by enabling them to hear from the women sitting in the outside circle describe what they witnessed. This dimension also provided an opportunity for the witnesses to take pertinent insights back into both their personal and professional lives based on the participants’ reflections. The witnesses were asked to silently observe the first three rounds of council process when the participants responded individually to the first two questions and then engaged in cross-talk about the third
question. During the fourth and final round of the council process, the witnesses discussed their reflections of bearing witness based on three questions that I provided to structure this round of the group format. After providing feedback about what they gleaned as witnesses to the unfolding of the participants’ histories, members of both groups engaged in cross-talk to share their personal reflections and reactions with one another about their experiences of the group process. Through the last phase of cross-talk, the participants in turn bore witness to the witnesses’ experiences.

Because we covered the first two rounds of the group process in the previous sections, we will now move to the third round of the group process and then move to a discussion of the fourth and final round of the group process in subsequent sections of this chapter.

The Vatican’s Current Investigation of Canonical Women Religious

The third round of the council process began with the question submitted by Stephanie: “How does an individual or a group follow the call of the spirit and still belong to a religious tradition whose hierarchical structure demands obedience?” The responses to Stephanie’s question focused on the Vatican’s current investigation of women’s religious communities in the United States. Since commencing the research for this dissertation in 2007, the Vatican began an Apostolic Visitation of 350 active women’s religious communities in the United States in the early months of 2009.

In order to understand the context of the participants’ responses to Stephanie’s question, I will begin this section with some background information on the current Vatican investigation before presenting the participants’ reflections. According to the website for the current investigation (www.apostolicvisitation.org), an Apostolic
Visitation is defined as:

A formal . . . process initiated at the highest levels of the Catholic Church [in order] to look into the welfare of a particular aspect of the Church. Cardinal Franc Rodé, C.M., Prefect of the Vatican’s Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, in a December 22, 2008 decree, initiated the Visitation of apostolic institutes of women religious in the United States and appointed Mother Clare Millea, A.S.C.J., Superior General of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to serve as the Apostolic Visitator.

Mother Clare is a Connecticut native who has served as superior general of her religious community since 2004. She has complete administrative authority of the Apostolic Visitation and will personally conduct many inquiries and visits. Mother Clare will prepare a confidential report of her findings and observations for Cardinal Rodé at the conclusion of the Visitation. (Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States, 2010, about)

The Congregation for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life exercises oversight in relation to all religious institutes throughout the world. Like other vocations in the Church, religious life has passed through challenging times. The Congregation for Consecrated Life is aware that many new congregations have emerged in the United States while many others have decreased in membership or have an increased median age. Apostolic works have also changed significantly because of societal changes. These and other areas need to be better understood and assessed in order to safeguard and promote consecrated life in the United States. (Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States, 2010, other/faqs)

Moreover, the website states the current investigation has been authorized in order to

(a) look into the quality of the life of apostolic women religious in the United States, (b) learn more about the varied and unique ways in which women religious contribute to the welfare of the Church and society, [and] (c) assist the Church to strengthen, enhance and support the growth of the more than 400 congregations to which the approximately 59,000 women religious in the United States belong. (Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States, 2010, index)

The genesis for commencing the investigation began in September, 2008 when a small group of conservative women religious gathered for the Symposium on Religious Life at Stonehill College in Easton, Massachusetts. Cardinal Rodé, who is considered the highest-ranking official in Rome on religious life, was invited by the women to attend the
conference. According to Cardinal Rodé, he left the Stonehill College symposium with a better understanding of the challenges facing [American] individual religious and their congregations. [He said that an Apostolic Visitation] could benefit the Church at-large as well as the sisters and institutes involved. [Cardinal Rodé also stated] “My hope is that the Apostolic Visitation will not only provide the Holy See with a thorough analysis of the condition of religious life in the United States, but also be a realistic and graced opportunity for personal and community introspection, as major superiors and sisters cooperate with this study.” (Fox, 2009)

Furthermore, during an interview on Vatican Radio on November 4, 2009, Cardinal Rodé said that a “certain feminist spirit” is one of the reasons behind the investigations of U.S. nuns (Thelandersson, 2010).

In a five-part series in the National Catholic Reporter regarding the meaning of religious life in contemporary America, Professor of New Testament Studies and Christian Spirituality Sandra Schneiders, IHM discussed her perspectives on the current investigation. Schneiders states in the first installment published on January 4, 2010, “Religious Life As Prophetic Life” that no presentation of opposing views regarding contemporary ministerial life was provided at the 2008 Stonehill College Symposium on Religious Life. As a result, Schneiders believes that “Cardinal Rodé [left the conference] having heard what he apparently thought was a widely-held consensus that U.S. women’s apostolic religious life was in serious decline.” Schneiders further notes that canonical members of women’s religious communities incorrectly assume that the current investigation is “an unprecedented assault on religious.” She clarifies that this type of investigation has occurred throughout the history of the Catholic Church. Moreover, Schneiders speculates that this investigation is not being conducted due to changes in modern American society or because of an interest in the post-Vatican II Church. She
argues that the investigation reflects attempts by the Vatican to re-enforce a “blind obedience to hierarchical authority.”

Although members of the conservative women’s religious communities view the investigation as an attempt to rebuild dwindling numbers in community membership, progressive women religious are concerned about a hidden agenda. Similar to the position taken by Sandra Schneiders, Maureen Fiedler, a Sister of Loretto and host of the radio show, Interfaith Voices, argues that the Vatican’s current investigation is focused on reigning in active feminist women religious who have created independent lifestyles and ministries. By pushing women religious back into highly scheduled convent living, recognizable habits, and church-related works, Fiedler states in “Bad Habits? Two Surprise Vatican Investigations of U.S. Nuns” (2009), that the current investigations are aimed at silencing the voices of women religious who adamantly oppose the injustices plaguing the contemporary Catholic Church.

Because this study’s participants are no longer members of a traditional canonical religious community they will not be required to participate in the Vatican’s current investigation. However, because of their experiences of being investigated by the Vatican during the 1960s, they have been closely monitoring the events surrounding the current investigation. In response to Stephanie’s question that asked how an individual or a group can follow the call of the spirit if they belong to a religious tradition whose hierarchical structure demands obedience, each of the participants provided insight on the current investigation while remembering the IHM’s struggles with the Vatican 40 years ago.

Joann, sighing with relief, was the first to respond:

I think we’re so privileged not to have to be investigated like the Vatican is doing with women religious. I think it’s rather sad that they’re doing this again and I
think it’s probably because of women’s ordination. They want to see how popular that is with the religious women. Fortunately we don’t have to worry about that.

Later Joann added “women’s ordination will be the salvation of the Church, to tell you the truth.” Joann alludes to what has been identified by the Leadership Conference for Women Religious to be one of the primary concerns propelling the current investigation—the Vatican’s adamant opposing of women being ordained as priests.

Several “womenpriests” ordinations have been held at La Casa de Maria during the past few years. It is known to be a safe space for women to assemble in order to move beyond the hierarchical and ecclesiastical structures that frame the contemporary Catholic Church.

Julie notes that many religious women do not want to participate in the current investigation. She states, “there’s some reaction in terms of not wanting to fill out the questionnaire or take part in any of it. I have not heard of anyone leaving their community, but that may be.” As opposed to the IHM’s experiences during the late 1960s when they did not gain the support of other women religious, Julie recognizes that women religious are standing together in solidarity at this time in expressing their opposition to the investigation. Carol states that she is surprised by Stephanie’s question’s use of the terms hierarchical structure and obedience which sound “like a foreign language; they are completely out of my frame of reference these days. I feel for those who are trying to fit themselves into that place . . . I just don’t fit inside there anymore.” Stephanie clarifies that her question has been fueled by what she has learned about the current investigation:

If you say you’re a Catholic there are certain expectations of being a Catholic. That you say yes to the rules and the dogmas of the Catholic Church and pretty much obey. I’m concerned for these communities undergoing the investigation
because they could be facing the same thing we faced in that they want to stay an official part of the Catholic Church, and yet they want to follow the spirit. . . . So if the investigation goes forward it might not bode well for them, if they want to stay in the formal structure of the Church.

Both Carol and Stephanie bring to light opposite sides of the same coin of what it means to be a Catholic in the 21st century. For Carol, her life process has brought her freedom and liberation from the hierarchical structures and expectations that once framed her religious life. However, in recalling the Catch-22 situation that she and the others were confronted with 40 years ago, Stephanie identifies one of the no-win situations that contemporary liberal Catholics are currently confronting. Within the structures of the contemporary Church, liberal thinkers who love their religion cannot abide by the Church’s continuing discrimination against women, gays, and lesbians.

Noting that Stephanie’s question and the topic of the investigations “relate very much to what we’ve been saying this afternoon about power—who has the power, who’s going to have an opportunity to author themselves or take power,” Mary points out that those in authority face a dilemma:

If they don’t control the women, then the power structure changes. I don’t know what their choices are really going to be. Looking back and looking forward, it’s really hard to tell. There are always shifts in society—over the past 40-year-period we have seen so many changes. . . . I’m not sure how much of [the investigation] has to do with obedience as much as the whole question of feminism and allowing women to have full participation [in the Church] and I’m not necessarily talking here about women priests.

Mary returns to an important theme that she discussed during another portion of the group interview, as well as during her individual interview about the use of power and authority. She emphasizes that the current Vatican investigation is propelled by a push-pull phenomenon where the need for women to be the authors of their own lives is confronting the hierarchical adherence to traditional definitions of obedience.
As she reflects on her impressions of the current investigation, Anita recalls the insights she received when viewing the video of the conference on religious life that Maria Inez participated in as a panelist several years ago. In particular, Anita was struck by the response made by the woman in charge of religious orders in New York when she was asked,

“What are we going to do about the fact that we have sent out decrees and constitutions to the Vatican and we’re not getting them back? They’re just ignoring us. What’s going to happen if they don’t approve our changes?” The woman [in charge] replied “We’ll walk.”

Anita believes that this option remains as viable today as it did for the IHMs 40 years ago when they chose to walk away from canonical status rather than compromise their integrity. Maria Inez concurs with Anita’s comments and believes the choice of “walking [away from traditional structures] continues to be prevalent.”

Maria Inez adds that when she works with clients who ask whether they should stay or leave the Church,

I remind myself to share with them what Vatican II told us: “We are the Church. We are it” . . . so whether we have women priests; whether we have gay, lesbians, transgenders—these are very difficult issues within the hierarchical Church . . . we need to remember we are the Church and we are the ones who will experience God’s presence, whether it’s a woman leading the liturgy or a gay or lesbian . . . we are called to be inclusive.

The participants feel a deep connection to the progressive-thinking women religious who chose to remain canonical members within the formal structure of the Catholic Church. They also acknowledge the bold steps that they themselves took 40 years ago that preclude them from being part of the current investigation. The participants’ reflections also convey considerable disappointment that the forward-looking visions offered through Vatican II—as well as the IHM’s responses to those
progressive visions—have been thwarted within the contemporary Catholic Church. However, the IHM’s progressive spirit continues to bear fruit through the sponsoring of ordinations for womenpriests at La Casa de Maria, the ongoing evolution of the lay Immaculate Heart Community, and a continuing belief that human beings make up the Catholic Church, not those in positions of authority.

_In the Lives of Lay Contemporary Women_

As noted earlier, during the fourth round of council process, the witnesses dialogued in a cross-talk format based on three questions that I contributed to this portion of the group format. The questions reflected my research interests and were designed to provide ample opportunity for meaningful discussions to transpire among and between the witnesses and participants: (a) How has your life been affected by patriarchy? (b) What did you learn from listening to the participants’ discussion and dialogue? (c) What will you take forward into your life from bearing witness to the participants’ stories and histories?

The witnesses who agreed to participate were invited by several of the participants and by me. The witnesses were (a) Jeannette, a volunteer at the Center for Spiritual Renewal; (b) Juliet, a graduate of Immaculate Heart High School and a member of the lay Immaculate Heart Community; (c) Lois, an organization consultant, author, and feminist educator on women’s issues; (d) Mary, a clinical psychologist, social justice activist, and university professor; (e) Patricia, a coordinator for Spanish-speaking programs for Latinas and their families; (f) Suzanne, a member of a noncanonical religious women’s community, clinical psychologist, and recently ordained Catholic womanpriest; and (g) Vicki, a human rights activist, writer, and former film industry
executive.

We will begin our discussion with the witnesses’ descriptions of how they have experienced patriarchal authority in their lives. This question was asked in order to integrate the witnesses into the primary focus of this study and to provide the participants with an opportunity to learn about the witnesses’ experiences as contemporary women. We discover in this initial round of dialogue how the witnesses’ experiences with patriarchal and hierarchical systems of authority mirror the participants’ experiences.

**Meeting Patriarchy in Their Childhood Homes**

Jeannette, Patricia, and Suzanne returned to childhood memories to frame the ways in which patriarchy had affected their lives. Jeannette recalls:

> I grew up in a family where my father was definitely a very domineering person. The only way I could work around that was to rebel back... because an energy of “I’ll just quietly do my thing” did not really work. I didn’t like fighting back... it sometimes took incredible courage to keep at it without even knowing if there was any security. I learned that the forces of patriarchy and dominance never created a sense of trust; to me the whole word patriarchy means order.

Jeannette, who was raised in Brazil, links patriarchy with her father’s role in the family and his dominating presence in their home. In retrospect, she recognizes that “after I left home, [I began to realize] there was another way—to just keep honoring [my] truth.”

Both Patricia and Suzanne were also raised outside of the United States—Patricia in Mexico and Suzanne in Canada. Patricia states:

> The way that patriarchy affected me is when I was little [growing up in Mexico] my father always said, “For women, 6 years of school is enough for study.” Because for him it was more important that women learn how to cook and clean the house—not to study. We have 8 sisters in my family—and only one of us went to school. My mother tried to help her, but my father said, “If you help you will live in a different place.” My sister had to move to my grandparents’ in order to go to school.

Similar to Jeannette’s experiences in Brazil, Patricia correlates patriarchy with how her
father treated her sisters, her mother, and her in Mexico. Dissimilar to the experiences of the majority of this study’s participants’ with their fathers, both Jeannette and Patricia define a negative experience of the way their fathers asserted their authority in the home.

Suzanne identifies childhood experiences of patriarchy. She recalls growing up in a small town in a French-Canadian family where Monsieur le Curé was not only the head of the Church, but he was head of all the French-American and French-Canadian families. I grew up with the pastor being very much a part of our family. We were told when he came for dinner of how we were to act, how we were to respect him, and that he was the authority.

Suzanne’s experiences of patriarchal authority in Canada are equated with the extended reach of clergy members in her home as well as in the Catholic community.

Meeting Patriarchy in Their Professions

Two of the witnesses, Mary and Vicki, note that they have encountered patriarchy in the professional domain—Mary as a clinical psychologist and Vicki in the film industry. Mary states that in her role as a therapist when working with women clients she has needed “to metabolize the feelings of inferiority that women often feel and helping them work through that—what they are told as young children in terms of their inferiority.” Mary’s feedback lends insight into women needing to learn to question and frame the sources of their feelings of inferiority. Mary later clarifies that these feelings stem not only from what they learn as young girls within their family of origin, but also from the broader perspectives of social and cultural biases that lead to genderism.

Vicki shares her experiences from working in the film industry where women are on the lower end of the totem pole . . . despite the fact that they have vision and creativity. I’m familiar with experiences of men looking past you, around you, or not considering you as having capacity. And at the same time there have been extraordinary men who I’ve worked with and without whom I could never have done anything. So I consider those men a blessing in my life.
Although Vicki acknowledges experiences of men looking beyond the creative talents of women, she also shares a similar response that many of the participants shared when recalling the positive influence of men in their lives. She clarifies in her remarks that not all men are patriarchal in their approach to women.

Later in the discussion, Vicki shares another view that a few of the participants described regarding the difficulty of correlating their struggles with the hierarchy of the Church as a reflection of genderism. Vicki believes that both men and women can misuse their authority:

Some men are caring and loving and guiding and wise, and some men are abusive and oppressive. Men come in all colors just as women come in all colors. And for us it’s to free ourselves from anyone who is oppressing us [where] patriarchy becomes a metaphor, but not necessarily a gender phenomenon. Men have had the economic power for so many centuries—and women have had to rely on men for security, food and shelter. The liberation of women came with economic empowerment—not to have power per se, but to have capacity—the capacity to do good.

Rather than an ability to merely attain power, Vicki equates women’s liberation with an increased capacity to do good as a result of economic empowerment. Vicki’s reflections regarding the capacity to do good provides a valuable distinction for women as they begin to gain access to power. They will need to know how to differentiate between having power and how to enhance their capacity to do good with that power.

*Meeting Patriarchy in Educational Systems*

Both Lois and Juliet describe the roll that patriarchy plays within educational systems. Lois recognizes that she has been affected by many negative experiences within patriarchal culture, and there is one incident that stands out the most for her:

The [experience] that is most startling to me was my graduate experience at UCSB when I went back to complete a doctorate in the School of Education. During those 6 years I had not one female professor—and I don’t remember
reading one theorist who was female. I studied a lot of organizational theory and the models were male, the professors were male, and there was a lot of male energy in the program.

Lois’s comments reflect what was discussed in chapters 1 and 2 vis-à-vis the domination of the male perspective in the developing of traditional models of education, psychology, philosophy, and history. Lois also describes the experiences of girls and women who are taught about human behavior from the narrow focus of the male perspective that excludes the experiences of girls and women.

Juliet states that she was fortunate to be raised in a family where she “felt very, very valued as a girl child,” and that her first experiences with patriarchy occurred outside of the family system:

It wasn’t until I went out into the larger world that I think I began to feel less than. Whether it was in [higher] education or just in society in general—I think the most difficult and challenging aspect of feeling “less than” was connected with my sense of the Divine and the sense of God where God was always a male image. And woman was always held up as the reason that the human race was disconnected from the Divine and kicked out of Paradise.

Juliet, who attended Immaculate Heart High School in Los Angeles, shares later in the group process that

it was the IHMs who gave me a sense of what a blessing it was to be born a woman, a girl. Leaving that community, although one would have thought once one had gained that sense of self [that it would endure], I wasn’t able to hold on to it. And that’s what brought me back to them 40 years later, because I had lost what I had learned from them.

Juliet’s reflections clarify how deeply ingrained patriarchal systems of authority are in culture, religion, and society, in women’s psyches, and in their lives.

Women such as Juliet who grew up in homes where they were valued as daughters, and who were taught by progressive teachers like the IHMs, often lose an empowered sense of self once they emerge into the external world. This is due to the lack
of social and cultural systems that substantiate and value women’s voices and modes of being. Because of cultural adherence in the West to systems designed to promote a predominantly male perspective, women face continuing colonization of psychic space with patriarchal messages that disorient them from a deeper sense of self.

*What the Witnesses Learned by Bearing Witness to the Participants’ Experiences*

**The Value of Respectful Resistance**

Both Mary and Vicki were struck by the participants’ descriptions of the manner in which they resisted and engaged with the authority of the Church. Mary noted that listening to the participants was inspirational—I loved the way that a few of you took issue with the way the first question was framed—that you did not surrender your vows nor were you concerned with disobedience. That same spirit of breaking free of the initial question that you were offered here really resonates with what you did in your history in terms of the Catholic Church. I’m taking away what it means to be faithful to the purposes you have discerned are the most important—when you are in a situation where other people have ideas for you, you keep a clarity of mind—knowing you are not disobeying—you are just obeying a higher call.

In acknowledging the participants’ spirit of resistance to the use of the word disobedience in the first question of the group interview process, Mary expands the focus of the dialogue to reflect the IHM’s overall capacity to break free from external domination.

Vicki was also struck by the process that you went through—which was respectful disobedience in a sense. You knew what was right and you did it together—it seems without anger or a desire for retribution or hate—which is so often the underbelly of change and rebellion. You did it with grace, confidence, and goodness.

Vicki reframes the IHM’s actions as acts of “respectful disobedience.” She also challenges the traditional views of disobedience as defiance against authority.
The Continuing Relevance of the IHM’s History

Jeannette, Suzanne, and Juliet responded to particular elements of the IHM’s history that they found inspirational. Jeannette shares the appreciation she has derived from hearing the participants’ discussion of the third question provided by Stephanie regarding the call of spirit and the voice of patriarchal authority:

I have appreciated being here and understanding the entire picture as someone from the outside—what you have gone through and where you are today. To me the whole word patriarchy means order. I loved the question about following the call of the spirit—even when it means going away from that sense of order and oppression—where you don’t have any other choice. . . . I take away from this afternoon that even without the structure of a community, it’s important to honor truth and have a sense of freedom and control.

We learn from Suzanne that her experience of bearing witness during the group interview has provided her with the opportunity to learn about the individual participant’s experiences. She also has gleaned insight into the broader story of the IHM Community’s history:

I experienced so much of what you were saying you got in your training about the individuality of each one of you—honoring the person. I saw that in your presentation. I saw the uniqueness of each one of you. That was a wonderful thing to sit here and witness; each of you sharing the experience that you had during a very difficult time, from your own unique perspective.

Listening to the participants share their personal and collective history during the group process has been enlightening to Juliet. She notes that her insights are particularly valuable to contemporary women:

In listening to this circle and putting it in the context of what’s happening today for women in the Catholic Church and around the world, I feel we are being called again to stand up, speak truth to power, to be there in solidarity with the women who went through what you went through all those years ago. I think too we are being asked to [work] for the full development of the human person, for women and men.

The group interview experience has inspired Juliet to look at the collective power of
women meeting, speaking, and working together in facing the postmodern world.

*The Value and Importance of Community*

Several of the witnesses were struck by the role that community played in the IHM’s ability to resist the external threat posed by the male hierarchy and when creating the lay community. I have chosen reflections shared by Lois and Patricia because they adequately represent the others’ reactions. From listening to the study participants discuss the questions, Lois states she is taking away “the importance of community at times when you are adrift or when you really have to look very deeply within to find strength and go forward.” She also notes the importance of what the participants were able to create together, in relationship, while going through their individual growth process: “Your descriptions of how you were there for each other—we are talking about many years ago when you were much younger—as you were maturing and you were there for each other really strikes me.”

Lois’s comments shed light on Jean Baker Miller’s “self-in-relation model” (1991, p. 13) where a personal sense of self grows and develops through relationship to others as a related subject, as opposed to a separate self that develops through indviduation. Lois later adds that individuals who are not part of an existing community are faced with the formative task of finding a supportive infrastructure: “For people like me in the world without this infrastructure, it’s a matter of creating that infrastructure for myself and my friends.” Lois appreciates the role that community plays in creating not only a strong front of resistance, but also in the design and implementation of dreams for the future: “I was touched by the pushback and the strength, when you took issue as a community in a way that was very positive—you created something for the future. People
will learn from hearing your story.”

Patricia describes the influence that the Immaculate Heart Community has had on her sense of self:

When I came to the United States in 1982, I came to work at La Casa de Maria. I came to know these wonderful people—and they immediately helped me. For 11 years I have worked on the Latinas’ Retreat—when I have problems these wonderful people help me. This is my second family—thank you for all your help.

Not only have the members of the Immaculate Heart Community been strong for one another, they have also extended their reach out towards the communities in which they live. Patricia has been empowered in her life through her connections to the Immaculate Heart Community and in turn she can extend that sense of community in her support of Latinas who attend retreats at La Casa de Maria.

*What the Witnesses Will Take Forward Into Their Lives*

*The Value of Safe Environments*

Both Mary and Lois share that they will take forward into their lives the importance of creating safe spaces where women and men can unfold, dialogue, and be empowered to challenge oppressive systems of authority. Their comments reflect what Jordan et al. (1991), Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997), and hooks (2002) describe as the need for community in the unfolding of a relational sense of self. Mary states:

I’m taking away a carefulness about how we construct the spaces that we offer to women. I was interested in a couple of the comments about Vatican II giving in some ways a permission to allow the Church to be the people themselves and to create spaces where people could be more the authors of their experience. In knowing the work that’s been done here at the retreat house and in your education work, you all have managed to create spaces where women and others can come to reflect on their experience, to critique, [and] to imagine how things could be done differently. And when they take that kind of a space away with them they may encounter strictures that say that they should not be doing that, but they can always feel the support that you’ve given them to go ahead and be the authors of
their own experience. So I’m taking away a sense of the care that needs to be happening as women come together to make sure that the authority lies within their own hearts and minds. And that they have ample refreshment by that.

Lois frames her response from her work as a coach to women who are embarking upon career transitions:

I coach women who are advancing, either from a technical position to a leadership role or a financial position—where they have a specialty but then they get into a place where they have to lead other people; inspire them, motivate them, respect them, bring out the best in them. I found that a feminist perspective wasn’t always useful because I made assumptions about where people were in thinking about how wonderful it was to work with other women. It’s a very dynamic environment in today’s workplace, which is multicultural. I’m just very stimulated to think about my approach to creating very positive creative environments in which men and women together can think about a very high visionary goal that will bring out the best in people and where there is room for not just personalities and disciplines and training, but a kind of energy that comes from very deeply within so that people want to be their higher self when they’re working with other people. That requires respect and pacing. . . . So I’m just thinking more richly about the possibilities I have to work differently with people; men and women or women alone.

*The Value of Honesty, Strength, and Courage*

Vicki, Jeannette, and Suzanne note that they were struck by the role that honesty, integrity, and courage played in the IHM’s history and how they each value those qualities in their own lives. Vicki begins by reflecting on insights she gained from watching her own mother gain access to success:

My mother was successful in the world and very strong in many ways. But she also operated in a way where she felt in order to be successful she needed to use charm and guile. I admired it, I liked it; it was sparkly, but it always made me uncomfortable because it felt like it was disconnected from something more grounded and more truthful and more honest. And yet as I look around me, I think we all have that experience growing up, of people playing roles and trying to impress and prove themselves. And how uncomfortable that is. All of the energy that goes into that. Whereas I feel being with all of you today that you feel to me that you are very grounded and there’s no artifice. And in that, as you were saying, comes tremendous strength . . . strength to develop a vision of goodness and in moving forward.
Vicki brings to our discussion the ways that women can attain success and influence—through “charm” and the ability to beguile others, or by being congruent and grounded in who they are as human beings.

Jeannette adds that in addition to taking away the importance of “discernment and strength” and “helping others,” she has also gleaned personal insight into the role that “spirit and the Divine” play in the unfolding of one’s life. She points out the importance of knowing that there’s a calling for all of us . . . and to keep honoring that direction . . . sometimes it’s letting go to what comes, and sometimes it’s taking action. It’s a process of discovery and living . . . honoring wherever that takes me and being witness to it in my own unfolding.

By bearing witness to the participants’ personal and communal histories, Jeannette learns that a strong sense of self emerges from personal and interpersonal processes of discovery and living.

Not only a member of a noncanonical religious group that is similar to the lay Immaculate Heart Community, Suzanne was recently ordained as a Roman Catholic womanpriest and heads a congregation in Santa Barbara. She notes that she is taking away not only the value of courage in resisting structures of authority, but an insight she gained from one of the study participant’s reflections. Carol had described during the group process that the actions she and the other IHMs took in the 1960s were required because social and cultural activism occur before changes are seen in legal and political systems.

Suzanne explains:

I’m leaving here with a lot of courage because a year ago here at La Casa I was ordained a Roman Catholic womanpriest. And I love that phrase that was mentioned earlier by Carol that “change happens before [the] law approves”
because I am not sure that I will live to see the approval of the step that I have taken. But I’m leaving with a lot of courage as I listen to each of you and witnessed each of you dealing with change occurring before law approves.

Suzanne concludes that it is the taking of action to create change that will lead to higher level changes in the Catholic Church:

I’m convinced that it’s the only way, especially for those of us who have been parts of the Roman Catholic Church forever; it’s the only way that the change will occur. We cannot wait for it to happen; we have to move ahead and be the change that we want.

The Value of Power, Love, and Pride

The last theme for this section was conveyed in the feedback given by Patricia and Juliet. Patricia acknowledges the power and love that the participants have brought not only to her life, but “who have extended their hands to my daughter, who have helped a lot of Latina women who have terrible problems.” Juliet adds that from the participants’ dialogue, she

takes away a fierce pride in [each of] you, a deep love and a recommitment as a member of the [lay Immaculate Heart] Community, as a woman, and as part of this retreat community, to continue the legacy of who the Community is and what we are all called to be.

Noting that the origins of the words “Immaculate Heart” are rooted in the sense of “a heart that is untarnished by fear,” Juliet concludes that “the Community’s origins and history need to be carried forward.”

The work that is carried out at both La Casa de Maria Retreat Center and the Center for Spiritual Renewal is for persons of all faiths, sexual orientation, gender, culture, and race. One does not need to be a member of the lay Immaculate Heart Community in order to participate in programs offered at both locations. With a mission to provide programs that nourish personal growth, recognize self-worth, and embrace the
sacred, both centers desire to cultivate spiritual growth that promotes the common good of communities.

In the next and final section of this chapter, we come full circle by returning to the participants to gather insight on what they gained from the group process. We will also spend time looking at what emanated from the cross talk between the witnesses and participants. As discussed in chapter 2, this study has been influenced by various elements of participatory and collaborative research methodologies (Friere, 1970; Herda, 1999; Mies, 1983). Collaborative forms of research are interested in the nature of human beings in dialogue, as well as the implications for what is possible when individuals engage with others in serious conversation.

*What the Participants Learned from Listening to the Witnesses: The Value of Belonging*

Joann, Maria Inez, and Anita are reminded of the value they have experienced as members of the IHM Community, as well recognizing the role the lay Immaculate Heart Community continues to play. Joann explains that, from the group experience, she feels “a sense of gratitude for our history and the people that I’ve known for many, many years—next year will be the 50th anniversary of my association in the Community.” She goes on to recognize that the steps she and the others took has resulted in a positive “influence [for others] that has developed over the years with such a great group of women because now we have men and families in our Community which is so wonderful.”

Not only does she agree with Joann’s comments “about gratitude,” Maria Inez is also reminded as she sits in the Terrace Room for the group interview that each time I come in here, it’s like [I’m] coming home. I’m grateful [not only] to the Community [but] also because we are no longer oppressed or dominated by
the structure. We can be happy and joyful that we’re in a better place now than we were then. And so it’s with deep gratitude to all of you for coming, deep gratitude to God and the Holy Spirit who sometimes I say led us out of the fleshpots of Egypt. To bring us to a better place.

Anita frames her gratitude from a quote by Middle Ages German theologian and philosopher, Meister Eckhart,

who once said, “that if the only prayer you ever say is thank you, that’s enough.” So I thank you. For me this place is the only place in the world where I feel I have any roots. Today was an interesting conversation, listening to you. I think this place has something to do with what’s happening here too—the people who come here feel that . . . if these walls could talk, it would be a very interesting conversation. So I’m grateful that you came, and that we had it here and not someplace else.

*The Value of their History Connecting with Other Women’s Experiences*

Stephanie, Julie, Carol, and Mary acknowledge the role their efforts have played and continue to play in women’s lives. Stephanie recognizes that having the witnesses share their experiences has helped create a bridge between her and them. She begins by sharing

up until now there’s been this feeling for me of “we” and “you” or “we” and “they.” That we’re over here; you’re over there. We’ve been through this experience; you haven’t. But what’s been really nice is as you’ve talked, the boundaries all started dissolving and it felt really nice. Because we can reflect back on our experiences dealing with the structures of oppression or dealing with individual oppressors. It’s nice to be reminded that you all have too. Maybe not as a member of a religious community against a church hierarchy. But I’m just so appreciative of all your being here, of the shared experience of women, and how what we’ve been through together, however we did it, really unites us.

Stephanie recognizes the importance of history being experienced between and among individuals, not merely as a one-way distribution of facts and knowledge. Stephanie also appreciates learning about the witnesses’ experiences of engaging/resisting forms of patriarchal authority and to discover that this is a common experience shared among most women. She has been reminded that
we individually and as a group followed our spirit. It was the right thing to do and I never regret a moment of it. I want to make sure that the people that I’m with, if there’s any way that I can help them to follow their spirit, I really want to do that.

Stating that she has been impressed by what the witnesses “have been able to pick up and discern from our conversation,” Julie is particularly pleased to learn that the witnesses have gained insight about the role that mentoring played within the IHM Community:

Forty years ago when we went through this in terms of wonderful leadership, [but] how our Community has also in turn been mentors to other people and to other women. I think of the risk taking that we did and have done through the years which are important qualities for the empowerment of women. This is something that we’ve been very much interested in as a Community through our educational process.

Similar to Stephanie’s appreciation for the shared connection among women in resisting authority structures, Julie is mindful of the influence the IHMs have had in mentoring and empowering women to take the risk of challenging authority. Julie concludes that she takes away from the group process a wonderful and very positive experience in terms of our Community and what happened [as well as] my great pride in this group of people and our Community . . . to have this wonderful reinforcement of the importance of our Community and, I hate to say it, but what a wonderful group we are.

Carol also describes the affect of learning that the IHM’s experiences continue to have value for women today. She states that she was moved by each of you witnesses and what you garnered from this day. What I want to take from this day is not to think of the experience just as one of the past but of its going forward, and certainly hearing from each of you what it can mean for women today. It has told me . . . that yes, we’re still alive and still have meaning. And so I want to think about that, what that means.

Carol’s reflections indicate that her personal history, as well as the collective history of the IHM Community, has been revived and renewed through the dialogical group
process.

Similar to Julie’s appreciation of what the witnesses garnered of the IHM’s experiences, Mary comments that she is not only “amazed [by] how many themes you as an observing group brought out that had come up in our individual interviews,” she is reminded that “there were a lot of things that came up in the individual interview that I just stumbled around because I had never tried to articulate it before.” Mary’s reflections shed light on how the process of constructing knowledge is a never-ending phenomenon that requires subjects-in-process to continually review and reflect on their lives and the actions they have or have not taken. Mary makes an additional observation that “this has been a very powerful experience, [one that has] made me try to look forward. We still have lots of things to tackle, and we need to tackle them and not be afraid of that.” Mary appreciates that the bearing of fruit in terms of knowledge and awareness is not only occurring for the witnesses, but for the participants as well. She has been reminded of the IHM’s role in women’s history and their continuing responsibilities in today’s world.

Cross Talk Between Participants and Witnesses

After the participants had the opportunity to share what they garnered from the group experience, time was allotted for the witnesses to ask questions of the participants. Questions asked by two of the witnesses, Vicki and Mary, engaged them and several of the participants in creative and constructive dialogue about the role of God and their views on where the future is leading them and the Immaculate Heart Community:

Who or What Is God?

Returning to a point she made about God/God-ness and Goodness when sharing during the witness portion of the group process, Vicki asked the participants:
I know this could just seem like an incredibly personal question, but I’m curious nonetheless about how you experience God. I don’t think I’ve graduated beyond my 12-year-old conflict of feeling that the God of the Old Testament did some pretty tough stuff. I wasn’t sure I wanted to be under that umbrella, psychologically and then feeling a bit adrift. There are of course some wonderful parts of the Bible, Ecclesiastes and so on are different. There’s like who is/what is this? Because you have thought so deeply about these things I would have so much to learn from you just to hear what you have to say. What is God for you?

Three of the participants, Stephanie, Mary, and Carol, dialogued with Vicki about her question. Stephanie is the first to reply:

I like the way you said, “goodness and God-ness.” I haven’t defined God recently but as you said it I thought “oh, it’s kind of a shorthand. There was good-goodness, and we shortened it down to God.” I think there’s a lot of wisdom in that. When I think about God, it’s not a person, it’s not Jesus or the God of the Old Testament; it’s this incredibly attractive goodness that I’m so drawn to. I want to be there. I want to be that and I want to be with that. When I said it’s not a person I mean not confined in a shape or a being. And yet when I pray, I pray to God and I like God.

Following Stephanie’s answer, Vicki asked for additional clarification: “Does that God have a face or is it a feeling?” In response, Stephanie states “Both. The face to me is the world out here. That’s what really touches my heart. But the feeling is definitely there.” Stephanie then expands this point by returning to thoughts she had made during her individual interview regarding the call to religious life:

When I was in the interview with Kathleen, she was asking about turning points. I mentioned that when I was in college I was taking an English class from Anita Caspary. And she was then Sister Humiliata and she wore the habit. She was right there at her desk and I was right here in the front row. She had us read all the spiritual classics—such as Thomas Merton, St. Augustine, Dante’s Inferno. I loved them. We also did poetry—one poem in particular stands out for me by Allen Tate. It began, “again the midnight hour lets down the locks” [Tate, 1942]. Another line that I still remember today said, “his eyes fierce shuttlecocks pierced the den of my failures.” I remember her saying that line while I was following along in my book. Then I looked up and she looked at me, and it was like oh my gosh. I couldn’t put any of that experience into words. But the next year I entered the Community. The God thing [for me] was so in that metaphor.

Vicki wonders if what Stephanie is describing is an experience of being “deeply known
and seen.” Stephanie clarifies that this is correct and adds that the experience is one in which she also feels “loved.”

The following dialogue then ensued among Vicki, Stephanie, and two other participants, Mary and Carol. In response to Stephanie’s point of being known, seen, and loved, Vicki adds, “and loved—with great compassionate eyes.” Mary adds that she feels “there’s nothing to be ashamed of or feared when you’re loved by God.” Through this cross-dialogue with the participants, Vicki discovers that God-ness involves being “known and to be seen with compassionate eyes and love. And so nothing is to be ashamed of really in the end.”

Carol acknowledges that she does not ask herself the question of who or what is God, but knows that her concept and feeling about God has changed over this time since 1950. Two strong images and concepts and feelings about God are present with me now—one is Sophia God, the feminine God. I find myself in centering prayer using the sacred word, “Sophia.” But then also as Stephanie said, “God is in the creation”—I feel God’s presence most when I’m walking along the beach or under the trees or in nature.

During her individual interview, Carol shared that one of the most compelling factors that helped her reach the decision to become a nun was the opportunity to be in continuous service to Jesus Christ. Through time her self-concept as a woman and her understanding of God have broadened considerably to include the face of a feminine God.

Mary adds that she experiences God the most when I’m with other people, like this in a bigger circle—where two or three are gathered together—that’s when I think there’s goodness. That’s what it’s all about. However it works out, Sophia or the poetry—that was a beautiful line, Steph. I think God is all those things. He’s/She’s [sic] qualities go beyond what we can express; we have to look to the human terms to try to come to some understanding but it evades understanding. That’s the spirit we had when we were children, when our life wasn’t too cluttered.
The importance of this portion of the group discussion helps us bear witness as researcher and reader to two important dimensions of the group process. First, there was an opportunity for rich dialogue among participants and witnesses about who or what God is, as well as a chance for those who did not dialogue to actively listen to the constructing and sharing of knowledge. As I read and write this section, I am re-affected by the discussion of God/Godness and how creative it became as the witnesses and participants worked together to define their views of God and the world. Secondly, when thinking of how they understood God at the time of entering the IHM Community which was shared in many of the heuristic portraits, we can discern an evolution beyond traditional definitions of a male authoritative God and the son Jesus who is sacrificed by his father. The definitions now include a feminine face of God, that of Sophia, as well as the face of Nature.

Where the Future is Taking Them

The second question from witness Mary W. asked, “I’m curious in your life up ahead—what you most want to manifest in your next chapter?” Five of the participants, Julie, Stephanie, Mary, Joann, and Carol, described their thoughts about what they believe the future holds for them individually, as well as for the lay Immaculate Heart Community. Beginning with a touch of humor, Julie quips, “That’s the $64,000 Question.” Stephanie then proceeded to explore the question by sharing her thoughts from a talk that was presented at a 2007 Leadership Conference for Women Religious:

The Sister that was giving the address was saying she sees four possible futures for religious communities. One is death with dignity; just admit it’s over, we’re old, new people aren’t coming in. Kind of close the door and live out your lives graciously and peacefully, and say it was great while it lasted and now it’s over. The next was to accept and love being in the traditional kind of Church—realizing and accepting that there are going to be some restrictions that you will need to
live with and to do so joyfully. The third was to roll up your sleeves and come to terms with the Church and fight for reconciliation, which is a great contrast. That you won’t let up until the Church lets up. But the fourth one, which I thought was interesting, and it wasn’t just for religious women but I thought for anybody, was the metaphor of a community of sojourners who are on a journey together. They’re not sure where it’s going to end, but the importance is we’re here together and we move forward. And I don’t have a better answer than that. I don’t know that anybody in the world has a better answer than that, actually.

Mary concurs with Stephanie that the fourth option, that of sojourners sharing a similar path together, is the most satisfying of the four. She further clarifies that the sojourner path is not only for Immaculate Heart Community members, but also includes the lives of others:

Yes, exactly, but as sojourners embracing the needs that other people are facing. I mean, not to ignore the real things that are out there. And that means less fear, it means trusting each other, it means being brave and hopeful in some ways.

Stephanie identifies a continuing goal for the Immaculate Heart Community’s future is to keep increasing the numbers of new members so that she and the others “won’t just sojourn until we—the last one, you know [is dead]. We do have new members joining, but I’d like more and sooner, because it’s a great journey, I want to share it.”

Joann includes her favorite member of the clergy, the late Father Virgil, in her response about her relationship to the future and to God. She recalls a time when he said Mass in the living room of the former Novitiate and asked her and the others, “‘Why did God make us?’” Recalling that she gave him the pat answer from the catechism books that “God made us to know, love, and serve Him,” Joan states that he emphatically responded, “‘No, no, no. God made you to grow. All of the challenges you meet, the way you deal with and accept them, that’s where you grow.’” Struck by his responses and affirming that she agrees with this perspective about growing through challenges, Joann adds,
we can accept our problems in a negative way or we can accept them as a
callenge to help us to grow. I think that’s true in the way we accept each other
and the people that we live with. It is an acceptance and an awareness of God’s
presence in each person.

When she reflects on the afternoon’s group process with the witnesses, Carol
mentions again how much she has appreciated the witnesses’ “collective and individual
challenges to us to not be content with what was and that it’s over.” Carol affirms that she
and others need to continue to be “on the move—we can’t just sit on our laurels.” Adding
that she doesn’t “really think that we ever considered them laurels,” Carol is aware “that
each of you has brought something to light that is challenging and new.” We learn
through this discussion that was prompted by Mary W’s question that the future viability
of the Immaculate Heart Community, the embracing and tending to the needs of the
greater community, and continuing to question and understand who and what God is, are
pressing issues for several of the participants.

Closing the Circle

I had planned to end the group process by having the participants and witnesses
link their hands with mine to form a circle and that each of us would offer one word to
describe our afternoon together. I did succeed in having them link hands and offer a
single word to the closing circle. From those words, I created the following poem/prayer
that I believe encapsulates the IHM Community’s history of resistance and its future
path:

Community engaging hope,
Inspiring love and courage.
We are thankful for this sacred community
Where integrity revisions goodness
And Spirit loves gratitude. Amen.

In the end, however, it was the participants who had the final say in how the process
would conclude. They sang a song that they learned from an IHM in her 90s who had recently passed away: “Thank you once and thanks again to you. Thank you thrice for twice will never do. We’re at a loss of what to say on this happy day, to show our gratitude. Thanks. Thanks. Thanks.” True to their historical spirit of self-expression, the participants took matters into their own hands and thanked each of us in that room for what we brought to their experience in a way that was fitting for former Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California.

Summary

*Remaining Faithful to the Voice of History*

We learn from this chapter’s lengthy analysis that each of the participants identified similar and yet distinct facets of their personal and collective experiences of the unfolding journey that led them from the traditional structure of religious life and towards the creation of a lay religious community. Overall, the participants were faithful in maintaining the integrity of their personal piece of the IHM’s history and in describing the creative process that went into forming the Immaculate Heart Community. In their experience, they did not disobey the authority of the Church by taking the actions they did in response to the ultimatums presented by Rome and members of the male hierarchy. Instead, they believe that they were listening to the higher authority of God whose voice was being expressed through the Vatican II decrees. Ultimately, their experimentation process was inspired by the Spirit of God, not by the dictates of the Church’s authority structure.

A critical dimension for the majority of the IHMs taking this courageous stand was cultivating the capacity to shift away from the traditional beliefs that only members
of the male hierarchy and high level women religious superiors could serve as intermediaries for God. By resisting the backward pull of century-old traditions, the IHMs chose instead to reach out towards the progressive visions of Vatican II that sought to empower lay and religious women to assume a greater role in the future of the Catholic Church.

*Acknowledging Powerful Women Leaders*

Because of their commitment to the Catholic Church’s broader vision for social justice, the IHM Community’s leadership nurtured and cultivated seeds of resistance in the years leading up to Vatican II through educational opportunities and exposure to progressive thinkers. With an internal strength in a state of readiness to bear fruit, community members were prime to plan, design, and embrace a renewal process that was in complete adherence to the Vatican II decrees. The IHMs were being asked as a religious community to modernize and adapt to the needs of the modern world. Generally, as societies modernize and the role of the individual takes on increasing importance, there is a gradual replacement of the family or community as the basic unit of society, as well as a decline in the importance of traditional religious beliefs. Although their traditional life as a religious community did break apart during the process of modernization, the value of community was always at the core of the IHM’s visions for imagining and creating newer approaches to religious life. The eventual realization of the lay Immaculate Heart Community was firmly rooted in a desire to retain the sense of community that they had come to depend upon and value.
Through a slow and steady reading and rereading of the interview transcripts, and through the process of writing this chapter’s analysis, it became clear to me that the participants effectively resisted the internalization of external expectations and historical authority that defined how women religious were expected to act, behave, and think. The IHMs were able to resist, withstand, and challenge the internalized definitions of the “good Sister.” They also succeeded in resisting the external efforts made by Cardinal McIntyre and many members of the male hierarchy to stop the IHMs from freely responding to the calls for renewal. Their capacity to withstand being dominated by the weight of history that has attempted to marginalize how women religious have been seen and understood was enhanced by the strength and resilience of the IHM Community’s progressive leadership. This capacity was also nurtured by the courage and tenacity of the members who chose to receive dispensations rather than back away from their visions for renewal. Joann aptly concluded during the group interview that, overall, those times were “just so tumultuous for everybody.”

In the end, the vast majority of IHMs stood up and said “No” to the demands of external authority structures. When given an ultimatum to return to outdated ways of being that could no longer support them in meeting the demands of the modern world, they chose instead to create a new path for themselves in the middle of the 20th century. The Immaculate Heart Community has been in process for the past 40 years and continues to evolve towards its future as a lay ecumenical community. The relevance of the term patriarchal authority, a key premise of this study, was resisted and challenged by several of the participants. However, they aligned with one another in accepting that
the lay Immaculate Heart Community was conceived because of the women’s capacity to resist the male hierarchy’s pressures to conform and back away from their visions of renewal.

In chapter 5, the next and final chapter, we will discuss and compare the findings of this study with those outlined in the literature review in chapter 1 and the research questions presented in chapter 2. We will also look at the importance of this study for the field of depth psychology and discuss future directions for this research.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a process, undergoing constant transformation. If men and women are searchers and their ontological vocation is humanization, sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation. (Freire, 1970, p. 75)

Introduction

Our journey began in chapter 1 with the words of early suffragette Margaret Fuller, who declared in a July 1843 essay, “The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men. Woman versus Women,” that what a woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such power as are given to her. (1843)

Fuller, along with hundreds of other women committed to the suffrage movement, had long questioned and challenged the limitations placed on women’s roles and equality in society. For 7 decades, thousands of women continued the fight for equality. As a result of the suffrage movement’s consistent focus on attaining equality, in 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in Congress, prohibiting state and federal agencies from gender-based restrictions on voting.

As I planned the focus of my research efforts, I was inspired by the fact that the suffragettes’ activism a century before my birth resulted in my right to vote for the first time in 1974. Galvanized by their courage and tenacity, I began to see that my interest in genderism and my Pacifica studies in depth/ liberation psychology would provide the stepping stones to a fascinating study. Although I knew that gender oppression was intertwined with such oppressions as racism, colonialism, and the destruction of the
environment, my primary interest was to understand the current relationship of genderism and patriarchy in the early decades of the 21st century.

With these primary pieces of the study established, I planned to explore how women’s intrapsychic space and content, their relationships, and the institutions that frame their lives are affected by patriarchy. I hoped to establish how those factors contribute to women’s ability or inability to confront and challenge patriarchal systems. In time, I recognized that the IHM’s history of engaging and challenging traditional and sanctioned forms of patriarchal/ecclesiastical authority in the Catholic Church was complementary to my research interests.

We discovered in the literature review that the externalized voices of cultural, social, and political patriarchy claim the authority to dictate to women the values and morals they should subscribe to in their lives. Oliver (2004) defines this as the “colonization of psychic space” (p. xx). These voices, internalized as “cops-in-the-head” (Boal, 1995, p. xxii), assume the authority to direct women to follow certain pathways that they may not consciously choose for themselves and their lives. With the capacity to interfere in the creation and healthy development of inner voices of authority, cops-in-the-head succeed in thwarting and often precluding the creative flow and unfolding of a woman’s life. The theme of patriarchal authority was substantiated throughout the literature review as one of the primary forces that interrupts women’s ways of becoming the authors of their own lives.

Based on her experiences as the former Mother General and President of the Immaculate Heart Community, Anita Caspary (2003) concluded that one of the major lessons to be learned from the IHM’s struggles with Cardinal McIntyre and the Vatican
was the “bonding of male power figures [where] once the patriarchal system is in operation, every activated link cooperates with every other” (p. 221). Having read Caspary’s reflections during the literature review phase of the study, I made an assumption that her conclusions were reflective of the IHM Community’s attitudes and conclusions.

However, we discovered during the thematic analyses in chapters 3 and 4 that neither patriarchy nor patriarchal systems were strongly identified by the participants as key factors in their personal histories. Perhaps because patriarchy was not established as a feminist construct until 1970, the participants did not benefit during the mid- to late 1960s from the yet-to-be spoken language of developing feminist theories of women in culture and society.

Before I began this final chapter, I spent time reflecting on the implications of this unexpected finding and how I would integrate it into the discussion and conclusions of the study. I started by revisiting the two research questions that framed this study: (a) What were the former nuns’ experiences of engaging the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and (b) What might these experiences teach us about how women can continue to engage patriarchy and resist oppression? I realized that I needed to re-look at and re-listen to what the participants had described about their experiences. With a renewed curiosity, I dove into the interview transcripts once again to learn how the participants recalled their experiences of negotiating those challenging times in their lives. I engaged the material with two questions: (a) What inspired each of them to say “No” to the authority and voice of the formal Catholic Church? (b) In choosing to say “No,” to the hierarchical voice of authority, which voices(s) of authority did they choose to follow
By broadening the research focus beyond my initial interests in uncovering the affect of patriarchy in women’s lives, I discovered underlying dimensions of the participants’ experiences that had been hidden from my view during the data analysis. Those dimensions are: (a) An emerging sense of an inner personal authority that was sanctioned through the inspired authority of Vatican II, (b) a respect for a “primacy of conscience” and its relationship to choosing a voice of authority to follow, (c) how their call of vocation to religious life was altered as a result of their experiences, and (d) a growing awareness of a convergence of multiple levels of authority.

We learn from the opening words of this chapter, articulated by the inspiring authority of Paulo Freire (1970), that reality, that is, the socio-political-cultural context of the times in which one lives, is not a static phenomenon. Instead, reality is continually undergoing change and transformation based on the context of the times. When women and men recognize an incompatibility between “their present way of life [and] their vocation to become fully human” (p. 85), Freire argues that they are faced with determining how to liberate themselves from that incompatibility. During the interviews, we learned that a key dimension of the participants’ struggles with the Church’s hierarchy was an incompatibility between their views of self-communal determination and the hierarchy’s need to maintain the status quo and to control the Church’s assets.

How Women Choose a Voice of Authority

Because an extensive amount of dialogue from the interviews was presented in each of the heuristic portraits and throughout the thematic analysis, our discussions in this chapter will not include actual dialogue from the interviews. Instead, the ideas and
reflections presented in chapters 3 and 4 will serve as our guides as we compare the
study’s findings with those from the literature review. During the re-reading of the
interviews, I recognized that the participants frequently navigated between their
impressions of authority from their pre-Vatican II experiences to those during the Vatican
II renewal process. This section’s discussion will reflect those two time periods:

Pre-Vatican II Era

The participants identified five levels of authority that framed their lives as
women religious prior to Vatican II:

1. An inner authority that provided ethical and moral guidance in forming
decisions. The decision to follow the call of vocation to religious life was reached
through prayer and dialogue between the participants’ inner authority and the supreme
authority of God.

2. An institutional authority that provided the context, structure, and guidance to
their lives as IHM Community members.

3. A hierarchical authority that structured how the IHM Community interfaced
and operated within the Los Angeles Archdiocese, in relationship to the parishes they
served, and in the ways they reported to Cardinal McIntyre. Because they were a
Pontifical Institute, they also reported to the authority of the Vatican in matters regarding
 canon law. Canon law refers to the body of laws and regulations that have been created or
 adopted by the Church’s ecclesiastical authority and serves to govern the Church and its
 members.

4. At the highest level of authority, the Vatican and the Pope provided the moral,
spiritual, and ethical guidance to the world wide organization of the Catholic Church.
5. Above all, they each answered to the supreme authority of God.

The participants recognized that these five levels of authority often spoke with different voices and delivered disparate messages to them as individuals, as IHM Community members, and to the overall well-being of the community.

We learned in the literature review that the Church’s attitudes toward authority and obedience had been heavily informed by the teachings of Adolphe Tanquerey. A prominent theologian during the late 1800s, Tanquerey viewed obedience within religious communities as a moral virtue requiring submission of personal will to one’s superiors as representatives of God (Kugelmann, 2005). Tanquerey’s teachings remained at the core of Catholic religious training and education well into the first half of the 20th century. The participants entered the IHM Community at different points between 1950-1960 when Tanquerey’s teachings were still informing the flow of authority.

Long viewed as authoritarian and harsh in his dealings with subordinates, Cardinal McIntrye’s educational background was highly militaristic and he perceived “liberals” as his enemies (Caspary, 2003; Greeley, personal communication, February 22, 2008). His allegiance and loyalty to the hierarchy of the Church says a great deal about his character, as well as the influence of a 19th-century educational system known for quelling intellectual curiosity and academic scholarship. Cardinal McIntyre was well known for resisting every step of progress in the Church and being most comfortable giving orders and expecting to be obeyed (Greeley, 1968; Greeley, personal communication, February 22, 2008).

Although there were struggles of authority between the IHM Community’s leadership and Cardinal McIntyre prior to Vatican II (Caspary, 2003); overall, the IHM’s
leadership found ways to appease him and to go around his authority. As IHM Community members, the participants noted that they were not privy to the higher-level authority struggles. Several were shocked when they eventually learned of the cardinal’s historical attempts to interfere with the institutional authority of the IHM Community’s leadership.

Once they entered the IHM Community, the participants were not surprised by the top-down flow of authority that structured traditional religious life. They understood, accepted, and learned to respect this structure of authority and the ways that it governed their lives and futures as IHM Community members. Once they took their final vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the participants found a personal sense of joy, fulfillment, and contentment in their lives as Sisters of the Immaculate Heart. Overall, each of the participants described a healthy attitude towards taking their vows and the effect it had on modifying their attitudes about a personal assertion of authority within the IHM Community.

The participants noted, however, that the vow of obedience was often challenging to follow when encountering the misuse of authority by the convent superiors. Many of the participants had at least one encounter with a superior, parish pastor, or parish assistant that was emotionally and psychologically abusive. They stated that the options for responding to the abuse were very limited because the dominant and prevailing narratives of both the IHM Community and the Church equated the voices of superiors and clergy members with the voice of God. Several of the participants also described the difficulty of being “missioned” by the hierarchy of the IHM Community to teach in classroom settings for which they felt ill-prepared. Because the voice of the convent
superior was aligned with the voice of God, it was understood that hers was the voice of authority. Often the guidance provided by the superior to those unfamiliar with the subjects they were assigned to teach was to pray to God for guidance.

The flow of authority from the highest level of the Pope as the earthly representative for God down to the lowest level of the community member was fueled by the dominant narratives of the Church and the IHM Community and reinforced by the vow of obedience. Furthermore, the vow of obedience typically overrode any movement towards an assertion of personal authority or the vocalizing of discontent towards higher levels of authority. None of the participants indicated that there were overt consequences to the superiors or clergy members who misused their authority.

All of the participants discussed with a distinct sense of pride and respect that the IHMs were not known for being traditional in their approaches to education. They also stated that, prior to Vatican II, the IHM Community’s leadership was not afraid to assert their institutional authority with the cardinal. While respectful and mindful of the higher authority of Cardinal McIntyre in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the IHM Community’s leadership did not tolerate being questioned by him on how they prepared their members as educators and religious women. We learned in both the literature review (Caspary, 2003) and from the participants’ interviews that the cardinal’s disapproval of and objections to the IHM’s liberal attitudes did not dissuade them from scheduling progressive theologians to speak at the Immaculate Heart College. This assertion of their institutional authority within the traditional structures of the Church says a great deal about their leaders’ strength of character.
Vatican II Era

When the renewal process began, the IHMs established various teams to study specific facets of the renewal decrees. The teams were comprised of faculty members from the Immaculate Heart College, teachers from the high schools and the grammar schools, and those members who worked in the IHM hospital settings. The participatory nature of the teams brought members together in a new way to learn, plan, and create visions for their futures. As a result of the participatory team experiences, we find a sixth voice of authority beginning to emerge—a voice of communal authority. All of the participants described the ways in which their personal and communal sense of self as religious women transformed because of the opportunity to participate in the planning of their personal and collective futures.

During both interview formats the participants spoke respectfully of the deeper spiritual implications of the Vatican II directives. Many of them identified that a primacy of conscience inspired the internal integration of the renewal process. In the space of prayer and reflection, as well as through the communal interpretations of the Vatican II decrees, the participants began to discern an inspiring quality in the voice and authority of God. The voice of the Holy Spirit infused within the Vatican II decrees was flowing towards them as individuals and as IHM Community members. The inspiring voice of the Holy Spirit was different from the voice of God which called them to enter the IHM Community. In effect, the participants experienced a profound shift in their relationship with and understanding of God.

When the participants entered the IHM Community, they described an experience of God’s voice that was external and transcendent; whereas during and following Vatican
II they describe a relationship to the voice of God that was more personal, immanent, and intimate. Through the spoken and written word of the highest sanctioned authority in the Catholic Church, that of the Pope and an Ecumenical Council, the participants stated that they felt inspired and empowered to experiment with and then initiate many radical changes to their lives as modern women religious.

*Transforming Attitudes Towards Authority*

We have established that the participants were profoundly affected by their exposure to and immersion within key Vatican II teachings. We learned in the literature review that the 1965 decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (Latin for “Perfect Charity”) was a pivotal document for women religious because it detailed what they were being mandated to do in order to adapt to the changing landscape of modern times (Carey, 1997; Caspary, 2003; Quiñonez & Turner, 1992). The acts of renewal were perceived to be inspired by the highest authority of the Catholic Church, the Holy Spirit; guided by the top representative of the Church, the Pope; and authorized by the sanctioned authority invested in Vatican II as an Ecumenical Council. These acts of renewal enabled women religious to shift from a static relationship with hierarchical/ecclesiastical authority to one that was dynamic and interactive. No longer mandated to subscribe to an unquestioning, passive obedience to these levels of authority, women religious were being directed to move towards personal responsibility as mature and adult Christians (Caspary, 2003; Greeley, personal communication, February 22, 2008).

Approximately a year after the promulgation of *Perfectae Caritatis*, Pope Paul VI issued a follow-on directive entitled “Norms for Implementing the Decree on Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life” (1966). This directive delineated how the acts of renewal
were to be implemented and was the critical piece of documentation that inspired how the IHMs chose their approaches to the renewal process. The voice of this directive called for and awakened a spirit of self-communal determination that included the participation of each IHM Community member (Caspary, 2003). Through this directive, the top-down flow of institutional authority began to wither as the seeds for personal-communal authority and leadership were being sown.

We learned from the individual and group interviews that as a result of the Sister Formation Movement, and prior to Vatican II, the IHM leadership team had begun initiating small changes in their traditional lifestyle. Some of these changes included removing buttons on the sleeves of their habit, softening of the habit’s head gear, and using English rather than Latin for some of their group prayers. The participants noted the irony that despite the IHM’s pre-Vatican II modifications, at the time the renewal decrees were issued in 1965, they as members were content with the quality of their lives within the traditional structures. Because they were directed and mandated by the highest levels of authority within the Church to adapt, renew, and change, they did not believe there was a choice. They learned later, however, that Cardinal McIntyre and members of the hierarchical and ecclesiastical structures were not in agreement with the mandates of the renewal.

*Perfectae Caritatis* (1965) and its follow-on directive “Norms for Renewal” (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1966) were instrumental in helping the participants transform their orientation from a traditional top-down flow of authority towards a shared sense of communal authority. From the perspective of the traditional vow of obedience, the participants entered the renewal process because they were mandated to do so, not
necessarily because they advocated for renewal. However, we can also discern that the transformative message and visions of Vatican II extended an invitation to the participants that asked them to move forward in meeting the needs of the Church in the modern world. In choosing to follow what they believed to be the highest voice of authority in the Church, that of an Ecumenical Council, the participants trusted that they were being sanctioned by this higher voice of inspiring authority to experiment and modernize.

The participants accepted the responsibility to become the authors of their lives as well as to serve as shepherds for the IHM Community in achieving Vatican II’s broader visions to restore human dignity through acts of social justice. With this sense of authorship to plan and critique how they as 20th-century women religious would need to modernize in order to support these visions, the participants entered the Freirian process of developing a critical consciousness of authority.

We learned in the literature review that Freire (1970, 1974) identified three stages leading to critical consciousness, beginning with magical consciousness, followed by naive consciousness, and finally an emerging critical consciousness. Freire weaves within each of the three stages the themes of naming, reflecting, and acting. During the initial phases of developing critical consciousness, individuals begin to differentiate that the source of oppression is correlated to the ways that systems work. They name the sources of the oppression to be the result of socio-political problems such as genderism or racism. They also discern how their personal identity has been shaped through an absorption of oppressive messages from external sources. Eventually, recognizing and reflecting on the ways that the external messages continually play within their minds with thoughts not
entirely of their own creation, individuals begin to act in empowered ways.

At the point of taking conscious and constructive action, individuals have developed an ability to respond to their internal oppressors. They have also begun to engage the external socio-political factors that affect their personal lives and the lives of others. Through parallel movements of collective connection and collaborative action, Freire (1970, 1974) hypothesizes that individuals and communities move from acts of dehumanization towards ones of humanization. Ultimately, the process of developing critical consciousness (conscientization) encourages the unraveling and examining of the forces that maintain the status quo and the concurrent developing of alternative interpretations for the real conditions confronting individuals and communities. Through the vehicle of the Vatican II renewal process, the participants were unlearning and detaching from traditional understandings of authority that had long defined how women religious were to be seen and heard.

The second document that influenced the IHM’s re-visioning of their vocation as women religious in the 20th century is from the 1965 constitution entitled Gaudium et Spes (Latin for Joy and Hope), “On the Church in the Modern World.” One of only four constitutions to be crafted during the years that Vatican II met from 1962 until 1965, Gaudium et Spes explored key teachings on the role of conscience, the dignity of the human person, and her or his relationship to God. Section 16 of this constitution states that:

Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary [where men and women] are alone with God, Whose voice echoes in [their] depths. In the depths of conscience, [men and women] detect a law which [they] do not impose upon [themselves], but which holds [them] to obedience . . . the voice of conscience can when necessary speak to [their] heart . . . for [they] have in [their] heart a law written by God. To obey it is the very dignity of [men and women]; according to
it, [they] will be judged.

We learn from this passage that the personal conscience resides *within* each woman and man and it is here that an individual can commune with God.

The personal conscience is qualified as a secret sanctuary, a private and holy place to dialogue with God to form ethical and moral decisions. Conscience is described “as the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us, and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, §17).

Ultimately, the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* authorized and substantiated (a) the value of human dignity, (b) a dialogical relationship between the voice of God and personal conscience, and (c) the primacy of an individual’s conscience in making informed moral decisions even if they are not congruent with the decisions of hierarchical/ecclesiastical authority.

As noted earlier, several of the participants discussed the influence that a primacy of conscience had on the choices they ultimately made regarding their acts of renewal. Primacy of conscience reflects an individual’s search for truth and is not equated with an autonomy of conscience that privileges an individual with the freedom to do whatever she would like to do. More so, conscience is correlated with an individual’s ability and responsibility to develop a moral decision from an informed conscience in dialogue with God (Kalscheur, 2009) and through developing skills of discernment.

**Discerning Voices of Authority: Confronting the Catch-22 Situation**

We learned in the literature review (Caspary, 2003; Kugelmann, 2005) and from the participants that obedience from the cardinal’s perspective during Vatican II was equated with the IHMs who taught in *his* schools: (a) Continuing to wear traditional
habits or a slightly modified traditional habit, but no secular clothes (despite Vatican II decrees authorizing them to determine for themselves what mode of dress best suited the IHM Community), (b) maintaining a traditional schedule for daily prayers and Mass (despite Vatican II decrees authorizing them to define what constituted prayer life in modern times), and (c) obeying the cardinal’s authority regarding their role as teachers in the Los Angeles Archdiocese. This was the ultimate Catch-22 situation for the IHMs, who as a Pontifical Institute reported to two different levels of superiors within the hierarchical structure.

We will discuss the Catch-22 situation because it illustrates what happens when levels of authority converge and collide. As mentioned earlier, because they were a Pontifical Institute, the IHM’s direct superior regarding issues of canon law was the Vatican. However, because they taught in the L.A. Archdiocese’s parochial schools, they were required to abide by what the cardinal deemed administratively and procedurally necessary to run the diocese and its schools. The higher authority vested in the Vatican II decrees mandated that women religious update and renew. The IHMs, therefore, could not in fact obey the cardinal’s orders, which forbade women religious teaching in Los Angeles parochial schools to wear secular clothes because by this point in their experimentation process they had unanimously voted for secular dress as their preferred habit.

Similarly, we learned in the literature review and from the participants that the cardinal demanded that the IHM Community continue to meet the diocese’s headcount requirements for teaching positions (Caspary, 2003). However, by this time the IHM’s leadership, in an assertion of their institutional authority, had elected to no longer send
ill-prepared members into the classrooms. In 1968, the IHM leadership advised the cardinal that they could not meet the headcount requirements because any members not assigned to a classroom were attending school full time to receive their BA degrees and to acquire teaching credentials. In response to this news, the cardinal terminated all the IHMs who were teaching in Los Angeles parochial schools. From the participants’ perspectives, the cardinal misused both his authority and the power invested in his position by unilaterally disregarding the IHM’s institutional authority.

We also learned through the personal and group interviews, as well as in the literature review (Briggs, 2006; Caspary, 2003; Greeley, personal communication, February 22, 2008; Kugelmann, 2005), that the IHM’s personal and communal interpretations and assertions of authority were a threat to the status quo of the Church. The status quo traditionally awards extensive amounts of privileged authority and power to clergy, bishops, and cardinals. Throughout their renewal process, the participants believed they were working in a spirit of faith to pursue what had been decreed in the Vatican II decrees, documents, and constitutions regarding the future of the Church. They further believed that in time the status quo would be transformed through Vatican II’s progressive decrees and by the radical actions they were undertaking as women religious in response to those decrees.

Cardinal McIntyre, who was known to be unsympathetic to Vatican II, remained in Los Angeles for most of Vatican II’s sessions, citing ill health as his reason for non-attendance (Briggs, 2006; Caspary, 2003). Like most churchmen of his time who headed large American dioceses, the cardinal’s approach to authority had been shaped by the 19th-century theological teachings of Adolphe Tanquerey. As noted earlier, these
teachings required both a submission of personal will and a deference of judgment to one’s superiors (Kugelmann, 2005). A few of the participants noted the irony in the fact that the cardinal chose not to defer judgment to his superior, the Pope, as well as to the authority of Vatican II. Instead, he chose to use his authority, time, and energy to assert his personal will and power to fight for the maintenance of the status quo. Ultimately, the cardinal determined that he was free to choose to remain loyal to the Church’s traditional teachings and that he could also choose to ignore the authority entrusted in Vatican II by the tradition of the Church that holds an Ecumenical Council to be the Church’s highest authorizing agency. Although Cardinal McIntyre did not defer his personal will and judgment to his superiors, he did demand that the IHMs defer their newly sanctioned Vatican II authority to him. Moreover, no one in a higher position of authority over Cardinal McIntyre challenged his acts of disobedience.

Limit-Situations and Limit-Acts

Freire argues that individuals, as conscious beings, exist “in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom” (1970, p. 90). When they learn through objective acts of reflection to separate themselves from the world and the activities of their lives, individuals can begin to “locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and in their relations with the world and others” (p. 99). Bolstered with an informed inner authority to perceive the situations which limit them, (i.e., the limit situations) through objective distancing, what were once perceived as obstacles to their liberation begin to “stand out in relief from the background, revealing their true nature as concrete historical dimensions of a given reality” (p. 99). Cardinal McIntyre and the hierarchical systems informing and structuring the Catholic Church
represented limit-situations for the participants. Even though limit situations are a given
dimension of life, Freire believed that responding to them was feasible through the
development of critical consciousness through dialogue and by learning how to transform
the factors contributing to the limit-situation.

Freire states that one can choose to respond and live within a climate of unending
hopelessness or one can choose to perceive the situation as a barrier to her humanity
which in turn demands taking responsible action through limit-acts. Freire defines limit-
acts as actions that are “directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively
accepting the given” (1970, p. 99). Limit-acts are generative in that the downward pull of
hopelessness is interrupted as an individual claims ownership of her personal authority
and freedom. The negotiation of limit-situations and limit-acts is pivotal to the
developing of critical consciousness because through the negotiation individuals are
unraveling and examining the forces that maintain the status quo. Concurrent with these
acts of unraveling and examining is the developing of alternative interpretations for the
real conditions that oppress individuals and communities.

It was not out of character that when confronted by a group of “supposedly”
disobedient nuns that Cardinal McIntyre would respond to their limit acts with an
assertion of his sanctioned authority. The cardinal fought to maintain the status quo as
strongly as the participants and the IHM Community fought to achieve self-communal
determination. With attention augmenting due to the media’s national coverage of the
conflict in Los Angeles between the cardinal and the IHMs, Cardinal McIntyre took his
concerns directly to the top of the hierarchical chain of command. Despite Pope John
XXIII’s 1962 vision of aggiornamento (Italian for “bringing up to date”) that would
enable the Catholic Church metaphorically to open its window to the world, the progressive nature of the 1965 renewal decrees issued by Vatican II, and the 1966 directives for renewal issued by Pope Paul VI, Cardinal McIntyre and a strong cadre of loyal supporters went to Rome in 1969. During their visit with high ranking Vatican officials, they succeeded in negotiating an agreement. This agreement essentially undercut most of the personal and communal authority the IHMs had adopted through the inspiring authority of Vatican II.

At this time, Anita Caspary and her advisory committee recognized that there was a very good chance that Rome would present the IHMs with an ultimatum. They understood that choosing to say “No” to the ultimatum would result in them receiving forced dispensations from their canonical status. More importantly, they recognized the amount of energy that was being expended and wasted inside the vortex of deciding who had the most authority. The IHM’s choice of saying “No” to patriarchal authority led to a saying “Yes” to their newly emerging communal authority. In the end the majority of the IHM Community members including the 8 participants of this study chose to disengage from the grip of patriarchal authority and to reach their hands out toward the call of their futures.

What We Have Learned from the Participants About Authority

The first question guiding this study asks, “What were the former nuns’ experiences of engaging the hierarchy of the Catholic Church?” The information we have gleaned in this section on authority provides insight to this question. Here is what we discovered:

1. The participants’ negotiations of these historical encounters required shifts in

...
their attitudes and beliefs about women’s authority within patriarchal and hierarchical systems. Through the vehicle of the Vatican II renewal process, they were unlearning and detaching from traditional understandings of authority that had long defined how women religious were to be seen and heard. The voices of self and communal authority emerged through developing a critical consciousness of the Church’s hierarchical and ecclesiastical authority structures.

2. As the renewal process unfolded, the intrapsychic spaces (Kristeva, 2002; Oliver, 2002b; 2004) of the participants were being de-colonized (Oliver, 2002b; 2004) of the sanctioned authoritarian voices of the Church and re-seeded with the transforming voices of inner and communal authority. Within the dialogical teams, the participants created a safe public homeplace environment (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997; hooks, 2002) in which to imagine, dialogue, debate, and create new understandings for themselves and their community. The physical safe space of the dialogical groups provided a new social space for the participants to step back into and away from the oppressive and constricting social space framed by the hierarchical authority of the Church.

Oliver (2001, 2002b, 2004) discusses the relationship between social and psychic space. She identifies the diminishing effects of dominating and oppressive social forces on the contents of psychic space and the denial of individuality to members of the oppressed group:

Oppressed people lack the ability to create meaning for themselves as a result of both the denial of social agency and the lack of social space within which to create meaning. Social agency is attached to personal agency, and the lack of social space is tied to the lack of psychic space. (Oliver, 2002b, pp. 43-44)

Oliver insists, as does Kristeva (2002), that personal revolt and social revolution require
personal and social space within which individuals and groups can create meaning about the socio-political-cultural context of their lives (i.e., Freire’s limit-situations) and take meaningful action (i.e., Freire’s limit-acts).

3. In looking back at that point of their history, Caspary (2003) writes that 350 out of 400 IHM Community members “elected to surrender [their] vows and status in the Roman Catholic Church to become a lay ecumenical community” (p. xii). During the study, we learned that the 7 participants who received the ultimatum from the Vatican do not believe they ever surrendered their vows. In their minds and hearts their vows had been made to God and the Immaculate Heart Community, not the dominant authority structures of the Catholic Church. The participants believe that they ultimately chose to surrender their canonical status with the Church.

As constructed knowers in process (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997), the participants had acquired a deep respect for the value of self-communal determination. As a result, they could no longer obediently receive and follow the directives imposed by the hierarchical structures because they had learned to trust and respect their interpretations of the decrees. They also respected their newly emerging sense of communal authority.

4. The participants shared in Anita Caspary’s (2003) visions for a self-determining lay community and chose to walk together with her to create and become the founding members of the lay Immaculate Heart Community. The decisions made by the participants to move to noncanonical status, to walk with Caspary, and to form a lay community represent examples of Freire’s limit-acts (1970). These limit acts offered the participants new life and freedom from the repression of the status quo.
The second question guiding this study asks, “What might the participants’ experiences teach us about how women can continue to engage patriarchy and resist oppression?” We learn from the participants’ experiences about the necessity of women developing a critical consciousness of authority while following the call of vocation. Freire’s (1970) three themes of naming, reflecting, and taking action correlate to the participants’ experiences of confronting the limit-situations imposed by the hierarchical systems of the Church and the corresponding limit-acts. We discovered several insights from the participants:

1. Women need to know how to name, identify, and describe the oppression(s) confronting and infusing their lives. The participants confronted gender oppression, as well as oppressions resulting from moral and ethical injustice.

2. Women need to be able to step back into a safe social space and observe the oppressive systems. The participants engaged in a 3-year process of personal and interpersonal examination, study, reflection, and implementation of the Vatican II decrees. This process allowed them to confront the triadic interlocking systems of patriarchal, hierarchical, and ecclesiastical authority.

3. Women need to know what effective action can be taken to stop and transform the conditions of oppression. The effective actions taken by the participants were (a) participating in personal and communal education, (b) building community through participatory teams, (c) cultivating faith in the voice of Vatican II, (d) learning to trust in Vatican II’s visions of social justice and human dignity, and (e) choosing to follow the call of their vocation to form a lay community.

Through the participants’ actions, we have learned what women need to know in
order to engage patriarchy, to resist oppression, to develop an inner voice of inspiring authority, and to pursue the call of vocation. By compiling the participants’ individual oral histories, we learned of their personal reflections and communal experiences of the limit-situations they encountered and about the limit-acts they created to achieve self-communal determination. These oral histories will be added to the historical pages of women’s struggles for equality.

In Dialogue: Literature Review Findings and the Study Findings

Introduction

At the conclusion of the literature review I had determined that women’s ability to engage and resist patriarchal/hierarchical systems of authority is contingent upon four key themes: (a) Forming a strong personal sense of self, (b) creating an interpersonal sense of self through communal relationships, (c) receiving and constructing knowledge within safe public spaces, and (d) knowing the implications of women’s history being silenced throughout time on women’s personal and communal sense of self. With one eye looking back at what was garnered from the literature review and the other eye focused on what was learned in the previous section regarding authority, we can see that there is synergy between what initially inspired the study and what has been learned since completing the study. We can easily discern that the four critical areas identified in the literature review vis-à-vis women’s ability to challenge patriarchal structures are also integral to what was discovered about the participants’ relationships with multiple levels of authority within the Catholic Church.

By re-reading the transcripts, we identified that the participants were developing a critical consciousness of authority (Freire, 1970, 1974). They were also equally engaged
in pursuing the call of vocation and what it means to be a human being in the struggle for liberation (Freire, 1970). Because the study has expanded beyond its original interest in women’s engagement of patriarchy, two additional concepts have been added to the list of key terms framing this study:

1. Developing a Critical Consciousness of Authority—For the purpose of this dissertation, a critical consciousness of authority reflects an awareness of the dominant voices of external authority. It is a discerning process dependent on a precarious balancing of mind, voice, and heart, with each providing corrective guidance to the other. During this process, individuals and communities investigate whether external authority is inhibiting/disrupting or supporting/nurturing one’s self-communal determination and self-communal governance. The developing of critical consciousness occurs intrapsychically as well as interpsychically.

2. Following the Call of Vocation—For the purpose of this dissertation, following the call of vocation reflects the pursuit of personal identity and satisfaction as well as cultivating social meaning, values, and responsibilities. Following the call is concerned with one’s larger purpose, personhood, and deepest values as well as the gift one wishes to give to the world. Moreover, pursuing the call of vocation emerges from a “desire to integrate the various dimensions of one’s life and to channel one’s ambition toward the greater common good” (Orr, 1994, pp. 22-23).

With the addition of these key concepts, we can move forward to discuss what was learned in the literature review and from the thematic analysis of the study. The discussion will be broken down by the key themes identified in the literature review. Within this discussion I will bring forward what was discerned from the participants
about the four themes garnered from the literature review. I will then discuss the themes
discerned from the study that were not identified within the literature review about
women and authority. From there we can illuminate how women (a) develop a critical
consciousness of authority, and (b) follow the call of vocation while living within
patriarchal cultures.

Forming a Strong Sense of Self

Findings from the Literature Review

The review of the literature on women’s subjectivity examined what is known
about women’s sense of self within both an individual and community context from the
perspectives of depth and liberation psychologies. We learned that traditionally oriented
depth psychologies grounded in the early works of Freud and Jung have narrowly looked
to personal history, interpersonal family dynamics, and archetypal dynamics when
tending to women’s wounded psyches. To broaden our discussion beyond the tenets of
traditional depth psychology, we moved to the works of feminist-inspired writings and
liberation psychology.

The first critical building block for the theme of forming a strong sense of self
was derived from the work of French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva (1980). Rather than
looking at the traditional perspectives of a subject progressively moving towards the
future in a linear fashion, Kristeva argued that female subjectivity reflects a cyclical
nature. Within the language of cyclical rhythms, she proposes a subjectivity that moves,
changes, and transforms in and with time. By moving beyond a universal and linear
definition of subjectivity to that of subject-in-process, Kristeva challenged traditional
philosophical definitions of static subjectivity and drew attention to the
feminine/maternal themes of rhythm. Moreover, she emphasized that we have reached a
time in history when a *multiplicity* of female perspectives and preoccupations can be
recognized and celebrated. Although Kristeva has been criticized within feminist writings
for being too narrowly framed within a psychoanalytic Western narrative of father,
mother, and child, there is tremendous value in her work. I found particular strength in
her discussions of the mobility of subjectivity and the multiplicity of female perspectives,
as well as the repercussions of denying the feminine in language.

The next building blocks in our discussion of women forming a strong sense of
Because much of Oliver’s work has been informed by Kristeva’s writings, they share
similar views on the liberation of subjectivity. Both of their perspectives enabled our
discussions to move beyond traditional depth psychological perspectives that have
viewed subjectivity as static and universal. Oliver’s work also served to broaden our
discussion to include the terrain of psychic and social space and their relationship to
women’s sense of self (2001, 2004). Based on her arguments regarding the dimension of
subjectivity that bears witness, Oliver expanded our discussion of subjectivity to one that
is reflexive and interactive. Mired within the dynamic forces of address-ability and
response-ability, witnessing is not merely about acts of testifying and producing facts.
Instead, witnessing is a dynamic process where a witness also “bears witness to the
necessity of its process” (Oliver, 2001, p. 143). We derived from Oliver a notion of
subjectivity that is not only reflexive and interactive, but is also dialogical and one
designed to take formidable stands against injustice.
Findings from the Study

The participants’ sense of self was transformed through an emerging voice of inner authority. This voice unfolded through the unlearning of and detaching from the sanctioned authority of the Church. As the participants were unlearning and detaching, they were also learning anew about themselves as individuals. As part of developing a critical consciousness of authority, the participants were engaged in an intrapsychic process of ferreting out messages of internalized cops-in-the head (Boal, 1995) which are the voices of external authority that undermine and silence a personal sense of authority. Through the ferreting out process and de-colonizing of psychic space, the participants were questioning the continuing validity of Church doctrine. The participants were also assessing their role as woman religious, questioning the etiology of the colonizing messages, and acquiring skills of discernment about the validity of those messages.

Through the developing of critical consciousness (Freire, 1970, 1974; Mies, 1983), individuals begin to recognize that many of the beliefs and assumptions they have had about themselves and the world in which they live have been deposited into their intrapsychic spaces by external structures of authority. These external structures are designed to interrupt the building of personal authority and the realization of one’s vocation to “become fully human” (Freire, 1970, p. 75).

An Interpersonal Sense of Self in Community

Findings from the Literature Review

The primary building blocks for developing the theme of an interpersonal sense of self in community in the literature review came from studies conducted at the Stone Center of Wellesley College based on the works of Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver and
Surrey (1991). Their research critically examined the traditional hallmarks of human development expressed in the works of Erik Erickson, Daniel Levinson, and Jean Piaget. We discovered from the Stone Center research that many women place importance on relationship and support, not autonomy and separation, as integral to living meaningful lives. From the Stone Center’s research, we discerned that women’s capacity to successfully engage in the world is influenced by connection and collaboration with others, relationships within and beyond the nuclear family, and through community involvement. We identified that through collaborative engagement with others many women discover that there is something inherently good about belonging, joining, and receiving meaningful support.

Particularly helpful in laying the groundwork for this theme was Miller’s (1991) proposal that growth-fostering relationships, not autonomy, are a central human necessity. Miller argued that disconnections and separation are the source of psychological problems, not the stepping stones for healthy human development. In her critique of Erik Erikson’s second stage of psychosocial human development, Miller challenges his conclusions that the fundamental learning objective between ages 1½ to 2½ is for a child to learn about autonomy through early stages of developing self-reliance. She suggests instead that this time period is one where the child is developing a sense of self not through separation but more so within an interactive/interconnected dynamic with others.

Miller’s (1991) work also contributed the notion of “being-in-relationship” (p. 13). In Miller’s analysis, sense of self is inspired through a simultaneous intrapsychic and interpersonal learning process that finds the child navigating within herself as well as in
relationship with others. The evolving and maturing of internal dynamics are not the result of an increased ability to separate and think for herself, but instead reflect a simultaneous growth within herself as well as between herself and others.

Another critical element in developing the theme of self in community was the work of Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock on The Listening Partners Project (1997). The Listening Partners Project identified the importance of the collective discovery process and collaborative learning situations in empowering women to move out of internal and external spaces where they are silenced. Belenky et al. determined that when women’s internal psychic connections are strengthened to support a sense of self that can question the external circumstances defining their lives, they find themselves in a position both to challenge and to transform oppressive beliefs that prevent them from taking responsive action.

Watkins and Shulman’s (2008) writings also supported the development of the theme of an interpersonal self-in-community. Through their discussions of internal psychic space and external social space, we learned that the liberation of psychic and social spaces go hand in hand towards supporting personal and community recovery. Women who are developing their personal skills to oppose injustice and violence in the dominant culture also benefit from joining together in smaller group settings to creatively and collectively think through approaches of engagement.

Our discussions about an interpersonal sense of self in community were enhanced by an additional dimension provided from Oliver’s work regarding the correlation of social space (2001) and the colonization of psychic space (2004). The colonizing of women’s intrapsychic space by external voices of oppression and domination was a
fundamental ingredient in developing the literature review. From the notion of colonizing we were able to lay the groundwork for the liberation of psychic space from voices of patriarchal oppression.

Findings from the Study

Within the dialogical planning team process, the participants were constructing knowledge as they created dynamic and egalitarian interpersonal relationships with one another. Through the team experiences, a voice of communal authority replaced the voice of institutional authority. Engaged in a communal process of developing critical consciousness, the participants were sharing in a similar process that was questioning and challenging the governing rules and regulations of the Church’s hierarchical system of authority. As individuals and as IHM Community members, they were looking at their role(s) within the IHM Community and the hierarchical system’s role in their lives as women religious. This communal process reflects an interpsychic assessment and purging of previously unchallenged cultural, societal, and political forms of authority.

We learned from the participants that they were engaged in dialogical inquiries and critical thinking about the validity of tradition, the role of authority, and the future call of vocation. In many ways the participants were learning how to problematize rather than merely solve the problems that were contributing to their oppression. As a reframing of the traditional approach of problem solving, Freire (1970) believed that problematizing empowered individuals to reinterpret rather than merely accept others’ conclusions about the cause and sources of oppressive conditions.
Constructing Knowledge

Findings from the Literature Review

The theme of constructing knowledge was primarily developed from The Women’s Way of Knowing Project (WWK) conducted by Belenky, Clinchy, et al. (1997). The WWK Project addressed the constraining implications of male dominated educational systems on the ways that women learn and acquire knowledge. Similar to the Stone Center’s findings on “self in relationship,” the WWK Project also determined that the universal trajectories of human development espoused in male-only studies did not reflect women’s experiences as learners and knowers. As a result, less is known about the role(s) that interdependence, intimacy, nurturance, and contextual thought play in the intellectual development of both women and men.

The WWK project (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997), as well as Belenky’s work with the Listening Partners Project (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997) which we discussed earlier, amplifies the importance of dialogical engagement in the ways women receive and construct knowledge. Critical dimensions in the acquisition and development of knowledge involve the abilities to question, listen, wonder, and construct alternatives to the received information. Moreover, with a wondering dimension to subjectivity, women are better able to question the very systems and rules that inform and govern their lives.

Of particular value from Belenky’s work (Belenky, Clinchy, et al., 1997) was identifying women as constructed knowers in process and learning that constructed knowers will experience efforts to silence them. Despite those efforts, constructed knowers are also adept at moving from the paralyzing grip of shame and silencing
towards generative action. Through a sistering of voice and mind, we identified that constructed knowers experience themselves as synthesizers of information and as constructors/generators of new understandings.

We discovered during the literature review that there were competing views on the ways the IHMs interpreted the Vatican II decrees, as well as on their struggles with Cardinal McIntyre and the Vatican (Carey, 1997; Caspary 2003; Coulson, 1973, 1994; Kirschenbaum, 1991; Kugelmann, 2005; Rogers, 1974; Thorne, 2003). Through this analysis we discovered four different versions of the IHM’s experiences. We learned that the construction of knowledge from varying perspectives, when coupled with the power of knowledge, can distort history. We also discovered that the power of knowledge can take what is seen as creative to be viewed as destructive, where power from within is seen as power from above, and where what has a long history of struggle and insight is reduced to the effects of external causes.

Findings from the Study

Within the IHM Community’s dialogical planning teams, the participants were receiving, critiquing, and constructing knowledge about past traditions and imagining their future as women religious. Through this process, they moved from an obedient way of received knowing towards shared and constructed ways of knowing. The participatory team setting provided a medium to empower the participants’ inner voices of authority as well as to create social spaces free of external sources of oppressive authority (Oliver, 2001; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). The participants were engaged in a process of developing and honing the skills of listening, constructing ideas about the decrees, and dialoguing with others on their team. In effect, the participants were pulling apart and
reflecting upon the fibers of the systems that had once structured their lives.

As the participants continued to refine and follow the voice of inner authority, they were following the call of vocation. Freire states that “a deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical [sic] reality susceptible of transformation” (1970, p. 85). He also argues that it is one’s vocation, regardless of which world she inhabits, to become more fully human throughout her life by securing sisterhood and solidarity with kindred spirits.

We discovered through the individual and group interviews that the participants developed a deep sense of sisterhood and solidarity throughout the Vatican II renewal process. Each of the participants also described the positive influence that was derived from participating in the dialogical teams. During the 3-year period of studying and experimenting with the decrees, the participants were assessing how their attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs about religious life required updating in order to follow the call of the 20th century.

Role of History

Findings from the Literature Review

The theme of history was supported through the work of feminist historian Gerda Lerner, who argued that women’s history is indispensable and essential to the emancipation of women. Lerner’s (1986, 1993) extensive work on the rethinking of history and the ways that history has inaccurately reflected women’s lives lent insight during the early stages of writing the literature review. Her work substantiated that we can learn from the ways past generations have acted in order to cause a healthy stream of re-actions in the present.
The work of feminist poet Adrienne Rich (1972) provided the notion of a re-visioning of history as a process of looking back and re-entering old texts from a new and critical perspective. Through re-visioning history with new eyes, Rich proposed that women can begin to understand the historical relevance of the societal and cultural assumptions that shape and inform their lives. She also notes that women can gain access to knowledge and identity by orienting themselves to the realities of a male-dominated society. Believing that women must expand their own sense of actual possibilities, Rich (1976) further argued that women can illuminate one another’s paths towards knowledge and identity by sharing their past struggles and successes in overcoming oppression.

Another contribution from Kelly Oliver on the theme of history was her argument that a rethinking of history requires both a curiosity for and a passionate reinvestigation of past moments of resistance to oppression. Oliver states that successes of the past can serve as conduits to the future—where critical moments of resisting oppression are reinvestigated. “Future justice exists only by vigilantly returning to the past, reinvestigating the past over and over again to open up a better future . . . to rethink history” (2001, pp. 135-136). By standing up for the reality of future justice that reflects a collaborative existence among the sexes, cultures, and nations, Oliver encourages resurrecting the past in order to gain access to relevant information that is obscured from view.

With the inspiration from the writings of Lerner (1986, 1993), Rich (1972, 1976), and Oliver (2001) serving as our guides, we were able to look back at the IHM’s history with a focus on re-visioning how their experiences can continue to bear fruit in women’s lives today.
Findings from the Study

Throughout their renewal process, the participants were engaging many of the historically unchallenged assumptions made by the sanctioned authority of the Church. During the mid-19th century the Church defined itself as immutable and changeless. One of the participants shared a November, 1970 cover story from a *Time* magazine interview with Anita Caspary entitled “You’ve Come a Long Way Baby”. I have chosen to include parts of that article in this section because it helps illustrate our current discussion regarding the value of looking back in history. When interviewed, Anita Caspary shared her reflections on the IHM’s then recent engagement of hierarchical authority (the IHMs had received their dispensations in early 1970):

If you bought the whole package of self-determination and you were being stopped every little while, then it seemed logical to break away. While I saw the break as inevitable, I didn’t really want it. But I wondered how much energy you could spend fighting authority when you could spend that same energy doing what you should be doing. . . . I am convinced that if tomorrow permission came to do everything we’re doing, I would not want to go back. The old structure simply is not geared to the 20th century woman.

The article further speculated that “in the next few years” the IHM’s visions for creating a lay community would demand all of her capacities as a leader:

The new Immaculate Heart Community, which will admit married couples as well as single men and women to membership, is something new in the church. Its goal is flexibility, which could be its salvation or its undoing; the degree of individualism in careers and life-styles offered to members might erode the sisters’ present sense of solidarity.

Looking back with an eye on a re-visioning of the IHM history, we can see that the success of the lay Immaculate Heart Community was not only due to Caspary’s leadership. Each of the women of this study is a leader in her own right who has tended to and maintained the progressive visions of the Immaculate Heart Community. In 1970,
in solidarity with approximately 350 other IHM Community members, the participants of this study chose possibility and freedom over the backward pull of tradition and history. This year marks the Immaculate Heart Community’s 40th anniversary as a lay spiritual community for both women and men.

Section Summary

From these very courageous acts of sacrifice and resistance the participants engaged in a creative process of developing a critical consciousness of authority. They determined that the call of vocation, like history, is not immutable, fixed, and frozen in time. Through this discussion of the findings from the literature review and the study, we can safely conclude that the IHM’s historic struggles with the Church’s hierarchical authority make a valuable contribution to the developing of what Maria Mies (1983) described as a conscientization of women. Moreover, the participants found that following and fulfilling a call of vocation is closely linked to the context of the times in which one is living. In other words, the call of vocation is ever-transforming in response to the political, social, and cultural dynamics that frame each point in history.

Emerging Themes Not in the Literature Review

Introduction

We learned in the literature review that the term *sistering* reflects the practice of reinforcing beams to support a floor or ceiling in the design and construction of buildings. The sistering of voice and mind served to illustrate what women need to do in order to step back from and critically view knowledge and to dialogue with others about the realities of external socio-political-cultural dynamics on their personal and communal lives. As constructed knowers-in-process and through the developing of a critical
consciousness of authority, women can generate, synthesize, and construct new knowledge and understanding for themselves and the communities in which they live.

The term *sistering* will lend support to this section of the dissertation that describes how my study contributes to the literature on women’s ways of being the authors of their personal lives and viable members of community while living within patriarchal cultures and societies. I believe the contribution of this study to the literature comes in its successful sistering of psychoanalytical social theory with the participants’ experiences of engaging the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. The sistering of the two will be accomplished by placing the “heart” of the participants’ human experiences in dialogue with the “abstract” concepts offered in the works of Julia Kristeva (1980, 1995, 2002) and Kelly Oliver (1991, 2002b, 2004).

From Kristeva we glean insight into the imaginary loving father, known as the loving third (1995), and the notion of intimate revolt within the psyche (2002). From Oliver we gain insight into the agency of the accepting/loving third (2004), as well as the colonizing and de-colonizing of psychic/social space (2002b, 2004). When necessary, I will employ Oliver’s insight into Kristeva’s work to illuminate Kristeva’s writings.

**In the Abstract: Theoretical Concepts of Liberation and the Loving Third**

Julia Kristeva (1980) illuminated psychoanalytic theory’s neglect of the maternal body and feminine subjectivity. Kristeva’s focus on the role of the imaginary father/the loving third was posed as a challenge to traditional psychoanalytic theory regarding the oedipal father. Oliver proposes that the move to the imaginary father was a way for Kristeva to maintain the loving maternal function where the imaginary father serves as a screen for the mother’s love, associated, as it is, with the child’s relationship to its conception and the mother’s womb. The imaginary father provides the
necessary support to allow the child to move into the Symbolic. This is a move from the mother’s body to the mother’s desire through the mother’s love. (Oliver, 1991, p. 44)

In *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995), Kristeva discusses the destructive conditions and maladies confronting the contemporary human subject. She argues that such maladies as narcissism, borderline states, and psychosomatic conditions are the best possible options available to human subjects faced with the diminishing conditions of psychic space. Kristeva proposes the securing of loving agency within the psyche, a conduit to creating an embodied psychic life, by restoring the paternal function to one of love rather than oppression and law.

Drawing from Judaic and Christian interpretations of God for a possible link to a loving paternal function, Kristeva points out that “the Bible draws attention to the love that the Jewish people have for their God, and it demands or denounces this love when it is found to be insufficient” (1995, p. 120). From the perspective of Christian agape, Kristeva notes,

> The love that the biblical God has for His people is expressed in another way [as a] Love [that] falls from the heavens. As direct as it may be, it demands neither worthiness nor justification, for it is interspersed with preferences and choices that immediately establish the loved one as Subject. Ancient biblical texts do not make a great deal of this love, and when they do intimate that it exists they imply that it cannot be represented. (p. 121)

Kristeva’s argument then moves to a description of shared experiences among psychoanalysts when listening to analysands unfurl memories laden with narcissistic wounding. She pinpoints a critical moment when the analysands become aware of a ghostly yet secure presence of the father [an] archaic mirage of the paternal function, which is placed against the background of primary narcissism as the ultimate guarantee of identity. [It] could very well be considered to be an imaginary Father. (1995, p. 121)
From this reflection and observation, Kristeva conjectures that the imaginary loving father represents a maternally inspired/pre-oedipal father who is first to love human subjects, and from this love one renders a primary sense of identity.

Although Kristeva notes the irony of an attachment being formed with a biblical God who is unnamed, unrepresented, and unseen, she recalls experiences in the psychoanalytic container when “those who believe in the God of the Bible do not doubt His love” (1995, p. 122). The imaginary father leads an individual to the “position of subjectivity” (p. 122) through love and thus towards the emergence of a positive sense of self. Moreover, through this conduit of the imaginary loving father, an individual can sublimate unconscious anxieties and fears through creative acts of art, music, and poetry.

Oliver’s sense of the loving/accepting third (1991, 2002b, 2004) expands beyond Kristeva’s (1995) notion of the imaginary loving father. Oliver notes that the bridging of inner psychic and external social space is achieved through an “identification with the imaginary third, or social meaning itself” (2002b, p. 54). Oliver clarifies that Kristeva’s explanations of the imaginary father do not “explicitly identify it with social support . . . or the accepting third as existing within the social” (Oliver, 2004, p. 126). However, Oliver postulates that the existence of the accepting third can nonetheless “be usefully interpreted as a primary form of social support necessary for psychic development, creativity, and love” (p. 126). Through the act of bridging intra- and interpsychic space, Oliver contends that women who are oppressed within patriarchal systems can learn to move toward social meaning and recognition through supportive social spaces.

*From the Heart: The Participants’ Journey to Self-Communal Determination*

Upon entering the IHM Community, the women of this study believed in the God
of the Bible and trusted His Love for them. They were not adverse to the laws and history that governed the flow of institutional and hierarchical authority within the Catholic Church. Moreover, they found comfort, direction, and a sense of belonging within the traditional structures of the IHM Community and the overarching structures of the Catholic Church. The participants trusted the historical and hierarchical interpretations of the laws of the Father, the ultimate authority of God within the hierarchical structure, and the role that obedience played within the structure.

From Kristeva’s perspective (1995), the participants would have formed an attachment to the imaginary loving father prior to entering the IHM Community. Through this attachment, they were able to follow the call of vocation. I believe this connection to the imaginary loving father may have enabled them to sublimate unconscious anxieties/anger about the Church’s patriarchal/paternal authority, as well as any gender oppression that may have been present. Perhaps the sublimation of negative emotions contributed to the creative expression of their vocation as educators, hospital workers, and community members.

The inspiring authority and progressive visions symbolized within the Vatican II decrees move our discussion beyond Kristeva’s (1995) notion of an imaginary loving father towards Oliver’s notion of the “agency of the loving/accepting third” (2004, p. 127). Oliver suggests that the agency of the loving third provides “the missing link between social and psychic space [where] the imaginary father can be read as a social support for identity” (p. 127). Without a link to a loving accepting third that can circumvent and thwart the onslaught of oppression caused by the colonizing cops-in-the-head, as well as the actions and authority of real cops in social space, marginalized
individuals are often rendered into unending states of hopelessness, emptiness, and worthlessness.

I believe that the inspiring authority of Vatican II represents Oliver’s (1991, 2004) notion of the agency of the loving/accepting third. Through its voice of inspiring authority, the agency of the Vatican II decrees provided a conduit towards an emerging awareness of the decaying social conditions of modern times and described the requirements that women religious needed to undertake to remediate the decay. We learned from the participants about the personal and communal transforming processes they underwent throughout their experimentation with the renewal decrees. Through these processes they moved from obedient received knowers/subjects of paternal authority towards constructed knowers/subjects who questioned and challenged hierarchical/paternal authority.

The participants identified the psychological and emotional pressures they withstood during the 1960s when they faced the disapproval of members of other religious communities about their interpretation of the renewal decrees. Several of the participants described the negative influence generated by the national news media’s sensationalizing of the IHM’s actions and the media’s subsequent distortion of the facts surrounding the IHM’s actions. They also described the internal exhaustion, physical weariness, and psychological numbing they regularly confronted as they experienced being denied a sense of belonging to what had once been familiar and the very core of their lives.

Several participants noted that they persevered by putting one foot in front of the other, taking one day at a time, leaning on one another when they lost sight of hope, and
through securing private moments of quiet reflection and prayer. The participants endured the psychological and emotional turbulence through their connection to and belief in the visions of Vatican II for themselves as individuals as well as for the future of the IHM Community. The agency of Vatican II as a loving third linked the participants’ psychic space and the interpsychic space of the IHM Community with the external needs of modern society. Through this linking, they and the other members of the IHM Community were fortified to engage in the turbulent crisis of authority with the hierarchical structures of the Church.

In the Abstract: Psychic and Social Space

Oliver (2002b, 2004) states that women living within patriarchy often experience circuitous and unending feelings of emptiness and hopelessness due to the paucity of positive self-images for women and motherhood. As a result women are unable to externalize and express the internalized negative affects of this paucity of positive self-images towards their oppressors:

The colonization of psychic space inherent in oppression operates in large part by denying access to the operations of meaning making . . . without available meanings to support their sense of self . . . any incorporation of social meaning will cripple rather than nourish the psyche. (Oliver, 2004, p. 128)

To have a sense of agency and authority in their lives and to create meaning about their lives, Oliver (2002b) argues that women need to learn to bear witness to the colonization of both intrapsychic and interpsychic space. By learning how to identify the voices/messages of the internal oppressors and the source of the oppression, women living within patriarchal cultures and systems can move towards decolonizing their intrapsychic space of the negative images and colonizing voices that have been inserted through multi-levels of patriarchal authority. As women learn to name, reflect, and take
effective action in response to the internal oppressors, they replenish their intrapsychic
sense of self and thus strengthen the voice of their inner authority. The process of
resisting and transforming internal oppressive voices and images is enhanced by building
interpsychic social space in solidarity and community with kindred spirits.

Oliver (2004) notes that the operating powers of colonization and oppression are
steeped within opposing patriarchal values and lead women to being divided within
themselves and from one another:

Colonization and oppression operate through the imposition of these values on
others until those others become “infected” with the dominant values, values that
mark them as contaminated and evil. The colonization of psychic space is the
result of this infection, an infection that leads to alienation, shame, and
melancholy. Colonization and oppression justify themselves using morality,
morality that covers over the fundamentally ethical structure of subjectivity. (p.
129)

Moreover, Kristeva postulates that intimate revolt within the psyche is a possible
conduit towards restoring an embodied psychic life and vivifying a sense of agency:

Revolt is necessary for psychic life [and] unceasing . . . the fertile ground [of]
imimate revolt [provides a] ground of self-reflection and self-questioning that
opens psychic life to infinite re-creation. Facilitated by a negative drive force, this
intimate psychic revolt makes possible both autonomy and connection with
others. (as cited in Oliver, 2002b, p. 410)

Oliver (2002b) notes that Kristeva’s writings strive to uncover the ways that gender
oppression and discrimination are intimately linked to the oppression of women’s psychic
space. Kristeva is also interested in discerning the cumulative effect on women’s sense of
personal self when they are restricted to the role of an outsider while living within
patriarchal systems and societies.

*From the Heart: The Participants’ Experiences of Intimate Revolt and Decolonizing of
Psychic Space*

The participants’ experiences bring life and meaning to the concepts of psychic
and social space, the colonizing and decolonizing of psychic space, and the role of intimate revolt within psychic/social space. I believe that the participants’ development of a critical consciousness of authority during the 1960s and 1970s was a dynamic process of intimate revolt requiring a negotiation between intrapsychic and interpsychic space. This process also required the identification of dominant gender values designed to minimize the role of women within the Church while maintaining the authority of clerics, bishops, cardinals, and the Pope.

As they reached towards the inspired authority and agency of the Vatican II’s decrees for direction and resiliency, the participants were reflecting on and detaching from the sanctioned voices of patriarchal authority that had long structured their lives as Catholic women religious. The participants were engaged in a simultaneous process of discerning new directions for the call of vocation to religious life while engaging/resisting the traditional authority of the Catholic Church’s repeated attempts to extinguish their emerging sense of personal-communal authority. In effect, the IHM’s progressive interpretations of the Vatican II renewal decrees when coupled with the 1960s climate of political-social-cultural revolt provided the critical links for transforming the participants’ intrapersonal sense of self and their interpersonal relationship to external social space.

Section Summary

Looking back at this dissertation’s unfolding journey, we can see that it has been concerned with identifying what women need within their personal-interpersonal lives and social systems to construct knowledge and create meaning given the realities of patriarchal and gender oppression. We determined through the literature review that
patriarchy has historically legitimated paternal authority within family systems, social institutions, and political society. We learned from the study and the literature review that the hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church continue to legitimate the voice of paternalistic authority.

Through the sistering of Oliver’s (2002b, 2004) and Kristeva’s (1980, 1995, 2002) theories with the heart of the participants’ human experiences, I personally acquired a deeper appreciation and understanding for what will be required to empower women. A 21st-century approach to empowering women will include supporting them to develop insight into and differentiation from patriarchal and other forms of oppressive authority.

Implications of the Study for Depth Psychology

As I look back on the journey of this study, I am mindful of my original intention to make a contribution to the field of depth-liberation psychology. The participants’ journey within the hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church teaches us a great deal about the traumatizing and silencing effects of genderism and patriarchal authority on women’s intrapsychic space. The participants’ experiences and history also tell us of the impediments to the well-being and health of communities when women are prevented from forming agency and creating meaningful connections to society. Moreover, we learned that religious life for women cannot thrive under patriarchal authority.

Depth psychology has not traditionally focused its attention on the oppression of women religious within the hierarchical Catholic Church. I believe this study can serve to awaken the field of depth psychology to the broader implications of historical, social, economic, and political forces on the oppression of individuals and communities. As an
act of retrieving and preserving history, this study demonstrates what transpired within the lives of individuals, families, communities, and systems of authority through the convergence of such factors as (a) progressive women leaders, (b) educated and committed community members, (c) supportive and progressive men leaders, (d) Vatican II’s progressive visions, (e) the 1960s political and cultural ideals, and (f) the 1960s women’s and civil rights movements. Through the convergence of these factors, a century old traditionally structured women’s religious community transformed into a modern lay Catholic-Christian religious community for women and men (Caspar, 2003).

Cushman (1995) notes that psychotherapy as a practice has fed into and substantiated the socio-political conditions that shape mental distress. As a licensed psychotherapist trained in the traditional tenets of family systems and cognitive behavioral therapies, I know firsthand that my professional orientation as a therapist has undergone considerable shifts since beginning this study. In particular, the works of Mary Belenky, Paulo Freire, Julia Kristeva, Kelly Oliver, Helene Shulman, and Mary Watkins have influenced the ways that I interface with my clients and what I expect from my profession. I have also been transformed on a personal level through the 3 years of working with the 8 participants, my volunteer activities at La Casa de Maria, and my exposure to many members of the lay Immaculate Heart Community. As a result of the convergence of my academic studies and the deepening connections with La Casa de Maria and the Immaculate Heart Community, I am more actively involved in the facilitation of the well-being of my family, profession, and community.

The sistering of depth psychology with the expansiveness of liberation psychology would help facilitate the integration of socio-political realities with the
forming of a healthy sense of self within community. By developing a critical consciousness of authority and oppression through Freire’s model of limit-situations and limit-acts, subjects-in-process learning to confront the external sources of those realities would be empowered by learning that they are not the sole source of their mental distress.

Impact of the Study on the Researcher

In the initial stages of research for this study, I discovered quite accidentally a disturbing fact about the history of the two-faced god, Janus, who is known in Roman mythology as the gatekeeper of crossroads and thresholds, of beginnings and endings. With one head looking forward and the other behind, Janus marked actual and metaphorical thresholds in time and space. According to feminist historian Barbara Walker (1983), prior to the Imperial Period in Rome, one of the two faces had been that of a woman, the goddess Juno. Walker states, “Every Roman woman embodied a bit of the Goddess’ spirit, her own soul, a juno, corresponding to the genius (soul) of a man. Later patriarchal vocabularies dropped the word juno, but retained genius, thus depriving women of their souls” (p. 484). Walker also speculates on whether the disappearance of the word juno correlates to the Church of the Middle Ages maintaining that women are soulless.

In Roman mythology, Juno, the daughter of Saturn, is known as the Daughter of Time and the Protector of Women. It is easy to understand how Juno’s perspective at the crossroads of time and history would be beneficial in her role as a protector of women. In Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Juno is noted for saving the eyes of her beloved servant, Argos after he is killed by Hermes:

There was a monster, Argos with a hundred eyes of fire, Fire that saw everywhere at once, and then went out, every one at once. When he died, the goddess Juno
saved those eyes, by setting them in the tail of her pet bird. She was like a jeweler as she set them there like stars in the peacock’s tail. Daughter of time, Juno worked in a frenzy of creation on this task. (as cited in Monaghan, 1999, p. 200)

After reading this passage, I spent time reflecting on what may have inspired Juno to preserve the eyes of her protector, Argos, and hide them in the tail of a peacock. In Roman mythology, peacock feathers were considered to be all seeing and valuable talismans to ward against danger (Jones, 1995). By saving the watchful eyes of her protective servant and setting them in the tail of a peacock, I believe Juno was safeguarding the discerning skills of reflection and observation. She was also preserving Argos’ watchful perspectives of time and history and placing those perspectives in a safe and protected environment.

I have learned throughout this 3½ year journey that looking back in history demands skills of discernment, reflection, and observation. Moreover, conducting scholarly research with an eye looking back to retrieve and preserve key moments of resistance to oppression also requires awareness of the socio-political realities of that period in history and discovering how those realities thwarted or inspired acts of resistance. Similar to Juno’s acts of preserving the powerful eyes and perspectives of Argos, conducting this study has been an act of preserving the history of the Immaculate Heart Community through the fiery eyes and perspectives of the women of this study.

I believe this study will serve to set history straight by recalling the historical removal of Juno from the mythological crossroads of time and history and the subsequent silencing of the female juno within patriarchal languages. I would like to imagine that I was inspired by Juno’s presence as a loving/accepting third throughout the course of the study. Furthermore, conducting scholarly research has provided me with a deeper sense
of my personal *juno* and a wider exposure to the brilliance of the collective *juno* within feminist scholarship. As the powerful goddess of women’s authority, Juno empowers women to think through and take action in the face of challenges. By providing her eyes at the crossroads of time and history, I believe Juno inspires women to connect to their personal brilliance as they approach the crossroads of the present and move towards the unfolding crossroads of their futures.

**Future Focus of the Study**

I plan to create an educational documentary that will highlight the history of the women of this study and explain the interlocking relationship of internal and external voices of authority. The documentary will describe the ways women are socialized to interact with authority and how they can learn to successfully extricate themselves from domination and oppression within family systems and business organizations as well as religious/political/social systems.

I also plan to integrate the works of Mary Belenky, Augusto Boal, Paulo Freire, Julia Kristeva, Kelly Oliver, Helene Shulman, and Mary Watkins, among others, into an experiential workshop and seminar series designed for women and men to discover their relationship with internal and external voices of authority. Through dialogical and interactive exercises, the seminar’s meta focus will be on developing a critical consciousness of the conditions that fuel genderism and maintain colonizing systems and structures that infect intra- and interpsychic space with authoritarian and oppressive messages.

**Dissertation Summary**

Despite global efforts to overcome oppression and the thwarting of human rights,
there is still a long way to go in addressing the nature and causes of inequalities such as genderism, ageism, racism, and poverty. This dissertation has examined a wide array of theories about genderism and has attempted to lead its readers to a better understanding of the factors that will establish gender equality and acceptance of diversity.

As the researcher, I have gained a deeper awareness for the dialectical nature of history. I have also developed a stronger understanding that looking at genderism in women’s history is not a study of isolated, unrelated incidents of the past. Instead, developing a critical consciousness of genderism is dependent upon an exploration of the historical, social, economic, and political forces that have impeded women’s support for equality in the past and continue to do so today.
References


APPENDIX A
Letter of Introduction to Study Participants

Dear

I am happy to report that I have received approval to conduct the study for my doctoral dissertation. My study “Developing a Critical Consciousness of Authority While Following the Call of Vocation: Study of Lessons Learned from the Women of the Immaculate Heart Community” is interested in the importance and value of women’s engagement of the dominating cultural, social, and political structures that frame their lives.

As you know, this study will describe and reflect on the lived experiences of several former Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of California when they grappled with the power structures of The Catholic Church, chose to receive dispensations from their canonical status, became lay religious women, and helped to create the lay ecumenical Immaculate Heart Community. I am interested in exploring two questions in this study: What were the former nuns’ experiences of engaging the hierarchy of The Catholic Church, and what might these experiences teach us about how women can continue to engage patriarchy and resist oppression?

I would like to give you an overview of what I have proposed for this study and what will be expected of you as a participant:

1. The study will take place in two separate phases: An individual interview phase and a group interview phase. The individual interviews will take place at my private office in Montecito and will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

2. THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PHASE:

a. The interview will be audio- and videotaped and then transcribed into a written format.

b. During this interview you will be asked a series of questions about your experiences as a former Sister of the Immaculate Heart. Although I will initiate discussion with the questions, the dialogue will be open, and you will be free to comment on anything which seems significant to you. For your convenience, I am including a copy of the interview questions in this information packet. During the course of the interview, strong emotions and memories may surface. You may feel psychological discomfort. You will be free to take a break from the interview or discontinue the interview at any point. If following the interview you feel the need for psychological counseling, referrals will be provided.

c. The interviews will be conducted as the taking of an oral history. Your individual oral history will be further synthesized by me into a heuristic portrait which will reflect the salient themes of the oral history. I am also including a brief description of both the oral history and heuristic portrait formats in this information packet.
d. You can agree or disagree to include your name with the final version your oral history and heuristic portrait. If you do desire confidentiality, every step will be taken to exclude details that could divulge your identity in the final version of your oral history and heuristic portrait.

e. Before beginning the creation of the heuristic portraits from your oral history transcripts, I will send you a copy of the transcript so you can review it, comment on it, and make any deletions you wish. From that revised edition, I will create your portrait. I will send the portrait to you for review and once again you can make any changes that you believe are necessary. When I have received these edits and changes from you, a final version of the portrait will be prepared. If you would like a copy of the final portrait as it will appear in the dissertation, I will provide you with one.

3. THE GROUP INTERVIEW PHASE:

a. I am proposing a 4-hour group session which will be audio and video recorded. I propose that we meet in one of La Casa de Maria’s meeting rooms. Prior to the group session, I will ask each of you to forward me questions that you would like to explore during the group process.

b. The first 3 hours of the group session will be divided into rounds of circle council process on three of the questions submitted for the group process. Once the council process is complete, it will be followed by a round of cross-talk dialogue about the questions.

c. To deepen the process, a Witness Council dimension will be part of the group format. A Witness Council is made up of a circle of women who have been personally invited by the participants to sit outside the circle and listen during the group process. The last hour of the group process will be dedicated to you as the inner circle of participants hearing from the women on the outside as they describe what they witnessed, what they have learned, and what can be applied to their personal situations.

d. With a proper Release of Information signed by each of you, the videoed material will be used in the future development of an educational documentary and seminar series. The focus of this training material will be to illuminate the historical legacy of patriarchy and to demonstrate how women can teach and support one another in overcoming and transforming oppressive systems that entrap their lives.

e. Following the group session, the videotapes will be transcribed. Upon receiving the transcript, I will carefully review it to identify preliminary themes. I will then create a thematic analysis from the individual and group interviews. I will forward a copy of the analysis to you for review. Each of you will have an opportunity to reflect on your words and contribute ideas/themes for the final transcript. I will incorporate those changes into the final version of the thematic analysis.

f. I am suggesting that a celebratory completion gathering be held following the
completion of my dissertation. At that time, we will have an opportunity to reflect on the research process, discuss what we learned from our participation, and examine possible implications for future work in this area.

When I began to research my study in November, 2007, I did not anticipate the amount of time it would take to reach this point. I have never once doubted the choice of my topic. Having had the chance to explore your history of engaging the hierarchy of The Catholic Church within the context of the overall study of women’s engagement of patriarchal structures, has been rewarding and gratifying. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share time with you to gather your history, reflections, and ideas for future women who will follow in your footsteps.

In deep appreciation,

Kathleen Barry
APPENDIX B
Information Sheet on Oral History and Heuristic Portraits

The qualitative method that is most appropriate for the individual research component of this study is the feminist practice of oral histories framed as heuristic portraits. Oral history is a critical research method for feminist scholarship and one that has fostered interdisciplinary dialogue, as well as substantial discussion about feminist epistemology, that is, “whose knowledge are we talking about?” (Code, 2000, p. 170). Feminist epistemological perspective states that since knowers claim responsibility for the knowledge they produce and dispense, then the diversity of women’s epistemic status, that is, their experiences and knowledge, is to be taken seriously and no longer ignored and marginalized. Because the history of women has been denied a voice in the recording of written history, the oral history method provides an opportunity for the words of women to be recorded and archived and given a place in the process of history.

A fundamental strength of the oral history method comes in its loyalty and fidelity to the experiences of the participants. The interviews are grounded in memory with memory serving as a critical tool for recording reflections of the past that are shaped both by the present moment and individual experience. The oral history methodology has played a critical role in the women’s movement because of its ability to delve deeply into topics that have psychological and historical relevance for women, as well as to produce findings in ways that are meaningful to women. In many ways, oral history and feminist consciousness have evolved alongside one another with a shared objective of strengthening how women learn and know about themselves inside a gendered patriarchal world view. Because of its ability to repair historical records about women’s experiences, oral history research as a feminist practice provides a valuable format to conduct this study.

The oral history process is concerned with capturing the unique experiences of the participants and is dependent upon the researcher being prepared to (a) determine whose story the interview is asked to tell, who interprets the story, and the theoretical framework to be used during the study; (b) to probe deeply by listening to the various levels from which the participants respond during the interview; (c) to listen for what is said and not said during the interview by watching facial expressions, hearing intonation in voice, and noticing long moments of silent reflection; and (d) provide a forum for the participants to discuss their lives in the context of telling the story about who they are, in their own words, without an enforced agenda on the part of the researcher.

In their description of how “listening for meaning” plays in their work with women in oral interviews, Anderson and Jack (1991) examine three modes of listening that will be essential during this study’s individual interviews and group process. The authors state that the ways researchers listen is critical towards creating studies that have meaning, impact, and relevance. Listening to the participant’s story from her vantage point requires that the researcher (a) listen to the individual’s moral self-evaluative statements in an effort to examine the relationship between self-concept and cultural norms, (b) listen into those moments when the individual suddenly stops speaking to go back to something that
was said earlier. These refining “meta-statements” can alert the researcher to a discrepancy between what is being said versus what the participant believes is expected, and (c) tending to both the consistencies and contradictions in the participant’s narrative vis-à-vis dichotomous thinking about experiences and assumptions about those experiences.

**Heuristic portraits**

As stated earlier, framing the oral histories as heuristic portraits provides a viable approach to this study because of the ability to synthesize the lengthy narrative of an oral history into a condensed format for the both the reader’s ease and for purposes of the final version of the dissertation. To remain loyal to the participants’ oral histories, however, the heuristic portraits will include ample quotations from the oral history text. Since this study is interested in discovering the history of the former IHM’s experiences within the Catholic Church, the etymology of heuristic supports this endeavor. Heuristic originates from the Greek word *heuriskein* which means to discover or to find. Heuristic research as a methodology in service to the discovery and re-discovery of human experiences allows for the creative exploration of “new images and meanings regarding human phenomena” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9) through a process of internal reflection and dialogue between researcher and participant.

According to Moustakas (1990), the development of meaningful heuristic portraits is greatly dependent upon retention of the researcher’s experience throughout the research process. A primary objective of heuristic research is to continuously delve into the heart of human experience and to create studies of human meaning. This objective is harmonious with the participatory and collaborative approaches that will be utilized during this study which embrace societal transformation. The influence of the feminist perspective implores that a shift occur that moves the focus of research beyond an interest in the ways that the researcher’s self-understanding is affected, and the meanings for others are delineated. Rather than simply tuning into my experiences while the stories are shared, I am listening while witnessing as the participants share their histories with me.

The traditional heuristic process will also be broadened during the process of gathering the participants’ feedback and comments about their oral history transcripts and through the creation of the final version of the oral history and heuristic portrait. A critical dimension of the recording and archiving of women’s oral histories is dependent upon the ability to help rethink how history is acquired, how history is presented in the present, and ultimately to broaden the historical understanding of the present out towards future applications for social change. Because the taking and archiving of women’s oral histories can provide an opportunity to creatively return to the events of the past, it is hoped that the dual approach of oral histories framed as heuristic portraits can inspire a nurturing of new growth of knowledge and insight about the IHM history.
APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form—Individual Interview (Participants)

Title of the Study: “Developing a Critical Consciousness of Authority While Following the Call of Vocation: A Study of Lessons Learned from the Women of the Immaculate Heart Community”

1. I agree to allow Kathleen Barry to ask me a series of questions about my experiences as a former Sister of the Immaculate Heart, as well as the activities that transpired during the time that The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart engaged with the patriarchal structures of The Catholic Church during the 1950s and 1960s.

2. I will participate in a formal interview with an audio and video recorder and the interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon location. After the interview is transcribed, I will receive a copy of the interview (as oral history) transcript, as well as a copy of the heuristic portrait that will be synthesized by Kathleen Barry from my individual interview. I may make additional comments or delete others from both the oral history transcript and heuristic portrait. I will return these changes to Kathleen Barry and a final version of my oral history and heuristic portrait will be prepared. These documents will be discussed in a follow-up meeting that Kathleen Barry will schedule with me at the conclusion of my individual interview. I will be offered the opportunity to receive a final version of both documents.

3. I understand that I may discontinue the interview at any time. I also understand that I can agree or disagree to include my name with the final version of my oral history and heuristic portrait. If I do desire confidentiality, every step will be taken to exclude details that could divulge my identity in the final version of my oral history and heuristic portrait. In that this is an interview for a doctoral dissertation, I am aware that portions of my interview and quotes made by me may be used in the final printed version of the dissertation.

4. I realize that this study is of a research nature and may offer no direct benefit to me. The interview material will be used to further understanding of women’s engagement and challenging of patriarchal systems.

5. Information about this study, the time and location of the interviews, and my contribution to the study was discussed with me by Kathleen Barry. I am aware that I may contact her by calling (805) 708-2561.

6. Participation in this study is voluntary. I may decide to not enter the study or to refuse to answer any questions. I may also withdraw at any time without adverse consequence to myself. I also acknowledge that the researcher may drop me from the study at any point.

7. I am not receiving any monetary compensation for being a part of this study.

Signed: _____________________________ Date: ______________
APPENDIX D
Release of Information Form (Participants)

Videotaping and Audiotaping of Group Interview Process—Authorization to Release or Disclose Information

I, _________________________, agree to give permission to KATHLEEN A. BARRY, a doctoral student in the Depth Psychology program at Pacifica Graduate Institute, Carpinteria, CA., as well as the camera operators and filmmakers Kathleen Barry employs, to videotape and audiotape me during the group interview process on August 27, 2009, at the Immaculate Heart Center for Spiritual Renewal in Montecito, CA.

I understand that this group interview process is part of Kathleen Barry’s doctoral dissertation study and I give permission to use my portions of the taped group interview in the future development of an educational documentary and seminar series. I also understand that I will have the opportunity to review, comment, and recommend changes to my portions of the video. I understand as well that I will be able to offer suggestions and recommendations towards the production of the final version of the documentary.

I understand that, in part, the focus of this documentary and training material will be to illuminate the historical legacy of patriarchy in women’s lives and to demonstrate how women can teach and support one another in overcoming and transforming the oppressive systems that entrap their lives.

__________________________
Name

__________________________
Address

__________________________
City, State, Zip

__________________________
Phone Number

__________________________
Date
APPENDIX E
Informed Consent Form

Group Interview Process—Participants

Title of the Study: “Developing a Critical Consciousness of Authority While Following the Call of Vocation: A Study of Lessons Learned from the Women of the Immaculate Heart Community”

1. I agree to participate in a group interview process with the other participants in Kathleen Barry’s doctoral dissertation study. The group interview will last approximately 4½ hours and will take place in the Terrace Room at the Immaculate Heart Center, Montecito, CA on August 27, 2009.

2. Prior to the group session, I and the other participants in the study will be asked to forward Kathleen Barry themes that we would like to explore during the group process. Once Kathleen receives them, she will compile a list of all the suggestions, make her recommendations, and return them to us for review. These choices will guide our circle council process/group discussion.

3. Kathleen Barry has provided me with a schedule of the August 27, 2009 interview process, as well as a summary of the circle council philosophy. I am aware that first 3 hours of the group session will be divided into three rounds of circle council process on the chosen themes, followed by one round of cross-talk dialogue about the themes and our experience(s) in the council process.

4. As part of the group process, I have agreed that a Witness Council dimension be a part of the group format. The Witness Council is made up of a circle of women who have been personally invited by the participants and Kathleen Barry to sit outside the circle and listen during the three rounds of council process. The last hour of the group process will be dedicated to the inner circle of participants hearing from the women on the outside as they describe what they witnessed, what they have learned, and what can be applied to their personal situations.

I also understand that there will be observers who will be taking notes for Kathleen Barry during the filming of the group interview, but will not participate in the interview process, nor be featured in the future documentary.

5. I agree that the 4½ hour group process can be videotaped by the film production company, Enlightened Pictures, Inc., of Los Angeles, CA.

6. With a proper Release of Information Form that has been signed by me, the video file will be used in the future development of an educational documentary and seminar series. In part, the focus of this educational training material would be to illuminate the historical legacy of patriarchy and to demonstrate how women can teach and support one another in overcoming and transforming oppressive systems that entrap their lives.
7. Following the group session, the video file will be transcribed by an outside source and put into a written format. Upon receiving the transcript, Kathleen Barry will identify preliminary themes. She will then forward the transcripts to me and the other group participants, along with a summary of the preliminary themes and her process for identifying the themes. I will have an opportunity to make changes, suggestions, and additions to the final written version of the transcript which will appear in Kathleen Barry’s doctoral dissertation.

8. I understand that at a later date a celebratory gathering will be held following the group interview process. At that time, we will have an opportunity to reflect on the research process, discuss what we learned from our participation, and examine possible implications for future work in this area. I understand as well that copies of the final version of the group process transcript will be made available to each of the group participants should she want one.

9. I realize that this study is of a research nature and may offer no direct benefit to me. The interview material will be used to further understanding of women’s engagement and challenging of patriarchal systems.

10. Information about this study, the time and location of the interview, and my contribution to the study was discussed with me by Kathleen Barry. I am aware that I may contact her by calling 805-708-2561.

11. Participation in this study is voluntary. I may decide not to enter the study or to refuse to answer any questions. I may also withdraw at any time without adverse consequence to myself. I also acknowledge that the researcher may drop me from the study at any point.

12. I am not receiving any monetary compensation for being a part of this study.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: _____________
APPENDIX F
Release of Information Form (Witness Circle Participants)

Videotaping and Audiotaping of Group Interview Process

Authorization to Release or Disclose Information

I, _________________________, agree to give permission to KATHLEEN A. BARRY, a doctoral student in the Depth Psychology program at Pacifica Graduate Institute, Carpinteria, CA., as well as the camera operators and filmmakers Kathleen Barry employs, to videotape and audiotape me during the group interview process on August 27, 2009, at the Immaculate Heart Center for Spiritual Renewal in Montecito, CA.

I understand that this group interview process is part of Kathleen Barry’s doctoral dissertation study and I give permission to use my portions of the taped group interview in the future development of an educational documentary and seminar series.

I understand that, in part, the focus of this documentary and training material will be to illuminate the historical legacy of patriarchy in women’s lives and to demonstrate how women can teach and support one another in overcoming and transforming the oppressive systems that entrap their lives.

__________________________
Name

__________________________
Address

__________________________
City, State, Zip

__________________________
Phone Number

__________________________
Date
APPENDIX G
Informed Consent Form

Group Interview Process—Witness Circle Participants

Title of the Study: “Developing a Critical Consciousness of Authority While Following the Call of Vocation: A Study of Lessons Learned from the Women of the Immaculate Heart Community”

1. I agree to participate as a member of a Witness Council Circle during the group interview process along with other participants in Kathleen Barry’s doctoral dissertation study. The group interview process will last approximately 4½ hours and will take place in the Terrace Room at the Immaculate Heart Center, Montecito, CA on August 27, 2009.

2. Kathleen Barry has provided me with a schedule of the August 27, 2009 interview process, as well as a summary of the circle council philosophy. As a witness circle participant, I will observe and witness the first 3 hours of the group session which will be divided into three rounds of circle council process on chosen themes, followed by one round of cross-talk dialogue among the 8 study participants about their experiences in the council process.

3. I have agreed to be a member of the outer Witnesses Council Circle which is made up of women who have been personally invited to sit outside the circle and listen during the three rounds of council process. The last hour of the group process will be dedicated to the inner circle of participants hearing from me and the other witnesses as we describe what we witnessed, what we have learned, and what we can apply to our personal or professional situations.

I also understand that there will be observers who will be taking notes for Kathleen Barry during the filming of the group interview, but these individuals will not participate in the interview process, nor be featured in the future documentary.

4. I agree that the 4½ hour group process can be video- and audiotaped by the film production company, Enlightened Pictures, Inc., of Los Angeles, CA.

5. With a proper Release of Information Form that has been signed by me, the video file will be used in the future development of an educational documentary and seminar series. In part, the focus of this educational training material will be to illuminate the historical legacy of patriarchy and to demonstrate how women can teach and support one another in overcoming and transforming oppressive systems that entrap their lives.

6. Following the group session, the audio-video files will be forwarded to an outside source, transcribed, and put into a written format. Upon receiving the transcript, Kathleen Barry will identify preliminary themes. She will then forward the transcript to the 8 study participants, along with a summary of the preliminary themes and her process for identifying the themes. She and the study participants will work together on creating the final written version of the transcript which will appear in Kathleen Barry’s doctoral
dissertation.

7. I understand that at a later date a celebratory gathering will be held following the group interview process. At that time, we will have an opportunity to reflect on the research process, discuss what we learned from our participation, and examine possible implications for future work in this area.

8. I realize that this study is of a research nature and may offer no direct benefit to me. The interview material will be used to further understanding of women’s engagement and challenging of patriarchal systems.

9. Information about this study, the time and location of the interview, and my contribution to the study was discussed with me by Kathleen Barry. I am aware that I may contact her by calling 805-708-2561.

10. Participation in this study is voluntary. I may decide not to enter the study or to refuse to answer any questions. I may also withdraw at any time without adverse consequence to myself. I also acknowledge that the researcher may drop me from the study at any point.

11. I am not receiving any monetary compensation for being a part of this study.

Signed: _______________________________ Date: ____________
Kathleen: As you know, there are 16 questions. It’s 9:25. Hopefully we’ll be finished by 10:45. This is a study on moving from domination to engagement; women speaking truth to patriarchy. [Question 1]: How would you, Steph, describe your calling to be a Sister of the Immaculate Heart?

Steph: Well, it’s interesting—the word calling. I always thought it meant God up there calling, and I never felt that I had a calling. I went to Immaculate Heart High School and Immaculate Heart College. In my first year of college, I took classes from Anita Caspary, and I boarded at the college. I was in this incredible environment with these beautiful nuns who were young and smart and happy and beautiful. And I thought, “Wow! Whatever it is they have, I want.” Because I was boarding there, I went to chapel with them and had a lot of contact with them. But I was also in love with this guy. I really wanted to be with him. I did not want to be a nun. But somewhere early in my sophomore year of college in an English class, Anita read this poem. I forget the name of the poem now, but there was this line in it about “His eyes, fierce shuttlecocks, pierced the close net of what I failed.” And it was like I was in that badminton game, you know, and God’s eyes, the shuttlecocks, went through my net. And I don’t know why, but I looked up then—I was sitting in the front row, and Anita was right in front of me. And our eyes met, and it was like she had seen all the way through me. I had her kind of up on a pedestal anyway. I don’t know how long after that, I thought I should talk to her about being a nun, and tell her I didn’t want to be one. And so I made an appointment with her, and we talked. And she said, “Well, why don’t you go see Mother Regina?” who was the
mother general—the one people saw when they were thinking of entering the convent.

So I had this appointment with Mother Regina, and she asked me why I was here. I said, “Because I don’t want to be a nun.” I was sort of hoping that she could tell me I didn’t belong there. So I gave her all my reasons for not wanting to be a nun. And she said, “Well, you definitely don’t belong here now. If you did join now you wouldn’t make it. And so just go back to college, go back to your boyfriend. Enjoy life. But if ever you find yourself wanting to be a nun, come back.” I thought, “Oh shoot.” I didn’t want her to add that on. I wanted it clear that it was not the life for me. But then she had to say, “if I found myself wanting to be a nun.” I thought, “Oh, great!” So I went back to my boyfriend, but found that when I was with him I kept thinking about being a nun. So, at some point, I went back to Mother Regina. And I got accepted into the Community.

Kathleen: You had said “what they had I wanted.” Do you know what that was?

Steph: They were happy. They were intelligent. They seemed to be really balanced; really had their feet on the ground. They seemed to be living this great life. They were all happy. I’m sure some weren’t as happy as others. But my experience with them was that they were people you wanted to be around because they were so together themselves.

Kathleen: Did you ever find out that they weren’t so together?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: And how old were you at that time?

Steph: I was 19 when I entered. I was 17 when I graduated from high school. I had 2 years of college, and then I entered after my sophomore year.

Kathleen: And I’d like to go back to when you saw Anita gazing you. She saw down into you, did you say something like that?
Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: What was that like?

Steph: Well, if there was a call that can come through another person, it was kind of like that. I’d had her as a teacher for a year and a half. She’d been recommended to me by my high school principal, who’d said, “When you go to the college, make sure that you get her for English.” So I had her for freshman English, and she was just incredible. We read the spiritual classics. I’m sure there was other stuff that wasn’t spiritual, but I remember best Dante’s Inferno and Seven Story Mountain, and—well, people like Thomas Merton and St. Augustine and Dante. Their interests were their relationship with God. And so I saw Anita almost as an intermediary, because she seemed to have that same intense relationship with God that the spiritual masters had. She was so passionate about it. It wasn’t just that one particular line, but the whole poem.

Kathleen: Do you remember the name of that poem?

Steph: It was by Alan Tate: “Again the Native Hour.”

Steph: It was that passionate connection with God and the things of God that called to me.

Kathleen: Got it. So your calling became a relationship with a way of being at this school, and with the IHMs that you weren’t aware of prior.

Steph: Right.

Kathleen: Did you notice it in grammar school or—was it ever even a conversation in your head that, gee, I think I want to be a nun?

Steph: I was in Catholic schools and the girls always talked about being nuns. I cringed, because I didn’t want to be one.
Kathleen: So that was kind of a surprise, I bet at 17.

Steph: Yes. And the other thing that happened that same year, that helped me get there, I think, was my best friend told me that she wanted to be a nun. It was like, “Oh my God. She’s going to go off and leave me.” We had gone through high school and 2 years of college together. And all of a sudden she was going to be a nun.

Kathleen: Same order?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Oh. And did she become a nun with you at the . . .

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: And she’s still around?

Steph: She left after—a fair amount of time. When we were going through all the changes, she left and got married and raised a family.

Kathleen: I want to make sure I’m getting—does it feel like we kind of got “how would you describe your calling”—does that feel like you’ve covered it well enough?

Steph: Yes. It’s just the word *calling*.

[10:00]

Kathleen: Would you use a different word?

Steph: They use the word *vocation*. And whoever interviews you asks, “What makes you think you have a vocation?” And I’d say I didn’t think I had a vocation. This is probably just mental parsing of words. For me vocation is getting a direct message from God. You have a vision, and God says, “Do this.” Like St. Paul being knocked off his horse. I didn’t have that. I was just strongly attracted to whatever qualities these women had. I was attracted to the qualities, but also it was about God. This is a way that I could be with
God, even though He didn’t say “Stephanie!”

Kathleen: It came through Anita.

Steph: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Kathleen: The invitation.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Anything else?

Steph: No.

Kathleen: [Question 2:] How would you describe your experience of taking the vows?

Steph: Oh, God. Oh. I think I need a therapist to answer these questions!

Kathleen: Want me to sit over there?

Steph: Okay, so here I am up in the novitiate here at La Casa. The postulate year was great. Then the novitiate year, when you’re wearing your habit—I loved it. I loved the novitiate year. I loved all of it. I loved the discipline. I loved praying together. I loved the singing. I loved the environment. Even the work we had to do. It was 2 great years. I felt like I was a monk in a monastery.

Kathleen: Contemplative.

Steph: Yes. And then of course they started talking about “Now, when you get out of the novitiate, you’re going to be teaching.” I was more drawn to the contemplative than to the active life. And this is a fairly active community. It was a little schizophrenic because we had a deeply contemplative training. The idea was if you were deeply spiritual, deeply contemplative that would translate into your work out in the world, even if you were busy as anything, teaching, etc.

Kathleen: Was that your experience?
Steph: No. Okay, so what was the question?

Kathleen: How would you describe your experience of taking vows?

Steph: Okay. Taking vows. About halfway through my novice year, I started thinking, “I don’t think I can do this.” It was like I wanted to stay in the novitiate. I didn’t want to go out there and do whatever—live in a convent in some city and teach a gang of kids. But I still wanted the God part. I remember —our Mother General came up—Mother Regina. She would interview us periodically throughout the novice year to see how we were doing. She said to me, “Well, how are you doing, dear?” And I said, “I’m getting a little nervous about this taking of vows.” And she said, “Well, maybe you’re not meant to.” That was her way of going about things. And she said, “You think about it and pray about it, and I’ll come back a month from now and we’ll see if you’re going to go ahead or not.” And she left. So a month later she came back. And I was a wreck all this time, because I thought she was going to tell me I had to leave. I didn’t want to leave.

Kathleen: This is your second year now?

Steph: Yes. And I had about 6 months to go before taking vows. She came up again. You know when she’s there; you recognize her car. She came and went. The next month she came again and didn’t call me or anything and left. And of course I was a total wreck. I probably lost 50 pounds by then. I was so torn because I couldn’t say to her I knew I had a vocation. I thought that’s what she wanted me to say, and if I couldn’t say it that she’d ask me to leave. I didn’t want to leave. So finally it was the month before vows, the time when we sent out invitations to come to the ceremony.

Kathleen: And you did send out invitations, right?

Steph: Well, yes. But I still expected to be asked to leave. So she showed up yet a third
time. I went to the Novice Mistress and said, Noreen—I didn’t say “Noreen.” I said
“Mother Noreen.” I told her the story. And she says, “She’s in the car. She’s just getting
ready to leave. Why don’t we run up and talk to her?” So the two of us trotted up to the
parking out behind the main house. And she got out of the car and walked over to me.
And I said, “You said you’d check in and I just wondered. You haven’t checked in with
me.” And she said, “Well, how are you doing?” And I said, “Well I’m doing better.” And
she said, “Well, do you want to make your vows or don’t you?” And I said, “Yes.” And
she said, “Well then, do it.” And she got in the car and left.
Kathleen: Did you know then that you were ready?
Steph: [no response]
Kathleen: Or were you still circumspect?
Steph: I never feel ready for anything. It’s part of my personality.
Kathleen: Got it.
Steph: So how did I feel about the taking of vows? It was a beautiful ceremony. And
there’s beautiful symbolism in it. And [pause]—I guess I felt unworthy. That I was
stepping in to this thing called religious life that was taking vows, wearing habits,
following customs that had been followed for hundreds of years. It was like a whole
different culture. And I was stepping into it as though I belonged there, and I hoped I did.
Kathleen: So the journey from novitiate—novice to postulant.
Steph: Postulant to novice.
Kathleen: Postulant to novice. Got you. They—that still in and of itself wasn’t—it was
just a process to get you there. I mean, the taking of vows starts way before the day of
taking of the actual vow itself.
Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: So the process, or your experience of leading up to the vows, was still this sort of questioning. You liked something about the life; being in community, having quiet. Probably, it sounds like, a wonderful place to be with great people. But then when it comes to oh. Like looking at houses is great but then signing the line to then you own the house. Was it kind of like oh.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Now I’ve got to put my you know what on the line. Makes sense.

Steph: Yes. It’s kind of like getting married. You’re great with your partner. You love your partner. You want to spend your life with him. It was like that with God and me; it was fine. But then you wonder if you are meant to get married. Can we live together in a house? Can we raise kids? Can we—whatever? And I think that was my fear. Things are good with me and God, and I really like this life, but can I do it? Is it really right?

Kathleen: Yes. I understand.

Steph: But there was no more waiting— it’s like after you’re engaged long enough, you’ve got to make a decision—especially if one partner wants to get married. So finally you just say, “Let’s go for it.” There are no absolute answers to anything in life.

Kathleen: So the day that Mother Regina said, “well are you going to do this?” and you said “Yes,” and she got in her car. Did you know — were you like “whew”?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: It was—you got it. You had made your decision and you were okay.

Steph: I stopped agonizing over it.

Kathleen: You stepped in.
Steph: Right.

Kathleen: Anything else on that question?
Steph: I don’t think so.

Kathleen: [Question 3]: How would you define patriarchy?
Steph: I define it as an institutionalized system of oppression of the powerless by the powerful. It is based on the conviction that some are intrinsically superior to others (men over women, White over people of color, wealthy over poor, etc.) and therefore should have control. It is called patriarchy from the Latin word pater (father), referring to the fact that in Roman times the father had the power of life and death over his wife, children, and servants. The word has an unfortunate connotation because it sounds as though, since these institutionalized systems were the work of men, men are free from oppression, whereas patriarchy affects men as well as women. Examples of its institutionalization are slavery, apartheid, denial of the right to vote, the glass ceiling for women, and Native American reservations, tolerance of child abuse and pornography, etc.

Kathleen: Okay. [Question 4]: How would you describe the influence of patriarchal thinking in the design of vows for women religious communities?

[20:00]
Steph: Okay. So you used the “p” word.

Kathleen: And I don’t mean “potatoes.”

Steph: I have to say that I was totally unaware of it, at the time. But looking back, I see it in the three vows, which are what religious life is based on. Poverty—the reason for poverty was to divest yourself of things to which you would be attached that would keep
you from being close to God. It never occurred to me that being poor would really limit your options. But it all fit into the structure of religious life. You didn’t have any clothes other than your habit, so you couldn’t leave and go out somewhere anonymously. You only had your habit. You didn’t own a car. You didn’t have a bank account. You couldn’t count on putting money in savings in case things didn’t go well. That was the practical part of it. We worked for about $200 a month. It did not go to us; it went to the Community. The fact that we only got paid $200 a month enabled the Church to have a cheap work force. I didn’t think that way then because we were all in it together. We were here to teach children. And the Church gave us a convent, and a car, and $200 a month. And we didn’t need anything else.

Kathleen: So that provided your meals, medical insurance.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Everything was taken care of, really.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: But you didn’t have spending money?

Steph: No.

Kathleen: So there was no life outside of . . .

Steph: Right. It was all God. I mean, if you could see your life as all God, then it was fine. And that was the point of Poverty. Chastity was the same thing. There was a book called *This Tremendous Lover* by Guardini. It was our guidebook in the novitiate, because it was all about falling in love with God. And God is this tremendous lover. No earthly lover could ever be anything close to that. The purpose of Chastity was to free your heart up to be with God, and to love in a detached way the people that you served.
And if you were in an emotional relationship with somebody or other, then the focus came back to your own needs, your own fulfillment, and could take you away from your focus on God and on serving the people of God. So it worked.

Kathleen: How do you think about that as patriarchal?

Steph: Again it is a restriction of freedom. You have to keep watch on your heart to make sure if you meet somebody that you like that you immediately run the other direction. Otherwise, you might leave, and the Church would have one less worker. And the same with Obedience. This is the worst one—the voice of the superior is the voice of God. So whatever your superior told you to do, unless it was a sin, was the voice of God speaking to you. Each year we received our missions. The letter said “Go do this work; live in this convent,” and you were expected to do it. Even if you don’t know how to do the work you’re assigned to, you’re just told, “That’s all right; you’ll get the grace.”

Kathleen: Did you get the grace?

Steph: I guess so. I got through the missions.

Kathleen: That’s like teaching classes on material you didn’t really know, would you say, or?

Steph: Well, for me—I had had only had 2 years of college. And suddenly I was in a high school classroom. I was teaching kids only 2 or 3 years younger than I. I was pretty smart, and I did an okay job. And other people helped me. We took classes—really practical classes: how to survive in the classroom, that kind of stuff. But a lot of people got shoved into really intolerable kinds of situations, and they didn’t have the intellectual or emotional ability to do it. They hung in there until they fell apart, because they were told the voice of the superior is the voice of God. That’s part of the whole patriarchal
thing, because who’s over the superior? Well, the Mother General’s over the superior.

And who’s over the Mother General? Well the Sacred Congregation for religious in Rome, and ultimately the Pope. However, it’s comforting to think that everything you do is the voice of God. It’s like people who open the Bible for an answer. If you believed that—and I did—it was comforting because you didn’t have to worry about whether what you were doing was really helping you be closer to God.

Kathleen: It just was. So there wasn’t a questioning or a wondering about—it was so laid out that it—you either had to accept that that was the process or you couldn’t be part of the game, really.

Steph: Right. Right.

Kathleen: With much ease and comfort.

Steph: Right.

Kathleen: And so the women—what is striking me right now, is these women that you were so endeared to when you were in high school, do you think that they bought into that whole system of the voice of God comes through the Pope and on down the line, and that’s just the way it works; or do you think they were questioning too?

Steph: That’s a tough one to answer. I don’t know. I think because I had them for class in high school and college I thought they bought into it. But then Pat Reif came along. She was different. She didn’t buy into it. She’s the one that started the feminist spirituality program. But I think most people were like the way I was, and maybe a few were skeptical.

Kathleen: It was the waters in which everyone was swimming, so it’s hard to know when you’re in it that you’re in it, until you begin to get the distinction, wow. There are sharks
in this water. Yes?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: So I appreciate you encapsulated the patriarchal piece was the restrictions on freedom, but it was so well laid out—I’m sure they believed it too.

Steph: Yes. Right.

Kathleen: That this is how it works. And if you choose to be part of this, great. And out in the greater community, the greater world, it was also going on. Now we all know that in retrospect. Yeah? Okay. Anything else on how the design of vows—the patriarch thinking is they—the obedience, poverty, chastity was all about restricting freedom, which also would be a restriction of what?

Steph: [no response]

Kathleen: You restrict freedom, you’re restricting?

Steph: Well, growth and maturity. I think that one of the inevitable results was that a lot of people stayed really immature. When it comes time to make a decision, you run and ask the Superior. And I think people found that out when suddenly we didn’t have vows and superiors any more. It’s interesting because there were a number of people in the Community that had high, little baby voices. I thought maybe that came from teaching second graders. But some of them had higher degrees and never taught second graders. So I think it did keep people immature in that sense. People worked really hard. They were really good. They did what they were told. But you weren’t invited to recognize your abilities, to think, “I have these gifts and I want to develop them.” Sometimes someone was told to do a particular job, and the superior saw that they neither liked it nor was particularly good in it. The superior might realize that the person has other talents,
and would suggest to the Mother General that Sister So-and-So might be better moved into this direction. Not all of them were like that. Some would say, “Well, I have eight grades here and eight teachers. This is what I was given. It’s God’s will. I’m going to make them work.” So there wasn’t an encouragement of going inside and looking for your own personal gifts and being creative and growing that way.

[30:00]

Kathleen: It was external.

Steph: Yes. Yes.

Kathleen: There are two things I wanted to ask. One was: It sounds like Mother Regina, however, didn’t—she let you make the decision.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: So she wasn’t imposing “this is what you should do.” It’s—so on that hand—in that regard, there was some freedom, I guess. Did that freedom change?

Steph: But I wasn’t in yet.

Kathleen: Say that again?

Steph: I wasn’t in yet.

Kathleen: Yes. It changed once you took the vows?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: There was no more wondering, should I do it or not. It was like you’re going to do it now.

Steph: Well people did leave, even after they took vows. After we took the first vows, we had 5 years of temporary vows. And a lot of people left during those first 5 years. I think they left for a number of reasons. Some realized they wanted to get married; they did not
want to live a celibate life. Others had some really tough superiors that made life miserable. I had a horrible one my first year out. And some people thought that it would be all about community and loving one another and were disillusioned with having to be obedient to someone who was cruel.

Kathleen: Was cruel to them.

Steph: So people left. And that was the point of having temporary vows. Until you make your final vows your name doesn’t go to Rome. It’s just here. And when you make your final vows it goes to Rome. So if you leave after your final vows, you have to get a dispensation. If you leave during your temporary vow time, you don’t need a dispensation. You just leave.

Kathleen: Got it.

Steph: So about patriarchy—I didn’t even know the word, *patriarchy*. We heard the word gradually, in the 1970s, but even then we didn’t use it. I didn’t learn about it until Pat Reif started the feminist spirituality program. Then I was able to look at the whole thing with different eyes. Until then, religious life was just what it was. And all these other nuns and all these other communities were doing the same thing we were.

Kathleen: Do all orders have the 5 years temporary vows?

Steph: Three to 5. I don’t think it has to be 5.

Kathleen: So it’s already—it’s an interesting system. I mean, you can’t do that when you get married; you don’t have 5 years to figure out whether you really want—that’s—what do you think that means—what’s that all about? That’s so—seems so un-patriarchal.

Steph: Hmm. It is, isn’t it? I mean—that was a good idea.

Kathleen: That was a good idea. So, in spite of it, there was always a way—there’s this
process to make sure it’s really your calling. You said something about the high-pitched voices of the nuns.

Steph: Like little girl voices.

Kathleen: And what do you think that was all about?

Steph: [no answer]

Kathleen: Were you inferring that?

Steph: No, I was thinking about how that—one of the negative parts of having the vows is it can keep you in a kind of an immature state, because you aren’t making your own decisions.

Kathleen: Gotcha. And part of that would be this voice?

Steph: Yes, like a little girl talking to her mother. Like a little nun talking to her superior.

Kathleen: Did the superiors ever have the high-pitched voices?

Steph: No. Not the ones I had.

Kathleen: And were there some women, as they got older they still kept the high-pitched voices?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Okay. Anything else on that? Did I go too quickly?

Steph: It’s okay.

Kathleen: [Question 5:] What would you say are other areas of religious life that were affected by patriarchy, and can you give examples that illustrate these experiences?

Steph: Well, I think that the structure really restricted our freedom. We wore habits; we shaved our heads. We didn’t have street clothes, so if you went on vacation you went in your habit. You were always public, always visible. And because your head was shaved,
or your hair was cut way back if it wasn’t shaved; you were really restricted. That’s a way of control.

Kathleen: Did the clergy have those same restrictions in public?

Steph: The clergy did not have those same restrictions. Priests had their priest outfit. They wore it when they were on duty and visible around the parish. But when they were not on duty they wore their civvies. If you want to keep everybody regimented, habits and shaved heads are a good way to do it. You keep the nuns in the convent; keep them praying, keep them doing their work; correcting their papers, cleaning the house, studying. And, in a way, if the nuns don’t want anything beyond that, there’s no problem.

Kathleen: So are you saying that you don’t think they really wanted anything more from the women than that?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Okay.

Steph: But beyond that—beyond whether or not you’re visible — I think the Church wasn’t eager to empower religious women. It’s the communities that made sure that their sisters went off and got degrees.

Kathleen: It was the order who made it happen?

Steph: The orders. Yes. The Bishop never said “I want all your sisters highly educated so they can give an excellent education.” It was the communities that would say “Okay, let’s save some money for Sr. So-and-So. She’s really good; let’s send her off to get a PhD.” We were always second-class citizens compared to the men.

Kathleen: Anything else on that?

Steph: Say the question again: what are the areas of . . .
Kathleen: What would you say are other areas of religious life that were affected by patriarchy?

Steph: It’s probably it for now.

Kathleen: And do you think even when the Community decided who got to go to school that there was—was it a fair process?

Steph: Well, they didn’t announce to the Community, “We’re going to send somebody off to get a PhD. If you’re interested let us know.” They would say, “Hmm. Sister So-and-So is teaching and she’s doing a really good job, and the students seem to like her, and it would help if she went on for higher studies.” Or now and again they might say that somebody that was teaching at a high school should be in the college. Having the college was a big help. A lot of communities didn’t have colleges, and their sisters all came to our college. In the summertime you’d have all these different habits floating around. It was a really good college. And I think it was thanks to the college that the Community went as far as it did. When Vatican II came along and said to modernize, it was mostly the college sisters that were elected to come to the assembly, who made all the changes. This sounds classist, but I think if all grammar school sisters had been elected to come to the assembly, we would not have done the things that we did. Even high school sisters. And it’s interesting because there was in the Community some resentment toward the college sisters. The college sisters had more freedom than the people out in convents. You’re out in the convent in the hinterland with a superior and four or five other nuns. Compare that to being in the college, where you live between the college and Immaculate Heart High School and there are all these events and lectures going on all the time. You can get permission to go out now and again to some other
lecture or film off campus. There’s a lot more freedom. And people from the hinterland
would come in and be somewhat resentful of the freedom the college sisters had.

[40:00]

Kathleen: And were you hinterland, or were part of the college sisters?

Steph: I was hinterland. But I thought college sisters were cool.

Kathleen: Did you feel that you were—so were you one that experienced that, like

“Wow. They get all the dut dut, and we’re out here in the hinterlands.”

Steph: No. I didn’t.

Kathleen: You didn’t feel that personally.

Steph: No. I think part of it is that, except for my first convent, I was in pretty good
convents with pretty good superiors. So I think I didn’t feel that restricted. It’s such a full
life. We were not just sitting around saying, “What are we going to do today?” or “Too
bad we can’t go out.” It was more like, “I’ve got a mound of papers to correct and I have
to wash and iron my clothes because it’s Saturday and then tomorrow’s Church.” You’re
supposed to pray all day Sunday. So it’s not like we had time on our hands that we
wanted to go out and do something beyond our ordinary daily schedule.

Kathleen: Did you ever have a day off?

Steph: Hmm. Well, Sunday was kind of a day off.

Kathleen: But it was in the convent or Church praying?

Steph: Yes. We had certain prayers that we said on Sunday, and once a month we had a
Sunday retreat day. We could relax on Sunday and play Scrabble or something like that.
Or sometimes take a drive. There were the 10 years that I was in the habit with vows.
And then when we started going through the changes, there was more freedom. In one of
the convents I was in, even when we were wearing habits, our superior took a lot of freedoms for herself, so she couldn’t impose as many restrictions on us. That was kind of nice. And then the next convent I lived in, we didn’t have vows any more, and we were in secular clothes. So I was kind of easing into more freedom.

Kathleen: When you say “vows,” that’s after you had surrendered your vows, you’re saying?

Steph: Yeah, when we got our dispensations.

Kathleen: Dispensations. So that was 1968?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: So you entered—you took your temporary vows?


Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: [Question 6:] Prior to the decrees of Vatican II for renewal, were there internal movements being experienced within the IHMs regarding the need to modernize and change, and how would you describe your understanding of these movements?

Steph: Movements—a movement to me implies organization by a group. I think it was because of the college, with people getting really good educations, with film series in the summertime, and the art department. Even before Vatican II the art department was thinking bigger thoughts, beyond the boundaries. We had a really good theater department that put on really good plays—plays of substance that explored important issues.

Kathleen: Made you think.
Steph: Yes. I don’t think it was a movement. It was a broadening, an opening up because of the college. Some people went off to their local convents and stayed there. We could all come to the college for classes if we wanted to. And those of us who were working for degrees, of course, had to. But some people just weren’t interested. They had their life in their parish. They served the kids; they served the Church. They didn’t go after more education, but a lot of people did go after it. So I think the people who were either in the college getting degrees or coming in on Saturdays were affected by the thinking of the college. And they had really excellent speakers, even before Vatican II, but especially after, of course. They talk about the “college sisters” and the rest of the Community. I think it’s more the people who took advantage of the richness of the college, and the people who just wanted to stay in their convents and do their work.

Kathleen: And were a lot of those women who stayed in the convent, were they the ones that wanted to stay with the order as it was, and were not inclined to surrender their vows? Or is it not that cut and dried?

Steph: It wasn’t that cut and dried.

Kathleen: So I hear you saying that while it might not have been a movement, there was sort of a constant seeding of thinking that, in spite of this structure of patriarchy, there was still something that was going on?

Steph: Yes. Yes.

Kathleen: Not all orders. But there was even, out there in the world—something was going on that was rupturing something. Would—so now that you look back.

Steph: Especially in the 1960s. Remember—in the 1950s, everybody had a 1957 Chevy and there was a way to look and a way to act, and life was wonderful. Watch the TV
shows in the 1950s.

Kathleen: [inaudible]

Steph: I was in high school during the 1950s, and that’s when I entered the convent. But then the 1960s hit. And there were the Beatles and the flower children. And all that was bubbling up as Vatican II was getting going.

Kathleen: Seeping in?

Steph: And it did seep in. And there were new ideas floating around out there . . .

[50:00]

Steph: So we were lucky.

Kathleen: Yes.

Steph: It was lucky that it was during the 1960s.

Kathleen: Change happens at—certain times. It’s taking advantage of those times when there’s change—like right now there’s change around us.

Steph: Yes. So, just one final thing.

Kathleen: Yes?

Steph: It’s not like we were in the 1950s in our little white-picket-fenced houses. And then we suddenly made this radical change. The majority of the Community was affected by the thinking of the 1960s. So that by the time the choice came, enough of us—350 of us out of 400 of us—felt that this was the way this we should go.

Kathleen: And that’s just the IHMs of California, is that correct?

Steph: Yes. Yes.

Kathleen: Because there are other IHMs around the country, correct?

Steph: Yes.
Kathleen: Okay. Got it. Good.

Steph: So the movements were exterior to the Community, but we were connected enough with them, and aware enough of them, that it changed us. So that when the choice came we were able to make it. I think.

Kathleen: [Question 7:] How did you experience the power structure, within the IHM Community prior to Vatican II?

Steph: Well, I already told you about Mother Regina.

Kathleen: Say it again about Mother Regina.

Steph: Well, I was telling you about in the novitiate. She had the power of life and death in terms of—she could have told me to leave. She could have said, “Well, you have a doubt. Leave.”

Kathleen: She’s really forward thinking, for her time?

Steph: Yes. I thought so. I think one of the difficulties in the power structure was that we had a strong Irish contingent. Nothing against the Irish, however.

Kathleen: You are Irish, right?

Steph: No. But they had a very rigid, conservative way of looking at things. And there were a number of them that, because they were assertive, and certainly weren’t afraid, got put in positions of leadership. When the Community opened a new convent or school and wondered whom to put in charge of it, the General Council would choose the Irish Sisters because they were tough and wouldn’t fall apart. So they got put in positions of authority.

Kathleen: Did you say, “Oh, it’s an Irish nun. She got it because she’s Irish.” Was it ever that cut and dried?

Steph: This is something it would be interesting to explore. Also, the Irish nuns, some of
them, kind of had the ear of the diocese. So I’m not sure.

Kathleen: McIntyre was Irish?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Is that . . .

Steph: No, I don’t know. I heard that they had the ear of the diocese. I was sort of apolitical. So the problem was that they were put in authority over convents. And some convents were really, really horrible. There was some racism. Some of the Irish nuns just thought Mexicans were only there to sweep the floors. They would yell at people. They would just be tyrants. And nobody wanted to be their superior. If a newer, younger person was put charge, and one of them had to obey, it would be hell to pay. So part of the problem was they kept putting these people in charge of convents because they didn’t know what to do with them.

Kathleen: And it was predominantly the Irish nuns? Was it the other—or—cultural . . .

Steph: The worst ones I can think of were Irish. I’m sure there were others. I wouldn’t say only Irish. And I think what happened is the Mother General and her council would sit down and say, “Okay. We’ve got these 50 schools. We’ve got these 500 nuns. So-and-So’s been here for 3 or 4 years. Probably time to move her. Let’s put her over there. Okay. And then well, who will take her place? Well, So-and-So here; she hasn’t been getting along very well. Let’s put her over there.” And then, in May, we all received letters that said, like mine, “Dear Sister Stephanie. For the glory of God and the honor of His Immaculate Mother, you are assigned to teach 5th grade at St. Anthony’s Elementary School in Long Beach. You will report to your mission on such and such a day.” That was it. It was kind of like being in the army. The day the missions came, some people
said “I will not do that.” They went storming in and raised enough hell that they got their missions changed. And other people were terrified, didn’t want to go, felt that they couldn’t do the work; but it was the will of God. They would never think of going to the Mother General and saying, “Please change my mission.”

Kathleen: Did you ever?

Steph: It’s interesting. My mom was really ill. I had been in Encino, and I got missioned to San Diego. I told my parents. And, unbeknownst to me, my dad came up and met with Mother Regina. He said, “You know, Stephanie’s mother is very ill. And we live here in Los Angeles. It would be a real hardship if she were in San Diego.” And I got switched to Long Beach.

Kathleen: Did you ever have any Irish superiors?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: [Question 8:] So how would you describe the path that led you away from the community religious life towards the construction of a new sense of self in the lay community?

Steph: Say that again: How would I describe the path that led me away from . . .

Kathleen: The community religious life and towards that of a laywoman religious.

Steph: Okay. The path. That was a good metaphor. It wasn’t something I chose. When Vatican II came along . . . I liked wearing a habit, I liked living in convents, I liked praying all together. I was pretty happy. I would have liked more of the contemplative life. I was teaching, and I was a good teacher. I’d been an English major in college, so it was okay. Then all of a sudden we started making changes. First we were going to experiment with changing the habits. I thought, “Great. Now I have to let my hair show.
That means I have to let my hair grow.” Then as we got out of the habit and into clothes, I thought “Great. Now I have to go shopping and think about what to wear.” All that seemed like such a pain. I didn’t come here to do this. This is before we got kicked out. When we first started making changes, following Vatican II, I didn’t like it. But I went and talked to Anita one day, and said something about not liking the changes. And she said, “Well, think about this, though. You know, the old way didn’t work.” I thought, “What? This life that I dedicated myself to didn’t work? What do you mean it didn’t work?” And she said, “Think about the old sisters.” In Hollywood, all the old sisters, the retired ones, lived up on the second floor. If you were a young nun, you were sent to serve the old sisters, and this is the job nobody wanted to do. The old sisters were cranky and some were crazy, although there were some sweet ones, but when you mentioned “second floor” everybody groaned. So Anita said, “If it had worked, the old sisters would be so sweet and loving, people would run to them for their wisdom. Do you run to the second floor?”

[60:00]

Kathleen: That’s very interesting.

Steph: Yes. So I heard that and I thought, “Okay.” I think that was a turning point on my path. I thought, “Okay, I guess I can let go of some of the accoutrements of religious life. Especially since it didn’t work.”

Kathleen: But even those changes coming through Vatican II felt like external orders once again from patriarchy?

Steph: It depends on how you looked at it. We were told by the Vatican—actually, the same thing Anita said—that it was time for a change. We were told that we should
experiment, that we should change our lives; we should become relevant to the modern world. And so in a way it was an order, but still they didn’t tell us what to do. They didn’t say stop wearing a habit or pray differently or whatever. They just said experiment for 5 years, and after you’ve experimented for 5 years let us know what you’ve decided you should do.

Kathleen: These were orders that said “experiment.” And so how did it come about that the habits were the first thing—that’s what I recall, being a student.

Steph: Right. I think it was because they said to become relevant to the modern world. I think everybody’s experience was that when you’re in a habit there is this barrier between you and everybody else. People clean up their language, they step back, they’re polite, they let you in line in the market when you have three baskets and all they have is a can of Coke. You know, “Oh, Sister’s here.” We felt this barrier, and thought that we should look professional, but we didn’t have to look medieval. We also felt that our ministering was impeded because people didn’t feel free to be really open with us: “What would Sister think if I tell the truth?” That kind of stuff.

Kathleen: It’s a very—it’s very forward thinking, really.

Steph: Yes. Vatican II did much good. So I think that was a turning point, a step along the new path. And then I think the next step was when I got into the feminist spirituality program. I had heard about it, about these great classes. And then I was talking to Margaret-Rose—Pat Reif founded the program, but Margaret-Rose Welch was then the director. She said, “Why don’t you come to a class sometime? I think you’d really like it. Really,” she said, “it changes people’s lives.” And so I went into a class with Rosemary Skinner Keller. It was a great class—The History of Women and Religion in America.
She had just finished a three-book series with Rosemary Radford Ruether. It went back to colonial days and looked at how women were treated. It was a critical feminist analysis of how women were treated for perhaps 300 years. There was so much I never knew. I either didn’t know the facts, or if I knew the facts I didn’t understand the implications.

Kathleen: What was that like, to begin to put that together?

Steph: God. It was great. I loved it. I think of all the structures that I had been trying to uphold—the culture, the philosophy, the theology. All that had worked for me to a degree but not totally. But I had signed on, whether it worked or not. And all of a sudden I knew it didn’t work and it didn’t have to work. I felt really freed up.

Kathleen: How does that experience compare to when you were first in school and you felt that Anita speaking . . .

Steph: [inaudible]

Kathleen: That was a similar kind of something. Was there any similarity between those experiences?

Steph: Well, in a way they’re almost opposite.

Kathleen: There was a lot of energy.

Steph: Yes. For Anita, it was like here is this precious ideal way of life that ensures that I’m right with God. And I stepped in. The Feminist Spirituality program was years later.

Kathleen: What? 15 years later now?

Steph: Yes, it was in the 1980s. Or maybe it was in the 1990s. It was more like 1990.

Kathleen: This is when you’re taking the course, you mean?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Okay.
Steph: Yes, it was about 1990. There were all these things I was supposed to believe and do, and yet I didn’t quite believe them all. But it’s part of what I was in. And then all of a sudden I realized I didn’t have to believe them. So, in a way, with Anita, it was like a closing in that lasted for a period of years; with Pat Reif, there was an opening out. I was in the program for 6 or 7 years. There was a feminist analysis of absolutely everything.

Kathleen: This is when you got your master’s?

Steph: Yes. It was so cool to look at things I’d never realized before. Things that were true, but I’d never noticed. Sometimes in the past, I’d heard people make anti-male statements. I thought that because I like men, they shouldn’t be criticized.

Kathleen: I can . . .

Steph: Yes. It’s not that all men are bad or anything. It’s just that there are factual things that have been there, all around us, which we haven’t seen. And all of a sudden we’re seeing what’s all around us. So that was cool. I began to find community more with the women in the feminist spirituality program than with the IHM Community.

Kathleen: So the sense of community also expanded.

Steph: Yes. But I mean I felt really connected with those women. And then I’d come back to IHM events and realized that I had new knowledge that these people didn’t have—or had new experiences that these people didn’t have. So I became a little more distant, emotionally, from the IHM Community as I became closer to the feminist community.

Kathleen: Did you ever find how to navigate both worlds?

Steph: Well, the feminist community doesn’t exist any more, since the college closed, unfortunately. I miss the closeness of those women, and the ongoing feminist analysis of
our world. I think I’m more critical of the Immaculate Heart Community in terms of not just accepting what goes on. Before, the Community was like the Church to me. It had to be accepted totally. Now I can look at what is going on and if I don’t think it’s okay, say it isn’t okay. We’re going through a lot of growing pains.

[70:00]

Kathleen: Right now?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: How do you think the experience, then, of going through all of that can help this time of growing pains?

Steph: Well, I think that having gone through all that, I’m better able to articulate what I see, when I’m in group meetings with the Community. I wish everybody in the Community had been through that program, but they didn’t. Pat Reif spent years—like the voice in the wilderness trying—standing up at meetings and saying, “But you need to know these things.” And they’d say, “Oh, there goes Pat again.” But I wish they had been in the program because they’d understand better the issues that we’re dealing with.

Inclusivity is a big one.

Kathleen: You mean?

Steph: You can’t be a feminist and be exclusive. And we’re constantly coming up with issues of inclusivity in terms of religious beliefs. People who believe Jesus is in the Eucharist and people who don’t. But we’re still in the Community together. Can we accept one another’s differences? Gays and lesbians. Is it okay to have a same-sex partner? And then there’s accepting people of other faiths. We’re saying that we’re ecumenical, but some don’t want to be ecumenical—just Catholic. Then there are others
who are barely Christian; just Christian enough to be part of the Community. So it would have been nice if everybody had said of the feminist spirituality program, “This is a great program; this is what we need. Let’s go and be a part of it.”

Kathleen: Or if you still had a place to go to get fed that particular message so that you could sort of stay wrapped in it and go back and speak it.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Is that kind of what . . .

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Would that be helpful?

Steph: Yes, I think so.

Kathleen: [Question 9:] How was your prayer life affected through all of this?

Steph: It’s hard to make an evaluation of it. In the novitiate it was all about prayer. You get conferences on prayer and you practice it, and you get more conferences on prayer and you practice it. And you talk to the Novice Mistress about your prayer life and you practice it. And then you get out in the real world and you’re teaching, and you’ve got a half hour to pray before Mass in the morning, you’ve got a half hour to pray in the afternoon. And you’re tired. And in the morning—it’s 5:30, and you’re sitting in the chapel just having crawled out of bed. It was really difficult to pray under those circumstances. Then, after we made the changes, you could pray anywhere. So that helped. If you couldn’t stay awake, you could walk outside somewhere. Or you could sit somewhere other than chapel. You could move around, to keep awake. But then we were still living in convents. And I think there is an advantage to having a regular schedule, a time when everybody’s doing it, a sense of togetherness. Because it’s so easy when
you’re living on your own to think, “Well I ought to do yoga and say my prayers, but I’m
tired this morning; I’m not going to do it.” So I think not living together has made it more
difficult because the structure isn’t there. You have to be a lot more disciplined and
motivated.

Kathleen: Has to be self-inspired.

Steph: Yes.

[Question 10:] What psychological and spiritual challenges did you face in building the
lay ecumenical community?

Steph: [no response]

Kathleen: It sort of follows on prayer life.

Steph: Me personally, or us plural?

Kathleen: Mmm. Let’s just talk you. I should say “personally.”

Steph: [no response]

Kathleen: Or you could talk whichever one you want.

Steph: I have to think about this. . . . Well, one of the difficult things was that the old
IHM Community was totally supported by the system. There was a theology, there was a
culture, and it had been done for hundreds of years. And it was accepted. And it was
expected. So I think one of the psychological challenges was believing in or feeling good
about the new way of doing things.

Kathleen: Like getting comfortable with it, you mean?

Steph: Yes. You couldn’t just pick up any spiritual book any more and read that what
you’re doing is great.

Kathleen: Would that be getting comfortable with freedom?
Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: So it was what psychological and spiritual challenges did you face in building a lay community? So you didn’t have the structure of a thousand years saying “here’s how you do it”?

Steph: Right. We didn’t have the structure. But I think it was more our thinking that needed to change—to know that just because we don’t have the structure we’re not less.

Kathleen: You’re not less.

Steph: Less of value. Less effective. Less of a person. A lot of people left when we made the changes because they said, “Well, I wanted to be a nun because I wanted to serve God and be holy. But if you can do it out in the world, why be in the convent?” Their feeling was “What’s the point of being in a community if you’re not nuns?”

Kathleen: Good question. What’s the point?

Steph: Right. So one of the challenges of building the new community was to say there is a point to being in community, and that there’s value in community, that you don’t have to be living a life with vows to be pleasing to God. They used to teach that in the hierarchy, the Pope’s the highest human being, and then the cardinals and the bishops and the priests, and then the nuns. The lay people were at the bottom, right above the animals.

Kathleen: You don’t like that.

Steph: I think it was probably the other way around. When you’ve been taught that, and you’re a nun, and then suddenly you’re not a nun, you get brought down a level.

Kathleen: Now you’re with the grunges at the bottom, huh?

Steph: Right.

Kathleen: Oy.
Steph: The challenge was to believe that what you have to give and who you are and the service you can render and the holiness that you had aspired to—you can do just as well as a lay person as you can as a nun. And I think that a lot people really wanted to keep their vows. The vows made them special. The vows were a symbol that they were totally dedicated to God. So the minute we got dispensed, some people went and made private vows.

[80:00]
Kathleen: Describe dispensation.

Steph: Normally, when people received dispensations, it was because they requested them, because they wanted to leave religious life. But this was not what we wanted. Imagine that you are married, and you have a marriage certificate. You had gone to the church, and you got married, and you were issued a marriage certificate. For us, receiving the dispensation was like your receiving a letter in the mail from Rome that says “Dear Kathleen and Roy, you are no longer married. Your marriage certificate is no longer valid.” And you think, “Wait a minute. Who says we’re not married?” And Rome says, “We do. Because in order to be married you have to do certain things and you’re not doing it, so you’re not married.” That’s what the dispensation was like for us—because we didn’t really choose to be dispensed from our vows.

Kathleen: Gotcha. Okay. So is it—was it dispensation or was it surrendering your vows?

Steph: Well, we think of it as dispensation.

Kathleen: This is how Anita described it . . .

Steph: It could be surrendering. Yes.

Kathleen: Surrendering feels personal: well, I make this choice; I’m giving it up. You’re
saying it came from the outside, said, “you’re out.”

Steph: Well, it was mixed. Rome said, “Either you do this or you’re out.” And we said “We’re not doing that.” So in a sense we surrendered.

Kathleen: It’s either/or. It is how you see it, I guess.

Steph: Uh-huh.

Kathleen: Okay. Have you talked to . . .

Steph: I didn’t realize that Anita had said “surrendering.”

Kathleen: It’s in—I forget what page, but I corrected it after Mary Fay corrected me.

Because I said “renounced.” And she said, “I didn’t renounce my vows.”

Steph: Yes. Okay.

Kathleen: Got it. Okay. Anything else?

Steph: Ask the question again.

Kathleen: What psychological and spiritual challenges did you face in building the lay community, and can you share stories that illustrate these challenges? Which I think you were doing.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: We left at the dispensation.

Steph: Right. So, we had a Community, with vows. And then suddenly we had one without vows. So . . .

Kathleen: And the new community was mixed with men, right?

Steph: Yeah, but that was an idea, rather than a reality. When you say “building a new community,” I visualize a few people out there gathering people, bringing them in.

Whereas we already were a community and we were trying to evolve into a lay
community.

Kathleen: Okay, got it. So it was an evolutionary process.

Steph: Yes. And, as part of it, we said we would be ecumenical and we would be open to having men in the community. I think we thought, in the beginning, that lots of non-Catholic Christians and lots of men would apply. And a few men did. But most of them—once they started coming to things—found themselves alone with all these former nuns. They needed some guys around, and there weren’t other guys around. So they bailed. Some of them were people that were very dissatisfied, like former priests who really had a grudge against the Church and just joined the Community to say “up yours” to the Church. Joining was negative choice on their part. So, either they didn’t stay or we didn’t accept them, when they were going through orientation.

Kathleen: How many were there, Steph, when it began?

Steph: Umm.

Kathleen: When you became a community without vows. How many of there were you?

Steph: I think in 1970, if I’m not wrong, there were 400 of us. Fifty chose to stay with vows, and 350 chose to get dispensations—or chose to surrender their vows—depending on how you would call it. I think the biggest challenges were figuring out what to do now, in creating this lay community. We’d all been teachers and nurses. A lot of the teachers went into public schools; some stayed in Catholic schools. So here we were—a bunch of former nuns—now opening up to people who’ve never been nuns. One of the challenges was to be able to accept people who had not been nuns as equals, and orient them to a new community that was mostly the old community. And hope that they would want to stay.
Kathleen: Yes. Lots of you being able to be inclusive, and then being able to inclusive—be inclusive too.

Steph: Yes. Yes.

Kathleen: Interesting.

Steph: It was a big challenge.

Kathleen: I bet. How do you think—is there anything else on that?

Steph: No.

Kathleen: [Question 11:] How do you think the IHM actions affected the Church?

Steph: I think that our actions were responsible for the Church not going any farther than they did. We drew a line and said, “No. We will not go back. We believed in the way we followed Vatican II. And we won’t go back.”

Kathleen: So stop “them” is L.A. and Vatican?

Steph: The Vatican. The Church gave us an ultimatum, and we said no. I think if we had obeyed they would have given the same ultimatum to every other community that was trying to do the same things we were. It was interesting, because we got this letter that said to get back in your habit, pray this way, go to mass all together, and obey your Bishop, or you can’t be nuns. That was the ultimatum letter. And we called other communities and asked, “Did you get that letter?” And they said, “No. What letter?”

There were other communities that were also experimenting, wearing different habits and doing the same things that we were. Just a little bit farther behind. And they never got that letter. We’re the only ones that ever got it.

Kathleen: The 400 of you?

Steph: Yes.
Kathleen: Only community in the whole United States? You got that letter.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: Nobody else did?

Steph: Right. So it was like the Marines. We’re the first ones to land on the beachhead.

Kathleen: Interesting.

Steph: I think that what we did was protect the rest of them from having that ultimatum, which allowed them to move forward more. Now, looking back at it 30 years later, though, they’re saying to us...

Kathleen: Who’s “they”?

Steph: The other communities: “We should have done what you did.” The Church never gave the other communities an ultimatum. But there has been kind of an uneasy peace ever since.

Kathleen: So they’re saying they should have renounced—they should have surrendered their vows too?

Steph: They should have supported us, and said to the Church “You do this to the IHMs and we’re out of here too.”

Kathleen: Got it. I see.

Steph: Now here it is 35 years later and they’re having another investigation of religious life. So it’s like we by our actions enabled them to make some progress forward, but only some.

Kathleen: “They” meaning the other religious orders?

Steph: Other religious orders. Yes. So I think our effect on the Church was to make them realize that women are a force to be reckoned with. It could have been a much bigger—it
could have been a real revolution — if the other communities had supported us. I mean, women could have stepped up to equality. We wouldn’t still be groveling around, trying to get women ordained priests. If all the religious women had said no, the Church would have changed radically.

[90:00]

Kathleen: What do you think stopped them?

Steph: Well, I guess fear. Thinking “We’ve got all these old sisters. And if they throw us out of our convents, what are we going to do with them? Where will we live? We’ll all be losing our jobs.” And not just fear of that, but also, “We love the children we teach; we believe in our work. If they throw us out of the schools, we won’t be doing that good work any more. It’s end of a way of life.”

Kathleen: Looking back, do you think it was feasible that most religious communities could have taken that step, or were you unique?

Steph: The college helped.

Kathleen: The college helped?

Steph: Yes. But some of them, like the CSJs, which Maureen and Marilyn were pretty close to us.

Kathleen: Sisters of St. Joseph?

Steph: Yes. Of Carondelet. See, it would have taken mobilization to do it. If only we could have called together all the religious superiors of all the convents in Southern California. But the trouble is, when you’re going through something that’s that personally traumatic, it’s a little hard to step outside of your own personal trauma and say, “Let’s look at the big picture, girls,”—to call together these people and say, “This is what’s
happening to us.” But we were riding it out. We weren’t able to mobilize everybody else and say, “This is the handwriting on the wall. You’re going to be getting these same letters” . . .

Kathleen: But they didn’t get the letters?

Steph: They—not yet.

Kathleen: Do you know . . .

Steph: Not then.

Kathleen: Not then.

Steph: They’re getting them now.

Kathleen: [Question 12:] Who were your champions, Steph, at that time? Your personal champions?

Steph: Anita Caspary. Pat Reif. Pat taught me in high school and college, and I loved her. But it wasn’t till I got into that feminist spirituality program that I saw the other Pat that I hadn’t seen when she was my teacher. And Margaret Rose Welch.

Kathleen: Are these all IHMs?

Steph: Yes. She [Margaret] was the president of the college. She and I were good friends. She was a psychologist. She took over the College Center, after Pat Reif decided she didn’t want to be the administrator any longer and she wanted just to teach. So then Margaret became the administrator. She’s a great gal. And who else? Thomas Merton.

Kathleen: What about Thomas Merton was a champion?

Steph: Well, he was my ideal of the contemplative life well lived.

Kathleen: His contemplative nature?

Steph: Yes. I read all of his writings, both in college and in the convent. He had this
passionate love of God, and he was deeply contemplative and spiritual, but also connected with the world.

Kathleen: Okay. So he negotiated both worlds.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: [Question 13:] How do you think your personal experience could inspire and guide contemporary women who are dealing with similar—not the Church, necessarily, but of patriarchy?

Steph: That’s a challenging one.

Kathleen: [laughs]

Steph: I think my experience has caused me to develop a really critical way of looking at things, which I think is healthy for women, not just to accept things uncritically. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza had this term, the hermeneutics of suspicion. She’s a feminist theologian. She was foundational in talking about what it means to be a feminist. The feminist method was supposed to be suspicion—that you don’t take anything on face value, because a patriarchal system has created the present reality. You have to look at it. And you have to listen to people and kind of run it through the feminist sieve. So—your question is how this can help other people.

Kathleen: Women.

Steph: Women.

Kathleen: Your experience.

Steph: I don’t know. My personal experience as opposed to . . .

Kathleen: Or it could—or the collective experience. Whichever feels. Right.

Steph: Wow, that’s a tough one. Yeah, I think about La Casa. I try to make La Casa be
the kind of place that holds feminist values. But it’s kind of subtle. I never use the “f” word. You know?

Kathleen: Yes.

Steph: I think that one of the things I learned is that there aren’t very many absolute answers, that we do the best we can. We try to stay loving and look at things. And try to see what’s there. And try to be—while being critical—nonjudgmental.

[100:00]

Kathleen: Are you saying then that if the person—you’re personally, you believe that your experience could help women understand that developing critical yet nonjudgmental ways of looking at the world and how life treats one...

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: ... those are good skills to have. A good way of looking at the world.

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: And from a collective experience—there’s just no absolute answers in life. And it’s getting comfortable with that—where it seems as though in the beginning, when you first started as a nun, there were absolute answers. There was a notion that there were absolute answers. And that’s not the case.

Steph: Right.

Kathleen: And what’s that like?

Steph: [laughs]

Kathleen: We’ve gone from there was absolute, that you thought was there when you started school. And we end at, it’s getting comfortable with no absolute. So it’s like full circle.
Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: What’s that like?

Steph: [no response]

Kathleen: Or would you describe it as full circle?

Steph: Yes. I think it’s healthy to realize that there are no absolutes. It’s life. And once you decide that you can live with it, it makes life easier. During the Obama campaign I saw so many people and organizations that were so strongly for or against something. But it’s all their perception of the way we have to go.

Kathleen: I would wonder—to have gone from such absolutism, whatever that word is, to—what would it be now?

Steph: Relativism. I don’t know if it’s relativism or not. That’s a bad word; the Church doesn’t like relativism.

Kathleen: It’s all relative.

Steph: Yes. Well, you know, I guess there are absolutes. There is God, whoever we think God is. There’s love, however we see it. What do you mean by love? You could argue on that. What’s the absolute meaning of love?

Kathleen: There may not be any absolutes.

Steph: Right.

Kathleen: But when we’ve been raised in—it was kind of safe to think that there were absolutes, and now we’re realizing there aren’t. And how do we navigate those waters, and how do we help women . . .

Steph: Then you get kind of pragmatic. What works best. Let’s act in a way that’s best for me and best for you and best for the world.
Kathleen: But then who decides what’s best. Right?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: I’m not objective; I think your story, you personally and your collective story, has a lot of weight and bearing on how young women might be able to look at their lives —how they’ve got their own space of absolutism; whatever it is right now. The rate of eating disorders and suicides are much higher than when we were younger women. So it’s still working, patriarchy; it just morphs and adapts to change. So I guess it’s that critical thinking that you got—how old were you when you got those skills of critical thinking?

Steph: I was in the Feminist Spirituality program with Pat.

Kathleen: Well, whenever you got your feminist master’s.

Steph: Well . . .

Kathleen: Would that be when you began to become a critical thinker?

Steph: Yes.

Kathleen: And how old were you?

Steph: Probably 45 to 50.

Kathleen: Do you think it could have happened any earlier? Do you think women can become critical thinkers younger?

Steph: Yes. Yes.

Kathleen: Because I didn’t get it until 4 years ago. I was 53. I do believe we can get to women younger.

Steph: Yes. The other day, a friend gave me a book called something about how to not look old. It was my birthday.
Kathleen: Oh, happy birthday.

Steph: I thought it was going to be healthy hints. I started reading it. And it was the most appalling thing I’ve ever read. It was all on: what’s an old lady? An old lady is one whose hair is this way, whose shoes are this way, whose stockings are this way, whose dress is this way. This was “old lady.” Now, you can be the same age but you can be young and hip—if you do your hair this way, your shoes this way, if you don’t wear stocking, and if you dress this way. I was almost like being in the convent. Here’s this set of rules. You wear this habit. It was really disgusting.

Kathleen: Are you going to tell her?

Steph: I haven’t yet. I don’t even know if she read it. Or maybe somebody gave it to her and she passed it on to me without reading it. It’s the attitude behind it. It was all about pleasing men. I was going to give it to a thrift store, but then I thought, “Jesus, I don’t want somebody reading this.” But then I thought, “What if there were a woman who came from an ordinary middle class family, and married into a family that was upper class. She has to go to all these social events. There’s all this pressure to look right for him, because of his career, and to please his family. And then all the other wives of the men in this particular social milieu.” Then I thought, “Well, maybe she should read this book. I mean, if she’s got to make it, this might help her. But what a horrible thing!”

Kathleen: I think it’d be very interesting to use it as a teaching: What do you think of this thinking?

Steph: Yes. Yes.

Kathleen: That’s very insightful on your part. That’s how it works. You think you’re out of it, and all of a sudden it’s there in your face again.
Steph: Yes. Yes.

Kathleen: Commercials, face lifts. It’s all working; it’s all there.

Steph: You could retreat to the wilderness and just be yourself . . .

Kathleen: That would . . .

Steph: . . . but in society . . .

Kathleen: Yes. It’s learning to be your own boss, and learning how to help others think.

This was great fun!

Steph: Was it?

Kathleen: It was.

Steph: Good.

Kathleen: [Question 14:] Are there any additional comments you’d like to share?

Steph: No . . .

Kathleen: Thanks Stephanie!