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Methodology and Research Notes

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Women’s Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography as Feminist and Emergent

In 1989, I participated in a panel at the American Folklore Society Meetings in Philadelphia which focused on the topic of reflexivity in the ethnographic study of religion and belief. The five presenters were concerned with the writing of ethnography, particularly in terms of the field research folklorists do in the area of religion. In that presentation, I examined the ways in which I had been reflexive in acknowledging my role in the field research for my book Handmaidens of the Lord: Women Preachers and Traditional Religion (1988), but admitted that I felt a disappointment in that I had not established an interpretive dialogue with the Pentecostal female ministers about whom the book was written. That is, while I established a close and friendly relationship with the women in the study and did fieldwork with them for over two years, I committed the scholar’s crime of collecting my data and disappearing to “write it up.” The women felt comfortable leaving the task of writing the book to me and trusted that I would represent them and their ministry fairly. In many ways, that trust was well-founded, but as it turned out many of the interpretations I made and conclusions I drew about their beliefs and their lives were clearly representative of my point of view as researcher writing about them and did not always or necessarily reflect their own interpretations or provide a way for them to respond to mine.

When the featured minister in Handmaidens of the Lord, Sister Anna Walters, read my book cover to cover, she was dismayed by the tone of some of the things I was saying, and in some cases strongly disagreed with my analysis and interpretation. She wrote long letters to me explaining
her perspective on the various topics. At that point, it was obviously too
too late to include her point of view along with mine—the book had already
been published. While I certainly would never advocate that the subjects
we study take on the role of “censor” of our work, in the AFS conference
session I argued that we need to establish a more collaborative methodology
for fieldwork and a theoretical framework of knowledge-sharing
which will allow for dialogue. This dialogue can be included in the ethnographic
field research as well as in the presentation of that ethnographic
work, as a part of the discussion, serving to privilege no one voice over
any other. In many ways, I still disagree with some of Sister Walters’
responses to my interpretations, or I see the issues in perhaps a larger and
more complex arena of women, religion, society, and culture. Neverthe-
less, her point of view juxtaposed against mine would certainly have
illustrated the polyphonic nature of belief, interpretation and presenta-
tion. I believe scholars are fearful of such honesty; it makes us vulnerable to
attack, questioning and critique from our subjects as well as from our peers
in a new and disconcerting way. The challenge must be met, however.

In the past decade, anthropological and folkloristic inquiry, at least
from some perspectives, has addressed a critical question: how do we
write ethnography and how does the ethnographer acknowledge her/his
role in the field situation? While several important works have emerged
on this topic, some anthropologists calling for “reflexive anthropology”
have been chided for talking about it more than actually doing it and in
the process have managed to be so reflexive that they have successfully
directed the spotlight onto themselves once again (see Mascia-Lees, et. al.,
1989). The fact of the matter is, however, that we must first be conscious
of the issue before we can tackle it, and, certainly, James Clifford and
George Marcus’s Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography
(1986), Clifford’s The Predicament of Culture (1988), Jay Ruby’s A Crack in
the Mirror (1982), and other studies have called our attention to the
concern for reflexivity. I see my ethnological approach as a natural
product of the evolution of ethnographic studies in this country in terms
of the attention to reflexivity and the conceptualization of the ethnographic “other.” Certainly, Charles Briggs, in his Learning How to Ask, has
tackled the problematics of the interview; his work, however, remains in
the mode and frame of the dynamics between interviewer and interviewee
although certainly his comments clearly address the problems I encoun-
tered when the women “heard” me ask different questions—which led to
varying degrees of candidness from them. What I shall be proposing here
only begins with the one-on-one interview and grows into a series of
dialogic sessions with the flow of interactions taking on multiple forms
and overlapping functions; the dialogues go beyond the ethnographer
asking the informants if s/he “got it right” and the conclusions (if there
are any) emerge from the discourse between and among all the participants, ethnographer included. Briggs correctly assumes that this dialogue session will represent a second speech event and I fully acknowledge the necessity for that second event. I disagree that "what is needed is some means of rechecking one's perceptions against those of the participants at the time (emphases mine)" (1986: 108). I sympathize with Stephen Tyler's assessment, in his work *The Unspeakable*, of where ethnographic thinking has gone awry. Tyler suggests that the ethnographer has "missed the true import of 'discourse,' which is 'the other as us,'" for the point of discourse is not, he suggests, how to make a better representation, but how to avoid representation. "In their [the ethnographers'] textualization of pseudodiscourse they have accomplished a terrorist alienation more complete than that of the positivists. It may be that all textualization is alienation, but it is certainly true that non-participatory textualization is alienation—'not us'—and there is no therapy in alienation" (1987: 205).

The approach I am advocating, which I have termed "reciprocal ethnography" seeks to humanize the ethnographic endeavor. It seeks true discourse, both among the participants and between the participant and the ethnographer and will emerge, hopefully, in the vein of what Tyler calls ethnography "in the right spirit," along with the work of, for example, Vincent Crapanzano (1980) or Kirin Narayan (1989). This past year, in doing the field research for a new book I am writing, *Holy Women: Celebrating Wholeness in Connection*, I have attempted to put "reciprocal ethnography" into practice. This approach will, I hope, take ethnographic studies into a new and more multi-layered, polyphonic dimension of dialogue and exchange. My current interest in women in mainline ministry is a natural evolution of my work in *Handmaidens of the Lord*, which focused entirely on Pentecostal women ministers (this study includes no Pentecostal ministers).

Initially, for this study, I tape recorded life stories, interviews, and sermons in one fairly small region in the upper Mississippi Valley. I should comment on my selection of contemporary women in ministry as a focus for study. The group I have been working with represents mostly white, female ministers from the Episcopal church, the Methodist church, Church of Christ-Disciples, Unity, Unitarian, and General Baptist. There were also two nuns and a black minister in the lunch group who chose not to participate in the dialogue group. All of these women are highly educated—graduates of Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Brite Divinity School, Union, Texas Christian, and Yale Divinity School; they range in age from 30 to 65; some are single, some married, some have children, some are lesbian. They are reflective about their ministry, their lives, their beliefs every single day; the work for this book simply provided a different forum for a focused discussion of these concerns.
At first, it was fairly tedious trying to locate women ministers and conduct my fieldwork; eventually, however, my work took a significant turn when I found that a group of women in ministry (which included many of the same women I had been interviewing) met on a regular basis and had formed an informal, but very close-knit, lunch group—a group which did more than get together “just” for lunch. Most definitely, for a while, I was the topic of conversations at this lunch. I had asked if I could join them every first and third Tuesday for lunch. After no little pain and trepidation on my part, as I realized just how much my presence could potentially alter the lunches and possibly deprive the women of this much-needed “safe” arena for discussion and sharing, I was allowed to join this group for their lunches and other meetings. My fieldwork then began to focus exclusively on this already established group. After more than two years of working closely with these women and considerable intermittent fieldwork later, I believe I can say that my presence has not, in the end, hindered them from talking openly and honestly. I cannot, of course, say that my presence has not had an effect on the meetings and the women involved, because it has.

In the most fortunate way, then, this naturally-formed group afforded the opportunity and framework for me to begin a series of group discussion sessions during my leave year (about fifteen total) where I could bring my thoughts, ideas, questions, and writing to them as a group, seeking their response to what I was perceiving in their life stories, our interviews, and in their sermons. While I met with the group at both our meetings and their regularly-scheduled lunch times, I never brought up our “book work” material at the lunches. I knew it was imperative to keep the two occasions for meeting separate while keeping the composition of the groups stable. In our dialogue sessions we explored a range of areas including the content of their life stories, the structure of their stories, what they left out of their life stories and why, their concepts and images of God, the problems and issues for women in ministry, sermon-making, and sexuality and the ministry. These sessions were all tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Along with the life stories, portions of this material form the basis for this particular article.

My work with female ministers is reflexive in that I readily acknowledge my presence in the research and the possible and very real effects my presence has on the field experience. And my work is “reciprocal” in that we, the women and I, have established a working dialogue about the material, a reciprocal give and take. This process is not to be understood as reciprocity, where obligation or payment is the motivating factor—but reciprocal, in the best sense of sharing and building knowledge based on dialogue and shared/examined/re-examined knowledge. In this sense, I also perceive this ethnography to be a feminist ethnography, growing
out of an understanding of how women come to know what they know (Belenky, et.al., 1986); here I include myself, as a knower who is constantly learning new knowledge, as well as the women in the study who were able to examine and articulate what they know in dialogue with each other and with me. Their knowledge and mine are presented as a collaborative multi-voiced ethnography. While I fully acknowledge that I am the one writing this article and eventually the book, I am committed to presenting the work as collaborative, as dialogue, and as emergent, not fixed.

Given that my criticism of the “reflexive” anthropologists is that some of them are talking about ethnography more than they are doing it, and given that I have suggested an improvement upon, or at least an evolution from, “reflexive anthropology” with my “reciprocal ethnography,” I will attempt in this paper to present, from the transcripts of our dialogue sessions, what exactly has been the advantage of this approach. Is there an epistemology which emerges from the women talking about their lives, their ministry, their preaching? What have I, as a scholar, learned in the process? Have the dialogue sessions taken me further in my own knowledge and understanding or have they actually served only to validate and authenticate what I already knew or suspected? My theory was, of course, that “reciprocal ethnography” would serve to deepen the hermeneutical epistemology, to improve what I had seen as dangerous flaws in my own earlier work—and the work of others. In fact, this article will demonstrate how reciprocal ethnography served, in this case, to illuminate a new understanding of what life stories are for professional women who, in contemporary times, find that their lives and their ministries segment, and fragment, their narrated experiences. This collective examination will, in the end, further our understanding of women’s life stories in that it demonstrates the importance of a multi-layered story, one which balances text and interpretation. My work calls into question the efficacy of a developed, integrated “life history” (which I refer to as a “life story”) as well as points to the critical nature of ethnographic inquiry.

The first thing I did in this field research was to collect, on tape, the life stories of the women identified for this study. I have chosen to focus on these life stories and the group’s response to their stories as the basis of this article. The initial fieldwork included many more women than the number in the lunch group, and I examined all of the life stories I had collected, attempting to discern patterns, determine content, look for structural frameworks, language, and other aspects of the life stories. I did not know the women well when I first met with them and basically asked only that they “tell me your life story.” “Begin at the beginning,” I said, “and tell me how you came to this point in your life, as a woman minister.” I explained that I was trained in folklore, anthropology and
literature and that I was committed to the efficacy of their story as story, that I felt the text of their life story as they delivered it to me would be valuable and provide insight into their individual life pattern and the collective patterns of other women in the group. I wanted them to talk without interruption, deciding solely on their own what would be included. I transcribed these life stories verbatim. Only later, in individual interviews with each of them did I ask specific questions.

In the dialogue sessions when we met together, I chose to talk with the group about the structure, content, style and form of women’s life stories in general and about their life stories in particular. All of the women in the group had received xeroxes of their own typed, verbatim life stories. They hated them. They came to the group session and slammed them down on the table with remarks such as, “I hate this!” “This is ridiculous.” “This makes me look very stupid; I don’t like looking stupid.” “I’m horrified; I cannot even read this.” This article will explore some of the reasons for their responses to their own stories.

In our group sessions, I presented to them some of the current thinking about women’s and men’s life stories and autobiographies and sought their responses to their own stories and to the scholarly opinions about women’s life stories. My presentation to them included a discussion of the works of Sidonie Smith, who writes about a “poetics of women’s autobiography” (1987); Carolyn Heilbrun, who poses how we approach “writing a woman’s life” (1988); of Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, who theorize about women’s “life/lines” and who, in their collection of essays include articles by Nancy Miller and Mary Mason (1988); of Domna Stanton’s notion of “the female autograph” (1984); of Joy Barbre and the Minnesota Women’s Group who have been “interpreting women’s lives” (1989); and of James Olney (1980; 1988), William Runyan (1984), and Lawrence and Maria Barbara Watson-Franke (1985), who write about both female and male life stories and life histories and autobiography (Cf. Jelinek 1980; Langness and Frank 1981). The broad conclusions the reader can draw from these various approaches can be summarized with a comment by Sidonie Smith, drawing on the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Misch and Karl Weintraub, that autobiographies (read “male autobiographies”) are seen “as texts of ‘individuality’ and the pursuit of the typical and the model,” while women’s texts, in contrast, are seen (by Elaine Showalter and others) as “wild—they lie outside the dominant culture’s boundaries in a spatial, experiential, and metaphysical ‘no-man’s-land’” (1987: 9). In general, male autobiographies have been characterized as logical, linear, objective, goal-oriented, fixed firmly in ideal notions of self-hood, and structured in accordance with the dominant order, while female autobiographies tend to be characterized as non-linear, even chaotic, subjective, experiential, interpersonal/
relationally oriented, connected to the world and its inhabitants, less individualistic and more spontaneous. Although I very much wanted us to discuss the content of the stories they gave to me, we did, first, agree that one of the difficulties with this kind of material is reading an orally delivered account which has been rendered into print. They knew, as I did, that their first response to the typed material was based on the linguistic markers—i.e., the false starts, the “you knows” which dotted the page, the pauses and “uhs” which abounded. We agreed, however, that we all understood that these were a function of the oral style of story delivery and ought not to be the focus of our discussion about the oral life histories in general. It is a given that written autobiographies would have been quite different. This difference, of course, also points to the difficulty of utilizing the scholarship on autobiography as literary scholars approach the subject; working with oral texts is always different, but not different enough for us to ignore the identifiable correlaries between these genres.

In response to the paradigm which suggests that men’s stories will be linear and logical and women’s fragmented and loosely formed, the women in the discussion group had some pointed objections. At the outset, Kathleen Miles-Wagner, a Unitarian minister, observed how value-laden those terms were and suggested that linear was, in fact, quite one-dimensional and that she preferred to think of women’s stories, and lives, as multi-dimensional:

> If there’s anything that we are, that we are, that lam, it’s multi-dimensional, or three-dimensional, or fully rounded out—and that’s not formless. . . . The difference between linear and multi-dimensional is more acceptable than linear vs. formless.

I pointed out to the women that I found their life stories to be, by and large, long and detailed, often lingering a long time on one segment of their life and only after considerable attention to that, would they move on to yet another lengthy segment. I offered to them the observation that rather than seeing their stories as either linear or fragmented (the binary opposition suggested by the scholarship), that perhaps a better way to look at their stories would be to conceive of them as “blocks.” I thought they were relating their stories to me in completed, deeply-explored, blocks of experience. At the end of each of these “blocks,” it seemed, they would declare that whatever they had been exploring during that segment wasn’t working, wasn’t what they ought to be doing, and they moved on (after much pain and consideration) to a new segment. I saw the blocks as segments of searching, of trying things out, a “reading” of the stories which corresponds with Gillian Bennett’s notion of “super-blocks” in women’s storytelling, blocks which she found created a “many-
layered, multi-textured structure" (1989: 170). I quoted from one woman who put this metaphorically: Flannery Eilers, a Disciples of Christ minister, said she just kept on trying on the clothes of first one thing and then another, but the clothes just never seemed to fit. Until finally, she put on the vestments of a minister and they felt right.

In response to my theory about blocks, they agreed, but they took it further than I ever could/would have on my own. What emerged from the dialogue, however, was new knowledge for the women there, as well as for me. Kathleeen continued to speak:

I really respond to your theory about blocks. I have often thought of my life as a series of doing something until I had sort of taken it to its limit. I had mined a segment of experience, taken it to its logical extreme, done it thoroughly, until I realized that it wasn’t what I am looking for somehow. . . . But I’ve always thought—nobody else’s life is like that.

They responded eagerly to the idea of women not having early in their lives one set goal from which they never wavered (a characteristic noted about men’s lives and stories). But, they re-interpreted my metaphor of “blocks” in challenging ways. Amy Seger, a young Disciples of Christ minister, responded:

I was thinking when you were talking about blocks of time—I was trying to draw blocks. I was starting with building blocks and that wasn’t helpful because everytime I kept thinking about building blocks I kept thinking about pyramids and hierarchies, and I kept yanking them down. But as Kathleen started talking, I’ve seen more of a train. But I haven’t decided whether the train is adding cars or taking them away. [laughter]

Flannery asked: Is this train coming or going? [laughter]  
Amy responded: Well, actually, it’s a sort of continuum.  
Kathleen interjected:

Yes, there’s something that has to get done which I think represents ‘spiritual journey,’ which it seems like is being done with each of these blocks and each one is taken to its conclusion and then you start over, and it’s always the same thing I’m trying to do.

Amy continued:

And the block itself—because you have the edge, and then the turn, and then you have another direction, and it gives shape in a whole and you have a wholeness there, but in the forming of that you are really going in different directions—taking different turns.
Carter Buchanan, an Episcopalian priest, said:

Then, too, there’s the multi-dimensional box—it’s a cube, a kind of a puzzle, but it’s a round puzzle that’s made of rectangle pieces of wood that all fit together. And that’s what happens, you get to the end of one block and you look at what you thought it was—at least that’s what happened to me—it was something quite different.

I offered to the group the suggestion that since they had too few real-life models or written life scripts to follow for their own stories, they were often making up their own script as they went along. At this point in my work, I did not believe that the women in mainline denominations were participants in a strong oral tradition which included stories about becoming a female minister. As it turned out, this was not actually the case; there is an oral tradition of particular stories, such as the “called into the ministry” stories and the abbreviated life histories which are often required at some point during the ordination process. However, it is important to note that when I asked the women in the group, they could not recall having heard many stories from other women. The truth seems to be that there is an unperceived (and perhaps unexpected) oral tradition, one which is verifiable only by looking at the style, content, and structure of the stories themselves and, in essence, working backwards.

The class, station, and context of the lives and ministries of these well-educated, sophisticated, professional women who seem to live every moment in the literate world deceives us into a static, class-oriented approach to folk/oral traditions—try as we may to avoid such thinking. Clearly, there is not, in this case, a strong oral tradition and just as clearly the women who elect to become ministers do very much perceive of themselves as anomalies.

Brodzki and Schenck, I recalled, write about the female self being mediated, her invisibility resulting from her lack of a tradition. I remembered their characterization of a male autobiography which might be “an objective and disinterested occupation in a work of personal justification,” and their caution that the decision to “go public” is particularly charged for a woman, especially one who has defied the culturally determined expectations for women: “To justify an unorthodox life by writing about it is to reinscribe the original violation, to reviolate masculine turf” (1988: 50). Because they have chosen a profession perceived by the culture as male, I felt their stories were often masking or justifying their choices, their positions. It seemed the long diversions in their stories might be serving as ritual disclaimers of sorts—saying, “look, I tried all this other stuff I was expected to do and it just didn’t fit!” Carter, an
Episcopal priest, responded to Flannery's metaphor of the clothes she kept trying on:

I remember when I was talking, I went on and on and on [general laughter], but it was very much like that—like trying on clothes. But there was a role for that [school teaching]—there's an appropriate "teacher role" and you can tag it: a high school teacher does these things. And I did keep trying to do them and I couldn't do them. Oddly, it was very much like: here now I'm doing something for which there are no particular models and it feels so much more right than it did to try to do something for which there were generations of models, of a variety of which you would think that I could have fit, but I didn't.

But Kathleen questioned her:

And it's the lack of models that makes the clothing feel so good? Well, I don't know, see I'm not willing quite to say that, but it is a fact that here you can do. I've really felt that the ministry was a place where I could do, do what seemed to be the right thing to do. I could form myself... without having to conform to a lot of structures. But even that didn't work. It turns out that there are a lot of expectations and structures. The question was, was I going to fit into them or not?

Anne-Marie, a Methodist Diaconal Minister, revealed that she had given this a good deal of thought:

You know I am in a denomination where one of my real concerns is about the models of the ministry that I know are in place, and the hierarchical structures and which I am considered a part, are rigid enough that I'm concerned about what it's going to do to me.

Amy interjected:

There's not a model for a woman minister. Yes, there are similarities among us, but there is also a diversity among us and that's something that I hope we will lift up as well. Because of the very fact that we don't have those models and we don't have those scripts, we are writing our own scripts and they're coming out differently. There are some parallels, but there's also that openness and freedom and flexibility for something new.

Kathleen responded:

And I don't sense that we are coercing each other to try to find the one "right" script.
This group session finally evolved into a discussion of just how vulnerable the women actually felt, once they had determined that the clothes of the minister felt just right to them. They fully acknowledge and understand that not everyone else thinks the clothes fit them particularly well. Linda Stewart, a Methodist minister, talked at length about a radical newsletter she edits and how the group of women ministers who began it had wanted to title it “Naked in the Pulpit,” because, she said, “in talking about how we felt— ‘naked in the pulpit’ was the way we were saying that we were feeling very much of the time, but we needed it to be safe.” So they named it, instead, “Notions ‘n Pins” and laughed hysterically as they acknowledged the subliminal messages of this domestic image. Linking this clothing image with Flannery’s, Linda told a story about another woman minister she knew who was tiny and whose robe, purchased by the congregation, swallowed her and seemed to make her vanish: “Her pulpit robe is too big—she’s very small. So, she’s getting a new robe that will reveal her more. She said, basically, that there was a difference between being too covered up, which is how she feels now, and being naked in the pulpit, which is how she felt before.” Conversely, another young Hispanic Disciples of Christ minister, Maria Gonzales, talked about claiming the power and authority of the vestments: “I am beginning to take the liberties of the robe—sort of putting on the clothing.”

Finally, in the group sessions, I presented to the women the scholarship on women’s stories, including works by Carol Gilligan (1982) and others, which indicates that women will relate their life stories in terms of “relationships” with others—primarily fathers, mothers, siblings, husbands, companions, and children. I then shared with them my observation that in their life stories, they had not, in general, told what appeared to be at the outset recognizable “relational” stories—stories which pivoted around key figures in their lives and their relationships with those key figures. Gilligan has suggested that if there is anything we can note about women, it is that they are relational. Why, then, I asked the group, are your stories not particularly relational? In fact, as I further pointed out, most of the women in the group who were married and had children, had definitely glossed over those aspects of their lives—made great leaps, in fact—over these relations. Others, particularly those who are lesbian, had left out all references to significant others in their lives. The responses from the women were varied, quite heated, and certainly illuminated further the ambivalence which makes the lives of female ministers often seem so disconnected.

At the beginning Kathleen suggested that for ministers the “community” becomes the “significant other” and that she would suppose that if I looked for relation in that perspective it would emerge in terms of the
congregation as community. Interestingly, most of the other women rejected this notion outright. Even those who did feel comfortable calling their church an “extended family” did not want this to substitute for the actual relationships in their more private lives. The initial response of most of the women in the group seemed defensive to me at first. Several declared with vehemence their “right” to present themselves as women, first, and as wives and mothers later. At first, they seemed proud that they had “come through” as professionals. Amy, married and with a small child spoke clearly:

I have tried in the last few years, to get away from identifying myself as Gary’s wife, mother of Kevin, because this was the way I identified myself for so long. Even after I was a professional person, I still thought of myself that way and identified myself that way. So, if I came through that way, that would be wonderful. I’m happy about that.

Linda, a young mother, married to a minister, responded:

You said you were writing a book about women in ministry. My guess is that I filtered that to say ‘I’m going to deal with the professional stuff.’ I’m very conscious right now of how I am perceived—as the mother of a toddler, not a professional. If we see the Bishop, he says, “Hi there, little Momma. How’s that big boy?” and to John he says, “Well, hello there, John, how are things down at the First Methodist?” [Linda serves two small rural churches, while her husband is downtown in one of the largest churches in the city.]

It became clear to me during this exchange that there is a basic problem with relationships—how to have them, what kind they can be, how questions of ministry and family get resolved—in the life of women in the ministry. If, in fact, the life stories related to me were not “relational” there had to be a good reason. Was it because the women were not “relational” in the way they connected with other humans in their lives? Brodzki and Schenck have proposed that “women tend to present their stories as a delineation of identity by alterity...self-definition in relation to significant others is the most pervasive characteristic of the female autobiography” (1988: 8). Did the lives of these female ministers not pivot around relations the way women’s lives have been depicted? Or had the life stories become a negotiation, an alternate strategy for presentation of self? What would/could the life stories tell us, then, about this critical issue? Is there embedded in them what Brodzki and Schenck suggest is “a compelling subtext...which defies socially constructed definitions of appropriate female behavior?” (1988: 8). The women themselves began to answer these important questions. Kathleen’s response reminded me of Nancy Miller’s comment that “to the extent that autobiography re-
quires a shaping of the past, a making sense of a life, it tends to cast out the parts that don’t add up” (1988: 56):

Relationships have always been problematic along in my life. They are filled with pain, sometimes for good reasons, sometimes for bad reasons. The possibility is that the ministry is my way of trying to find solutions to the relational ambiguities and paradoxes and confusions of life. They’re left out because they’re too confusing. I’m unable to resolve them. What’s put in there is what I could resolve about my life, which is the sort of intentional structure working with community or trying to work within the community.

Others agreed with her and went on to vent the frustrations which can actually wreck their relationships and do considerable damage to how they perceive themselves. Amy, who had defiantly told us at the beginning of this session that if she had presented only herself then she was “happy about that,” suddenly began to realize that she felt she had been cornered. She began to verbalize how limiting she felt the expectations and perceptions of others could be and began to re-examine her presentation of self and her dissatisfaction with that image. She also began to express her anger about the restrictions she felt were in place to prevent her from revealing her whole self in terms of her significant relations.

Can I say one more thing on that ‘significant other’ stuff? Because this is really on my mind. I think I may be the only one in this group [and, of course, she wasn’t]—but I feel that it’s really—I don’t know what it is—but that it’s a real ‘no, no’ to talk about my husband, even in this group, but it’s not the first time in a women’s group. Even in seminary, somehow, I felt that—you’re supposed to be a person by yourself and if you start talking about your husband, it sounds like you’re not being real anymore. I find that I don’t feel I’m allowed. I don’t allow myself to claim that significant relationship and its worth and its value in terms of who I am. If I’m not at my best because the three-year-old has kept me up for the last three nights in a row—that is then a part of who I am at that particular moment. If a male colleague says the same thing, folks will ask, “Oh, is the wife out of town?” [laughter]

Brodzki and Schenck ask the critical question, How do women “find ways to challenge inscription into conventional feminine identity” and autobiographical representations of selfhood, and at the same time “exploit the textual ambiguity of their partnership with significant others?” (1988: 11) The dialogue which emerged in this group session directly answers this question. The women revealed that being “relational” was, in fact, a terribly important part of the way they perceived themselves; they were also explaining that to be “relational” was obviously
perceived by others as being “female,” and carried, then, a less than serious value. They had learned, therefore, to couch their presentation, as well as their stories to me, in terms of this expected, isolated, professional image. As Gail Reimer has pointed out, mothers can write, but they cannot write as mothers—mothers must be absent and silent (1988: 208). Miller speaks of “the writer who gave birth to a child” (1988: 53). Here we have “the priest who gave birth to a child” and the impact is even greater.

Because the hierarchy de-values them as women and de-values the “wholeness” of their lives, women in ministry are forced to be ambivalent about and deny some of the most significant aspects of their lives. They had, in fact, shuttled between what Brodzki and Schenck suggest is an “objective representation of a Significant Other . . . and prescriptions for ideal femininity” (1988: 9). Women inhabit the space between these two poles, they posit, refusing inscription into either by employing deft evasions and purposive self-contradictions because a fixed/named identity is too dangerous. They make displacement work for them—a “double displacement” (1988: 9)—what Sedonie Smith calls a double helix of the imagination, a double dialogue between “two, three, or four stories. The female narrator gets caught in a duplicitous process: she exists in the text under circumstances of alienated communication because the text is the locus of her dialogue with a tradition she tacitly aims at subverting” (1987: 51).

Talking about these issues in the group context, and in direct relation to the life stories they had given to me, allowed many of the women to come to a new realization of the anger they felt about this yoke which they agreed came from outside sources but the wearing of which they had participated. They revealed, in the process, that they had, in fact, been speaking from this space between poles, refusing inscription into either. Marsha Johnson, a Methodist minister married to a clergyman, and mother of two children, brought the margins back to the center:

If, in my life story, I gave you the impression that that part wasn’t at the heart of my life and that the professional side was everything, I misinformed you. I think I was responding like, what does it mean to be a professional minister. If you’ve got to leave out anything, for me, don’t leave out my children. Leave out my professional church work. But I just get so angry . . . because, I told you, this first district supervisor I ever met in Iowa said to me, “don’t try to become ordained, as a woman—you’re a woman! Why should you be ordained? That’s like bashing your head against a wall.” Then, the clincher was, he said, “Have you even seen a pregnant bishop?” He just sat there and just laughed and laughed . . . and I’m sitting there, thinking, why is this man laughing? It just made me furious. So, I’m still acting out my fury, I guess. I don’t like people telling me what I can’t have.
The juxtaposition here of this woman’s intense feelings about the importance of her family and the anger she feels about the district supervisor’s comments about women in ministry mark the nexus of relation and ministry for many of the women in this group. It also marks the derailment of what the women perceive to be their right to talk openly about the importance of their relationships and their lives—they feel “un-representable.” Like Amy, Marsha feels cheated because she has not been allowed to speak about her family; clearly, she does not allow herself the luxury of revealing all the parts of her life. To do so would only feed the ugly misogyny of the supervisors in her denomination. But her denial of family is obviously not without cost. Ultimately, I heard the women articulate their own emerging theory about women’s stories. Carter began:

Our worry about what we’ve done here is that they [our stories] don’t sound like men’s stories, but that we are applying men’s criteria, I guess, to how to tell our stories. So, then, if I turn it around and say, well, okay, I want to tell a woman’s story, then I don’t know what that is.

Anne-Marie picked up on Carter’s train of thought:

If I think more the way men do, and then I try to make myself say, oh my goodness, I ought to be a woman, okay, but then the other part of that is that because these are the accepted categories, that’s how we’re supposed to do it. Then I must say, I don’t know what a woman’s story sounds like, and that does not have a great deal of validity. I’m sitting here saying I can’t believe I told my story that way. On the other hand, I’m glad I was asked to.

And Carter continued:

I look at what I said, that’s written down on paper, and at the categories that have been taught us by primarily male people—male methods of looking at the world and I mean I’m embarrassed because I look so stupid. Because we have said that if you’re intelligent, you think this way. And then if we turn around and then we’re saying also that our stories aren’t as important as male-constructed stories would be, because they’re not coherent and they’re not this and they’re not that, then we can’t even tell them.

What does this dialogue tell us about the life histories as collected from these female ministers? It tells us a great deal. Mostly, it tells us how, as Miller suggests, to “over-read” them—both in terms of what is there and what is missing: “How do we look for the unsaid things’? [over-reading] is a double reading—an intratextual practice of interpretation.
and a ‘gendered overreading’ which does not privilege either the autobiography or the fiction” (1988: 58). Such a reading suggests that the life histories are suspect in terms of what we can actually learn about certain aspects of women’s lives from them. It warns about taking theoretical postulates and trying to apply them to raw data. The dialogue helps us to answer the question of why Gilligan’s “relational” aspects were missing, and leads us to understand that as women change their roles in society, they are learning how to change their public presentation to fit a prescribed and largely male image—yet realizing the futility of that effort early on but having no alternative as a substitute. Women have learned how necessary it is to cloak their relations, their inclinations, their values, their sexuality, themselves. Reading these stories, as Miller suggests, is “rather like shaking hands with one’s gloves on”; their stories become “deliberate fictions of self representation, rearranged fragments of emotional life” (1988: 57). The pain and anger in these group exchanges revealed a level of negotiation not even hinted at in the life stories given to me.

Originally, I was stymied by the stories, by the ways in which they did not, in fact, follow the expected patterns and content I’d been led to believe would characterize the way women live their lives and tell stories about them—at least in terms of the relational aspects of them. On the other hand, I was uncomfortable calling the disjointed quality of many of the stories “chaotic” and “nonlinear.” I was much happier with our collective assessment of the stories as experiential and emergent. In many ways, the life stories are not at all “accurate”; instead, they represent a working out of a woman’s identity. But as Kathleen pointed out, “what’s there is what I’ve been able to resolve.” Which leaves me dissatisfied, then, because the looming question is, of course, what have they not resolved? That seems to be the key to understanding where a woman in ministry finds herself today. What she has resolved and presents is significant on the one hand, but the cauldron which contains all the anger, fear, guilt, hurt, ambivalence, denial, joy, growth, and setbacks is a vital arena for our continued and emergent exploration. These autobiographies belong to what Miller calls “a defense and illustration, at once a treatise on overcoming received notions of femininity and a poetics calling for another, freer text.” She quotes Elaine Showalter who in A Literature of Their Own claims women’s stories as feminist in that they represent a “protest against the standards of art and its views of social roles and as advocacy of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy” (1988: 50).

During the time we were dialoguing about life stories and whether or not these life stories the women had given to me were legitimate texts which represented their lived lives, I heard Norman Denzin deliver a talk
about postmodern approaches to sociology (see Denzin 1989). Denzin seemed to be saying that the postmodern obsession with representation and simulation had so invaded our existence that there were no longer pure lived experiences, only texts. This, of course, bothered many in the audience who clung to the notion that they had indeed had some “real” experiences, alone or with their most intimate friends, and were offended to think that Denzin questioned those as pure lived experiences. Denzin’s is the postultimate radical postmodern point of view, suggesting that even our conversations are fed by the representations of what conversations in our society ought to sound like and be, that even the way our kitchens are set up or the way we cook our meals, talking all the while, is but a mirror image of television, movies, and advertising.

Like others in the audience that day, Denzin’s thinking makes me uncomfortable. It seems to me a more reasonable approach, based squarely in an understanding of how the media world affects our lives, our very being, would first be to acknowledge that there is pure experience—we walk across the street, we have a conversation, we feel the rain. As long as that experience remains a phenomenological essence—a lived experience—it is not a text, but the moment that act, whatever it is, is framed in some way, it becomes a text. The moment we reflect on the event, re-imagine a conversation, analyze how we crossed the street correctly or incorrectly, re-wind the tape, so to speak (the essence of a postmodern metaphor!), and look at the event—then it is text. Now, Denzin and others may argue that our media-blitzed world is so reflexive, so representational, so oriented to intertextuality that the original text can never be retrieved for all the layers of super- and sub-text; that is their privilege. It is more useful for me, however, to conceive of text as the framed event, framed in order to perceive it, comprehend it, analyze it, reflect on it. Certainly, Denzin would argue (probably correctly) that we are so tuned to what we are doing that we barely act before we are analyzing our actions, reflecting on what we just did or said; we rewind the tape and review our actions as quickly as we move toward the next act, the next event. And it is this approach to experience and text which best informs how I have come to “over-read” the women’s life stories in this study.

What does this have to do with ethnography? Ethnography is the framing of cultural events. It is first, of course, a description of people’s lives within a certain context. But once the events have been described, it is the ethnographer’s task—here, along with the subjects themselves—to then interpret, to analyze, to reflect, to conjecture about what makes that framed event meaningful, to the persons involved in the event, and finally to the ethnographer and her audience. And what events are profitable for study? Folkloristics guides us to an understanding of the
importance of events already framed by the participants as set-aside time, framed for a purpose other than everyday, ordinary life: festival, storytelling, ritual, dance, artful representations in material form, song. Even in a media-blitzed, overtexualized world, the oral and the traditional prevail. Denzin’s work with the stories of alcoholics, his fascination with film, suggest that these forms are really no different than those recognized by the folklorist as the oral and traditional forms which persist in the face of literacy—the film becomes the myth and the folk tale; the drunk’s story, told and re-told, formularized, adapted, and accepted is identical to other conversion stories held as appropriate by folk groups in many contexts, sacred and secular; commercials and advertising share the fanciful, other-worldly qualities of the fairytale, the Märchen. We come to believe in the efficacy of the perceived genre, i.e. the notion of a life history as an entity—a legitimate text.

With Clifford and Marcus we ask the question—How do we write culture? On what events and acts do we focus? Which framed texts will enrich our understanding? And how do we frame what is so elusive as lived experience? Of course, it is still beneficial to turn to the people we study to see, to ask how they frame their experiences. This emic point of view must be the first step in understanding how they have conceptualized what they do. Beyond that, however, our etic configurations are difficult and always bear the responsibility of accuracy; that is, how true to the lived experiences are the frames which we, scholars and outsiders, place on them?

In my current research with contemporary female ministers in a postmodern context, it is more difficult to maintain the clarity of genres, the definitive approach, for the oral genres are not prevalent, the life story not developed. So simple a fieldwork question as “tell me your life story,” suddenly becomes problematic. Often, to direct their reply, to urge them in their telling, I would offer, “tell me your life story—that is, tell me how you came to be a woman in ministry.” Innocent questions on the surface, straightforward, not leading, geared to produce a text of a life—the life, in particular, of a woman who is a minister. But through the course of our dialogue sessions, it became increasingly clear to me just how loaded those simple first questions of mine actually were for women who are professional women, trying to balance these separate yet integrated public and private lives. In fact, one woman became quite angry because she felt she had revealed far too much. She claimed the other women had understood the “rules” but she had not. Her concerns had arisen when she read the life histories of all the women in the group and realized that she had been much more candid in the telling of her story than most of the other women. We talked at length about the difference between the request for a “life story,” and the request “tell me how you came to be a woman minister.” When I listen to the tape recordings of the
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life stories, I generally said both—but different women heard different requests and interpreted the requests in different ways. Most heard “tell me your life story in terms of how you came to be a woman minister” which colored the way they told their “life story” to me—which, of course, is defensible in some ways because I had come to collect their life stories because they are female ministers. Not framing my question in this manner seemed inappropriate because I did in fact want them to include that information within the context of their larger life story. The one woman who felt she had told far more than anyone else argued that she had only heard me say “tell me your life story”—and she did—revealing much more than the other women had.

Looking back, I probably sought both stories in my initial thinking about the fieldwork and the life stories I wanted to tape record. I wanted the women’s life stories—the whole story (which is a misperception, I think, of this genre)—where they were born, where and how they grew up, their family life, their schooling, the significant influences on their lives, etc. I also very much sought to get their life story in terms of how they had come to be ministers; I hoped I would be able to discern parallel patterns in important professional decisions, the call to preach, the execution of the will to preach, and the integration of ministry and other life choices. What is apparent now, and certainly was not at the outset, is that we perceive our “life stories” (and here we need to begin to focus on discreet stories within the larger story) in different ways, from different angles, with different emphases depending upon the context of the telling. For these women, the critical part of this telling was determined by what they heard me say: those who heard “tell me your life story” delivered one text; those who heard “tell me how you came to be a woman minister” delivered a different text. The separation of these texts reveals the segmentation of experience they live with every day. Because they cannot integrate these aspects of their lives, they cannot relate a text which integrates them. It was only as we explored these various aspects of their lives and their stories that the women and I were able to synthesize the various strains of their stories and their lives. This mutual exchange of information, of creativity, this moving back and forth that I am calling reciprocal ethnography, is clearly a cousin to symbolic interactionism, to Denzin’s interpretive interactionism, but hopefully it will take us even further.

I determined to follow the natural extension of this exploration. Does a life story accurately portray a lived experience? The women first agreed that their stories did not represent a “life story” which had been told and retold, honed over time, reflected upon, presented/performed, for a critical audience. They did, however, agree that they told portions of their story to different audiences. In fact, further work with different segments of the life stories, in terms of looking at particular stories (e.g.,
“called into the ministry” stories), demonstrates much more congruity in both style and content than the larger, unwieldy “life stories” which have been discussed here. I think it can be argued that certain kinds of stories do exist within an oral tradition of exchange among women in mainline denominations. Anne-Marie perceived that one problem was telling the life story for the researcher—who may pose a difficulty for the performer. There cannot be a life story in a vacuum, a life story requires an audience:

I think that most of the telling of a life story is one of those textual, aesthetic things, that you tell with an audience in mind. We have stories we tell to different audiences. I have one I tell my family, one I tell to my personnel committee, the staff parish committee. Our problem with this one was, we didn’t know who our audience was. And that’s why the story is so chaotic, so sort of “unformed.” All of our aesthetic principles couldn’t be brought to bear on this and we didn’t know who the audience was.

Carter agreed with this and continued:

We just had one question—which is, tell your life story. . . . I think what I was doing anyway, and maybe the rest of us, too, I was telling a story to you and interpreting it at the same time, which is partly why the diversions are there. I was thinking about experience—I think we do have experiences and then we begin immediately to interpret them. . . . What I was doing was hearing myself tell a story and then interpreting it at the same time and saying, “well, this is important because of this and this and this.” But I still have a very hard time reading it. See, I had to do a piece of this [life story], anyone who has gone through a seminary process had to do a piece of this, over and over again. But the main thing was, there were two questions. In my case, “How did you arrive at the assumption you have a call for the ordained ministry?” And “What can you do as a priest that you cannot do as a lay person.”

Some of the women wanted to go back to the previous notion of men’s constructs and women’s constructs as different. Kathleen wanted to present the notion that the life stories they gave me were closer to “truth” than goal-oriented, linear constructs might be:

The stories we gave you were not constructs. They’re sort of selections from reality that focus around some point real clearly. We’re giving you the chaotic nature of reality. That’s what you’re getting. And I think that’s a plus. It may make your work more difficult, but . . . .

Anne-Marie felt it was important not to focus too much on the notion of the life story as “the” truth. She preferred to think in terms of “multiple” truths:
I would still want to talk about truths. Because I told it, this is true. This is all true. But there’s a lot of other stories I could tell that would also be true, which would also trace all the way through my life. I could take people, for instance, and just talk about people and how relationships have lead me through my life. . . . I think that’s one of the things that bothers me more than the grammar and the fragmentation, is that reading back through mine, I’d say these things and there was all this under them. It’s like an iceberg and I’m only giving you the tip here and I could have, and I wish that I had, on important issues, said—and then this means this and this is important because of this—I wish I had said more what they mean.

Conclusion

When a woman dares to put on the robes of the ministry and take on the role and the authority invested in those robes, she is consciously calling into question all the standard stereotypes of both females and males. When her story is so clearly a re-definition of, a questioning of, a re-constructing of female rights and roles, then her story cannot any longer be unselfconscious. Because these women are not men, the male constructs of “life story” do not work. Yet, because they have been raised and trained in a culture which privileges male constructs, they are aware that they have internalized them and have accepted male notions of what is a good, intelligent, respectable story. When asked to relate their own life stories, they tried to maintain the perimeters of this notion of “good story” as they told theirs, but because they are not men, they often diverged from the “appropriate script” and, in the end, found the result frustrating and unacceptable.

The women in this study recognized that their rejection of their stories went beyond their failure to adhere to the male construct of a “good story.” They rejected their stories because they recognized them as only skeletal representations of their actual lives. They regretted that they deleted important figures in their lives from them; they were frustrated that they did not communicate what they believed to be the meaning of what they did relate; they were dismayed by the “professional image” that prevailed, one which, in the end, they felt did not capture them as the women they actually were. Most importantly, our group discussions revealed what Carter articulated so well: “we don’t know what a woman’s story sounds like because we’ve never heard them.” And, because we’ve never been asked to tell our stories, and because we don’t know what they sound like, women can become paralyzed; as Carter says, “we can’t even tell them.”

In our dialogue sessions, the female ministers have called into question the application of male constructs (or female constructs for that matter) to their own stories. They have pointed to the difficulties inherent in telling a “woman’s story,” when the expectations for them, as
women in ministry, are different. They explored the critical need for models and scripts which would provide a construct for their stories, one that would allow for validation and respect from others but would remain true to the “truth” of the wholeness and the complexity of their lives as they see and experience them. And, perhaps most importantly, they have articulated a theory about women’s life histories which suggests that, for women, textual constructs alone are ultimately too confining—that texts without interpretation are invalid, that a linear progression without digression and reflection fails to tell their stories. They rejected the stories which they had given to me as their life stories because they perceive their lives, and their narratives about those lives, as a multi-layered text with interpretation. When their stories fail to balance both, they feel estranged from them.

The stories of these women in ministry are, indeed, raw. They are what emerged in unrehearsed sessions when I asked them: “tell me your life story—tell me how you came to be a minister.” Feminist ethnography, here designed as reciprocal, multi-layered, and polyvocal, mirrors the text and sub-text of the women’s stories, which are equally multi-layered and polyvocal. The spoken voices of the women interplay with other aspects of their own sub-[unspoken and/or muted] voices, with internalized male constructs of text and story, and with the stereotyped and misogynist demands of their cultural context, revealing in the end a rich harmony of experience and interpretation, of personal depth and political savvy—but a story which cannot and should not be understood on one level alone. The women in this study could have given me a standard, linear construction of their lives, or related the unselfconscious “woman’s” story which would have reflected the relational aspects of their lives; instead, they gave me something else—stories which confounded and confused, stories which attempted to do both, by inclusion or by exclusion, by inversion and diversion. They related stories which incorporated self-interpretation and which demanded further collaborative interpretation—stories we came to understand together through discussion and dialogue.

In my work with female ministers, I have adopted what I am calling reciprocal ethnography. As I attempt to paint a descriptive portrait of women who are ministers, I have come to rely on a methodology which provides a way for the women to be involved in the collaborative process of gaining and sharing knowledge. At the beginning of this article I posed the question about what reciprocal ethnography would provide for the scholar that she could not ascertain on her own; hopefully, this article has demonstrated the value of the methodology in expanding our understanding of how women construct a life story and why. In turn, the methodology provides a new frame for searching for meaning and col-
laborative interpretation; it also provides access to new theoretical perspectives about how social constructs of both lives and texts influence creativity and impulse, device and rhetoric. The meta-narrational information provided through the dialogue sessions creates a lens through which to read and understand the stories the women actually told. There is not, at the present time, a perceived tradition of what a good professional woman’s life story sounds like—at least as evidenced by these contemporary female ministers. They continue to seek the story script which will fully and accurately allow for all the different aspects of their lives. The integration and connection they seek in their lives has been represented here in their discussions about their stories. Reciprocal ethnography seeks this level of exploration and emergent knowledge-sharing and deems it well worth the time and effort.9

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NOTES

1. The other participants of that panel were David Hufford, Diane Goldstein, William Wilson, and Leonard Primiano. All four continue to influence, support, and humanize my work with religion and belief, and I thank them for their continued critiques and friendship. We have submitted the papers given at that meeting to the Journal of American Folklore as a special issue with a response by Jeff Todd Titon.

2. I am using “life story” as many scholars would use “life history” because I recognize this genre as both history in story. When I spoke to the women in this study about collecting the story of their lives, I used the term “life story” rather than “life history”; therefore, “life story” is the working term for this article. I do see the texts that they gave me as “stories,” although I recognize that others will think of them as “histories,” with stories embedded within. Recently, as I have begun to focus more sharply on single aspects of the larger story, I have had to speak about “life stories,” as smaller, segmented stories within the total “life story,” in the way that Sandra Stahl (1985) would. I will use “life story” as the larger texts that were collected in single settings and that the women and I recognized together as their “life stories.”

3. In order to protect the lives and positions of the ministers included in this study, the location will be referred to only as “the upper Mississippi valley.” All names of persons, places, and churches have been changed at the ministers’ request. In most cases references to actual denominations and seminaries have been retained as they may have bearing on the women’s denominational experiences.

4. The longer I worked with this group of ministers, the more they have acknowledged the importance of my presence in their group and the effect that the “discussion sessions” have had on their group. They tell me that my work has
drawn them closer together, and has forced them to address issues on a much deeper level. They were genuinely dismayed when the group sessions had to end so that I could go back to teaching and begin to write my book. They opted to continue the sessions and discuss areas of interest they shared, as well as to embark on some group work on spiritual journeys. On infrequent occasions, I have taken or mailed my final drafts to them for their continued input.

5. This year, when I gave a version of this paper at the American Folklore Society, people seemed most eager to discuss it. I was amazed, however, that even though I made it clear in the oral presentation that I was using the term “reciprocal ethnography,” listeners continued to refer to it as “reciprocity,” which implies a connotation I specifically intended to avoid.

6. I have taken this notion of “scripting” women’s lives from Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985). I explored how Pentecostal women develop and tell oral narratives about their call to preach and about their lives in ministry in order to provide appropriate scripts both for themselves and for young women who may wish to follow in the ministry in Lawless (1988) and expanded that argument in Lawless (1991).

7. A “diaconal” minister in the Methodist church is a consecrated minister who can preach and teach, but cannot serve the sacraments or perform marriages. Anne-Marie serves as Education Director of a large Methodist church and preaches on a regular basis. While others question her choice because it seems less than an official, ordained minister, Anne-Marie justifies her choice by pointing out that as a diaconal minister she is a free agent in the employment world of the church. Ordained ministers are moved by the church on a regular basis; she interviews for jobs and keeps them as long as she pleases.

8. I have often included comments about laughter because humor, joking, and loud, uninhibited laughter is an integral part of the women’s interaction at lunch and in our group sessions. Because the topic and the discussions are quite serious and often emotional, and certainly because all are ordained ministers, I was not quite prepared for the levity of the group and the witty repartee that they have developed with each other. While the humor always serves to ease tensions and unite the group, it seems clear that the humor also helps this ecumenical group remain in a communicative mode, even when the discussions concern important differences.

9. The sociologist Howard Becker was present at Denzin’s talk. Both Becker and Denzin responded with guarded enthusiasm to my description of my response to reflexive anthropology and thoughts about “reciprocal ethnography,” but Becker summed up their attitude, I think, commenting that it sounded great but would take too much time.

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