

A FIELD OF WOMEN:  
EXPLORING MEANINGS AT THE MICHIGAN WOMYN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL

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## ABSTRACT

### A FIELD OF WOMEN: EXPLORING MEANINGS AT THE MICHIGAN WOMYN'S MUSIC FESTIVAL

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This ethnographic study investigates identity politics and expression at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF). The festival is a woman-only event, held annually in Michigan, which celebrates women's culture through music, comedy, crafts, and workshops on women's health, spirituality, and politics. I propose that women at MWMF are engaging in a reclamation of 'woman as nature' motifs which challenge Enlightenment polemics and binary constructions. I claim that it is significant that this reclamation occurs in women-only space. Festivals are liminal spaces which engender interactions that stretch boundaries and challenge normative constructions; women-only festivals incorporate a shared marginalised position into that liminal moment. These characteristics of liminality and marginality produce an environment which empowers women to challenge normative constructions through experimentation and performances of identities. This project is informed by feminist scholarship and approaches to research and analysis, as well as by anthropological and folkloristic analyses of semiotics and expressive forms.

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## Introduction

This ethnographic study investigates identity politics and expression at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF). I propose that women at the MWMF are engaging in a reclamation of 'woman as nature' motifs which challenge Enlightenment polemics and binary constructions. I further claim that it is significant that this reclamation occurs in woman-only space. Festivals are liminal spaces which engender interactions that stretch boundaries and challenge normative constructions; Women-only festivals like MWMF incorporate a shared marginalised position into that liminal moment. These characteristics of liminality and marginality produce an environment which empowers women to challenge normative social constructions of who women are through experimentation and performances of both conventional and unconventional identities as woman.

This project is informed by feminist scholarship in the area of identity construction and feminist approaches to research and analysis. I identify feminism as a location which privileges women's experiences and seeks to further women's access to equality in society. I chose MWMF as a site for research because it offers possibilities for this emancipatory feminist agenda. The festival is a woman-only event, held annually in Manistee National Forest in Michigan, USA, which celebrates women's culture through music, comedy, crafts, and workshops on women's health, spirituality, and politics.

The research follows an exploratory model, identified by Neuman as research which rarely yields definitive answers and seeks to explore a social

situation through qualitative data gathering (1997: 19). The inclusion of primary data in the appendices reflects the exploratory model of this research, providing information from which other scholars can continue to refine research in this area. The research also emerges as a descriptive approach, providing a picture of MWMF and some of the issues which arise there. In this thesis I engage an explanatory mode when I move to interpretation of the expressive communications at MWMF and their possibility for translation into a larger social context. I identify expressive communications as those modes of performance and interaction which reveal, both within and between groups, information about individual identities and collective norms and values. These communications provide insight into group dynamics and into interaction between collective and individual goals and desires. They can be both prescriptive and proscriptive models for behaviour and belonging. For example, the parade discussed in Chapter Four, "Fields of Meaning", provides a prescriptive message about who belongs and the power of women through representations of goddesses and in-group participation. It also provides a proscriptive message about who doesn't belong through the lack of involvement by certain groups (i.e. S/m practitioners).

The first chapter, "Locating the Field", describes the research site and my personal experience with MWMF. I provide some insight into the location of the field and the variety of experiences available to participants at the festival. I describe some of the conflicts and issues which have arisen over the years. The chapter also contains some reflections on my personal history with MWMF. These reflections arise from and inform the research project design and methods

chapter.

In Chapter Two, "Working the Field", I describe the ways in which the research team I was a member of explored identity politics and expression at MWMF. Our research is important because it examines and engages with MWMF as an on-going project in the prefiguring of society towards a woman-positive ethos which attempts to include diversity. In the exploration of dynamics within the community of MWMF lies the power to bring an understanding of these dynamics, with their conflicts and successes, to a wider application within the women's movement and society in general.

Chapter two then moves to a discussion of the ethnographic methods we employed and the general outcomes of those methods. The methods employed provide a framework for the discussion of preliminary findings and the experience of doing research. I include some consideration of our ethnographic failures. What didn't work is valuable because it allowed a more reflexive process in the field. For example, the discussion of problems at a workshop in the Womyn of Color Tent highlights the negotiation of ethics in the field and the negotiation of prior anthropological research's impacts upon its subjects. The discussion of ethics in this chapter explores the gap between the ideal and the real in terms of practice. I close with a discussion of ethics and location of the self in research.

Chapter Three, "Framing the Field", provides an overview of the scholarship which has informed this research project. The literature on ritual and celebration opens the chapter and provides background on how events like the

MWMF can be understood. Victor Turner's (1969) notions of *communitas* and *societas* provided a lens through which to view interactions between the festival and mainstream, as well as intra-group interactions at the festival. Arnold Van Gennep's (1909) concept of phases and the liminality of festival facilitated our examination of the festival structure and process. I draw on material which explores women's festivals in particular and link it to the broader body of work by exploring how women's festivals incorporate characteristics of liminality and process. For example, Bonnie Morris' (1999) work on the history and culture of women's festivals in North America provides an opportunity for comparison with other sites as well as details on the history of MWMF. In a discussion of identity construction and identity politics informed by feminist scholarship on the subject, I bring the process of identity building into the festival framework. A description of semiotics and interpretative frameworks in relation to their application to festival venues provides techniques for interpretations of expressive communications. This literature frames the discussion of expressive communications in Chapter Four, "Fields of Meaning".

"Fields of Meaning", Chapter Four, explores expressive communications that contribute to and (re)present the festival community, culture and identities, specifically during the research of 1997 and 1998. I mobilise semiotics and festival literatures to unpack communicative interactions through sign and symbol. My discussion focuses on the annual festival quilting bee, Puppet Parade, and permanent decorative signs. I propose that women at the MWMF are engaging in a reclamation of 'woman as nature' motifs which challenge

Enlightenment polemics and binary constructions.

I argue that, despite the historical roots of identifying woman and nature as a connection which devalues women, there is power in reclaiming such imagery at MWMF. The paradoxical character of woman and nature in the Enlightenment suggests that the meanings mobilised are not inflexible and static. Recognising nature as a political and ideological construction allows for re-inventing its meanings and (re)presentations. The challenge to Enlightenment thinking in the 'woman as nature' motif at MWMF lies in the intent of the images, framed in a field of meaning in which binary thinking is contested and the 'unnatural' becomes 'natural'. The balance between using images of nature and resisting the historical oppression concomitant with such images and constructions is central to the developing identity performance in women's communities like MWMF. Nature as an image of empowerment for women is a stand against the ideology of hetero-patriarchal-colonialist social organisation. The Enlightenment model is embedded in contemporary Western society and resistance to this hegemony can be enacted through mobilising images from within the hegemonic discourse to create counter-hegemonic frameworks. The goal is not to move from one hegemony to another, but rather to negotiate the tension between the two and, in doing so, stretch the boundaries and fields of meanings.

In Chapter Five, "Fields of Possibility", I share my exploration of self as a subject in the field using Foucault's concepts of power, discourse and the subject to discuss identity construction in the context of locating myself as a

researcher and a subject. This chapter brings the discussion from Chapter 4 to a more personal reflection on identity construction and representation of the self.

Feminist analysis is implicit in the work, using the awareness of power dynamics, standpoint theory, and the need for communities which create change and nurture self discovery. My identity as a feminist must be recognised in any discussion I undertake regarding my subjecthood in the field. A recognition of power relations, marginality, the social constructedness of meanings, and partial knowledges inform my reflections on the field experience. I discuss some feminist responses to Foucault and conclude that the inter-relation of subject, identity and power in constructing (re)presentation supports the feminist project to critique assumptions of knowledge and power. It is in his return to the subject as a viable construct when conceived of as de-centred and poly-locatable in changing temporal moments that the post-structuralism /modernism of Foucault resists the nihilism which critics attack as central to questioning the subject. I found Foucault's revisitation of the subject to be most useful in understanding my own location at MWMF.

The thesis concludes by bringing together the threads of research practice, meaning, and identity in the context of MWMF. The process of fieldwork and my prior connection as a participant at MWMF affirm my claim that women-only spaces are important to the project of furthering women's access and equality in society. The experience at MWMF allows for an ingathering of skills and diverse identities which further the project of inclusion for all women in the women's movement by offering an opportunity to exchange ideas and test

strategies in a woman positive space. The project of reclaiming meanings within the 'woman as nature' motif is an example of testing strategies which challenge normative mainstream constructions of women. The liminal character of festival allows for exploration of identities which expand women's possibilities for roles and subjecthoods in the larger society. I present suggestions for future work on women's festivals and MWMF in particular and show how 'woman as nature' motifs could be deployed in a larger social context.

This thesis invites you into a field of women that challenges homogeneity and celebrates diversity. There is "a female Brigadoon which rises in the woods of Michigan...."<sup>1</sup>, come explore....

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<sup>1</sup> From the cover of the 1998 festival program.

## Chapter One: Locating the Field

The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF) is an annual gathering which brings together a diverse community of mainly North American women to celebrate the music, dance and theatre of 'women's culture'. The festival is open only to "womyn born womyn" (Festival Program, 1994: 3). It is held annually in August on one square mile of women owned land in Manistee National Forest, Michigan. For the week of the festival, the site becomes the third largest city in the county (Michigan Womyn's Music Festival Program, 1997). Feminist scholar Rebecca Kaplan (1996) describes the festival as a place where women come together to celebrate lesbian culture, music, and art, as well as a place where lesbian and feminist politics are discussed, debated, and evaluated. MWMF is a unique community in that it is entirely constructed by women, for women. The women's festivals of North America are, in general, open to *all* women but remain "produced, organised and attended by a lesbian majority and serve as ingatherings for lesbian activists and musicians from across North America" (Morris, 1999: 14). Bonnie Morris, an historian in Women's Studies, recognises the singularity of the Michigan Women's Music Festival (MWMF): "All festivals are life-changing, but Michigan is unique due to its [size] (nearly 10,000 women its most crowded year) and its aura of mystery (privately owned land, womyn born womyn only)" (59). As well as musical performances, the festival features workshops on a multitude of topics ranging from politics to spirituality, including issues of race, health, healing, and life passages.

Festivals such as MWMF - including the National Women's Music Festival (started in 1974), the Boston Women's Music Festival (founded in 1975), and the West Coast Women's Music and Comedy Festival (begun in 1979), to name but three of many - emerged out of a women's movement which worked to push forward the rights and opportunities for women to fully participate in society. The second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 70s did much to improve women's access to participation in society. However, as some women began to make gains, feminism was criticised as promoting a perspective which was white, straight, and middle class (see Rich, 1980; hooks, 1984; Bannerji, 1995; Smith, 1977; Miles, 1982). Current trends in social activism reflect a need to consider the diversity of the women's community, representing standpoints of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and identity in general. The rise of women-only events and women-owned land reflect women's emerging political and personal identities; the MWMF is one such example. This event becomes a metaphorical house of many rooms, as women carve out spaces which reflect their diverse identities at the festival.

The Michigan Women's Music Festival began in 1976 as a three-day event. Today it runs from Tuesday afternoon to Sunday night, and the 'e' in women has become a 'y'. There have been many less superficial changes. The attendance has increased from hundreds to thousands and the volunteer workforce from 20 to 700. The festival has always been a women-only event, meaning that no men are allowed to participate. Originally the age for male children was left to the discretion of the parent. Now that the festival is more

organised for childcare and has more womanpower for volunteers, the age for male children is 3 and under on the festival site. Brother Sun Boy's Camp provides care and activities for boys age 4 - 10.

The first festival's statement of intent read:

We want to help create a physical/psychological space for three days where women can retreat to the country to experience women's energy, especially women's music. We envision this gathering to be a cultural and spiritual expression of our energies, with music being a primary collective sharing. Our focus has been on making possible an atmosphere that is totally inclusive of all women (Festival Program, 1995: 34).

The focus has not changed over the years, the festival continues to strive toward the creation of an inclusive community. Its definition of inclusive has shifted as the festival adjusts to new issues that arise, in particular the clarifying of women-only to women-born-women in response to the transgender issue, which I will discuss later in this chapter. A Womyn of Color tent has been incorporated, as well as support tents for addictions, medical aid, emotional support and an area for women with disabilities. The constituency of MWMF is diverse, bringing together women from all over North America and many parts of the globe. The diversity of its constituents challenges the construct of the homogeneity of values within the Women's Movement and 'women's culture'.

The "'City of Womyn' [still] rises once a year in a place known simply as *The Land*" (Festival Program, 1995: 3). The 1995 program states:

This is the week each year we create something very special, our own world...a place where womyn's principles and values, our often unheard thoughts and voices, shape the world of Michigan. Not perfect, never the same from year to year, and nothing like it anywhere on the planet (1995: 3).

MWMF maintains a transportation system on the site in the form of shuttles which ferry participants from the gates where they park their cars into the festival site proper. This system includes DART (Differently Abled Resource Team) vehicles for women with disabilities. There is an infrastructure of roadways, some partially paved, and footpaths. The footpaths are maintained with indoor/outdoor carpet in areas that are likely to become impassable by wheelchairs in inclement weather. There is a distinct political will to make the site accessible to all women. The festival operates its own security and communication system to patrol the borders of the festival and maintain safety for participants in the event of emergencies. The festival also maintains its own sanitation system of garbage pickup, composting, burning, and recycling. The water system was built by the collective and is maintained through filtration and underground pipe systems. There are also warm water outdoor showers. Medical treatment is organised at a central location (The Womb) and blends allopathic and alternative choices for health - including doctors, nurse practitioners, herbalists, massage therapists, reflexology, and chiropractics. There is also an emotional support tent (The Oasis) which provides short term crisis counselling and support for women with situational and chronic mental health problems. This site also acts as a networking space for support groups. Addiction support is provided at the Sober Support tent. The Community Center offers translation services in the form of ASL interpreters and spoken language interpreters. Childcare is organised in three locations, Gaia Girls Camp for girls over 5, Toddlers for girls under 5 and boys under 3, and Brother Sun Boys Camp

for boys 4-10. All cooking and food preparation is undertaken in the kitchen area, where meals, which are included in the attendance price, are prepared on open fire pit ovens for the thousands of workers and festival attendees. Clearly, the festival creates its own social structures to meet the needs of constituents.

### Being There

My personal relationship with the Michigan community began in 1993 when I attended the festival as a participant for the first time. I was overwhelmed by the diversity of women, in appearance, politics and lifestyles. I found my time there brought a sense of renewal for the community work I undertook at home. It allowed me to connect with other women who had similar interests and to engage with women who challenged my perspectives. I did my workshifts at the Oasis support tent. We were quite busy that year with the response to Tribe 8's stage performance and the presence of 'Camp Trans' protesting the exclusion of transgender outside the main gates. My experience was profoundly satisfying and led me to the decision that I would try and attend every year.

I returned in 1995 as a participant. By this time I had completed my first year at university and found the festival a place which brought sociological and anthropological ideas to my mind. When I returned to school in the fall I asked if I could write a paper using primary research about the festival and the construction of woman as a category. I interviewed six Winnipeg women who had attended MWMF and discussed the transgender issue with them to try to understand how they defined a 'real' woman. The diversity of responses was

surprising. This research and the paper I produced from it led me to focus on MWMF as the research site for my honours thesis in Anthropology.

In 1996, 1997 and 1998 I went to MWMF as a researcher and a participant. My focus was to do an ethnographic study of the festival, looking at identity politics. After that first year 'in the field' I realised that the topic was huge, and beyond the scope of an honours thesis. I began reading literature about my specific areas of interest at the festival - festival literature, identity politics, queer theory, gay and lesbian literature, and symbolic anthropology. The second year's research was informed by that reading and became a more focused examination of the symbols of identity which emerge at the festival. The focus on symbols and identity remained for the last year of my work at MWMF.

In this way, my research has developed along inductive lines. The experience of the festival informed my research design and proposal. The length of my relationship with MWMF results in a wide variety of literature, as well as experience, contributing to my research there. At heart, the research is driven by the experiences and interactions I have had with the festival and the literature has been a tool for understanding the dynamics I have seen first hand.

The focus on identity politics at the festival led to my own reflections as a participant, and later as a researcher, on my particular location at the festival. Three areas of focus that emerged were the notion of discrete lesbian and women's cultures, the issue of safety at MWMF, and expressive communications like the annual quilt as representations of identity politics at the festival.

Efforts to locate myself as a researcher and participant in this event led to

my reflection on the difference between women's culture and lesbian culture. I found this difference to be an intangible concept which was difficult to discuss. On an experiential level there appears to be a difference. When one tries to point to particular artifacts or practices of culture, this difference becomes more difficult to locate. While MWMF is primarily lesbian-identified space, it also claims to promote a more general women's culture. In that context, even something as straightforward as a double-woman's sign (♀♀) becomes layered with meaning. For lesbian women, it symbolises lesbianism, yet on another level it symbolises women joined together in the sisterhood of resistance.

The vulva, breasts, and images of naked women in all shapes and sizes seem to reflect a reclaiming of the 'goodness' of women loving women in lesbian relationships at Michigan. These images take on a sexual meaning. The same images speak to reclaiming our bodies and ourselves for all women, and is the primary meaning of these images for heterosexual women. The concrete elements of the culture are not exclusive to either lesbian or women's cultures. It is in their translations to personal meaningfulness that boundaries become evident. Perhaps, too, lesbian culture is being co-opted and contained by and in women's culture. Lesbian activists have been primary movers in the development of women's shelters and women-centred services, yet this work is often not recognised and perceived by the movement and society as the accomplishments of a homogeneous women's movement. The silencing of lesbian identity during the 1980s may still be at work in the co-option of lesbian cultures and their assimilation into more general women's cultures at MWMF.

I spent a significant portion of my interviewing time with craftswomen from the Crafts Bazaar area. We explored the symbols and objects which reflected 'Festie Culture'. The concept of identity construction at the festival arose. Women regularly come in to buy items to wear which reflect how they feel about themselves while at Michigan. The importance of acquiring a 'piece' of Michigan to take home was a recurring theme among the craftswomen with whom I spoke in relation to women constructing identities at the festival.

The play between women's and lesbian culture and the dynamic of identity politics is evident in craftswomen's discussions of the meanings of the artifacts they create and sell. These items are generally accepted to be badges of 'dykehood'. Michigan souvenirs are a means of identifying sisters once we return to the outside world. The primary identification as a lesbian event presents an interesting turnabout on the mainstream experience where assumptions are of a straight identity. Being identified as a 'Michigan sister' implies a lesbian identity. The idea that women are creating a unique space and value system is an agreed upon norm; the process of that creation, and who is doing it, is not so universally understood.

Craftswomen seem to fall into one of two perspectives on the role they play in the culture that is Michigan. Some view themselves as reflecting the culture which women create. Their work embodies values, feelings and images which define Michigan for the women who attend. They see themselves as providing a concrete and tangible product of the intangible atmosphere of the festival. Their products arise out of the collective spirit of the event.

Other craftswomen see their role as more directive. They suggest that in the creation of their products they create, produce and direct the culture of Michigan. They see their images and symbols as personal epiphanies which translate into values of woman-centred ethics and actions. These products then find a home in the women's community at Michigan and shape the values and ethics of that community.

This dynamic of creation/representation seems to me to be similar to the way theory looks at language. Can we live what we cannot speak? Can we imagine what we have no words for? Can Michigan have a culture if there are no objects which represent that culture? The Crafts Bazaar is certainly an integral part of MWMF, both representing and creating the festival culture. The beauty of women's creations is praised and respected, a market for women-centred art is available for craftswomen who make their living from their products, and women are provided with a multitude of items in varying price ranges to enable them to purchase a 'piece' of Michigan. The movement towards more professional craftwork and presentations has had an impact on who has access to the area. This is true for both those who are sharing their products and those who would like to partake of them. For example, the first appearance of crafts at the festival was in the form of a barter market, rather than a cash-based interaction. The move to a money exchange system has obvious connotations for women of limited income. The jurying process is more rigorous than in previous years, tending to exclude less professional craftswomen. A Sunday afternoon barter market has been re-incorporated to

allow these artists to exchange their wares and provide a venue which is more accessible to women of limited income.

The second focus which arose from reflections on identity politics was the issue of safety. The notion of MWMF as 'safe space' is frequently raised in relation to lesbian/women's cultures and women's experiences of Michigan. In virtually every interview and discussion the concept of safety comes up, whether the participants are talking about the meanings of symbols or individual experience. Many women define their experience at Michigan as feeling 'safe'. The concept seems fairly straightforward and is explicitly emphasised as part of the festival's character. When one begins to unpack the idea, it becomes many-layered and multiply located. Like the meanings of symbols which represent lesbian/women's culture, the notion of safety depend on the location of the individual discussing the concept. The question of *whose* safety is rarely overtly addressed by participants. There is a strong resistance to questioning the reality of safety in the context of the festival environment. Yet even a casual survey of the women in attendance clearly shows widespread diversity of needs and interests. The concerns around the S/m population in attendance are a clear site where groups come into conflict over the definition of safe space; some women feel that the images of violence associated with S/m threaten their own personal perception of MWMF as a haven from such threats.

An example of resistance to discussing the particulars of safety developed at one of the group discussions of festival herstory at the series of workshops which we conducted as part of the research project. A woman remembered an

incident in which a rape occurred at the festival. Woman to woman violence was not a topic in which anyone else wished to engage and, after a few seconds of silence, a new topic was introduced. The issue of how the incident was dealt with did not elicit comment. Apparently, the perpetrator was asked to leave the Land and escorted off. No charges were laid and no report was filed with local authorities in Crystal County. This lack of response is not surprising, considering how recently the topic of domestic violence in lesbian relationships has emerged as something which can be discussed (see Ristock, 1998), and the lack of reporting around partner abuse in general. What made it surprising was that on most other aspects of the festival women were willing to engage in criticism, evaluation and lively argument.

The construction of Michigan as safe space is one in which women are heavily invested. The need for the construct outweighs the need to take the steps required to make it a reality. In part, this is probably due to the fact that the reality of complete safety is unattainable. Each woman brings her own ideas of what safety is for her, and addressing the diversity of those needs means unpacking the assumed homogeneity of lesbian and women's space. While the women's movement has begun to address issues of diversity, it has not yet successfully integrated those issues into ongoing discourse. Michigan participants reflect that lack of integration in their unwillingness to take on the issue of safety.

The existence of Oasis, an emotional support area, is a response to the need for emotional safety. As the festival has grown, and become in some

respects a more impersonal space, the need for peer support has emerged. The second function of Oasis is to provide a space where women with mental health issues can expect respect and support. This function emerged after a woman in difficulty was removed from the land and admitted to a local psychiatric facility. Several women at the time considered the action inappropriate, but no method had been established for dealing with such incidents. The Oasis came into being in response to that incident. The question became one of ethics and avoided looking at the issue of safety, which in fact was underlying the response of organisers.

Safety is a central concern in women's lives. Safety in our streets, our homes and our workplaces is an ongoing struggle which the women's movement engages. The idea of leaving that concern behind is very attractive. Overall, the level of safety women experience at Michigan is much higher than that which is experienced in our everyday lives. This level of safety is due to the size of the community and participants' expectations of safety which translate into a willingness to look out for one another. The lack of men does rule out certain kinds of violence which are part of women's lives in mainstream society, like heterosexual stranger-rape, domestic violence from male family members (who are not present at MWMF), and the lack of a male gaze imposing sexual expectations and images. However, there is a danger in presuming safety at Michigan and in disguising issues related to it as something else. There are still women who may steal, hurt, or judge, based on identities and power-dynamics.

A third focus which emerged out of reflections on identity politics was the

creation of an annual quilt to represent the MWMF. The quilting area at MWMF is a site which represents women collaborating to communicate ideas about the culture at the festival and the realities in their lives. Quilting is traditionally part of women's culture (see Pershing, 1993; Elsley, 1996). The quilting tent at MWMF recognises the history of that process while exploring the ways in which women have used the craft to communicate with one another and the world at large. Quilting has been a formal part of Festival culture since the early eighties, reflecting a shift in constituency and interests at the festival. Each year a quilt is designed as a fundraiser for the festival, to be raffled off on Saturday evening at the last Night Stage performance. All women attending the festival are encouraged to contribute to its creation, and the quilt is paraded through the community prior to being given to the raffle winner to take home.

I interviewed the co-ordinator of the tent for the 1997 Festival. It was her first year at MWMF. Her daughter approached her because the previous co-ordinator was not available and there were no women on the organising committee who had the necessary skills. I found it interesting that a first time festie-goer designed and facilitated the quilt. It suggests a certain universality of the images which both lesbian and straight women recognise as potent. The collaborative process of creating a representation of the festival does not require previous engagement with festival culture. As they work the fabric, women circle around the quilt singing, telling stories, sharing skills and techniques, and exploring their experience of the festival with one another. The use of quilting is a mode of communication and a process for building community at MWMF.

The images that appear in the quilts are often repeated in other expressive communications at the festival!. Signs for the different areas are quite intricately decorated. Many of the areas had wooden scrollwork signs as gateposts. Banners and flags for the areas were batiked, tie-dyed or fabric painted. The images were often of women and nature - trees becoming women, seeds in wombs, flames as hair. While the images are similar, each sign is unique in its mix of symbols and presentation. The moon often figures prominently, sometimes subtly, yet is virtually omnipresent. Comparing these images with the symbology of the quilts over the years, and the products from the Craft Bazaar, show similar themes which arise from both lesbian and more general women's cultures.

My history with women's festivals is limited to my experience at MWMF. Other writers have drawn comparisons between this festival and others like it in North America. For example, the National Women's Music Festival (NWMF) is described as an ""attempt to create feminist communities that are 'prefigurative' " (Brienes 1982: 4) in that, by embodying feminist ideals, they prefigure the type of social organisation that feminists would like to see throughout the society" (Eder, et.al., 1995: 486). This goal of the festival is the crux of a process which reflects the dialectic between MWMF and the larger society. Feminist scholars Eder, Staggenborg and Sudderth comment that, at NWMF, " the structure of the festival facilitated a positive atmosphere at the event, the identity politics on which the festival was based were both a help and a hindrance to the creation of a prefigurative community" (1995: 508). MWMF experiences the same dynamic

of push and pull in relation to identity politics. The diversity of the constituency, combined with an emphasis on identity politics, contributes to the creation of pockets of *communitas* (Turner, 1969) which enter into a dialectic with the larger festival structure and promote a richer experience, while at the same time creating tension between competing visions of what the festival is/can be.

The MWMF began as a collective where the ethics promoted include such policies as sharing the work among all attendees, sliding scale for admissions, vegetarian food, etc. Feminist theorist Rebecca Kaplan (1996) notes that while these practices are viewed by many of the attendees as a model for the building of a women's utopia and that it is important to respect and honour this utopian urge, it is however, unlikely that seven thousand women will share all ideals: all women's issues are not the same and so it is inevitable that tensions arise.

The collective identity of the festival community is forged through the shared experience of outlaw status (Kaplan, 1996). Outlaw status in this instance denotes an identity situated in sexual, political, spiritual, and/or emotional locations positioned outside of the mainstream. These inner landscapes of identity overlay the geographical definitions of identity found at the festival. This overlay results in the reflection of the diversity of the festival population through the physical arrangement of the site. The geographical definitions manifest in such locations as designated camping and public areas that outwardly express the inner landscapes of identity. Once through the gates, women move through a myriad of choices for locating themselves within the festival. These choices range from those expressing radical politics (like the S/m

area in Twilight Zone) to those of accessibility or simple logistics (like DART and child friendly areas). Each reflects personal and/or political facets of individual identities. In this articulation of spaces and identities, the festival can be seen as a house, with each subculture within the festival population creating its own metaphorical, and often physical, room.

The interstices of these inner and outer locations of identity become the point of departure from which polemic constructions of unity and division emerge. One obvious geographical identity is the choice of camping areas which offer different environments suited to individual women's various needs and desires. These areas include chem-free<sup>1</sup>, over fifties, scent-free, loud and rowdy, special needs, RV, toddlers/family (includes boy children under the age of four), and camping with boy children between the ages of four and ten (located outside of the main festival site) (see Map 1). As women locate themselves physically within these sites, they choose an identity to foreground. The performance of identity within the framework of 'space' which the festival provides helps form the boundaries of the metaphorical rooms. While boundaries of identity are permeable and overlap, the physical boundaries imposed set the stage for an emerging discourse around the polarities of segregation/assimilation, division/unity which form as festival participants navigate diversity. Much of this discourse develops out of crisis and conflict at the festival, for example, the 1988 shigella outbreak, S/m activists renting a plane and dropping leaflets in 1990, the 1990-93 festivals' issue of cultural appropriation of Native arts and culture, and in 1994 the transgender issue was first raised at the festival (Morris, 1999).

Each of the issues and conflicts which arise shape the future structure of the festival society. The 1988 shigella outbreak led to more focus on sanitation and the provision of handwashing stations outside the portable washrooms. The kitchen organisation was also revised to include closer attention to hygiene in the outdoor plate-washing and food preparation areas. The increased presence of S/m practitioners led to the informal recognition of the Twilight Zone camping areas as S/m friendly space and more of an effort to inform women attending how to avoid interaction with S/m play parties that take place there. The issue of cultural appropriation led to Native American support networks in the Women of Color tent. The transgender conflict remains ongoing, but the inclusion of workshops and clear statements of the festival's goals have emerged from the process; "Womyn-born-womyn" was added to the festival program statement about who the festival is for in response to transgender activism.

The development of a Womyn of Color Tent provides an example of the festival's changing identity politics and its response to the needs of its constituency. A chronology of the Womyn of Color Tent was provided through an interview in the field with Anne and Paran (pseudonyms used at their request). The tent evolved through the recognition of a need for women of colour to connect with one another during the festival. It arose out of these women taking responsibility for ways to meet this need. Originally, the festival viewed the request for a Womyn of Color tent as divisive. Eventually, half of a meeting tent was designated a women of colour space. The next year, a Womyn of Color tent was created and its creators viewed it as being a 'women of colour

living room'. The tent was used as a base from which many of the women moved out into the festival. Over time, it increased in size, as the women of colour participants identified resources that were necessary to their festival experience.

Paran clarifies that the Womyn of Color tent was never intended as an exclusive space, but many festival attendees identified it as such. The space was rarely used by white women until drumming became a part of it. The cultural misunderstandings around drumming<sup>2</sup> led to the creation of a sanctuary within the space which was restricted to women of colour only. The Womyn Of Color tent was one of the first successful inclusions of such a space at women's festivals. However, the space became contested as festival participants began to comment on the tent as "racial segregation" or a response to white prejudice. Some white women and women of colour were concerned that the space would lead to a segregated population and some white women were defensive of the implication that the 'utopia' of MWMF included white prejudice. Women of colour found it necessary to define the space as for them not against anyone else. They adopted an official policy never to ask a woman about her ethnicity; however, individuals within the space occasionally question non-visible women of colour.

MWMF has a split personality. One face is the collective creation of women's space. The other is the reality of a business venture owned and produced by a generally benevolent dictator. The hierarchies among workers and between festie-goers and workers speak to that split personality. MWMF is

an interesting study in how effectively one can step outside of patriarchy when one is undertaking that action within a patriarchal system. Issues of racism, cultural appropriation, exclusion, exploitation, and incidents of violence which have arisen over the festival's history can be viewed as the long fingers of outside society reaching in to test the festival's resistance to structures of oppression. Barter markets, support tents, communal food, work sharing, the open exchange of ideas, and painful reflection are the strong hands of women attempting change.

This chapter has provided a sense of the complicated nature of MWMF as a site of research. I hope to have rendered some insight into the location of the field and the variety of experiences available to participants. Each woman who attends leaves with a unique experience and impression of MWMF. There is no definitive 'field', rather a layering of many fields of experience and meaning. The next chapter explores the ways in which the research team of which I was a member unpacked these varied impressions and experiences.

### Endnotes

1. Chem-free refers to the absence of alcohol or drugs in the space. Camping and audience areas are given this label to accommodate individuals wishing to avoid contact with alcohol, drugs, and cigarette smoke.
2. The movement of women and hand drumming led to a growing interest in the Womyn of Color Tent when celebrations involving drumming were held. Drumming is often viewed as a social event and excuse to dance by non-drummers.



## Chapter Two: Working The Field

In the Augusts of 1997 and 1998 I was part of a three-person team of researchers designing and undertaking field research at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (MWMF). My research partners were Maria Fowler and Amanda Birdsell, fellow honours students at the University of Winnipeg. The 1998 period of the research was funded through a SSHRCC grant program administered by Dr. Pauline Greenhill. The objective of the ethnographic study was to undertake emergent research on a variety of issues, within the context of the MWMF. The research focus had a multivariant character, dealing with issues of construction of gender and identity in a woman-only environment; symbols which are particular to the constituency and identity at the MWMF; structures and anti-structures within the festival milieu; issues of race/ethnicity and identity; emerging social complexities; and the processes of women building women's communities. Much of the focus of feminist and anthropological scholarship examines constructions of identity and gender within the context of larger society. Drawing on that scholarship, this research examines constructions within the context of a woman-only environment. We explore how constructions from the larger world infiltrate women's community and have an effect the dynamics of power relations and struggles for inclusivity and diversity on a multitude of levels.

The importance of our research lies in the opportunity to examine and engage with an active and on- going project in the prefiguring of society towards

a woman-positive ethos which attempts to include diversity. In the exploration of dynamics within the community of MWMF lies the power to bring an understanding of these dynamics, with their conflicts and successes, to a wider application within the women's movement and society in general. The microcosm of MWMF reflects the many issues which arise in the macrocosm of the women's movement and other communities struggling for change.

This chapter describes the research methods which the team designed and implemented. I focus on my specific contributions to the work. The interviews referred to are those which I conducted and the analysis of the survey data is my contribution to the team research report. The description of the methods used provides a framework for discussing preliminary findings and experiences of 'working the field'.

The on-site research project took place from August 12- 18, 1997 and August 11 - 17, 1998. The data collection on-site was organised from a base camp in the RV camping area where we maintained the security of tapes, equipment, and notes. Participant names and identifying information were kept on a disc file in a lap top computer. A research tent was used as a more central communication point for the research team and a venue for conducting interviews. We erected the tent on the main road near Triangle -a central location on the Festival site - where it was highly visible and facilitated drop-in traffic (see Map1 for locations).

The data analysis took place post-festival in the fall of 1997 and 1998. We wrote a final report and submitted it to Dr. Pauline Greenhill, our University of

Winnipeg research supervisor, and then made it available to the organisers of the MWMF. We were careful to maintain the anonymity of participants in sharing information. All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

## Methods

The participants were drawn from the women attending and working at MWMF during 1997 and 1998 who were eighteen years of age or older (age of consent was addressed in each consent form). The age restriction avoided the complicated ethical questions of doing research with minors. The research design incorporated seven ethnographic tools:

### 1) Surveys.

a) A quantitative survey (see Appendix A) sampled the population from 1997 and 1998, and explored the demographics of the festival focusing on vital statistics, individual identity (i.e. sexual orientation, race/ethnicity), access, and attendance history.

A total of seventy-five women returned their quantitative surveys over the two years of the research project. There were an estimated 7,000 women in attendance at the 1998 festival (as announced on stage, August 16/98) and 5,000 in 1997 (also from a stage announcement). We handed out 400 surveys over the two years. One World and the Research Tent were sites where the information regarding the research project, previous years' reports and surveys were located. One World is a networking and information spot where women with particular interests, both political and community building, are drawn. The

Community Centre drop off box for surveys was centrally located. However, the area was often quite crowded and the box was obscured. The RV office was rarely visited by participants. (See Map 1 for locations)

Obviously, the returned sample is not large enough to infer specific characteristics or trends in the population. However, some general characteristics emerged from the data. The age range of respondents was 19 - 57, with the majority of respondents in a 30-37 year age group. In terms of sexual orientation, 76% (57 out of 75) of the women identified as strongly lesbian; 11% (eight respondents) identified as bisexual; and 12% (nine respondents) identified as straight. One person did not answer. Car was the most common mode of transport to the festival, with 88% of those surveyed traveling by car. Other modes of transport identified were plane (seven women flew), bus (one took the bus) and one woman hitch-hiked. 9% (seven women) of those who answered the survey self-identified as women of colour. Six women indicated they were perceived by others as women of colour, including five of the seven who self-identified as such and one who did not. The majority ( 90%) had post-secondary or some post-secondary education. None had less than high school.

Thirty of the participants earned \$30,000/year and more in US funds. Three of these earned over \$60,000. Fifteen of the participants earned between \$20,000 - \$29,000 and fifteen earned between \$10,000 - \$19,000. Five earned under \$10,000 and ten did not answer the question. Sixty-six percent of respondents earned over \$20,000/year. All of the camping areas were

represented in the participant responses, with 64% of respondents from central camping areas and 11% in more distant campsites on the borders of the festival site. Five percent were in Differently Abled camping, 4% were in child-friendly designated camping areas, 6% were in RV camping and 10% were in chem-free camping space.

The surveys were poorly designed for rating the interests of participants at the festival. Participants were confused by the rating system and consequently the results were not usable. The question regarding identifying as a vegetarian or not was regularly missed due to its location on the survey. The question regarding how participants had heard of the festival was also poorly situated on the form and resulted in a low response rate. The situation of questions on the survey was the result of our focus on keeping the survey length to one page, a length which we hoped would increase response rates.

Despite some problems, the surveys allowed us to get a sense of who was attending the festival in 1997 and 1998. In summary, the responses indicate the diversity of women at the festival, while reflecting the white, middle-class, lesbian identity of the majority of attendees. Overall, for future surveys, more attention to the visual presentation of the questions in terms of visibility and readability, and more explanation of terms with less academic language would improve response. The preamble in 1998 was altered with this in mind and resulted in a higher return rate for the 1998 distribution (See Appendix A1). The survey proper was not adjusted so that the two years' responses could be compared. The results presented here reflect the combined data of both years'

responses.

b) A qualitative survey (see Appendix B & B1) explored women's insights and experiences of the festival as well as issues and politics of identity. These self-administered surveys were left at high traffic areas, and returned to drop boxes placed at strategic locations throughout the festival site.

Qualitative surveys were handed out at the Community Center and left at One World and in the Research Tent near Triangle. We also distributed them in person during participant -observation activities. Two hundred surveys were handed out in 1997 and 1998. A total of thirty-seven surveys were returned, eleven in 1997 and eighteen in 1998. Seven surveys were returned in 1998 by mail post-festival. The sample is quite small, but the material is personalised and detailed making it quite useful, in keeping with the nature of qualitative research.

A digest of the qualitative survey responses is included in Appendix C. The responses to the question regarding women's connections to the women and nature symbols (#13) have been particularly useful in framing ideas for the discussion of such images in Chapter Four, "Fields of Meaning". Comments like "I always feel more connected with the earth after the festival", "the images are empowering, they reflect an understanding of life and spirituality which resonate with me" and "I need a lot of deprogramming from the society I live in where there is a scarcity of these images" suggest that women are connecting with the symbols and find strength in the nature connections. More explicitly political

comments such as “Very important to link politics of being female with replenishment of the earth, eco-feminism will help the earth to survive” suggest that some women are very conscious of the socio-political possibilities for connecting women to nature as part of a woman positive environmental movement. The discussion in Chapter Four of reclaiming ‘woman as nature’ motifs focuses on the responses and interviews which recognise this strategy. However, it is important to note that not all women at the festival find this imagery speaks to them. It appears there is a generational quality to this process. Younger and more queer-identified participants are not as aware, nor do they place as much importance on, the nature imagery. Such imagery finds its roots in the 1970s culture of lesbian, goddess, vegetarian identities which were prevalent among the organisers of the first decade of the festival.

## 2) Group interviews

We conducted the group interviews in the form of an open oral history workshop designed to encourage participants to share stories and memories, insights and concerns, regarding the MWMF and its history. These workshops were held four times during the 1998 festival (see Appendix D for poster). The first half hour of the workshop explained the research project. This included explaining the consent letters designed specifically for the group interview (see Appendix E) and the guarantee of anonymity. We received permission to record from participants at this time.

The workshops developed as facilitated discussions in which the

participants directed the flow and content. We used a talking stick to ensure respectful discussion, whoever had the stick held the floor and it was passed around the circle of women to give everyone an opportunity to share stories and respond to what others had shared. The workshops began with a round of introductions and a brief discussion of how many times people had attended the festival. These workshop/interviews were unstructured and only a few general questions were prepared (see Appendix F).

The interviews lasted a total of 10 hours. The number of participants in each session varied, women came and went, and some attended all of the sessions. In total, 30 women were involved in the group interviews over the three-day period. Twelve particular themes emerged from these interviews:

1) The Womb and changes in healthcare at the festival; one comment that "The Womb has integrated more main stream medicine over the years, while maintaining alternative approaches to healing in their service provision" indicates the general nature of discussion.

2) structural changes and improvements to the festival site and program; "DART asphalt path- was the first permanent structure on the land, first snow fencing for wheelchair access then carpet, now the main street is paved" one woman's comment traced the changes in access. Another talks about the site change "the festival first took place in Mt. Pleasant, then Hisperia, as a collectively run event, then moved to Manistee where the land was purchased and became privately owned". The program was seen to have more workshops now, and more family services. Women also commented that there are more

children.

3) organisational changes; In relation to how owning the land has changed organisational practices, one woman said “while conflict and dispute resolution take place within the festival worker community, land ownership has given the organisers the power to arbitrate”.

4) issues of class; in relation to the workers’ experience one woman noted “an attempt to start a worker’s union was busted by a management consultant team, hired by Lisa & Boo [festival owners]” Another mentioned that “some workers are paid (i.e. heavy labour), not others (oasis workers)”. Also, in regard to the gap between performers and attendees a participant complained, “performers don’t do workshifts, anymore”.

5) relationship of festival with the locals; stories were told of how local men “used to try and sneak on the land” and incidents “of trashing during the winter like blowing up the cemented electrical line trenches”. One woman commented that in recent years the local businesses have been “more supportive, due to economic benefits of the festival”.

6) issues of race and the Womyn of Color Tent; one woman said that the “Womyn of Color tent and the concept of ‘the land’ opened up understanding of American Indian views of sacred places and land claims” for her. Discussion of the history of the WOC tent and conflicts were brought up - “I remember a drumming workshop, all these white women dancing in the WOC tent, and these little brown heads outside trying to get in, that’s part of why we built the Sanctuary”.

7) women's descriptions of what "Michigan is..." ; "good lesbian mothering"; "sense of coming home"; "community memberships, connections, commonalities"; "making women's herstory"; "Gaia Girls camp- an impact for the future"; "safety, women only seems to imply safety".

8) fashion and identity statements; women noted that the 70s were marked by rainbow beanies, labrys symbols, work-boots, ear cuffs, paper ties, and parachute pants. The 80s fashions were Birkenstocks, crystals, and labrys symbols. The 90s brought crystals and mass-produced t- shirts.

9) inclusion of hetero and bi women; "inclusion/sisterhood, but to a point, no 'I love my boyfriend' workshops" said one woman. Another commented, "We are striving for inclusivity, but unsure about how far to take it, like the laughter at 'straight struggle' at Michigan, then guilt over the laughter".

10) identity politics and norms about who the festival is for; there was strong agreement when a woman commented that "lesbian centred culture [at MWMF] never changes". One woman responded, "straights are OK, but they need to understand it's lesbian dominant here". A woman noted that the rule of "boy children over 10 not allowed, is a response to increased child attendance". There was general agreement with the comment that it is "good to segregate S/m".

11) S/m population at the festival; a comment that there has "always been a presence, just more visible now" elicited a complaint that there "should be more clarity in the program about what Twilight Zone is about". Another woman responded, "S/m campers make visitors to Twilight Zone aware" to which a third

claimed, " I was there and there were underage women, no one said anything". A comment was made that " festival organisers place restrictions on workshops (i.e. hands-off)". And one woman noted that "S/m challenges womyn, makes diversity an in your face thing, shows that not all women are veggies [vegetarian], spiritual and power sharing".

12) and safety. Women commented that there is "no mugging, stealing, getting lost". One woman noted that " transgender people are not safe on the land" and another agreed and said "S/m are not safe, either". A response that "others are not safe because of Trans and S/m on the land" met with many nods of agreement and the comment that "pornography & dildoes infringe on safety".

These themes and the samples of comments represent the types of dialogue and discourse in which womyn engage at MWMF. Of particular interest to our research focus are the norms that emerged around identity, the silences around certain topics, and the concept of safety. The norm for identity comparison is lesbian. This identity is qualified with the characteristics of whiteness, non-S/m and woman-born. While normative constructions of sexuality shift in this lesbian dominant environment, sexual conventions remain fairly conservative at the festival.

Norms around identity emerge at the festival in constructions of 'other'. The interplay of norm versus other becomes evident in who participated in the oral herstory workshops. While the Womyn of Color Tent and the S/m presence at the festival were often a focus of discourse, no visible women of color or S/m practitioners participated in any of the four sessions. Consequently, the

comments pertaining to these groups emerge from outsider perspectives. Similarly, discussion of the transgender issue occurred without representation from that group. This is not surprising given the discouragement of transgender attendance inherent in official festival policy (womyn-born-womyn only). The fact that women of colour, S/m practitioners and transgender-identified women did not attend the workshops is an absence I read as their lack of investment in the dominant discourse of what festival oral herstory is.

A second point of interest was the areas of silence in the discussion groups. Class was one topic which was avoided in the discussions. While there were many comments which we interpreted as relevant to issues of class and economics, participants did not explicitly express themselves in terms of class oppressions. Their comments often centred around perceived loss of privilege in the form of exclusion from "in -groups" such as the workers community. The issue of access was not addressed in relation to affordability. Women were uncomfortable with attempts to elicit discussion of class and issues of access to the festival.

A third theme was the issue of safety. There were notable silences in this discussion. The comments on safety operated on two distinct levels. One was the infringement of emotional safety at the festival. The other was physical safety. While it was acknowledged that emotional safety was at risk for some participants, there was a notable silence surrounding threats to physical safety. Even after the disclosure of an alleged rape during a previous festival (referred to in Chapter One), women were resistant to deconstructing their concepts of

safety. This silence suggests the centrality of a construction of safety to the collective identity of the festival. While there is an element of reflexivity, as indicated by comments regarding the lack of emotional safety for marginal groups (like S/m practitioners), there is a strong commitment to the perception of the festival as an implicitly safe space.

Overall these sessions were enlightening. They became repetitive over time, in part because some of the same participants attended each workshop. However, the content of the discussions reflects the currents of discourse expressed at the 1998 festival. Women were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences and, in general, maintained a positive focus on MWMF's strengths.

### 3) Individual interviews on-site

I conducted nine interviews in total, seven in 1997 and two in 1998. The interviews were informal and open-ended, but based upon an interview schedule (see Appendix G). They provided individual perspectives on identity construction and experiences of MWMF. My selection of participants was random, I invited women I met during participant-observation activities, or who dropped by the Research Tent and volunteered. Participants signed interview consent forms (see Appendix H).

The 1997 interview participants included three women of colour (one Native American and two African-Americans) and four white women. The 1998 interview participants were both white women. In total, six of the interviewees were lesbian and three were heterosexual. Three were in their 30s, three in their

40s and three in their 50s. Each interview participant had particular issues they were eager to discuss. For example, Kim's interview focused on her experience as a British 'crone' coming to MWMF for the first time. The notions of changing identities and changing bodies are central to her discussion of and experience at MWMF. In contrast, Rebecca's interview focuses on the quilting area and her responses to the 1997 research report as both a worker and participant. The concepts of interpretation and identity construction through art and symbol were central to her interests in the interview. The interviews enabled me to incorporate personalised and in-depth accounts of particular moments of experience at the festival and incorporate participant interpretations of expressive communications in Chapter Four "Fields of Meaning".

#### 4) Ethnographic field journals

I maintained journals throughout the period in the field. These journals consisted of reflections, accounts of the festival experiences, descriptions, maps, and notes on participant comments from participant-observation activities.

I found the field journals difficult to keep up. It took two hours to record one hour's worth of activity, keeping me out of circulation for ongoing activities. The festival is a very busy environment, with events going on throughout the day and often through the night. The urge to experience first and write later led to procrastination and constant affirmations that fieldnotes "had to get done **today** for sure!"

The lack of a regular schedule made it difficult to set aside time to write

fieldnotes. Each day was different and we had to be flexible with our time to meet participants for interviews or information meetings. The group interviews were held mornings and afternoons. Evenings were excellent opportunities for connecting with people and doing participant-observation in community areas. The time spent getting to the kitchen tent for meals, lining up, and eating was another practicality to negotiate. It was difficult to schedule a regular time for the field journals.

Another major factor was the physical environment. The weather interfered with research plans. There was rain for all but two afternoons of 1997 and two days in 1998. We had problems with a leaky research tent in 1997 and the trek to the RV base camp was extremely unpleasant in the pouring rain. Just getting from place to place was time consuming in inclement weather. Writing fieldnotes had to take place in dry conditions, or there would only be Rorschach-like blots to bring home, those conditions were hard to find in 1997!

In 1998 I kept my fieldnotes on a mini-cassette recorder. I was more likely to transcribe at home in my warm, dry house than I was to keep notes in a wet, cold tent. Overall, getting the information down was the most important part and if dictating into a recorder got it done then I was willing do the transcribing.

The fieldnotes helped me to maintain a level of critical reflexivity during the fieldwork. I was able to see where my focus of interests lay as they emerged in my fieldnotes. The nature symbology, insider/outsider perspectives, and the benefits of research for the festival were frequent reflections in my writing. The nature symbology became tied up with biological determinism arguments and

anti-essentialist feminist theory in my interpretations on site. These reflections inform my approach to expressive communications in Chapter Four. I found the insider/outsider concept to be challenging and noted how the research experience is an identity-forming one for the researcher. This concept and my reflections on it developed into the discussion of locating myself in the field Chapter Five "Fields of Possibility".

#### 5) Post-festival interviews.

I conducted three post-festival interviews. Initial contact with participants was made at the festival or through announcements in the print media and/or postings in applicable women- and lesbian-centred locations such as, MS Purdy's Women's Club in Winnipeg, The Gay and Lesbian Resource Centre in Winnipeg, and Women's Resource Centres in various locations. Participants signed consent forms (See Appendix I). The ad (see Appendix J) briefly described the research, the nature and format of participation being requested, and the probable length of time required for participation. For Interview Schedule see Appendix F.

Maggie is 39 years old, a community activist and self-identified ardent feminist. She is heterosexual, middle-class and white, with an Irish heritage. Jill is 21 years old, a student and poet who identifies herself as a feminist, lesbian and 'lefty'. She is working-class, European with a Hungarian/British background, she is sometimes mistaken for a person of colour. Lorna is 30 years old, a community activist and student. She identifies herself as a strong feminist and

bisexual practising serial monogamy. She is white, working-class, with an English background. Maggie and Lorna have been to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival twice. They attended the twentieth anniversary gathering in 1995 and the 1994 MWMF, but did not meet while there. Jill attended in 1992. Each of the three women participated in a two-hour interview, discussing their experience of the festival and, in particular, the transgender issue. These interviews provided insights into individual definitions of woman and inform my discussion of women and nature in Chapter Four 'Fields of Meaning'.

#### 6) Photographs.

We took photographs to help with the interpretations of signs and symbols and to conceptualise the event once we returned home. Written consent forms were obtained for all shots taken in which individuals could be identified (see Appendix K). All crowd shots, for which consent is not possible, were taken in such a way, or adapted electronically, to diminish the possibility of individual identification (i.e. no close-ups, no faces, etc.).

I have used the photographs and slides for the purpose of illustration during conference presentations and as a visual aid to memory in my interpretation of signs and symbols. While some of the images were taken specifically for work on symbol and community, as discussed in Chapter Four "Fields of Meaning", others were taken to provide a visual image for areas identified on the map of the festival site, and many were taken spontaneously in response to festival imagery. Appendix L is a complete list of images taken at

the festival in 1997 and 1998.

One roll of film was lost due to water damage in the research tent. The 1997 images 1-11 were poor quality, with little detail visible. These line-up shots do, however, serve as an indication of the line length (nearly 5 miles in 1997) and rural setting. These shots give a sense of the vehicles women traveled to the festival in; they were mostly newer models, in good shape, with a lot of campers and RVs. Many of these RVs were large traveling motor homes.

#### 7) Participant Observation

Doing participant observation enabled us to develop a multi-faceted relationship with women attending MWMF. It provided the opportunity to understand structures at the festival and get a sense of the importance of particular events, like the Puppet Parade. I observed and engaged in 'public' activities as well as interactions with individuals. Insofar as it was feasible, participants were informed that research was being conducted. However, this was not always possible due to the large numbers of women attending. The information acquired through this method was general in nature and individuals were neither identified nor directly quoted. My descriptions of the Puppet Parade, stage concerts and other public events in Chapter Four are drawn from participant-observation and fieldnotes. The reflections about identity and locating myself contained in my fieldnotes form the basis of my discussion in Chapter Five "Fields of Possibility".

In terms of participant-observation it might have been helpful to observe at

one site throughout the week in order to capture a particular perspective or site with a degree of depth. Interviews with team leaders and volunteer co-ordinators at a specific site, followed by interviews with women who accessed the site would allow for an in-depth analysis of particular areas at the festival. More discussion of this as a possible research avenue will be taken up in the Conclusion of this thesis. We chose to take a broader view of the festival as a whole. My goals in this project are broad and exploratory, making a more general survey of the festival the most appropriate choice. My own participant-observation activity at the quilting area, parade and opening ceremony was very helpful for developing the discussion of symbols and meaning undertaken in Chapter Four, "Fields of Meaning".

#### Ethics in the field

Before we began research, the Senate Committee on Experimental Ethics' Human Research Ethics Checklist from the University of Winnipeg was reviewed and completed; possible areas of concern in relation to the research methods were addressed (see Appendix M). We have continued to consider ethics throughout the process of writing up the research and undertaking future interactions with the community.

The process of research and the application of ethics was an ongoing issue during fieldwork. Ethics become very convoluted once research moves out into the field and we begin dealing with real people. The goals of the researcher and those of the participants sometimes seem at odds, often in subtle

ways. The reality of time constraints and the creation of a product also intersect with ethical issues.

An example of conflicts between the 'ideal' and 'real' was our experience at a discussion group at the Womyn of Color Tent. We were granted permission by the facilitator to record the discussion. The process of obtaining permission from participants was, however, not clear to her. This led to her not allocating enough time for women to read, sign, question and return consent forms. Before the forms were read, signed and returned, discussion started and the facilitator urged us to begin recording. Latecomers, when they understood what was happening, were offended by the presence of 'anthropologists'. The issues of exploitation and intrusion were raised and one woman said "I am fucking offended that fucking anthropologists are here studying us like bugs under a microscope!! Go dig up your own ancestors!!!" At which point the recording was stopped and we made apologies to the participants. Their cultural background had prepared them to view anthropologists in an extremely negative light. We were unprepared for the history of our discipline to follow us into the field.

The discussion group continued with permission for us to remain as participant-observers. One of the women who had arrived late and was upset by our intrusion was a performer. In her stage show that night she sang a song about anthropologists which was less than flattering and preceded it with a discussion of the exploitation of Native Americans by the discipline.

We had discussions with the facilitator, advocates for the Womyn of Color Area and participants in the discussion group which cleared the air regarding our

intentions. These discussions did not take place immediately, because we did not wish to further intrude on the topic and situation at hand. Over the course of three or four days opinions were gathered, discussed, and eventually it was decided that only parts of the tape for which completed letters of consent had been received would be used. Upon returning home it became clear that the session would not be usable, as informed consent was not received from all participants for recording. Our observations as participants and reflections on the experience from our own point of view were all that we felt comfortable taking away from the experience. The rich data on race, diversity and identity at the festival was lost. In future, I would engage in a more careful discussion of informed consent, and less haste in 'getting the information'.

A second area of ethical concern arose around the task of locating myself in the field, which I explore more deeply in Chapter Five. On the one hand, the perspectives and ideas of the participant are the most important part of an interview and/or interaction. On the other hand, the relationship should be somewhat reciprocal, where the participants receive information and are met with a willingness to match their own openness and authenticity. As a woman living a heterosexual lifestyle and identifying as a hetero/bi, I was often faced with the dilemma of when, and if, to 'come out'.

Women were willingly discussing very intimate aspects of their lives and sense of identity. They were often engaging in this process with the assumption that I shared their identity and lifestyle, because the assumption of identity at MWMF is lesbian. Sometimes women made comments regarding their

perceptions of 'straight' women and their attendance at the festival. While not wanting to bias their responses by letting them know they were addressing a nominally 'straight' woman, I also felt uncomfortable with the omission of that fact. I did not want them to experience a sense of embarrassment or deception if they should discover later that their assumptions about my identity were not correct.

In general, I tended to disclose that I was a bisexual woman in a monogamous heterosexual relationship and then discuss their feelings regarding our interaction in light of my disclosure. No woman chose not to speak with me, or discontinue our interaction. In fact, each was open to discussing our assumptions about each other and how their contribution might change now that I was concretely located. Woman wanted to know why a 'straight' woman would attend MWMF. I believe it became more reciprocal once I located myself within the process and allowed the lines between investigator and investigated to blur. In this case, ethical integrity also provided the opportunity for richer data.

In reviewing my fieldnotes, I found that ethically locating myself in the field was also problematic on a more personal level. Questioning my perspectives, subjectivity, and personal ethics was an exhausting process. I live with a mood disorder and found that the change in my routine disrupted my carefully constructed equilibrium. This made for a harrowing two days in the middle of the field experience. Participant-observation requires an ability to discern the boundary between simple description and subjective analysis. Neuman (1997) notes that “[t]he researcher is the instrument for measuring field data” (354). I

found it difficult to negotiate the distance between my perceptions and reality. For example, I found myself crying at a stage performance by Dar Williams. The people around me were not in tears, my reaction was an internal mood disassociated from the events around me. The impact on the work was less than I imagined it during the episode. As Neuman has also commented "Personal, subjective data are also part of field data"(354). I think that it is worth noting that personality and individual traits have a profound impact on the data collection methods one is able to employ. It is important to recognise individual strengths and use them to enhance the research project. In our team approach we were able to divide up tasks that were best suited to our individual strengths. Amanda was excellent at mapping and Maria had an astute perception of class distinctions. My strength was rapport building and one on one interviews. None of us work well with statistics, so a quantitative approach would not make the best use of our skills.

In my naiveté at approaching MWMF as a research project, I failed to recognise an important characteristic of the event. Despite the performance of collectivity and unity, MWMF is an extremely politically charged environment. Women are very often their own harshest critics. While an ongoing reflexivity regarding the construction of the festival is essential to its evolution and growth, the process is often painful and charged with expectations for participants and organisers. Negotiating through interactions, choosing issues to focus on, and even who to engage with in the process, emerged as part of the context of a political 'big picture' for participants,

The research team was well matched, ethical, reflexive and respectful. However, once out in the field one can only follow one's 'gut'. When three guts are involved it is inevitable that they will not always say the same thing. Collaboration, as always, makes the process more difficult and time-consuming. Negotiating our own voices, while respecting one another's, became an ongoing part of the research. I believe this adds depth and perspective to the work.

The importance of ethics and the location of my self as a researcher emerged in the process of 'working the field'. I feel it is important to pursue this line of enquiry and provide a more reflective and in-depth account in Chapter Five "Fields of Possibility". This chapter has explored the field methods used in the research at MWMF. In the next chapter I consider previous analyses of similar events and the theoretical approaches to issues under consideration that I have brought forward in these first two chapters. "Framing the Field" brings in other voices which have considered some of the issues in this project and have helped to frame the discussion of meanings in Chapter Four.

### Chapter Three: Framing the Field

Chapters One and Two provide a picture of MWMF, and the process of fieldwork in this project. Some notion of the preliminary findings and the experiences of MWMF has been imparted. This chapter explores the literature of festival, identity politics and semiotics. The early ritual and celebration material will be treated separately, and brought into the discussion of contemporary celebration and festival material. The recent literature on women's festivals will follow, exploring the relationship with earlier material in light of my particular project at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Much of this literature overlaps, both theoretically and chronologically. The same authors appear in these streams of knowledge construction. The festival literature is followed by a discussion of identity construction practices and theory in relation to gender and sexuality. A discussion of the semiotics literature and frameworks for the festival venue will conclude the chapter and the frame in which the research analysis occurred.

The literature of festival, ritual and celebration are closely linked in their historical appearance on the anthropological scene. Early literature in these areas focused on traditional events which were tied to cosmological beliefs in pre-industrial societies. Much of the material from which this literature emerges is based on ethnographic data from such societies. In this way, the evolution of theories about celebration and festival developed in connection with ideas about religion and structures and meaning of the ritual process, most notably van Gennep (1909/1960) and Turner (1969). As the study of society in anthropology and folklore moved closer to the homes of those in Europe and North America who were the students, the literature on celebration and festival included a focus on secular events. The 1980s heralded a new interest for anthropology in work

'at home', in response to criticisms of exoticising other cultures, but also in recognition of epistemological flaws in previous anthropology's conception of Other and of Self (Said, 1979; Barrett, 1998).

Identity politics have become a central issue in the analysis of women's cultures and of lesbian-identified and/or woman-identified events. The 1960s feminist projects of defining and embracing an essential identity of woman as a rallying point for a political movement has moved toward exploring politics of difference and the heterogeneity of women and their experiences. The discussion of identity politics is framed in this particular ideological shift in feminist discourses.

Semiotics literature has undergone similar transformation in the movement out of traditional linguistic modes of apprehending the sign and into a broader interpretation of deciphering cultural meanings. The discussion of symbol and metaphor as part of meaning-making systems also appears in the literature on ritual and celebration, pre-figuring the semiotic move into this area. Traditional semiotics focused on linguistic and textual fields of meanings. As the academic landscape became more interdisciplinary, fields such as Cultural Studies emerged and semiotics moved to the forefront of much interpretative literature. Text becomes a term which refers to any signifying action as well as actual written or spoken moments. The postmodern movement, both cultural and theoretical, embraced semiotics as an approach to unpacking meanings from multiply-layered events and perspectives. The metaphor, and more recently the broader term trope which incorporates less linear and direct metaphorical relations, shifted from the periphery to a more central concept for understanding meanings and capturing paradigmatic moments in events and culture.

## Ritual and Celebration

The literature of ritual is influenced by early sociological work on religion. Max Weber, in 1904, was examining the relations of religion and capitalism. Emile Durkheim wrote *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* in 1915. References to their viewpoints are still found in the literature today, Weber's cross-cultural comparison in an ideological /symbolic framework competes with Durkheim's functionalist approach in the developing threads of ritual study. Sigmund Freud's focus on psychological explanations for religion and the use of ritual also remains influential in the psychology of religion.

Anthropology contributes to this early study with ethnographic accounts of the function and form of ritual and religion in pre-industrial cultures. Edward Tylor (1871) described the relation of myth and magic, framing ritual and religion in an evolutionary model from primitive to civilised. Sir James Fraser's *The Golden Bough* (1922), written between 1890 and 1915, still provides rich descriptive material of pre-industrial society ritual and myth, following Tylor's evolutionary model. Bronislaw Malinowski (1925) emphasised the individual in relation to religion, challenging Durkheim's functionalist approach. His British contemporary, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1922), maintained Durkheim's social functionalist approach and focused on the social cohesion aspect of religion. Edward Evans-Pritchard (1956), a student of Malinowski, contributed studies based in an historical and symbolic approach to the literature in anthropology on religion. This symbolic approach was to become a major thread in anthropological work on ritual (see Douglas, 1999; Turner, 1969; Geertz, 1973). Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) brought a structural perspective to ritual studies, employing a linguistic model to interpret ritual, myth and symbol. The rest of this section will focus on selected analytical and theoretical studies which reflect approaches to ritual that have led to current work on festival.

Arnold Van Gennep provided an early anthropological work with a specific focus on the mechanics and meanings of ritual. In 1909, he described rites of passage as marking the transition from one life stage to the next. He notes that the "life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another" (1960: 25). His key contribution in this work is identifying three stages to the process of ritual: separation, transition, and incorporation. Van Gennep employed a useful analogy, comparing society to a house and suggesting that ritual might be compared to the windows and doors. The walls of a house provide structure and protection: they keep out those who don't belong, help define those who are inside as household members, and maintain boundaries between the different roles and activities involved in maintaining the household. The windows and doors allow people, objects, and such natural resources as light and air to pass into the house and between rooms, without having to destroy the integrity of the structure to allow for such necessary movement. Humans provide these openings, but guard and maintain them so that only the proper things pass through, and only at proper times and in a permissible manner. Rituals, Van Gennep argued, do much the same things for society, moving people into and out of groups and between different statuses within groups, acting like the windows and doors of a house. Van Gennep demonstrated that many different types of ritual have a common pattern and purpose, allowing for comparison cross-culturally and between different specific rituals. His three phases, his analogy, and his incorporation of ritual into the cultural and social matrix of society would provide a foundation upon which future scholars would build.

One of the most influential builders on van Gennep's foundation was Victor Turner (1969). Turner follows Levi-Strauss' notion of a semantic structure in ritual, incorporates van Gennep's three stages and transitional nature

of ritual, and challenges the functionalist notions of ritual as social control and cohesion. Turner identifies two processes at work, *communitas* and *societas*. *Societas* reflects the normative structure of society (structure) and *communitas* represents the challenges and process of change to that structure (anti-structure). The dialectical relationship between these processes creates tensions and facilitates change. Turner argues that it is beyond the structural that *communitas* lies. He notes, however, that “the spontaneity and immediacy of *communitas* - as opposed to the jurial-political character of structure-can seldom be maintained for very long. *Communitas* itself soon develops a structure, in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between personae” (1969: 132). Through this dialectical process societal change occurs: “the ‘essential We’ [of community] has a liminal character, since endurance implies institutionalisation and repetition, while community (which roughly equals spontaneous *communitas*) is always completely unique, and hence socially transient” (137). *Communitas* can also take the form of “a total or partial withdrawal from participation in the structural relations of the world” (155).

Turner’s notion of *communitas* continued to inform his thinking about ritual and celebration as moments of conflict rather than cohesion. Turner identifies social dramas, often related to ritual and celebration, as units of “aharmonic or disharmonic processes, arising in conflict situations” (1976: 106). Such disharmony may lead to *communitas*; that liminal interstructural situation which provides the “conditions for the production of root metaphors, [and] conceptual archetypes” (115). Social dramas lead to four phases of public action: 1) the breach of regular, norm governed social relations; 2) mounting crisis; 3) redressive action; and 4) reintegration or legitimisation of conflicting identity. These phases reflect Van Gennepe’s notions of separation, transition and

incorporation. Because "the social world is a world in becoming, not a world in being," Turner is wary of static terms such as 'society' or 'community' or the study of 'social structure'. He argues, "such a view violates the actual flux and changefulness of the human social scene" (98).

In a similar vein, Clifford Geertz suggests that functional theories of ritual fail to cope with change because they exclude the cultural singularities of an event's context and symbols. Geertz defines symbol as "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for conception - the conception is the symbol's 'meaning'" (1973: 91). Symbols simultaneously express a model of reality and a model for reality, providing a representation of the way things are as well as prescriptions for activity. He suggests that culture is an ordered system of meaning and symbols, while social systems are the patterns of social interaction. "Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their existence and guide their action; social structure is the form the action takes, the actually existing network of social relations" (145). It is in the relationship of interdependence, strains, and inconsistencies between these two elements that social change occurs. In Geertz's view, functionalism fails to account for cultural components and focuses on social structures, missing the dynamic from which change proceeds.

In his focus on symbols and their meanings Geertz reaffirms Weber's approach (*verstehen* or sympathetic understanding) to cultural meaning. Geertz advocates "thick description" in ethnographic work as a way of apprehending meaning in symbols and the meanings social agents assign them. He uses the example of a Javanese funeral ritual gone awry to explicate the dialectical relationship between ritual and social change. In his example he cites the rapidly changing social structural aspects of Javanese society as needing to be understood through cultural aspects and individual experiences. In this way he

makes sense of the ritual event's failure to re-integrate the mourning mother into normal routines after the ceremony and highlights change processes taking place on both the individual and cultural scales, particularly the shift from rural to urban locations (1973: 169).

H. Nieburg published *Culture Storm* (1973) in the same year as Geertz's work discussed above. He explicates how ritual permeates all aspects of society. Nieburg argues that, "for the group, it tests and confirms a web of interrelated roles, interdependencies, past, present, and future exchanges of values" (1973: 30). Through a discussion of the Woodstock festival, Nieburg states, "The very fact of group encounter, strangeness, anonymity, the reinforcement of numbers, inverts the normal senses of danger and the reflexes of self protection, liberating people from their private roles" (134). Nieburg's work completes the transition of discussions of celebration, festival and ritual from the religious to the secular, the non-industrial to the industrial society. This shift characterises the ongoing focus in celebration and festival literature.

### Celebration and Festival

Two edited editions in the 1980s solidified the inclusion of secular festival in the literature on ritual and celebration. Victor Turner's *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual* (1982) focused on the transformative character of festival. Celebration and festival, for Turner, may be said to "bring about a temporary reconciliation among conflicting members of a single community" (1982: 21). The ability to cross boundaries which are otherwise rigid is inherent to Turner's view of festivity and ritual. He also explores the use of ritual and festival to strengthen social bonds in the context of re-affirming existing boundaries. Ronald Grimes' contribution to this text discusses the meaning of festival in the context of social change and movements for change. Grimes suggests that

"leaving the bonding of *communitas* is a rite of separation and reincorporation at once" (1982: 279). The shifting modes of identity can be recognised in the context of festival, as people move through the circles of reality which embody festival identity and emerge into 'real' world identities of everyday personas.

The second volume, edited by Frank E. Manning, *The Celebration of Society: Perspectives on Contemporary Cultural Performance* (1983), included the concept of performance, pre-figuring a stronger focus on developing performance theory and identity construction in festival scholarship. Manning presents four central features of celebration in the modern world: "1. celebration is performance, entailing the dramatic representation of cultural symbols, 2. it is entertainment, 3. it is public, socialising personal meanings, 4. it is participatory" (1983: 4). He maintains van Gennep and Turner's notion of the liminal characteristic of festival as a secular ritual, noting: "The celebrant takes 'time out' from practical affairs and ordinary routine, and does so openly, consciously and with the general aim of aesthetic, sensual and social gratification" (5). Manning affirms that celebration is both culture and politics. In this sense it is a 'power play' through which cultural politics "assumes style, shape, and significance" (16). Therefore "celebration does not merely 'reflect' the political field, it is integrally, and influentially, part of it" (28). The essays in this collection follow these ideas as they play out in small town fairs (Lavenda, 1983), First Nations' public Pow-wow performances (Dyck, 1983), and a myriad of other modern celebratory contexts. Victor Turner contributes a "Postlude" which approves of the focus on celebration as more than "safety valves for normatively suppressed impulses" and suggests closer attention be paid in future to the concreteness, or impact, of these events (Turner, 1983: 187).

David Kertzer (1988) brings a discussion of their concrete impact to his focus on the use of rite and symbolism by government as a means of social

control. He argues that cultural meanings and identities emerge through ritual and symbol and defines ritual "as action wrapped in a web of symbolism" (9). He maintains that symbols condense a variety of different meanings and are thus multivocal cultural manifestations. The multivocality of symbolism allows for individuals with divergent interests to rally around particular, and necessarily ambiguous, cultural signs in the formation of group identity. He states, "it is the very ambiguity of the symbols employed in ritual action that makes ritual useful in fostering solidarity without consensus" (69). This ambiguity of meaning is what entices semioticians into the study of symbol in ritual and celebration.

Manning (1989) brings a modern Canadian example to the literature in his exploration of the politics and social history of the Caribana Festival and Carnival Extravaganza held in Toronto. Originally organised as one event - Caribana - by the Caribbean Cultural Committee, the group splintered over issues of identity and representation at the festival. Manning discusses the conflict in relation to race and social class as played out in competing visions of how the event should represent Caribbean peoples. Lines of conflict are drawn around people's island of origin within the Caribbean collection of communities. Commercial considerations also present conflicts between those who wish to celebrate and those who wish to profit. Manning contends that "Power relations are represented, negotiated, and acted upon in the arena of celebration, while celebratory symbols derive much of their meaning and dramatic impact from underlying socio-political realities" (33). The concrete, represented by the socio-political realities of peoples' lives and the changes negotiated through celebration, are seen as both having an impact upon and being impacted by the 'play' of festivals.

### Contemporary Festival Literature

The discussion of contemporary festival events did not begin with Manning and Turner's collections. The move to literature specifically about festival developed as the secular and modern became an acceptable focus. Francis Hearn (1976) suggests that what is needed in contemporary culture is a re-creation of festival as an institution which acts out as a playful celebration of freedom. He argues that play does not deny reality, but reorders it. In doing so, it allows people to reflect upon their situation critically. The May-June 1968 French student uprising, he says, can be seen as revealing the power of the play impulse to generate a political sensibility. However, the lack of a theoretical language limited its power to produce change in that context. Hearn also argued that industrial capitalism has undermined play by associating it with idleness, and calls for a return of serious study to the 'playful' events of festival and celebration.

Roger Abrahams and Richard Bauman (1980) discuss traditional notions of festival as symbolic inversion through examining Carnival on St. Vincent Island and Belsnickling on the La Have Islands. They challenge structural/functionalist arguments of interpreting rites of reversal as symbolic expressions of normally suppressed conflicts in society. Instead, they suggest that the reversals expressed in festival are expressions of ongoing characteristics of disorder which exist throughout the year. The authors frame the reversal as "[f]ar from constituting events that have hostility and conflict as their organising principle, carnival and belsnickling appear to us to draw together two opposing elements in the two societies in which they occur, and to draw them together more closely and harmoniously than at any other time of year" (206). They suggest that what is perceived as 'disorder' reflects the coming together of segments of society which do not generally interact outside of the festival milieu without confusion and embarrassment. At festival these groups are able to participate together,

identifiable as separate elements which constitute parts of a whole.

Marjorie Esman's (1982) work on a major festival complex in south Louisiana supports Abrahams and Bauman's contention that the disorder of festival is not out of the norm and that festival provides an opportunity to be part of a whole. She suggests that the festival complex in Louisiana reflects the shifting priorities and internal conflicts of the Cajuns who organise them. At the same time, the festivals provide opportunities for ritualised celebrations of unity for this heterogeneous group. She writes: "festivals can provide an important clue to the degree and kinds of sociocultural changes, stresses, and conflicts within the groups that stage them" (199). Furthermore, "because they celebrate important commodities, manipulate symbols, and mirror social structures and values, festivals can be powerful vehicles for the expression of the group priorities. In fact, like other kinds of ritual, in their structure and content festivals can reflect shifting priorities, internal conflict and other varieties of cultural dissonance" (199).

The focus on festivals as sites of research led Beverly Stoeltje (1983) to present a conceptual framework for festival research. Her focus is on events held within a community setting which are produced by and for its members and express traditions meaningful to that community. She approaches festival through three categories: generic features, festival structures and symbolic action. She suggests that the complexity of festival can give the impression of chaos and disorder and that it is therefore imperative that researchers of such events maintain their focus on the multiple modes of communication that characterise celebration and spontaneous community. Stoeltje identifies these characteristics as humour, complexity, intensification and participation. A second area that requires special attention is the temporal dimension of festival. Festivals are frequently linked to historical moments or seasonal changes,

however “a second dimension emphasises the dialectical process of tradition and change” (240). While festival often builds on its representations of the past, it occurs in contemporary fields and is thus a producer of social change in the process of understanding the past. Stoeltje suggests that a researcher must obtain a variety of participant perspectives on festival experience to construct a synchronic picture of what she considers a diachronic process.

Alessandro Falassi’s edited collection continues the focus of festival research on the concepts of boundary creation and the subversion of mainstream ideology. Falassi works with Turner’s concept of the liminal characteristics of festival. Arguing that “festival questions authority and challenges social harmony” (1987: 174) he departs from Durkheimian concepts of social reinforcement and outlines the radical potential for festival as a vehicle for social change. He describes festival as a “significant way to feel in tune with [our] world ... to partake in the special reality of Festival, and celebrate life in its ‘time out of time’” (7). This opportunity for celebration does not overshadow the theme in the text that festival has a concrete impact on the everyday conceptions of people once they return to mainstream experience and action.

One article in Falassi’s collection, by Louis Marin, provides a semiotic interpretation of festive perambulatory events. Marin notes three major types of routes these events are constructed around: a) the one-way route that signifies irreversibility and focuses on a cathartic final point, “for a walking collectivity, the end point represents a symbolic victory over those ideas or persons defied by the march”, b) the round trip, “which emphasises a reversible, bi-directional spatialization” and c) a circular route which creates “a real or ideal limit and protects the enclosed space with a symbolically closed border” (1987: 224). Marin frames these events as examples of transformation of specific social relations into *communitas*. He then suggests that these events unfold as two

types, "one that symbolically enacts a real, internal antagonism" and "one that symbolically rehearses a confrontation with an enemy external to the group" (228). Perambulatory events are employed to transform spectators into participants, to present and re-tell stories or concepts, to affirm identity, and to legitimise value systems. The semiotics in this approach lies in the attention to the meaning of patterns of movement.

J. Lewis and Paul Dowsey Magog (1993) examine the annual Fire Event which is the ritual climax to the Maleny Folk Festival in southern Queensland, Australia. They argue that such celebrations constitute a neo-liminal framework (in contrast to Turner's notion of the liminoid as a modern experience of liminality which retains connections to the rational observer) within which participants can achieve a consensus of belief and action. The mobilisation of pre-industrial indigenous rites within a modern celebratory event provides a sense of inclusion for marginalised Aborigines in modern Australian culture. Through showing that some Fire Events have been more successful than others, factors that impede participation in such settings are presented. Cultural divisions at the festival are identified and related to more general patterns of interaction and division in the larger Australian society which impede the hoped-for solidarity.

While Lewis and Magog come from an anthropological background, Stoeltje's work on frameworks for festival research emerged from the discipline of folklore, as does Bauman and Abrahams' work. The interdisciplinary nature of festival research becomes apparent as sociologists Albert Piette and Mary Delahye (1992) critique two extreme types of theoretical approaches to festival derived from the works of Durkheim: the celebration festival and the transgression festival. Through examining the ethnographic complexity of the festival movement, the authors attempt to uncover its main constraints. The notion of "interstitial frame" is offered as a theoretical ground for ethnographic

description and analysis of the festival experience. This notion describes transformations of the festival frame which creates different synchronous layers of activity. Particularly important is a play between reality and fiction, between times of actions, pause, and breaks, and between downkeying and ludic re-transformation.

In her second decade of work in festival research Stoeltje offers a definition of festival as “occurring at calendrically regulated intervals, public in nature, participatory in ethos, complex in structure, and multiple in voice, scene and purpose. Festivals are collective phenomena and serve purposes rooted in group life” (1992: 261). She suggests that many events using the term festival to describe themselves are “contemporary modern constructions, employing festival characteristics but serving the commercial, ideological, or political purposes of self-interested authorities or entrepreneurs” (262). For researchers looking at festival she suggests that a primary identifying characteristic of festival is that “communication involves a major shift from the frames of everyday life that focus attention on subsistence, routine, and production to frames that foster transformative, reciprocal, and reflexive dimensions of life” (263). Structures which work to create festival reality can include: opening ceremonies, ritual, drama and contest, feasts, dance and music and a concluding event. Social structures of participation at festival defy external ideological control because festival is based on individual social interaction and the recognition of difference, and strives for participation and integration. Therefore external forces which seek to homogenise events fail because of the interpersonal character of festival. The use of symbolic processes in festival permit communication of a large array of cultural knowledges because symbols condense messages and carry multiple meanings.

The very denseness of symbols allows for ambiguity in meaning. Kevin

Hetherington (1996) discusses the possibilities inherent in the process of festival for identity formation and social centrality for marginalised groups. Focusing on New Age travellers in Great Britain, the author argues that free festival sites serve as shrines for marginal groups. He describes how certain spaces symbolise values and beliefs around which groups can centre their identities. Multivalent locations such as Stonehenge are described as "heterotopias", imbued with a multiplicity of meanings through festival and pilgrimage practices. Through a variety of performances, marginality and the power of difference become visible, shared, and experienced on ritual and tribal levels. Hetherington's notion of festival is broader than Stoeltje's, yet his basic approach remains the same.

Folklorist Inta Gale Carpenter follows the Latvian exile, and subsequent homecoming of 1990, noting that "migrations are made up of individuals who conclude that their problems and needs can best be met outside the native land" (1996: 93). She argues that "in a typically exilic response ... they constructed and nurtured a borderless global Latvia-outside-of-Latvia to promote their ideological strategies for restoring Latvian independence and preserving Latvian culture" (94). Through her exploration of the Latvian homecoming, Carpenter examines the reality of authoritarian nationalist politics, accompanied by divergent assumptions regarding authentic cultural identity and the eternal contestation over signs and their meanings/mobilisation. Her research on festival with a particular political and ideological purpose suggests that there is more overlap in festival typologies that Stoeltje's definition of 'true' festival allows. The focus on symbols in festival and their role in the process of festival dynamics has been seen in the last three sources, and marks the approaching interest in semiotic analyses of these events.

While the focus of research is largely on participants and the rituals and

performances of festival, the festival as a commodified event is also present in the literature. Stoeltje was responding to the blossoming of 'festival' events in her article which warned about the need for recognising 'true' festival. John Crompton and Stacey McKay (1997) look at event participation at Fiesta San Antonio. Six specific motive domains were identified to explain why visitors attend different kinds of events at festivals. These motive domains included: cultural exploration, novelty/regression, equilibrium recovery, known-group socialisation, external interaction/socialisation, and gregariousness. Each of these motive domains takes on varying degrees of importance for various festival attendees. The marketing of these events has become an important part of tourism development. The article by Crompton and McKay appeared in a journal for tourism research, indicating the competing interest in festival as a commodity with festival as 'pure' cultural/social event.

#### A Particular Expression of Festival: Women's Festivals

The rise of women's festivals in the mid-1970s emerged from the second wave of feminism in the women's movement. The festivals reflect the development of a cultural feminist approach. This stream was part of the radical feminist school of thought which advocated a separation from patriarchal systems and values. Cultural feminism sought to empower women through the recognition of women's unique and diverse experiences and cultural contributions. One of the strategies employed in this approach is to create women-centred environments. The women-only and women-centred festivals are a manifestation of the drive to discover women's culture and identity outside a patriarchal framework. While the initial impetus for the festivals often found its catalyst in radical theory and lesbian communities, many of the festivals are not exclusively lesbian, nor are they homogeneous in the theoretical orientations of

organisers and participants. The discussions of women's festivals in this section bring concrete examples of the liminal characteristic of festival with the concomitant possibilities for change they engender to the framing of this research project.

Suzanne Staggenborg, Donna Eder and Lori Sudderth (1993/4) challenge the critiques levelled at cultural feminism as promoting essentialism and being detrimental to the radical potential of feminism. Drawing on data from the 1990-1992 National Womyn's Music Festival, they assert that a focus on 'culture' should be seen as a basis for, rather than in opposition to, political engagement with external power structures. They argue, "one key aspect to women's empowerment is replacing negative and limited cultural images of what it means to be female" (40). They go on to say that, "the festival also provides exposure to other belief systems, such as those presented in some women of colour workshops" (48). The heterogeneity of participants and the importance of women-centred environments are the focus of their article.

In juxtaposition to Geertz's critique of functionalism's exclusion of culture, cultural feminism has been critiqued for excluding engagement with mainstream social structures in favour of cultural practices and behaviour. Like Geertz, the authors suggest that it is in the relationship between women's culture and mainstream social institutions that change can be realised. This discussion of women's festival is an example of how, as Manning asserts, celebration is both culture and politics.

Much of the literature on women's festivals has focused on the diversity of participants. Eder, Staggenborg and Sudderth (1995) continue their contribution based on research at the National Women's Music Festival with a paper on the interaction of collective identity and diversity in lesbian community. The authors focus on the dynamic between collectivity and diversity in the practice of building

community. The discussion is placed in the context of the tensions and successes surrounding identity politics at the National Women's Music Festival (NWMF). Viewing the festival as a microcosm of larger feminist communities and as a space which encourages experimental community building, they note that feminist communities like NWMF "prefigure the type of social organization that feminists would like to see throughout the society" (486).

Once again we see Geertz's influence in the notion that celebration can act as a model for reality. The liminal character of festival is implicit in this article as the authors discuss the freedom of participants to experiment with accepted boundaries and norms about what makes community work. The opportunity at women's festivals to practice models of feminist community is an example of the concreteness of festival behaviour. Turner's suggestion that future festival study take into account this concreteness is often seen in literature which argues for the maintenance of women's cultural events as strategies for developing solutions to issues in the lives of women. Manning's contention that festival symbol and behaviour is informed by underlying socio-political realities and the expression of concrete solutions is evident in this example from the women's festival literature.

Becki Ross (1995) focuses on the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT) in the 1970s to discuss the complexities of lesbian community, identity, and visionary politics of that decade. Efforts to articulate alliances across liberatory groups were made difficult by the lack of an established infrastructure of communication and collaboration. Lesbian organising often took on the form of celebration during this period: "lesbian politics as a rule has taken the form of festival - an outpouring of spontaneous musical solidarity [Lorna Weir "Socialist Feminist Politics, unpublished manuscript, 1987,17]" (10). Ross' discussion of the failures to manifest the political realities the group was striving for are

reminiscent of Hearn's assertion that play allows for critical reflection, but without a language and concepts to articulate the movements' visions. As in his example of the French student uprising, such collectivities can lack political resolution.

Celebration and politics are often linked. Frank Manning noted that culture and politics are both inherent in celebration. Ross recognises the central role of celebration in developing feminist communities. She states that festivals like "the first annual Michigan Women's Music Festival in August [1976], provided forums for the emergence and coalescence of a largely white, middle-class, lesbian-feminist energy" (60). Cultural activities remain an important part of lesbian communities: "Today, Valentine's Day dances, sex cabarets, and porn goddess Annie Sprinkle's workshops sell out; local bars are jam packed on weekends; and vanloads travel to the Michigan Women's Music extravaganza every August" (10). The ability of festival and celebration to act as a catalyst for the formation of solidarity, consensus and collective identities has been a recurring theme in the literature of celebration and festival. Women's festivals and celebrations engage this characteristic of festival to mobilise political action and reflection.

Rebecca Kaplan (1996) gives an ethno-historical account of the sex-debates at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival between 1989 and 1995. She traces several events which fuelled the sex debates at the MWWMF, including the disruption of a play party by women 'guards' in 1989, and the inclusion of Tribe 8's sadomasochistic imagery on-stage in 1984. She notes that while internal ideological and political divisions become pronounced at the festival, it is important that lesbians use their shared outlaw status as a starting point for dialogue. She argues: "Differences among queer women are real, and ignoring those differences is often impossible or serves to perpetuate the invisibility of dykes who are minoritized in other ways" (129). Still, experience shows that an

element of collectivity remains when subsumed in the patriarchal landscape: "once one travels a mere mile from 'the land', as the festival grounds are called, all dykes seem to become instant allies" (129).

Kaplan identifies conflicting identities that challenge the collectivity of a festival event. Turner's concept that *communitas* arises from conflict seems apt to this example. He noted that *communitas* quickly becomes *societas*. The dynamic at the festival seems to reflect a solidification of normative behaviour within the *communitas* that can be found at the festival, yet as this process is taking place it initiates conflicts which give rise to new pockets of *communitas*, thus creating a cyclical dialectic within the *communitas* that the festival represents in relation to the *societas* of mainstream culture. This is an excellent explication of the dynamic process of *communitas* and *societas* within festival structures. A constant flux of structure/anti-structure is at work within the microcosm of festival, while this same flux is at work in the macrocosm of festival and the larger society.

Joshua Gamson (1997) argues that we must examine "the processes through which identity boundaries stretch and contract in response to particular communication environments" (195). His discussion centres around identity-related disputes within the International Lesbian and Gay Association and at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Gamson claims that discourses about inclusions and exclusions are particularly affected by public communicative environments: "The *us* is solidified not just against an external *them* but also against the *thems* inside, as particular subgroups battle to gain or retain legitimate *us* standing" (180). In the case of a womyn's festival "the delineation of male from female" would seem a necessary condition, and reflects separatist and cultural feminist practices.

Gamson's description of the discourse on inclusion/exclusion reflects

Kaplan's assertion that outside the festival a solidarity against an "external them" is foregrounded. His description of the "internal others" supports Abrahams and Bauman's suggestion that festival allows for a disorder and fluidity around identity while enabling participants to come together as part of a whole, maintaining identity as separate elements of that whole. The power play at work between conflicting identities in festival is often a result of clashes between generations as well as ideologies. This conflict is an example of Stoeltje's concept of dialectical processes between tradition and change. Gamson's discussion of festival boundary maintenance brings to mind van Gennep's analogy of society as a house with ritual controlling the influx of ideas, concepts, behaviour and resources. The festival is the house of *communitas* and controls the entry of resources and identities, maintaining a structural core of identity while allowing difference to permeate the structure through ritual acts like parade, ceremonies and performances.

Bonnie Morris (1999) provides a comparative history of women's music festivals in the United States. She identifies the beginning of 'festival culture' as the years 1973-1976. Morris' book provides a comprehensive chronology of women's festivals' starts, conflicts and closures. Her contribution is informed by her location as an history and women's studies scholar. The influence of cultural feminism can be heard in her description of what is radical about festival culture is "that it dares to provide a venue for women's politics when radio, television, and Hollywood film do not, but also that festivals make possible an ingathering of artists and audiences who believe that women's voices *should* be heard - and heard daily - not just in music and the arts but in government, religion, medicine, global diplomacy, and so on" (12).

In discussing the staying power of long running festivals such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Morris notes: "The newcomer audience

which is so important to extending and perpetuating festival culture, thus overlaps with returning festigoers who know the herstory of women's music and have definite favourites" (17). It is this dynamic that promotes change and continuation, but also conflict, as noted by Stoeltje, Gamson and Kaplan.

Regarding the impact of women's festival's acceptance and promotion of lesbian relations and women-centred experience, Morris claims: "Festivals provide a concentrated blast of antidote, where we are, for three to eight days, *not* the problem but the solution, *not* responsible for the sins of Eve but back in Eden ourselves, planting apple trees from whence grow women's wisdom" (25). This description speaks again to the liminal character of festival. As Turner has pointed out in his notion of *communitas*, the festival allows for a bonding of the social 'other' and development of practices which can transform *societas* into a more inclusive space for the 'other'. The experience of how it 'could' be at festival allows for reflection on how to bring that about in the everyday world.

Morris recognises the singularity of the MWMF, "[a]ll festivals are life-changing, but Michigan is unique due to its enormity [sic] (nearly 10,000 women its most crowded year) and its aura of mystery (privately owned land, womyn born womyn only)" (59). Her description of Michigan's layout, structure and the conflicts that have arisen within the Festival during its 26 year history is clear and well-presented. The importance of establishing a context for discussing festival phenomena is made clear in her attention to detail. The implication of her attention to the unique characteristics is that the form of women's festival does not adhere to a discrete typology, perhaps some comparison to Stoeltje's characteristics of 'pure' festival would be instructive in a fuller treatment of the MWMF. Some of her examples of crisis and conflict include the 1988 shigella outbreak, s/m activists renting a plane and dropping leaflets in 1990, the issue of cultural appropriation of Native arts and culture in the early 90s, and in 1994 the

transgender issue. Morris is careful to point out that "not all women see the issues that flare and fade; only a core of activists or personalities concerned are likely to be affected. This is not necessarily a good thing" (153). This indication of differential experience and concerns speaks to Crompton and McKay's expression of motive domains for people attending festivals. There are a myriad of individual motives for participation, not all of which conform to the organisers' visions of what festival provides.

In relation to the inclusivity of festival culture and identities assumed within it, Morris says, "there is no need to explain one's identity as an aficionado of women's music, festival culture, camping, lesbian political activism, woman-centred art, the Goddess, etc. - just being at the festival signals an openness to these basic interests and institutions" (124). Morris identifies four particular aspects that "attract the 'typical' festiegoer to return... 1) The personal safety of women-only space, 2) freedom to love other women openly, 3) a focus on female spirituality and healing, and 4) seeing what co-operative and creative energy can accomplish" (313-314). The appendix to the book includes excerpts from festival participants' surveys, comments and Morris' collective diaries.

In her research on festival, Morris has followed the advice of Stoeltje and attained a variety of perspectives on the events from participants, organisers, performers and workers. The framework she mobilised includes attention to the characteristics of modes of communication which Stoeltje suggested: humour, complexity, intensification and participation. Her book is largely descriptive in focus but she does include interpretations of the conflicts which have arisen in women's festival milieus.

The authors and topics covered in the women's festival literature overlap and inform the literature of identity politics which arises from feminist, gay and lesbian, and community/social movement studies. The festival is an event which

lends itself to the study of gender and identity construction, which has been alluded to throughout the literature on festival. This brings us to a discussion of the literature on identity construction which is relevant to festival and questions of gender and sexuality.

### Identity Politics in Gender- and Sexuality-centred Communities

In the 1970s, the women's movement and notions of sexual liberation conflated to create a discourse in feminism informed by sexual politics. The burgeoning realisation that the second wave of feminism often failed to take into account the diversity of women's experience (McNeill, 1996) led to a rise in identity politics. Two streams of response to this developing discourse on sexual identity and identity politics in feminist frameworks and lesbian communities emerged. As Stacey Young (1995) notes, "some people call for flexible, inclusive definitions, and others urge caution, warning against indistinct definitions they think could weaken lesbian and gay struggles against homophobia" (219).

One stream argued that the rise of identity politics subverted the potential of radical feminist efforts through creating hierarchies of oppression and stifling debate. It was argued that women must remember their shared oppression by men and work for more broad based, rather than single issued, goals (McNeill, 1996). A second stream argued for the non-essential and mutable nature of identity. For example, Barbara Ponse (1978) noted that homophobia emerges from the social construction of compulsory heterosexuality which relies on the principle of consistency and "assumes that the elements of sex assignment, gender identity, sex roles (or gender roles), sexual object choice, and sexual identity vary together" (24). This second stream proved fertile ground for discussions of identity politics and feminist community building, and parallels Foucault's concept of a socially and historically constructed definition of sexual

identities and practices (1978).

Shane Phelan (1989) addresses identity politics, community, and feminism in relation to lesbianism, sadomasochism, and the limits of community. She discusses the not unproblematic relationship between the lesbian community and the larger women/feminist community which came to a head in the 'sex wars' of the 1980s. Phelan focuses on issues of sexuality which both the lesbian and feminist community have had difficulties accepting, in particular S/m practices. She argues for recognition of difference in building feminist community:

We can afford neither assimilation into mainstream politics, nor total withdrawal in search of the authentic community. We have to stand where we are, acknowledging the links and contradictions between ourselves and other..., resisting the temptations to cloak crucial differences with the cloak of universality and to deny generalities for fear of essentialism. Only in this way will we be able to be free from the domination that lives both within and around us (1989: 786).

Judith Butler (1993) also cautions against the view of self-identification as a rigid and unchanging category. She argues that "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (13-14). In relation to identity as a rallying point for resistance Visweswaran (1994) suggests that: "All identities are intrinsically coalitional in that they seek to establish grounds of affinity. It is important to recognize, though, that coalitional identities are by nature unstable" (23). Gender and sexuality, like all aspects of identity, are performative and come into being through the repetition of social norms, in Butler's explanation. As such, identity itself, whether collective or individual, may be on the constant verge of collapse: "For if the 'I' is a site of repetition, that is, if the 'I' is only the semblance of identity

through a certain repetition of itself, then the 'I' is always displaced by the very repetition that sustains it" (18). Through understanding the mutability of identity Butler and Kamala Visweswaran suggest that we may begin to escape the hegemony of such categories. "In avowing the sign's strategic provisionality (rather than its strategic essentialism), that identity can become a site of contest and revision, indeed, take on a future set of significations that those of us who see it now may not be able to foresee" (19).

In a similar vein, Bidy Martin (1996) argues for fluid, but legitimate conceptions of gendered identities. However, she contests the notion that all gender categories are oppressive, cautioning against the disembodied aspects of abstractions of identity and anti-essentialist demonizations of feminism. She suggests "that we stop defining queerness as mobile and fluid in relation to what then gets construed as stagnate and ensnaring, and associated with a maternal, anachronistic, and putatively puritanical feminism" (101). Instead, Martin advocates for a rejection of such polemic and binary constructions of identity.

Rosalind Morris (1995) discusses gender as an act of performance and argues that new theories of gender performativity are the logical heir, but also the apotheosis, of the traditions of feminist anti-essentialism and practice theory. She notes two trends in anthropology which look at either the creation or subversion of particular gender systems: the anthropology of 'making difference', which examines how genders are socially constructed over time and space; and the anthropology of 'decomposing difference', which focuses on institutions of ambiguity. Morris suggests that "the idea of performativity offers much to a constructionist anthropology, but it has yet to fulfil its promise to explain the relationships between difference and normativity, society and individual, history and its transcendence" (587).

Gilbert Herdt's 1994 work begins the task of applying notions of

performativity in cross-cultural perspectives which approach relationships between difference and normativity. He provides a broad base for comparison of expressions and practices of gender and sexuality, which includes: Balkan sworn virgins (female-bodied men), Polynesian "liminal" men (gender-crossing males), Native American two-spirited people, Indian *hijras* (emasculated males who are neither men nor women), transgenderists in the U.S., and a study of an intersex condition in the Dominican Republic called "penis at twelve". Herdt highlights the cultural construction of gender as it is performed in diverse cultural frames. Each of the studies provides ethnographic evidence attesting to the existence of more than two sexes and two genders, as well as to the constructed nature of gender.

In support of gender and identity as performative, Butler (1990) argued that gender is not a core aspect of our identity but is an achievement gained through performance. She contests gender as a biological factor and suggests that we should view gender as fluid rather than fixed: "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as female one" (6). Butler advocates challenging traditional notions of gender through performance and parody. Her main metaphor for this is drag. She believes that in dressing up as a member of the "other" sex, drag artists are subverting ideas of gender norms, challenging the "constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity" (148).

In contrast to Butler's position, Sheila Jeffreys (1996) unequivocally rejects the personal and political validity of role playing in the formation of lesbian relationships and identities: "Role playing in the 1980's is the soft pornography,

compared with the hard pornography of s-m" (106). Identifying butch/femme and their concomitant masculine and feminine manifestations as indulgences in heteropatriarchal power structures, Jeffreys paradoxically calls for all women to take on the political strategy of "looking like lesbians" (112), suggesting that the lesbian-look transcends any relation to a gendered presentation. Jeffreys warns that, "Lesbian role-playing needs to be explained as part of the very grave worldwide backlash against the liberation of women" (112).

Such responses to roles and performance in gender identity dismiss earlier work on identity as performative. This concept is often linked to the work of Erving Goffman (1976), who examined the "fronts", "dramatic realizations", and "idealizations" of social performances in everyday life. Fronts are "the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his [sic] performance" (91). Clothing, sex, age, racial characteristics, etc. are all examples of personal fronts. Social systems of identification and treatments tend to place individuals within such socially constructed categories. As a result, "the full range of diversity is cut at a few crucial points, and all those within a given bracket are allowed or obliged to maintain the same social front in certain situations" (92). Through this process social fronts become institutionalised and naturalised: "The front becomes a 'collective representation' and a fact in its own right" (93). This leads to the idealisation of collective fronts, which become rigid collective identities for communities to rally around. "Furthermore, in so far as the expressive bias of performance comes to be accepted as reality, then that which is accepted at the moment as reality will have some of the characteristics of a celebration" (95). This analysis of performance and identity echoes concerns regarding the reification of identities by those advocating fluid notions of gender and sexual identity. The use of performance to push the boundaries of identity categories

lends identity the liminal characteristic of celebration.

The importance of identity performance and the construction of identity is clarified in a short biographical essay by Boye (1998). Boye tracks the personal changes that led to her current gender identity. She identifies the lesbian feminist politics of the 1980s as offering, and working to enforce, rigid identity categories: "I came out as a lesbian into the feminist climate of the eighties, when 'too much male energy' was the most fashionable insult. The non-commitment of androgyny gave me the protection of asexual conformity but no sense of self" (246). Breaking away from the rigidity of androgynous identity, Boye reconceptualised "the Butch role of the 1950's", and fashioned for herself an identity which encompasses, rather than erases, both her masculine and feminine sides.

The usefulness of gender performances which challenge normative constructions of male and female is further supported by Teresa de Lauretis (1993). She proposes that the concept of gender is predicated on a male norm, where femaleness is that which differs. De Lauretis argues that butches assert sexual agency which is independent from men, contesting Jeffrey's notion that butch roles are a mere copy of heterosexual male identity and behaviour. She argues in favour of the figure of the "mannish woman" as the representation of a "reverse discourse" which stands as "the representation of lesbian desire against both the discourse of hommo-sexuality [male centred constructions of 'gay' sexuality] and the feminist account of lesbianism as woman-identification" (146).

The liminal characteristic of identity performance, identified by Goffman and implied in the blurring of male and female characteristics, makes identity politics particularly relevant at events such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival which seek to build communities around collective identity. Nancy

Whittier's (1997) propositions regarding the transformation of social movements provide some insight into the conflicts around identity which arise at the MWMF. She offers three propositions for the transformation of social movements: First, "The collective identity of a given cohort of social movement participants remains consistent over time" (763); Second, "Differences in collective identity exist between the political generations that mobilize each wave of protest and among micro-cohorts within each political generation" (764); and third "Cohort replacement contributes to change in social movements" (764). Social movements often contain cohorts with divergent definitions of the movement and its goals, because the collective identity is informed by the changing contexts that prevail when activists first join the cause. The same dynamic is at work in long-running annual events like MWMF where change is promoted through challenges to universalising collective identities.

Paula Rust's (1995) discussion of the challenge bisexual identity presents to lesbian politics reflects a changing cohort entering into the lesbian/feminist movements. Rust traces the controversies of bisexual politics from the 1970s onward. While bisexuality has traditionally been seen as a threat to lesbian politics, Rust argues that queer politics, as opposed to gay/lesbian politics, provides a space for the successful development of bisexual movements. She argues, much like Hale's propositions, that "both the lesbian and the bisexual movements are part of a historical dialectical process in which each political cycle sets the stage for the next" (258). In future considerations, she asks "will [the bisexual movement] lose track of its focus on diversity and its goal of breaking down limiting gender and sexual categories, allowing itself to be co-opted into the gender system and constructed as a new sexual category?" (259).

Her question echoes Butler's concern that creating new identities and performances merely creates new categories with which to regulate behaviour.

Gayle Rubin (1984) engaged this concern in relation to the 'sex wars' of the 1980s. She directs her critique at the social forces which work towards the oppression of sexual minorities. She points particularly to the discourses of "antisex feminists" - who, she claims, in their anti-porn, anti-SM, and anti-trans discourses, work to preserve monogamous heterosexuality as the paradigm for 'natural sexual relations' by identify minority sexualities as 'deviant'. The 'deviant' behaviour of sexual minorities, Rubin argues, ought to be seen as sexually liberating, rather than as a cause for moral panic in feminist circles.

Kristin Esterberg (1997) works to elucidate the complexities of lesbian and bisexual identities and communities. She argues that "according to constructionists, although homosexual acts have been observed in all manner of time and places (and may near be universal), homosexual actors, whose identities and lifestyles are organized around their erotic desires for persons of the same gender, are historically specific" (21). While she agrees with this approach to identity, she is sceptical of the radical political potential of queer politics and theory: "what queer theory misses, in its attempts to take apart the sexual categories, is the role that identities play in individuals' own lives" (24). Ultimately she offers a reconceptualisation of community in order to overcome the barriers of identity: "Instead of seeing communities as places in which people really are alike in some fundamental way, we may be better off acknowledging that lesbian communities are really overlapping friendship networks, and sometimes exclusive ones at that, with multiple centers and fuzzy boundaries" (175).

Iris Young (1990) addresses concepts of community which, in her opinion, privilege unity over difference. This privileging is problematic because, "a desire for unity or wholeness in discourse generates borders, dichotomies, and exclusions" (301). Young calls for a "politics of difference", stating, "I propose

that instead of community as the normative ideal of political emancipation, that radicals should develop a politics of difference. A model of the unoppressive city offers an understanding of social relations without domination in which persons live together in relations of mediation among strangers with whom they are not in community" (303). This solution, however, fails to provide the looked for intimacy which draws many women to woman-only or lesbian-identified events.

Communities which depend upon certain undeniable realities of identity, such as who is a woman, resist performances of identity which threaten to make the collective 'I' unstable. The question of transgender attendance at the MWMF is an example of resistance to just such a threat and the practice of regulation through discourse which Rubin critiques. Kate Bornstein (1994), a transsexual lesbian performance artist, shares her experiences of coming to terms with a transgender identity in a text which is part autobiography/part sexual-political manifesto. Bornstein addresses issues of identity and shifting identity, acknowledging that identity is never static. In reflecting on her own experiences of being raised as a male but feeling female, Bornstein explores society's expectations and categories of gender and sexuality. By refusing to accept the essentialistic categories "man" and "woman" she calls into question exactly what is a man? What is a woman? She labels those who do not conform to these preset categories as "gender outlaws". She particularly notes that transgender identity challenges the viewpoints of both feminism and women's community, in the context of inclusivity and praxis.

Joshua Gamson (1995) works to clarify the meanings and distinct politics of queerness in order to trace its implications for social movement theory and research. He argues that the road into understanding the queer dilemma involves acknowledging the paradoxical necessity of both the deployment and destabilisation of identities. Queer "builds on central difficulties of identity-based

organizing: the instability of identities both individual and collective, their made up yet necessary character" (390). As such, queer offers a new push to social movement theories which assume success is contingent upon the formation of collective identity. While queer does much to challenge heteronormativity, "deconstructive strategies remain quite deaf and blind to the very concrete and violent institutional forms to which the most logical answer is resistance in and through a particular collective identity" (400).

Gamson sees this as a key dilemma in contemporary identity politics. He identifies two different political impulses and different forms of organising which appear to be facing off: "The logic and political utility of deconstructing collective categories vie with that of shoring them up" (391). He questions, not the viability of sexual identities, but their usefulness. Gamson follows Foucauldian concepts and the perspective of Butler when he states that "sexual identities are historical and social products, not natural or intrapsychic ones. It is socially-produced binaries (gay/straight, man/woman) that are the basis of oppression; fluid, unstable experiences of self become fixed primarily in the service of social control" (391).

Jacob Hale (1997) exploits the usefulness of sexual identities. He argues that 'masculine' performances and identities within lesbian communities work to deconstruct traditional notions of sex and gender, but also pose a challenge to the boundaries of such communities. He states, "anxieties about masculinity, manhood, and maleness...become especially acute in determining the boundaries of the category woman for admittance to woman-only sexual spaces, due to a felt need to protect women's sexual safety in sexual spaces" (226). His observations cut to the heart of what is at stake for many women in the conflicts around identity politics at women-only events like MWMF - the perception of safety. He goes on to argue that "gender performativity, just as any other form

of performativity, must occur within social constraints to be intelligible; it must be intelligible if it is to be efficacious; and if it is not efficacious it cannot succeed as performative” (226). The dynamic of sign systems which are universally meaningful within a particular community are crucial to the communication of collective identity. It is in the unpacking of these sign systems which are particular to specific communities that the literature on semiotics, which follows this section, becomes relevant.

### Semiotics and Interpretation

The literature on semiotics and interpretation can contribute to developing models for continuing the interpretation of women’s festivals. The discussion of semiotics in this section centres around three collections of essays which represent varied conceptions and approaches to the practice and theory of semiotic analyses. All three of these texts are part of editor Thomas Sebeok’s *Advances in Semiotics* publication project with Indiana University Press. Robert Innis’ (1985) text provides an historical approach, focusing on the original works of authors whose contributions engage basic concepts and approaches to semiotics. John Deely (1990) presents a philosophically oriented text organised around concepts in semiotic analysis. Marcel Danesi and Paul Perron (1999) approach the topic from an anthropological location, making the cultural stream and practice central to their discussion. Many of the authors who were discussed as influential in developing ritual, celebration, and festival literature appear as references in these works on semiotics. Durkheim’s concept of ‘collective unconscious’, Freud’s psychoanalytic approach to myth and individual identity, Weber’s ideological approach to culture as a system of symbolic meanings, and Tylor’s examination of ritual and symbol systems’ contributions to cultural development are cited as contributions to the emergence of semiotic theory.

The study of culture, which is anthropology's special project, is enhanced by the literature produced in semiotic studies.

Innis provides an opportunity to read some of the foundational work of semiotics in the authors' original form. He begins with Charles Peirce's threefold process of sign, interpretant and object. A sign exists, is apprehended by an observer, and the observation of meaning leads to a sign's connection to the object it identifies (1985: 8). Peirce then introduces three types of signs which have remained in the contemporary lexicon of semiotics:

A sign is either an icon, an index, or a symbol. An icon is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometric line. An index is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant. Such, for instance, is a piece of mould with a bullet hole in it as sign of a shot; for without the shot there would be no hole; but the hole remains whether.... [it is] attributed to a shot or not. A symbol is a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that significance (10).

This taxonomy of signs is helpful in categorizing signs to indicate their actions in meaning-making situations and highlighting the agency of social actors in assigning meanings.

Innis proceeds to Peirce's European contemporary Ferdinand de Saussure, a French linguist. Saussure defines the nature of the sign as arbitrary because the signifier and the signified (concept and sound image) have no natural relationship to one another. Saussure views the system of signs as inherently abstract, a closed system of meanings which is removed from substantive associations. The lack of concreteness is the reference point around which his arbitrary nature of the sign revolves. The value of a linguistic sign is

determined by its environment. Saussure defined two elements of this environment, the syntagmatic (diachronic) and the paradigmatic (synchronic). The diachronic provides the sequence of units which locate a sign in a context of relative value to the preceding and succeeding signs. The synchronic allows for the associative relationship to other signs of similar meaning which point to what the particular sign is *not*. This model of two elements would influence structural anthropology through the work of Levi-Strauss, who took Saussure's linguistic model and applied it to the study of myth and ritual. Saussure's concepts of *langue* (the system of grammar and syntax within which communication takes place) and *parole* (the practice of communication by social agents) compare usefully to Geertz's notion of the form of ritual as both a model of (comparable to *parole*) and a model for (comparable to *langue*) cultural and social behavior.

Saussure and Peirce also figure centrally in Deely's presentation of semiotic trends. Deely identifies two streams of semiotic development. The first is based in the work of Saussure and ties semiotics to linguistics and an idealist frame of reference. The second follows the work of Charles Peirce which presents semiotics in a realist frame and perceives it as not limited to linguistic models and representations. Deely clearly locates himself in the second tradition as a realist and someone who conceives of signs beyond the linguistic. He suggests that semiotics is not a method, as hermeneutics has been treated, but a point of view which holds the possibility to unite the social sciences in an evolutionally driven search for understanding of human behaviour and communication. The subject matter of semiotics becomes, for Deely, epistemology. The centrality of history as a transmission of culture brings semiotics from the ideal to the real in its tracking of knowledge creation and process.

Danesi and Perron open their book with a definition of humans and

semiotics. "*Homo culturalis* is above all else a meaning-seeking species, whose hunger and search for *meaning* to its existence has led it to invent myths, art, ritual, language, science, and all other cultural phenomena that guide its search. The study of how humans search for and make meaning comes under the rubric of *semiotics*" (ix). This places the authors clearly in a theoretical location which privileges the ideological over the material. They discuss various approaches and components to interpreting the material of culture through its derivation from or contribution to the ideological foundations of that culture. Unlike Deely, the authors perceive the development of semiotic method as a useful project for grounding ideological concepts in the material practices of cultural behaviour those concepts actuate.

Part 1 of the text describes the history of the study of culture, inside and outside the field of semiotics. A discussion of the theoretical explanations for the development of culture is put forward and culture is defined in semiotic terms as "a way of life based on a signifying order developed originally in a tribal context that is passed along through the signifying order from one generation to the next" (1999: 23). The authors then go on to consider the contributions of Saussure and Peirce to semiotics as a present day science of signs, reiterating many of Innis' and Deely's points. Danesi and Perron emphasise the interdisciplinary nature of semiotics.

In Part 2 the authors present approaches for identifying, documenting and explaining meaning-based aspects of culture and human behaviour. This section covers nonverbal semiosis, language, metaphor, space, art, objects, narrative and medias. Danesi and Perron present a list of primary tropes (metaphorical manipulations): climax, anticlimax, antithesis, apostrophe (addressed to object not present), euphemism, exclamation, hyperbole, litotes (understatement), simile, metonymy, conceit (extravagant analogy), irony, onomatopoeia,

oxymoron, paradox, personification, rhetorical question, and synecdoche (part stands for whole) (162-164). This list and its accompanying definitions is a useful taxonomy for identifying metaphorical processes in expressive communications.

Part 3 presents a synthesis of the material in the text toward an elucidation of semiotic method. Microsemiotic and macrosemiotic are presented as discrete approaches. Macro examines the relation of the parts to the whole and micro considers how the parts take their meanings from the whole. They suggest that three basic questions guide semiotic enquiry, 1) What does a certain sign, code or text mean? 2) How does it represent what it means and 3) Why does it mean what it means? (291). Seeking the answers to these questions is guided by five principles: interdisciplinarity, relativity, signification, dimensionality and interconnectedness (292). Both the micro and macro approaches follow these questions and principles. Semiotic analysis of either kind consists of three stages: observation, analysis, and synthesis (295).

The separation of micro and macro approaches is problematic in its implied limitation of semiotics' ability to pursue an holistic analysis of cultural meanings. The authors present the value of semiotics as lying in its ability to provide a means of understanding the systems which, often unconsciously, shape our thoughts and behaviours. Citing Michel Foucault, they note that much of what we consider normal and natural is socially constructed in a specific historical moment using the signifying order to claim legitimacy. In advocating awareness of the unseen forces which shape norms and culture, semiotics recognises the Foucauldian notion of power as producing its own resistance. Resistance develops both within the micro and macro arenas, and in their interaction with one another. In semiotic approaches to festival, where the process of social change and concrete manifestations of festival's production of critical reflection are a central concern, the separation that Danesi and Perron

propose is counter-productive to realising the relation between individual, festival and mainstream culture.

Susanne Langer suggests that abstractions made by the eye and ear, the forms of direct perception, are "genuine symbolic materials, media of understanding, by whose office we apprehend a world of *things*, and of events that are the history of things" (1985: 99). Langer's concept that there is no standard key for translating sculpture because the "equivalence rests on their common *total reference*"(101) illustrates the variety of interpretation possible for expressive communications readings. This mutability of meaning rests in the characteristics of the visual form as having "no fixed meaning apart from its context" (101). Taking Langer's notion of context to its conclusion supports the notion that semiotics, or the study of meaning, must work with both micro and macro moments in meaning-making practice to fully engage the possible contexts which supply significance to symbols and signs.

Literature which speaks to the interpretation and analysis of ritual and festival is closely linked to semiotics, and broadens opportunities for applying semiotic analysis to festival research sites. An example is *The Social Use of Metaphor* (1977) in which James Fernandez proposes that metaphors provide organising images which ritual action puts into effect. The unpacking of metaphorical statements depend upon a multitude of experiences with the word or image in contexts which often overlap and contradict. Fernandez provides a two part semantic definition of metaphor as "1. a device of representation in which new meaning is learned ... and 2. a strategic predication upon an inchoate pronoun which makes a movement and leads to performance" (102). In other words, a true metaphor must open new ways of seeing and provoke response or action from the social agent who views it.

Fernandez sees the process of connotation which metaphor provokes as

the primary mode through which metaphor teaches us something new about a subject. He focuses on what he terms the 'performative metaphor' which implies performance both on the part of the viewer and the presenter of the metaphor. Fernandez uses performance in both the literal sense of action and in the figurative sense of recognising the inherent lack of the 'real' in a metaphor's representation of a subject. For example, calling a person a clown does not really mean they are wearing white-face and big rubber shoes.

Folklorist Roger Abrahams posits that the use of genres allows ethnographers to name patterns of expression within a context of performance and presentation. He suggests that perceptions of genre contribute to understanding the ceremonial communicative interactions of small groups (1981: 194). Abrahams contends that for an investigator of expressive culture "genre analysis provides a common frame of reference" which can be used to compare within one group or cross-culturally the expression genres take in particular contexts (195). He identifies three structural levels for analysis in forms: the structure of materials (colours, shapes, repetitions); the dramatic structure (relevant to performances where a dialogue between characters is presented); and the structure of context. Abrahams identifies the latter level as the location of patterns of interaction which inform meanings in particular situations and grants the structure of context pride of place (198). He critiques the tendency to impose discrete categories on expressive culture versus technology, suggesting that the need for academic boundary making inhibits understanding of flows of expression in real lives.

In a similar frustration with discreteness, Barbara Babcock (1992) takes issue with the primary division of artifacts into utilitarian or aesthetic categories, which has evolved over time in studies of material culture. She suggests that the distinction "is best discarded because the idea of art as a separate category of

things 'beyond necessity' is alien to most of the world's cultures" (204). She chooses instead to mobilise Simmel's concept of 'objective culture' which views artifacts as central to the production and reproduction of cultural persons and social relations. She goes on to state that structural and semiotic studies have failed to recognise adequately objectual sign systems. Babcock lists five distinctive aspects of artifactual communication: Multifunctionality and polysemy - which recognises that "most objectual signs are not used only or primarily as signs" (201); Multiple frames and contextual determinants - which reflects the characteristic of objectual signs to change meanings radically depending on the context and perspective of the viewer; multiple channels and multivocality - objects have more than one signifying dimension and changes in any one can alter meaning and indicate a shift in context; Recycling and bricolage - construction of a significant object from fragments of other signs and sign systems; ephemerality - many highly significant cultural products are meant to be used and used up (199-203).

Babcock concludes with approaches to studying artifacts grouped in the order in which they emerged on the cultural studies scene. 1) Description and analysis, 2) stylistic analyses -focus on patterning of formal features, 3) technique and technology - focus on process of production, 4) social uses and cultural meanings, 5) communication and interaction - Turner's 'operational meanings', 6) structural or semiotic - viewed as a cultural system, 7) ethnosemantic - an emic viewpoint for analyses, 8) producer or artist centred, 9) acculturation - how signs reflect intercultural communication, cultural change, 10) politics of production - Bourdieu's 'symbolic capital', and 11) performance-centred. Babcock suggests that, ideally, readings of artifacts should combine these eleven approaches.

Feminist scholarship on interpretation and semiotics also resists the

division of the material and the cultural, the useful and the aesthetic. Butler (1997) argues that the supposed Marxist objection to the study of 'mere culture' in academic circles and the tendency to relegate social movements to the sphere of the cultural, should not be thought of in dichotomous ideological terms. Rather, she suggests that the theoretical separation of the material and the cultural is a fruitless and dangerous endeavour reminiscent of uncritical separations of gender, race, and class. These separations, she argues, emerge from a neo-conservative left which fails to take into account the multiple interstices of social power. Her argument is reminiscent of conflicting viewpoints in the festival literature about whether ritual and celebration can be seen as having concrete impact on the dynamic of social and political change.

Expressive communications from women's cultural practices are often political in nature and impact, despite their location in cultural milieus. Judy Elsley (1996) discusses how projects involving textile art and political action have re-emerged as a popular form of resistance in the last decades. Elsley mentions such groups as: The NAMES project, undertaken by the organisation Persons With AIDs, which use quilts to remember those who have died from AIDS and raise funds to support those who live with it; Justine Merritt and the other creators of the Ribbon around the Pentagon Project who used quilt panels to protest the nuclear arms race; and women in Boise, Idaho who began the Boise Peace Quilters project, creating quilts to recognise groups and persons involved in peace work. As one of the Boise women points out "a quilt serves as 'an apt metaphor for stitching together our ragged world'" (Pershing: 65). Elsley describes the quilting bee as somewhere that "[w]omen [gather] together outside the knowledge and control of the patriarchy" (55). She points that "the sewing itself, the finished quilt, the material product, is of secondary importance to the process of healing, community and transformation it represents" (72). The

quilting bee represents a movement out of structural norms and into liminal space, where critical reflection takes place. This reflection results in both a material representation in the quilt, and political actions which challenge normative structures. This piece is an example of the cultural becoming both political and concrete in its impact upon individuals and structures.

In a feminist mobilisation of techniques for interpreting cultural texts, Joan Radner and Susan Lanser discuss how women's cultures have developed strategies of coding in order to pass along information that is exclusive to that particular community. They describe how coding can refer to a set of signals, words, forms, behaviours, and signifiers (such as rainbow flags). They define coding as "the expression or transmission of messages potentially accessible to a (bicultural) community under the very eyes of a dominant community for whom these same messages are either inaccessible or inadmissible" (3). Their work speaks to the transgressive and social power of cultural texts. The understanding of semiotic interpretations and conditions by social agents allows for those techniques to be mobilised in resisting power structures. Strategies and codes are fluid and change with groups' shifts in identity and relations to power structures.

In an example of this mobilisation, Linda Pershing notes that the quilting bee is a non-threatening expression of women's community because it is linked with traditional feminine roles which outwardly support the norm. Yet "these same forms can also operate as a way of articulating human differences and resistance to cultural norms" (64). "When other forms of public expression - such as voting, holding elected office, public speaking and political organising - have been discouraged or denied them, women have used needlework to convey their ideas about political process" (54). A reversal of normative roles is common to political textile arts, juxtaposing traditional images with non-traditional contexts as

an expression of "resistance to dominant cultural norms" (98). The feminist contribution to semiotics and interpretative practices is particularly relevant to applying those practices at women's festival events because it addresses gender, identity, and feminist expressions of resistance.

### Conclusion

The variety of festival literature available led me to set parameters regarding what constituted relevant literature to the topic of contemporary women's festivals. The sense of the sacred that emerges in women's accounts of MWMF leads me to focus on the festival literature which has maintained a connection to early ritual and celebration material. The performance theory and gender identity literature overlap with much of the material on festival. Recent studies of celebration and festival in folklore and anthropology have included newer discourse on performance theory and identity construction. The liminal character of festival lends itself to identity construction and fluid movement between self and other which is particularly useful in exploring theories of performance and identity construction. The literature on women's festivals is largely preoccupied with this aspect of the festival milieu. In this review I focus on those sources which make central the character and structure of festival and its interpretation.

The expressive communications at MWMF lend themselves to the broader field of semiotics as the study of symbols and signs in communicative texts which focus on artifacts and material productions. The philosophical stream of semiotics and hermeneutics provides useful ways to think about texts and meanings. A focus on artifacts and material productions reflects the concreteness of the processes and materials which emerge from festival that are the focus of my work. I found the text by Danesi and Perron most useful and

complementary to the approach I have chosen in my research analyses because of their emphasis on practice and method.

This chapter has tied together the separate transformations of academic work on ritual and celebration and that on semiotics. Festival literature has moved from its origins in the religious and sacred arenas to a broader focus on the secular events of festival and celebration. Semiotics has diverged from a specifically literary and linguistic focus to the broader realm of interpreting cultural meaning-making systems. This broadening of the conceptualisation of semiotics has been tempered in this paper through the application to the particular topic of interpreting women's festivals and identity politics they display. These three bodies of literature complement and enhance one another in the project of studying meaning-making practices in women's festivals.

In the next chapter I use these theoretical groundings and frameworks to undertake a discussion of expressive communications at MWMF. These expressive communications are explored in relation to their context in a women's festival using some of the interpretative frameworks and semiotic concepts that have been explored in this chapter.

### Chapter Four: Fields of Meaning

Chapters One and Two set the stage for exploring MWMF by locating the field through its history and my relationship with MWMF and then by describing the research process and preliminary findings. In Chapter Three I presented some of the theoretical developments and ideas regarding work on festival, identity and semiotics. This chapter is framed by that scholarship as I turn to an exploration of meanings in the field at MWMF. I explored several forms of expressive communication that contribute to and (re)present the festival community, culture and identities during the research of 1997 and 1998. These included an annual quilting bee, puppet parade and permanent decorative signage. Some of the most frequently occurring images engender explicit connections between women and nature. This chapter explores the ideology of woman as 'natural' within the multiple meanings and modes of identity construction in the woman-defined and woman-centred space of MWMF.

I begin by discussing the situated character of these forms of expressive communication in women's space. The images, in particular the quilts, reflect the fluid and changing identities of MWMF. I work to provide a sense of the collective identities of the festival over time through a discussion of the quilts. The puppet parade is an expressive communication event which emerges as intra-group communication. Who participates and who doesn't is a clue to what the festival as a text can say to participants with regard to inclusion and normative measures of identity. Signage, a third aspect of expression, speaks to

collective identities in this woman-centred space. These symbols and images will then be unpacked in terms of the ideology expressed through the linkage of woman and nature. Finally, I will critically explore the project of reclaiming nature imagery from its Enlightenment locus in relation to its potential for social change beyond the situated location of woman-identified events like MWMF.

### Creating Women's Space

Falassi describes festival as a "significant way to feel in tune with [our] world ... to partake in the special reality of festival, and celebrate life in its 'time out of time'" (1987: 7). He asserts that "festival questions authority and challenges social harmony" (174). MWMF is portrayed as time out of patriarchy and, as a women-defined space, is specifically intended to question authority and challenge social harmony. "When women separate (withdraw, break out, regroup, transcend, shove aside, step outside, migrate, say *no*) we are simultaneously controlling access and defining" (Frye, 1995: 149). Frye suggests that such separation, however temporary, critically reclaims women's identities and social power.

MWMF is identified as a primarily lesbian event and, like The National Women's Music Festival, is an "attempt to create feminist communities that are 'prefigurative' [ . B]y embodying feminist ideals, they prefigure the type of social organisation that feminists would like to see throughout society" (Eder, et. al., 1995: 486). Armstrong, like Frye, points out the importance of lesbian specificity and lesbian communities: "Lesbians are asserting ownership of their

own sexuality, and promoting women's sexual agency" (1995: 208). She states that "The importance of the lesbian community for the development of women's sexual agency cannot be overestimated. The more visible lesbianism is as a sexual option for all women, the more likely that heterosexuality can be authentically seen as a choice, instead of as compulsory" (216).

Participants recognise these elements of the festival: "My world was changed forever in the moment that I realised I was not alone" (Lesbian Connection, 1998: 4). "The festival is about freedom and acceptance. The diversity is good" (Lesbian Connection, 1999: 8). Seiss, a craftswoman at MWMF, states that "Michigan's women's culture allows us to develop a strong self and sense of power, which it is important to take out into the world" (Seiss Interview, 1997).

The dynamic of normative versus other remains salient in this alternative community. Seiss feels it is important to recognise "that there is darkness here. Women can hurt women as much as anyone, maybe worse. It is only in these women-centred spaces that the deep wounds can surface and be healed" (Seiss Interview, 1997). While there is an element of reflexivity, as indicated by comments regarding the lack of emotional safety for marginal groups, there is a strong commitment to the perception of the festival as an implicitly safe space. Women, in a group interview in 1997, discussed the issue of safety on two distinct levels: Infringement of emotional safety at the festival was acknowledged; however, there were notable silences surrounding threats to physical safety. This silence suggests the centrality of a construction of safety to

the collective identity of the festival. Gamson notes that in order for the safe space outside of patriarchy to work at MWMF there can be "no ambiguity about who is female and who is not" (1997: 188). The concept of safety is predicated on notions of women's essential identity as non-violent. He notes that, "Transsexual women remained excluded from the lesbian festival collective, even as they gained entry" (179). The boundary of identity and inclusion/exclusion can be symbolic and maintain group identity while in practice boundaries are more fluid.

Bensinger, in her work on feminist pornography debates, suggests that, "By targeting an 'enemy' that exists 'outside' the movement, conflicts existing inside, at the level of everyday practice, are obscured" (1992: 69). While normative constructions of (hetero) sexuality are absent in this lesbian dominant environment, sexual conventions remain fairly conservative. The sexual and erotic are still contested images within feminist ideology; lesbian sexual identities are locations of discourse for this issue in feminism and the women's movement. At events like MWMF, it is not always easy to maintain the outsider target for conflicts. This is due to the multiple levels of meaning and identity which conflate in woman-only spaces. This dynamic can be seen in the emphasis on festival as a 'safe' space in relation to mainstream locations.

"For all their materiality, positions of 'difference' (and differences of positioning) are increasingly realised within and through representation" (Pitchford, 1997: 6). The fragmenting of identities in post-modern discourses, in which the oppositional nature of man/woman is blurring and there is the loss of a

universal identity to act as an umbrella for a women's/feminist movement, can be threatening to those who find such an identity necessary for engendering solidarity. Events like MWMF provide a location where the essentialising of identity becomes especially problematic, due to the gender-specific population but also its diversity. Pitchford re-iterates many MWMF participants' emphasis on unity when she concludes that "feminism can function in multiple, contingent ways without sacrificing its *one defining commitment*, the economic and psychic well-being of women" (32, emphasis added).

### The Quilts: Dynamic Identities

The fluidity of collective identity at the festival, as well as the urge to capture images which speak to unity and shared values, are evident in the quilting images at MWMF. The use of symbol and metaphor to express ideas and feelings allows for multiple meanings and interpretations from both the creators and the viewers. The quilts are unique each year, reflecting current issues and the constituency of the festival workers who design the larger theme and motif.

Textile and fabric art has a long and ambiguous history. Early suffragists, like American Elizabeth Cady Stanton, viewed women engaging in sewing and embroidery as part of the oppressive structure of society, and encouraged them to put down their needles and take up the struggle for equal rights. At the same time, many of the expressions of the early women's movement found voice in the traditional techniques of fabric art. Arm ribbons, banners and fundraising quilts

carried the messages and furthered the cause of the suffragette movement.

The stereotypical image of women's needlework serves to support and reinforce cultural constructions of gender. The Euro-North American image of women as active in the domestic sphere makes needlework an appropriate, as well as an unchallenged, occupation for women. The opportunity for women to gather together under the auspices of such normative constructs as the quilting bee can, however, also be viewed as an opportunity to engage in resistance. The quilting bee is a non-threatening expression of women's community because it is linked with traditional feminine roles. While outwardly supporting the norm, "these same forms can also operate as a way of articulating human differences and resistance to cultural norms" (Pershing, 1996:3). They are locations where women can gather outside the 'public' scrutiny of men and share their own concerns and issues.

The history of political uses of fabric art is difficult to trace. This is largely due to the lack of importance and value which has been placed, in general, on women's work, and on needlework in particular. Access to the history - herstory - of women and textile arts increased with the development of the printing press, which allowed for patterns to be recorded and exchanged more easily. In the 1800s, "women sold quilts at fairs and festivals to raise money for hospital relief" (Pershing, 1996:57-8). "When other forms of public expression - such as voting, holding elected office, public speaking and political organising - have been discouraged or denied them, women have used needlework to convey their ideas about political process" (54).

Projects involving textile art and political action have re-emerged as a popular form of resistance in the last two decades. The NAMES project, undertaken by Persons With AIDS, is one such form which uses quilts to remember those who have died from AIDS and raise funds to support those who live with it. Justine Merritt and the other creators of the Ribbon around the Pentagon Project used quilt panels to protest the nuclear arms race. Women in Boise, Idaho began the Boise Peace Quilters project, creating quilts to recognise groups and persons involved in peace work (see Pershing 1997). As "one of the women [from the Peace Quilt project] points out a quilt serves as 'an apt metaphor for stitching together our ragged world'" (1996: 65) . Perhaps this explains the rise in fabric art as a political statement for change and the attraction for women as expressive communication.

I have had some limited involvement with projects that use textile arts as a means of communicating political messages. The Vigil Committee<sup>1</sup> in Winnipeg, Manitoba used squares of cloth with the names of murdered women embroidered<sup>2</sup> on them. At each vigil, the squares were held up by participants to commemorate and personalise the impact of violence against women. These squares were created with the intent of combining them to form a quilt which could be displayed at hearings, the legislature and on International Women's Day. I have also participated in the Quilting Area at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival in 1994, 1995 ,1997 and 1998.

My coven undertook the creation of an altar cloth in 1992. We designed the piece as a general image of the Wheel of The Year with space for images

representing the high holidays. Each member of the coven took the cloth home to create an image for the upcoming festival. Over the course of a full liturgical year, the cloth was completed. Methods varied from embroidery to appliqué and included attaching items like feathers, shells, etc. My experiences working with group textile art projects and political expressions through that medium influence my interpretation of the quilting images at MWMF.

The festival itself can be seen, like the quilting bee, as a place where "[w]omen [gather] together outside the knowledge and control of the patriarchy" (Elsley, 1996: 55). The festival is about re-claiming women's culture and strategising for bringing that culture into the mainstream. The Quilting Area is one of several areas dedicated to special interests, activities and events at MWMF. Like the Ribbon of Merritt's group, quilting at MWMF "draws on a long standing tradition of women using fabric to express their values, social concerns and political allegiances" (Pershing, 1996: 49). The images of the Michigan quilts challenge assumptions that "women's textile arts simply reproduce cultured images of women as the keepers of the hearth and home" and the quilting area is used as a "vehicle for the critique of cultural norms" (1996:4).

The history of the Quilting Area at MWMF has not been documented. Like much of the herstory surrounding the festival, there has been no archiving of the quilts, their makers or images. The originator of the Quilting Area, Dreamwalker, is no longer a participant in the festival. The first festival was in 1975 and the first recorded images of the quilting area available publicly are from 1984. Quilter K. is attempting to obtain personal pictures by advertising in

the Quilting Area and Community Center for women to bring in any images they have. It is conceivable that there has been quilting, either formally or informally, since the inception of the event. However, the area became a formal part of the festival in the early 1980s. A second quilt is created in the workers' area. I did not have access to this space at MWMF and was unable to observe the process of creating the Workers' Quilt. In discussions with quilters, I was told that the Workers' Quilt was a replica of the festival quilt pattern, until the early 90s when the two projects became independent. The renaissance which fabric and textile arts enjoyed in the 70s and 80s coincides with the creation of MWMF, suggesting that the presence of the Quilting Area may be tied to this broader social current.

My observations in the Quilting Area led me to identify three major elements displayed in the quilting at MWMF. These elements are the subversive nature of the images, the social nature of the process, and the fundraising aspect of the final product.

The first element I observed was the subversive images the quilts contain. I view them as representing resistance to both gender inequalities and heterosexism. The quilts are unique each year, reflecting the current issues and the constituency of the festival workers who design the larger theme and motif. The piano logo is a consistent image which repeats each year, a symbol which represents the festival itself and is an explicit and recognisable code for women who are aware of the MWMF. Images of women, stylised vulvas, labryses, celestial images and woman symbols are popular representations in each of the

quilts on record.

The 1986 quilt, titled "Safe Space" (see Figure 1), depicts the code (the piano logo) for the festival contained in a stylised vulva. The message is that the festival is in women's space, and implies that this location indicates safety. The assumption of safety among women and constructions of women as non-violent and supportive are inherent in the image. This quilt speaks to an inward focus at the festival of creating women's space and celebrating women's culture within that space. The vulva image indicates the embodiment of identity. 'Womyn-born-womyn' is implicit in this image, foreshadowing future conflicts over transgender participants and creating a symbolic boundary of identity.

The 1991 quilt, "Everything She Touches" (see Figure 2), presents an appropriation of Michelangelo's creation painting. In this rendition, both the divine and humanity are represented as female figures. The idea of woman as divine and as the representative of humanity turns the Judeo-Christian creation story in the Hebrew Bible on its head. This reversal of normative roles is common to political textile arts. For example, Wendy Lewington Coulter used the traditional block pattern of quilting in her piece *Home Sweet Home*, to expose the realities of domestic violence and violence against women (see Lipsett, 1994). Her traditional-looking rows of houses, upon closer inspection, reveal details which juxtapose the quilt's name with the reality of many women's lives. The "Scandalous Sue" quilt employs a similar technique of juxtaposing traditional images with non-traditional contexts in an expression of "resistance to dominant cultural norms" (Pershing, 1993: 98).

The 1991 quilt reflects a changing dynamic at the festival, the use of a famous mainstream image suggests more concern with the larger social world. The festival celebrates women's culture, seeking methods for including those values and meanings in mainstream society. This quilt reflects a stronger focus on intersecting with society at large, incorporating women's values and culture into social constructions of gender and roles.

The 1992 quilt, "All Roads Lead to Michigan" (see Figure 3), speaks to the issue of diversity. The festival was struggling with the issue of transgendered women attending. The Womyn of Colour tent had been (and still is) an ongoing site of conflict. The SM constituency was becoming more visible, and their heightened presence became a contested issue. Heterosexual women were attending in larger numbers and the lesbian separatist contingent was on the decline. This quilt is the representation of the value of inclusivity which is central to many participants' views of MWMF. The value of inclusivity is (re)presented by a diverse group of women standing in a field of flowers. The image codes diversity as 'natural', like the diversity of flowers, and therefore good. However different, all flowers remain flowers – and I read this as "all women are women" - which speaks to unity amidst diversity.

The 1997 quilt, "Midnight Woman" (see Figure 4), has as its central motif a full figured woman, possibly pregnant, depicted in deep blue velvet material. This image is similar to many of the goddess images seen throughout the festival site. The abstract, singular woman speaks of the claiming of individual identities within the umbrella of identity as 'woman'. Her full figure challenges normative

Western views of female beauty and supports a 'natural' womanly shape. When viewed as pregnant, the image challenges 'natural' motherhood through its placement in a lesbian field of meaning. Lesbians do not fit the normative image of 'mother'; The heterosexual procreative model for sex and the concomitant naturalisation of heterosexuality as the norm does not allow room for notions of lesbian motherhood. Motherhood has been used to justify the containment of woman to the private sphere. Lesbian identities challenge norms of woman as only active in the home. Placing this pregnant image in a lesbian context challenges the whole system upon which role division by sex is predicated.

Stylised trees flank the figure, in a patchwork of fabrics. Images of trees and women together are common elements in banners and signage around the festival site. The trees speak to women's connections to nature, the rootedness in earth and practicality, with branches reaching towards the sky which symbolise creativity, spirituality and transcendence. There were round signs reflecting women as trees in several areas of the festival site, some with roots of fire and images of snakes included in the piece (see Figures 5 & 6). The tree image seems to be connected to sexuality and sensuality at MWMF.

The background is white, with a foot wide frame inset and surrounding the central image. The frame is a multicoloured traditional interlocking triangle pattern. These elements, along with the central figure, were in place prior to the quilt's arrival on the festival site. The embroidered images of a spiral in the figure's belly, the red sunburst/flower outline surrounding the spiral, a crystal pendant on a necklace of beads around her neck, and the red, open mouth were

added by participants on site. The images on the white background and edges are also part of the collective process.

The triangle pattern in the frame is a clear code reflecting the triangles which the gay/lesbian communities have adopted as symbols. While it is also a traditional pattern, its use in this context becomes a code for the lesbian-identified character of the event. The triangle is tied to the impact of homophobia; triangles were used in Nazi-occupied Holland to identify homosexuals. The triangle is also a symbol for water in magical correspondences (see Starhawk, 1979; Greenwood, 2000), which is a natural element traditionally seen as feminine. When combined with the apparent pregnancy of the central figure, the triangles can indicate birth waters and the trees a genealogy. The theme of the quilt then becomes birth. The birth image is surrounded by the triangles of lesbian identity. One woman commented that "we are birthing ourselves" (Fieldnotes, 1997).

At MWMF, full figured images of women are common, although the apparent pregnancy of this image is unusual. The choice of blue for the figure is significant: it is neither black, nor white, nor red, nor yellow, nor pink. The fact that it is none of the traditional skin colours opens the potential for the image to represent all of the women attending MWMF. In 1997, there was some controversy over the existence of the Womyn of Colour tent. Some participants, both white and women of colour, challenged the area as a location which divides the solidarity which MWMF strives for. The fabric choice acknowledges tensions about skin colour and race/ethnicity which were present at the festival that year.

Dragonfly images in the central white space reflect the actual presence of the creatures on the site. This image shows up again in the Stilt-Walkers costumes at the Saturday Night Parade and Opening ceremonies, where 'Moth Women' (see Figure 7) move through the audiences. The image is tied up with ideas about pushing boundaries and freedom. The spider is another common natural image which has emerged in the quilts and banners over the years. The connections and networks women make at MWMF lend themselves to images which are circular and weblike.<sup>3</sup>

Spirals, hearts, joined woman symbols, moons and stars are embroidered across the surface of the quilt. A house with a picket fence and sheltering trees could be an image of home for the woman who created it. Many women talk about MWMF as 'home', and 'the Land' is a meaning-laden term used to talk about the site. In interviews, casual conversations and overheard comments, the festival space is clearly marked by the terms 'home', 'the Land', and 'Michigan' (which refers to the festival not the state and becomes a code for recognising one another out in the 'real' world).

One of the reasons that the site at MWMF takes on particular significance is the fact that it was the first festival site to be owned by organisers. The knowledge that the land is owned by women and used for nothing but the festival event lends it an aura of the sacred. Michigan is unique because of the Land and the length of time it has been going on. "The collection of energy, and women's energy, draws here and energises the land" is one description overheard at the August Night Cafe (Fieldnotes, 1998).

The history of defending the space in the early years also contributes to the sense of collective ownership, despite the reality of Lisa Vogel as the lone deed-holder. An example of this comes from an interview with Seiss:

In the middle of the night, the security women went through the campsite calling out "Men on the Land". Women silently came out of their tents and went to the front gate. Men were standing there with shotguns, yelling obscenities. I have an image of the silent women standing in front of them, marking our boundary. The men lost their momentum and eventually left. I'm unclear on the details of how and why - the lasting impression is the feeling of the power of women standing together in that way, claiming their space. (Seiss Interview, 1997)

In group interviews and conversations, comments like "I get a sense of coming home" are recurrent in women's descriptions of what MWMF means to them and why they attend. Women also describe a sense of renewal, they "get energy here to move out into the world" (Fieldnotes, 1997, comment at Nightstage).

The 1998 quilt, "Puppet Parade" (see Figure 8), marks a particular shift in the (re)presentation of MWMF. It is the first time the images have been direct (re)presentations of previous Festival events and creations. The quilt becomes a (re)presentation of representations of MWMF and is explicitly self-conscious for this reason. One of the quilting area workers notes: "This year's quilt was more conscious ... the choice of the breasts as a central image to speak to the reality of nakedness and sexual energy at the festival. Breasts are the one thing that all of us have, or have had" (Rebecca Interview, 1998). A central motif remains the embodiment of 'woman', even within the more abstract

images in this quilt.

The second element of the quilts is the social nature of the process; the weaving of community. The creation of community in the quilt production and distribution through the raffle is emphasised by workers and participants. Shantz described a similar function in Frances Mateychuk's quilts: "Looking through her photo album at the quilts she has given away, Frances is reminded of the scope of her social community through time as well as space" (Shantz, 1997: 184). "These portable objects minimise the geographic isolation of a rural community." (185). They become a physical reminder of festival herstory and a personal connection to a community which is only physically present once a year.

Nadelstern and Hancock describe quilting bees historically as important social events; "they provided a grand excuse to be creative, show off skills, to make friends, and exchange news and political ideas" (1988: 3). This social element is apparent in the Quilting Area at MWMF. Quilter K., the woman who organised the 1997 and 1998 Quilting Area, describes quilting as "craft, community building, talking, networking, sharing backgrounds. If it weren't here it would be important to start it. Quilting is a powerful part of the festival culture." (Quilter K Interview, 1997).

The process is the key element for Quilter K. and many of the women who participate in the Quilting Area. As Elsley points out regarding the PWA NAMES project and the Boise Peace Quilters, "the sewing itself, the finished quilt, the material product, is of secondary importance to the process of healing, community and transformation it represents" (1996:72). Through their needles

women express their feelings about MWMF, women's community, lesbian identity and women's realities in the world. The act of sitting in a circle around the quilt frame promotes dialogue and builds connections among the participants.

The age range of participants at the Quilting Area ran the gamut from girls of eight to ten to crones in their 60s. However, the majority of women whom I observed were in their mid-to-late 30s and 40s. The tent where the activity was set up was a shared space with the Over Forties network and support area. In previous years, the quilt had been set up in the tent which was shared by the Nature Lovers Area <sup>4</sup>. This switch was made, in part, to accommodate the Over Forties constituency, who tend to camp in the nearby Crone Heights camping area and make up the majority of participants and organisers of the Quilting Area.

Women sat at the quilting frame, five to a side and four at each end. Spools of thread and ribbon, scraps of fabric, flew from side to side. Women tossed the tools and materials from hand to hand, occasionally falling short of their goal. When this happened, one of the young girls would be enlisted to crawl under the frame and bounce the item towards an edge. There was usually a lot of laughter during the afternoon sessions. Women would tell jokes and stories. Many of them were at the festival for the first time and expressed their surprise and pleasure in finding a quilting area at MWMF, somewhere that they "fit in".

One evening the women were singing Goddess songs. Sewing in a halo

of light cast by the lanterns and electric generator's lamps, their voices drifted out over the darkened tables of the August Night Cafe, competing with the ambient strains of Lunachicks from the Nightstage. "We all come from the Goddess..." as needles worked attaching crystals and shiny beads to the spiral in Midnight Woman's belly<sup>5</sup>. I wondered how often quilting had been done to the strains of Goddess worship and juxtaposed that with images of women quilting to the hymns "Rock of Ages" and "Onward Christian Soldiers". The quilting bee is indeed being subverted from its earlier roots in Church basements (see Klassen, 1994) and Victorian parlours.

The repertoire of Goddess songs was exhausted after an hour or so. Women began to sing show tunes. Before long they were changing the words to fit the Michigan milieu. "These are a few of my Favourite things" became "Raindrops on nipples and warm sun on bottoms...Kisses from women with freckles and sun burns, Wonderful women not wearing a thing, these are a few of my favourite things!" (Fieldnotes, 1998). Laughter and music accompanied the stitches, bitching about the patriarchy, celebrating the Goddess, all these became a part of creating the Festival Quilt.

The use of symbol and metaphor to express ideas and feelings allows for multiple meanings and interpretations from both the creators and the viewers. "Individual voices are heard in the context of community, not in competition with each other, not necessarily in harmonious concert, but jostling together in a celebration of separate voices" (Elsley, 1996:46). Quilter K. interprets women's participation in the quilting area as "the need to produce something of their own

that may carry on into history. A quilt is going into someone's home - it builds connections between people and the festival" (Quilter K interview, 1997).

Quilter K.'s previous experience working with children as a therapist, using art to draw out feelings and awareness of issues shapes her approach to the Quilting Area. "Talking while the art happens frees up voice and acts as a catalyst. Women stop by to look, it is a hunger to get involved, but they are afraid to try and do it, because they don't know how" (Quilter K interview, 1997). Encouraging women to try their hand with the needle is part of supervising the quilting area. Quilter K.'s background as a therapist/teacher enables her to fulfill that role and see beyond the technical expertise of textile art. Participation in the creation of the quilt is more than putting one's hand to a needle and thread. Often women stop by to entertain the quilters with stories and songs, becoming part of the creation without ever committing a stitch to fabric.

A third element of the quilts at MWMF is the fundraising aspect of the final product. This third element is subversive in its own way. Historically quilts have been used to fund-raise for local churches and mainstream institutions. A quilt created at, and used to fund, a woman-only, lesbian-identified festival is inherently subversive. In this setting, as Radner and Lanser have noted, fabric art is an act of appropriation, "adapting to feminist purposes forms or materials normally associated with women's culture or with androcentric images of the feminine" (1993:10). The 1991 Quilt "Everything She Touches" is an excellent example of this strategy for coding.

The element of monetary value also speaks to the commodification of

women's fabric arts over the last few decades. Earlier quilts designed by Dreamwalker seem to have been more technically oriented toward the creation of a finished product. This orientation is still evident in comparing the Workers' Quilts to the Festival Quilts (see Figure 9). The Festival quilts have become more focused on the second characteristic of the quilting process, social dynamics and community building. A group which already has a strong bond and sense of community creates the Workers' Quilts. This difference between the groups producing the quilts is revealed in more embroidery and appliqués on the Festival Quilts which are divergent from the central motif, while Workers' Quilts reveal less individualistic images. Recognizing the cultural currency of textile arts, MWMF uses the Quilting Area as both a cultural event and fundraising device to generate capital.

Although the Workers' Quilt is given away in a free raffle (using the names of quilting participants as 'tickets'), it retains an element of capital value. Given the history of many workers at the festival coming into conflict with the organisers regarding payment and exploitation of their general labour at the festival, the quilt becomes a symbol of that struggle. Providing the materials and opportunity to create the quilt and then setting up a lottery for those who participated to possibly gain ownership of the quilt is a form of compensation for the labour of the workers. The lack of a Workers' Quilt for the last two years may reflect the change in ownership of the festival land and image.<sup>6</sup>

The Quilting Area embodies the performance of collectivity which is an ongoing part of MWMF identity. The festival presents itself in the program and

advertising as a community of women, built by women, which is inclusive, diverse and as an event which depends on the collective actions and voices of women who attend. The quilt is also presented as a multi-voiced creation reflecting the contributions of women who participate in the Quilting Area. In reality, collectivity in both arenas is limited.

Quilter K. was asked to supervise the Quilting Area by her niece, a long-time volunteer and worker at MWMF. 1996 was the first year that Quilter K. took part in MWMF as a volunteer. She designed a quilt using the piano logo, stitched the basic design and brought the quilt to the site a week in advance to allow the workers to have time to contribute to the piece. In 1997, she felt that one person designing the quilt was inappropriate and struck a committee to make decisions about the design. Her approach to the quilting area reflects what she views as important at MWMF. "Being different is important. Expressing that difference is part of why the quilt is important" (Quilter K Interview, 1998). Her recognition and support of diversity among the community at MWMF contributes to her focus on collective process over technical skill.

The central motif of each year's quilt is designed and installed prior to the festival. The piecework of the framed quilt has been completed prior to MWMF for the last three years, at least. What participants are adding are their own embroidered or appliquéd symbols, names, etc. and the stitches which hold the batting, or fill, in place. In a similar way, the geography and structure of the festival itself are constructed well before the community of women who will inhabit them arrive.

The central theme of the festival is also decided prior to the event, by a staff of five. This group of year-round employees forms the nucleus of the festival organisation. Lisa Vogel now makes all decisions regarding the Land, use of logo and funds. The structure of the festival campgrounds is clearly laid out to reflect elements in the population of attendees. There are chemical-free camping areas, over forties, family, and loud and rowdy camping areas. Women are expected to determine where they will be most comfortable and select their home for the week accordingly. As needs arise, new areas are designated. An example is the creation of the Twilight Zone as a recognised S&M camping space.

While the intention of a collectively created environment is maintained in the abstract, the concrete reflects a much more directed and directive experience. The size of the festival mandates a structure for dealing with waste, food, and transportation. The need for this basic infrastructure impacts how the festival looks and feels for participants. Rules become inevitable, and with rules come conflicts over who decides and who enforces. These conflicts over rules, for example transgender attendance and where S/m play can take place, are ongoing elements in the negotiation of space and diversity at Michigan.

There is room for individuality in the collective quilts. The individual appliqués and embroidery fall on the borders between the chosen motif. They fill in white space and adorn the basic elements and figures, adding detail and multiplicity to the one-dimensional images on the quilt. The festival itself also leaves room on its borders and in the empty spaces for women to create their

own reality. For example, each campsite is decorated with flags, banners and iconography that reflect the identities of the women that call them home. Also, women organise impromptu workshops in empty fields in the workshop meadow. Women are still collectively creating an atmosphere and reality that reflects the diversity of our lives. Like the quilts, the festival is different every year.

Through the eye of the needle, the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival becomes an intersection of multiple voices and layered meanings. Coding is both explicit and implicit in the quilting. The quilt becomes a trope for the festival context, each thread a partial perspective from the hand that held the needle. The images are set on the backdrop of fabric, just as the festival takes place in the context of a larger social reality upon which we weave women's space. The individual strands of participants and organisers come together to create MWMF. Like a patchwork quilt, the festival is a collage of identities and scraps of meaning which become more than the sum of their parts.

### Parading Identity

The annual parade encompasses performative expressions of festival identities by individual women, the presentation of puppets made on site and the presentation of the completed quilt to the collective. This performance is a communication within the festival of 'who we are'. Women line the road and encourage the performers, exclaiming over the costumes and creations. Wise Fool Puppet Creations host a three-day intensive workshop to share the skills of

giant puppet making, Soul Masks is the title of an intensive workshop on mask making, and Women Walking Tall host a workshop on stilt-walking and costumes. The parade puppets return year after year with new additions each festival from the workshops. The parade becomes a historical record of previous parades while re-creating new images of festival.

Women paint their bodies and create masks in workshops to express themselves (see Figure 10). Spiral images are common in the body paint, in part because they lend themselves well to the 'topography' of breasts. Spirals are also symbolic in the Goddess and nature spiritualities, which predominate at the festival, as images of the natural cycle and non-linear thought. The woman in the foreground (blue and purple) covered in spirals self-identified as the element of air, making a link between spirals and a natural element. The red puppet in the background was used at a previous Opening Ceremony dedicated to the element of fire. The elements of nature (earth, air, fire and water) are often themes around which performance is created.

The parade begins at the Community Centre with the Goddess Puppet (see Figure 11) from the Opening Ceremonies blessing leading the way; it proceeds down Lois Lane to the Kitchen Area and returns to the Night Stage. Women gather on both sides of the road to cheer on the parade and soak up the visions and images of MWMF. The stilt walkers, giant puppets (see Figure 12), and body painted women are scattered through the length of the parade.

There are also particular groups who make up sections of the event. Gaia Girls appear near the front of the assembly, their faces painted, wearing masks

or hats that they have created at Gaia Girls Camp (a childcare area mentioned in Chapter One) and singing ,

We are the Gaia Girls  
Mighty mighty Gaia Girls  
When people ask us  
where do we come from  
So then we tell them  
We are the Gaia Girls  
Mighty, mighty Gaia Girls.

Women watching sometimes cry as the young girls go by, rejoicing in the freedom that they experience at MWMF to be who they are in safety and perhaps a little sad that their own girlhoods did not include an event like MWMF.

Women wave to the girls and cheer them on, singing along as the group goes by.

Groups representing different work crews are also in the parade. The “Garbage Sluts”, “Kitchen Wenches” and “Shuttle Babes” proudly call out the nicknames for their crews. Mums and toddlers walk together. Celebrating their completion that morning of the annual three mile run, women who took part in the Lois Lane Run walk together.

The Drummers are in the centre of the parade, so that all the participants hear their rhythms. Some wear costumes, others are naked. They walk drumming out heartbeats and conga rhythms. Ubaka Hill, who organises the Drumsong Orchestra, leads them - walking backwards and encouraging the

drummers who are losing their places or unsure of their beat. Women's voices rise in happy greeting as the drummers go by, women dancing and moving to the beats.

The quilt is the central feature of the parade. Women have remarked that it is the quilt's 'coming out' - a pun on the term for the public claiming of lesbian identity in mainstream culture or for the attaining of adulthood in polite society<sup>7</sup>. These comments suggest that the quilt is recognised as a symbolic representation of the collective identity. The quilters walk behind their creation, smiling at friends in the audience. Women point out to one another their contributions - "The appliqué on the left side, near the middle, is mine, it symbolises my partnership ceremony here last year with X" (Fieldnotes, 1998).

The Fabulous Redheads, an impromptu group of women collected at the Community Centre, followed the quilt, in 1998. They walked chanting "We are Fabulous Redheads, We are Fabulous Redheads" and flinging about their varying shades of red hair. The initiator of this group called out the names of famous redheads as they walked. Apparently, the group felt that redheads had been unfairly categorised as temperamental and argumentative. The performance was clearly intended as humour and was greeted by the audience with gales of laughter and offers for dates.

The Craftswomen were the next group represented. Some carried instruments that they had made, others wore clothing or jewellery that they had designed. Many were face-painted or in costumes. The several booths that sold sex toys were not evident in this collection of women from the Crafts Bazaar.

At the end of the parade women from the audience join in the procession to the Night Stage, moving off to seats in the stage audience. The puppets, stiltwalkers, drummers and quilt move on to the stage and open the evening's entertainment with dancing to the drums around the quilt.

As mentioned earlier, the images on the 1998 quilt were from the previous year's puppet parade (revisit Figure 8). The banner on the quilt says "The MWMF Puppet Parade 1998". It marks a confidence in the future of the community and a sense of predicting what is to come when the designers worked on the quilt with the intention of (re)presenting the future parade. The festival's 24-year journey is allowing the opportunity for recursive identity construction as current expressive communications engage reflexively with past images and symbols.

The presentation of the parade works in three modes of identity construction. First, it provides an occasion within the festival event which encourages group participation and solidarity. Women gather together from around the festival site to encourage parade participants and view the community performance.

Secondly, it plays a "role in which expressive forms of collective identification facilitate the development of self-identity" (Hetherington, 1998: 61).

The women in the parade are provided with the opportunity to perform self-identity. This expression contributes to group identity at the festival and facilitates discovery among the viewers of components of their own self-identity. The audience celebrates the individuals who perform diversity and catch a

glimpse of possibilities for their own explorations of performing self.

The third mode is implicitly expressed through the constituencies of festival participants who lack representation. This exclusion can be read as a prescription of normative measures of identity. The S/m population is not in evidence, no group joins the procession in dog collars, leather harnesses and dildo straps - yet women in these indicators of identity are seen throughout the festival site and maintain a physical group presence in the Twilight Zone. The Brother Sun Boys Camp workers are not present - yet the other children's areas are represented. The parade is very loosely organised, and many of the groups represented are there because they initiated their participation themselves. It is indicative of the areas of conflict and discomfort around identities which challenge solidarity that S/m constituents, womyn of colour and workers in the Brother Sun Camp area do not choose, nor are they encouraged, to participate as groups in the parade. Their participation would indicate these groups' full integration and inclusion in community at MWMF.

#### Signs: Both Literal and Figurative

Images of trees and women together are common elements in banners and signage around the festival site (see Figures 5 & 6). The trees speak to women's connections to nature, constructed as rootedness in earth and practicality. Branches reaching towards the sky are often read as symbols of creativity, spirituality and transcendence by women at MWMF (Fieldnotes 1998). The transcendence is embodied in natural imagery which contests the normative

use of transcendence as overcoming earthly concerns, body and nature. Many round signs representing women as trees in several areas of the festival site show roots of fire and images of snakes which are associated with sexuality and sensuality at the Festival.

M'lou, a craftswoman, noted that the language of symbology is more close to women now than at early festivals, from her perspective.

The audience is quite sophisticated, about Goddess stuff in particular. The images have changed over time. They have become subtler, moving from two-inch women signs and labrys to finer, less obvious symbology. Natural images are more common (M'lou interview, 1997).

M'lou believes that the craftswomen's creations are as central to creating the community of Michigan as the music and workshops are. Her jewellery is personal, you wear it and take it home which moves the symbols of MWMF and women's culture into the mainstream. Seiss, another craftswoman, has also noticed that the images on the jewellery are strongly connected with nature and the healing path.

The images come out of women's culture. I have an image of two women's faces, kind of a yin-yang. It's about putting the balance back in women's energy. My images are about trust of self and women coming into their own power" (Seiss Interview, 1997).

The "Day Stage" sign (see Figures 13 & 14) reveals woman as earth. The topography of breasts, mentioned earlier in the body painting symbols, becomes a metaphor for hills and valleys. The body of woman is re-inscribed as the body of nature - of earth. The sign is twenty by ten feet in size and dominates the field of view from the road. Women speak of the festival site as

"the Land" - one can hear the capitalisation in their voices and see it in later programs- and this sign further indicates the special connection between geography, place and women's identities. The size of the figure speaks to an image of power and empowerment. MWMF reclaims 'woman as nature' as a site of power and agency.

### Enlightenment/Modernity and Nature

The image of woman as nature has been used historically as a tool for women's oppression and the naturalisation of male power, differentially valued gendered identities, and their concomitant social roles. Yanagisako and Delaney define naturalising power as "differentials of power...embedded in culture. ...[As such,] power appears natural, inevitable and god-given" (1995: 1). In the 19th century, the universal character of nature and culture became part of assumptions and explanations of social structures and organisation. Mies argues that the designation as inferior for those "nearer to 'nature', along with the parallel distinction between men and women, found its clearest expression in the age of Enlightenment" (1993: 178). She notes that: "According to the dualistic and patriarchal logic, man, in the process of 'humanization' and 'civilization', emancipated himself from the realm of nature (the 'realm of necessity'), from woman and from savagery" (180). Ortner's thesis develops this concept: "woman is being identified with - or if you will, seems to be a symbol of - something that every culture devalues, something that every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself" (1974: 72). Ortner defines that

'something' as nature. Culture is the process - systems of thought and technology - by which "humanity attempts to assert control over nature" (72). Ortner asserts that the subordination of women arises from the perception that they are closer to nature than men, and therefore inferior, because nature is that which we attempt to domesticate through culture.

How did this identity for women develop in Western social thought?

Hamilton introduces the key ideas of the Enlightenment, and presents the thesis that "the Enlightenment represents a watershed in human thought about society - that it produced a qualitatively new way of thinking concerned with the application of reason, experience and experiment to the natural and social world" (1992: 18). The myth of objectivity finds its roots in the early sociological thinkers who drew on the Enlightenment paradigm to uncover universal laws which applied to society through observation and experiment. Hamilton lists ten key characteristics of the enlightenment paradigm: reason, empiricism, science, universalism, progress, individualism, toleration, freedom, uniformity of human nature and secularism (1992: inter alia). The monopoly over ideas shifted from the Christian Church to scientific/positivist social institutions. The notion of progress as the ultimate goal led to the development of technologies and practices which assert human control over nature.

Zinster and Anderson explore the role of women in the Enlightenment through the salon, which "allowed both women and men a social mobility which existed nowhere else. The salon mixed elements of the nobility, bourgeoisie, and intelligentsia and enabled women to rise through both marriage and

influence...rational conversation, sociability between women and men, delight in the pleasures of this world are the hallmarks of Enlightenment culture" (1992: 59). The authors note: "It is a tragedy for women that these men, who were aided, sponsored, and lionized by the salonieres, produced - with very few exceptions - art and writing which either ignored women completely or upheld the most traditional views of womanhood. ... As well as extolling the domestic virtues for women, the men of the Enlightenment, like so many generations of European men before them, insisted that chastity was woman's highest virtue and left the double standard of sexual behaviour intact" (60). Woman becomes the madonna/whore - either pure and idealised on the one hand or base and a victim of her 'nature' on the other.

The shift away from theological explanation that marked the Enlightenment led to the humanism which Clifford describes: "[A]nthropological humanism begins with the different and renders it - through naming, classifying, describing, interpreting - comprehensible. It familiarises" (1988: 145). In contrast, this anthropologist marks surrealism as an aesthetic which values fragments, juxtapositions and the unexpected (146). He states: "The two attitudes presuppose each other; both are elements within a complex process that generates cultural meanings, definitions of self and other" (146). Clifford points out that this process of opposites in dynamic interplay is "characteristic of global modernity" (146). The paradox of women's mediation through nature, then, reflects the tension of opposites which works to maintain the Enlightenment paradigm.

Desmond suggests that the word nature is "so central [to social identities] that multiple, even contradictory meanings emerge within the same utterance as we shift back and forth among the residual traces to more contemporary uses" (1995: 218). She also notes that "[w]ith the intensification of our separation from the natural world, in the turn from an agrarian-based economy to an industrialised, urbanised one, we can trace a concomitant idealization of nature" (218). Bamberger recognises this idealisation of nature and that the paradoxical Enlightenment location of nature as base and pure, and woman's connection to it can be dangerous. She warns, "the elevation of woman to deity on the one hand, and the downgrading of her to child or chattel on the other, produce the same result" (1974: 280). The result is objectification and the rendering of fluid identities as static and reified.

In light of these historical roots of identifying woman and nature, where is the power in reclaiming such imagery at MWMF? The paradoxical character of woman and nature in the Enlightenment suggests that the meanings mobilised are not inflexible and static. Tsing has noted that "[n]aturalizing power requires empowering nature" (1995: 114). She contends that "[n]ature is molded and melded into a reflection of human cultural concerns. ... and cultural agendas create the frameworks and technologies in which observers find natural difference where they need to see it" (114). This supports the plasticity of nature in Enlightenment values. Tsing also problematises the analogy of woman/nature as oppressive by her suggestion that "this approach does not help explain the gendered quality of those forms of agency that *are* attributed to

nature" (136). Similarly David Schneider's notions of kinship as a cultural system and therefore constructed and malleable "laid the groundwork for analyses which link ideologies of the 'natural' to systems of inequality" (Yanagisako and Delaney, 1995: 10). Recognising nature as a political and ideological construction allows for re-inventing its meanings and (re)presentation.

### Re-inventing Nature

The juxtaposition of hetero-patriarchal-colonialist models of nature in a womyn-centred community and framework allows for the reclamation of nature imagery at MWMF. As images of empowerment through nature infiltrate the mainstream, they are non-threatening because they fit the norm and the paradoxical location of nature in modernist ideology. The coding employed is recognisable to women as empowering, yet the same coding is recognised by Enlightenment notions of women as subjected to their natures. The artistic representations of the crafts, such as stylised entwined women's symbols allow for a subversive communication of identity which is overlooked by mainstream critics of lesbian lifestyle. Yet these representations work to build community beyond the festival and create resistance which mobilises discourse that can challenge mainstream notions of identity and deviance. Lesbians reclaim their identity as 'natural' at MWMF through the mobilisation of the motif of woman/nature as legitimising imagery/symbols. The challenge to Enlightenment thinking lies in the intent of the images, framed in a field of meaning in which

binary thinking is contested and the 'unnatural' becomes 'natural'. These images are empowering when one steps outside binary models and recognises the fluidity and shifting field of identity in which performances occur.

Haraway states that the invention and reinvention of nature is possible because nature is a construction used to justify social categories and roles (1991: 2). She encourages a re-visioning of the positivistic reified constructions of nature in negotiating identity and knowledge construction (98). Similarly, Butler asserts that gays and lesbians, through role-playing and identity performance, use "parodic replication and signification of heterosexual constructs within non-heterosexual frameworks to explicate the ideology of naturalising identities" (1991: 314).

Challenging naturalised knowledge and recognising the situated character of knowledge is not a new concept. Thumim remarks that, "It began to be clear to me that there is nothing 'natural' about historical evidence any more than there is anything 'common' about knowledge, rather both knowledge and evidence are the stuff through which hegemonic struggles are conducted" (1995: 63). Orner recognises this struggle in her own attempts to categorise the universal nature of male dominance. She re-visits the opposition of culture/nature and notes that this binary construct is not universal (1996: 176). She concludes, however, that as an underlying structure, despite variant definitions and approaches to nature and culture, some sense of a patterning of relations exists which rests on the problem of what humanity can do and what sets limits upon human actions/agency (176). Egalitarian societies have traces of male dominance,

"but the elements of male dominance are fragmentary - they are not woven into a hegemonic order" (174). She argues that the challenge is "to capture bodily issues in our understandings of gender asymmetry, but without essentializing either men or women" (177).

Ortner's revisitation ties in with Strathern's (1980) work in New Guinea. Strathern concludes that "[t]here is no culture in the sense of the cumulative works of man, and no nature to be tamed and made productive. And ideas such as these cannot be a referent of gender imagery [in Hagen society]" (1980: 219). She contends that the wild and domestic categories of Hagen typology represent a realm beyond themselves and the characteristics of human bonding respectively, "[t]hus humanity is bounded off from the non-human, but does not seek to control it" (219). This conclusion tells us that binary thinking which seeks to *rank* difference is not universal.

Arguments for less static categories arise from the recognition that difference is only one aspect of identity. Holmstrom, for instance, argues for a "dynamic, primarily social/historical origin rather than innate" concept of woman's nature (1993: 57). She cautions that most talk of 'nature' is used in sexist associations and recognises the danger of using such a term, but contests biological determinism and the static characteristic of the natural: "Not only do biological factors undergo slow change on their own, but they can be changed or their results affected by social conditions and deliberate human action" (53).

## Conclusion

Revisiting the ongoing debates in anti-essentialist feminist theory and feminist theory which seeks to draw on similarities among women, one is faced with the conflation of post-modern discourse (specifically identity and performance theory) and feminist struggles to empower a diverse women's movement. The balance between using images of nature and resisting the historical oppression concomitant with such images and constructions is central to the developing identity performance in women's communities like MWMF. Nature as an image of empowerment for women is a stand against the ideology of hetero-patriarchal-colonialist social organisation. The Enlightenment model is embedded in contemporary Western society and resistance to its hegemony can be enacted through mobilising images from within the hegemonic discourse to create counter-hegemonic frameworks. The goal is not to move from one hegemony to another, but rather to negotiate the tension between the two and, in doing so, stretch the boundaries and fields of meanings.

Lesbian and gay communities provide examples of such tenuous negotiations in developing models of kinship expressions. "Having rejected the equation of biological connection with the sort of 'genuine' kinship supposed to lead to enduring solidarity, many gay men and lesbians looked to enduring solidarity as sufficient basis for laying claim to familial status for their relationships" (Weston, 1995: 101). Temporality and solidarity become the markers of kinship rather than the procreative nexus.

Hetherington argues that the "significance of identity politics and the

changes it brings about within society are local, plural, situated, and topologically complex, challenging the still persistent singular idea of new social movements as historical agents of change" (1998: 6). The post-modern family adopts similar modes of kinship expression which contest biological constructions of genealogy. This expression of kinship was prefigured in the new social movements of gay and lesbian identity and community.

The agency of individuals to effect change on the larger society is minimised in Hetherington's position. Events like MWMF contribute (re)presentations of meaning which reach beyond the sphere of the event, the movement, or its location. The inclusion of theoretical work which draws on such events is evidence of their infiltration into the academy. The popular works of academics like Marija Gimbutas, Joseph Campbell and Riane Eisler are evidence that the academic discourse infiltrates the popular culture. There is a dialectical relationship in these infiltrations which inculcates change in both arenas. The interactions and transformations are often slow and subtle, the origins hard to trace - but there is power in the margins which contests mainstream ideology. That's why the ancients built walls around Rome....

## Endnotes

1. The Vigil Committee is a political activist group which protests the deaths of Manitoba women at the hands of spouses or family members by holding public vigils outside the Manitoba Legislative Building shortly after the death.
2. I use the term embroidery loosely. Some of the squares were done in *liquid* embroidery - a comment on time constraints and the needlework skills of the committee. A lost art...Elizabeth Cady Stanton would be thrilled!
3. Of course, it could also refer to the plethora of spiders invading tents and sleeping bags. Meanings are multiple, and any interpretation is essentially arbitrary!
4. This area provided information on the local flora and fauna, and organised nature walks.
5. I overheard a woman referring to the central figure as Midnight Woman, Quilter K. was unaware of any official name for the image. I think the naming of her by participants speaks to their sense of inclusion and ownership of the project and the work.
6. Lisa and Boo, the two women who eventually owned the land and concept, split up in 1995. Lisa retained control of the festival. Boo was the partner who was most involved in the practical running of the site and organisation of the workers. Lisa did the booking and accounting pieces.
7. I'm referring here to the term as it is used at debutante balls celebrating 'coming out' as an adult and marriageable woman.

Figure 1



1986 Quilt "Safe Space"

Figure 2



1991 Quilt "Everything She Touches"

Figure 3



1992 Quilt "All Roads Lead to Michigan"

Figure 4



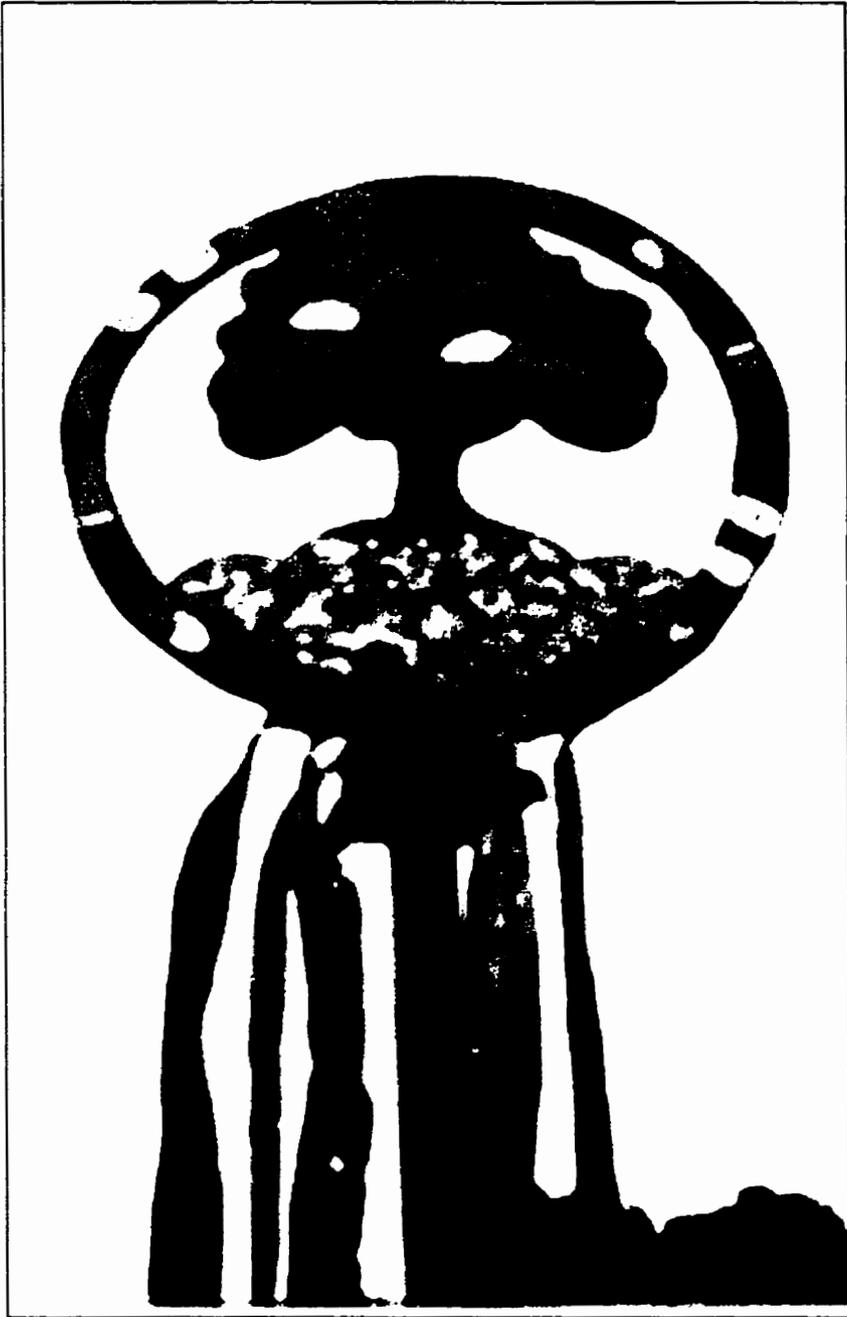
1997 Quilt "Midnight Woman"

Figure 5



Wooden carved and painted sign at Community Center

Figure 6



Wooden carved and painted sign at August Night Cafe

Figure 7



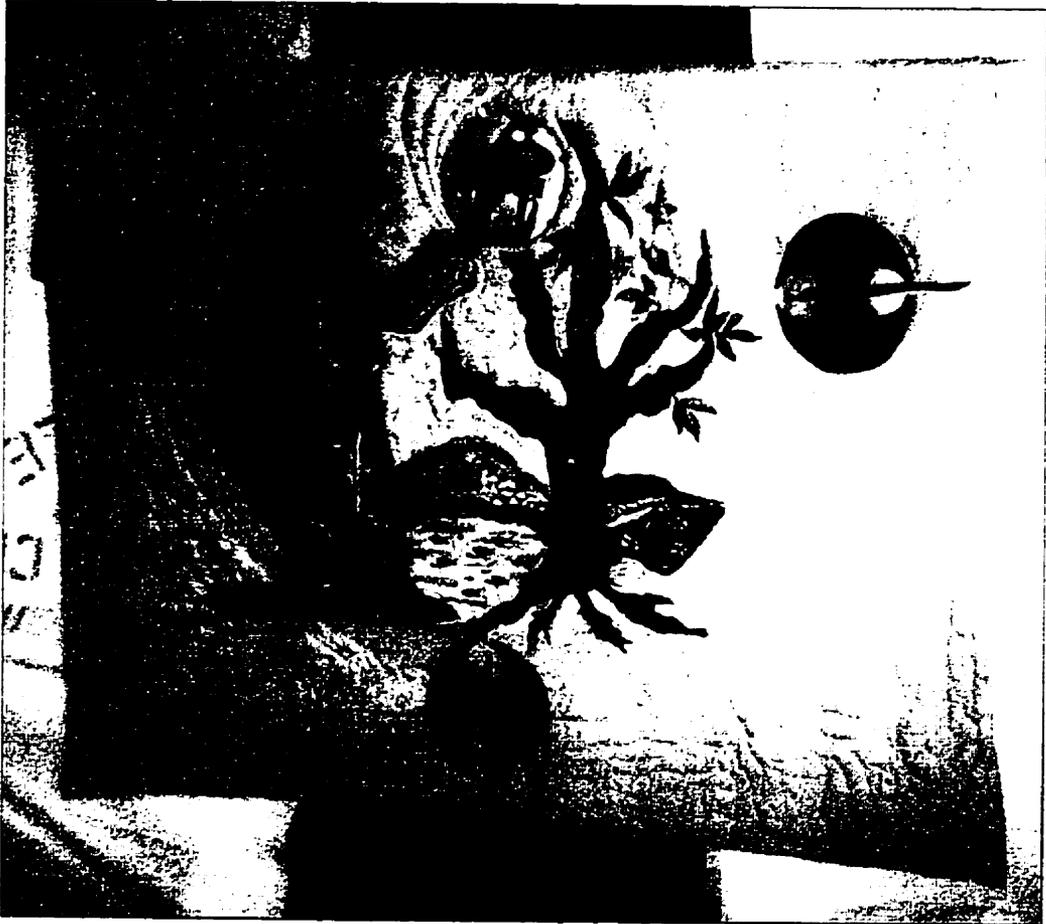
"Mothwoman" stilt costume in parade

Figure 8



1998 Quilt "Puppet Parade"

Figure 9



1994 Workers' Quilt "Turtle Woman"

Figure 10



Parade Participants

Figure 11



"Mother Goddess" giant puppet in parade

Figure 12



“The Furies” giant puppet in parade

Figure 13



Wooden painted Day Stage sign, north entrance

Figure 14



Wooden painted Day Stage sign, south entrance

### Chapter Five: Fields of Possibility

Chapters One and Two provided a description of the festival site and the methods employed in the research project. Chapter Three framed the project through previous scholarship in the areas of festival, identity, and semiotics. In Chapter Four the project of reclaiming 'woman as nature' motifs was explored through the expressive communications at MWMF. This chapter brings the notion of identity and ethics to a more personal exploration of identity and locating myself in the field.

The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival of 1997 was my first time 'in the field'. We left on August 9, 1997 and returned home on August 19, 1997. Ten days in the field was relatively little time to spend undertaking an ethnography. However, the experience was an education in the process of fieldwork, as well as the process of the construction of identity at MWMF. A second visit in 1998, also for ten days, allowed for some reflection on how the process of 'doing fieldwork' had changed my impressions of MWMF as a participant and as a researcher.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the task of locating myself in the field was ethically problematic for me. This chapter mobilises Foucault's concepts of power, discourse and the subject to discuss identity construction in the context of locating myself as a researcher and a subject in the field. A recognition of power relations, marginality, the social constructedness of meanings, and partial knowledges inform my reflections on the field experience. Feminist analysis is

implicit in the work, using the awareness of power dynamics, standpoint theory, and the need for communities which create change and nurture self-discovery. My identity as a feminist must be recognised in any discussion I undertake regarding my subjecthood in the field.

It is useful to review some feminist responses to Foucault. Mascia-Lees, et. al. (1989) have charged that post-modernism and Foucault's challenge of the subject is a patriarchal power shift intended to remove the focus on subject just when women are re-claiming subjecthood. This critique is directed specifically at the impact of Foucault on anthropology and the new ethnography. The new ethnography (Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Clifford & Marcus, 1986) is an interpretation of early Foucault by anthropologists. Yet I suggest that the feminist critique overlooks the central role of self as subject in Foucault's later works.

Feminist authors (see Butler, 1993; Probyn, 1993; Diprose, 1994) have mobilised Foucauldian concepts in "dissolving normalising identity categories" (Loyd, 1997: 98). Biddy Martin focuses on Foucault's insistence that our "subjectivity, our identity, and our sexuality are intimately linked; they do not exist outside of or prior to language and representation, but are actually brought into play by discursive strategies and representational practices" (1996: 191). This recognition of representation as part of power relations is also a thread which runs through literature on ethnographic writing (Geertz, 1973; Visweswaran, 1994; Fuss, 1995; Tsing, 1993). The interrelation of subject, identity and power in constructing (re)presentation supports the feminist project to critique

assumptions of knowledge and power.

Feminist perspectives forefront an awareness of the paradoxes in social relations, the incongruities of positions and realities, and the ongoing negotiation of representation in, by and for the women's movement. As a human struggling with self-discovery and growth, I wrestle with issues of ethics, integrity and authenticity. My humanness is what connects me, across gender, ethnicity and geography, to broader concerns; it bridges distance, without erasing difference. It is through this lens that I understand and mobilise Foucauldian concepts to make sense of myself as a researcher at MWMF.

### Foucault

Michel Foucault has been called the founder of post-modernism, a structuralist, neo-marxist, empiricist, anti-positivist and nihilist. His personal ideology is difficult to pinpoint because he engages in the questions of how social constructions of identity and history work, rather than why or what they are. Foucault's focus on the genealogy of knowledge and the relations of power within that genealogy is a process of discovery for both the reader and Foucault himself. In a 1982 interview, Foucault said, "I don't feel it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in my life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it?" (Martin, 1988: 9). I found his work intriguing and "good to think with" (Levi-Strauss, 1966) when negotiating my experience with a field that was also at

home.

In "Locating the Field", I discussed the fact that, contrary to usual anthropological assumptions that the field is profoundly strange and "Other" to anthropologists, my relationship with MWMF predates my work there as a researcher. This prior experience as someone attending the festival made my fieldwork 'at home' in two ways. First, unlike traditional anthropological fieldwork, I was doing research in a North American setting rather than an 'exotic' locale. Second, I was researching a community of which I am already a part, and which extends beyond the ten days of festival. Anthropological discourse which constructs fieldworkers 'going native' becomes reversed in my project. I found that I was 'going stranger' in attempting to find a location for the research which I perceived as necessarily objective. While I do not believe in the construction of social science as an objective field, I felt that some effort to engage in the expectations of my discipline was required. Foucault's work on the subject allowed me to let that effort go and to engage in reflexive critique of the attempt.

Foucault's early writings (1970;1972) challenged the existence of the subject with the notion that it was complicit in the oppression of individuals and groups. He suggests that in the search for knowledges, the subject becomes objectified and is made 'subject' (sacrificed) to knowledge. In this vein, identity categories serve to regulate behaviour as well as subjecthood. This approach has been hailed by both the skeptic and affirmative post-modern schools. Authors in the skeptic stream, such as Judith Butler (1993), have mobilised the concept to challenge the subject, authenticity, identity, and power.

Foucault's revisitation of the subject moved toward the development of a critical discourse of the subject as polylocatable and de-centred. Affirmative post-modern discourse embraces this second theoretical thrust in the literature on identity politics (see Code, 1987; Haraway, 1988 ; Phelan, 1989). Foucault suggests that it is the dialogue between subjects and subject/object wherein the crux of identity and subjecthood lies. The discourse of identity is fluid and resists static categories. It is in the reification of identities that the oppressive nature of subjecthood is revealed. Discourse can be mobilised to resist reification.

Foucault's careful utilisation and critique of language and his resistance of debates which centre around polemics reflect his commitment to discourse as an active and changing part of constructing reality. In other words, if subjecthood and identity are constructed through discourse, and discourse is fluid and resists reification, then the subject can remain fluid and discursive.

Bouchard (1977) describes Foucault's use of discourse as the interaction of language, counter-memory, and practice. Language, embodied in text, becomes a constraining force on literature and knowledge. Out of this constraint arise textual versions of human identity. These texts are fictions, in the sense that they provide a centred, universal identity. In response to these fictions, counter-memories emerge in the narratives of individuals which challenge these 'official fictions'. These narratives then inform the action and everyday lives of individuals as they interact with language. In this way the three concepts of language, counter-memory, and practice converge to produce discourse; human interactions which construct meaning and social reality.

These discussions of subject and discourse are embedded within the relations of power. Foucault's analysis of power requires social actors to recognise that the central mechanisms for power are not repressive but constitutive, a dynamic network of non-centralised forces that sustain positions of dominance and subordination (Foucault, 1980: 94). Power is enmeshed in our day to day understandings and practices; it is maintained through multiple processes, both individual and collective. Recognising this means that power becomes perceived as a dynamic, fluid, resource, made up of practice and understanding and mediated through individuals. This can help clarify and define ethical decisions, as we engage our own needs for respect and involvement and recognise our power - the implicit becomes explicit, the subject attains personhood and is de-objectified.

Foucault has described the ethical dimension of morality as the series of acts and "technologies by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being" (1986: 2). This process occurs within the structurally decreed 'moral code' and its concomitant policing of acts and behaviour. It is this 'working out of the self' within power relations and through discourse which I find most relevant to my research in Michigan.

### Foucault in Michigan

In the context of the MWMF, women are engaging in the discourse of identity. The early festival notions of solidarity and a homogenous woman/lesbian identity are giving way to more heterogeneous identities. This

shift away from essentialised subjecthood parallels Foucault's struggles with the subject. The festival becomes a site which can both explicate Foucauldian concepts of dynamic subjecthood and be better understood through them. Dynamic subjecthood emerges through discourse and in resistance to categories of the subject constructed as objects to further hegemonic epistemologies of the self.

Resistance to homogenisation is central to identity constructions at the festival. The global identity of MWMF as a woman-only, lesbian-dominant event works to forefront the structural identity of the group as active in mainstream resistance to marginality. The global identity also serves to exemplify Foucault's notion of static subjecthood as oppressive. The universal subjects of 'women and lesbians' become a location of conflict and site of discourse which articulates heterogeneous identities. Women are struggling to develop individual voices which affirm the multiplicity of meanings embodied in the real individual women and lesbians who attend the event. In the search for a utopia of women's culture, a heterotopia has emerged. It is this multiplicity of subjecthood which Foucault celebrates.

Conflicts within the festival arise when individual and sub-group identities contest the larger identification of the festival. From these sites of conflict, identity discourses arise. Resistance lies in the discourse that contests oppressive usages of identity. An example of this can be found in the discourse surrounding S/m (Sado-masochism) at the festival:

There were 30 women attending an "Against S/m" workshop, where the facilitator presented herself as wanting to develop a

feminist analysis of S/m here at the festival. She begins with: "Patriarchy in the world is about dominance and submission and so we experience it all the time and S/m is that structure invading lesbian culture, Michigan, the women's movement." In the course of her opening she managed to say that heterosexual relations are totally about dominance and submission - men on top, women on the bottom, and that S/m is replication of that in a woman to woman situation. One participant tried to suggest that slaves have agency and was shouted down and told that it was an oxymoron to talk about slaves and agency. Another woman said the obvious S/m (fashion and gear, not acts) destroyed the sense of home and safety that she has here.

It was interesting to see myself identified as an S/m practitioner just because I was speaking in favour of inclusion. My comment was that the workshop was reminiscent of second wave feminism and the arguments of including lesbians in a feminist movement - because feminists were often labelled as 'dykes' and it was one of the ways to dismiss them, we can't have lesbians in the feminist movement, because they take away our validity.

I thought this workshop would be about solution finding, but it was about developing a defence against S/m and finding a way to win arguments about it. It is probably one of the few times at this festival - perhaps the only time- that I have ever felt othered as a woman who lives with a man<sup>1</sup> (Fieldnotes 1998).

This workshop showed the dynamic creation of alternans and sub-alternans within a collective action of identity construction in resistance to normative constraints and dictates of identity. Foucault discusses a characteristic of political rationality; "the integration of individuals in a community or in a totality results from a constant correlation between an increasing individualisation and the reinforcement of this totality" (1988:1 37-8). In other words, the tension between collective and individual arises from the domination of the collective identity over the individual. While the festival works to create collective identities which resist totalising discourse in mainstream culture of who women are, that collective identity becomes global and totalising within the festival collective. Workshops

like "Against S/m" are acts of self-policing within the festival context which work to silence sub-alterns and re-establish essential characteristics of collective identity. At the same time, this workshop provided the space for a discourse of resistance to emerge and re-focus the argument to more critical questions of how identities work, rather than what they are.

My own experience of being labelled an S/m practitioner simply because of speaking for openness to the perspective/practice also speaks to the impact of totalising identities on the individual<sup>2</sup>. Within a framework of other and not other, I could only occupy one site of identity. In speaking to support inclusion I negated any identity I might have individually as 'against S/m' and became part of a collective identity of inclusion. This collective identity then erased any possibilities of being 'not other'. Reflections on the role as researcher also serve to illuminate this dynamic.

This year I'm experiencing a lot more than last year the feeling of being conflicted. I don't feel that I'm being exploitative, but I have this feeling of being seen that way, as encroaching on private space. It's as much my experience as it is any woman's who comes here, but I seem to be feeling othered by the process of doing research. More othered than I ever felt any year as a straight/bi person... it's the 'researcher' who is othered - not me. In the program one woman's description talks about Republicrats and academentia so I guess there is some past experience, and we're getting labelled with that wide brush of what is research and what academics are doing. We're trying to do feminist research and honourable research, we are learning and we're exploring and looking for new ways to write things that don't sound so distancing and aren't so removed from the experience of women, we want to write with, and about - not 'for' - it's hard because you know you're doing ethical stuff and hope to benefit the community. It is really different being both roles, and seen as only one (Fieldnotes 1998).

Foucault's notion of the constrained subject sacrificed to knowledge can

be seen in how the identity of researcher is constraining and exclusive. I am only able to be one at a time in the eyes of others. The dominant discourse of positivism and science has preceded my entrance into the field. This discourse has shaped the perceptions of those around me and become a global, totalising identity of researcher. A second reflexive moment in my fieldnotes shows how I am able to be both researcher and participant; and marks the multiple and de-centred locations of identity.

So here I am at 11p.m. thinking about the whole insider/outsider thing. I find myself here researching, so I'm critiquing the whole concept of safety and unity stuff, but on the other hand, as a participant and someone who really loves it here, I also find myself saying to women who are coming into camp or whatever - oh sure borrow this, take my drum to a workshop - take my cart - just remember to bring it back. Women ask if I think it's okay to leave this here while they get their other stuff - and I say oh yeah, it's safe here, no one will touch it. And I catch myself and I think- hold on- I know better. I have heard the stories that women tell about things that have been stolen on the Land. And yet I contribute to the myth that is Michigan. I need it just as much as anybody else. I guess that doesn't mean I can't be critical of it in one part of my life and somehow forget that and still enjoy the moment when I'm here.

There's a real sense of community here. No, it's not perfect. Communities aren't perfect, they are always in development, they're always changing and so does this one. You can choose to be aware of dialogue and division or not aware, or selectively aware of it when you want to be and not when you don't. It's a choice, at least I think of it that way. I know there are some women who see it as not quite that optional (Fieldnotes 1998).

The reality of acting in the world does not accommodate static, discrete categories. In my participation in the 'myth that is Michigan' I am engaging in counter-memory, creating a fiction which pre-figures a reality I hope to bring about. This counter-memory can pre-figure practice, which is how the dynamic

of discourse becomes change in the real world. Moments are constantly replacing moments; on the micro-scale of daily life, this constant replacement is a reflection of Foucault's genealogical approach to history. On a larger scale, he is attempting to show that the daily currents which contribute to historical moments are not discrete, totalising entities; that what has been handed down as history in text and memory is made of moments in which knowledge has been reified for the purpose and power of the history-maker in that moment.

Foucault's critique of Enlightenment polemics as re-inscribing binary constructions of identity is evident in my own reflections on biological sex and identities. This focus of the research emerged in the previous chapter and the discussions of woman as nature symbols at MWMF. My own discomfort with the binary template is what provoked that line of questioning in the research. In a third reflexive moment in my fieldnotes, the reader can see how global, totalising discourse in science and reason sets up codes of behaviour and constraints on identity construction. Referring to a conversation with Rita, a festival attendee I sat with during participant observation activities in the Kitchen tent, I note:

It showed me that the way I've been thinking about biological determinism is pretty binary, because that is what most of the literature portrays. It was interesting to recognise that even in challenging identity and sex, when we talk about expressing gender we are still really putting it in binary terms and that's probably a response to how mainstream culture views it, but it isn't really breaking the boundaries at all - it's still working in that framework somehow, by defining things by what they are not or by the 'other'. Really, ideologically I want to move past that, but it's very difficult. It's kind of like patriarchy - patriarchy is binary and so it becomes really difficult - you have to find it in yourself to be able to unpack it in other things and to try and change how you talk about it. So it was an interesting discussion to have in terms of re-thinking where I want to go with looking at gender and looking at

women creating culture.

I'm looking at symbols and body and how body impacts our identities, how much we are directed by, or allow it to direct, or shape it and change it. Some of the questions that I have this year around the nature symbolism and how that can be twisted into a kind of biological determinism - I want to critique that and show the power in women and goddess and that earth energy is something that is web-like and not necessarily biologically driven but more driven through empathy and willingness to collaborate and sustain and look ahead. This talk with "R" has got me re-thinking the whole biological determinism kind of argument and thinking maybe I just don't have access to the right information to understand what that's about. I'm still pretty suspicious of the body as a basis for identity, I think it's another way to limit women and what we do and how we are. Knowledge about what the physiology of our sexual orientations are or are not is just another way to control it and change it and make you fit. There is usually an agenda, a politic behind this knowledge that is about change and control. Those of us who are not living typical lives or expressing gender in acceptable binary terms are the ones who are gonna get changed to fit. Knowledge is never for its own sake. It's a double-edged sword to talk about biology and physiology as causative. It's becoming a more and more controllable part of our lives - cloning technology, etc. When we find out how to do stuff we do it and we don't choose the most ethical or far-sighted ways of using knowledge (Fieldnotes 1998).

These comments bring to mind Foucault's notions of bio-power (1978). Through this concept, he discusses how technologies of control are exerted based on our biological characteristics. These biological characteristics are mobilised through an Enlightenment worldview of rationality and reason. We are bounced back and forth between the poles of our biological nature as a species and our experience of biology in the body. The discourse of self cannot escape an Enlightenment privileging of 'natural' laws and characteristics. Foucault shows how these 'natural' attributes are constructed through the application of reason to the resolution of 'problems' which arise from meeting biological needs. For example, the struggle at the festival over transgender attendance and the

challenges it makes to who is 'allowed' to identify as a woman at the festival is an example of the biological characteristics of woman (no penis) coming into conflict with social constructions of woman (not raised with male privilege). Natural attributes of woman are part physical (breasts, vagina) and part emotional (nurturing, caring), bio-power links the socio-economic realities to the physical reality and suggests that bodies are regulated under the guise of meeting needs. The exclusion of transgender at MWMF works to regulate who is 'woman'.

My own struggle with the limited language available to talk about body and embodied knowledge speaks to this lacuna in the literature which is a result of the privileged place of reason and science that emerged from Enlightenment moments. Identities at MWMF are embedded in this binary construct, where images of women as nature contest Enlightenment values which place nature as an object to culture's subject. It is this repressive subjectification which Foucault critiques. Women engaging in identity construction at MWMF are mobilising discourse which challenges the nature/culture opposition and its concomitant ranking of men as superior and related to culture.

## **Conclusion**

Foucault's assertion that power relations motivate the discourse of reclaiming subjecthood from the oppressive construction of the Enlightenment separation of subject/object relations recognises the embeddedness of power relations with the self. Despite Foucault's critique of Enlightenment thinking he

remains within its boundaries in his use of reason and logic to 'work through' notions of the subject and identity - there seems to be little else available, and the use of reason and logic do not in themselves create the binary structure we critique. In fact, much in the Enlightenment model has been emancipatory in terms of releasing knowledge making practices from the control of the church. In particular, this move provided the opportunity to challenge misogynist dogma regarding the humanity of women. This challenge remains apparent in the movement to increase women's access to, and participation in, society.

I found Foucault's revisitation of the subject and his later statements that relations to/with self have been a connecting theme throughout his work (Cook, 1993) to be most useful in understanding my own location at MMWF. Foucault's discussion of techniques of the self makes room for recognising the process of an internal dialogue which implicates the reclaiming of subjectivity as a starting point for resistance. It is in this return to the subject as a viable construct when conceived of as de-centred and poly-locatable in changing temporal moments that the post-structuralism/modernism of Foucault resists the nihilism which critics attack as central to questioning the subject.

In general, MMWF is constantly re-constructing itself. Each year new issues come to the fore. In a very real way it is a different festival every time it coalesces into a community of women. There are basic foundations of structure and organisation which lend continuity to the event. The performance of collectivity is fundamentally deceptive with regard to those ongoing practicalities. However, in the uniqueness of each woman who attends and imprints her own

personal identity on the space a mosaic of changing identities emerges anew each time the "city of womyn" rises in the woods of Michigan. Like Foucault's discovery of himself in his writing, so women - including this researcher - are discovering themselves in the making of MWMF. The final chapter brings together the threads of research, meaning and identity in the context of MWMF.

### Endnotes

1. This may also be because the assumption is of a lesbian identity I have probably passed as a lesbian in much of my festival experience, where sexual orientation did not come up directly.
2. This dynamic follows mainstream notions of 'it takes one to know one' and works in my academic life to label me as a lesbian, because I study a lesbian-identified event.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

This thesis has explored identity politics and expression at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Through a discussion of the festival's history and my relationship with the festival community in Chapter One, I laid the groundwork for insight into the festival experience and the variety of issues which arise there. Reflections on the conflicts and issues surrounding the development of the Womyn of Color Tent, S/m practitioners' attendance, and the construction of MWMF as a safe space provide a sense of the complexity of social interaction which is expressed at this event.

The process of unpacking this complex site as a research field emerges in Chapter Two, where I provide a description of the methods we employed and some preliminary outcomes of those research methods. My presentation of the outcomes of surveys and interviews at this early stage engenders an informed reading of the discussion of scholarship relevant to the festival in Chapter Three. The themes which emerged from the qualitative surveys and group interviews provide a key to how the interpretative Chapter Four, "Fields of Meaning", developed from the data. The process of research followed an inductive path, moving from experience to research to an exploration of literature which informed future experience and research. The process has resulted in this written project. This inductive path is indicative of the exploratory nature of this study. Similarly, the appendices for Chapter Two are extensive, presenting the raw data and instruments used to collect it, reflecting the exploratory character of

this study. This knowledge sharing also complements my identification in the introduction as a feminist researcher. My hope is that the inclusion of the raw data will enable other scholars to pursue interests at women's festivals and use this data as a source for comparison or future interpretative research.

Chapter Two includes the recognition of failures in the field and complex relations between the research and ethical considerations. The gap between the 'ideal' and the 'real' of research in practice is explored with particular attention to ethics. Through this exploration of the ethical considerations in the field I provide background for Chapter Five, in which I share my struggle with the insider/outsider location I inhabit when I do research at MWMF.

Chapter Three locates the theoretical contributions to my data analysis and research development. The discussion of early literature on ritual and celebration marks the connection to the sacred which many participants at MWMF have emphasised in their expressions of experiences at the festival. The contemporary literature on celebration and festival in the secular arena provide links to the process of transformative social movements which are also characteristic of MWMF. MWMF seeks to transform society towards a woman positive ethos through pre-figuring social structures which achieve access and equality for woman. The scholarship on women's festivals encourages comparison of this particular event to other similar events and includes other voices who have commented on MWMF.

The exploration of identity politics and semiotics prepares the ground for the interpretative discussion of expressive communications at MWMF. Identity

politics are central to the dynamic at MWMF and must be included and understood in a reading of this event's expressive communications. Semiotics and interpretative frameworks for the festival venue provide the tools with which I deconstruct the fields of meaning in the expressive communications at MWMF.

Chapter Four undertakes the interpretation of annual quilts, Puppet Parades, and permanent signs which grace the festival site. I propose that women at the MWMF are engaging in a reclamation of 'woman as nature' motifs which challenge Enlightenment polemics and binary constructions. I further claim that it is significant that this reclamation occurs in woman-only space. Festivals are liminal spaces which engender interactions that stretch boundaries and challenge normative constructions; Women-only festivals like MWMF incorporate a shared marginalised position into that liminal moment. These characteristics of liminality and marginality produce an environment which empowers women to challenge normative social constructions of who women are through experimentation and performance of identities as woman. I mobilise semiotics, festival literatures and a discussion of Enlightenment moments to support this claim.

I argue that, despite the historical roots of identifying woman and nature as a connection which devalues women, there is power in reclaiming such imagery at MWMF. The paradoxical character of woman and nature in the Enlightenment suggests that the meanings mobilised are not inflexible and static. Recognising nature as a political and ideological construction allows for re-inventing its meanings and (re)presentations. The challenge to Enlightenment

thinking in the 'woman as nature' motif at MWMF lies in the intent of the images, framed in a field of meaning in which binary thinking is contested and the 'unnatural' becomes 'natural'. The balance between using images of nature and resisting the historical oppression concomitant with such images and constructions is central to the developing identity performance in women's communities like MWMF. Nature as an image of empowerment for women is a stand against the ideology of hetero-patriarchal-colonialist social organisation. This hetero-patriarchal-colonialist social organisation both pre- and post-dates Enlightenment periods, and remains throughout. The Enlightenment model is embedded in contemporary Western society and resistance to this hegemony can be enacted through mobilising images from within the hegemonic discourse to create counter-hegemonic frameworks. The goal is not to move from one hegemony to another, but rather to negotiate the tension between the two and, in doing so, stretch the boundaries and fields of meanings.

The discussion of identity politics in the expressive communications at the festival leads to my reflections on locating the self as a researcher and participant. I undertake this task in Chapter Five, mobilising Foucault's concepts of power, discourse, and the subject. I make extensive use of my fieldnotes to critically explore my experience and reactions as a subject in the field at MWMF. This chapter not only engages in reflexive discussion of researcher as subject, but also highlights the importance of maintaining critical and reflexive fieldnotes during a research project. The process of locating myself informed my analysis of the expressive communications in Chapter Four. In this way this writing has

been a recursive exercise in reflection and practice.

The practice of participant-observation during this research project focused on a broad picture of the event. My intent was to capture the flavour of the festival and tease out patterns of expression and practice which offer a glimpse of the moments which make up the festival as a whole. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, another choice could have been to focus on particular locations within the festival and undertake an in-depth study of those sites. I think future research could benefit from explorations of the collaborative model of healthcare practiced at The Womb, for instance. The Oasis is a location which provides insight into feminist models of mental health support, which are non-directive, respectful, and inclusionary. The construction of the festival site, with its water supply, waste disposal, and power generation, in an undeveloped forest could provide a window into systems which respect the environment and are based on co-operative models of labour. The possibilities for research are many.

I have chosen to focus on the imagery at MWMF and the possibilities it presents for social change in my approach to our ethnographic study. The project of reclaiming 'woman as nature' motifs at the festival moves out into the larger society through the products from the craft bazaar, quilts, photographs and memories of the women who attend. This social current of nature as empowering for women can also be seen in women's spirituality and goddess movements of the last three decades (see Christ and Plaskow, 1979; Plaskow and Christ, 1989). There is clearly some strong connection for women to this motif. In challenging the power over nature model of the Enlightenment, through

an ethos of collaboration and cooperation with nature as a symbol of power and a catalyst for transformation, the images at MWMF begin to work at the root of social constructions that place women in a 'natural' and lesser social location.

The celebration of woman's nature, with a cautionary eye to avoiding essentialism, can be mobilised to celebrate the diversity of women's bodies, desires and identities. It is this celebration of diversity which I have read in the 'woman as nature motif' at MWMF.

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**Appendix A - Quantitative Survey -**

The focus of our research is multivariant, dealing with issues of: construction of gender and identity in a woman only environment; symbols which are particular to the constituency and identity of MWMF; structures and anti-structures within the festival milieu; demographics and issues of access; issues of race-ethnicity and identity; emerging social complexities; and the processes of women building women's communities. Much of the focus of feminist scholarship and anthropological discourse examines constructions of identity and gender within the context of larger society. Our own focus examines these constructions within the context of a woman only environment and how these constructions from the larger world infiltrate women's community and effect the dynamics of power relations and struggles for inclusivity and diversity on a multitude of levels. The results of this research will be used to fulfil an assignment in a Feminist Ethnographic Studies course and may also be presented as a paper or published in a journal. A copy of our data and our final results will be submitted to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. In accordance with our ethical guidelines **you must be 18 years of age or older in order to participate in this survey**. Your participation in this research is completely anonymous. You may choose to leave any question(s) unanswered. Should you wish to have questions about the research addressed or if you are in any way dissatisfied with the research procedures you can make an anonymous phone call to either the researchers (listed below) or their supervisor Pauline Greenhill or Kristine Hansen, Chair, Senate Ethics, at the numbers below. Your completion and return of this survey will be understood as consent to use the information contained within in the above mentioned formats. After completion of the survey please return to survey drop off boxes at various locations on the MWMF site. There will be copies of the final research report available at One World in 1998.

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Jane Leverick - (204) 582-6708 **Supervisor:** Pauline Greenhill - (204) 786-9752  
**Senate Ethics:** Kristine Hansen - (204) 786-9345

**Demographic Survey**

Sexual Orientation: < 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 >  
 (1-3 Hetero) (4-6 Bisexual) (7-9 Lesbian)

Income: \_\_\_\_\_/year Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Total MWMF attendance costs: \_\_\_\_\_ Travel to MWMF: \_\_\_ bus  
 (i.e., ticket, travel, childcare, food, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_ automobile

MWMF Interests:

- Politics
- Crafts
- Music
- Health & Healing
- Spirituality
- Environment
- Sexuality
- Dance
- Networking
- Psychic skills
- Art & Culture
- Children's workshops
- Community Organising
- Relationships/family
- Work/Business/Finance
- Socialising

- plane
- train
- motorcycle
- hitchhike
- bicycle
- other- specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Camping Area at MWMF: Circle one

- Amazons Acres, Bread and Roses, Brother Sun
- .Bush gardens, Crone Heights, Dart, Dart RV,
- Gaia Girls, Jupiter Jump-off, Over-50's, RV
- Solanes Ferns, Twilight Zone, Workers Camp

Vegetarian: yes / no

Religion/Spirituality: \_\_\_\_\_

Rate each interest from 1-5 (1 being not important and 5 being very important)

Children: yes no How many: \_\_\_ Ages: \_\_\_\_\_. Country of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_.

Identity Politics of Race: self-identified 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
 (1-3, not a Woman of Colour) (4-6, sometimes a Woman of Colour) (7-9, a Woman of Colour)

other-identified 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
 (1-3, not a Woman of Colour) (4-6, sometimes a Woman of Colour) (7-9, a Woman of Colour)

Political identity: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  
 ( 1-3 left)(4-6 middle of the road)(7-9 right)

Education: \_Less than secondary\_ Secondary\_ Post-secondary\_ Some Post-secondary

How often have you attended MWMF: \_\_\_\_\_. Which years: \_\_\_\_\_.

Are you a Worker at the MWMF: (yes/no). Which years: \_\_\_\_\_.

How did you hear about MWMF: friends radio print media Internet travel agent  
 (circle all that apply) membership in an org.

**APPENDIX A1 - 1998 Version of Introduction to Quantitative Survey  
Demographic and General Survey**

This research deals with women building women's communities, focusing on constructions of identity and gender. The results of this research may be presented as a paper or published in a journal. A copy of our data and our final results will be submitted to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. In accordance with our ethical guidelines **you must be 18 years of age or older in order to participate in this survey**. Your participation in this research is completely anonymous. You may choose to leave any question(s) unanswered. Should you wish to have questions about the research addressed or if you are in any way dissatisfied with the research procedures you can make an anonymous phone call to either the researchers (listed below) or their supervisor Pauline Greenhill or the Chair of Senate Ethics, at the numbers below. Your completion and return of this survey will be understood as consent to use the information contained within in the above mentioned formats. There will be copies of the final research report available at the One World tent at the 1999 festival.

**Researchers:**

Amanda Birdsell, University of Guelph (204) 772-3596,  
or a\_birdsell@yahoo.com

Maria Fowler, University of Winnipeg (204) 772-3596,  
or mfowler@callisto.uwinnipeg.ca

Jane Leverick, University of Winnipeg (204) 582-6708,  
or jleveric@callisto.uwinnipeg.ca

**Supervisor:** Pauline Greenhill - (204) 786-9752

**Senate Ethics:** (204) 786-9345

**( You can keep this page for your information)**

**Appendix B - Qualitative Survey -**

The focus of our research is multivariant, dealing with issues of: construction of gender and identity in a woman only environment; symbols which are particular to the constituency and identity of MWMF; structures and anti-structures within the festival milieu; demographics and issues of access; issues of race-ethnicity and identity; emerging social complexities; and the processes of women building women's communities. Much of the focus of feminist scholarship and anthropological discourse examines constructions of identity and gender within the context of larger society. Our own focus examines these constructions within the context of a woman only environment and how these constructions from the larger world infiltrate women's community and effect the dynamics of power relations and struggles for inclusivity and diversity on a multitude of levels. The results of this research will be used to fulfil an assignment in a Feminist Ethnographic Studies course and may also be presented as a paper or published in a journal. A copy of our data and our final results will be submitted to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. In accordance with our ethical guidelines **you must be 18 years of age or older in order to participate in this survey.** Your participation in this research is completely anonymous. If you are willing to be available for follow-up interviews please fill out the name and address section of the survey. You may choose to leave any question(s) unanswered. Should you wish to have questions about the research addressed or if you are in any way dissatisfied with the research procedures you can make an anonymous phone call to either the researchers (listed below) or their supervisor Pauline Greenhill or Kristine Hansen, Chair, Senate Ethics, at the numbers below. Your completion and return of this survey will be understood as consent to use the information contained within in the above mentioned formats. After completion of the survey please return to survey drop off boxes at various locations on the MWMF site. There will be copies of the final research report available at One World in 1998.

**Researchers:** Amanda Birdsell - (204) 772-3596 ; Maria Fowler - (204) 772-3596;  
Jane Leverick - (204) 582-6708 **Supervisor:** Pauline Greenhill - (204) 786-9752  
**Senate Ethics:** Kristine Hansen - (204) 786-9345

## General Survey of MWMF Participants

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information:

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Please answer the following questions use the back of the page if needed.

1. Describe your partnership status.
2. Do you consider yourself a Feminist? Please explain.
3. How does race/ethnicity impact your identity at MWMF? Do you consider yourself a woman of colour? Please explain
4. How does class impact your identity at MWMF? Please explain.
5. Describe your gender-identity? How does this affect your experience at MWMF?
6. Discuss your sexual orientation. How does this affect your experience at MWMF?
7. Which area are you camping in and why?
8. Who do you think the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival wants to attract as audience/participants?
9. What did you like least and best about Michigan?
10. Is the atmosphere inclusive for you and others? Is the accommodation of diversity at Michigan too much, too little? Explain.
11. Discuss the issue of transgender and Michigan. How does the womyn-only policy affect you?
12. What does 'Michigan' mean to you?
13. There are many images of women and nature at MWMF (ie. Mother Oak, images on signs). Do you connect with these? Explain. How do they fit in with your ideas of women and/or feminism?

Do you have any further comments, thoughts or observations?

**Appendix B1 - 1998 preamble to Qualitative Surveys**

This research deals with women building women's communities, focusing on constructions of identity and gender. The results of this research may be presented as a paper or published in a journal. A copy of our data and our final results will be submitted to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. In accordance with our ethical guidelines **you must be 18 years of age or older in order to participate in this survey**. Your participation in this research is completely anonymous. You may choose to leave any question(s) unanswered. Should you wish to have questions about the research addressed or if you are in any way dissatisfied with the research procedures you can make an anonymous phone call to either the researchers (listed below) or their supervisor Pauline Greenhill or the Chair of Senate Ethics, at the numbers below. Your completion and return of this survey will be understood as consent to use the information contained within in the above mentioned formats. There will be copies of the final research report available at the One World tent at the 1999 festival.

**Researchers:**

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**Supervisor:** Pauline Greenhill - (204) 786-9752

**Senate Ethics:** (204) 786-9345

**( You can keep this page for your information)**

## Appendix C - digest of Qualitative Survey responses

### 1. Describe your partnership status.

- a) none
- b) commitment ceremony at MWMF 98, monogamous
- c) girlfriend
- d) single
- e) relationship with woman, 2yrs, live together 1 year
- f) "widowed" life partner (woman) died 3.5 years ago
- g) non-monogamous long term
- h) single, bi, recent break-up with man, looking for a woman because of more attraction
- i) single
- j) have one, just one, so does she
- k) committed long term with woman
- l) exclusive sexual live-in relationship, 8-9years
- m) married to partner since 1984, living together since 1982
- n) traveled to MWMF with recently separated partner and her 12 year old niece
- o) with long term partner
- p) married to a man, woman lover
- q) Independent
- r) 8 year monogamous relationship
- s) committed relationship with woman, 15 years
- t) single, not looking for a relationship now
- u) single at the moment
- v) married since 1985 (heterosexual)
- w) partnered with a man in committed long term relationship
- x) partnered with bi-sexual woman
- y) did not answer
- z) single
- aa) single
- bb) straight/married, nice to have a break from my testosterone-filled household
- cc) partnered with a man
- dd) hetero living with a boyfriend
- ee) long term lesbian relationship
- ff) I love my girlfriend!
- gg) living with girlfriend
- hh) partnered with a woman
- ii) live-in lovers with my girlfriend

### 2. Do you consider yourself a feminist? Please explain.

- a) yes, but prefers female liberationist. Not wanted to be labelled 'feminist' in settings where it meant anti-gay, privileged, professional, or anti-trans.
- b) yes, feminism is the belief that women and women's energy and creations are equally important as male influences and men
- c) yes, anyone that is interested in promoting the equality and rights of women is a feminist
- d) yes, I believe the patriarchy is a destructive system that oppresses women and other minorities-I work to smash the patriarchy through political activism(Women's Action Coalition) and personal choices

- e) yes, I believe I am aware of patriarchy and the way a male dominated society impacts me as a woman. I am aware of alternative ways to live in society through a focus on women's rights. I live my life in a way which honors lesbians and other women.
- f) sure, my life is women oriented, women centered in social life, recreation. I prefer to spend time and do business with women.
- g) yes, I am not fearful of the term although its definition is fluid and changing
- h) yes, I believe feminists are anybody (man or woman) who loves and respects women and believes in equality for women.
- i) yes, because I am pro-woman and recognise the oppression we have and do live under, both overt and covert. Also because I fight to remove/reduce the oppressions and celebrate women, lesbians especially.
- j) yes, although this is a word with multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings
- k) yes, I identify as female and center my world around women and women's issues.
- l) yes, so much more to be done
- m) no
- n) yes, based on les/fem politics of the 1970's
- o) yes, believe in the advancement of women's rights
- p) yes, am conscious of patriarchal bias in the culture - am active in women's orgs. to address this
- q) yes, women have been oppressed and practically obliterated from the power structures of the world's political, social structures - being feminist is about Re-claiming our inherent rights and position in the world.
- r) yes, I suppose anyone, unfortunately, who believes in equal treatment for women would be considered a feminist.
- s) yes, I believe in refocusing world in a way which values and prioritizes women and practices/qualities historically associated with women.
- t) sort of, don't like the word, but I believe in each person being encouraged to grow to their fullest potential.
- u) yes, I am concerned about women's issues, interested in women's music and keeping the culture going, equal rights - not a separatist
- v) yes, I want to support and be part of encouragement, expansion, and inheritance of women's knowledge, skills, strength, gentleness...
- w) yes, I am committed to all equality for all people, but since the oppressed group which I belong to is that of women, it is often easier to identify with women's struggles and to work for my equality by working for the equality of all women.

- x) no, I have not heard a definite definition of that word. I do not fit in many of other peoples definitions of it.
- y) yes, hetero box is limiting
- z) yes, being a woman in the US requires action and getting involved
- aa) yes, academic
- bb) yes, radical, socio-economic focus
- cc) yes, movement as a correction force for society and both genders
- dd) yes, collective values and differences, empower women
- ee) yes, recovering Catholic, need sense of community
- ff) yes, women's community and women's values predominant
- gg) yes, term under question for WOC, gender equality, aware of word's limits
- hh) yes, understand patriarchy woman hating society
- ii) yes, radical, becoming more and more conscious

**3. How does race/ethnicity impact your identity at MWMF? Please explain.**

- a) it's a pretty WASPish crowd. I'm white and prefer more integration.
- b) not an issue for me.
- c) doesn't
- d) I am white. I realise that this places me in a position of privilege. This year, although I noticed there is a great deal of diversity at the festival, there are white womyn than womyn of color.
- e) I am aware of the diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds and feel that the womyn of color tent makes me aware of the diversity. I would like to learn more about the womyn of color tent and the purpose it holds. (the separation and restriction of white women from it)
- f) not much, as far as I can tell I think its interesting, in this microcosm, to find not only that here we also select groupings to belong to (racial, ethnic, social) and that here we also are exclusionary. A human phenomenon, I think.
- g) I am white and acknowledge that I am still in the majority because of this. I celebrate the spaces women of color claim for themselves and respect it.
- h) I am white, but I attended a workshop (intimacy & diversity through movement) where we focused on our backgrounds, (mine is Irish) so I felt my own uniqueness by thinking about my ethnicity and the various other women's ethnicities.
- i) Born in N.Z., of European background.
- j) I'm a Jewish woman. though I haven't even gone to see them, I'm glad it's there. Ditto the klezmer band. Race - I have noticed I'm part of the majority here.
- k) I always feel that my boundaries are stretched by the strong presence of women of color and the racism workshops. I challenge myself to recognize my own racism everyday - but Michigan always makes me think more.
- l) not much
- m) I do not believe it impacts in any strong way. Life at MWMF seems to encompass a diverse

lifestyle.

n) I am with a lover who is part African and my own heritage is Romanian and Italian. Diverse ethnicity very important in terms of community.

o) doesn't

p) no answer

q) I am white - means the groups I attend are larger, less intimate or connected.

r) Doesn't

s) I have \*multiple identities which influence who I spend time with, which events I attend, how I see myself, where I camp; who I resonate with. \*white woman working towards anti-racism; mother/partner of Deaf; mother of Latino child; Lesbian; Over 40; working-class childhood/marriage

t) I'm sometimes awkward around women of different race/ethnicity (also abilities) cause I don't want to say something stupid

u) Doesn't

v) I'm white; Here I finally feel like I'm in the majority (the majority in this case meaning womyn) which is a fine feeling. That allows me to breathe freely, but being white I feel an obligation, a pressure, here to go to the workshops on racism.

w) As a white woman I have to work to be aware of my white privilege. I also have to work against my racism, work to be accepting of many cultures and ethnicity.

x) I imagine its easier for me (as most anywhere) since I look like a white WASP - type.

y) no answer

z) white, only aware when it comes up here, acknowledge my white privilege

aa) I look white, am Lakota, sometimes have to explain identity as a woman of color

bb) not a woman of color, feel the imbalance of a white majority

cc) no impact

dd) no impact, like the diversity here

ee) MWMF is very white, I am a woman of color

ff) no impact

gg) it doesn't

hh) I am white and recognise the privilege I enjoy because of it

ii) has no impact on my time here

#### **4. How does class impact your identity at MWMF? Please explain.**

a) you've got to have a least a little privilege to get here. Overall people I meet seem to be more white collar and schooled than average.

b) not an issue for me

c) Can't afford a lot of the crafts to buy a \$1 soda every time I'm thirsty.

d) I would say that I am in the middle class. When talking with other women at the festival, I get

the impression that many women are middle class.

e) some women can buy more snacks, crafts. As a Canadian I feel strongly impacted by the price of a festival ticket - its very expensive to come to Michigan and partake in the things which cost \$ @ the festival.

f) I think I'm on a socio-economic par with most people here. I think most of us are more educated and affluent then the majority of Americans. I tend to have more informative and interesting conversations here than elsewhere.

g) The festival, although community building, beautiful and diverse, it is still a \$ making event and I have no \$ and so it reflects my usual lifestyle.

h) I basically feel great about not having class barriers here - we seem in many ways so alike-no rich or poor neighbors, etc. the only place I feel that class makes a difference is in the crafts area where I can't afford anything! (but I respect artists' prices -as an artist myself I understand)

i) From a family where Mum was a teacher and a solo parent, so little money but middle class values. Means I understand not having enough money.

j) Well, if I were poor it would have been mighty hard to get here or to pay the registration, so I think the fact I'm here is a factor of my current class background.

k) I have always been working class and never feel like I have enough cash for the crafts area - I feel my class more here.

l) less here than elsewhere

m) not greatly, it appears that the older you are you may need to be middle class and above only because you may want more creature comforts.

n)yes, sense that there are some drug/drinking people at MWMF who are the campers who never leave their tent sites, I see this as a class issue.

o) Doesn't

p) no answer

q) I am owning class -in conversations I am the minority

r) Doesn't - I see MWMF as pretty class free. (unless you're not here because it costs too much which happens, but inside the festival I see no class)

s) see #3

t) not sure other than I can't afford all the cool stuff @ crafts area.

u) Doesn't

v) Raised working class; married "up" into a white-collar family. All my life have read and collected etiquette books. Am very, very conscious of class in my workplace and in public. Find myself rating many women I pass here "she's rich" Then the feminist answers "you don't know that, your reacting to the way she's dressed, the way she walks"

w) It is so expensive to attend the festival. I am here as a worker, could not be here if I were not a worker. My identity here is that of "worker", which sometimes gets me perks, but it would be nice to be here on vacation and not have to miss events because of work.

x) ?

y) ii) section damaged, unreadable.

**5. Describe your gender identity (i.e.. butch, femme, switch, etc.)? How do you express it? How does this affect your experience at MWMF?**

a) gynandro - identified female is my gender identity. butch/femme is an interrelationship thing that varies with time and person for me. I don't call it 'gender identity' I'm pretty much Kiki and like the freedom at MWMF

b) I just am. I don't identify with any of the 'groups'.

c) Femme I guess. I tend to wear skirts etc. Doesn't affect my experience.

d) I tend to be more butch. I express this through my appearance. I feel 'at home' at the festival - there are a lot of women like me here.

e) I would say that people would designate me a femme but I don't feel that way inside.

f) I am a human being I am me - I don't engage in role playing behavior. I have a lot of fun

g) I identify as fluid - I change - a femme diva bottom that aspires to be a bitch top dom - SM is still taboo although slowly being more excepted. My partner is TG and I was surprised how many people accepted this, and that he's here.

h) I feel a little weird about being bisexual. I think I would feel more comfortable if I was a lesbian. Today I met a woman that I found Attractive, and told her about my son, and her reaction was like "oh" (conversation stopper) I think she thought I was straight, and I wished I could say ":Oh - I'm attracted to women too."

i) Some days (hours) I feel butch, other days (hours) I feel femme. I change my own oil and like silk- I resist labels. I feel more comfortable being however I feel here than in other spaces so I don't have to check to see if how I want to be is appropriate to the space (physical) I'm in.

j) Semi-femme. I haven't played dress-up this week so have felt kind of 'normal'. I am happy to see a range of attire (an absence there of).

k) I think I between femme and butch and find that no one gives me any rude looks-only supportive smiles. This doesn't seem to be the experience of my very butch girlfriend through.

l) woman in all its complexity, broad range. feel accepted here for my own self, evolving over the years/more acceptance now than 12 years ago.

m) Butch in dress and frame of mind. Does not affect my experience here.

n) Butch femme is not something I feel or identify with. I tend not to polarize in relationships. Prefer a continuum of roles.

- o) Two-spirit -some women look at me with disgust, some with lust, according to their own issues.
- p) lesbian (not sexually active with husband), androgynous femme. I have tried to find activities to meet 'butch' women.
- q) I am female -sometimes more "femme" or 'butch' Dislike the restraint that labels necessarily carry. I struggle to find, express, be me.
- r) Woman? I don't 'classify' myself as butch/fem etc. Womyn are being empowered here which I feel.
- s) How I dress butchy-femme. When I first started coming to Mich I was kinda whiny about 'roughing it'; left it to my butchy partner to set up and 'did' Mich according to her recommendations. 3 years ago I decided i wanted to do something different so I came alone as a first tie worker (in order to have more time to figure out how to 'do' Michigan). I felt very successful, competent and more butch. Since then we come together for 2 years in a more balanced way
- t) It varies frequently. I love wearing a dress one day and jeans and boots the next. I NEVER wear dresses @ home. It's a great place to try out different 'roles' or costumes -can't think of the right word.
- u) femme, I don't feel it affects me.
- v) not an easy answer, I see this as a continuum, from completely female oriented women to completely male oriented men. I'm with a man but its HIM, not necessarily his maleness that I love and chose to be with. I tend to avoid mentioning him here, not wanting to offend. Also not wanting to bring him into this space.
- w) I am a tomboy. I guess-a sometimes femme tomboy - I wear both dresses and pants and dress-up and down in both. I think butch and femme are the really annoying overused labels at the moment -mostly not useful to me.
- x) androgenous dyke.
- y) heterosexual, envious of closeness between lesbian women
- z) bisexual, can be uncomfortable, especially around lesbian separatists
- aa) lesbian
- bb) lesbian, went from heterosexual to bisexual to lesbian route, could go bisexual
- cc) lesbian, went heterosexual to lesbian
- dd) heterosexual, which I choose and still feel included
- ee) bisexual, sense a lack of seriousness of my identity by others, or maybe resistance
- ff) lesbian, difficult experience if you're straight, might feel out of place
- gg) lesbian, MWMMF is an important part of my cultural education, closeted in mainstream
- hh) lesbian, sense of freedom at MWMMF, not silenced
- ii) lesbian

## **6. Discuss your sexual orientation. How does this affect your experience at MWMMF?**

- a) my sexual orientation is toward other women, but I might be open to men. Since its been that way for as long as I remember, leading to lesbian sub-cultures, MWMMF is more comfortable and natural than most places.

b) I am lesbian and feel very accepted at MWMF

c) The first year I came I identified as bi-sexual. Felt very uncomfortable with remarks that were made on the stage and by feisty goers. decided to come back because I loved the space. Haven't heard as many remarks the last four years. Did attend bi-support meetings. Enjoyed speaking with other women in the same situation.

d) I am a lesbian. I believe that this lifestyle is celebrated at the festival which helps rejuvenate me for the remaining 51 weeks of the year where being lesbian can be a bad or unsafe thing.

e) I am bisexual, in a lesbian relationship. At MWMF i feel in the majority and its very positive. I feel supported and not different like I do in the city I live. I feel more amorous within my relationship especially at the festival. Positive role models are very important for this.

f) 90% lesbian. It's a lovely change to be in a society in which my sexual orientation is what most people presume it to be.

g) I identify as a dyke, although my partner identifies as a male. There are many assumptions at the festival and I aspire to challenge all of these.

h) see 5

i) lesbian-it's great

j) bisexual. It's that outsider 'thang'. But the workshops made us a lot more visible, at least to one another.

k) I'm a lesbian and feel very supported here I love all the lesbian culture

l) lesbian, previous life as het., Helps to feel "in". When I came here and had to return to the het world it was very painful-both being here and the returning. Now I feel peaceful with self and lifestyle.

m) Woman only. I think it enhances my enjoyment of the festival.

n) Lesbian for 20 years. I am wary of the straight and-or bi women at Michigan. they tend to be heartbreakers and dishonest about their sexuality.

o) with a woman long term, makes my experience here better.

p) Lesbian-feeling very comfortable that I can be unguarded. Am looking to meet women.

q) I have usually enjoyed sexual experiences -hetero as well as lesbian- I identify as lesbian now- it is a choice- I am comfortable and happy here- sexually not active- I don't like all the innuendoes, etc. around sex - I think its like labels and carries images and vocabularies with it that confines etc.

r) currently with a woman. Consider myself a bi-sexual but have been with a woman for a long time. Don't know that it directly affects my festival experience. Except its good to see women together in the open.

s) Lesbian-makes it heaven to be here. Much less fear, anxiety. Much more in touch with my

sexuality in my relationship. e.g.. we (as a couple) get so shut down, sexually, in the "other world" and while here touch all the time and have more sex then we do in months.

t) Dyke- it's so nice to have people assume I'm gay

u) Lesbian, it's wonderful. Although I do have to be aware of making assumptions of women I meet, re: their orientation. I sometimes forget that non-lesbian women are here.

v) see 5

w) I am bisexual. Most women here assume I am a lesbian which doesn't bother me, but I worry that women will think I'm 'passing' or trying to deceive them if I don't explain that I'm bisexual immediately. I feel as if I'm constantly having to tell my life story.

x) Sm dyke, in some years it has been difficult to be accepted by others - freedom of expression or clothing choices.

y) straight, and introductions can be uncomfortable because of that

z) no answer

aa) bisexual

bb) female, find it odd sometimes when meeting people, because I am straight

cc) female, currently a tomboy to the extreme, some issues with gender

dd) multiple expression of female gender, femme-butch

ee) female, funky femme

ff) female but there's lots more to it

gg) female, lesbian

hh) woman! home at MWMF

ii) lesbian

## **7. Which area are you camping in and why?**

a) over 50's, convenience and a gift of honor to myself for surviving.

b) Amazon Acres. I like the relative solitude and night sounds of nature

c) Bush Gardens. Ready to try something new (from family camping). Close to workshop walk-kitchen and nightstage

d) Bush Gardens- central location

e) Bush Gardens - central location

f) Jupiter Jump off - tradition

g) Bush gardens- central but not overpopulated

h) Bush gardens - central location

i) Bush gardens - central location

j) general-convenient, quiet

k) bread and rose, convenient and a habit

l) +50, close to everything

m) RV, comforts of RV living

n) Bush Gardens, secluded yet central

o) Bread and Roses, partner

p) Bush Gardens, central, accessible

q) Over 50's- looking to bond/connect with women my age

r) Bush Gardens/ location.

s) Deaf Womyn's -partner and Daughter are deaf, near my work area

t) Bush Garden's -Lou's Cafe, issue free space-drinking and smoking ok, but no pressure, cool people, close to triangle.

u) RV, convenient, warmer

- v) Sleeping in my car, don't own camping gear.
- w) Workerville, because I'm a worker, my tent is close to worker support and worker diner etc.
- x) general, quiet. i like to sleep at night and twilight zone is too far.
- y) no answer
- z) bread and roses - convenient
- aa) bread and roses - old friends
- bb) solanes ferns, meets my mother's needs, close to workshops
- cc) bread and roses, central location
- dd) jupiter jump-off, quiet and convenient
- ee) bread and roses, meet my friends
- ff) DART, I have fibromialgia
- gg) Bush Gardens, convenient
- hh) Amazon Acres, quiet
- ii) Bread and roses, convenient and I've always camped there

**8. Who do you think the Michigan Womyn's Festival wants to attract as audience/participants?**

- a) females -born-assigned- and identified adults who are oriented to other women socially, culturally, emotionally, sexually.
- b) open, accepting women
- c) All womyn
- d) Womyn, although most people are homosexual, the festival is not for lesbians only. If it was, it would be named the Michigan lesbians Music festival. So, all womyn.
- e) Womyn-primarily lesbians and gay, bisexual women, all womyn as participants, performers who are making a strong contribution to womyn's growth and development in all areas.
- f) -women oriented women- women curious to explore a different cultural experience- women wishing to interact with other like and unlike themselves-women wishing to cooperate and compromise and negotiate.
- g) Rich lezbians, not dykes, TGers, SM and kids or anyone that is not gonna bring \$, but we claim our space.
- h) Ideally, I'd say all women no matter what, but really I think it's kinda geared towards lesbians.
- i) All womyn, especially lesbians.
- j) Lesbian identified women. My guess is that they want class, race, geographic diversity but probably would prefer to have a little less of some of its diversities (bi, transgendered, S/M, etc.)
- k) women who need/want change
- l) Whoever can afford the fee
- m) Women who enjoy the relaxation of outdoors, music, comedy.
- n) Lesbians and women identified women. Also perhaps bi women and women questioning their

sexuality

- o) All women born women
- p) Lesbian women, although I think straight women seem to be very comfortable.
- q) Women, especially gay women.
- r) Women
- s) Primarily lesbians, but want to see some diversity (hetero-bi). Strong desire for other diversities, especially age, race, ethnicity
- t) Good question.
- u) In more recent years, the younger generation, 18-30years.
- v) I can't speak for the organizers, for myself, the festival welcomes all women.
- w) Women with money since they're trying to make a profit. If they really wanted poor or working class women here, they would offer sliding scale admission or some sort of scholarships (not everyone can afford to take time off to be a worker).
- x) middle class middle of the road dykes.
- y) no answer
- z) women who appreciate and affirm women
- aa) women who need a break from the men's world, especially lesbians
- bb) lesbians and lefty feminists, less so women in general
- cc) lesbians or straight allies, feminists
- dd) 80% lesbian and bisexual, 20% heterosexual and not sure, all races
- ee) lesbian identified, not much for straight women here and trans is ignored
- ff) women wanting music and women's culture
- gg) all women
- hh) as many women as possible, maybe younger ones for the future, safety for women of color
- ii) a wide variety of lesbians

#### **9. What did you like least and best about Michigan?**

- a) L. being alone this time with basically no explicit settings to make new one-to-one contacts.  
B. the communal daily life.
- b) L. that it has to end each year  
B. the atmosphere of love and acceptance
- c) L. the womyn that don't leave their issues at the gate, making it less enjoyable for others. The variety of activities, music and workshops that allow a variety of women to enjoy the festival.  
B. the atmosphere of togetherness and friendliness with most of the women
- d) B. being safe and surrounded by women, no least indicated
- e) L. line -ups, people standing in front of me at night stage. It is difficult to find a sense of space and freedom when some of these rights are violated, no best indicated.

- f) L. the loud male voices in the outdoor movie Monday night  
B. the ambience, people, food, woods, the culture
- g) L. rain, relationship processing, cold showers  
B. food, S/M 101 workshop, camping, flirting, beautiful women, cold showers, communication and community.
- h) L. I've felt self conscious of my body here even through I'm not supposed to. I see young women with beautiful bodies, whereas i have saggy boobs and a fat belly from childbirth, and I don't want to take my shirt off.  
B. dancers
- i) L. phones that don't take all cards, line-ups.  
B. food, performers, land
- j) L. Some of the tensions that inevitably emerge when difference and different needs are negotiated.  
B. The magic that goes into making a community happen –it's exiting and amazing.
- k) L. porta-janes  
B. culture
- l) L. dependent on economic class  
B. constance, can come for renewal, new ideas
- m) L. Food  
B. Atmosphere
- n) L more discussion ofd "issues", more and larger workshops  
B. diversity, sense of alliance and warmth
- o) L. Porta Janes  
B. women's diversity and music
- p) L. long wait to be processed and delivered to camp site.  
B. accepting atmosphere, opportunity to meet people.
- q) L. need better shuttle service for disability  
B. Freedom, loving, supportive, diverse atmosphere of womyn only.
- r) L. too much segregation/separation  
B. all the beautiful women, energy
- s) L. "work" sometimes resembles patriarchy (attitudes, schedules)  
B. opportunity to learn from other women about options for living life other than I've experienced: diversity in music
- t) L. rain, food line  
B. clothing optional, spirituality, community, hugs, smiling at everyone
- u) L. some of the type of music (punk rock). It's not the music the culture was built on or has the global perspective of peace and mother earth. It's rock (as in mainstream) with lesbian words.  
B. when the women's music is (real), various activities, living with just women.

v) L. Porta Janes  
B. just "being" here

w) L. no workshops on wed (except for intensives), few workshops on Sun, dance classes to loud and early  
B. daily bisexual network meetings at Oasis, bisexual workshops

x) L. Political battles  
B. women's energy "summer camp"

y) L. vegetarian diet  
B. freedom

z) L. not fully accepted as bisexual  
B. a community that is created

aa) L. lack of first timers and solo services  
B. no men

bb) L. camping, food, weather, porta janies  
B music

cc) L. lack of seats at a comfortable height  
B. body pride

dd) L. no free coffee  
B. safety (no men)

ee) L. pagan intolerance of Christians  
B. relax, freedom to be

ff) L. men come on the land for work, like the cleaning the porta-janes  
B. women's culture

gg) L. rain  
B. opportunity to do work (astrology reader)

hh) L. soggy tent  
B. beautiful women

ii) L. weather  
B. women centred/lesbian centred community

**10. Is the atmosphere inclusive for you and others? Is the accommodation of diversity at Michigan too much, too little? Explain.**

a) accommodation of diversity that does exist is beautiful. A point of non-inclusion that has caused pain and spread miss-information and prejudice is the exclusion of sex-changed women.

b) I feel it very inclusive. No such thing as too much.

- c) inclusive-haven't heard remarks about bisexuals lately, have learned to live with the lesbian separatist banner.
- d) I feel included. Went with a het woman who was harassed by lesbians last year, she didn't
- e) would like to know more about WOC tent, why there's not a tent for Jewish women and other diversities. I like that there are more children and older women, impressed with dart services.
- f) It is much more diverse than when the festival began - we were pretty homogeneous in the early years. I like it better now.
- g) Inclusive only because we are claiming our space-to have it be completely inclusive much education would be needed.
- h) feel good here, happy to be open about lesbianism
- i) I love the inclusivity and accommodation of diversity. It's cool.
- j) more than in previous festivals
- k) I feel include but I believe transgender women aren't always welcome-because they look very butch and women aren't always friendly.
- l) Diversity is getting better, can't be too much, see comment on economic constraints.
- m) It is inclusive for me and friends. I think that the diversity is at healthy standards, I would not care to see more separatists.
- n) diversity is accommodated, perhaps more ramps and wheel chair access. I tend towards inclusion of transsexuals
- o) sometimes inclusive-depends on the women
- p) yes, diversity fine
- q) is great
- r) diversity is good and very important to see and understand, yet I see too much segregation at times. Celebrate the diversity and show unity together.
- s) yes, not perfect, but evolving and self-conscious.
- t) It is very expensive for my Canadian friends.
- u) Diversity is plenty, especially for the handicapped, almost to the exclusion of the able-bodied. We keep separate from each other at concerts, eating, etc. I also feel the sign saying 'all womyn welcome' is a lie, since transsexuals are not allowed.
- v) Inclusive-generally yes. There have been moments in workshops or in small social circles where I felt animosity or exclusion because of my circumstances (hetero, while married).
- w) too little as far as class and money. Not many women of color (particularly Asian) are these women being recruited?.
- x) not inclusive for sm

- y) yes, great for wheelchair, not great for transgender
- z) yes, can never be too much
- aa) not inclusive for bisexual, heterosexual, or obese women
- bb) as a white Jew it's ok, women of color may not find it so
- cc) yes, helps women accept diversity, but, have heard comments about jungle music - these are inappropriate
- dd) no answer
- ee) yes, sad more Christians don't see this/attend
- ff) yes, DART is especially appreciated
- gg) yes
- hh) yes
- ii) It's great, everyone's welcome

**11. Discuss the issue of transgender at Michigan. How does the womyn-only policy affect you?**

- a) the festival being for mothers and daughters of womyn-born-womyn is no longer expressed in the brochure. Upon phone inquiry this year people were told it's for who ever thinks it is for them; but its much safer for transphobic bigots than TS womyn. I'm put off by the 'transgender fluid' types who want to be there with 'allies'. Mother nature is not so simple. I'd prefer no-one who lives most of the time as a man and/or is hopped up on testosterone and/or has organs hanging down between the legs. That seems to work at the women's bathhouse in San Francisco.
- b) I agree with the womyn only policy. It's the only place I can walk in the woods at night and feel safe. I'm not sure I agree with the womyn-born-womyn policy. If a person feels female and has the sex change surgery, I feel they should be allowed. Very difficult issue with no black and white answers. We can't be running around checking peoples X and Y chromosomes but the line needs to be drawn somewhere to keep the festival 'female' in atmosphere.
- c) I like the womyn only policy but who's to say TG aren't or weren't supposed to be womyn.
- d) I maintain my stance that I accept how a person self identifies.
- e) Womyn-born-womyn policy makes me feel safe. I would like to see TG women be supported in some way. It is a hard question. I wouldn't like people with penises on the land but people who are living as women without penises and feel like they've always been women, I'm not sure.
- f) It's a sticky issue. How do you define 'woman' genetically? physically? philosophically? experientially? Are the boys 'raised' here at the festival growing up to be the kind of people it would be fun to have here?
- g) I think the issue is being more accepted and people are willing to listen but their is still a lot of transphobia among the people here.
- h) Womyn-born-womyn is important to me. I think that what's inside a woman makes her as much, or more of a woman than her physical traits, and its great to be able to share ourselves with womyn only.
- i) My initial response is why not allow post-op M to F. However, I know their are concerns about having people here raised with male privilege. I like having a space where there are just women.
- j) I hate the current policy. Reality is very complicated and it's hard enough to liberate gender

rules in the real world. I hate that we contribute in any way to this exclusion.

k) I support the womyn-only policy -but we need to support womyn along the butch/femme continuum.

l) Transgender M to F might improve the costumes! Fine with me.

m) That's the reason I come to the festival

n) an issue that needs more discussion and perhaps a vote among festival goers, a more democratic approach

o) see 8

p) I want only bio-girls at Michigan

q) have not arrived at an opinion.

r) We as womyn need a place to be to celebrate our selves, bodies and spirits.

s) I am please to spend time with the littlest amount of contact with male-born males. I support the current policy

t) Definitely not people with male genitalia in my opinion, but I would still come if they were let in.

u) see #10

v) It doesn't, I know no transgender womyn personally and know the issues of this only peripherally

w) TG women should be included. Womyn who identify as womyn should be included, no matter what their original biological condition. If we don't believe biology is destiny we need to accept transgender women who identify as women.

x) Hard issue, much easier with M to F women being here, not sure about F tom, hate to have to be the judge

y) some discomfort with who decides

z) this would be a difficult place for transgenders, F-M no, but exclusion has closed dialogue

aa) uncomfortable, equate the issue with racism and anti-Semitism, trans is just another identity

bb) safety is the issue, no transgendered

cc) doesn't impact but uncomfortable with gender police

dd) ok with it, don't want to deal with the problem, have issues with dildoes

ee) ok with inclusion, I think the numbers would be small anyway

ff) mixed feelings, could ruin woman only space

gg) have friends who are impacted, mixed feelings on exclusion of M-F

hh) feel it should remain exclusive

ii) no answer

## **12. What does Michigan mean to you?**

a) a U.S. state a little ways east of my home state.

b) Freedom, peacefulness, love, community

- c) A fun week when you get to experience the power of women, meet new friends and renew old friendships.
- d) A sacred place where womyn can come together and celebrate their identities. It means a place where life changing events can happen. It means being involved in creating peace, loving, equalitarian community
- e) Freedom, being at a place where I am in sync with my surroundings.
- f) An extraordinary week of the year. A holiday, A celebration. A password, codeword.
- g) Community, sexuality, fun, games, politics, movement, dirty, awakening and one of the most vibrant events around - I will come in the future
- h) "Womyn's Festival" means more to me.
- i) A place that feeds my soul, recharges my batteries, where I'm not the only one with hairy legs and armpits. The way the world should be.
- j) Its a mini-utopian experiment. It's a microcosm of what's going on in various communities. For many women it's a lifeline.
- k) vacation, replenishment, rejuvenation.
- l) Space to be, think, feel, renew, learn, move forward
- m) Michigan is my home state so I identify closely with it.
- n) A place to relax, hang out, vacation with lesbians. I do not see it as a utopia but as a nice vacation sanctuary.
- o) coming home
- p) lesbian gathering
- q) women for women, a sane week to refuel.
- r) A place to heal, see womyn happy, showing energy, be at peace.
- s) A place to hear about, consider and experience a "different" way of life - non, or at least, less patriarchal
- t) Being more comfortable than anywhere else. Don't have to wear cloths, can safely talk to strangers, can talk about spirituality
- u) Fun, living in comfort with others without the presence of men. Pride in being a part of a small town in America that functions independently as a small town.
- v) My home state.
- w) Since this is my first year Michigan doesn't have the mythological connotations for me that it does for others.

- x) A space for lots of different womyn to get together.
- y) inclusion and freedom
- z) not sure yet
- aa) freedom, energy, wisdom, knowledge, great sex, relaxation, major no rape focus, comfort, home
- bb) home, ferns, Mother earth
- cc) spirit, comfort, no 'outing' of self
- dd) re-energise and be with my kind (heterosexual)
- ee) the world of the future, minus camping, symbol for beauty, abundance and justice
- ff) relaxation, girls, time to breathe and think,
- gg) ?
- hh) opportunity to experience dyke dominated, woman identified culture
- ii) fun, music, diversity of lesbian culture

**13. There are many images of women and nature at MWMF (i.e. Mother Oak, images on signs). Do you connect with these? Explain. How do they fit in with your ideas of woman and/or feminism?**

- a) I don't really notice them.
- b) - no answer
- c) love the signs, saw one I believe is new about respecting the diversity of all the women at the festival. Think this is the true spirit of the festival, to be a safe place for all womyn. Love all the nature references also. I always feel more connected with the earth after festival.
- d) Yes, I do connect with these images. They reflect an understanding of life and spirituality which resonate with me. The images are empowering.
- e) I love all the womyn at Michigan - all the sizes of womyn. It is so helpful to be reminded / inundated with feminine images and symbols. I need a lot of deprogramming from the society I live in where there is a scarcity of these.
- f) Don't think much along those lines. I see such images used in feminist ideology.
- g) Women and nature are connected, just as much as humans and nature - my politics are similar to my spirituality, goddess, Gaia earthmother focused - again it is one level of my being and I celebrate it.
- h) I love it. They all seem to be connected to a womanly spirit and make me feel more empowered (women being empowered here is very important to me).
- i) I believe womyn and nature have a connection that must be strengthened if we are to survive. I love the images on the signs, etc.
- j) Not really - my reaction is supportive as I know these images mean a lot to some women, but it doesn't really move me.
- k) I love all the images and believe that all shapes/sizes are beautiful.

- l) Sure. Already have this ideation of my own. Nature is my religion- female
- m) I am not into feminism enough to make a great connection between images and MWMF.
- n) Very important to link politics of being female with replenishment of the earth. Eco-feminism will help the earth to survive.
- o) sometimes connect, sometimes not
- p) ok
- q) I love them-reminds me to connect -reminds me of my centrality to creation etc.
- r) Yes, I share energy with the earth - it grounds us all. Hence, it only makes sense to encompass it into nature
- s) I enjoy them but probably only connect on a subconscious level.
- t) Yes. The earth is our mother I can feel her cradling me here.
- u) I believe in Mother/Father earth and god. To acknowledge Mother/Father in anything I believe is true feminism, to exclude the opposite of male is to exclude our own duality since all of us have male/female including men. We must all learn to live together harmoniously and rid ourselves of fear by bringing forth love. Love is the absence of fear. We don't have a right to fear, just replace it with love. We too, as lesbians, feminists, have to stop attacking others with our thoughts, words, and actions.
- y) -bb) no answer
- cc) love the art, makes it beautiful here
- dd) love the connection to the land here and how the signs and art celebrate that
- ee) pretty, but not that important to me
- ff) like the full bodied images of women
- gg) no answer
- hh) love the celebration in these images of unbounded womanhood, tied to the earth
- ii) maybe subconsciously, I mostly notice the colors!

#### **Further Comments**

- a) none
- b) I dread the day when the mainstream media finds out about the fest. Please don't help this to happen.
- c) none
- d) great line up (night stage)
- e) wish I lived in Michigan, would like to create more societies
- f) none
- g) love the festival and the challenges it brings
- h) the project is a great idea
- i) Coming here has been really important to me in my journey as a lesbian and as a womyn with deep connections to plant spirits. I have gained so much, and learned so much. Every woman should come here at least once.
- j) -k) none
- l) Would like to see significant women invited here - Alice walker, kd lang - to minimize the difference between Michigan and the other world.

- m) none
- n) I am a Prof. - I teach women's studies to grad students. I think this survey is a good idea.
- o-x, no comments
- y) some identities feel more important and valued by this community than at home
- z) would like to get the program ahead of time
- aa) no answer
- bb) no answer
- cc) appreciate the organisation and commitment, want this to always be
- dd) some questions were difficult to answer
- ee) no women who complain about MWMF policies and practices don't realise what we would be missing
- ff) - ii) no comments

The University of Winnipeg Research Project



# Oral Herstory Workshops

**Place: Under The Old Meeting Tree**

**Time: Wednesday, 2pm-4pm  
Thursday, 10am - noon  
Friday, 2pm-4pm  
Saturday, 10am - noon**

*Come and share stories  
and memories of  
Michigan over the years.*

*All womyn welcome!!*

These workshops are hosted by the University of Winnipeg Research Project Team and are part of an ongoing research project to explore identity and community building at Michigan

The University of Winnipeg Research Project

### **Appendix E - Consent Form For Group Interview**

The focus of our research is multivariant, dealing with issues of: construction of gender and identity in a woman only environment; symbols which are particular to the constituency and identity of MWMF; structures and anti-structures within the festival milieu; demographics and issues of access; issues of race-ethnicity and identity; emerging social complexities; and the processes of women building women's communities. Much of the focus of feminist scholarship and anthropological discourse examines constructions of identity and gender within the context of larger society. Our own focus examines these constructions within the context of a woman only environment and how these constructions from the larger world infiltrate women's community and effect the dynamics of power relations and struggles for inclusivity and diversity on a multitude of levels. The results of this research will be used to fulfil an assignment in a Feminist Ethnographic Studies course and may also be presented as a paper or published in a journal. A copy of our data and our final results will be submitted to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. In accordance with our ethical guidelines **you must be 18 years of age or older in order to participate in this survey.** I, \_\_\_\_\_, am 18 years of age or older and give my consent to participate in a tape-recorded group interview, in the presence of, and through discussion with a group of women. I understand: that I can participate anonymously in this group interview and/or in the final presentation of this research through the use of a pseudonym and that I can have removed or altered to maintain anonymity any portion of my oral or written input; that I can choose to discontinue my participation in this research at any time; and, that I can contact the researchers (listed below), their supervisor Pauline Greenhill, or Kristine Hansen, Chair, Senate Ethics, at the numbers listed below to have my questions addressed or if I am in any way dissatisfied with the research procedures. I wish to remain anonymous for the group interview (yes/no) and/or in the final presentation of the research (yes/no). The pseudonym I have chosen is: \_\_\_\_\_. I would like a copy of the final presentation of the research (yes/no). Please send (fax or e-mail) to: \_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researchers:** Amanda Birdsell -(204)772-3596 Maria Fowler -(204)772-3596  
 Jane Leverick - 204)582-6708 **Supervisor:** Pauline Greenhill -(204)786-9752 **Dept. Chair:** Gary Granzberg -(204)786- 9875  
**Senate Ethics:** Kristine Hansen -(204)786-9345

**Appendix F - Group Interview/Workshop Guideline****Workshop 1 Outline**

The first half hour of the workshop will be spent explaining the research project. This will include explaining the consent letters and the guarantee of anonymity. Permission to record will be sought at this time. The workshop will be a facilitated discussion. The participants will direct the flow and content. We will use a talking stick to ensure respectful discussion. The discussion will begin with a round of introductions and a brief discussion of how many times people have attended the festival.

The following is a list of questions with which to initiate discussion and/or redirect discussion if the dynamic falters:

What was your first time at Michigan like?

What stories do you hear/tell about Michigan?

What changes have you seen over the years?

What is the funniest story you've heard about Michigan?

What is the most inspiring story you've heard about Michigan?

## **Appendix G - Interview Schedule for MWMF - Images of Womyn**

Review of consent letter. Collect address and demographic information.

How long have you been coming to MWMF?

What first attracted you to the festival? How has that changed over time?

How has coming to MWMF impacted your life? How has this changed over time?

Are there ways of expressing your identity that you are able to engage in at MWMF that you don't feel comfortable with in other places?

How would you describe your herstory of festival experience?

What is your perception of MWMF? How is it organised? What are the dominant groups?

What keeps you coming back, or makes you feel you won't return?

Would you describe yourself as a feminist? If yes, describe your feminism. If no, how would you describe your politic or philosophy?

How involved in a women's community or social network are you back home? Why or why not?

What kinds of images, objects and symbols at the festival do you connect with the most? What images speak to you about Michigan and which about women in the world?

Are there gender role/stereotypes involved in those images? Why/why not? How are they related?

What is the relationship between images/symbols and your concepts of identity?  
 What is the relationship between images/symbols and your concepts of feminism? ...women?

In the images of woman/nature at MWMF is body important?

How important is body to your ideas of self and identity?

Is there anything you would like to discuss before we close the interview?

Could we contact you again if we have any additional questions?

## Appendix H - Consent Form For On Site Interviews

The focus of our research is multivariant, dealing with issues of: construction of gender and identity in a woman only environment; symbols which are particular to the constituency and identity of MWMF; structures and anti-structures within the festival milieu; demographics and issues of access; issues of race-ethnicity and identity; emerging social complexities; and the processes of women building women's communities. Much of the focus of feminist scholarship and anthropological discourse examines constructions of identity and gender within the context of larger society. Our own focus examines these constructions within the context of a woman only environment and how these constructions from the larger world infiltrate women's community and effect the dynamics of power relations and struggles for inclusivity and diversity on a multitude of levels. The results of this research may be presented as a paper or published in a journal. A copy of our data and our final results will be submitted to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. In accordance with our ethical guidelines **you must be 18 years of age or older in order to participate in this survey.** I,

\_\_\_\_\_, am 18 years of age or older and give my consent to participate in a tape-recorded interview. I understand: that I can participate anonymously in this interview and/or in the final presentation of this research through the use of a pseudonym and that I can have removed or altered to maintain anonymity any portion of my oral or written input; that I can choose to discontinue my participation in this research at any time; and, that I can contact the researchers (see listed below), their supervisor Pauline Greenhill, or Kristine Hansen, Chair, Senate Ethics, at the numbers listed below to have my questions addressed or if I am in any way dissatisfied with the research procedures. I wish to remain anonymous for this interview (yes/no) \_\_\_ and/or in the final presentation of the research (yes/no)\_\_\_\_. The pseudonym I have chosen is:

\_\_\_\_\_. I would like a copy of the final presentation of the research (yes/no) \_\_\_\_\_. Please send (fax or e-mail) to: \_\_\_\_\_

Please add any other additional comments or constraints you feel are necessary: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researchers:** Amanda Birdsell - (204) 772-3596 Maria Fowler - (204) 772-3596

Jane Leverick -(204) 582-6708 **Supervisor:** Pauline Greenhill - (204) 786-9752

**Anthropology Chair:** Gary Granzberg -(204)786- 9875

**Senate Ethics:** Kristine Hansen -(204) 786-9345

**Appendix I - Consent Form For Post-Festival Phone Or In-Person Interviews**

The focus of our research is multivariant, dealing with issues of: construction of gender and identity in a woman only environment; symbols which are particular to the constituency and identity of MWMF; structures and anti-structures within the festival milieu; demographics and issues of access; issues of race-ethnicity and identity; emerging social complexities; and the processes of women building women's communities. Much of the focus of feminist scholarship and anthropological discourse examines constructions of identity and gender within the context of larger society. Our own focus examines these constructions within the context of a woman only environment and how these constructions from the larger world infiltrate women's community and effect the dynamics of power relations and struggles for inclusivity and diversity on a multitude of levels. In accordance with our ethical guidelines **you must be 18 years of age or older in order to participate in this survey.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am 18 years of age or older and give my consent to participate in a tape-recorded interview. I understand: that I can participate anonymously in this interview and/or in the final presentation of this research through the use of a pseudonym and that I can have removed or altered to maintain anonymity any portion of my oral or written input; that I can choose to discontinue my participation in this research at any time; and, that I can contact the researchers (see listed below), their supervisor Pauline Greenhill, or Kristine Hansen, Chair, Senate Ethics, at the numbers listed below to have my questions addressed or if I am in any way dissatisfied with the research procedures. I wish to remain anonymous for this interview (yes/no) \_\_\_\_ and/or in the final presentation of the research (yes/no) \_\_\_\_\_. The pseudonym I have chosen is: \_\_\_\_\_ . I would like a copy of the final presentation of the research (yes/no) \_\_\_\_\_.

Please send (fax or e-mail) to: \_\_\_\_\_

Please add any other additional comments or constraints you feel are necessary:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researchers:** Amanda Birdsell -(204) 772-3596 Maria Fowler -(204) 772-3596

Jane Leverick -(204) 582-6708 **Supervisor:** Pauline Greenhill -(204)786-9752

**Anthropology Chair:** Gary Granzberg - (204) 786- 9875

**Senate Ethics:** Kristine Hansen - (204) 786-9345



## Appendix K - Consent Form For Photographs

The focus of our research is multivariant, dealing with issues of: construction of gender and identity in a woman only environment; symbols which are particular to the constituency and identity of MWMF; structures and anti-structures within the festival milieu; demographics and issues of access; issues of race-ethnicity and identity; emerging social complexities; and the processes of women building women's communities. Much of the focus of feminist scholarship and anthropological discourse examines constructions of identity and gender within the context of larger society. Our own focus examines these constructions within the context of a woman only environment and how these constructions from the larger world infiltrate women's community and effect the dynamics of power relations and struggles for inclusivity and diversity on a multitude of levels. In accordance with our ethical guidelines **you must be 18 years of age or older in order to participate in this survey.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, am 18 years of age or older and consent to being photographed and to having that photograph anonymously (that is, without my name attached) displayed in association with the aforementioned research. I understand that: that the photographs may be displayed as a part of the final presentation of this research; that I can choose to discontinue my participation in this research at any time; that I can contact the researchers (list below), their supervisor Pauline Greenhill, Dept. of Anthropology and Women's Studies, or Kristine Hansen, Chair, Senate Ethics at the numbers below to have my questions addressed or if I am in any way dissatisfied with the research procedures; that I may choose to view the photograph prior to that photograph being used in any way by the researchers; that I may place restrictions on the use of the photograph. I wish to view the photograph prior to its use (yes/no) \_\_\_\_\_. I wish to place the following restriction(s) on the use of the photograph

\_\_\_\_\_

I give permission to the researchers to use the photograph as they see fit (yes/no)

Please send (fax or e-mail) to: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researchers:** Amanda Birdsell -(204) 772-3596 Maria Fowler - 204) 772-3596  
 Jane Leverick - (204) 582-6708 **Supervisor:** Pauline Greenhill - (204) 786-9752  
**Anthropology Chair:** Gary Granzberg -(204) 786-9875  
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**Appendix L - List of Images**

## 1997 images

- 1-11. line-up shots - Aug.12
12. Maria and Jane writing field-notes, waiting in line - Aug. 12
13. shot of main gate upon arrival - Aug. 12
14. arrival at shuttle drop - Aug. 12
15. general arrival area - Aug. 12
16. campsites and the yurt - Aug. 13
17. RV research office - Aug. 13
18. view towards treeline from RV site - Aug. 13
19. view towards main gate from RV site - Aug. 13
20. opening ceremonies, stage shot - - Aug. 15
21. opening ceremony, fire jugglers - Aug. 15
22. opening ceremony, lava women - Aug. 15
23. opening ceremony, trapeze artist in tree - Aug. 15
24. Community Centre entrance and Jane - Aug. 16
25. Quilting and Over 40's - Aug. 16
26. WOC tent and Sanctuary - Aug. 16
27. Craft Bazaar entrance - Aug. 16
28. August Night Cafe shot from main street - Aug. 16
29. August Night Cafe up close - Aug. 16
30. Day Stage - Aug. 16
31. Craft Bazaar pathways to illustrate wheelchair accessibility - Aug. 16
32. the shuttle transporting women from area to area - Aug. 16
33. the tractor shuttle - Aug. 16
34. puppet parade set up, tree goddess - Aug.17
35. puppet parade set-up, animal faces - Aug.17
36. puppet parade set-up, stilt walking woman - Aug.17
37. puppet parade set-up, stilt walking woman in American flag - Aug.17
38. puppet parade set-up, women with body paint and Furies puppet -Aug.17
39. participant in puppet parade - Aug.17
40. puppet parade set-up, goddess of hands - Aug.17
41. puppet parade set-up, mask - Aug.17
42. historical sign of the Watermelon Tree - Aug.17
43. historical sign of Craft Bazaar - Aug.18
44. cloth banner in tree - Aug.18
45. carved/ painted wooden sign, nature & woman images, heart shape -Aug.18
46. carved/ painted wooden sign, nature & woman images, tree shape - Aug.18
47. carved/ painted wooden sign, nature & woman images, heart shape - Aug.18
48. carved /painted wooden sign, nature & woman images, heart shape - Aug.18
49. carved /painted wooden sign, nature & woman images, heart shape - Aug.18
50. carved /painted wooden sign, nature & woman images, heart shape -

Aug.18

- 51. carved /painted wooden sign, nature & woman images, heart shape - Aug.18
- 52. carved /painted wooden sign, nature & woman images, heart shape - Aug.18
- 53. garbage truck painted with Isis symbol - Aug.18

1998 images

- 1. Research Tent with sign - Aug. 11
- 2. Interior shot of research tent - Aug.11
- 3. Jane working the surveys at community centre - Aug. 12
- 4. Opening ceremonies hot air balloon - on ground - Aug. 12
- 5. Opening ceremonies hot air balloon taking off - Aug. 12
- 6. Opening ceremonies hot air balloon dropping balloons - Aug. 12
- 7. far shot of balloon in sky - Aug. 12
- 8. Entrance parade of Opening ceremonies - moth women - Aug. 12
- 9. "
- 10. "
- 11. Entrance parade yellow and red elemental puppets - Aug. 12
- 12. Opening ceremonies goddess puppet welcome - Aug. 12
- 13. Opening ceremonies Trapeze artists - Aug. 12
- 14. Cuntree Store shot - Aug. 13
- 15. Quilting tent - Aug. 13
- 16. Sanctuary sign and wall at Women of Colour Tent - Aug. 13
- 17. Garbage "Slut" - Aug. 13
- 18. Kitchen tent - Aug. 13
- 19. Watermelon tree, distance - Aug. 13
- 20. Watermelon tree, close up - Aug. 13
- 21. Watermelon tree and kids - Aug. 13
- 22. The Womb entrance - Aug. 13
- 23. Gaia Girls Sign - Aug. 13
- 24. Zena cut-out at Triangle - Aug. 13
- 25. Day Stage sign- front - Aug. 13
- 26. Day stage sign back - Aug. 13
- 27. Craft Bazaar cut-out painted wooden signs - Aug. 13
- 28. cloth banner in tree - Aug. 13
- 29. cut-out sign of four women sitting - Aug. 13
- 30. Womb historical sign - Aug. 13
- 31. Alice Walker signing - Aug. 14
- 32. Alice Walker talking - Aug. 14
- 33. Alice Walker signing our books with Jen - Aug. 14
- 34. Detail of quilt edging, in process - Aug. 14
- 35. women working on quilt - Aug. 14
- 36. detail of breast figure - in process - Aug. 14
- 37. detail of puppet face for quilt during construction - Aug. 14

38. detail of furies on quilt during construction - Aug. 14
39. Completed 1998 quilt in parade - Aug. 16
40. Blue woman in mask at parade - Aug. 16
41. Gaia Girl in parade - Aug. 16
42. Dancing stilt women in front of Furie puppet in parade - Aug. 16
43. Green woman in parade - Aug. 16
44. Yellow/red scarf woman in front of red crone puppet in parade - Aug. 16
45. feathered mask woman in parade - Aug. 16
46. Crones in parade, Caroline on drum - Aug. 16
47. Green stilt woman in parade - Aug. 16
48. topless purple stilt woman in parade - Aug. 16
49. therianthropic puppet -horse/blue in parade- Aug. 16
50. mud women in parade- Aug. 16
51. stilt woman in front of grey crone mask puppet in parade - Aug. 16
52. Yellow blue puppet woman in parade - Aug. 16
53. Dragon puppet in parade- Aug. 16
54. Red pig-tailed grrrl puppet in Gaia Girls parade group- Aug. 16
55. Furies puppet in parade - Aug. 16
56. Red/yellow bannered elemental puppet - Aug. 16
57. Abstract Mask, bright colours, and mudwomen - Aug. 16
58. Gaia Girl and Yellow elemental puppet - Aug. 16
59. Striped pants Stilt woman - Aug. 16
60. Pink body paint woman with blue spirals - Aug. 16
61. Karen Findley, on stage covered in chocolate - Aug. 17
62. Woman giving henna tattoos - Aug. 17
63. Ubaka Hill and the Drumsong Orchestra on stage - Aug. 17

## **Appendix M Explanations For Research Ethics Checklist**

### **Section A**

**5.** We would confidently answer 'yes' that participants would be aware that they are subjects for all methods of our research except for participant observation. Insofar as it is feasible we will be informing participant that we are conducting research, however, due to the large numbers of women attending MWMF this will not always be possible. For instance the Night Stage at which there are over 7000 women in attendance, it would be impossible to inform everyone that we are conducting research. Information gained from participant observation will be general in nature and will neither identify nor directly quote individuals.

**7.** Although we do not intend to use information from third parties we are concerned that material obtained from the autobiographical journals may make references to third parties whose consent has not been obtained. Whenever possible efforts will be made to obtain that consent or to conceal/alter any identifying elements.

**10.** The confidentiality of all survey participants is positively ensured as their participation is completely anonymous. Some participants may choose to reveal their identities, however, this information will be used solely for post-festival follow-up contacts and not in any publication of the research. The women participating in the interviews will themselves choose their own levels of anonymity. They can choose to participate in the interviews and/or the final presentation of our research under a pseudonym and they can have any portion of their oral or written input removed or altered to maintain anonymity. This information is clearly stated in the consent forms for the interviews and will be repeated orally when the women are first asked to participate. The women being photographed can be assured that their names will not be used, but not that they will not be recognised by their image. Information regarding the locations where the photographs may be displayed are contained in the consent form. They will also be informed orally when asked to participate that their names will not be included, but that there is the possibility that they may be recognised by their image. In the instance of crowd shots where consent cannot be obtained, every effort will be made to ensure anonymity (i.e., no close-ups, no faces, etc.).

**14.** It is not our intent to induce mental discomfort in our research, however, we acknowledge the possibility that feelings of discomfort may arise during unstructured interviews. Should this situation occur, we will inform participants that they may seek counselling services at the Oasis, which are available 24 hours a day. Information about the Oasis is also printed in the MWMF guide.

**24.** The only instance where publication of the research results might interfere with strict confidentiality is in the instance of public photographs. This issue is addressed in response # 10.

**25.** The only instance where publication or results might harm the participants through identification with their membership group (i.e. lesbian/feminist) is in the instance of public photographs. This issue is addressed in response # 10.

**30.** A letter seeking access permission (see Appendix A), as well as a copy of this research proposal, is being concurrently submitted to MWMF. A copy of their response will be submitted to the Senate Ethics Committee upon receipt.

**Section D**

**1.** All research instruments and consent forms are attached and a letter of permission will be submitted pending approval from MWMF (see Section A #30).