There is a captivation with the disappeared woman or child—the suspenseful waiting—each piece of news generating more curiosity, more attention to accounts, holding an increasingly larger public with fascination. There is a sense in which the disappeared woman is unattached, loosened from patriarchal grips, outside of her family of origin, her marriage, disconnected from husband or lover. There is an unknown as to what the new configuration of the disconnected, unattached woman’s new life will be. Woman is assumed to be wild and roving when she is not controlled by patriarchal power.

During the time Patricia Hearst eluded the FBI these assumptions formed the backdrop to the public’s construction of their image of her and blighted the knowledge that rather than being released from patriarchal power, she had been kidnapped into another version of it.
I have included in this work a revised chapter from *Female Sexual Slavery* on Patricia Hearst because her experiences crystallized the way women experience female sexual slavery in prostitution. Her kidnapping is emblematic of the nature of women’s victimization in that she became the woman no one wanted to, or dared to, understand. In the mid-1970s I followed her story through the kidnapping, the Hibernia Bank robbery, and the shootout at the sporting goods store, while the American public was riveted on each account. I was compelled by her plight, but even more so by the American public’s refusal to understand her. Their increasing confusion stood in contrast to the one and only consistent voice of support for her, that of her mother. While I had no sympathy with the politics of the Hearst empire or with many of the public policies promoted by Mrs. Hearst, I saw that her loyalty to her daughter was unwavering as she repeatedly told an increasingly unbelieving press that Patricia was an innocent victim who was “looking down the barrel of a gun.” She was one of the few who had not forgotten that Patricia had been kidnapped. Two years later, when Patricia’s testimony in court corroborated her mother’s belief in her daughter’s victimization, the jurors, representing the American public’s refusal to know Patricia Hearst’s case as female victimization, concluded that she was lying.

While I followed this case, I was doing research for my book *Female Sexual Slavery*, interviewing women in prostitution, riding with vice police in the prostitution areas, interviewing district attorneys, and following pimps’ cases in court, and I began to see clearly that Patricia Hearst’s experience was representative. More, it was what sociologists call an “ideal type,” meaning that in Patricia Hearst’s story were all of the elements of women’s victimization. Taken to an extreme, with intensified drama due to her family’s wealth and notoriety, her case produced clarity by revealing to us more about women’s victimization than we had known before.

Yet as her tragedy unraveled, Patricia’s plight was not always
clear to me. While I could criticize the failure of public opinion as misogynist, I was left with confusions, lapses in my explanations. That became personally painful because to the extent that I could not understand what happened to Patricia Hearst, who was a typification of female victimization, I would fail to understand the range and depth of those multitudes of invisible victims to whom my work was committed.

This started to affect my life and even disturb my sleep. I began to think of the loneliness of women's victimization—how the world closes women out, as it had Patricia, and how our experiences cease to be treated as human while unreal expectations of bravery and inhuman endurance—"if only she had," "why didn't she"—reminded me of what I had heard too many times (once being too many) when I had been raped years earlier. I thought frequently about her mother's comments and wondered if Patricia, wherever she was eluding the FBI, had heard them on television. If she did hear them, I wondered, would she know that one other human being saw her as she was—"looking down the barrel of a gun"? Would it matter that someone saw her in her own reality, a world that the rest of society refused to know?

I worried that my attempts to make sense of the misogyny surrounding the Hearst case were "getting under my skin." I could not afford to lose my perspective because, after all, as a rigorous sociologist I believe that research provides access to long-obscured women's realities. At that time I was studying under Herbert Blumer, the renowned sociologist and leader of the school of symbolic interactionism. One day, as I listened to him deliver an important lecture in which he portrayed the interpretive experience that is the cornerstone of sociological study of interaction, all the conflicting details of Patricia Hearst's story fell into place for me. Sociological interpretation had brought me to the place where feminism had already taken me, and I finally put the two together in such a way as to forge my "method": in interpretation one can only derive the meaning of a situation for another by
interpreting that meaning from the point of view of the person going through the experience. Patricia’s point of view and her knowledge of her situation was what she would take into consideration in making interpretations of her and others’ actions. Her interpretations had been distorted by the police, the media, and the public’s objectified interpretation of her. Normal human interaction involves repetitive acts of interpretation of the meaning of the other. Authentic interaction is interpretation that involves seeking the closest possible approximation of the meaning of the other. This core of the interpretive act is the foundation of human social action. When the other’s actual situation and response is framed in terms of ideology, the meaning attributed to the other will be distorted, and the other becomes objectified.

By feminism as a method I refer to the act of restoring the objective situation by explicating everything in the situation from immediate objective conditions to institutional arrangements, gender and class conditions and patriarchal relations of power. Elaborating the situation provides the context for interpreting action. But ultimately, when women are refused subjective interaction, when women’s victimization is construed ideologically as consent, a step further is required. I realized that meant that I must put myself in Patricia Hearst’s situation, take on the objective conditions of her situation, and interpret the meaning she must have conveyed. At the time she was on the FBI’s ten most wanted list, and later she was a prisoner in a federal prison, so the only way I could know the meaning she gave to her experiences was to put myself in her situation and ask, What would I have done in that situation?

I resisted this next step of really putting myself in her place, really knowing. I was already too far into my study of female sexual slavery to turn back. In my worry that this research was “getting under my skin,” I had already begun that process. With this question: “What meaning did she give to her situation from her point of view?” I could begin to interpret her meaning because
the question required that I take on her point of view, that is, put myself in her situation and then try to see it as she saw it.

So I began to reconstruct her situation from details I gathered and impressions I had developed. And finally I dared to ask myself, from what I hoped was the best approximation of Patricia Hearst’s point of view, What would I do if brought before Cinque, known to me as a rapist and murderer, having been kept in a closet and tortured by him for 57 days? What would I do when he offered me my freedom or the opportunity to join the SLA? Immediately the confusions I had experienced gave way to full clarity. I knew then that only a complete fool would believe this to be a genuine offer. A survivor would make the choice to stay alive, in this case a choice to stay with the SLA, a choice that survivors know is no choice at all. It is merely the next thing you do.

My personal crisis with this study and with Patricia Hearst’s victimization was resolved. But Hearst’s ordeal continued. I wrote an article based on my research and interpretation of the Patricia Hearst case and published it in the feminist journal Chrysalis. And one day after her trial, Patricia Hearst’s parole officer gave her the article. When she went back to prison, she asked to have me visit.

When I arrived at the Federal Correctional Institution in Pleasanton, California, Patricia was at a large table, surrounded by her sisters, being pre-interviewed by David Frost. I wasted no time. I went directly to her and we introduced ourselves to each other. She pulled up a chair for me next to her and within a few minutes David Frost left. Patricia turned to me to say, “I’m so glad to meet you at last. I have a question for you. Your article about me was the most accurate, fullest description of what I actually went through. How did you know?” I shrugged and said, “Oh, I was just trying to understand,” unable to explain to her my satisfaction that my interpretations were finally vindicated. As I began questioning her for the interview I was there to conduct, I quickly realized that she was still fighting for her freedom.
Patricia Hearst was kidnapped, beaten, tortured, raped, and then imprisoned for the crimes that resulted from her victimization. Her case was prototypical of female slavery. When I talked to her in prison in July 1978, I asked her if she saw it that way, too. Her voice was emphatic: "What happened to me happened because I was a young female college student, an easy target. Women are always the easiest targets! It was unique only in the sense that what happened to me happens to many women but for me it was taken to the extreme. I feel that I can identify with many forms of oppression—I have been kidnapped, beaten, raped. I have been a prisoner in both county jails and federal prisons."

Patricia was kidnapped by self-styled leftist terrorists, not by a pimp. She was turned out as a revolutionary bandit, not as a prostitute. The rhetoric of her captors was different from that of pimps, but the seasoning that broke Patricia was as calculated as that of the best-trained slave procurers. The social attitudes and legal actions that coalesced around Patricia directly parallel those toward other women in slavery. In the public’s mind she became the cause of her own victimization. In the eyes of the law she was a common criminal—not for hooking, loitering, or disturbing the peace, but for bank robbery.

On February 4, 1974, a member of an organization calling itself the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) kidnapped 19-year-old Patricia Hearst, an heiress of the Hearst publishing and corporate empire, from the Berkeley apartment where she lived with her fiancé, Steve Weed. Three days later, from a secret hideaway, the SLA announced that Patricia was a prisoner of war, and shortly after that escaped convict Donald DeFreeze (who called himself Cinque) set forth a ransom demand for a $6-million-food-giveaway program for the poor.

It was only a few days after her kidnapping that theories began to develop in radical circles that Patricia Hearst planned her own kidnapping. According to prevailing conjecture, she was a rich kid out for fun, rebelling against the social restrictions of upper-
class life. At the time, no one knew much about people in the SLA except that they had taken responsibility for the murder of Oakland schools' black superintendent, Marcus Foster, and that they claimed to have revolutionary combat units around the country. While there was not an immediate round of applause from left radicals for the SLA, there was an instant hatred for Patricia Hearst—a rich kid who was “getting what she deserved.” The lines were drawn as the right-wing and conservative public expressed pity for the poor young girl and sympathy for her abused father.

Details of Patricia’s background, her childhood, school days, and affair with Weed fed the daily press. The portrayal of Patty as a docile and easily led but rebellious teenager seemed to support both leftist theories and right-wing pity. Public opinion shortly after the kidnapping was still malleable, able to shift according to new theories or available gossip—and there was some genuine worry and concern for her well-being.

But the events of April 3 and 15, 1974, changed everything. On April 3, a tape recording was released by the SLA in which Patricia announced her decision to join the SLA, and on April 15 she was photographed with others in a robbery of the Hibernia Bank in San Francisco. Her kidnappers had made her a symbol of corporate abuses and oppression by the rich. The public up to then had been tentative about what symbolic value to attach to these events. But Patricia’s rhetoric and visible acts of apparent defiance immediately caused attitudes to shift and resolidify. The left’s smug arrogance (they knew she was a rich kid out for thrills) merged into the right’s condemnation as they saw their cherished values being trampled by one of America’s former finest. Public opinion tended toward a sense of inevitability, with comments ranging from “what can you expect from the rich” to “there is no way to control these teenagers today.” These judgments catapulted into an inevitable hatred of Patricia; she became everybody’s symbol. She was envied, condemned, pitied, or ridiculed for being a spoiled brat or loving daughter, a kidnap victim or a
revolutionary, a brainwashed neurotic or a common criminal, a rich kid out for adventure or a helpless victim. She became a symbol, no longer a human being either to the SLA or to the public.

As events passed from the bank robbery to a silent year and a half underground, then to her arrest, imprisonment, and trial, people began to complain bitterly about Patricia’s taking up so much space in the news. It was a weird twist of logic. She had no control over the press that was exploiting her newsworthiness. The public had been captivated by her and then hated her for occupying its attention. As a symbol she ceased to be a woman; she could be disposed of whenever she was no longer of use. She had once told a CBS news reporter how frightening it was to be with the SLA, never knowing whether the “people you’re with (are) going to kill you because you out-lived your usefulness to them.” Later, after the trials, after she had been released on bail and then returned to prison, the public was bored and resentful.

Patricia was enslaved as much by the public’s use of her as a symbol as by the SLA’s need for a publicity trip to carry off its reactionary version of revolution. I discussed this with her and found that she had analyzed it herself: “I think people’s own fears about themselves were exposed. People saw in me weaknesses in themselves that they were afraid of—like fears that they could be broken down. It’s hard for people to face that. They couldn’t stomp that out for themselves. It was cathartic for them to stomp me out.”

And stomped out she was. After almost two years underground with William and Emily Harris, the only remnants of the SLA after a Los Angeles shootout, Patricia was arrested with them in San Francisco on September 18, 1976. Usually, when a kidnap victim is forced to commit crimes while with her captors, there is no prosecution for those crimes. Nevertheless, not only was Patricia charged for the Hibernia Bank robbery, but her case was mysteriously moved ahead on the crowded court calendar. The government was taken with a fever to bring this victim to justice,
to make a lesson of her long before her remaining captors would face trial for her kidnapping.

Patricia was able to explain her participation in the Hibernia Bank robbery only in terms of her enslavement and abuse by the SLA. At her trial she testified that after she was abducted from her apartment, her life was constantly threatened while she was held, bound and blindfolded, first in one hot, stuffy closet and then in another for 57 days. (The jurors were taken to see the closets.) For 2 weeks she was allowed to go to the bathroom only at her captors' will, and later she would be allowed to go when she knocked on the door. After she had spent 2 weeks in the closet, her hands were tied in front of her; she was grateful that they no longer had to be tied behind her. Her menstrual period stopped. She was fed periodically, but initially she couldn't eat. When she did eat, she was often forced to sit blindfolded outside the closet in the humiliation of knowing that her captors were watching and ridiculing her while she was trying to eat. She was given a bath weekly by her captors, who wore ski masks while her blindfold was off, and the very removal of the blindfold caused her extreme pain and distortion of vision when the light hit her eyes. From inside the closet either she would hear music continuously playing outside the door or she would hear her captors' guns: "I could hear a lot of clicking and noises; and, it sounded like clips going in and out of guns and sometimes . . . they'd make noises like they were shooting and I could tell that they were standing right in front of the closet and doing it at me." During her 57-day confinement, the SLA moved from Daly City to a Golden Gate apartment. Patricia was stuffed into a garbage can for the move.

She was told that she had to pay for the capitalist sins of her parents. In pain and humiliation, she was dependent on her captors for air, for food, for the opportunity to urinate, for her life. This dependency was reinforced when she was ordered to make the first taped message telling her family, "Mom, Dad, I'm okay," and asking her father to cooperate with her captors. A tape re-
corder had been brought to her in the closet, and she was given instructions on how to make the first message. Later the SLA women berated her for not doing well enough and reported her to Cinque, who meted out her punishment with sexual abuse.

At one point she was approached in the closet by Angela Atwood. “She said I was going to sleep with William Wolfe,” Patricia recalled. Later, according to Patricia, Wolfe entered the closet and raped her. She was raped again by Cinque about a week later. During her trial, Patricia testified to her hatred for William Wolfe. In response, Emily Harris called a news conference and denied that Wolfe could have stirred such negative feelings in Patricia, declaring him to be one of the sweetest, most gentle men she had ever known. But Mizmoon, an SLA member who died in the Los Angeles shootout, recorded in her poetry a feeling closer to that of Patricia’s:

Willy... I hate him
I want to scream
next time he touches me
Get your God Damned Hand off
    My Body!
(but his hands never were)
damned... he’s bein’ only
friendly... I’m not being
paid to have him maul me
Get your damned mind off my body!\(^2\)

After 57 days Patricia was allowed to leave the closet, and 2 days later, she reports, Nancy Ling Perry cut her long hair down to an inch all over her head. Humiliation. Prior to leaving the closet, she was allowed out occasionally for some exercise and political discussion. During these discussions she realized that the SLA knew more about her father’s wealth than she did. She was endlessly interrogated with questions she could not answer and demands for information she did not have. This tactic kept her in the untenable position of trying to meet her captors’ impossible expectations while her sense of futility and helplessness increased,
engendering in her guilt for the wealth and practices of the Hearst empire.

The pivotal point concerning her willingness to join the SLA came on April 3, 1974. In a tape-recorded communiqué from the SLA, Patricia’s voice pronounced:

I have been given a choice, one, being released in a safe area, or two, joining the forces of the Symbionese Liberation Army and fighting for my freedom and the freedom of all oppressed people. I have chosen to stay and fight.

Did she mean what she said? Did it matter whether she meant it or not? In open court on February 9, 1976, she described the situation in which that decision had been made. She recalled how her captors, as an April fool’s joke, had notified her parents that she would be released on April 1. She testified:

Well, a few weeks before, DeFreeze told me that the war council had decided or was thinking about killing me or me staying with them, and that I better start thinking about that as a possibility. Then he came in later and said that I could go home or stay with them. I didn’t believe them.  

Patricia had to make a decision at that moment, a decision that followed 57 days of abuse and torture while she was confined in a closet. “I didn’t believe them.” Her decision was not whether to join the SLA and play at revolution or go home to Mom and Dad. Her decision, based on as reasonable an evaluation of her circumstances as she could make in her situation, was whether or not to stay alive. She made the decision of a survivor; the world saw it as an act of defiance—the kind of frivolity that only the rich can afford.

What would make her word so suspect? It was remembered, of course, that she had evaded an embarrassed FBI for nearly two years, but it was quickly forgotten that her life as a fugitive was spawned by a vengeful kidnapping. But her kidnapping was of negligible consideration in her trial. Her report of it was the only thing that all parties—defense, prosecution, judge, and jury—
accepted. Why? Steven Weed had many times publicly described the kidnapping of his then-fiancée, Patricia. Male corroboration was enough. Weed was not even required to testify at the trial. For the rest of it—her life as a kidnap victim, as a fugitive—we have only her word, her testimony. That was not enough.

On Lying

Did Patricia Hearst tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help her God? Given her conviction, the jurors apparently believed that she lied in court in order to save her life. It was believed that the attorneys gave her a story that would fit their strategy. Whether before the U.S. courts or the SLA war council, Patricia’s life was dependent on her word. And in her trial, her word—which ultimately was her only defense—counted for very little. At times it worked against her; it never seemed to work on her behalf.

Who would believe her?

Not the prosecution that overzealously pursued justice against a kidnap victim placed in a bank robbery.

Not a judge who, after Patricia’s conviction, had the option of choosing the lenient route of sentencing her under the Youthful Offenders Act, which would probably have given her immediate probation. He instead chose the harshest possible sentencing, giving her a full 7 years in federal prison, noting that her conduct could not be condoned, that a lesson must be made of her to serve as a deterrent to others.

Not her lawyers. The defense strategy used by F. Lee Bailey was, in my opinion, a clear statement to Patricia and to the world that he lacked confidence in his client’s veracity. Would he have portrayed her as a mindless, brainwashed victim if he hadn’t believed she was guilty as charged? I think that by representing her as hopelessly empty-headed, he not only catered to the stereotyped public image of her but also tried to remove her agency
from the very action she chose on her own behalf, the only key to her survival. He legitimized *his* picture of her by the use of experts. (Patricia told me that she saw about 12 different psychiatrists during the period between her arrest and the trial.) As a defendant, she was simply a witness in her defense while one psychiatrist after another presented his or her expertise, attempting to uphold or break down the credibility of her word through that expertise. According to this strategy, she did not have to be believed. Judge and jury were asked to believe not Patricia’s words, but the experts’ analysis of *her motivations for those words and actions.*

In analyzing Patricia’s experience of the SLA, the media, the FBI, and the courts from an interactionist approach, it becomes clear that Patricia ceased to be considered a human being by these parties. There was no interactive involvement with her experientially that was based on her, who she was. She was the “other,” a thing, a symbol. And it was in this context that she had to represent herself as interactive, as truly human, a real woman. When the judge dismissed the relevance of the experts’ testimony on Patricia’s state of mind, all that was left for the jury was her word. They did not believe her. In fact, one juror I interviewed had developed considerable respect for Patricia’s captors: “It is difficult for me to conceive that all seven of those people were crazy, all mad dogs.... These people appeared to treat her in some reasonable fashion.” Neither did the jurors believe she was raped. Another man on the jury stated he was not sure: “It could have gone one way or another,” and “it was only her word,” he said. Another juror, discussing Patricia’s confinement in the closet, asserted, “We [the jury] didn’t think she had been in the closet that long.... In deliberations we felt she had been in the closet only *two weeks*” (emphasis mine). Clearly most people never think about what it might be like to be locked in a closet—for 2 weeks or 57 days. But that kind of statement represents a refusal of empathy, a distanced, noninteractive, not-human assessment.
If any one of the jurors had put themselves in Patricia's place and tried to understand what she faced and how she faced it in order to survive, especially when they had the responsibility of judging her, they would have transcended her symbolic representation to find a human being.

Each of the jurors I interviewed described Patricia as listless, empty, and pale during the trial. In awaiting her answers to her attorneys' questions about the brutality she experienced from the SLA, the jury expected to hear emotional outbursts. But as one juror said of her testimony on being raped, "She described it so calmly and didn't have any emotion in her voice." This led another juror to assert that she had simply been programmed by her attorneys. "She fit exactly what she was portrayed to be—a selfless, helpless, defenseless creature." This rationale made it possible to reason that Patricia was lying through her body as well as through her words. Her clothes, her tone of voice, her complexion, her sad eyes all meant—to the jury and the vigilant public that followed this trial—something other than what they were.

The only voice in this proceeding that credited Patricia's word—a voice that was not officially heard in the deliberations—was that of Mary Neiman, an alternate juror who would have held out for acquittal even if it meant a hung jury. But she never made it into deliberations. Agreeing that Patricia was listless in the courtroom, Mary saw this condition as a result of her experiences and an indication of her truthfulness. Talking to Mary made it clear that her point of reference was a personal, interpretive involvement. She tried to think of how any of her daughters would have responded in similar circumstances. "If she were lying, she would have tried to make herself look better," Mary said. While dramatic testimony would have impressed other jurors, Mary was convinced by Patricia's simple, unadorned statements. For example, when asked why she wrote on the wall of one apartment in Spanish and signed her name "Tania," she only said that everybody else did it and they expected her to do it, so she
did. Surviving couldn’t be as simple as that, the other jurors decided. They needed to see violent force from the SLA determining Patricia’s every action, held over her every move.

 Shortly after her trial, Patricia’s lung collapsed, and after surgery her doctors reported that she was in a very debilitated condition. A legitimate medical authority made her pale, listless state real, legitimate, even believable. The doctor was believable. But it was too late. She had already been convicted of robbery.

 Patricia had gone through all of the phases of dehumanization from distancing to disembodiment. But after she was arrested she could/did stop dissembling, acting as if disembodiment was her real self.

 Patricia Speaks about Surviving

 “I think people wanted to see something dramatic from me. They wanted to see me break down. I did everything I could to hold myself together. It would have been so humiliating to break down after all I had been through.” It was not stubbornness but pride, a personal claim to her own self, that prevented Patricia from giving the jury and the public the performance they were expecting.

 Four months passed between her arrest in San Francisco and the Hibernia Bank trial. She had been broken by the SLA and then kept in their constant companionship for 2 years. It was hardly surprising that she had not been able to compensate for the effects of those 2 years in 4 months. She accounted for her demeanor in the courtroom: “I was still very sick. I had lost a lot of weight. I had malnutrition and had just had pneumonia and the flu. I had not recovered psychologically from what had happened to me and I was very tired. During the trial, I was kept in the holding tank where all the drunks were at the county jail. I never got any sleep with all the yelling and carrying on in cells around me.”
Two years after her trial, when Patricia had returned to prison after having been out on bail for 18 months, she was able to reflect on why this had happened. In our discussions I was taken by the relativity of her statements, the way she evaluated her present conditions in terms of her previous enslavement. Being back in prison (having exhausted all appeals in her case) was not such a big deal after all she had been through. At the time of our meeting she was faced with the likelihood of 6 more years behind bars. But her response was, “Prison isn’t the worst place to be. They try to threaten you with discipline slips here. I never get any, but if I let that little piece of paper have any meaning for me, I would never make it. I can’t think of it as anything more than a piece of paper. After all, what can they do to hurt me? Nothing! They can’t put a gun to my head and threaten to shoot me.”

When victimization is ongoing, unrelenting, and becomes an enforced way of life, injustice, abuse, and deprivation become relative to their circumstances. With the SLA Patricia was continuously threatened with murder. When the FBI was in mad pursuit of the SLA and the shootout occurred in Los Angeles, Patricia watched the shootout on TV with horror as other SLA members were fired upon and eventually the house was burned down. During it all she heard police and newscasters repeatedly state that they believed she was in the house that the police were shooting at and burning down. When I asked her what she thought was the single most important thing that she could attribute her survival to, she simply, almost off-handedly, responded, “Luck. I was just lucky so many times to not be someplace when I would have been killed, like being in the house in Los Angeles when it was burned down. Every time something awful happened that could have killed me, I missed it.”

Surely, there was more to her survival than luck. Patricia began to open up:

I guess you have to have an ability to do something to stay alive. Some people just give up and don’t make it. Staying alive means that you don’t
give up. You want to stay alive so much that you do anything you have to—it’s a selfish state in the sense that you are only able to focus on yourself and how to get through it alive. That is the point in surviving when you feel you have made it at the loss of your self-respect. Self-respect is most important to surviving. You have to be able to look at yourself in the mirror in the morning. When I realized the things I had to do just to stay alive, I started feeling confused and guilty about it, wondering, “How could I let myself do this or that?” My psychiatrist helped me a great deal with that guilt.

It was the shift from living in a crisis-dominated, moment-to-moment effort to survive, to being in jail, faced with a different challenge to survival, that first allowed her introspection on her behavior in a crisis state.

Patricia described how, during her time with the SLA, she had to turn inward and draw from her own reserves in order to survive. She depended only on herself: “No one else can get you through something like this. People are so used to TV programs where, when someone is in danger, there is always someone there in minutes to rescue them. My youngest sister had an awfully hard time facing that I wouldn’t just automatically be rescued. When you are held captive, people somehow expect you to spit in your captor’s face and get killed.”

The Missing Years: Was She Patty or Tania?

The stages in constructing a woman into a prostitute fit Patricia’s report of her circumstances. First, facing the immediate terror of being kidnapped and physically abused, like the rape victim, she tries to make sense out of what’s happening, to figure it out, to get away. She makes every reasonable interpretation of her captors’ behavior that she can make from the information she has available to her. Used to interacting with and interpreting the world around her, she finds that her interpretations no longer work. The act has distanced her from her life as she knew it before the
kidnapping. One of the psychiatrists, Dr. West, found that for Patricia,

Her usual coping techniques, mobility, independence, autonomy, use of allies, winning the esteem of others by performing well, self-assertion and so on—these were all useless. Her external points of reference for maintenance of her identity had disappeared. All sources of self-esteem were cut off. At times, the entire situation began to seem unreal to her and, at other times, it was she who seemed unreal or it was another person who was having these unthinkable experiences.

The second stage, disengagement, is how the woman handles the situation as a result of her captors' forced redefinition of her world. Unlike rape victims, who will eventually get away from their attackers, however shattered they may be from the rape, a woman enslaved cannot physically leave. She must find another way out. It is a common human response when one is faced with tragedy to react conditionally with “this couldn’t be happening to me.” But when tragedy becomes unending, when abuse is the total environment, the conditional is transformed into the permanent and becomes dissociation: “This isn’t happening to me.” Then the woman becomes disembodied to take on the role assigned to her. As SLA heroine or Bailey’s client, “She fit exactly what she was portrayed to be.” But others’ constructions of her were taken to be her, therefore she was dissembling.

In Patricia’s case, as in most slavery, all of the phases of breaking down a woman’s identity for prostitution, from distancing to disengagement to dissembling, eventually became collapsed into one, repeated in different scenarios. Whether it is enacted by the SLA, an international ring of procurers, or individual pimps, the seasoning of women enforces dependency on their captors, and in that dependency they construct new identities. Dr. West testified in Patricia’s case that after she was released from the closet,

She was persuaded to take on a certain role and she complied with everything they told her to do. . . . And if she took her part with the group, she just tried to blend in with others and behave in a fashion that she understood was to be accepted. For her, it was be accepted or be
killed. Now after they finally went through the sort of little ceremony where she was taken out of the closet after about eight weeks and allowed to take off her blindfold and sit down and eat with the others for the first time as a member, sort of, sometime soon after that, she was given her name by Cinque . . . . Then after she . . . had assumed the role of Tania, she began to try to be like they wanted her to be—if she was going to be Tania, that meant writing *venceremos* [we will win] on the wall with a can of paint or something, if that’s what was expected of her.\(^5\)

**Temporality**

The experience of rape is different from that of slavery or long-term abuse in one significant respect: time. Female sexual slavery invokes the same stages as the prostitution of sexuality, which may extend over days, weeks, months, and even years. In this context Patricia’s experience sheds light on the experiences of women forced into prostitution. Simply, when one foresees the probability of escape in 10 minutes or 10 hours, one will behave differently than if, in addition to all the torture and violence, one foresees no probability of escape. In the latter state, the world becomes closed; vision narrows only to present experience. The victim’s world is only what is contained in the immediate moment. And, finally, distinctions blur between one’s identity and the identity one has learned, been forced into, or taken refuge in as a captive. What makes this slavery is the loss of one’s self, which Gabel describes in terms of false consciousness: “Identification with the enemy is the worst form of depersonalization; it is the loss of freedom to be oneself.”\(^6\)

When there is a possibility of getting out of a situation, a woman will do what is necessary to survive, whether that be going passive or physically fighting back. The strategy chosen depends on the context of the situation, the degree of force used against her, the extent to which she is not immobilized by terror,
the training in attitude and physical self-defense she has had. But when there is no possibility of getting out, survival inevitably necessitates redefining oneself to fit the new circumstances.

For women in long-term captivity and subjected to sexual terrorism, fear is different from, and cannot be compared to, that of male prisoners of war. Overwhelming fear increases the sense of terror. Dr. West found this phenomenon to be critical in the violence Patricia experienced: “I would say it was more violent than any military captive, because these, after all, were soldiers and had been trained and gone through various kinds of hardening experiences before they were captured.”

Patricia’s case provides a clear understanding of the stages of becoming a prostitute, of the way identity and will are reconstructed when time is frozen and the way distancing, disengagement, dissociation, and disembodiment occur.

During Patricia’s captivity, her social world consisted only of people who hated her. With them she lived in the moment only, never knowing and not having control over what the future would be. Her world consisted only of the SLA, their actions, and their rhetoric. It was an unreal world in that she was cut off from life as a process, a progression. What we normally take for granted as life evolving through interaction and involvement was denied by this group, which lived only in the context of their rhetoric, not by experience—only by “correct” positions on issues, not through interaction and relationships around issues. Patricia could not take into account a total environment, for she was removed from it and did not know the world beyond the SLA’s representation of it to her and her experience in the confines of their various hideouts.

Positive change or growth is impossible in a situation in which time is rigidified into the present only; where interaction is denied, interpretation becomes meaningless. Change normally evolves out of interaction in relationship with people and one’s environment; it is a progression, a movement over time. When time is halted, progression ceases and the world is narrowed, making interaction
almost meaningless. This is the situation of the very young child who has not learned interaction but is totally self-centered, living in the present moment. Gabel describes this state as the “loss of the dialectic of the possible and impossible.” When “the possible” is truly denied, the future is cut off. Life is only in the immediate moment. One does not think about whether or not to go to a movie, take a certain job, plan a course of study, have a child, or become a revolutionary for lack of anything better to do.

In addition to the torture and imprisonment in closets that inevitably caused her to take on a new identity, the politics and rhetoric of the SLA formed the not-real world in which she was held. Life for the SLA was an abstraction, a denial of the process of existence. By making their rhetoric into their style of behavior and by assuming a political superiority to the real world, they separated themselves from the real world. It was in the world of the SLA that Patricia Hearst took on the identity of Tania.

When I first met Patricia two years after her arrest and trial, she was looking well. She had gained weight and recovered her psychological as well as physical strength. But her focus on the present, the immediate situation, was startling to me. She spent considerable time talking about what happened that day, but when I asked questions that involved thinking about the past or the future, her answers initially were brief, one word. For example:

Q: What was the most significant factor in your survival since you were kidnapped?
A: Luck.

Q: What do you want more than anything else in the world?
A: Serenity.

As rapport grew between us and as Patricia started to take time to reflect on these questions, she would, on her own initiative, come back to these questions with fuller responses, giving substantive, insightful meaning to her initial one-word answer. She
PATRICIA HEARST

was, I think, two years after her trial, still filling out that time frame that during the SLA days had been narrowed to the moment. She had a profound understanding of her experiences, of how she was treated and how she has been judged, but in those years she sometimes had to make an effort to break through the time frame of the present moment in order to reflect on the past.

In an attempt to avoid living her life in reaction to her immediate past, she became philosophical.

I try not to be bitter. All that does is eat away at me. It isn't a good way to get back; it doesn't accomplish anything. I mostly try to laugh at the people who threaten me.

I could look at the last five years as wasted. But it could have been worse. I try to pick the good out of it all. I think there is a lot to be salvaged. I've learned a lot about my strengths and weaknesses. In getting my whole ego and personality destroyed and then building it back up again, I've had an opportunity to get stronger than I was before.

Being in jail does not facilitate rebuilding an ego or redefining one's identity. One prison succeeded another for Patricia. She had passed from the hands of the SLA to those of the U.S. government, and, she had become its prisoner. After being arrested, Patricia spent 14 months in solitary confinement "for her own protection," and later she was held with other prisoners who hated her either for being rich or for being a snitch. "I feel like I'm becoming a professional prisoner. I'm here. I have to deal with it. The people who run this prison keep telling me this is such a nice place. Like I'm lucky to be here. I feel like saying to them, 'You're no better than the SLA.' I mean, I'm their prisoner. I'm not here because I'm their friend."

As soon as she was released on bail from the U.S. prisons, she became a prisoner in her own home. This time her captors were her lawyers. The first security company that was hired told her she could not leave the house at all, a restriction that was imposed by her lawyers.
They were really overreacting to the possibility of someone else doing something to me.

Bailey told me never to go out because reporters would be waiting for me. It took me several weeks to figure out that it was all right to go out. Bailey also didn’t want me to go to nightclubs, and he told me I couldn’t go to Disneyland because someone might try to take my picture with Mickey Mouse!

But by the time she was released to her parents’ custody, she had developed enough strength to assert herself again. She refused to comply with Bailey’s attempt to further confine her and insisted on trying to develop a normal life again. “Being out on bail finally put me back into a normal environment where I could have normal interactions with people. Until I could socially interact again, I was not able to assert myself or function the way other people do. That’s when I stopped seeing a psychiatrist, even though my family protested, but I figured I could rely on myself then. I wanted to make it on my own.”

She went home to people who love her—her parents, her sisters, and friends. She no longer saw many of her old friends from school. “They weren’t part of what happened to me. They didn’t have to change as the rest of us did. It’s hard to relate to them now, and a lot of people have this thing—they actually are afraid to be around me. Some of my old friends are afraid, their families are afraid, so I just can’t put up with them!” With family and friends she began to connect the past with the present and the future. Her identity was established in that continuity. When I met with her after she had been returned to the Federal Correctional Institution in Pleasanton, California, she seemed more sure of herself than media reports had suggested. She had changed lawyers and she herself had taken over decisions and direction regarding the legal issues she faced. Clearly, the initiative and the decisions were hers then. Until she was granted clemency, she had to maintain a delicate balance between tolerating her confinement and knowing it was unjust, between seeking release and vindication and not wanting her life to be absorbed in negativism.
Feminism and the Left

From the SLA’s inception, theories were developed that it was a government-sponsored covert plan to discredit and destroy the left and so-called revolutionary movements. Whether or not that was the case, leftist organizations did not denounce the atrocities carried out by the SLA, and consequently those acts were seen as a logical extension of male left revolutionary rhetoric. Tacit approval of the SLA was implied in the silence of groups with whom it was trying to establish a solidarity.

Political movements like the left, dominated by white middle-class males, derive their rhetoric from intellectual theories rather than lived experience of oppression. As a result, their politics are motivated more by their self-interest and personal power than by actions that would change the actual conditions of oppression. The SLA belonged to that group of political people whose connection to oppression was superficial and self-serving. They claimed to be in support of feminism, but they exploited the women’s movement for their own purposes. The media accepted their line, and no one noticed that the SLA had actually violated, in the most dangerous and vicious way, the basic principles of feminism by kidnapping a woman to punish her father and justifying the action because she was from a privileged class. Behind the shabby rhetoric, in the SLA feminists saw men against men over the body of a woman.

Like so many left groups in the 1970s, the women of the SLA used feminism by emptying it of its politics and reducing it to a kind of self-improvement ideology, in order to gain recognition and legitimacy from the men in their group. Without a feminist politics the SLA could not recognize the threat Patricia Hearst’s change in identity represented to the patriarchal establishment. To the FBI and the general public, she was dangerous and threatening, not simply because of some abstract identification with another class, but because as a woman she was defying—for all
the world to see—the gender expectations of her sex-class. She had been a loving daughter, but after her change in identity she was a woman trampling on all the female virtues to which she had been so carefully socialized. She appeared openly to reject wealth, her family, her fiancé, and the protection of the FBI. There were few female roles that tradition begs us to play that Patricia didn’t challenge as “Tania.” What was assumed to be her ungratefulness and defiance angered the public and enraged the establishment.

It was not just because Patricia defied female gender expectations that this wrath was brought down on her; in a patriarchy set up to protect and thereby confine women, Patricia as Tania appeared to turn her back on rather elaborate offers of protection—her father’s wealth and the FBI’s support (even though accepting could have meant her death). Try as they might, the SLA women—Emily Harris, Camilla Hall, Patricia Soltysik, Angela Atwood, and Nancy Ling Perry—could never have rejected so much, for they never had so much combined patriarchal love, capitalist advantage, and personal support and protection offered to them. As a child of wealth, Patricia had inherited the Great American Dream for womanhood. The other women were only on the fringes of such a patrimony. But Patricia could have had it all. It was when the public thought that she rejected this inheritance, when she seemed to defy the offerings of patriarchal protection, that she brought down the wrath of the FBI in the form of an anti-feminist backlash. The backlash was directed against Patricia, and was meant as a warning to feminism.

Loyalty

From the time she was kidnapped, society, across the spectrum from right to left, expected Patricia to vindicate herself. To the right, vindication meant fighting to her death or at least being able to walk away from her captors and into the hands of the FBI,
even after she witnessed the massacre in Los Angeles on television. In other words, both the right and the left expected her to extricate herself from her fear for her life while in the hands of her captors and hunted by the FBI, and to undo the dependency that had been cultivated with great calculation by her captors. To vindicate herself to the SLA, to the American left, and to the other self-proclaimed revolutionary movements, she was expected to espouse the cause of violent revolution and murder even unto death (her death). Had she refused to testify on her own behalf, she could have gained some support from the left. Had she in martyrdom submitted herself to the fate of her captors, she would at least have won pity from everyone else.

Considering all this, women are left to conclude that to be recognized as a victim one has to be dead, the condition of honor in masculinist society.

When we talked at the prison in Pleasanton, California, I asked Patricia how she felt about loyalty. Her response was immediate and firm: “To thine own self be true!” This is the “selfish state” she referred to earlier in our discussion, and I thought it marked her passage from victim to survivor. Yet it was not freedom. Freedom lies beyond mere survival and beyond prisons, and Patricia had not yet arrived there; she was still in prison, looking forward to being released and to beginning a life that would not be lived in reaction to the past.

President Jimmy Carter commuted Patricia Hearst’s sentence on February 1, 1979. After she was released, she married her former bodyguard.