A FEMINIST ANTI-RACIST GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION
IN NORTHERN ONTARIO:
A CASE STUDY OF DOING THE UNDOABLE
SOMEWWHAT WELL

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of
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in Sociology of Education and Equity Studies
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ABSTRACT

Based on five years of participant observation, qualitative interviews with forty-one activists and a feminist multi-methods approach I describe an organization which existed in Northern Ontario, in Coldtown (a pseudonym) to enhance the lives and expand the options of ethnocultural minority women who were socioeconomically vulnerable. This organization, Women of the World Initiating New Formulas for Equality and Wisdom, (a pseudonym) or WWINFEW, provided social services, popular education, and skills training to ethnocultural minority women. WWINFEW had a self-help grassroots approach that utilized many volunteers from diverse backgrounds.

People within these organizations always have multiple 'identity pegs' (ethnocultural, gender, socioeconomic status, family status, religious affiliations, etcetera) and these identity pegs impact on how people interact with each other regardless of what the actual day-to-day tasks are within the formal confines of the organization's stated goals. My
findings are that within these progressive organizations we are attempting to give recognition to these identity pegs but we are sometimes doing so with unexplicated or ad hoc strategies and processes. I advocate that organizations invest much more time and energy into the exploration and cultivation of meaning-making, meaning-sharing, trust and faith in a long-term vision.

Unfortunately, funders and other outsiders often attempt to impel us to focus exclusively on the short-term tasks they have assigned and as our resources become scarce we become less focused on enhancing our interpersonal relationships and reaffirming the higher visions that originally brought us into these organizations as activists for social change. I conclude that when the organization's core activists lose sight of their vision and their sense of solidarity and compassion for each other then the organization is vulnerable to dismemberment. Funders and outsiders, of course, ongoingly impact upon us but to blame all our discomforts on the funding process is both inaccurate and disempowering to us. The process and evolution of problem identification, problem creation, and problem resolution is dynamic and dialectical.

My findings suggest that although women come to work in organizations like WWINFEW for altruistic reasons, and to obtain marketable skills, many women also have female
friendship seeking as a primary motivator. These WWINFEW women are depicted here in regards to both their prudence joyful sides and their shadow sides. My contributions to the scholarly literature include: a detailed ethnographic description of a unique Northern Ontario organization; an extensive application of feminist methodology (i.e. I am not only telling a story but also trying to know and feel, and thus, tell the story differently); and the connection of seven diverse bodies of information (feminism, anti-racism, social status inequalities, organizational studies, social work/voluntarism/self-help, symbolic interactionism, women's mental health issues) to each other and to this specific context.
CHAPTER ONE: WHAT DID WE DO AT WINNF EW AND HOW DID IT BECOME UNDOABLE?

'Sister!' The words wavered, and Igraine knew she had not cried them aloud, but only whispered, her hands flying to her breast. 'Do I truly see you here?' The face was reproachful, and the words seemed to blow away in the sound of the wind beyond the walls. Have you given up the Sight, Igraine? Of your free will? (Zimmer-Bradley, 1982, p.5)

The above quote is from the fictional novel Mists of Avalon in which sisters (and non-biologically related women) were powerful in a matriarchal society until they began losing faith and trust in each other and in their matriarchal paradigm. One sister reproaches another for losing her faith or her 'Sight'. Within Zimmer-Bradley's fictional account faith itself is what brings their women-centered world and their powers into existence. These Mists of Avalon women remained strong when they focused on each others needs, meanings, priorities, and goals. I propose here that feminist grassroots anti-racist women's organizations manifest similar dynamics.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

My purpose in writing this thesis was to make sense and meaning of what I witnessed and experienced in this organization in which I was passionately involved: Women of
the World Initiating New Formulas for Equality and Wisdom. I wanted to understand the experiences of the other forty-one activists from WWINFEW who allowed me to interview them. As others have done (Agnew, 1996; Bannerji, 1995; Bunch, 1983; Freeman, 1995; Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Loseke, 1992, pp. 6-8, Reinharz, 1979; Ristock and Pennell, 1996, pp. 1-15) I make no apologies for being passionate about the visions discussed at WWINFEW. Not enough is known about how precisely women initially come to be involved in these feminist anti-racist grassroots organizations and groups as activists. Not enough is known about what keeps some women vigorously involved for years while other women quickly drop out and disappear from the activist scene. Feminist organizational insiders' own telling of their experiences and perceptions will enrich the existing body of knowledge.

The larger questions with which I have been engaging are of interest to other feminist and anti-racist activists, government bodies, helping professionals, volunteer or self-help coordinators, and community organizational theorists. These larger questions include the following:

1. What initially motivates women to become involved in organizations like WWINFEW?

2. Once inside these organizations how do women activists experience their own organization and how do they experience the organization's goals?

3. How do women activists perceive the wider context
in which their organization and their organizational efforts are situated (i.e. how do they understand the personal and organizational implications of community, racism, sexism, social inequality, etc.)?

4. Are there identifiable patterns of struggle and challenge that these types of organizations exhibit?

These core questions that I am struggling with can easily be seen to invite journeys through diverse rivers of research and writing (and as I later explore, symbolic interactionism assists in exploring these questions of 'meaning construction'). The realities and dynamics of feminist anti-racist organizations can benefit from background knowledge derived from the helping professions, community organization, classical organizational theory, anti-racist writing and volunteer management material (just to identify a few of the potential areas of knowledge). Actually, when activists proceed with a complete absence of knowledge in any of these areas they are functioning with a dangerous blind spot that could have the consequence of damaging the organization as a whole, damaging other activists, doing emotional harm to themselves, and/or damaging service recipients. This thesis is one of the too few examples of research that attempts to bring together these diverse bodies of knowledge from different disciplines.
WHO WERE THESE WWINFEW WOMEN?

To protect the women who worked side-by-side with me at WWINFEW I have had to change some details of their stories. I have reflected extensively on which characteristics could be altered so that their lives remain uncomplicated and their confidences are not breeched. Below I have grouped some of the characteristics that may help the reader of this text feel a connection to who these women were. By grouping WWINFEW women's characteristics I am able to quote them later in the text without sharing specifics of each woman that would make her visible to her WWINFEW or Coldtown peers.

Only women who had been involved with WWINFEW as paid staff, volunteers, or board members for more than three months were approached for an interview. Some of the interviewees had been involved for the whole five year period but most had been active for about two years. All of the forty-one women quoted within this text signed a consent to be interviewed (see appendix); were given the list of questions being used for the semi-structured interview (see appendix); were interviewed in a location of their choice; were interviewed in private; and each chose the pseudonym that would be used in this text to identify her. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Some interviews took place over more than one session; some were done through long distance calls because
some of these women no longer live in Coldtown (or this province or country as a matter of fact). All but one of the interviews were conducted during the year in which the organization closed. The vast majority of the interviews occurred in a six month period before the organization closed.

To select the potential interviewees I invited (by phone or in person) all WWINFEW activists (women who have been board members, volunteers and/or staff) to participate in a semi-structured interview. An informal assessment of how many women had ever been involved suggests that about fifty-five women were activists with WWINFEW. I have defined "activists" as women involved for a minimum of three consecutive months between December 3, 1988 (the founding meeting for WWINFEW) and December 3, 1994 (the primary time-frame of focus which I have somewhat arbitrarily chosen -- a five year period). My assessment has to be somewhat informal because records were not always kept regarding volunteers' and staffs' duration of involvement. Forty-one women consented to be interviewed (forty-two when I include my own participation and my own interview). Four declined to be interviewed (due to lack of time, suspicion about interviews in general, or personality conflicts). Two women had died (and it is worth noting that both were First Nations women; one died from cancer and one from a heart attack and my understanding is that both were in
their early fifties).

The remaining WWINFEW women were not traceable. Some of WWINFEW's women have returned to their birth countries. Some women live very mobile lives. Many First Nations women, for example, are drawn to Coldtown to attend the special programs for First Nations students and while they were in Coldtown they became involved with WWINFEW. They then returned to their reserve or went on to further education or accepted employment wherever it called them. In summary, I believe the forty-one interviewees who shared their thoughts here do constitute an accurately representative sample of the women who gave life to WWINFEW.

WWINFEW women's ages ranged from eighteen to fifty-eight. Twenty-seven of the interviewees were younger than thirty-eight at the time of their involvement with WWINFEW. The remaining fourteen women were thirty-nine or older during their activism time. Their previous training and employment experiences ranged from being full-time home workers; to being social workers, teachers, waitresses, cooks, secretaries, cleaning ladies, book-keepers, or researchers. Only five of the forty-one interviewees had no children. Most of the interviewees were in marriages or partnerships.

WWINFEW women's income levels ranged from less than five thousand dollars per year (on average during the five years
before the interview took place) to over thirty thousand dollars of personal income on average for the preceding five years. Thirty-eight of the forty-one women had earned less than fifteen thousand on average in the preceding five years. This suggests that the majority of them could be defined as economically vulnerable or of a low socioeconomic status although they may not have identified themselves this way. Some of these women lived with men or kin whom they were entirely financially dependent upon.

Seven of the women interviewed had been involved with more than ten organizations preceding their involvement with WWINFEW. This "involvement" was defined as "being any kind of a volunteer or staff member" in another organization. Twelve of the interviewees had never been a paid staff member or volunteer in any organization before WWINFEW. These women had largely been full-time home workers. The remaining twenty-two interviewees had some involvement in the middle range but most of them had been involved with less than three organizations before their activism with WWINFEW. The types of organizations in which the women had been either employed or volunteered were quite diverse but most of these previous activism experiences were in the areas of women's issues, ethnocultural minority issues, poverty issues, or children's issues.

I use the word "ethnocultural" here in the way it was
commonly used at WWINFEW. It was a term used at WWINFEW (and elsewhere) to refer to a combination of racial, religious, and ethnic characteristics attributed to people. Every person has an ethnocultural heritage and identity: most WWINFEW women had a cluster of attributes that positioned them, to be, or feel different than the majority of people in Coldtown. WWINFEW women's ethnocultural backgrounds were quite diverse. Only twenty-two of them spoke English alone; some had three languages; one was fluent in five languages. Fourteen of the women self identified as "visible minority". Twelve of the fourteen "visible minority" women also identified as "immigrants". Five women identified as "First Nations". Four identified themselves as non-visible "immigrants". The remaining eighteen WWINFEW women identified as first generation (for example born on Canadian soil to parents who were both Italian or Polish immigrants); as of diverse ethnocultural heritage (for example one parent was a First Nations person and one was an immigrant); Francophone and Canadian-born; or white Anglophone Canadian-born.

During the months or years of their involvement with WWINFEW each of these women had lives outside of the organization that influenced how they interacted with the organization and their roles and friendships inside WWINFEW shaped how they lived their personal lives. Within this text I
am discussing their interactions inside the organization but also when I remember these women and the sharing we did I remember some of them becoming pregnant; giving birth; falling in love; separating from loved ones; signing up for courses; dropping out of programs; buying or selling houses or cars; having relatives finally come to Canada from far away; having relatives leave Canada because they had to; and I remember lots of dinners in women's homes or sweets brought from their homes to WWINFEW. I remember many hours of sharing that are not included in this text. As Wolf (1992) has taught us every story is partial.

**WHITENESS**

Some authors have been focused on decentering the white "norm"; decentring a Eurocentric world view; unpacking and reflecting upon what it means to be white from those who have lived their lives inside whiteness (Allison, 1988; Katz, 1978; Roach Pierson 1991, p. 192; Ware, 1992; Wolverton, 1983). Using Goffman's ideas (as discussed in Burns, 1992, p. 109) some whites have been trying to make ourselves into "exiles from the familiar" so that we may "see with different eyes". One of the most respected authors doing this type of work is Frankenberg (1993a, 1993b) and she says:

Whiteness ...has a set of linked dimensions. First,
whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (Frankenberg, 1993b, p. 1).

Throughout the last ten years of thinking through these issues I have been trying to understand structural advantage, my standpoint, and cultural practices that might have been getting in my way of a richer relationship with women from all cultures.

White Anglophone Canadian-born women's involvement with WWINFEW resulted from five influencing factors. Many government programs were organized so that when the funding began it had to be used or it was lost to WWINFEW. Therefore, once confirmation was given for a specific program/activity the organization felt impelled to find appropriate woman-power as quickly as possible. This meant that sometimes appropriately skilled women from our constitutionally defined primary target groups (immigrant, First Nations, visible minority women) were not available.

Second, many white low income women experience some of the same struggles and problems that WWINFEW's three target groups experienced and, thus they had an empathy and a commitment to social change. Thirdly, many white women of low socioeconomic status are actually the first generation daughters of undereducated immigrants from, for example,
Italy, Portugal or Germany. Many have immigrant parents who have experienced war, violence, and poverty and the daughter's generation, as Middelton-Moz (1989, pp. 8-13) discusses, is still working through the issues of her parents and a place like WWINFEW can help in this working through of issues.

The fourth reason that white women were involved was that some are in cross-cultural marriages and they were intimately concerned about the issues that WWINFEW addressed. For example, Ruth describes her family and its meaning:

I think working there [at WWINFEW] in that subject area [of ethnocultural minority women's issues] was part of my political life as well, on two fronts. Most importantly was the multi-cultural aspect to me. And secondly, was the women's issue aspect of it. The two I guess...two parts being...when you put them together as more than just the sum of the two parts. It was political aspects of my life. Living in a multi-cultural marriage or an inter-racial marriage, an inter-religious marriage I know there are a lot of multi-cultural issues out there that need to be addressed because I see them in my family. I have two daughters who are half East Indian, half Canadian so they are going to have to deal with these issues when they grow up. So it was on their behalf as well that I did it.

A fifth reason was that some of our social work interns and other helping professionals were authentically committed to working on these issues either as volunteers, staff, or interns and they were in the process of constructing a larger vision of how the world could be lived in. These white women had their consciousness raised and they passed on their educational experiences to others. I feel it is important to
clearly and immediately express some of these dimensions of who WWINFEW women were because the involvement of white Anglophone Canadian born women was sometimes controversial. Agnew (1996) alludes to this emotionally and politically complicated conversation when she describes the cautions of some ethnocultural minority women:

Women from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, conscious of the biases of feminist theory and practice in the 1970's, may question the motives behind white feminists' interest in their struggles. They fear that white women who are sympathetic to their cause may use that as a pretext to speak on their behalf, thereby suppressing their 'voice' once again (p. 91).

She continues by adding that ethnocultural minority women share other women's concern about gender oppression but they simultaneously experience "race, class, and gender oppression...and this experience puts them at odds with white feminists and makes a working relationship between them problematic" (Agnew, 1996, p. 91). So it was in Coldtown and so it was sometimes at WWINFEW.

A sixth dimension of white women's involvement that deserves comment is that all of our government assigned project officers¹ and assigned representatives from

¹ I want to emphasize here that "project officers" were situated to implement policies and programs and their own individual personalities and characteristics are not necessarily what I am focusing on in this text when I challenge how programs were created, implemented, and monitored. In fact, many of the project officers I have worked
interfacing agencies from which we accepted interns and placements (and my estimate is that WWINFEW representatives had dozens of meetings with at least eighteen different people) with two exceptions were white women. These white women generally wanted to support our work but they did not always understand how to achieve that -- they did not always know how to get over and outside of their own whiteness.

**INVolvement**

Many of the forty-one women interviewed for this text had been involved with WWINFEW in a diverse array of ways. Some had been board members and then later they were hired as contract staff. Some moved through the organization in the reverse order: first they were staff, then volunteers and then eventually they accepted the responsibilities of board membership. Twenty of the women interviewed stated that they had been a Board member with WWINFEW; thirteen had been volunteers; and twenty had been staff members at some time in with in Coldtown are caring, respectful people trying to do the best they can with what they know. Most of them do their best to understand the programs and policies created by others above them in a social structure and then they follow the rules as they perceive them. A few project officers certainly bent the rules as far as they could in response to the requests of WWINFEW women. Each project officer is hired because of their own cluster of identity pegs and their professional training -- that cluster, training, and how they are situated shapes how they make meaning and distribute resources to a place like WWINFEW.
WWINFEW's herstory². These numbers add up to more than forty-one because (as stated above) some women had been involved in more than one capacity.

My involvement with the organization began while I was employed as an immigrant settlement worker in another organization and I became involved as one of the founding members of WWINFEW and an advisory committee volunteer. Later, and for a short time I was a paid researcher/coordinator with WWINFEW (coordinating a needs assessment). For approximately four more years I was involved in a volunteer capacity as a fund-raiser, intern supervisor and board member. For the last year and a half of WWINFEW's life (and while I was doing these interviews) I was involved only as an observer. It was only in the third year of my involvement that I began to realize how very special this organization and its activists were and it was then that I decided to study it for my doctoral thesis. WWINFEW was a small Northern Ontario based volunteer organization that demonstrated a lot of stamina and creativity. It had employed, at most, one core staff person and a few project workers and had a few student interns (from various programs) at any given time. During most of WWINFEW's years of existence there was only one staff/student person in

² There will be a full discussion of how women's perceptions or women's "herstory" of "history" are different from men's in chapter four.
the office at any given moment. WINFEW had to relocate four times in six years because of changing financial circumstances. At the time of its closure, WINFEW's office was about fifteen feet by twenty feet in size, had its own washroom, one computer and one phone line. WINFEW's budget ranged from approximately thirty-six thousand dollars per year to one-hundred thousand dollars per year. As an activist/participant observer I attended approximately sixty board or committee meetings, approximately thirty special events, and had (and I continue to have) countless conversations with WINFEW activists.

MAKING MEANING AND MAKING FAITH MAKES AN ORGANIZATION

A successful women's organization comes to exist, and remains in existence, for as long as women activists have faith in each other, in their paradigm of a different world, and in their shared visions for the future. By discovering and making meaning together women keep the doors of these organizations open. The issue of finding the money and the resources to keep the doors open is equally important but it is not the central defining factor. Both of these dimensions (meaning making and the meaning of funding) are somewhat diffusely visible to the actors as they live inside these
Women of the World Initiating New Formulas for Equality and Wisdom came to exist in 1988 and ceased to exist ninety-four months later. We came into existence because we had a shared faith, a different paradigm from the mainstream, and a shared vision for the future. During our existence (and as our pseudonym "WWINFEW" suggests) we did "win a few" and we did "lose a few". Eventually we did lose the whole organization. My guiding research questions throughout this whole project have been: How could we have done the seemingly undoable differently so that we could still have our doors open? What did we do as well as could have been expected? What should organizations like WWINFEW do to repeat the successes of WWINFEW?

We began losing more than a few when we stopped talking to each other about our shared faith, visions, and paradigms. We should have continued explicating our individual and group meanings and we should have remained attentive to the way government financing was shaping our interpersonal relationships.

During the time of WWINFEW's existence it directly impacted on the lives of over a hundred women. Hundreds of other women's lives were indirectly impacted upon. The organization's mission statement (which was declared on its
pamphlets, flyers, letterhead, and other documents) was "we exist to enhance the lives and expand the options of immigrant, First Nations, and visible minority women." We wanted to create a safe place in which racism, sexism, classism, and other isms were understood for what they are (complex, ever-shifting, huge, emotionally volatile phenomena). We wanted to do something different from what we saw in the mainstream world around us. This something different we also wanted to do well.

We wanted to provide social services and educational services like group discussions on racism or family violence. We also wanted to provide individual counselling in these areas and others. Organizations that intersected with WWINFEW's client group and/or volunteer pool were forced to shift in their orientations because of WWINFEW's existence. Some of these organizations have continued moving forward on new paths. The patterns played out through WWINFEW's life, our struggles, and our demise demonstrate the patterns of wider social issues in Canada today.

SUMMARIZING AND APPLYING DIVERSE THEORIES TO A NEW CONTEXT

Throughout this thesis I am trying to link many complicated issues, theories, perspectives and realities. In
chapter two I describe how complex the seven troubled "rivers of knowledge" are that could flow through an organization like WWINFEW. Knowledge limited only to the sphere of women's issues or limited only to the sphere of ethnocultural minority issues is not enough to respond to ethnocultural minority women's issues. In Chapter two I explore seven bodies of knowledge and how they connect to each other and how they connect with practical concerns. To do the undoable we must deepen our understanding of: the feminist perspective; the world views of people from very different cultures; the meaning of resource deprivation and living with a low-economic status; organizational dynamics; social work/voluntarism and self-help; the significance of symbols and meaning making; and of how all of these realities impact on women's mental health. To even have substantive conversations with each other before we engage in the difficult work of transforming the material world around us requires a great deal of commitment, knowledge, and kindness.

APPLYING FEMINIST THEORY AND METHODOLOGY TO NEW CONTEXTS

In chapter three I define feminist methodology and I utilize it (to interview forty-one activists; to make meaning of my five years of participant observation and to synthesize
the literature in this area of study), and then describe how I applied and integrated that approach to the task of describing WWINFEW. I have described how our approach as feminists to asking the questions and documenting the answers to these types of struggles can, in itself, be a large and engaging project. Learning how to learn and learning how to tell the story with authenticity, dignity, and a tender acceptance for messiness between boundaries and categories is another whole project. Feminist methods assist us to initiate a closer relationship with the reader of our text; to approach the problems with a transdisciplinary eye; to be prepared to challenge traditional scholarship; to maintain the feminist perspective and theory through all the layers and time-frames of the project; to empathize with human diversity; to experiment with a multiplicity of methodological tools (i.e. surveys, participant observation, quantitative work, etc.); to define our own stance and situatedness as a person; to remain focused on social change; and to maintain a feminist ethic which is conscious of our power and focused on not abusing that power. Chapter three explores and applies many dimensions of feminist methodology. Throughout the whole text I continue with these feminist considerations and my analysis consists of integrating data from diverse locations. Throughout this text I have attempted to let the data form its
own grounded and practical shape.

THE PAST LIVES INTO THE PRESENT

In chapter four I have tried to go far enough and deep enough backwards in time and herstory to explicate the roots of problems WINFEW women faced in the 1990s. I emphasize that ethnocultural minority women in Coldtown arrived in the late 1990's with burdens and struggles to contend with. These burdens and struggles were not new -- only some of our strategies to frame and resist these burdens were new. These burdens and struggles were not the result of accidents or the result of oppressed women's own random and individual psychological problems. Instead, ethnocultural minority women's "self-esteem" was damaged in response to a multitude of herstoric and social forces which left them stuck and vulnerable because of their low socio-economic status. These social forces are accomplished and reproduced in day-to-day ways by ordinary people. The experience of oppression and oppressive behaviour is extremely ordinary. The very foundational underpinnings of Coldtown are linked to the oppression of these women. They have constituted the invisible work-force that helped the men go into the mines and produce the wealth that ethnocultural minority women have not always been able to share.
Many WINFEW women (and/or their mothers before them) came to Coldtown to care for their husband's personal needs. These women often remained delegated to the private sphere. First Nations women experienced losses hundreds of years ago and the implications and reverberations of those losses are still being felt in their flesh and bones today. Many visible minority women experienced oppression as a result of colonization in their birth countries and in response to that oppression generations of them have come to Canada. Every woman has a personal journey that has both distinct characteristics and characteristics that connect to a larger pattern. Most visible minority women ended up in Coldtown because their kin or they themselves found work in the health care sector or as educators. Chapter four will describe how the motivators that brought them to Coldtown had consequence in regards to who decided to come to Coldtown, who decided to stay in Coldtown, and how these citizens felt while in Coldtown.

In chapter four I discuss similarities and differences that were put in place by the way Coldtown came to exist for ethnocultural minority women. All of these colourful and emotion-full experiences shaping ethnocultural minority women's lives today have also divided women from each other. When Canadians talk about equality and declare "all Canadians
are now equal" it is important that we do an assessment. Often we must first commit to "compensatory enumeration" to those who are not experiencing the world as a place of equality and abundance. Ethnocultural minority working class women in Coldtown have survived a hundred years (Coldtown was created approximately a hundred years ago) of limited access to resources and opportunities.

In 1988 when WWINFEW women gave birth to their new organization there were a lot of assumptions in the wider community that had to be fought. One of the most disturbing assumptions of the dominant culture/s\(^3\) was that all women had resources available to them in equal richness. The startlingly obvious thing was that we created an organization to enhance ethnocultural minority women's lives precisely because these women were underresourced -- but once we formally existed as an organization the expectations that were imposed on us were that we were now equal so we should have been self-sustaining and raised our maintenance costs and resources from among our

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\(^3\)I refer to "cultures" because some immigrant women in Coldtown have told me they feel oppressed by both of Canada's founding "Nations". This sense of oppression is linked to the fact that in Coldtown many jobs are designated for bilingual persons. This means that some of the jobs that have traditionally been open for women of lower socioeconomic status such as salesclerk, secretary, social worker, childcare worker, or teacher are closed to women who only speak English. For immigrant women this sometimes means they feel pressured to learn two new languages and this is daunting.
client groups, users, communities, and/or activists. This expectation was somewhat bizarre given the truths that emerged from the Needs Assessment that launched our organization into existence.

WHO AM I IN THIS STORY?

My personal experiences with WWINFEW, articulated in chapter five, made me into a different person. I am deeply appreciative that I stumbled into the chance to be part of such a project. WWINFEW's activists -- even the ones that I had ideological or stylistic differences with -- were very special people. Many of these committed and vibrant women will remain close to my heart for decades. Their personalities, world-views, expectations, pleasures, and regrets will remain in my consciousness. I have done my best to insure that this text has accurately portrayed their experiences. Over the years some of them have read my writings about WWINFEW and they have kept me humble, brave, and more able to experiment with the ambiguity and messiness of life.

My involvement with WWINFEW could be defined as falling into three phases: as an activist from approximately 1988 - 1991; as a researcher / participant observer from 1991 - 1996; to a writer/ synthesizer ongoingly. As my role shifted so also may have WWINFEW women's thoughts and feelings towards me
have shifted. Much of those possible shifts have gone unexplored in this text due to space and resource limitations. I hope to take up that reflection in some future discussion elsewhere.

CREATING DEFINITIONS

In chapter six I describe how one of our largest struggles at WWINFEW was to define who we wanted to be as an organization. We had a variety of attributes and visions in common but we also confronted troubling truths. There were many, seemingly unbridgeable gulfs between our priorities and needs as groups of women. These gulfs often became insurmountable and led to many hurt feelings and disenchantments. Immigrant, First Nations, visible minority and/or socioeconomically oppressed women were separated from each other over the decades and through an assortment of social dynamics. Discovering and rediscovering how to connect requires almost superhuman strength sometimes.

There are many forces which resist women's discovering and reconnecting with each other. On the individual level many male kin want to keep their female family members in the traditional caring and nurturing role. On the community level many male-dominated or male-centred organizations want to continue having access to submissive female volunteers,
disempowered female staff, and/or these organizations want to continue accessing a disproportionate share of the community's material resources. As women we have also often internalized our oppression. Some of us act as handmaidens to patriarchy or handmaidens to racist ideologies and we reproduce the very pain of oppression that we also claim to be trying to resist. Chapter six identifies how WWINFEW women creatively struggled to define WWINFEW's role within the community of Coldtown. During the ninety-four months of WWINFEW's life as an organization we were able to help many women change and enrich their lives.

**WHICH SERVICES GET COUNTED AND WHO DOES THE COUNTING?**

Chapter seven describes what kinds of services we provided and how they were funded. At WWINFEW we assisted women who wanted to assess and upgrade their educational goals and needs. We educated the larger community of Coldtown about what the needs of ethnocultural minority women were. For a time a distinctive teaching/learning process evolved at WWINFEW using guidance from "freedom to learn" theorists such as Rogers or Freire. As a result of WWINFEW's efforts anti-racism practices and cross-cultural understandings were deepened in Coldtown. We raised the level of understanding of
these issues in high schools, colleges, the university, social service organizations, women's groups, the media, among women interns and participants, as well as parallel organizations. Our activists went out into the community and sat on many boards and gave presentations anywhere we were invited to go. Some women who had never done these types of micropolitical activities before were able to achieve their goals as a result of the support they found at WWINFEW.

Chapter seven continues describing "services" (such as anti-racism education, popular education and skills training) and expands the word "service" to fit what I have witnessed in women's organizations. The initiating and building of women's friendships and social networks emerged as one of the most desired "services" that WWINFEW provided. Sadly, this is one of the "services" that cannot smoothly fit inside the "mandate" of any formal government funder. Canada does not have a minister of "female friendship". Not one of the three levels of government possesses, lays claim to, or will accept responsibility for delivering this service to ethnocultural minority women who have limited access to material and supportive human resources. Nonetheless, WWINFEW's successes in regards to women connecting women to each other were the "services" we can reflect upon with the most pride. Many WWINFEW women continue to spend time with each other and
support each other. Those who have lost contact with WWINFEW women have positive memories of their friendships. In many instances, they have expanded and transferred friendship initiating and maintaining skills to other contexts and relationships.

**FUNDING IMPACTS ON EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE, AND EVERYONE**

Funding issues alone did not make WWINFEW disappear. Moss Kanter (1972) while talking about the many self-help cooperatives and communes she studied noted:

...A number of both successful and unsuccessful utopias weathered periods of hardship and suffered financial losses without dissolving, but then broke up at a time when they had accumulated great wealth and showed a profit (p. 158).

There may have been other ways that WWINFEW women could have responded to our material circumstances but chapter eight outlines the huge fight we engaged in to keep WWINFEW's doors open. These funding battles exhausted us.

Many of WWINFEW's women are still in Coldtown doing similar work but they might be fighting more cautiously now. The fight for funding wore us down and altered the group's membership and profile. As the fund-raising struggles intensified so did the mean-spiritedness among the few remaining women who tried (in their own perfect and imperfect
ways) to keep WWINFEW's doors open and programs functioning. Silence and confusion surrounded the changes that were happening and many women did not know how to respond to overt and covert conflict.

In the last months of the organization's life a number of women were involved in WWINFEW to sell make-up, to create traditional meals and costumes, and/or to participate in fashion shows. Chapter eight continues by describing how these traditional women quietly challenged some of the more vigourous feminists who founded the organization and helped establish WWINFEW's original structures. Gradually, the contested terrain of what was "really" good for women and who was "really" positioned to identify "authentic cultural attributes" and "authentic women's ways" became too painful to witness. One woman key informant told me that "wife beating is a culturally authentic aspect of every culture, but we aren't going to celebrate that at WWINFEW and reproduce that at WWINFEW now are we?". She felt that we should not have been celebrating women's use of makeup, women's social assignment to the kitchen and the private sphere, or the use of "costumes" to distract ethnocultural minority people from paying attention to larger social issues. Many WWINFEW women tried to resolve these contradictions and complications that were faced daily at WWINFEW and these women continued doing
the undoable somewhat well for as long as was possible.

Throughout all the chapters of this thesis I describe the layers and evolutions that existed within WWINFEW. I describe the strengths and weaknesses of the organization -- and these were always in movement. My hope is that if a future group of women begins coming together to bring about change in their community they could look to a resource like this text. I have no illusions of grandeur about rescuing them. Instead, my hope is that this text could help them shape their own questions, feel validated, and connect them to other resources that would assist them to map out their own unique journey. I hope their journey would be smoother, longer lasting and have more happy moments in it than WWINFEW’s journey.

After much reflection, I chose the pseudonym of WWINFEW for this organization because it seemed appropriate. During our organization's existence we "won a few" and "lost a few". In our efforts to construct connections and change the social environment WWINFEW women put up a surprisingly vibrant and admirable struggle. I chose the pseudonym of Coldtown for the city because it had meaning to my interviewees and comrades from WWINFEW. Northern Ontario has lots of snow, cold lonely winters, and Coldtown, it might be said, turned a cold shoulder to ethnocultural minority working class women's pleas for recognition, support, and a fair share. On the other hand,
even during the coldest winters there are some beautiful days and some lovely scenes to bear witness to and some people in Coldtown surprised us with their generosity.

I believe these chapters constitute the "biography" of WWINFEW. The herstory of WWINFEW documents how exhausting it can be to challenge conservative agendas. These agendas were emerging more aggressively across most of Ontario just as WWINFEW rose up in 1988. The limitations of funding positioned us to lose sight of our original vision. Or maybe we had such a wonderful buffet of visions that we became immobilized by the beauty of the imagined options. We were not strong enough to continue resisting the movement forward of the conservative regimes around us.

**WHAT WE DID NOT ALWAYS KNOW DID HURT US**

In Chapter nine I propose that, regrettably, not many of WWINFEW's women were conscious of the pernicious ways that funding restrictions and complications were impacting upon their relationships with each other. Neither were many of WWINFEW's women able to clearly see how funding shaped their relationships with the organization, their relationships with other organization's representatives, and with their female peers within WWINFEW. My detailed descriptions of how funding processes shaped us as people and shaped our possible
interventions is one of the contributions to the scholarly literature that this text claims. All WWINFEW women recognized that we needed more money to make our dreams come true -- but most of them did not realize that our interpersonal dynamics were distorted on many levels because of the funding realities we faced.

The path we were trying to mark out on the terrain was not linear and simple. In contrast to the image that feminist organizers are all incredibly warm, nurturing, co-operative, and able to come together in sisterly solidarity -- we can also be nasty, short-tempered, and impatient. Further, in contrast to the image that we can relocate mountains of oppressive dirt one respectful spoonful at a time feminist organizing efforts and organizations can be hard, hurtful, and slow. Frequently, the dirt avalanches back down on us.

In response to these multiple forces bringing disharmony into the centre of the organization WWINFEW became vulnerable to the covert and overt oddities and unpredictability of charismatic leadership. As the leadership styles and ethics began to change so did the membership profile. Then there was some factioning, hustling, and nudging for the position of "definers". During this time the membership was unable to sense a solid shared path forward and trust began to break down. When women feel they cannot trust each other they then
feel hesitant to take risks, invest their emotional energy, or their precious few hours a month of volunteer time. As one woman would leave so often would her friends. In addition to the above factors, my impression is that in the last few months when WWINFEW became fragile those who were the most organizationally insightful and/or who had the most resources available to them "jumped from the sinking ship".

A primary factor in WWINFEW's downfall was that from the first meetings of its Advisory Committee its sovereign and intrinsic right to be a major member of the social service/women's service community was resisted by other organizations. Multicultural/ethnicity centred organizations and mainstream social service organizations resisted WWINFEW's efforts to take root in Coldtown. Every organization, as could be expected, wanted to continue claiming their portion of government money and community money. Tragically, they would not or could not provide effective services for low income and/or disempowered ethnocultural minority women. WWINFEW's first major project was a Needs Assessment (encouraged by potential funders) which involved extensively interviewing one hundred and thirty ethnocultural minority women (Wilkinson, 1990). This was an effectively and responsibly done qualitative and quantitative research report supervised by a committee of professionals and activists with doctorates in
Sociology, and masters degrees in Anthropology or Education. This Needs Assessment also collected and assessed the results from two hundred and fifty-one social service providers' survey responses. We initially believed that this would constitute the "evidence" we needed to start solving the problems we were witnessing. There was never enough evidence.

In the last chapter I describe how WWINFEW closed. In the last few months of WWINFEW's life a critical incident occurred in which the last energies and final hopes of the organization's supporters and activists were put on the table. Using the Civil Court system an immigrant, visible minority, socioeconomically vulnerable, religious minority woman, who had been employed as a project worker, charged the President of WWINFEW (who was an immigrant, visible minority, socioeconomically vulnerable, religious minority woman) with "racism" and "wrongful dismissal". If the organization had any reserve of positive energy, material resources, interpersonal goodwill and trust we might have been able to make it past this trauma. Had we been working together with one shared goal, with a high sense of trust, with a belief in a solid future then we would never have ended up in court with this situation in front of us. By the time the court case was heard nothing was left of the heart of the organization. The remaining corpse was disposed of within a few weeks.
I conclude this text by affirming that as an eclectic and diverse group of activists, we can be proud of the fact that we learned a great deal from WWINFEW. As individuals, it seems to me, every single woman walked away with more knowledge than she initially came forward with. Most of the women seemed to feel grateful that they had their experience with WWINFEW. Most of them came away with professional and marketable skills. Most of them came away with a deeper and richer understanding of other cultures, their own culture, and how to negotiate the space between cultures. These are among the "wins" that WWINFEW women can always look upon with pride. Another important win we might treasure from our WWINFEW experience is that each of us constructed and deepened our theories about what is possible, probable, and undoable in a place like WWINFEW.
CHAPTER TWO: THEORIES: MULTIPLE, INTERSECTING, PARALLEL, CHAOTIC AND/OR HARMONIOUS RIVERS?

April [an early activist with WWINFEW]: WWINFEW was an organization with beautiful goals. It had a perfect vision of how we could get along. There were different goals and different visions and these were always changing. I was involved in the 'meshing' to create these... different goals and visions. The visions were always changing because women kept coming in. Very different women were always coming in and so we always had sort of their own little vision, everyone had their own little vision of what they wanted to be at WWINFEW. I was doing different things. I had a couple of different titles. Originally I think I was secretary, then receptionist. Then I was the assistant coordinator. Then I was book-keeper slash something. No. Actually I was just 'book-keeper' at that time. Only one title that time. Just book-keeper.

An understanding of a complex layering of theories is necessary as a prerequisite for understanding WWINFEW and WWINFEW women. This chapter highlights the theoretical templates used throughout this text. I have used an eclectic theoretical approach for analysing feminist anti-racist organizations while borrowing theory and facts from seven 'rivers of thought'. My two main tasks in this section are to describe these seven rivers of thought and to describe some of the confusions I have confronted as an activist, researcher and writer while trying to wade through and map these seven rivers of thought:

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1. Feminism
2. Anti-racism
3. Socioeconomic Realities
4. Organizational Management
5. Social Work/Voluntarism/Self Help
6. Symbolic Interactionism
7. Women and Mental Health

Often while attempting to explore these seven rivers I have felt like I was drowning or that the cross-currents would carry me away to some place unrecognizable and from which I would never return. Other times it has felt like I was alone in the dark wading through thick swampy shores. At different points while writing about these complex bodies of knowledge I will use the imagery of water because water can manifest itself in many guises and forms (and so can these bodies of thought).

I use the imagery of rivers because their beginnings are open to dispute, they end by connecting to other bodies of water, their width and depth changes dramatically from one point to another, and the water temporarily contained within them is always in movement and transition. Understanding these seven rivers of thought (and their cross-currents) is necessary for an understanding of WWINFEW and places like WWINFEW. A scarcity of understanding and an abundance of
confusion exists about how to do the seemingly undoable (successfully creating and maintaining anti-racist feminist organizations). I propose that these seven rivers of thought flow through all progressive organizations.

As will be discussed feminist (and symbolic interactionist) theories especially, give me permission to confess my confusions, unanswered questions, and ruptures. Feminist researchers accept that we can offer frayed and incomplete packages of information and still be appreciated as contributing members of the scholarly community. Also, research of the type that this project committed itself to is, by necessity, transdisciplinary and this crossing of disciplines is an aspect of feminist research (Reinharz, 1992, p. 240). Therefore, I shall proceed by speaking to how I came to be spending time at the shoreline of each of these seven rivers of thought. Then, I will describe what I perceived while exploring each river. Finally, I will attempt to describe how these rivers do and do not harmoniously intersect. I will describe these seven bodies of knowledge in the rough and messy order in which I discovered them but first I will give a brief description of my research methods.

RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter three will extensively describe the methodologies
used during my six years of involvement with and studying WWINFEW (and the issues these types of organizations face) but first, some basic information about my methodological practices needs to be understood. My work utilizes Reinharz's "feminist multiple methods approach". Reinharz (1993, p. 197) describes a 'feminist multiple methods research' approach:

Feminist descriptions of multi method research express the commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks. Multiple methods enable feminist researchers to link past and present, 'data gathering' and action, and individual behaviour with social frameworks. In addition, feminist researchers use multiple methods because of changes that occur to them and others in a project of long duration. Feminists describe such long projects as 'journeys.' Sometimes multiple methods reflect the desire to be responsive to the people being studied. By combining methods, feminist researchers are particularly able to illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experiences. Multiple methods increase the likelihood of obtaining scientific credibility and research utility.

My feminist multiple methods approach includes a case study examination, more than five years of participant observation, extensive semi-structured interviews with WWINFEW's activists, professional or activist involvement with organizations which interacted with WWINFEW and ongoing discussions with key informants from WWINFEW.

As Reinharz (1993, p. 169) and Hamel (1993, pp. 20-32) discuss, the production of these kinds of case studies is a long standing tradition in sociology (and especially in the
tradition of the Chicago School of Symbolic Interactionism). Reinharz's multiple methods research approach is also harmonious with anti-racist approaches in that WWINFEW's ethnocultural minority women were able to articulate their first hand experiences and world-views through the semi-structured interview format and through ongoing dialogue.

1. THE FEMINIST RIVER

Kim: [A Black immigrant woman Board member with WWINFEW] To me it [feminism] means equal access to the social, political and economic opportunities in the country by women as well as by men. Equal. Equality. It also means being able to hear and listen to women's issues. Specifically, instead of calling them 'men's issues'; we are different. Although not so different. But the differences should be appreciated and taken into consideration.

A feminist perspective always begins with women's own experiences and views of their world. As Smith, a feminist sociologist, says:

The standpoint of women, as I've worked from it, insists that as thinking heads -- social scientists -- we are always inside what we are thinking about; we know it in the first place as insiders...For knowledge itself is made problematic when we insist that there are knowers 'doing knowing' and that we can explore, make explicit, know the socially organized practices in and through which we accomplish knowledge (1990, p. 51).

And as Bannerji, another feminist sociologist, adds:

...there is no better point of entry into a critique
or a reflection than one's own experience. It is not the end point, but the beginning of an exploration of the relationship between the personal and the social and therefore the political. And this connecting process, which is also a discovery, is the real pedagogic process, the 'science' of social science (1995, p. 55).

Many feminists have written about what it means to be a feminist reflecting on the world and women's issues from a woman-centered standpoint (Anderson, 1991; Bart and Moran, 1993; Bartky, 1990; Eichler, 1988; French, 1985; Jones, 1993; Ristock and Pennell, 1996; Wolf, 1993). Every discipline of knowledge is being reassessed to identify how women have been misrepresented, silenced, disadvantaged or distorted. Throughout my participant observations and during every aspect of the research process I have approached my work from a feminist perspective. Most of the WWINFEW interviewees also explicitly identify themselves as "feminists" and many of the organization's goals and challenges emerged from this orientation.

In Coldtown, as in the larger terrain of Canadian society, women's paths to empowerment often involve organizing in groups or agencies. There are many organizations in Canada such as Elizabeth Fry Societies, Big Sisters, Business and Professional Women's Clubs, women's centres, Sexual Assault Crisis Centres and women's self help groups which are actively involving thousands of women every day. Alone, the National
Action Committee On The Status of Women (an umbrella group for women's associations and organizations) has over six-hundred institutional members. Women's groups, agencies and organizations exist in almost every community. Over four-hundred Canadian women's groups were funded in 1994 by the federal government (Ng, 1995). Hundreds more received allocations from the other levels of government and/or directly from the communities they served. The evolution of these organizations and their relationships with the State has inspired both celebration and criticism (Adamson, Brisken, and McPhail, 1988; Agnew, 1996; Andrew and Rogers, 1997; Ng, 1988; Walker, 1990).

These groups and agencies become the vehicle through which some feminist anti-racist activists arrive at understandings and through which some women articulate their unique concerns and needs. These groups and agencies are also the places in which activists advocate for social change. Inside many of these groups and agencies feminist anti-racist activists frequently also experience profound personal change (consciousness raising, new skills, new information, friendships, etcetera). Many of these organizations provide social services to vulnerable women (rape victims, wife assault victims, etcetera). The shape of these organizations influences how social services are delivered and experienced.
through these organizations.

Some feminist materials and approaches have been criticized for not being integrated with, or respectful to, ethnocultural minority women's world-views and experiences. The following quote is discussing how dominant-culture women took a great deal for granted while organizing in the late nineteen-eighties.

Although somewhat more recognized, racism was still not highlighted. It was spoken of, but it was not seen as a major concern of the women's movement, and certainly not as an organizing priority. There was no recognition by most white women that the lives of immigrant women and women of colour are socially organized by capitalism in different, oppressive ways. There was no understanding of separate material realities within the Canadian context, or how white women have in most instances, constructed feminism according to their own needs (Egan, Gardner, Persad, 1988, p. 37).

Theorists who challenge the dominant cultures' (I use the plural 'cultures' because of Anglophone and Francophone Canadian realities) white Eurocentric perspectives include: Agnew, 1996; Bannerji, 1995, 1993; Bulkin, Pratt, Smith, 1984; Griffiths and Campbell, 1989; hooks, 1984; 1990, 1992; Mies, 1988, Ware, 1992, Wong, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1994).

Bannerji (1995) talks about how it is a "liberal empiricist method of thinking" to chunk the world down into segmented single issues ('women's issues, 'class issues', etcetera). This method of thinking prestructures our minds to
sort people and information into non-permeable categories. As Manji (1997) says: "... the essence of identity lies not in what is fixed but in what is fluid (p. 15)". Manji adds, "... my identity is not merely who I think I am. That would be self-perception. Identity is also about who (or what) others think I am (p. 15)".

Bannerji's and Manji's reflections and insights run quite parallel to symbolic interactionist reflections and insights. Canadian feminist activity has been largely influenced by government financing and monitoring practices. As Gabriel discusses (1996, pp. 173-195) government funders have perpetuated this unwholesome pattern of chunking and segmenting (and separating and alienating) when, for example, they will provide money for a conference on 'women's issues' or 'immigrant issues' or 'poverty issues' but will resist giving three times the amount of money for a conference on 'low-income immigrant women's issues'. Further, different representatives of the State will try to put these different issues (immigrant's struggles, poverty, women's oppression) onto other representatives of the State. This process of segmenting us into distinct identity categories serves to divide and, unfortunately, often conquer us. Bannerji continues describing this style of segregated single issue thinking:
...so current in North American academia and politics, is also particularly favourable to this ideological way of thinking about (and subsequently acting in) the world. And all this fits right in with the racist common sense of a people, whose self-definition and social organization, not to mention economic organization, has been fundamentally based on racism and imperialism (Bannerji, 1995, p. 52).

All women are gendered and located in a particular socioeconomic situation and ethnicity-identified at all times. Agnew (1996, pp. 4-8) also does a wonderful job of expressing this fact that our identity pegs are not something we can take turns at but instead that our identity pegs are enmeshed and they exist simultaneously.

My working definition of 'feminism' includes a world-view that avoids this chunking down and segmenting and instead seeks connections and recognizes webs of influence (i.e. gender oppression, race oppression and socioeconomic oppression are simultaneously connected and ever-shifting webs -- and within these webs some people benefit and other people lose).

There are many 'feminists' whom I will identify as also being anti-racist theorists and whom I have, somewhat arbitrarily, assigned to the following section on 'ethnicity and racism' (some authors could also be arbitrarily assigned to a section on 'socioeconomic realities' or 'social work' or as contributors to a body of knowledge about other socially
constructed chunks of the world because they have something of value to contribute to these different chunks). WWINFEW women's identities could not be neatly dissected for the purposes of discussion and segmented into 'pure' categories and this entanglement of diffuse 'identity pegs' (Goffman, 1964, p. 56-57) was a main reason for WWINFEW's existence and it is a major theme throughout this thesis.

Women could not speak and live only in response to their identities as 'women', 'low-income', 'immigrants', 'visible minority' or 'First Nations': their way of speaking and living was much more complicated and entangled. Similarly, neither can contributors to these rivers of literature be placed into pure or tidy categories. I have organized the insights of these contributors in regards to how I believe their ideas predominantly contribute to a particular "river".

Within the river of feminist theory I will discuss how feminist organizations have been discussed by feminist researchers. Note how Smile, an activist with WWINFEW, struggles with understanding and applying to an organization the meaning of "feminism":

Smile: Like, it's not only one [problem within this organization], like, different kinds of problems about the leadership, about the way um...handle the organization, or about the aims for example. Also like, some immigrant women don't like the more feminist for example, and they would not come [to WWINFEW or WWINFEW events]. This word [feminism] shocks them because they don't know exactly what is "feminist", so they are
afraid. They think that it is against their culture, or their country or their religion, whatever. And, uh, some personal problems among the board members, like I'm not involved in this. I was never involved anyway, like we would clarify it in the past, and like, it was normal. It happens in any organization. Um, speaking about my misunderstanding, but that's all.

Many women's/feminist organizations might also be defined as 'social service' organizations and many of these organizations are presently going through stress and the challenges of restructuring and redefining (Brodie, 1995, 1996; Chandler, 1995; Hasenfeld, 1992; Mills Simmons, 1995). Organizations and activists responding to ethnocultural minority issues are similarly fighting their way through identity issues and access to resources (Agnew, 1996; Bissondath, 1994; Gabriel, 1996; Pal, 1993, pp. 153-215; Wilson, 1995). Some women's services focused on ethnocultural minority women's needs and perspectives have multiple layers of potential meanings, troubles and challenges (Albrecht, Brewer, 1990; Bulkin, Pratt, Smith, 1984; Chandler, 1995; Cooper, 1995; Gutierrez, 1991; Lee, Weeks, 1991; Weeks, 1994). WWINFEW had troubles largely due to its simultaneous commitments to working on issues of gender, ethnicity and resource deprivation. WWINFEW had what Goffman (1964, pp. 56-57) calls multiple 'identity pegs' and we were rarely able to set firm and unanimous priorities regarding turn-taking or responding to concrete issues and tasks. Securing ongoing commitment from any group
of participants is a challenge (Moss Kanter, 1972, pp. 64 - 138).

There are a few case studies of organizations that are relevant to our understanding of feminism and of WWINFEW. The first of the case studies that I will discuss is Griffiths' (1993) biography of an organization. Griffiths' work is a description of one hundred years in the life of an organization called 'The National Council Of Women Of Canada'. This work is largely descriptive (rather than critically analytical). Griffiths points out how enormous the struggles of women's organizations can be even after one hundred years of effort. At WWINFEW we struggled for more than six years and each year we said, 'next year it will be easier' or 'next month we'll have figured this part out' but it never did become easy. The National Council of Women which Griffiths describes is also internationally based and thus, potentially, more informed and powerful than many small autonomous local grassroots entities like WWINFEW. Griffiths confirms the never-ending struggles involved in recruiting new volunteer members and finding an organizational vision that can be emotionally and intellectually adhered to by a clear majority of activists and concretely realized. At some points in the life of this organization the issue of access to social services and social resources and the needs of resource
deprived women were reflected upon (more frequently on the level of how could these benevolent women inside the organization help the oppressed outside of the organization) but very little discussion seems to have taken place regarding the potential ethnocentrism of this organization (there are pictures in the book of the leaders of the organization and all of the pictures appear to be of the faces of white women).

It might be proposed that a core belief in feminism is the equalization of power and the manifestation of this in regards to organizations is the creation of collectives instead of pyramids of power. Iannello's (1992) work, *Decisions Without Hierarchy: Feminist Interventions In Organization Theory And Practice*, details the decision-making and decision-implementing processes within three different women's organizations (a peace group, a health collective, and a women's business group). She describes the strengths and weaknesses of adhering to different decision making styles. WWINFEW initially tried to make decisions by consensus but quickly moved to a somewhat standard board structure. WWINFEW's board was elected yearly from among those women who chose to attend the annual general membership meeting (i.e. these women did not have to be paid members and they did not have to participate in actually implementing decisions).

Iannello also makes the point that women’s organizations
need to quickly sort out which decisions are 'critical' and which are 'routine' and then delegate these differently among their activists. Critical decisions are those that can change the identity or the goals of the organization and these decisions need to be arrived at through consensus. Routine decisions are those that are more task specific (related to implementing the decisions arrived at through the consensually arrived at goals) and these decisions should be delegated. At WWINFEW there was always some degree of confusion about how decisions should be arrived at. As the organization's activists began to lose trust and understanding with each other these confusions escalated. When people were not able to vividly articulate what the goals of the organization were they could not demonstrate how they were implementing those goals and they could not feel confident in how they were proceeding with their work. Women often factioned into their friendship dyads and groups and chose pieces of work that interested them and this was positive in that friendships developed and deepened and that some work was accomplished but negative for the whole of the organization in that these practices decreased their loyalty and sense of long-term vision or coordination for the whole organization.

Remington (1991) studied American feminists' organizations through interviews with activists. Remington
does an excellent job of documenting the frictions and contradictions that can emerge in these kinds of organizations. She discusses issues around power, victimization, the personal, solidarity and diversity, and organizational structure. She proposes that there was a Springtime period of feminism (Ridington proposes something similar: see Ridington, 1982, pp. 94-96). A Summertime and Fall period passed and now we are in the 'Winter' period of our activism. Feminism within organizational contexts has proven harder to implement than we ever imagined. Remington proposes that now in the 1990's women are more conflicted, more overwhelmed with other responsibilities, and since there are more 'issues' that different women prioritize it is more challenging to find a praxis in which all women in an organization can invest themselves equally and effectively. She adds to this a consideration about accountability:

...women's organizations were consciously created by women in order to do things by ourselves, in our own way. So although sexism is an external, limiting given, blaming it for our problems is not especially productive. Focusing 'out there' deflects attention away from where we need it and confuses blame with the responsibility for self-determination...women are responsible for women's organizations. We deserve credit for their successes and we are accountable for their failures (Remington, 1991, p. 4).

These patterns and a sense of a 'winter' wind blowing over our activities at WWINFEW seemed to emerge through WWINFEW
activists' description of their experiences and perceptions.

Remington concludes her work by emphasizing that the volunteer time and resources that were available for earlier manifestations of feminist ideals are simply no longer available. As paid staff and professionals inevitably fill the positions of volunteers then a modified hierarchy emerges. Many of these paid professional feminists and the volunteer old-timer leaders are challenged by those who would prefer a more egalitarian grass-roots approach. Some of these knowledgeable and dedicated leaders have left the movement exhausted, disenchanted and hurt because their knowledge is not validated or their sense of being entitled to play a leadership role is frowned upon. These patterns certainty played themselves out at WWINFEW.

Ristock (1990, 1991, 1996) offers us insights about Canadian women's organizations that are very important. She points to the rapid changes that women's organizations are finding themselves faced with. Most dramatic of these changes are the impositions that funders make on us. She places the source of tensions largely within the realm of funding. Ristock takes this position in contrast to Remington who seems to believe that we should hold ourselves accountable and not project the blame onto the wider society, funders, or government. My present position is that both of these forces
(external influences and internal ones) contributed dynamically to the interesting life and sad downfall of WWINFEW. Issues arose in response to funders' impositions and in response to women's inability to find their way through interpersonal dynamics that left racism, socioeconomic realities and inequalities, sexism, and other oppressions undiscussed and unresolved.

Another important topic that Ristock focuses on is that feminists do not come to and remain within the organization with the same depths of commitment, knowledge, or resources (1991, p. 52-53). Her writing suggests that within these organizations we are equal in our rights for self-determination and respect (among other things) but we are not equal in regards to what we are able to give to organizations and in regards to what we chose to give to organizations. We are not equal in our gifts, skills, resources, and energies before we come to the organization. We are often not equal while we are inside the organization. When we leave the organization at the end of the day or at the end of our patience we are not equal. As Ristock says ((1991, p. 46) this is a painful and hard thing to talk about or respond to in organizations were we dream of being equal but have not fully figured out how to live this way.

Moss Kanter (1972) made the point that organizations that
are trying to form collectives or cooperatives must have a large degree of homogeneity of identity pegs and commitment to survive and that it is quite difficult to achieve this because disruptive people or those who want to offer less of themselves (or who can only give less of themselves) are usually only subject to informal peer pressure and this, in itself, does not necessarily bring about change. She says, "The effectiveness of [the collective's work system] depends on the members' willingness to abide by it..." and she continues: "there was no effective way to counteract this situation [of having some activists who gave less than their fair share to the group] except by criticizing such people to their face since it is considered inappropriate to gossip; yet these same people were the ones least likely to attend the weekly, voluntary feedback meetings [where they could be invited to engage in discussions with team members about the consequences of their choices](p. 25)." At WWINFEW I am not sure that we ever evolved into an organization that knew how to effectively and fairly respond to activists who did not follow through on their commitments, were unkind to others on the team, or who took advantage of the informality of the organization. These inhibitions and confusions around equality/inequality of personal resources/abilities and equality/inequality of commitment remain in need of reflection
within feminist organizations.

Ristock, and others (Remington, 1991, Wolf, 1993) bring out the point that sometimes the role of oppressed victim or wounded woman is the least challenged inside the organization. So the woman who can emphasize her oppression and her victimization will be the most validated and the woman who has managed to become healthy, successful, fully actualized, and empowered may feel attacked or that she has to suppress her powers (1991, p. 49). I have witnessed WWINFEW women who frequently used tears and screaming as a manipulation technique to control the behaviour and decisions of others. This seemingly odd situation has emerged, of course, out of our sense of empathy and kindness for the vulnerable among us. The troublesome aspect, though, is that sometimes the women who are successful in the world, who have over-come troubles and challenges and/or who are from the mainstream are the very women with the resources (emotional, intellectual, material, etcetera) who are desperately needed to keep the organization functioning. Women who are in chaos and economically and emotionally depleted are often unable to commit to large amounts of volunteer activism or material contributions. Also, some women are tired of being thought of, or stereotyped as, just victims (Agnew, 1996, pp. 102-103) and women wanting to be thought of as "successful" may avoid activism with
organizations that emphasize a victim identity.

In regards to organizational realities Ristock seems to advocate that places like WWINFEW can be more effective and harmonious if they implement a caucus structure which then invites people with extensive knowledge and commitment to focus on concerns that they can best address and that these caucuses can bring that knowledge back to the consensus decision making bodies. She concludes her work by saying:

Collectives will continue as a viable organizational form if they are responsive to the needs of workers, the context of their work, and if they remain committed to an ever evolving feminist ideology. We need to reevaluate our ideas of collectives in the 1990's and ensure a politics of difference, a vision of heterogeneity, and practices and agendas for social change (Ristock, p. 181).

At WWINFEW, I think we gradually lessened our investment in the evaluation process of what the work was that we were doing and how we were doing this work. This eventually led to many of our troubles.

Vickers, Rankin and Appelle (1993) studied the National Action Committee On The Status of Women. This organization is, perhaps, the most influential women's group in Canada. Like the above described case studies this work suggests there are many different faces of feminism and women do not always find the time, the safety and the focus to work harmoniously through those differences. As one of Ristock's interviewees
said, "The theory is to work collectively, but there is little
time to develop this (1991, p. 47)." Vickers, Rankin and
Appelle also emphasize that preserving the memory of the
organization is important. There are many problems that an
organization discovers, assesses, faces and successfully or
unsuccessfully responds to. Without extensive documentation
and protection of these documents we lose our hard-won
insights and then repeat our mistakes over and over. WWINFEW,
despite being so young an organization, fell into this
pattern. We had too few resources and we tried to get on to
the next task and the next task without processing the things
already done and then saving the wisdom in permanent ways so
that future women could share in that wisdom.

Ng's (1988) work describes an organization that is unique
in regards to its ethnocultural minority perspective. It was
founded by ethnocultural minority women to help ethnocultural
minority women find meaningful employment. One of the most
memorable points that Ng makes is that the organization she
studied began with a variety of goals which were all loosely
related to enhancing employment opportunities and experiences
for ethnocultural minority women. When the organization was
initially created it had one type of focus which was
eventually substantively altered by outside influences
(employers, funders, other organizations).
Ng concludes her work on the point that the organization shifted to become focused on the needs of employers rather than on the needs of the women clients themselves. This eventual outcome emerged as a result of a subtle series of decisions in which different women participated differently. Over time the women activists' meanings for why they were there and what they were doing changed. Further, these insider activists were not always able to share their feelings and thoughts about how these changes were happening and about what meanings these changes had for each activist. The pattern Ng identified repeated itself at WWINFEW -- even though we began by reading Ng's book.

G. Walker (1990) writes about the women's shelter movement. She presents her analysis of the battered women's shelter movement with a disenchanted and disenchanting tone. Walker's work is important to this discussion in that she (very much like Ng) describes how the funding process, the documentation process, and the resulting 'professionalization' contributed to the deradicalization of the battered women's movement. Her discoveries were reproduced to some extent at WWINFEW. The more WWINFEW emphasized the needs of government support providers and the more we produced the documents they wanted from us the more we became disassociated from our original goals, our original selves and the needs of our

2. ETHNICITY AND RACISM RIVER

Marie [A First Nations activist with WINNFEW]: Now? Today? That word [Feminism] has meant a lot of different things to me. What it [Feminism] means now and what it meant five years ago are different. That word has evolved with my experience. 'Feminism' actually while I am doing a lot of work in reclaiming my [First Nations] culture is not a word that you can use. It is not part of the vocabulary anymore. You [within my culture] look at the world in terms of wholes and you can't discard the men in that process. You look at the men and the family and the community. So the value orientation has changed for me. It is not an individual's orientation anymore. Independence and equality; it's not about that anymore. It's more equality, freedom, peace, serenity for the community. The individual doesn't count. They count in terms of the work that they do. They are needed in the community, yes. But in terms of the work that they do. They are needed in the community, yes. But in terms of the ego or the personality, no, that's irrelevant.

Just as feminists are re-examining everything that has been assumed and taken-for-granted in every discipline so also
are people from every culture and ethnicity re-examining how they have been portrayed in non-authentic and damaging ways by the dominant cultures' texts. Since WWINFEW existed to assert the world views of ethnocultural minority women in a community where they are statistically overwhelmed by white Anglophone Canadian-born people and white Francophone Canadian-born people it is important to identify some of the literature on ethnicity and/or racism that is shaping my consciousness as I reflect on, and describe, WWINFEW.

Key theorists in this river of study that I refer to include Agnew (1996), Albrecht and Brewer (1990), Amott and Matthaei (1991), Bannerji (1993, 1995), Bissoondath (1994), Bulkin, Pratt and Smith (1984), Frankenburg (1993a, 1993b), hooks (1984, 1990, 1992, 1994), and Ng (1981, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1991). These authors identify how complex our ethnocultural identities are and how our ethnic identities are invisibly socially sculpted so that some people become advantaged while other people become disadvantaged. These authors effectively explicate for us how our ethnic identities have evolved almost imperceptibly through hundreds of years of both the dominant cultures' efforts to oppress and the minority cultures' efforts to resist. These oppressions and resistance efforts are dynamic and always in motion.

All of these identity pegs or 'ethnicity markers' (Jary
and Jary, 1991, p. 152) are relevant to how WWINFEW women experienced themselves as women and as organizational activists. Further, each woman's identity pegs (i.e. her sense of self as a 'woman', 'low-income', 'unemployed', 'immigrant', etcetera) existed in dynamic juxtaposition to other women's displays of their own identity pegs. These identity pegs were not static and solid. Instead they shifted and changed as a result of discussions, reading, presentations by speakers at WWINFEW, the availability of allies, and issues current in the media.

For example: when four women sat down to work on a project at WWINFEW if all four were mothers, heterosexual, married, in their thirties, and employed, then these common identity pegs would probably be noted and shared and focused on. If three of the women were First Nations and one was a white Anglo Canadian born 'Settler' this would have meaning and be noted. This ethnocultural 'identity peg' might be filtered through the other identity pegs. How does a First Nations woman do mothering compared to the Settler? How do First Nations women experience marriage compared to the Settler? If all four women had been mothers, heterosexual, married, in their thirties and employed and if all four were First Nations or if all four were Settlers the juxtaposition would not have existed to be made note of and made meaning of.
Another example: during the Oka protest the organizational dynamics shifted in that some Settlers became more conscious of their whiteness when they were attending protests and some of our Francophone activists became hesitant to come to WWINFEW because at least one of them felt more of a loyalty to the Quebec government than to the First Nations people protesting. Our ethnocultural heritage would be an identity peg given more saliency during this type of moment in WWINFEW's herstory.

There are many cross currents in this river of ethnicity and racism. Rachelle below describes what motivated her to become involved with WWINFEW:

Rachelle [An immigrant woman activist with WWINFEW]: Well [I became involved with WWINFEW] because I said, being an immigrant person myself, so I thought that it was a very good idea to create an organization that would help these minorities, immigrants and other visible minorities, to have a better chance at opportunities, at life, at jobs, at life I guess in general, and having been discriminated myself or having had a very difficult time in fulfilling my choice or my desires or my hopes, so I decided that maybe I'll have an input and perhaps something will come of it.

Later she also describes how her goals were not always fulfilled and how she encountered cross currents and conflicts. Even sorting out how we talk about these issues can be problematic and puzzling.

Ethnocultural minority people cannot accurately be reflected through some of the limiting language we commonly
use (Agnew, 1996, pp. 104-112). Fox-Genovese (1991) says, "No politics remains innocent of that which it contests (p. 17)". I would add that few of these words that we use remain innocent of those words we contest. The phrase 'Ethnocultural minority' (although I reproduce this problematic application of a term) is an awkward phrase because how a group of people experience themselves (and are experienced by others) is relative to their proportion of the population, how they came to be in that geographic area, what religious beliefs are held by the different sectors of the community, how long the different segments of the community have been in that geographic area and what kinds of opportunities are possible based on natural resources, just to cite a few of the relevant variables that shape people's experiences of themselves and others. Within an imagined group of people (i.e. among Blacks, women, First Nations people) there is always some degree of dispersion of views (i.e. all ethnocultural identity pegs being equal there still remains a huge array of opinions, personalities, philosophies, etcetera within the group of people who share ethnocultural identity pegs). Said differently, for example, among thirty-five year old white Anglophone second generation Scottish Canadian-born heterosexual able-bodied Northern Ontario working class women homogeneity of world-views does not exist. Therefore, it is
lazy thinking to assume that all 'immigrants', 'visible minorities', 'First Nations people', or women would have a homogeneous world view.

Recognizing this diversity within imagined or assumed similarity is vital. Problems often arose at WWINFEW because people (funders, helping professionals in other organizations, activists, etcetera) assumed that since one representative of a cultural group felt a certain way then all people from that group would feel that way. For example, a person might say: "I had a Black friend once and she was an angry person and that's why I believe all Black women are angry!" Proceeding with this type of thinking is ineffective and perpetuates stereotypes.

Agnew's 1996 book which examines the needs and experiences of women from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean and the women's movement in Canada is a rich and extensive discussion of some of the issues I have tried to address in my analysis of WWINFEW's struggles. In regards to the factors that motivated groups like WWINFEW to exist she says they were "dissatisfied with the politics of settlement organizations and of the women's movement" (p. 134) and she continues:

Minority organizations subordinated the specific interests of women to the collective rights of entire ethnic groups. The women's movement advocated change on behalf of all women but specifically addressed only the concerns of middle-class, white women. Minority women wanted groups that would address their concerns (p. 135).
Agnew adds that even within these organizations for ethnocultural minority women there are troubles sometimes around class issues (pp. 6-7, 135-136) and this was certainly true at WWINFEW.

3. THE RIVER OF SOCIOECONOMIC REALITIES

An enormous amount of literature has emerged that describes the meaning of class positioning for women (Allison, 1994; Bartky, 1990; Baxter, 1988; Burnett, 1989; Cameron, 1989; Rosen, 1987; Rubin, 1976). In Theodorson and Theodorson’s (1979) dictionary of sociology they define the “working class” as, “Loosely, the category of skilled and unskilled manual workers, sometimes extended to include low-paid clerical workers and other white collar workers... (p. 467). Many authors seem to use the terms “working class” and “low socioeconomic status” somewhat interchangeably.

Women’s experience of “class” or how women experience their “socioeconomic status” is complicated. I have chosen to talk more about “socioeconomic status” rather than “class” because the term “socioeconomic status” seems able to effectively describe the many diffuse and solid variables I am considering when I reflect on women’s empowerment or disempowerment in the world. Theodorson and Theodorson define “socioeconomic status” as being within “a system of social
stratification" and as a:

combination of various social and economic indexes of rank that are used in research studies. The term is often used to deal with stratification in a society without the need for the assumption that there are distinct social classes. Social characteristics (family background, education, values, prestige of occupation, etc.) and economic status (income) are combined into one SES rating (p.399).

Socioeconomic status then is a term which recognizes that a diversity of characteristics, attributes, and resources situate people to feel capable of getting (or not getting) their material, intellectual, and emotional needs met. The more purist Marxist way of talking about "class" looks at people's relationship to the means of production. Often these Marxist discussions around class are somewhat one dimensional in that they look only at occupational status and/or income. Within this Marxist paradigm people are thought to belong to the bourgeoisie or the proletariat and if people assign themselves to a category that Marxists would not assign them to then these people, according to the Marxist theory, are suffering from a "false consciousness" (Theodorson and Theodorson 1979, p.50). I am not positioning myself to state who was or was not suffering from "false consciousness" at WWINFEW. Instead, I am describing how they described themselves and how WWINFEW women felt their own disempowerment in the world as they expressed it to me.

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Women who had experienced, and/or were vulnerable to economic crisis, or in economic crisis constituted a large portion of WWINFEW’s staff, volunteers, and/or clients. A few WWINFEW volunteers had a cluster of socioeconomic privileges and as a result of these privileges they experienced guilt around their sense of empowerment and this may also have had meaning for how WWINFEW functioned as an organization. A few WWINFEW activists who had access to more socioeconomic privileges felt a strong sense that they should give back to the world because they had received so much.

My sense of how women experience themselves as empowered or disempowered does, of course consider where and how they get their material resources but there are other factors shaping women’s sense of entitlement and options. Some of the variables are: communication skills, health, physical attractiveness, religious affiliation, social networks, social skills, age, sexual orientation, kin networks, ideological affiliation, employment skills and experiences, self-esteem, and, of course, educational accomplishments and accreditations. How these variables came together during any given moment to shape each WWINFEW woman’s unique cluster of identity pegs shaped what her own sense of empowerment and efficacy would be.

Each variable or identity peg needs to be considered
against the backdrop that exists. For example, a devout Buddhist in the community of Coldtown may have only two or three people to share her faith with so "Buddhism" constitutes one identity peg she may associate with loneliness or being misunderstood by others. In contrast, a devout Catholic in Coldtown may have thirty or forty thousand people to share her faith with so for her the identity peg of "Catholic" means having companions, being understood, and being accepted.

One important aspect of women's empowerment or one important indicator of their "socioeconomic status" is educational accomplishment and credentialling. The variable of educational achievement does not always have clear meaning when people are talking about empowerment. What I encountered at WWINFEW in regards to women and the meaning of their educational backgrounds was that academic credentials could mean that a woman had accomplished financial independence, security, and confidence. On the other hand, credentials secured in other countries may not be recognized in Canada and thus her ability to access resources was diminished. Further, credentials in women's professions are not always well rewarded. Women with diplomas or degrees in early childhood education, social work, or health care, for example, may be poorly paid if employed or unemployed as a result of the present downsizing of social services. Women may be well
credentialed and work long hard hours and still be unable to pay their rent or raise their children in comfort if these women are solo parents and positioned to pay a large portion of their weekly wages to childcare expenses.

Another dimension of conversations about class that I have found problematic is that of transition and evolution throughout the life cycle (sometimes class positioning is portrayed as a static and frozen identity peg from birth to death). Many of WWINFEW’s women were connected to a class position in relationship to a man or a clan and then as the men in their lives changed so did their class position (i.e. many women are one man away from welfare).

A woman’s sense of how she is socioeconomically located is a complicated concept to pin down because a woman’s access to status and resources can change during the life cycle. For example, some of WWINFEW’s women may have thought of themselves as very high up on the social ladder in their birth country (one interviewee showed me a picture in her living room and told me that it was a picture of her relatives sitting with the Queen of England) but some WWINFEW women had experienced a dramatic decline in their material and social well-being when they arrived in Canada/Northern Ontario.

Social status positioning has more dimensions to it than just the material resources that a person has access to. For
instance, some women had a higher status in their birth country due to religious affiliations that had meaning (Brahmin class for example) or a well-known family name that inspired respect, but these status symbols mean little or nothing to the people they encounter in Northern Ontario (i.e. most people in Coldtown have no idea what 'Brahmin class' means and would be unfamiliar with famous family names from cities in India or Iran).

On the other hand, some women had minuscule material resources and status symbols in their birth country and have experienced a wonderful expansion of their options here in Canada. This is particularly true with some of WWINFEW’s women who had married a Canadian-born white male and who had come from socioeconomically oppressed families and places like Mexico, Peru or Vietnam. Earlier in their lives some of these women had been ’social status imprinted' with poverty, crowded living conditions, minimal access to health care and

'I like to use “imprinted” in these discussions because I believe that the socioeconomic “profile” of our birth family often is the template we compare ourselves to in later life. If, for example, we grew up in a home of low social status, low income, crowded housing conditions, minimal access to educational opportunities and, as adults we have professional status, a huge income, and a large home we are likely to feel good about ourselves and our location in life. People usually want to have at least the same if not more resources and opportunities then they had in their first family. We make meaning and subjectively locate ourselves in a socioeconomic structure largely in comparison to what others have but also in comparison to what we have had at other times in our lives.

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minimal educational opportunities. In Coldtown, as a consequence of their marriage (and becoming Canadians), they were able to fulfill more of their dreams. Most of these men had been in other countries as employed professionals. The men had professional status (and their white Canadian-born privileges) and this status they brought with them to Coldtown. Their wives shared in some of the status privileges of these marriages (there are also potential shadow sides to what might be defined as cross-class cross-cultural marriages but that is another discussion for another time).

Socioeconomic status had often changed dramatically for women as a consequence of chaos. War in their birth countries meant that some WINFEW women became refugees and left their countries with just the clothes on their backs. Further, some also lost recognition when they came to Canada for their educational and professional credentials (i.e. a doctor in her birth country married to a lawyer from her birth country but both unable to speak English might end up working as 'unskilled' service sector workers). In these situations the women may feel very resentful and bitter about their life circumstances because they did not actively chose to come to Canada -- war and social upheaval forced them to leave their homes. These patterns regarding the potential meaning of economic vulnerability and disempowerment for immigrant women
have been well documented elsewhere (Das Gupta, 1986; Galway, 1991; Immigrant Women Of Saskatchewan, 1985).

I define "socioeconomic empowerment" as a process and location through which a person has access to resources. "Resources" includes money, power with/over others and self, education, meaningful engagement with the world, and I believe that our sense of "socioeconomic empowerment" changes for many people during the life cycle. In our western world money usually is the primary indicator of socioeconomic status but its not the only indicator of socioeconomic status.

While listening to WWINFEW women's stories of interacting with each other and with WWINFEW as an organization I found many subtle examples of socioeconomic status imprinting and conflicts having meaning in day-to-day life --even within the organization of WWINFEW. For example, Cadeja, a staff member from WWINFEW articulates and alludes to the intersections between socioeconomic status, race, and organizational dynamics. Cadeja is describing how a Board member of a higher socioeconomic status assigned tasks that "belonged" to a women of a lower socioeconomic status (typing, office cleaning, photocopying, making coffee, babysitting). The women from the alleged lower socioeconomic status also belonged to another cultural group whom the Board member had negative feelings toward:
Cadeja [a lower socioeconomic status, physically challenged white woman activist with WWINFEW]: My saddest moment was when I was leaving. Not in the process of leaving. The sadness of it all. The racist remarks that I heard, that was puzzling and it made me unhappy with the organization. [Hearing] Talk about changing our mission statement which would exclude the group being slurred. We had a placement from a college, an older educated woman [who was from the slurred group] and she was a professional. She was being treated like [long description of entry level secretarial tasks like photocopying]. This woman wanted some kind of education [through her placement] something challenging that she didn't receive.

Cadeja continues describing how this ethnocultural minority woman student was oppressed by a board member who, according to Cadeja, was a racist and had a sense of contempt for women of a lower socioeconomic status. The racism and socioeconomic status oppression was manifested through the regular assignment of menial drudgery to only this specific staff member.

Si: So let me be clear that I understand? WWINFEW welcomed in a woman [from this slurred group] on an internship? [Cadeja nods to the affirmative].

Si: So when you say 'project' you mean something meaningful?

Cadeja: Yes, [the intern wanted] something [a work project] that applied to her [the intern's] education and her needs. Something that at the end she could say 'this was something'. Instead when she left she said 'this organization sucks'. I tried to make it as interesting as I could and I told her 'don't do it [these menial tasks], don't do that! Why should you demean yourself, and put yourself through a low-level secretarial task?'
Si: The meaning of that exercise was? A low level secretarial task?

Cadeja: The meaning was nothing! It wasn't even that high, [gestures with her hand showing near the floor] a secretarial task. It was more like a goffer task. That was a really sad moment (during my time with WWINFEW).

Here, and elsewhere in her interview, Cadeja is describing how she perceived one ethnocultural minority woman of a more secure and empowered socioeconomic status abusing her power as a board member because of her racism toward another ethnocultural minority woman who was from a location of less socioeconomic status and who was a relatively powerless intern.

Few things were simple at WWINFEW. Each woman may have felt empowered through some of her identity pegs but disempowered through some of her other identity pegs. Not all of our identities emerge through our access to material well-being and not all of who we are emerges through our racial heritage. Each person is a unique cluster of strengths and weaknesses in transition. This has meaning to how organizations recognize their participants, their clients, and those individuals who interact with our organizations. This also has meaning in regards to how we advocate for social change and for how we identify potential allies to our causes.
4. THE ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT RIVER

Over the past decade I have vigorously explored what organizational management theory might have to offer to help me understand what was happening in feminist organizations. While reflecting on the lived and grounded realities of feminist, anti-racist grassroots organizations, I have been referring to theory produced by contemporary business owners and managers (Brown, 1989; Ivancevitch and Matteson; Kiam, 1989; Lewis, 1990; MacKay, 1989; Peters, 1987) and/or produced by organizational administrators (Adie and Thomas, 1987; Goodsell, 1989; Gronbjerg, 1992; Hasenfeld, 1992; Jackson, 1989; Leong, 1992; Lindenfeld and Rothschild-Whitt, 1982; Mannix, 1993; O'Connell, 1989; Rapin, 1992; Rubin, 1993; Snow, 1993; Tucker, Baum and Signh, 1992; Waddoc and Post, 1991; Yeheskel and Hasenfeld, 1992). The amount of material available is enormous and could be categorized under a variety of labels. I have grouped material under the category of 'organizational management' when other labels might also be possible for some of these authors (such as the labels of: 'administration theory', 'organizational behaviour theory'). Here I only intend to offer a brief comment on how this material has meaning directly and indirectly for places like WWINFEW.

As part of my exploration of information on managing
organizations, I almost completed a Public Administration Certificate which included classes labelled: 'Micro Economics, Macro Economics, Organizational Behaviour, Organizational Management, and, Public Administration'. Additionally, I completed a certificate in Small Business Management in a program created by the Federal Business Development Bank. I selected the above authors because they contain deeply entrenched ideas and because they were used as texts or referred to in the courses that I completed. These organizational management authors demonstrate some consistency in their beliefs, values and assumptions.

It has been said that, "knowledge is power not just in the sense that knowledge enables people to acquire power, but also in the sense that those in power determine what is to count as knowledge" (Agnew, 1996, p.94). There is a story I heard somewhere a long time ago and I can not remember where, nor can I remember all of the details of the story but the story explores knowledge creation and the significance of question formation. What questions are asked and why and what seeds are contained within the questions seems enormously important to me in this discussion of organizations.

The story is (as I remember it) about four blind men who are each touching only a tiny part of an elephant. Each one of the four men describe the creature as being a different
animal. For example, one says the animal must be a rhinoceros because the skin is so rough. The other, while touching only a tip of an ear says it must be a large bat. While thinking of this story I ask myself how the story would tell itself if our characters were four feminist women? What would be different? It seems that a retelling of this story might include the feminist women asking different questions of the situation, of each other and of the audience.

The men (if the story were expanded and told by authors from an organizational management perspective) might be asking 'What can this animal be used for?', 'What price can I get for such an animal?', 'Who would be prepared to pay for this animal?', 'How can I personally exclude these other three potential exploiters of this animal from any deals I might make?', 'How can I construct a contract which will protect my own best proprietary rights over this animal and against the best interests of these other three potential competitors?'. Notably, the men would not necessarily talk to each other and openly discuss their absence of knowledge and their plans for expropriation and control. Or would they? What would be different about the men and their questions?

The story could be told very differently. Our four feminist women, if similarly situated to the four men above, might ask questions like 'Who are these other three women?',

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'Do they like me?', 'How do they feel about being here touching this animal?', 'How does the animal feel about being surrounded by four women touching her?', 'Is this animal hungry and what would she like to eat?', 'Is this animal here all by herself with no others of her kind?' Women, notably, would not ask 'What can I do to make this animal and these other three women respond to my own needs and my own priorities?' Or would they? How would the women be different?

My point in bringing this story forward here is that by asking dramatically different questions, of course, dramatically different answers emerge. As explained in the earlier section on feminist research the initially set perimeters of discussion construct what is even possible to imagine. Organizational behaviour and management research and literature seem to be like this in regards to women-centered organizations. This body of research and literature (regarding organizational management) emerged in response to employers and owners wanting to maximize their profits, control their product and control their employees. Women's organizations originally emerged in response to victims' pleas for help, a validation of women's pain, and many other reasons which had nothing to do with profits, product or the control of workers. Our reasons for existing are distinctive and so is our organizational culture (Galey, Gillies, Gurr, and Minnie,
It is vital to also remember that women's organizations in a Canadian context are almost always funded, at least in part, by the federal, provincial and/or municipal government. These government representatives (often called 'project officers') have been trained in these traditional streams of thought about organizations. When they meet with feminists seeking funds for their woman-centered organizations, the project officers frequently have an academic background in public administration or business. They learn about organizational management and we learn about responding to vulnerable women's needs.

Project officers have a world-view rooted within very different soil from the soil the feminists they 'administer' are rooted within. 'Taylorism', for example, might be thought of as the father of all organizational and behaviour management thought (Robey, 1986, pp. 154-155; White and Bednar, 1986, pp. 7-8). Taylor was the first to consciously, meticulously, and some might say ruthlessly, break the labor process down into its smallest potential components. Each job description was assessed to identify how minute by minute the employee's body could be defined as one of many instruments of production. The primary goal was then to quantify and document the profit-oriented results of that instrument of production.
Taylor was the father of time-management and a variety of other control mechanisms that included not only the physical components of the 'worker unit' but the psychological components of the 'worker unit'.

These ideas from mainstream organizational management theory are important. Below Sarah, an ethnocultural minority activist with WWINFEW, gives one example of the impact of organizational management approaches in a place like WWINFEW:

I think that they [the funders] impose a structure on organizations and necessarily so in terms of accountability and all that but I think they [also] impose a structure of organization of hierarchy which is inappropriate to the goals of these organizations and certainly is inappropriate to the goals of that organization [WWINFEW]. But, I found that also true in [names another women's group she was involved in]. I remember years ago I fought against applying for 'status' as an organization [referring to legal incorporation] and setting us up as a board and giving us the hierarchy of a board.

Sarah emphasizes how goals change once mainstream organizational theory comes into a group's practice:

Yes. I fought against people doing that [organizing into a formal government sanctioned pyramid] in another place. The minute you do that you are setting up a hierarchy; a board which supervises a staff and is legally responsible for them. You can apply for funding and then the funding you apply for structures and creates more forms of authority and hierarchy and then it limits you even more. It is like these mounds of paper just fall down on you and you lose your [original] focus, [you loose] your central goal.

In later sections of this thesis it will be shown how these
ideas shaped how WWINFEW women experienced the organization. As will be demonstrated, WWINFEW women probably were not always conscious of how they had absorbed some mainstream organizational ideas. Neither were WWINFEW women always conscious of how funding realities positioned WWINFEW women to be in active resistance to these mainstream corporate-centred ideas. Neither were they conscious that they were attempting to apply ideas from a dramatically different context (government/business) within the terrain of WWINFEW (feminist/grassroots/anti-racist).

Within our organization we experienced many cross-cultural currents and rocky shorelines. Note how Nancy describes these issues:

Nancy: ...WWINFEW is a great organization if it could work to its full [professional and organizational] capability. If there was a way to keep the turn-over of women low. And keep some of the women as pillars, because that's what they were [pillars], and because of lack of funding we could not keep them on. Also, every time there was a turn over [of staff or volunteers] there was still a large measure of having to teach, reteach the job to each new woman. There was a large time consumption just learning the job. Also, for example, both summers that I was there someone redid [reorganized and relabelled] the library that's because the people from the second summer didn't know what the people from the first summer did and they wanted to know. I was the only person there who knew what was going on [because she had been there for the longest period]...like the file cabinets. The first summer I did them and then we had a different coordinator the second summer and she wanted them redone so that you knew them. We already knew what was in there and yet the new coordinator didn't so we redid them.
Obviously, in Nancy's opinion, there were many ways the organization could have benefitted from some more formalized processes and procedures. Some of this business management or administration information is useful if we creatively adapt it and apply it to our own needs from our own authentic standpoint. Some business management or non-profit administration ideas do help us to organize and monitor ourselves. If we fully understood these traditional management concepts and practices it might help us understand how the oppressors are manipulating us. Although their ideas are often disharmonious with our own world-views and activities their ideas are important for us to understand because we are increasingly forced to interact with these paradigms. For example, here is an insight offered to us from an administration text:

The 'third-party' government structure allows public agencies to externalize their problems onto the nonprofit sector [such as feminist anti-racist grassroots organizations], including fiscal shortfalls, staff turnover, limited career mobility, and visible responsibility for the (often inadequate) delivery of mandated public services. Nonprofit organizations that rely heavily on government grants and contracts risk becoming part of an 'organizational sink' in which government submerges its problems (Gronbjerg, 1992, p. 95).

WWINFEW could certainly be considered an 'organizational sink'. When Coldtown's ethnocultural minority women did not have their needs met they might blame WWINFEW activists for
being inadequate or ill-prepared rather than blame the federal or provincial government for not fulfilling its responsibilities or promises to its citizens. WWINFEW activists themselves often blamed each other for the organization's weaknesses and many of these weaknesses were entirely a consequence of inadequate funding.

Much of this management information is relevant to a place like WWINFEW because WWINFEW's funders have been bathed uncritically in this river of knowledge. Not only are funders (and some professionals from intersecting agencies) soaked in this river they were often insistent on submerging WWINFEW insiders within this cool and murky river. With restructuring and more government restraints continuously being announced (Brodie, 1995; Maguire, 1996) what Ng and Campbell articulated in 1988 is even more relevant and powerful today.

Corporate management found its way into the non-profit sector in Canada in the 1960's, as governments began to use advice from the private sector for reorganizing government decision-making structures. Publicly funded agencies and institutions began to implement the same rules and procedures as the state bureaux to whom they are accountable. The Ontario Ministry of Health began to offer management consulting services to hospitals, for instance, and many hospitals began, during the 1970's to institute 'responsible budgeting' in new cost centres under a corporate structure of management. Bringing the management practices and organizational structures of voluntary agencies and public institutions 'up to date' continues apace, encouraged and enabled by grants from governments who are responsible for mandated services provided through these agencies (1988, p. 42).
Below is an example of how seductive administrative information can be. This example also illustrates how this material is subtly laced through with racist, sexist, and other false and oppressive assumptions. Note the word "pluralistic" in the first sentence of this quote:

...because ours is a pluralistic society, public values and views about the roles and work of human service organizations often are ambiguous and changing. Moreover, external groups often place competing or conflicting demands on service organizations. As a result, human service organizations [and we could conceptualize WWINFEW and other feminist anti-racist organizations as 'human service organizations'] face turbulent and hostile environments. Assessments of effectiveness are not only difficult to conduct in such environments, but they also tend to have short life spans because the criteria of effectiveness shift rapidly (D'Aunno, 1992, p. 343).

The choice of the word 'pluralistic' assumes certain things. The above quote assumes the existence of a 'pluralistic' and equal rather than racist, sexist, socially stratified society -- 'pluralistic' makes invisible that in a place like Coldtown almost all the people making decisions are white Anglophone or Francophone Canadian-born males (i.e. 'pluralistic society' did not often include WWINFEW women as even a voice in the crowd). Note how Marie, a First Nations woman, describes going to interagency and resource distribution meetings where almost everyone there (if not in fact everyone) was white Anglophone/Francophone Canadian-born:
We often used the expression of 'hitting the ground running, go go go!' And walking into a committee meeting and not knowing the political environment of these people who had been there working for ... years together. Everybody knows their little cliques [and their organization's turf, etcetera] and what they are doing and what every other organization is supposed to say and where they all come in. I just walked in there cold and I was touching all the sensitive parts of the community that you didn't really know about but, in terms of, was it demanding. You were advocating [for ethnocultural minority women]. Sometimes you were going into some very politically charged things in the community. And then you wouldn't realize until you had done it. Realizing that something was wrong but not realizing what you had done. That's what I mean by mistakes.

Earlier in the discussion (above Maria's comments), the quote from D'Aunno does not problematize 'plurist'. Maria would problematize the assumption of equal pluralism. The authors below would problematize D'Aunno's implicit assumption that all human service organizations are seemingly equal players in a just multi player-field. Human service organizations for ethnocultural minority women and staffed by ethnocultural minority women are not necessarily equal players in this field of rugged terrain.

The Canadian state does not relate to all people(s) equally, and as far as it relates to women at all, it tends to treat Native, South Asian, Black, Chinese and other non-white groups of women as quantitatively aberrant and qualitatively homogeneous. In this scenario, the reality is often an implicit hierarchical structuring of women; the placing of all these groups of women together, on the pretext of attempting to deal with their shared experiences of oppression, does nothing to negate the importance of that fact. Our goal here is not to deconstruct the term 'visible minority,' but suffice
to say that the term is void of any race or class recognition and, more importantly, of any class struggle or struggle against racism. It is therefore ahistorical and serves to reduce to meaninglessness the specific parts it purports to elevate (Carty and Brand, 1993, p. 169).

D'Aunno's is the type of oppressive yet largely taken-for-granted assumption I have been trying to identify and explicate through out my work for/with WINFEW. These implicit assumptions are often difficult to identify, explicate, and respond to.

Mainstream organizational theory usually answers questions that feminist anti-racist grassroots organizational insiders are not asking. There are different questions, different assumptions and different myths being operationalized in these different rivers of knowledge. Mills and Simmons (1995) critique classical organizational theory and substitute what might be defined as a symbolic interactionist analysis. Mills and Simmons (1995, pp. 200-201) discuss how a great deal of classical organizational theory assumes individuals rationally analyse, understand and respond to the profit-motive/ personal-gain-motive when they interact with each other in an organizational context. Organizational theorists frequently promote the idea that people consistently calculate what is in their private and best individualist interests (Adie and Thomas, 1987; Ivancevitch and Matteson,
Much of business management or administration theory has either shown itself to be irrelevant or so peripheral and obscure in its relevance to an organization like W WINFEW that the exhaustive work of stretching to make it match my ten years of feminist organizational life-experiences was not worth the intellectual aerobics. My experiences in feminist anti-racist organizations suggests that many women are not fully focused on their long-term material gains and/or they define their worth and meaning in the world more broadly than just through material gains (i.e. their time spent mothering or caring for elders is more meaningful to them and more of a priority than their time working to maximize their individual material gain).

I have now described harmonious and disharmonious currents of information from the feminist river, from the anti-racist river and from the organizational theory river. In the above descriptions I have also brought forward some insights from a symbolic interactionist perspective but below I will deepen that description. Before deepening my discussion of symbolic interactionism’s relevance to WWINFEW I will discuss the theoretical relevance of the knowledge gained from, and the practical problematics created by, the diffuse discipline of social work/voluntarism/self-help.
5. THE RIVER OF SOCIAL WORK/VOLUNTARISM/SELF HELP

Bonita [a First Nations low economic status woman]: Sometimes...we all have control over our time and all, where we spend our time and waste time, but um, what I want to say is: Like I want to establish my home [her husband's unemployed and she has two small children] and get myself settled and then I could be able to spend some of my time elsewhere. Because...before...I was just volunteered out. So I think for me that I forget what they call it, a burn out? You know you get burnt out and you tend to just to set yourself off from everything...Yeah. That's happened to me a few times too. Like I go out to meetings with WWINFEW and then I have to, my dishes are not done. The same thing ay. Like last night too I was working late too finishing up my laundry and cleaning up. And then you wake up to go to work again.

Social work is a 'discipline' with a mixed heritage of knowledge, values and practices. We are now examining our role in the elimination or perpetuation of racism (James, 1996; Absolon and Herbert, 1997; Desantis, 1990; Galway, 1990). We are also examining our role in the elimination or perpetuation of sexism (Brinker-Jenkins, Hooyman and Gottlieb, 1991; Callahan, 1997; Hanmer and Statham, 1989; Levine, 1989; Van Den Bergh and Cooper, 1986). A concrete example of how we have more progress to make as a discipline can be seen in that in 1994 when I went through the examination process to become a certified social worker the application form listed a variety of specialty areas for social workers that their exams could be centered around (i.e. children, the family, substance abuse, seniors). My specialty areas of "Women" and "Anti-
Racism" were not listed anywhere on the forms. When I phoned to inquire about this I was told that I could write these practice areas on the last line under "Other".

On the one hand the profession of social work has been accused of participating in the process of co-optation and social control of vulnerable populations (De Montigny, 1995; Wills, 1995) on the other hand it has a fringe element among its members who could be thought of as participating in resistance, revolution, and reform (Alinsky, 1972; Agnew, 1996, pp. 45-46; Callahan, 1997). The questions often have to be asked: who do we define as a social worker; what do we define as control; and what do we define as reform?

Mainstream social service agencies have frequently shown themselves to be resistant to changing in ways that would satisfy ethnocultural minorities' needs (Agnew, 1996, pp. 135-162; Albrecht and Brewer, 1990; Brown and Root, 1990; DeSantis, 1990; Galey, Gillies, Gurr and Mennie, 1996; pp. 8-11). Social work has been a discipline which promoted voluntarism and self-help among oppressed groups (Weil, 1986, p. 188). Although voluntarism has carved out some forms of empowerment for some women (McCarthy, 1990; Ridington, 1982, p.102) some feminists are challenging why women's caring work should be done for free (Callahan, 1997, pp 195-197; McCormick in Kramarae and Treichler, 1985, p. 475).
Since social work as a discipline was accidently responsible for my connecting with the women's movement (I have six years of training as a social worker and have earned my living largely from my social worker "ticket") it plays an important role in my own intellectual development regarding feminism and organizations. Social work as a discipline has also played an important role in many feminist organizations' development (Agnew, 1996, p. 72; Galey, Gillies, Gurr, and Mennie, 1996; G. Walker, 1990; Weeks, 1994; Weil, 1996).

WINFEW's development was also shaped by the input of social weaknesses: at least eight of the whole group of activists were social workers. The manner through which agencies and self-help groups evolve out of community organizing efforts and their key activists' personalities, of course, shapes the final character of the organization.

Social work has some "sub-disciplines" embedded within it such as "volunteer management", "self-help organizing" or "community organizing". Each of these subdisciplines is very relevant to the development of women's organizations for a variety of reasons. One reason is that feminist organizations are intrinsically "self help" groups for women. Secondly, feminist organizations have the goal of going beyond just raising women's consciousness. Feminist organizations almost always have the goal of changing the wider community so that
women will be safer, more fulfilled, respected, empowered, etcetera. Therefore, feminist organizations are ipso facto interested in "community organizing".

Feminists want communities to be more organized according to women’s needs and priorities. Usually, feminist organizations are run by women who are not paid to be there. Most feminist organizations have one or a few staff but they are profoundly energized by "volunteers" who need to be "managed". Therefore, although most feminists inside feminist organizations, in my observation, have not immersed themselves within the well developed bodies of knowledge created under the categories of "self help", "community organizing" or "volunteer management" they are living the experiences of these bodies of knowledge without consciously being aware of these common factors. Further, some feminist organizational insiders may actively reject these labels because they feel these labels are associated with the professionalization of feminism or because they feel there is a power imbalance created through these conceptualizations of human interaction. For example, many feminist organizational insiders are uncomfortable with the idea of their "volunteers" being "managed".

Community organizing as a body of literature has some positive dimensions to offer to the work we are trying to do
inside women's organizations. The first, I might suggest is that we recognize that we, as feminist activists, do not have to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The second is to think vigorously and analyse our own practice so that we do not repeat each other's mistakes. In the next section I discuss how some aspects of traditional or classic community organization theory might be problematic when attempting to create an organization like WWINFEW.

Rocky shorelines and cross currents in the river of social work/voluntarism/self-help were seen by Marie and others inside WWINFEW:

Marie: I saw this organization [WWINFEW] as trying to do so much. Sometimes it was too much in terms of what its mandate was. It wanted to do research. It wanted to do direct counselling and working directly with clients. It wanted to also, hopefully, change policy in terms of women's needs, from these different ethnocultural backgrounds. And rural [issues]. So the mandate was so broad...In terms of women's lives. Everybody always tried to put this organization into a little sort of pigeon hole. [People would say] 'What services are you providing? Are you doing computer training for ethnocultural minority women? [Making hand gestures suggesting categories or rows]' That's not what the organization was about at all! Most of the work that we did was not obvious at all in terms of outcome; like that you pumped women out at the end. A lot of the work was committee work. Where you are informing [people]. Raising the consciousness of the community.

Marie seems to be suggesting that too many things were expected of volunteers and people trying to help themselves.
Some texts suggest that organizations position their volunteers and organizers to do things that seem, based on my experiences with WWINFEW, to be undoable.

Sherry and Lipschultz (1984, p. 222) provide an outline of what steps should be followed during community organizing. They also offer an interesting discussion of how the process should go and of how we should focus our energies as organizers. The book their steps are published in was used as a social work classic during my education: Tactics And Techniques Of Community Practice (Cox, Erlick, Rothman, and Tropman 1985). There are many other social work community organization texts that follow their assumptions, style and/or suggestions. I will propose that Sherry and Lipschultz's 'ideal type' steps may work when certain challenges are faced but if a group of women are attempting to form a feminist anti-racist/multicultural self-help organization in Northern Ontario there are many irrelevant ideas or contradictory ideas that this 'ideal type' presents. I am not proposing that the work of WWINFEW, or the ideas in this text, sort out or smooth over all of these problems. Instead, what I am proposing is that the work of trying to harmonize the interests and efforts of immigrant, First Nations and visible minority women in Northern Ontario is a path for only the bravest and most patient. It is somewhat
undoable although some people have tried to do it well.

In an attempt to make more visible the potential problems of using mainstream social work and community organization guidelines to achieve radical change on these new terrains I am going to discuss some specific pragmatic examples. These techniques and the problematics of appropriately applying them in a place like WWINFEW will be discussed again in later chapters as the WWINFEW activists themselves speak about their experiences. I have presented just enough data in this section to make clear the existence of a huge array of complex intersections and limitations (or troubled waters if we continue with our metaphor of rivers). I make no claim in this thesis to having resolved these troubles -- that may be a project for other people. I believe a useful contribution is still being made by identifying troubles and new questions.

Sherry and Lipshultz’s first recommendation is that activists set firm priorities. They state:

Action #1: Focus on a specific event that will invite active and/or passive participation of the target community groups (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p. 211).

How do you select only one specific event? A feminist way of approaching issues is to assume that there can be multiple priorities simultaneously existing. For example, feminists refuse to decide if rape is more important than wife-
battering. In the context of WWINFEW we were initially trying to not give primacy to one oppression. Also, feminists have come to realize that only by working in combination on these issues do we understand their foundational underpinnings (unequal access to resources and privileges, male desire for power and control, etcetera).

Action #2: Extend outreach efforts to the greatest number of individuals within the target groups to increase the base of eventual activists (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p.212).

How can these efforts continually be expanded when there are so few activists? With low socioeconomic status ethnocultural minority women (the core activists at WWINFEW) there were simply too few hours and resources to go around. Who is to do the outreach? Often the splits, diverse ideologies, past conflicts and competition for resources are impossible to surmount and women are not able to come together and experience themselves as 'a target group'. Only "Bountiful White Ladies" (McCarthy, 1990) have leisure time and resources that they can casually give away.

Action #3: Find key leaders (formal and informal) within each target group who will actively support the program and promote participation by their group (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p.213).

How do you identify the formal and informal leaders in such tiny ethnocultural women's communities? Many times these women hardly leave their home or if they leave they are so
over-extended that you almost offend them by asking them to take on one more volunteer project or activity. Also, "leaders" are sometimes thought to be antithetical to a feminist egalitarian approach. Sometimes the people who are "leaders" are the ones who are the most assimilated into the dominant culture/s and not the people who are the most "authentic" representatives of their oppressed ethnocultural minority group. Sometimes 'leaders' are the most ambitious, most educated, most career oriented (i.e. in contrast to the women who are extremely family oriented) and, therefore, these leaders use places like WWINFEW as stepping stones to where they really want to go (assimilation into the mainstream and upward mobility -- just as many women from many places want).

Action #4: Activate involvement of different constituency groups by appealing to their particular vested interests (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p.213).

The vested interests of some ethnocultural groups have been cultivated by the funding and resource distributors. The groups who are receiving from Citizenship and Culture, United Way, Canada Employment, Secretary of State, etcetera do not want to encourage others to rise up into more assertive identities because there will then be that much more competition for resources. As can be seen throughout WWINFEW women's discussions, government, through short term grants and
project oriented financing, has often divided and conquered and obscured long term vested interests and instead people have been attending to immediate vested interests.

Action #5: Identify and relate to participants as representatives of their constituency rather than as autonomous individuals. Instill a sense of accountability to their group (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p. 214.

With what validity can outsiders encourage women that they are the 'true' voice for their group? Feminist principles of each woman having a voice and a sovereign right to express her feelings, thoughts and needs sometimes come into conflict with the idea of 'appointing' or 'grooming' one woman to speak for her community. Another potential problematic in action #5 is that as Baines, Evans and Neysmith (1991) explain, some woman already feel too much accountability for their group and they are caring for kin and neighbours through less formalized methods (caring for an elderly relative, baby-sitting, baking, doing housekeeping, etcetera). They are "accountable" but they define it differently. For example, "accountable" to some woman may mean NOT talking about the shadow side of their community (for example a South Asian woman who feels powerfully accountable to her community may not be prepared to discuss wife assault as a frequent happening in her community).

Action #6: Stress the commonality of concerns among
diverse groups to build solidarity and emphasize the potential of collective action (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p. 215).

Certainly, this was the original intent at WWINFEW. This was a theme into which enormous energy was invested. This theme might be said to be the skeleton on which all else within the organization grew and moved. Unfortunately, what I often observed was that women could agree on vague commonalities 'women are oppressed' but then discussion and action in regards to concrete specifics brought about splinters groups or factions (for example: women who wanted minimum wages increased because they worked for minimum wages were immediately in conflict with women who owned small businesses or who hired home-help and who resented paying such 'high' minimum wages). Another example can be found in that we all agreed we wanted violence against women to stop but there was disagreement regarding which types were more prevalent; which agencies should do what; which communities should be focused on first, etcetera.

Action #7: Underscore inequities in the system to impact participants on an emotional level. Concurrently direct participants to immediate outlets for action (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p. 216).

An interesting reaction that might accidently occur when individual activists invest their energy in intensifying emotional reactions and heightening people's sense of
inequalities is that people may turn upon each other. When I began conducting my interviews with WWINFEW participants they made many comments about "paranoia" among activists about each other's motives and feelings and intents. Individuals may become hypersensitive about the use of language, political correctness, the meanings of eye contact, the 'hidden' meaning around who goes to lunch with whom, etcetera. Many WWINFEW women were emotionally exhausted and were repelled by events that were too emotional. Sometimes evoking strong emotions among WWINFEW women was counter-productive.

What immediate outlets for action were available? Protests and rallies do not occur as frequently, as easily, with any anonymity, and with the same type of consequence in small towns as in urban centres. Partially because decisions are made far away and local government representatives and funders are not able to overturn decisions or to respond immediately to local people. Local options and realities are restricted. Our options for action were limited and often it was impossible to arrive at consensus regarding what actions we wanted to take. Our immediate outlets for effective and purposeful action were too few.

Action #8: Involve participants in events that will provide them with tangible rewards and outcomes which are likely to be successful (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p. 217).

Tangible rewards were very much sought after by women who had
their access to resources blocked. Grant proposals (the creation of jobs, honorariums, etcetera) served this purpose (of rewarding) as did discussion evenings at WWINFEW. The grant proposal 'events' were not immediate but they were tangible and women certainly felt good when they had brought thousands of dollars into an organization or when they received an employment opportunity or a paid learning opportunity. Here are some examples of how WWINFEW did make the tangible rewards appear in some WWINFEW women's lives:

Joy: I remember when I was told I got the job. When I first got that phone call! I wasn't yet involved [as a volunteer]. I was just coming in. Being told I did have the job I was very pleased with that.

An unfortunate possibility presented itself here. Some women became attentive to these short-term rewards rather than their long-term original vision (i.e. they became co-opted).

Action #9: Implement the organizing efforts considering a form and style with which the target community can identify (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p. 218).

Which community? The 'leaders' might have high education levels and feel comfortable with a great deal of written material. The 'client' community may not have time or interest in lengthy discussions or information sharing. With an organization like WWINFEW there often seemed to be too many communities or interest groups being reached out to
simultaneously (i.e. ethno-specific, low income people, women, religious minorities, helping professionals, etcetera).

Action #10: Provide substantive information in a manner that is comprehensible, relevant, and usable by the community advocate (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p.218).

Who do we define as 'the community advocate'? Who do we expect to create, produce, distribute and access this information? Where are all of these volunteers to come from? The creation of 'substantive information' such as pamphlets, flyers, newsletters, readers, etcetera in different languages and on multiple topics is an enormous project requiring advanced language, research, and communications skills. These resources also cost a lot of money (art work, access to computers, graphics, printing, distributing, postage, etcetera) and frequently the money is not to be found. Also, it might be said, the more volunteer work downloaded onto women -- the more oppressed these women become.

Action #11: Structure into each phase of the organizing effort activities that will meet the personal and social needs of those involved (Sherry and Lipshultz, 1984, p. 219).

Action #11 was a strength of WWINFEW’s organizational efforts. Although, again finding the balance between social time (coffee chats, speakers, women sharing their stories) and the budding organization's needs (the production of documents, the raising of funds, the networking with professionals, the
outreach to other organizations) is sometimes hard to establish, monitor and maintain. WWINFEW did not always achieve consensus on where the precise point of balance was between social time and formal organizational goal-achievement time.

In the preceding I have described the contradictions and challenges inherent in trying to apply Sherry and Lipshultz's eleven ideas in a place like WWINFEW. In regards to the social work, voluntarism, self-help river of information and its relevance to a place like WWINFEW it should be noted that this river is very deep and muddy. Activists at WWINFEW were constantly being dampened or misted with water from the river. Often they were not fully conscious of this. Often information existed that they could have been using more wisely (i.e. we did not always have to reinvent the wheel). Often we were accidently mixing, matching and making things work in ad hoc ways and we should have been celebrating accidental discoveries. Through out this text I am explicating how these ideas and practices from social work, voluntarism, and self help bodies of literature infiltrated WWINFEW in both positive and negative ways. I continue to contemplate how we could more effectively utilize knowledge from this river -- my goal here has been to point to areas of discussion where further work needs to be done.

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6. THE SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST RIVER

SI helps us explore "truth" and its multiplicity. In the Mists of Avalon the narrator tells us, "Truth:... there is no such thing as a true tale. Truth has many faces and the truth is like the old road to Avalon [a matriarchal society]; it depends on your own will, and on your own thoughts, whether the road will take you, and whether, at the end, you will arrive..." (Zimmer Bradley, 1984, p.x). At WWINFEW there were many simultaneously viable and simultaneously contested "truths". I do not represent myself as being the person to affirm or assert a definitive truth here except for the truth that there seemed to be diverging and diverse perceptions of truth. Note how Dawn articulates what was going on at WWINFEW:

Dawn: ...I think that is what is happening because of the new people who keep coming into the office...they have trouble because [they] keep trying to re-invent the wheel...they still don't know what direction they are going. I have spoken to [an executive board member] and she says she doesn't know and then I have spoken to [another board member] and she doesn't know and then I think, in that case, 'what am I doing?' Rather than getting totally involved I'll just stand back and say 'Okay, when you know what you are doing or when you decide you need my help let me know.

The sixth large river of thought that I am bringing together in this thesis is SI. A very relevant insight from SI is that almost all meaning is dynamically constructed in a
minute-by-minute manner between participants. Few things in life are unambiguously 'true' according to this perspective. Our identities and our world-views are shaped by the information we have been exposed to (as feminists and anti-racist authors have also been declaring). Human beings are always sifting through the storms of information in front of us and vigorously selecting bits which we use to actively construct who we think we are and who we think the people around us are. Our own identity, the identity of the people around us and the identities of organizations are always in flux. Even when identities appear to be constant this is an accomplishment that all people present are participating in making happen.

For example, in a place like WWINFEW, the 'President' was a group effort construct that the legalistic/bureaucratic incorporation process imposed but it was also one that we as individuals daily participated in creating. 'President' was a title given to someone who was voted in at an annual general membership meeting according to the constitution of WWINFEW. The 'President' was someone who was supposed to carry a great deal of responsibility and hold some types of authority over a twelve member board, all staff, and clients/participants at WWINFEW. During WWINFEW's life some odd moments occurred during which people tried to secure and anchor a meaning for
the role of the person titled 'President'. We found ourselves asking each other some very awkward questions.

For example, at one moment in WWINFEW's life a President refused to take any responsibility or to even attend meetings for months but also did not resign. Note how Jane describes another situation:

Well...when certain uppermost executives having power and not sharing the power and the other people aren't strong enough to partake in the power or challenge the power that is being emitted from, maybe, one individual. When you have that individual announce to a general membership at an A.G.M. 'I am the President, this is the Vice-President, this is the Treasurer, we have an opening for blah blah...Does anybody want it?' Then, I'm sure she picks the ones she wants from the raised hands in the audience. I'm sure it didn't go to the ballot. As a matter of fact, I wanted to start withdrawing [from the organization] at the last AGM.

At this AGM that Jane discusses above, only six people attended and four of those in attendance were already paid staff members (i.e. they could not also be paid staff and voting members). How did 'President' come to exist in this case? One woman announced she felt like being 'President' and the other women in attendance were prepared to duplicate that definition of who she claimed to be. She was the 'President'. Months later, in court, someone challenged that definition of who was 'President'. During the court challenge an ex-employee attempted to erase and nullify decisions made by that 'President'. During some moments of WWINFEW's life staff
members or some board members simply refused to acknowledge the 'President' and did things as they felt like doing them.

The authority, job description, ritual observances, and responsibilities of the 'President' were always in movement at WWINFEW in a dramatically noticeable way (as was the meaning of other statuses). SI tells us that most identities like 'President' are constructs demanding focused participation by many people. Similarly, as many authors have explicated, identities like 'Black' (Cooper, 1995; hooks, 1984, 1990, 1992), 'First Nations' (Alia, 1994; Haig-Brown, 1992; Vickers, Rankin, Appelle, 1993, 220, 288), 'white' (Frankenberg, 1993a, 1993b; Green, 1987; Katz, 1978; Rave, 1990; Wong, 1994), or 'immigrant' (Allevato, 1987; Bissoondath, 1994; Boyd, 1978; Iacovetta, 1986; Ng, 1988) are shifting, contested and permeable constructs. These identities are also identities into, and out of which, a person can sometimes 'pass' (Goffman, 1964, pp. 41-104).

SI is a theory that has many feminist principles that are compatible with feminist ones (Deegan, 1991). To the extent that SI shares feminist principles and assumptions (and anti-racist principles and assumptions) it does seem to have a wealth of relevances and insights that make sense out of what I was witnessing in an organization like WWINFEW.

As Olesen (1994) suggests in "Feminism And Models Of
Qualitative Research", more and more material is emerging which supports the compatibility of these approaches. For the purposes of my discussion I am defining those who might 'belong' within the SI camp very broadly. Others have done this also (Adler and Adler, 1987; Denzin, 1992, xiv-xviii; Jary and Jary, 1991; Ritzer, 1988, pp. 290-320). The boundaries of who I am including are permeable and I make no claims to having definitively included every candidate within the SI labeled boundary.

SI, similar to feminism, might be said to be about changing the world. SI might be said to have a tradition of aligning itself with vulnerable populations (Denzin, 1992, ix). Some of the many examples of SI writers who tried to give voice to the perspectives or 'conceptual frameworks' (Charon, 1989, p. 3) of oppressed groups and silenced or 'deviant' people include Addams (1938), Alia (1994), Ferguson (1984, 1980), Goettler (1944), Moss Kanter (1972, 1977), and Thursby (1994). There are many other examples of SI researchers/writers trying to open up space and expand boundaries for people who have had their resources, space and boundaries limited by others.

A SI belief is that we should study people in their everyday social world (Adler and Adler, 1987, p. 219). A SI approach (Lauer and Handel, 1983, pp. 179-193) discusses power
and the defining of consequences in groups as continually renegotiated orders. Cooley says:

...the imaginations which people have of one another are the solid facts of society... to observe and interpret these must be a chief aim of sociology. I do not mean merely that society must be studied by the imagination -- that is true of all investigations in their higher reaches -- but the object of study is primarily an imaginative idea or group of ideas in the mind, that we have to imagine imaginations. The intimate grasp of any social fact will be found to require that we divine what men [and here I add 'women'] think of one another. Charity, for instance, is not understood without imagining what ideas the giver and recipient have of each other; to grasp homicide we must, for one thing, conceive how the offender thinks of his victim and the administrators of the law; the relation between the employing and hand-laboring classes is first of all a matter of personal attitude which we must apprehend by sympathy with both and so on. In other words, we want to get at the motives, and motives spring from personal ideas (Cooley, 1964, pp. 121-122).

Applying Cooley's idea that "the intimate grasp of any social fact will be found to require that we divine what [women] think of one another" suggests that all aspects of organizations are processual phenomena created through the perpetual interactions of the situated actors. These ideas from SI seem particularly relevant to my experiences and observations in feminist anti-racist grassroots organizations.

Connecting Cooley's idea, for example, to Socioeconomic status we affirm that to some extent "poverty", "empowerment", or "entitlement" are states of being that are relative. For
example, when other women who are members of an organization have cars and one woman does not; when others applying for the jobs we want are English / French bilingual and computer literate and one woman is not; or when others can afford high quality childcare and one woman cannot then the one without experiences herself as deprived, poor, disempowered, without entitlement -- and in fact she are. In a different time and place, where no women had cars; where few women were in the paid workforce or computer literate then being without would not be experienced as “problematic” or an aboration.

SI suggests we are always making and remaking our 'selves' and our past, present and future activities into social objects to be contemplated, interpreted and re-interpreted. Nothing is static. Mead (1934), for example, says the organization of the self is:

...simply the organization, by the individual...of the set of attitudes toward its social environment -- and toward itself from the standpoint of that environment, or as a functioning element in the process of social experience and behavior constituting that environment -- which it is able to take (Mead, 1934, p. 91).

We are always assessing the world and our place in it through the significant symbols and meanings others share with us (Ritzer, 1988, p. 297). We are always assessing how best to 'self-present' (Sims, Fineman and Gabriel, 1993, p. 291).

For the purposes of discussion, it might be said that
S.I. divides our identities into three parts: I, me and self. These three 'spheres' or 'layers' of who we are interact simultaneously and ongoingly without our necessarily being aware that they do so. Our 'I' is impulsive and spontaneous, our 'me' is the organized community around us mirrored back and our 'self' is the dialectical process that mediates between the 'I' and the 'me' (Lauer and Handel, 1983, p.111; Mead, 1967, pp. 135-226). We are creative, thinking, emerging beings always in tension with our social and material environments (Denzin, 1992, xiv; Lauer and Handel, 1983).

The 'self' is acquired initially through the child's role-taking of behaviour observed in significant others (Ritzer, 1988, pp. 298-299). We develop our 'selves' through imagining and processing how others perceive us. For girls socialized in ethnocultural minority families, in countries other than Canada, and/or for girls socialized in very low-income families parts of the 'self' would be challenged and 'shifted' or questioned within organizations like WWINFEW (i.e. from self blame or internalization of the colonizer's voice to societal blame or a political consciousness). Every white Anglophone Canadian-born and white Francophone Canadian-born women would also have her 'self' shifted and challenged and questioned ongoingly. Everyone's 'self' would be invited to grow richer, more complex and wiser and sometimes every
WWINFEW woman's 'self' might feel invited to grow more angry, impatient or defensive. Activists within WWINFEW ongoingly monitored their selves and their responses to and from others. This ongoing dynamic monitoring and responding is discussed by Ritzer (1988, pp. 300-301). Two forces that motivate people to continue to participate in such monitoring and responding activities are the urge to build self-esteem and the desire for self consistency (Ritzer, 1988, pp. 305-306).

A central feature of interest to S.I. researchers is the nature of interaction. The interactions between people and their environments should be a focus of study because this recognizes the dynamic aspect of human life. In regards to places like WWINFEW exclusively studying the experiences of one 'group' of women (i.e. visible minority women, First Nations women, immigrant women, white Anglophone Canadian-born women, etcetera and/or 'staff', 'board members', 'volunteers', 'participants/clients', etcetera -- or any other way 'group' might be experienced) would not give us the deep substantive understanding that we can instead achieve through studying how each individual within each 'group' experienced their time with WWINFEW and how each 'group' experienced or interacted with the other 'groups'.

SI suggests that people ongoingly create meaning through actively engaging with significant others (Charon, 1989;
Denzin, 1992, p. 25). 'Significant others' are people we look to for validation, confirmation, empathy and information. In a discussion of women in an anti-racist feminist grassroots organization this concept has multiple implications. If a woman defines herself as an immigrant, a visible minority, a Hindu, and a lesbian then at which moments of her organizational activities does she give primacy to which 'significant others' who mirror these important pieces of her 'self'? She is frequently feeling that she is forced to choose sides or to prioritize her alliances. WWINFEW women were often splintered even within their own selves.

Mead talks about the 'generalized other' and describes how certain assumptions about the world come to be experienced as 'common sense knowledge'. Note that I have changed the gender of Mead's pronouns.

The very universality and impersonality of thought and reason is from the behaviouristic standpoint the result of the given individual taking the attitudes of others toward [her]self and of [her] finally crystallizing all these particular attitudes into a single attitude or standpoint which may be called that of the 'generalized other' (Mead, 1934, p. 90).

WWINFEW women would have mixed thoughts inside their 'selves' at different moments because they had different 'generalized others' who might shape their sense of 'self' (while with lower socioeconomic status immigrants a lower socioeconomic status immigrant woman might chose to display or emphasize or
'impression manage' her feelings and ideas which were most compatible with the shared identity pegs of lower socioeconomic status and immigration and another time with other 'generalized others' such as 'mothers' she may chose to emphasize the shared identity peg of 'mother'). Said differently: if individual women felt factioned and splintered within their own selves isn't it almost inevitable that the group also would be factioned and splintered?

According to SI theory, we imagine ourselves and others and situations as 'social objects' that we reflect upon and actively shape meaning for (Charon, 1989, pp. 37-44). These meanings are always potentially in transition and evolve in response to our social and material environment. When we use the word 'feminist', for example, we are referring to a social object. There are a diversity of meanings attached by women to the word 'feminism' (Bartky, 1990; Burstow, 1992; Henderson-King and Stewart, 1994; Oleson, 1994; Wolf, 1994). How a WWINFEW woman defined 'feminism' shaped how she engaged with other 'feminists'. How a WWINFEW woman defined 'feminism' had implications for how she engaged with WWINFEW as a 'feminist' organization and of how she experienced her 'self' as a 'feminist'.

Mills and Simmons (1995), in one of the few examples of the SI's river flowing smoothly into the organizational theory
river, talk about shifting alliances and 'goal displacement' in organizations. They say that this term refers to:

...how commitment to the goals of particular sectors of an organization may sometimes become more important to the individuals and groups within these sectors than the larger goals of the entire organization. Thus, competition between officials from different departments may result in their losing sight of, or displacing, the more central goals of the organization (Mills and Simmons, 1995, p. 217).

Individual women within WWINFEW, due to a different sense of 'self' at different times during their organizational involvement, often grouped and split into factions around their access to resources, ethnic alliances, professional alliances, age, particular interests, commitment level or educational level (or at least a dozen other "self" alignments). At WWINFEW women's shifting and individually-centred factions and goals meant the formally documented whole organization's stated goals (to enhance women's lives, to enrich their options) were often forgotten, unknown, diffused and/or obscured.

Goffman adds to the SI discussion and enriches our understanding of a place like WWINFEW with his ideas called 'dramaturgy'. He suggests the world is like a series of sets or plays and individuals are aware of, and present, certain signs and symbols (or behaviours or words) to shape the immediate 'audience's' perceptions. This he called 'impression
management'. People need front stages and back stages for impression management.

For example, in a place like WWINFEW meetings and public presentations or rallies could be called 'front stages' and private lunches attended only by dyads of WWINFEW women or triads of WWINFEW women might be 'back stages'. Agnew, (1996, pp. 74-75) also discusses what might be called front stage and back stage practices. Sometimes individual WWINFEW members had 'secret' phone calls with other members each attempting to influence the group's decision-making process. These phone calls could be defined as bonding or self-help sessions. These phone calls could also be thought of as 'back stages' designed to set the agenda for upcoming 'front stage' staff or board meetings.

Women come to organizations like WWINFEW for a variety of reasons and different women come to feminist organizations seeking different kinds of empowerment. Some women within WWINFEW experienced empowerment in ways and in moments that I had not expected to discover. Some women experienced being overpowered or disempowered by other women. Each woman's experience varied over time, and the meaning of those experiences will be filtered through women's retrospective analysis of their experiences. With each different audience for the telling of their experience the telling and the tale
will be different again. And, of course, in my retelling of their experience, the story will once again alter. Some women come to a group like WWINFEW to make friends. Some initially wanted to expand their personal or professional network. Some were seeking employment or employment readiness skills. Only a minority of women come to WWINFEW exclusively filled with altruistic or revolutionary motives. Some wanted only a safe and interesting place to visit intermittently and for unpredictable durations of time.

SI might be defined as a classic or well-accepted theory in that it has been around for over sixty years. Cooley, for example, was publishing in the 1920's (Cooley, 1964). Precisely because it may have been defined as classic or well-accepted it may have been rejected or assumed to be irrelevant by grassroots feminist or anti-racist activists.

Sometimes knowing when, and in whose voice a theory originated, we can better judge what applications it might have today. SI was, like most academic topics, originally constructed by men and/or men were the ones who were able to have their voices heard and remembered (i.e. through access to the university podiums, the publication space, the mass media, etcetera). A great deal of research has shown this to be as a general pattern that served to inhibit, distort or erase women's contributions to formal knowledge (Deegan, 1991, 1987;
Roach Pierson, Cohen, and Bourne and Masters, 1993; Spender, 1982). SI itself recognizes that the meaning of the past and the accomplishments of the past are always being rewritten and redefined in the present.

Given the above stated reflections and cautions, some of the most quoted fathers (or men who might be considered as major contributors) of SI include Blumer (1969), Mead (1934, 1936, 1938, 1967), Cooley (1964), Shibutani (1961) and, more recently, Denzin (1989, 1992, 1994) and Goffman (1959, 1961, 1964, 1969, 1974, 1981). Not all of these men would have defined their life's work as belonging, or belonging exclusively, in the camp of SI. Some have become identified as contributors to that body of thought by scholars who followed after them. Some authors, like Denzin (1992, 1989) for example, have sometimes dropped the word 'Symbolic' and used only the word 'Interactionist' to describe their approach. Some, like Mills and Simmons (1995) refer to themselves as 'Actionists' or 'Critical Theorists' although they extensively refer to people like Mead and Ferguson. Adler and Adler (1987) interchange 'SI', and 'Everyday Life Sociology'. In their Dictionary of Sociology Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1986, p. 215) cross-reference 'Action Theory', 'Ethnomethodology' and the 'Dramaturgical' approaches with SI. It seems probable to me that the fact that so many of the
spokespersons for this river of thought were white Western men might have contributed to why these ideas were not vigorously embraced by feminist theorists and anti-racist theorists.

A case can be made though that women theorists have been contributing to SI but their work has not always been given the recognition it deserved. Some of the best known mothers of SI (or women who might be claimed as major contributors to this body of thought) include Addams (Addams, 1938; Davis, 1973; Deegan, 1989; McDonald, 1994), Deegan (Deegan 1989), Ferguson (1980, 1984), and Moss Kanter (1972, 1977, 1983). Much of the material produced by these women in SI also has an obvious feminist analysis. In addition to the above noted fathers and mothers of SI there are numerous other well known contemporary researchers whom I would include in the SI camp. These contemporary SI researchers have provided interesting examples of applications of SI concepts and they include Ahrne, 1994; Berg, 1989; Chafer, Dietz and Stebbins, 1994; Charmaz, 1994; Charon, 1989; Dietz, Prus and Shaffir, 1994; Fineman, 1993; Lauer and Handel, 1983; Lofland, 1975; Low, 1994; Mullins and Mullins, 1973; Prus, 1984; Wolf, 1994. SI, because of its intrinsic acceptance of 'theory' as something each of us is doing every day is very useful for describing and synthesizing the experiences of women and in supporting the idea that most women most of the time could be thought of
as experts on their own lived experiences. Here I use the word “expert” to mean that each person can describe their own feelings and thoughts in any given moment better than a detached observer.

7. THE RIVER OF WOMEN AND MENTAL HEALTH

The related mental health professions (social work, sociology, social psychology, anthropology) have diffuse and contested boundaries between them. Here I will refer to “the mental health professions” in recognition of the permeability of boundaries between these kindred disciplines. Until relatively recently researchers, therapists, social workers, and other mental health and support workers either responded to women's needs in the same ways they responded to men's needs or they responded in ways that might have perpetuated women's secondary and oppressed roles in society. Their definition of a "healthy" or "well-adjusted" woman was often a definition that contemporary feminists would define as an "unhealthy" or "male-adjusted" woman. For a long time in the mental health professions women were given a very limited role to play in the world (mother, wife, homeworker, heterosexual sex object, passive, etcetera) and when women did not fit this role they were defined as sick and treatment involved pressuring women into fitting the role. Feminists have offered

Our conceptualizations and practices in regard to women's mental health are relevant to conversations about a place like WWINFEW for a variety of reasons. One reason is that, in my observations, women who have been very damaged in this world are often drawn to a place like WWINFEW as part of their healing journey (almost every staff member or volunteer member I have ever met in a women's organization has at least one really painful story to share about her own violation). Here is an excerpt from my interview with Sunfire (one of WWINFEW's Presidents) in which she describes her depression and suicidal ideation emerging due to stress, poverty, family, and marital problems:

...I went through a huge depression...it left people with an impression of me that's not true...[Sunfire's] unreliable she's un'...you know a lot of things that I was, but not because I am, but because that's where I was [in a clinical depression] and; do you remember 'R'? Well, I had it in my head that I was going to commit suicide that weekend. And I just thought, oh geeze, the damn guy's coming [a motivational speaker whom one of our funders was keen on] and I gotta show up for the board meeting!

Si: ['R'] saved your life [laughing]?!
Sunfire continues:

He did [save my life]. I wrote a letter to tell him so; I did Si, I wrote him a letter I... ask [the funder] she will tell you I told [the funder] that... He called [the funder] to tell her about this letter because... I was just; I was sooo incredibly depressed. And I could not function. It was when I look back at it now I think I know what depression is. He saved me, he really did. You remember 'A.T.'? Bless her soul if 'A.T.' didn't come to save me! Like there were days Si, I'd close the curtains and I wouldn't open the mail and I wouldn't answer the phone and I'd stay in bed. And I wanted it to be dark and... I just couldn't function, I was in school, and, and they don't afford you any kind of leeway... everyone goes in and says 'I'm depressed, I can't write my essay', cause it's such a cop-out. But I was [depressed]- I saw a black hole. I don't say that figuratively... I went to go see the psychiatrist at the school and he gave me an anti-depressant, and I took it for two days, and I woke up one day and there was this great vortex next to my bed this swirling black cold vortex. And I knew if I got outta bed I would die. I would fall into the hole and I would die.

Sunfire continues by describing herself as stuck and wading through black jello:

Oh my god I felt like, I told the psychiatrist that it felt like I was wading through jello or something and... it's such an incredible sadness... from my soul, and 'A.T.' came to me, to get me outta bed to go to school, to go to class and I said 'A.T.' you know, she called, and I just happened to pick up the phone, I never picked up the phone, I was crying and screaming 'A.T.', 'A.T., there's this hole and you know she just said 'I'm on my way'. She came and she took me outta bed, and saved my life.

Sunfire was trying to find her way through her own mental health issues while trying to help other women with theirs. Many WWINFEW women fit this profile. Also, of course, when individual activists feel they are out of control of their own
lives how are they impacting on those agencies and the clients in these agencies?

A second reason to reflect on women's mental health is that these organizations exist to enhance women's well-being. Third, funders who give resources to mainstream organizations do not always give these organizations enough (or set high enough standards) to respond effectively to women's mental health issues.

It is now well understood among progressive helping professionals that women's realities are distinctive from men's and sometimes from each other's. In fact women often absorb the consequences of, and are even blamed for, men's 'unhealth' (i.e. when men batter often women are blamed because, the thinking goes, if she was a better wife he wouldn't have to discipline her). It is also well understood that most women will confront some of the negative consequences of patriarchy during the life-cycle. The woman who escaped incest, child-sexual abuse, or date rape may not escape the poverty plunge of a divorce. The woman who escaped sexual harassment on the job, discrimination regarding upward mobility in her agency, and negative physical consequences of breast implants, thalidomide I.U.D. may not escape physical violence from her husband. The double-work day, the stresses of single parenthood, and the responsibility of caring for an
aging parent may be the "only" regular burdens that patriarchy has inflicted on the woman who escaped the many other threats. All of these potential threats to women's sense of well-being and balance are there every day. WWINFEW existed to "enhance the lives and expand the options of ethnocultural minority women". The complex and multidimensional oppression faced by ethnocultural minority women has enormous impact on their "mental health".

Immigrant women's language barriers, isolation, poverty, or cultural differences may make them that much more vulnerable. Native women often confront the same issues as immigrant women. Native women who have grown up on isolated and poverty stricken reserves that are geographically remote from urban centres seem especially vulnerable to confronting issues that are similar to immigrant women's issues. When they do find themselves in an urban environment they sometimes feel like "immigrants" to the dominant culture. Visible minority women may be part of the other two groups or they may be Canadian born. They may experience racism and discrimination in addition to the disadvantages and barriers that women as a group are confronted with.

Since women are often the primary socializers of children and the primary "bonders" of the immediate family (and extended kinship network) women often experience more stress
when their children or kin are experiencing stress. These three groups of women may experience these pressures more frequently than white Anglo Canadian born women. In instances where cross-cultural marriages have occurred woman are often the ones who make the additional efforts to "connect" the two cultures. They are often the ones who are "blamed" when the bridges between the two cultures are not strong and well-functioning. As I believe the interviews with WWINFEW women demonstrate many members at WWINFEW (staff, volunteers, and Board members) had real mental health struggles they were trying to sort out while they were trying to do their best for WWINFEW.

**CONCLUSION**

WWINFEW came to exist so that, as our mission statement said, we could "enhance women's lives and expand their options". Our lives had become troubled, distorted, impoverished and shrunken because of large and enduring social issues and social inequalities. I believe that I have made clear in the preceding material that feminism has confirmed for us that women's realities and experiences have not been validated in this world. Large, dominating and intersecting segments of the world (the justice system, the social service system, the mental health care system, the economy, etcetera)
that women live in have been perniciously created by men for men about men. Centuries of sexism have created women who now "need their lives enhanced".

Ethnocultural minority women in Canada have often felt even more removed from the centre of definition-creation and change-agency. Centuries of racism have created ethnocultural minority women who "need their lives enhanced". Poverty is a socially constructed phenomenon -- constructed by people who are writing policies, implementing social programs, and organizing companies for their own gain and comfort. Unemployment, under-employment and low wages, for example, are created, caused and unnecessary (Mies, 1988; Waring, 1988) -- and unemployment, under-employment and low wages are not caused by those people who directly experience these social conditions of deprivation. The existence of poverty in Coldtown (similar to elsewhere) is a designed choice made by people (politicians, owners of corporations, stockholders, policy makers and administrators) who do not care about "enhancing the lives of ethnocultural minority women". Organizations and the theories that drive them forward have been manufactured in response to a profit motive, a model that is hierarchal and task-oriented. The fact that most social service organizations have reproduced and perpetuated sexism and racism within the very fibres of their organizations and
social service delivery processes has meant that "some women need their lives enhanced".

The movements of voluntarism and self help have emerged in a creative tension within the discipline of social work. Social work, voluntarism and the self-help movements have had to respond to the dictates of profit motivated organizational structures and, more recently, to severe cutbacks in resources. SI suggests different people will always have different experiences which they dynamically engage with to create a unique analysis and 'sense' of the world around them. As they create and interact with their sense of the world they are also, to some extent, creating the world around them. WWINFEW women's stories can be brought together and into meaningful patterns using the sociological paradigm of SI as a type of adhesive.

Sexism, racism, socioeconomic oppression and an absence of effective theories for their lives could be said to come together to create a terrain on which ethnocultural minority and/or working class women in Northern Ontario were with few resources, role models or theoretical texts to guide their actions. WWINFEW women desperately wanted their lives to be different. They wanted to feel more secure, validated, hopeful, in control of their choices and their access to resources -- they wanted to bring about (for themselves and
for others) enhanced access to material and social resources and enhanced mental health. Women’s mental health can only be effectively responded to if an understanding exists of how these seven rivers intersect ongoingly and shape who we are in the world. This chapter has described the state of affairs when WINFEW women first began meeting in 1988.
CHAPTER THREE: FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

Before I go forward with my description and assessment of WWINFEW it is important to describe my thinking and methodology. One of the eleven components of good feminist research as Reinharz (1992, p. 240, p.27) describes it involves the creation of a "special relationship with the reader". Therefore, throughout this document I am continually defining this "special relation" with you the reader. My motivation for writing this is to share my learning journey in a pragmatic manner accessible to academics and grassroots activists (I want to remember 'who brung me to the dance' -- and who I still want to dance with). My belief is that every woman (i.e. nonacademics, non-sociologists) can be vigorously engaged in the process of "feminist research" and as Ristock and Pennell (1996) and others (Adler and Adler, 1987; Banks and Mangom, 1994; Charmaz, 1994; Denzin, 1989, 1992, 1994; Dietz, Prus and Shaffir, 1994; Ellis and Flaherty, 1992; Ferguson, 1980, 1984, 1994) suggest a close feedback loop should exist between those studied and those doing the studying. It can simply be how we live our lives.

I want to share my discoveries about what feminist
research can accomplish, what the process of feminist research can feel like, and what feminist researchers must attempt to respond to when we are trying to assess and give voice to what happens in organizations like WWINFEW. Reinharz in her 1992 publication Feminist Methods In Social Research describes what constitutes excellent feminist research:

1. Feminist research frequently defines a special relation with the reader.
2. Feminist research may be transdisciplinary.
3. Feminist research involves an ongoing criticism of nonfeminist scholarship.
4. Feminism is a perspective, not a research method.
5. Feminist research is guided by feminist theory.
6. Feminist research strives to represent human diversity.
7. Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods.
8. Feminist research frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studied.
9. Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a person.
10. Feminist research aims to create social change (Reinharz, 1992, p. 240).
11. Ethical questions are heightened in feminist interview research because feminists try hard to avoid perpetuating the exploitation of women (Reinharz, 1992, p. 27).

Throughout this text and during my years of involvement with
I have attempted to demonstrate attentiveness to these eleven components of feminist research (although at the time that I was doing whatever activities I was doing I may not have formally defined my activities as "feminist multimethods research").

In the next section of this chapter I will speak to each one of Reinharz's eleven dimensions of feminist research to demonstrate how these dimensions are manifested in this research and writing. Each of my responses to Reinharz's eleven dimensions are different in length and they are different in their depth of discussion. Some of Reinharz's considerations, of course, are more relevant to my project than are others.

**SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH READERS**

1. Feminist research frequently defines a special relation with the reader.

By sharing who I am, how I came to be who I am, and how I remain situated in the community of Coldtown I am exposing vulnerabilities (this is especially apparent in chapter five). By discussing my own thoughts and feelings within my relationships with WWINFEW activists I am taking risks. I am sharing a dimension of myself that traditional research often excludes from the telling of the story. Many researchers are now advocating this approach of including the personal,
political, professional in all its open messiness and grounded authenticity when we discuss our research process and findings (Brooks, 1992; Charmaz, 1994; Cook and Fonow, 1990; Das Gupta, 1986, Ferguson, 1994; M. Wolf, 1992). SI has long advocated this approach. Goffman's (1959, 1961, 1964, 1968, 1969) work, for example, is composed quite like a personal journal in many ways and his own values, beliefs, and feelings are displayed close to the surface in his text.

In doing this (the blending of personal, professional, political ways of knowing) I am inviting a special relationship with the reader. I remain quite conscious of the fact that "The reader" may be other people in Coldtown who will have dramatically different stances regarding the material I am presenting. I locate myself in a way that is open to attack or dismissal by choosing this approach to data collection and data presentation. The benefits to this approach are that I am impelled to be more challenging of myself and that I am able to explicate and display more depth and richness for the reader regarding the meaning of a place like WWINFEW. The strength of this approach also is that WWINFEW women themselves will be able to read and connect with this biography of their organization. Some WWINFEW women are my friends and they have read and critiqued these pages. My hope is that their knowing gaze has kept me alert and
authentic.

FEMINIST RESEARCH CROSSES DISCIPLINES

2. Feminist research may be transdisciplinary.

Chapter two of this document has already demonstrated the transdisciplinary nature of this work in that insights have been woven into this text from the disciplines of: sociology, organizational management studies, psychology, women's studies, social work and other disciplines. In chapter four of this text I attempt to draw on knowledge presented by feminist historians. A later chapter draws on research and practices given to us from popular education. The transdisciplinary stance that I have been taking may echo some of the strengths and weaknesses that occurred at WWINFEW itself (more on this theme elsewhere). As I lived, researched, and wrote about WWINFEW it became more vividly real to me that many of the borders constructed between the disciplines were constructed by men and constructed long ago in a different world. Today's world, and the worlds of WWINFEW women, are better described or understood with transdisciplinary knowledge than within the narrow confines of a single discipline, although my overall approach remains sociological.
ON GOING CRITICISM OF NONFEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP

3. Feminist research involves an ongoing criticism of nonfeminist scholarship.

This has been one of the thorns in my side as I attempted to do the work required to make sense of WWINFEW. Each of the multiple disciplines that I looked to for insight had to be assessed for its accuracy, relevance and blind spots. With each author that I turned to I had to remain vigilant. I had to not only attempt to explicate the knowledge and relevance embedded in the work, but also I had to ask myself: Is there any dimension of this work that is sexist? Is there any dimension of this work that is racist? Could this text be considered oppressive in how it has relevance to women of low socioeconomic status? How might these ideas flow and ebb differently in the context of Northern Ontario?

Understanding women's relationships with each other and with the organization of WWINFEW involved collecting knowledge from many perspectives. While collecting knowledge from these other disciplines I have attempted to remain cautious. Misogyny has proven itself to exist in every discipline at some time or at some level. My analytical skills are always being stretched in attempting to ascertain that information does have a base that is feminist "friendly". Some material does not declare itself to be feminist (for example, it was
written at a time when the jargon and buzz words were
different) but this material is quite in harmony with
contemporary feminist perspectives, for example the work of
(1969). Our understanding of women's lives, I believe, can
always be enriched by crossing discipline boundaries and by
exploring what bits of mainstream research can be usefully
adapted to feminist agendas.

**FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

4. Feminism is a perspective, not a research
   method.

As should be obvious to the reader by this point I live
my feminism. My ideological commitments are not afterthoughts
to this project that I will dispose of when this text has been
produced. The fact that I earn my living by working as a
therapist in a Sexual Assault Treatment Program in Coldtown, I
believe, intensifies my ability to understand and describe the
dilemmas I was witness to at WWINFEW. I did not parachute in
and out of the material or parachute in and out of my feminist
perspectives: feminism is a life-stance for me.

Feminist multimethods approaches, as already mentioned,
suggest that we utilize information from a variety of mediums
and perspectives. Tom (1995, p. 42) discusses how vital it is
that we not practice 'cognicentrism'. Cognicentrism, she explains, means preceding as though there is only one way to discover knowledge and that this one way is our own way. Tom, like Reinharz (1979, 1992), and others (Andrew, 1987; Bannerji, 1995; Bartky, 1990; Brand, 1991; Denzin, 1989; Dietz, Prus, and Shaffir, 1994; Eichler, 1988) propose that there are many equally viable paths to many equally viable 'truths' and that these truths need to be declared. One of the most central sources of knowledge to be claimed is our own first hand narratives. In this text I want to make visible my own "identity pegs" which may influence how I have been allowed/invited to be involved with WWINFEW. Each of our identity pegs constitutes a filter through which we can understand or analyse the world around us. My own identity pegs that seem most relevant to my involvement with WWINFEW and my attachment to WWINFEW women include: "Feminist white Anglophone Canadian-born", "grassroots organizer", "friend", "Northerner","social worker" and "women born into a low socioeconomic status". These collective identity pegs create the messy and jagged template through which I view the world of WWINFEW.

**FEMINIST THEORY AS GUIDE**

5. Feminist research is guided by feminist theory.
I believe that earlier in this text I have outlined the relevance of feminist theory to the work at hand. By building upon, synthesizing and applying feminist theory (as feminist theory was defined in chapter two) to WWINFEW I can distil and display my own personal six guiding assumptions.

My first guiding assumptions is that feminist organizations are worthwhile and they have a great deal of necessary and exciting work to do in our communities. Feminist organizations are substantively changing the landscapes of our communities and of our country. I state this explicitly because not everyone in Canada shares this assumption.

A second guiding assumption of my work is that racism/ethnicity is present in all organizations and agencies. Agencies/organizations that are exclusively created and run for white Anglophone Canadian born people have, of course, a powerful ethnicity/ethnocentrism that has been implicitly or explicitly woven into the fibre of their day-to-day organizational activities. Often through a variety of processes (which I am ongoingly trying to identify and describe) organizational racism/ethnocentrism is made 'normal' and invisible.

My third assumption is that organizations are places in which we live out or “do” our socioeconomic status. People who have limited communications skills, no computer skills, are
unfamiliar with civic and political entitlements and responsibilities and who have been socialized to believe they are not entitled to have a voice usually do minimal organizational activism. In contrast, people who have strong communications skills, powerful computer skills, are extensively versed in civic and political entitlements and responsibilities and who have been socialized to take for granted the roar of their own voices are positioned to do extensive organizational activism. These types of realities are the realities of doing socioeconomic status within organizations. Our socioeconomic status can become a role or performance piece that we feel trapped in or that we participate to some extent in reproducing in a day-to-day way.

A fourth guiding assumption which is synthesized from feminist theory is that organizations that are organized around feelings (rather than documents), that are pioneering, that invite intense and compassionate activists into the centre of their decision making processes are organizations which are likely to have a great deal of exuberance -- and volatility. There are organizational strategies that can be implemented to soothe these explosively complex situations. My hope is that my research will identify new ways that feminist anti-racist organizational activists can engage in their work more creatively, more tenderly and more effectively. For
example, more attention to protocol, etiquette, communications skills, rituals of acceptance, and delegation of 'sponsors' or 'mentors' could help women from startlingly diverse backgrounds to feel more connected to each other and more able to proceed with the collectively identified work at hand. Promoting the value of 'forgiveness' for mistakes and awkwardness would also go a long way toward enhancing group solidarity in these volatile and exuberant organizations. I will discuss these ideas more fully in later chapters.

The fifth guiding assumption is that external forces (funders, incorporation procedures, external 'monitors', and activists' previously learned organizational teachings) must be meticulously identified and scrupulously countered. Women's groups can be blamed for the struggles they face when instead these struggles are caused by the poverty, oppression, violence and exclusion that women face at every turn (more on this theme later). We are victims who try to resist our victimization and often we are blamed for our ineffective resistance (in a different world perpetrators would be blamed for victimizing us and we would be celebrated for the courage and stamina it takes to continue resisting our perpetrator's oppression).

A sixth assumption built through my understanding of and application of feminist theory is that anti-racist and anti-
sexist organizations and activists are different in Northern Ontario than in places like downtown Toronto or downtown New York. In the North there is a different collage of people who have selected themselves out to become residents (in contrast to people who have selected themselves out to live in densely populated/cosmopolitan contexts). As Sara a WWINFEW employee said:

...I think that the town, historically, is defined as an industrial working class town. Male dominated and male dominated by the waves of ethnic groups that came in here just after the second world war and the community and its visual sense of itself as a community where ethnic and cultural and racial groups from the third world is hidden and so that, there are people from those so-called third world countries is not legitimized. In a city like Toronto or Hamilton there are enough people from the third world that they are much more visible and so here you don't get that sense and they are treated almost like they are deviant to the whole community because the real ethnic culture is linked around [lists many Old European] all white northern immigrant populations and even Black population. The other day, while I was in Toronto, I met a Black woman who runs a store, and we got talking and then she told me she was born and raised in Coldtown and I thought 'What?' and then I thought, 'Well yeah!' And then she told me about herself and that her father was one of the first who had come to this area. So they are here but they are not visible. One of the things that WWINFEW did was start to say 'Hey! Look, we do need the service here. We wouldn't need the service if there weren't people from these ethnic and cultural groups living here. They are here and we have to make them visible...' I think that is really the most powerful one. It [Coldtown] just simply defines them [some visible minority immigrant groups] and cultural groups out of existence. The other thing is, of course, that it is a male, a male industrial class so it [Coldtown] is not only defining cultural and ethnicity out of existence, but it is defining women out of existence.
As Sara alludes to above, the demographic mix of people also has consequence. For example, if there are only three Korean women within a three hundred mile radius how likely is it that these three women can form a solid unit of resistance? What kind of 'back-lash' will exist against such a small 'group'?

In Northern Ontario the Black community, for example, is relatively small and most of its members could be thought to belong to a higher socioeconomic status (at least the male members). They have largely come to Northern Ontario to be teachers, doctors and professors. Their needs and experiences are different than, for example, low socioeconomic status Blacks in Toronto. Additionally, the background of "whiteness" that they are situated against is a different whiteness (for example, in Northern Ontario we have many first and second generation Francophone and Old European functionally illiterate miners, labourers, etcetera). Chapter four will give multiple examples of the distinctions between Northern Ontario and Central Toronto. These six assumptions have emerged in response to my synthesis of, and applications of, feminist theories. As this work proceeds I will rely on many feminist theorists to enrich my analysis.

**REPRESENTING DIVERSITY**

6. Feminist research strives to represent human
diversity.

At WWINFEW we struggled passionately and extensively with this idea of "diversity":

Rachelle: I think [that one of the strengths of WWINFEW was its diversity] that the possibility or the potential of having great ideas, of being able to do great things if you bring the right people together. And the diversity, you know, the diversity of people that, that umm you could build...you could add to what you have already, you could add even more, richer.

We tried so hard to do what seemed undoable. This diversity of women's experiences created infinite challenges. Note how Kila (an immigrant visible minority woman leader at WWINFEW) comments:

We should have had courses on how we are going to handle situations within two different cultures. Sometimes we don't understand each other. There are cultural differences. Sometimes we, we should educate each other so that we understand our people and differences. Then we can understand each other better.

Kila continues talking about how hard it is to understand diversity:

I mean learn about how to get along. Of course, when you know their cultures then, each other's cultures then we will get along because we will know what to say and to do. Sometimes they [other WWINFEW activists] get tense. They get tense because they understand the wrong way. I think it is better to educate ourselves about other cultures more. When you are involved with this kind of thing, an organization like this, we should know more how to handle things better.
In this text I have been grappling not only with the "diversity" issues of racism/ethnocentrism and feminism/women-centred world-views and issues of class but also "human diversity" in regards to intellectual styles, coping strategies and human eccentricities.

Chapters four to eight demonstrate how huge the range of views often were among women even when their ethnocultural heritages were similar, their sexual orientations the same, their socioeconomic status backgrounds paralleled and other identity pegs were similar -- their "stances" on a particular issue might be quite different from each other. Also, we must recognize that most women are always in movement as they go through different experiences and stages of the life-cycle (Jones, Marsden and Tepperman, 1990). In my own life the woman I was at age thirty when I began my involvement with WWINFEW and the woman I am now while I write about WWINFEW is different. My writing here can be seen to struggle with layers of diversity; or diversities of diversities.

MULTIPLE METHODS

7. Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods.

As stated earlier, feminist anti-racist grassroots organizations can be examined from alternative perspectives
and discovered through different ways of knowing (cognipluralism versus cognicentrism). WWINFEW activists' voices and perceptions may be compared and contrasted to voices and perspectives centred in different life experiences, different disciplines and/or different orientations. Below Reinharz (1993, p. 197) defines a 'feminist multiple methods research' approach. This statement from Reinharz was of central influence to my work. I have returned to it again and again.

Feminist descriptions of multimethod research express the commitment to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks. Multiple methods enable feminist researchers to link past and present, 'data gathering' and action, and individual behaviour with social frameworks. In addition, feminist researchers use multiple methods because of changes that occur to them and others in a project of long duration. Feminists describe such long projects as 'journeys.' Sometimes multiple methods reflect the desire to be responsive to the people being studied. By combining methods, feminist researchers are particularly able to illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experiences. Multiple methods increase the likelihood of obtaining scientific credibility and research utility.

I have attempted to utilize Reinharz's 'feminist multiple methods research'. It should be noted that this approach (because of its thickness and richness) demands more time and resources.

One aspect of my feminist multimethods approach includes the case study. As Reinharz (1993, p. 169) and Hamel (1993,
pp. 20-32) discuss, the production of case studies is a long standing tradition in sociology (and especially in the tradition of the Chicago School of SI). Hamel (and many others: Blumer, 1969; Charmaz, 1994; Ellis and Flaherty, 1992; Mead, 1967; Reinharz, 1992, pp. 164-174) suggest that the deeper the immersion the researcher experiences in the field the more valid the final ethnography. Also, as in my situation, by triangulating data (five years of participant observation ⁵, forty-one interviews, key informants continually providing feedback on my writing, and my continuing involvement with similarly situated organizations in Coldtown) I enrich my analysis and description.


⁵During me first phase of involvement with WWINFEW I was an activist but I was also a researcher in that I was the coordinator of our Needs Assessment in 1988-1989. Therefore, I was always both observing and participating. In approximately 1992 when I decided to do my thesis work on WWINFEW some women may have perceived my role to have changed but others may have not because I was always one of the ones asking lots of questions.

**SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE**

8. Feminist research frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studied.

Given that some of my relationships with WWINFEW activists existed years before the organization was formed and since many of these relationships are still active after the organization has closed I feel these relationships are "special". As Ristock discusses (Ristock and Penneil, 1996, pp. 65-77) these additional dimensions of relationship create, burden, pleasure and responsibility. My responsibilities are particularly poignant in regards to boundaries around relationships. I am the one who needs to negotiate and initiate dialogue in the sense that I am the 'professional' doing the research (and thus bound to certain professional rules and protocols) and I am a certified social worker and a member of the Ontario Society of Psychotherapists (which also obligates me to adhere to certain behaviours in
relationships). Identifying, monitoring, and understanding these special relationships has brought joy and pain into my life.

Some of WWINFEW’s women responded to me as a shoulder to lean on while they or the organization was going through troubles -- or while women were going through troubles with each other. Long after the interviews, and partially because of the many locations in which I have been / remain situated, I have had WWINFEW women call me and ask me to be a job reference; give them advice about how to get into an educational program or about how to access a social service. Long after the last interview was completed I have been invited to graduation parties, weddings, house-warmings, and Xmas parties by the women I interviewed / worked with at WWINFEW.

INCLUDING THE RESEARCHER’S STANDPOINT

9. Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a person.

As a feminist researcher/activist/therapist/professional social worker in Coldtown and like other WWINFEW women who were involved in WWINFEW, my herstory in Coldtown (similar to theirs) shaped and defined the meaning of what we were thinking about what we were doing, what we actually were
doing, and what we accomplished together. What we brought to
the organizational fabric determined the fibre and the texture
of our collective in/actions. These experiences (past and
present) are always fluid and are always changing. Each one of
the WWINFEW women’s personal stories gives meaning to the
organization’s story. Similarly, my story, like that of other
WWINFEW members, contributes one "account" or portion of
emphasize that we would be arrogant as researchers if we
proposed that our one story was the grand truth. This
dimension of my own unfolding as a feminist and consequently
as a member of WWINFEW, will be discussed in more depth in
chapter five.

COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL CHANGE

10. Feminist research aims to create
social change (Reinharz, 1992, p. 240).

Social change, I believe, consists of small shifts in
daily practices. "Social change" is a process that every
person is a part of every day when they wake up and go about
accomplishing their day. We are all confronted with moments in
our day during which we can do "the right thing" and reach
towards excellence and integrity or we can do the "lesser
thing" and settle downwards towards mediocrity and compromise.
A major dimension of social change for women is to bring about a world where more of us experience mental health (as opposed to depression, anxiety, Post Traumatic Stress Disorders, eating disorders, etcetera). As stated elsewhere this was one of WWINFEW's goals: to enhance women's mental health and feelings of well-being. A Needs Assessment project that WWINFEW did in its first year discussed mental health indirectly in that it asked a variety of questions about women's struggles, services available to them, their experiences of being misunderstood by the dominant culture, etcetera. When constructing the Needs Assessment our hypothesis was that if these dimensions of women's lives were lacking so would be women's sense of well-being. Women answered by making clear that they were not feeling supported by society. As part of the conclusion of the needs assessment we found that:

Immigrant women [in Coldtown] have less income than their husbands and frequently do not have close friends. Some had difficulty with reading and writing in English, found it difficult to continue their education, and would like to learn to drive. This lack of empowerment probably relates to their focus on issues of childcare and communication. Visible minority women make less money than their husbands and average less than immigrant women. Some have little personal support and they feel misunderstood by white Canadians. The main issues they are concerned with are housing, babysitting, communication, and transportation.

The report continues by describing the realities that First Nations women experienced.
Native women do not have incomes greatly different from immigrant and visible minority women, but their husbands make much less money. Consequently there should be much less [relative] familial disempowerment. They are more likely to have personal friends, but also more likely to feel misunderstood by white Canadians. Perhaps because of their financial position, the most important issue by far was housing. Transportation, communication, health care, and financial support were also seen as very important issues (Wilkinson, 1990, p.117-118).

When women do not have the basic material resources of life they can not fulfil their human potential. When their creative, material and intellectual potential is blocked so is their potential to achieve full mental health. WWINFEW wanted to bring about social change and expected that these changes would have the consequence of enhancing women’s mental health.

Implications of the results of this study I have embarked upon (on WWINFEW as an organization and WWINFEW women as organizational activists) are that feminist anti-racist activists will be better able to control their own activities and involve more activists in their work (and to involve appropriate activists appropriately). If social change activists are to face the reality that we must survive on limited human and material resources in our organizations then we must be very reflective and efficient in how we invest those resources. We must minimize our repetition of mistakes. To minimize our repetition of mistakes we need dedicated feminist anti-racist grassroots organizational activists to
respectfully speak about our discomforts, challenges and shadow-sides. We also need to learn how to energetically and surgically repeat each other's successes. WWINFEW was about social change. This thesis I hope will prove useful to women activists as they go about their social change efforts.

ETHICAL CHALLENGES

11. Ethical questions are heightened in feminist interview research because feminists try hard to avoid perpetuating the exploitation of women (Reinharz, 1992, p. 27).

The ethics of being located in so many locations within the same story and being located in these ways for so long are difficult to sort out sometimes. Much has now been written about the ethics of feminist praxis, relationships and/or research (Eichler, 1988; Gartrell, 1994; Lerman and Porter, 1990; Rave and Larsen, 1995; Ristock and Pennell, 1996). As I reflect on ethical relationships and practices and feminist ideology there are many locations my gaze fixes on (i.e. the relationships between staff and clients, the relationships between board members and staff, my multiple roles, WWINFEW members interactions with activists from other organizations, etcetera). In addition to these complications of constructing and implementing a research plan there are dozens of ethical difficulties while being a member of an innovative
organization that is trying to do the undoable somewhat well. The activists in this organization are also activists and/or service recipients in other agencies and groups. Almost everyone knows everyone inside these small circles and this has consequences. I have been an activist, a service provider and/or a service recipient also in many other organizations in this community for many years. Presently, I am attempting to produce a doctoral thesis which creates certain expectations and boundaries on my behaviour. Simultaneously, my social network and friendship network is composed of some of the forty-one WWINFEW women I have interviewed for this thesis.

Large areas of this process involve questions I do not feel I was fully prepared for by my academic training. My training in feminist research methodology and techniques also did not fully prepare me for the emotional violence women can do to each other. My initial expectations were that almost all women insiders would want to be honest, open, caring (to each other, to clients, to activists in kindred organizations, etcetera) -- my idealism has taken a bruising. Feminist and mainstream 'text-book rules' and actual field work practices have not gently blended in this project. Ethically, I have decided to not document all of these discomforts. I have instead documented more of the positive aspects and thus I have potentially skewed the profile of this organization and
its activists.

Near the end of WWINFEW’s life WWINFEW activists split into many factions; and thus we confronted some of the same pain and anger that women confronted at Nellie’s (Cooper, 1995; Dewar, 1993; Freedman, 1993), Shirlee Sameroo house (Monsebraaton, 1994), and other women confronted in feminists’ organizations (Bunch, 1983; Farge, 1987; Fried, 1994; Gottlieb, 1993; Philp, 1995; Ristock, 1990,1991). Numerous women left the organization of WWINFEW with broken hearts. How can I protect their safety and integrity and protect my own safety and integrity while protecting the safety and integrity of the research product created for academia? Below are some examples of "moments" at WWINFEW when people (and I include myself here) were confronted with difficult choices regarding how to be an ethical researcher, social change agent, organizational participant, and/or ethical feminist. To protect confidentiality I have altered some details.

Example one: A distressed staff member was taking a board member to court and I was asked to bear witness. The information collected through the forty-one interviews with activists and my years of notes and participant observation might have proven useful to either party in this legal dispute. What thinking process does a 'good' feminist activist researcher use to negotiate through this terrain when demanded
by the courts to appear and disclose information?

Example two: One faction of women activists had circulated a petition (and made it available to the media and to funders) to force the resignation of a board member. By signing the petition I thought I might be participating in washing our laundry publicly. Also signing involved confusing my relationship with interviewees and activists and alienating potential interviewees who could give voice to different sides of the organization's story. By not signing I could be going against my own personal ethics and beliefs about what the long-term well-being of the organization required. I was always thinking about how every choice might impact upon how my final doctoral thesis would be assessed in regards to 'scholarly' and 'unbiased' positioning. Other WWINFEW women struggled with how much dirty laundry to wash.

Example three: Some of these women were my friends before this organization was initiated and before my doctoral thesis was initiated. By honestly displaying their 'shadow side' (racism, attitudes that victim-blamed low socioeconomic status women, homophobia, mean-spiritedness, etcetera) through the interview texts I run the risk that they may feel exposed, vulnerable and betrayed. To only display their strengths and positive attributes would position me as a non-authentic feminist researcher and as a person colluding with them in
their 'shadow side'. Many interviewees also struggled with how much of their own and their peers shadow sides they wanted to expose.

Example four: Many of these women know that I am a private practice therapist and this means they feel they can share their feelings quite extensively. None of the interviewees here were or ever will be my clients but their knowledge of me as a "therapist" may have opened some of them up to me more extensively than had they only known me as a "sociologist". When a woman has conversed with me hundreds of times, is then formally interviewed by me, and then converses with me hundreds of times at what moments was she sharing with me as a 'therapist', a 'friend', a 'researcher', a 'comrade'? How responsible am I to continually clarify her perceptions of me? What process can I utilize to do that?

Example five: A visible minority immigrant woman, who was devoutly religious, influential in her ethnocultural minority community and the elected leader of her organization said at a vitally important coalition forming meeting that she was prepared to bring all of her contacts and resources into WWINFEW. As an after-thought she said, "I'm glad that we will be working with WWINFEW and not that other feminist organization because they have lesbians in that organization. My religion says lesbians are freaks of nature!" She did not
know (apparently) that there were also lesbians at WWINFEW. WWINFEW desperately wanted and needed to be connected to the groups this ethnocultural minority woman could connect WWINFEW to. If the WWINFEW woman contact said anything confrontational she may have alienated the ethnocultural minority woman being outreached to and her contacts and WWINFEW may, consequently, have been disappointed. If she said nothing she was hurting her lesbian friends and colleagues and compromising her own values and beliefs.

Example six: A WWINFEW woman was exhaustively working on grants to different government bodies to get money to keep the organization’s doors open. Finally, one funder came through and made high demands on WWINFEW. The project the funder asked WWINFEW to do required extremely highly qualified, very assertive, well connected individuals who had cars, home computers, strong English language skills and professional ‘credibility’ within the service communities. One of the primary goals of the project was to connect with the ethnocultural minority groups and another equally important goal was to produce a series of documents and statistics. If WWINFEW failed with this project (by the standards the funder set) WWINFEW might not have been funded again (and WWINFEW may have had to close). No ethnocultural minority women applied for the job who had the kind of resources and qualifications
at their disposal that were needed. Many white Anglophone Canadian-born women applied for the job who had the resources and qualifications that would increase the likelihood of success as defined by the funder. The dilemma here is: hiring only white Anglo Canadian-born women went against WWINFEW’s mission and our vision to create employment opportunities for ethnocultural minority and low socioeconomic status women.

Example seven: A Board member of WWINFEW recognized that the organization was in need of funds. More and more frequently this Board member was being drawn into fund-raising activities. Many of these activities directly challenged her personal beliefs as a feminist. Some of these fund-raising activities included 'fashion and beauty make-over days', 'dances' (focused on heterosexual couples and able-bodied financially secure people who could afford the expensive tickets), and the selling of high-brow brand-name cosmetics. She repeatedly explained her behaviour and her beliefs. An immigrant woman of colour brought up again and again that this Board member did not care about the group and that because she was white Anglophone Canadian-born she was not as committed to the organization as some of the others who were immigrant and/or of colour. In this seventh example, one aspect of the dilemma is: should places like WWINFEW be asking a woman to support the organization by being involved in fundraising
practices that challenge her beliefs and to ask her to do this for the supposed long-term good of the organization? Should organizational activists sometimes set aside their own values and beliefs so that they can raise the money required to maintain the organization?

The above examples point to how difficult it was to think through and concretely work through the meanings of sexism, racism, socioeconomic status oppression, homophobia, and other oppressions in ethical ways. WWINFEW was historically and herstorically situated in the midst of turbulent times. Reinharz emphasizes that as feminist researchers we must attend carefully to ethical challenges. Sometimes we are left feeling impelled to 'choose our poisons' and none of them are sweet.

In real life these situations arise unexpectedly and suddenly and a decision often must be made on the spot (i.e. we usually do not have the luxury of reading a few books, consulting with feminist philosophers, and calmly reflecting for a few days before actually acting in the world). In this last and, possibly, most diffuse of Reinharz's dimensions of feminist research I have discussed some of the intersecting complications I encountered and/or witnessed at WWINFEW. I have not fully discussed here how each of them was resolved in that specific moment at WWINFEW because to do so might expose
some WWINFEW women to discomfort. Also, the point I want to make here is not that there is a perfect way to resolve any of these messy dilemmas but instead my point is that these messy dilemmas exist and are encountered in organizations like WWINFEW on almost a daily basis. Facing these dilemmas can be exhausting, hurtful, and depleting of individual and organizational resources. As a researcher some of my own dilemmas were also exhausting, hurtful and depleting. On the other hand resolving some of these dilemmas does move us forward to a more respectful, satisfying, caring and wise place or state-of-being as organizational activists and/or as researchers.

METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

How did I collect and process the data about WWINFEW? Since my understanding of this organization is build upon such diverse and overlapping locations and sources sometimes it is difficult to verify where one source of data began and another concluded -- or where one aspect of processing began and another concluded. For example, I can not always be sure of precisely where and when I came to know a certain aspect about the organization: Was it during a board meeting when an executive member explained something? Was it during an interview? Was it from an informal conversation I had over
lunch with a WWINFEW activist? Was it from a letter sent to the organization by one of our funders? Most of the information documented in this thesis arose from the interviewees telling of their experiences.

Why did I choose an interview schedule rather than a mail-out questionnaire? As Reinharz discusses (1992, pp. 18-45) there are many advantages to using an open ended interview approach. I did not think that women would take the time to fill in a questionnaire because the process would not be as emotionally rewarding or stimulating as a caring conversation. Also, I know that some WWINFEW women, because English is their second language, are not comfortable writing down their thoughts. A questionnaire would have only brought me a shallow profile of their perceptions because I would not have been able to probe deeply with each woman who wanted to share the richness of her experiences. Certainly, an interactional process was also more satisfying for me. I chose to not use a focus group approach because I knew some women would feel shy in any group context. A few WWINFEW women may have felt intimidated by other women’s presence. Some WWINFEW women might have felt impelled to agree with whatever other more empowered or assertive members in the group said. Further, I would not have been able to protect confidentiality had I used a focus group approach because other members could disclose
what had been said. I did not want to use only a document analysis approach because I felt that much of what went on at the organization was never documented -- and much of what was documented never actually occurred (documents were sometimes produced to make funders' happy and these documents, therefore, had a certain slant to them).

The interview schedule questions (see appendix) emerged in my mind as a result of conversations that I had witnessed organically going around the organization from the beginning of WWINFEW's existence. Some of the questions emerged because I knew I would have to describe these activists and I wanted their own assessments of which ethnocultural group/s they identified with, what they thought feminism was about, and their income level. Their ages and what types of organizations they had been active with seemed like useful questions in that these questions would point to how much maturity and experience each woman had -- and age and experience may shape how they viewed the organization. Some of the questions ask about their perceptions of the organization itself (WWINFEW's strengths and weaknesses, what they would change about the organization, barriers to change, etc.) and these questions again had formed the center pieces of many discussions that took place around lunch tables, around the meeting tables of funders, and in the presence of people from other
organizations.

I asked questions around what motivated WWINFEW women to become involved with the organization in the first place and whether those motivations and goals were still active and what their happiest and saddest moments had been within the organization because I wanted to know what had held them or repelled them from the organization itself. Again, these themes were ongoingly being examined by different activists because we were almost always trying to involve more women in the organization as volunteers. "My" questions, I believe were actually "their" questions but I formalized the process of "data collection". Indeed these questions might be said to belong to the whole women's movement.

Questions about Coldtown itself and about funding processes were important in order to probe the generalizability of my findings to other organizations and to other communities. Also I wanted to further develop my understanding of how WWINFEW women themselves perceived the wider community context and funding context in regards to how these phenomena shaped the organization. Since we spent so much of our time worrying about funding issues it only seemed appropriate to ask about this dimension of our existence and our activities.

With most of these questions there was often a splitting
going on in my mind in that sometimes I was looking at the women themselves (as individuals, as activists, as oppressed women, etc.) and other times I was looking at the organization itself which is bigger, different, a composite, and shaped by other forces. The boundaries between the women themselves as a passionate group and the organization as a formal administrative entity were inevitably blurred. Is the organization more than the sum total of its activists? Are the activists more than the sum total of the organization?

The cluster of questions that eventually emerged were discussed with a number of participants and activists before finalization. Then I tested the format on myself by being interviewed by a colleague from outside of Coldtown (see chapter five for a transcript of my own interview). This “testing” of the interview schedule also captured my own thoughts before I began collecting the other women’s thoughts. My transcript now displays my pre-existing biases and expectations about WWINFEW and its activists.

The sequence of doing interviews with WWINFEW women after my own interview was completed and transcribed was simply a process of approaching everyone I could find who had been active with WWINFEW for more than three months and finding a time when they were available. I had posted my request for interviews at WWINFEW and elsewhere and I had phoned everyone
I could find who had been involved or who had friends or peers who had been involved. Everyone who could be located and who consented was interviewed. The interviewees were usually given a copy of the survey itself in advance of the interview. Some women were given the questions over the phone a few days before the interview. My goal in giving them the questions before the actual interview was twofold: both to increase their comfort level with the process and to give them more time to think through what they wanted to tell me so that their ideas would have had time to "gel". During the actual interview almost all of the interviewees had a copy of the survey in front of them.

The tapes were transcribed as soon as possible after each interview. Speedy transcription meant that I would not lose the memory of the interviewee's body language or the emotional flow of the interview. As each subsequent interview was transcribed the clarity of patterns and themes seemed more vivid. Therefore later interviews usually have more texture and depth because I was able to prompt interviewees with my body language or with minimal verbal encouragers to expand on certain ideas that seemed to be more dominant among the group. For example, the theme of female friendship became more and more visible as interviews were concluded and transcribed and therefore I probably highlighted this theme more effectively.
with later interviewees.

My process of making sense of the transcripts may be thought of more as an art than a science. I would read and reread the transcripts and highlight sentences or paragraphs that seemed to resonate. Some quotes were especially good because of the way the idea was expressed (creatively, poetically, concisely, etc.) and some quotes seemed to contain a great deal of wisdom although they may not have displayed as much sophistication in their communication style. These quotes that stood out for me became center pieces for discussion. I would place them up on the computer screen and dialogue with them. I would try and connect them with themes that I have seen in the literature and then organize the material into a draft "proposal" of something that made sense. These draft discussions of themes I then gave to a few key informants from the organization who had already been interviewed. In respect of confidentiality issues no WWINFEW woman saw the actual transcripts of any other WWINFEW woman’s interview -- only a few quotes that were separated from all other aspects of the interview were used to ground and build discussion.

For example, the idea of funding issues shaping our relationships with each other, with other organizations, and with WWINFEW itself became a paper that I presented at conferences and discussed not only with WWINFEW activists but
audience members in three different communities. Ideas distilled from that diffuse process have become embroidered into this text. There have been continual feedback loops among some WINFEW activists, some activists from other organizations, and my own thinking. The process continues. In terms of quote selection I also made an attempt to quote each woman at least one time and to try not to quote any specific woman too many times. My reasoning for this was that a diversity of quotes would bring more fairness, accuracy, and diversity into the final product.

At one moment in this journey I almost gave up on this project. The writing of this (as I state elsewhere) was originally supposed to be a happy story and a document that would help WINFEW women do our work more effectively and more compassionately. Unfortunately, the organization became filled with turmoil and closed. For a few months after that difficult time my heart was so burdened that I did not feel that I could go on with this project. Eventually though, it may have been a freeing situation (that the organization closed) because I was less worried that the information I disclosed in these pages could be used against us by our funders. On this same note: some of my key informants felt more able to discuss some aspects of the organization because it had closed and because they had subsequently left Coldtown.
Through out this text I have not quoted any documents created by funders or by WWINFEW itself because I have not needed to. As a result of reading all of these documents (minutes of meetings, newspaper articles, funding proposals, job descriptions, etc.) I was able to guide the discussions with WWINFEW interviewees in certain ways and with a richness of understanding that I do not think an outsider would have been able to achieve.

Why did I chose these questions to ask and not others? I avoided any questions that would have invited a feeling of "gossiping" about other WWINFEW women because I did not want to be a participant in casually dividing women from each other. I avoided any questions that were too closed because I wanted each woman to articulate her own unique journey through the issues and through the organization.

I tried to use simple words throughout the interviews because some of the interviewees were not as comfortable discussing issues in English as others were and I wanted to "equalize" comfort levels for everyone. I wanted to ask questions that everyone would be able to offer an answer to and that did not divide the women. So, for example, I did not specifically ask board members to describe problems with staff or staff to describe problems they had with board members because that might have served to further divide the
organization or served to create a false description of the organization. I avoided any questions that might have made women feel uncomfortable because I knew there was a diversity of women involved with WWINFEW (i.e. I hesitated to use words like “Marxist”, “abortion”, “patriarchy”, the “State” until they had used them in the interview) and some WWINFEW women had strong feelings towards these kinds of words or issues and I did not want to position them to feel undereducated or awkward. Neither did I want to take us on the path of a passionate discussion that had little to do with the organization itself.

For example, if an activist from Romania, Russia, or Vietnam had been asked questions about “the ideology of Marxism” she might have given me long answers which told me more about her experiences of an ideological and political context from her birth countries than she would have told me about her experiences and perceptions of WWINFEW as an organization or about other WWINFEW activists as a group. Other women with minimal formal educational experiences might have felt intimidated by a question asking about the “ideology of Marxism” or “the meaning of patriarchy” because they would not have known much about it. If women themselves brought up these themes during the course of the interview then I encouraged them to share all of their thoughts on that theme.
and I encouraged them to connect their ideas to the organization as an entity.

In the end, as is usually the case in these situations, I have hundreds of pages of interview text that have not been displayed in this thesis. One of the reasons for that material not being included is simply that many of the same ideas were repeated over and over. Another reason for some of this text remaining only on disk at the back of a shelf is that the text was mundane and filled with long descriptions of very ordinary things that annoyed the interviewees (like equipment that broke, that another worker smoked, that the room was too cold or too warm while they worked at WWINFEW, etc.) or ordinary things that made them feel nice (like coffee that tasted good, that something finally got fixed or purchased, that the room was nicely decorated, etc). Some text did not get included because I knew that to do so might position a specific activist to be identified by the other activists and I did not feel that was ethical. I believe I have made my own kind of sense from the data that I collected but each reader and each WWINFEW activist who reads this will make up her own mind.

CONCLUSION

There are a cluster of attributes associated with feminist research and this chapter has attempted to test and
apply these attributes to the context of writing about WWINFEW. Reinharz suggests these include: establishing a special relation with the reader; a transdisciplinary approach; ongoing criticism of nonfeminist scholarship; an adherence to a feminist perspective; a respect for feminist theory and human diversity; application of a multiplicity of research methods; the possible development of special relationships with the people studied; an authentic ongoing sharing of the researcher as a person; the goal of social change; and a heightened awareness of certain ethical dilemmas.

The remainder of this thesis will strive for an adherence to these eleven criteria that Reinharz so effectively articulates. My hope is that this text manifests and does honour to the hugeness and intensity of a place like WWINFEW. This organization and this thesis impacted on every aspect of my life: communicating this hugeness and intensity is a challenge.
CHAPTER FOUR: COLDTOWN: LAYERS, COMPLICATIONS AND MEANINGS FOR THE PRESENT

Paula [A First Nations woman activist from WWINFEW]: In a place like Toronto they [average people] might be more open-minded. I think, in Coldtown, it is hard still. It [Coldtown] has just been born. It is just seeing things and putting things together. In terms of these issues, immigrant issues. They are just starting to wake up and realize, oh!, there are people out there [who are from ethnocultural minority backgrounds] and there is nothing being done for them. These people [non-ethnocultural minority residents of Coldtown] aren't as sensitive to these issues. They don't come together. A lot of racism is here in this community. I think there is more than, more than I assume is in Toronto. Because in Toronto, it is a big city and very multicultural. The racism is not too high [in Toronto]. This is a small town and it is already set up for just two groups of people, from the French and the English, for immigrants and Native people there is not a spot [saved or made]. Those two groups are always controlling this small town. There is always going to be a controversial situation. And there is always going to be a non-acceptance. I can see it in the school and everywhere.

Coldtown has existed as a formal bureaucratic entity for slightly more than one hundred years and it is vital that WWINFEW (as Agnew 1996, pp. 66-92, and Ng, 1993 have said about other women's organizing efforts) be understood as situated within the larger space of the past and the present (macro sociological and historical). I have chosen the pseudonym "Coldtown" for this mining town at the suggestion of one of the WWINFEW interviewees. Coldtown is an appropriate
description of the weather here and the wider community's attitudes toward WWINFEW women's issues. This chapter is not about WWINFEW as an organization, but about Coldtown's past which prepared the way for WWINFEW to exist in the organizational form that it took (and for WWINFEW women to exist with the attitudes, beliefs, feelings and practices that they had). Coldtown emerged in response to the mining and forestry industries approximately a hundred years ago.

Whatever I say within this text about Coldtown, my theme and intent is larger than this specific town. Ethnic; social stratification and division; and gender realities are built into every town by the living breathing people who populate the town and they have learned these rules for interaction from the generations before them. These micro behaviours are so endemic that they are usually invisible to insiders -- and sometimes barely visible to those people who are outsiders. In this brief sociological historical and herstorical reflection I outline some of the problems of seeing, hearing, and meaningfully describing a feminist cross-cultural historical background. The multi-layered way we are impacted upon by general historical and sociological backdrops such as racism, capitalism, sexism, and regionalism is complex.

Goffman thought that all of us participated in making the world unfold around us in the ways that it unfolded. Manning
summarized Goffman's ideas in this regard by saying:

Instead of viewing the predictability of social life as the consequence of underlying laws, Goffman thought that predictability was something that we all made happen; it is then, an issue of rule-following behaviour. These rules of social interaction do not produce social order (they do not compel us to act); rather they are a way of exhibiting social order. Rules are subject to interpretation, to disagreement about what constitutes an occasion of rule-following, to exceptions, and to decisions not to abide by them. That the world is even in the slightest a predictable place is an extraordinary and largely invisible accomplishment (1992, p.10).

WWINFEW women and everyone else were implicated in the creation of our world unfolding.

In this chapter I also utilize some insights from ecofeminism (an approach that blends an analysis of environmental issues and an analysis of gender and power issues) because this theory seems to be appropriately complex for analysis of WWINFEW and its place in the world. An ecofeminist theoretical analysis struggles to provide a holistic interpretation of the past and present. In this chapter a basic description of the Coldtown of today and the Coldtown of the past will be offered. The remaining challenges to be faced in attempting to write the herstory of Coldtown's women's past and present will also be outlined.
IDENTITY POLITICS AND POSITIONING

Sunfire [an immigrant visible minority woman leader at WINFEW]: ... I think Coldtown is a prime example of the Unbourgeoisie and these women come to this mining town city and you know the whole concept of...what did you think they take rock out of the ground, they make a living, it spews crap in the air and then breathe it and you know it's fucking cold in the winter and I'm wearing my sarong...you know and you know I'm still hanging on to that...[my sarong and my cultural identity pegs]...

The process I have engaged in (while attempting to understand Coldtown's past) is knotted and complicated. For example, how might I select and block out "periods" for discussion? This is an important decision (Kelly, 1984; Lerner, 1979, pp. 154-159). How might I define, separate, and/or connect information which is "history", "herstory" or "ourstory"? These are important questions which have consequence (Flax, 1987; Scott, 1988). How might I sort which issues or information can be compartmentalized and placed within the title "race-ethnicity", "gender", "socioeconomics"? These are continually changing lived layerings (Agnew, 1996, pp. 93-112) Baron, 1991; Glen, 1992; Kelly, 1984; Ladner, 1987). How might I establish trust with other individuals and groups when my real or perceived situated knowledge and alliances are different (and sometimes oppositional) from theirs? How might I access records when I am perceived as an outsider (by some groups and organizations) and how might I
make sense of things when no primary records were kept (Lerner, 1979, p. 179) or when records were kept with a precise artificial goal (for example, funder's or bosses' mandated interests)? As the oppressed sometimes know it is the conqueror who gets to write about what happened. How we shape and answer questions predicts our answers and the telling of any story.

Chapter three explored 'How do I know what I know and what I remain in need of knowing?' Identity politics (or political stances and practices which emerge in response to our distinct identity pegs) and personal declarations of frame-of-reference are ideas feminist herstorical sociologists now uncomfortably reflect upon. These questions are particularly salient for white Anglophone feminists attempting herstorical sociology. For example, Roach Pierson says:

...white western feminists, such as myself, are becoming more aware of the ways in which our appropriation of the discourse of colonization participated in the continuing colonization by the western world of women among 'third world' peoples at the same time as we were also participating in the oppression of women belonging to those social groups colonized within predominantly white western nations, i.e., poor, indigenous, disabled, black, Asian, and others. In particular, we white western feminists have been guilty of diminishing more horrific forms of oppression by finding facile analogies between them and our lesser oppression (Roach Pierson, 1992, p.134).

These questions about who is in the centre and who is in the
margins of a discussion are complex. Within these pages I am unable to honor all of this complexity. Instead, my tasks are only to confess my limitations and invite further reflection.

As a researcher, questions are raised about how information was written up and made meaningful. How do we authentically deconstruct or reconstruct the social backdrop that shaped what any woman with unique configurations of identity pegs experienced? How do we know how to interpret what we find? Roach Pierson describes the present recognition of the need for diversity and the present consciousness of the complexity we are confronting:

With increasing urgency over the years, however, not just gender difference but the issue of difference between and among women has been raised within feminist circles. In Canada, women of colour, aboriginal women, immigrant and working-class women, lesbians, women with disabilities and non-English speaking women have challenged the dominance and universalization, within Canadian feminism, of a white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied and Anglophone point of view. Women who have been oppressed as 'women' are being asked to confront the fact that other women less advantaged than ourselves have experienced us as the oppressor (Roach Pierson, 1991, p.87).

Flax (1987) adds to Roach Pierson’s ideas and suggests that there is no one universal truth. There are many partial and located truths and we must proceed with precisely that as our only truth. Flax adds that we must validate and appreciate ambivalence and ambiguity. She suggests we learn to let go of
our drive to impose order, structure, and closure on the world we see around us.

The "story" that I have composed about why certain women came together in Coldtown, what they hoped to achieve, and how they interacted may be a partial fiction. Explorations of fine lines between history/herstory and fiction have been presented by authors such as Finlay (1988), Morton (1991), Scott (1988, p. 8) and Zemon Davis (1983). There will be people from differently situated positions who will have a different vantage and interpretation of the past and the present. That is their authentic perspective to articulate. We all face similar limitations. All descriptions are partial and contaminated by our lived experiences, values, beliefs and ideologies. Below I describe some feminist considerations regarding how communities herstoriically evolve and I begin to present some of the backdrop for WWINFEW as an emerging and evolving organization.

**PAST, PRESENT, AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

Lahar gives voice to a connected/interwoven questioning of the 'organic world' and 'the social world' and this questioning's relevance to historians.

To transform our relationship to the past by learning to understand the interactions and continuity of what has been divided into natural and
social history, to establish a personal relation and place in it, is to develop roots -- a metaphor that expresses grounding in both the organic world and social communities. This is riskier, more confusing, more exciting, and more transformative than adding on pieces to a purely social construction of history... (Lahar, 1993, p. 114).

Lahar seems to be advocating that we recognize that the past lives on in us, around us and in our futures. Lahar continues...

...It involves experiencing viscerally and intuitively, as well as rationally, the genesis of the human body and its organic and subjective milieus of our grandmothers and grandfathers. We simultaneously arrive from the past and depart for the future in each encounter with history and with the decisions that we must make today (Lahar, 1993, p.114).

Ethnocultural minority women and/or women of low socioeconomic status have been written out of mainstream history but they have 'simultaneously arrived from the past and departed for the future' and they are 'encountering history in the decisions they are allowed/able to make today'. Recognition of these identity pegs and identity locations has barely existed. Women, ethnocultural minority groups, and people of oppressed socioeconomic status have been the silent invisible lubricants which enabled the cogs and machinery of the malestream profit-oriented world to continue smoothly.

Those who are written out of history are those who suffer at the hands of the dominant groups. Invisibility and, ultimately, violence happens most easily within a short-sighted and fragmentary mind set that is isolated from the existence and needs of
others, qualities that characterize a modern, reductionist, and patriarchal intellectual and scientific tradition (Lahar, 1993, p. 96).

The Western world has evolved into a rigidly hierarchial order where everyone and everything has a specific place and limited boundaries. These places and boundaries have been defined by a superordinate "other" not by those put into the subordinate positions. This subordination, exploitation, and oppression is often defined by the "master" or "central definers" as "love". In the context of Coldtown it has been my observation that when ethnocultural minority women are spoken of in the newspapers or in funders' brochures there is often this theme of romanticizing 'these interesting charming others'. Examples of this can be found in formalized religions, how Canadian immigration policies and practices created different types of immigrants, or in how colleges and universities almost imperceptibly sort out blue collar from white collar workers. Institutions which emerged in Coldtown created and exaggerated differences between groups (ethnocultural, gender, socioeconomic status, religious). Schools, businesses, and housing arrangements participated in this segregation. Note how Bernadette, a First Nations woman helping professional, struggles but also remains embedded in these exaggerated differences. Bernadette remains embedded especially when she reproduces a current stereotype about
"yellow" people being rich business owners:

The majority of Coldtown is white. Everywhere I go white, white, white. There's very few blacks. In my eyes there's very few blacks and those few blacks I've noticed are centred in certain sections of the city which makes it stereotypical. Their being segregated, yeah but that's life too. [My thoughts] on native people, they come and go. Those people they know where they're coming from. Ah, so they are leaving a town behind that's not too far away from them so if things get rough here in Coldtown they can always go back. And those yellow people, oh my goodness, that's really far, far away and besides that the only way they can transfer down here from a different country is if you got cash. And a lot of them got enough cash, or get sent more cash to begin a business. So that those guys are not too, too bad in Coldtown...I think because Coldtown is mainly white, French white, I think a quarter of them might be Italian, that descent area anyways, Portuguese, you name it, that area. There is, there used to be fighting amongst them 'cause I talk to a lot of these people and this area that I am living in right now this used to be called the good side and they were all French people. Those people on the other side of the road, those were the bad ones.

This segregation in Coldtown that Bernadette describes helps create and intensify experiences of racism, sexism, and social segregation and stratification for Coldtown's women. It might be said that Northern Ontario's past has been romanticized in material produced by mining companies (Falconbridge, Ltd., 1990) and by some male researchers (Bray, 1984; Saarinen, 1988; Sketches Of Our Town, 1989). The alienation, isolation, poverty or despair that some Coldtown women have experienced is not romantic from their standpoint.

Feminist theory emphasizes that all oppressions be
recognized as interconnecting and interdependent. By attempting to fight one form of oppression at the expense of another form we defeat ourselves. Lahar explains how some theories are inadequate in their definition of the problems faced in our unhealthy society and these theories are inadequate in their understanding of solutions available to us.

Oppression and repression are sustained by individuals and institutions that are also most often sexist and heterosexist, racist and classist, as well as exploitative of the natural world. Radical feminists see the original problem as sexism; the Old and New Left see the problem as economics and government; and other progressive movements and theories point to various 'isms' that interconnect, negating and distorting the past -- as well as the present -- in a way that is damaging to us all. (Lahar, 1993, p. 93)

Feminists talk about not only the political but the personal dimensions of change. At WWINFEW initially we were trying to simultaneously address all of these oppressions. Some feminists suggest that we must live our politics and our politics must become our lives in a day-to-day manner. Feminism is a theory, an attitude, a practice and a psychological outlook which sees:

...as destructive not only the perceptual distancing and isolation of different peoples from each other, but also the habits of dualistic thought that separate human society from nature. The human/nature dualism is crucial to address and redress, since it is so fundamental, underlying and undermining our relations to the world around us and to that which
is embodied and unmeditated within ourselves. When we set ourselves apart from nature, we disembodify human experience and sever it from an organic context. This means that we stop being aware of the shapings and natural containments that a particular environment places around human practices and social structure (Lahar, 1993, p. 96).

One of my assumptions in this chapter is that white Anglophones and white Francophones oppressed First Nations people and subsequent layerings of immigrants and exploited the environment in their quest for furs, forests, mining rights and land. As a result of companies and the state damaging the land and segregating people, women in Northern Ontario were further divided (from men and from each other as women) and exploited. Women from these various social locations were always divided. In almost insurmountable ways they have been divided from the beginning of contact between settlers and First Nations.

Women's traditional ways of supplementing the family's income (gardening; harvesting wild fruits, vegetables, and herbs; farming, fishing, etcetera) were gradually eroded away because the natural environment was changed and damaged. Discussions of how the degradation of the natural environment can impact on women's ways of earning and securing resources may be found in the work of Cohen (1988), Mies (1988), Shiva (1989) and Waring (1988). As Gordon (1990) and Ross and Usher (1986) so effectively map out any city (and especially cities
like Coldtown) could have been (and could be in the future) developed quite differently.

Women in Northern Ontario were simultaneously blocked from some forms of traditional employments for women and from employment in the lumbering and mining industries. For example, in 1898 the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada called for women to be barred from working in the mines (Armour and Stanton, 1990, p. 29). This process (of disempowerment and division) has been going on for hundreds of years. Women were dependent upon men for resources and divided from each other as a consequence of the day-to-day practices and accomplishments of sexism, racism and economic oppression.

In 1988 we arrived at the moment when an organization like WWINFEW emerged to attempt to perform redress. I emphasize: these WWINFEW women did not suddenly wake up oppressed, divided, but motivated for change in December of 1988! The historical process of dividing and conquering women has been so successful that few of those women oppressed by racism, capitalism and sexism then, or oppressed by racism, capitalism and sexism now, consciously realized the magnitude of these forces or multidimensionality of these forces. WWINFEW arose to assist women in the process of raising consciousness and recognizing commonalities. The most deprived and oppressed women have not had chance to learn about all the
connections and patterns that have shaped their own lives.

The following sections describe some of the communities that exist in Coldtown. WWINFEW, at the time of its conception, decided that it would 'exist to enhance the lives and expand the options of immigrant, First Nations and visible minority women'. Therefore, in the following sections I have briefly discussed 'communities' that might be considered as falling within each of these three identity categories and I discuss them in the order in which they might be thought of as emerging on the terrain of Coldtown (First Nations, Italian-Canadian, and Blacks/South Asians). Although there are many "white" immigrant groups (Finnish, Polish, Ukrainian, German, etcetera) in Coldtown, I have made the choice to discuss Italian-Canadians because they are one large representative group of non-visible Old European immigrant groups who came to Coldtown. I have chosen to discuss Blacks and South Asians together because I believe that within this context they have some potential commonalities.

PRECONTACT / CONTACT YEARS AND FIRST NATIONS WOMEN

Below, Kila demonstrates how important it is to some women to see reminders of their cultural heritage. She is describing a fashion show hosted by WWINFEW:

Kila: [a visible minority immigrant woman and leader
We had an ethnic fashion show. The moment I see women from all across the world who were there. When I see their faces how happy they were to turn out. Most of them were crying to see something from their cultures. People from their different cultures...When they got a chance to see their [from their own ethnocultural group] costumes. Also their music! [From] India, Pakistan, Africa, Turkey, Lebanon. They wore their [from their birth country] costumes. They feel good about that because they don't see their [costumes] very often.

Si: So it made them feel validated? It made them feel, 'so you have this special thing about you and we are all going to share these special things today. There were First Nations women also who danced?

Kila: Yes. There were First Nations women there who danced. Of course, you have to invite them because they were the first here in this country. Lots of people came that same day, while we were having tea, they came to us and they were telling us what a wonderful thing we did...there was a good turn out. Also we made the desserts and snacks from different cultures. It was nice.

Some First Nations women may feel saddened to think of their attributes being reduced to singing, dancing and the eating of desserts. Some might think of this show casing of their culture as being a superficial gesture when compared to the large unresolved structural and political issues like self government and the settlement of land claims.

Although today it is difficult to imagine, Coldtown was once a forested area where individual sustenance hunting and fishing were the only interferences humans made on the landscape (Saarinen, 1988). First Nations people were the
owners of this land until the very recent past. The
grandmothers of women now involved with WWINFEW were without
an "Indian Act" and without reserves and other forms of
governmental control and oppression. Their great great
grandmothers did not need Canada Employment and Immigration or
Secretary of State to finance a program for First Nations
women so they could put food on their tables. They did not
need Community and Social Services to organize a program for
First Nations women so they could have work to fill their days
and to provide for their own material well-being.

First Nations peoples have had their lives dis/organized
and defined by the white dominant culture. There has always
been a fairly large First Nations population in the
geographical area that has been named "Coldtown". According to
Bray (1984), First Nations people had been in the Coldtown
area for over nine thousand years. The Nation which originally
lived in this area were Odawa (Dickason, 1992, P. 65). The
Nations which have historically populated Coldtown and area
include: Ojibwa, Cree, Odawa, Mohawk and Potawatomi
(Recollect, 1989; Manitowabi, 1989). The largest group
statistically is the Ojibwa (Saarinen, 1988).

Lane (1983, p. 322) only mentions "Indian" women in her
discussion of Wives Supporting the Strike in 1978 (this was an
important strike among Northerners). She does not problematize
or discuss the meaning of ethnicity in the group's resistance work. Significantly, two authors who recorded the history of Coldtown and Communist activity in Coldtown never once mention First Nations people (Betcherman, undated; Swift, 1977) although they mention many other ethnocultural communities. From this type of erasure, it might be assumed that no First Nations people existed in Coldtown. My point here is that it seems to not even be problematized when First Nations people are not visible in some historic events and processes.

While compiling oral histories from First Nations women Jagessar (1992a) asked how their families had come to be in Coldtown and/or why they stayed in Coldtown. Within Jagessar's dynamic interviews a great deal of diversity was displayed but commonalities and patterns also emerge.

Being Native this was our land before any settlers moved in. This land was our fathers and their fathers before them. We were proud at one time of our heritage, but now it has changed and we had to change with it (Interview #4).

Natives (First Nations) were here first. We were born here. We were put here in this area of the Earth first (Interview #5).

My father came here to work in the mines (Interview #9).

My mother used to live here. She was working here. Personal problems (Interview #19).

My father was a miner (Interview #20).

We originated here. My mother would not move far away from home. We originated from this region
(Interview #21).


These quotes suggest that the mines, reserve system, and the delivery of social programs divided and reorganized First Nations people. Today there are more than 2,000 women of "Aboriginal ancestry" in our community (Statistics Canada, 1986). First Nations' people's organizations which exist in Coldtown that are relevant to our discussion of WWINFEW include: a Native women's secretarial training centre, a N'Swakamok Friendship Centre, the Ontario Native Women's Association, a variety of University level classes and programs emphasizing Native realities, and a variety of College level programs designed to respond to First Nations people's needs. Most of these programs emerged in the last fifteen years.

The recent creation (in the 1980's) of these university and college programs for First Nations people in Coldtown may have introduced a strong political, economic and social force for change into Coldtown. These Native-directed and Native-oriented programs (social work, political science, child-care, community services, family counseling, etcetera) now collectively graduate scores of First Nations women yearly.
As will be described throughout this text many of WWINFEW's First Nations women were graduates of, or professionals involved in, delivering these programs. This new pride in their heritage, accompanied with their new-found strengths, desire for self-government and Native delivered services has meant that many First Nations women are angry and effectively able to articulate and focus this anger. By 1988 when WWINFEW began creating itself First Nations women had been damaged by centuries of abuse and imposition (by women and men) from other cultures. To date, First Nations women of Coldtown have not documented the full extent of these abuses and impositions.

RESOURCE EXTRACTION, IMMIGRATION, AND ITALIAN-CANADIAN WOMEN

In 1883 the first of three suffrage proposals was presented in the House of Commons by J. A. Macdonald (Armour and Staton, 1990, p. 21) and, as we all know, these proposals were not accepted until decades later. In that same year (1883) Coldtown formally emerged when a railroad built a station in the location that our little city eventually evolved around (Saarinen, 1988). The extraction of raw resources evolved in a boom/bust manner with minimal attention to the consequences on the ecological environment, the well-
being of the wider community, the long-term economic
development of the area, and the opportunities for women, or
the experiences of and opportunities for ethnocultural
minority people. Mining companies evolved for mining
companies' profits and Coldtown also evolved for mining
companies' profits.

Different ethnocultural communities evolved in different
historical/historical waves. As, for example, a "Message Of
Solidarity" from "Women Working With Immigrant Women"
declares:

During the economic expansion of the 1950s and
1960s, there was a need for highly skilled and semi-
skilled workers -- Europeans and Americans were
brought in to fill these gaps. The late 1960s and
early 1970s were characterized by a large
immigration of Third World people who were used as a
source of cheap labour. Today, because of the
economic crisis, they do not need us any longer.
Therefore, immigration policies are making it almost
impossible for us to come (Women Working With

Italian immigrant women were one of the earliest waves of
immigrant women in Coldtown. By examining the situation and
development of Coldtown's Italian women's community insights
can be generated about the wider immigrant experience in
Coldtown. Coldtown's patterns are largely reflective of the
larger Canadian immigration patterns described by Beaujot
(1991) and Hunter (1986). The Italian-Canadian population of
Coldtown more than doubled between 1951 and 1981 (O'Neill and
Coldtown's resident ethnocultural mix has been shaped by our large resource extraction companies. As Swift (1977) says,

The nature of the [Coldtown's] workforce, indeed, of most of the North American industrial working-class, provided ample opportunities for the use by company management of 'divide and conquer' techniques. The hinterlands of Canada were largely populated by a heterogeneous mix of immigrants. In the case of [Coldtown], most management and some skilled workers were of British origin, while most of the workforce consisted of more recent immigrants, Poles, Finns, Ukrainians, Swedes, and Italians...(p. 34)

Multinational resource extraction companies and Canadian immigration laws and policies all participated in creating and maintaining a specific ethnocultural mix. Northern and Southern Italian men came to Northern Ontario to work in the mines. Women kin arrived later and usually once enough money had been saved to bring them here by a male already established in the area. Lengthy separations of husbands and wives or of fathers and children were not uncommon. In this experience of familial separations Coldtown's Italian community was similar to the larger Canadian and American trend (Allevata, 1987; Boyd Caroli, 1978; Harney, 1978; Iacovetta, 1986; Jagessar, 1992c; Sturino, 1986).

The fact that the men came first may have enhanced their ability to define "the Italian-community". An example of how
the men 'owned' and defined the community might be read into
the recent decision to now allow women members into the
Italian community's main formal organization. On June 29, 1992
an Italian Club (which has existed since 1947) just allowed
its first woman to enter as a member (Gervais, June 11, 1992,
Coldtown Star., p.1). Italian-Canadian women have been key
participants in the fund-raising for, and care of, the club
since its inception. Nonetheless, allowing women equal
membership in 1992 was a controversial and long-debated
decision.

Coldtown's Italians first settled in limited
geographical areas of town called Coldgatch and Cold Cliff.
Initially there were next to no services and resources for
them. Some lived in shacks that did not have running water (as
did many other immigrants during that time). As they were
establishing themselves as a community they had to adapt to
some very primitive conditions.

Jagessar (1992) interviewed twenty-five of Coldtown's
Italian-Canadian women about why they had come to live in
Coldtown and what it was like for them to live here. Almost
all of Jagessar's interviewees explicitly or implicitly
communicate that they came to Coldtown because of the men folk
they were emotionally and legally connected to. For example,

...after my husband died. [I] Came [from Italy]
because my father was here working in construction
My dad came to be with his father and work. My mom came to be with her brother. My father came to Canada during the war and depressed times to find employment and a better way of life...(Interview #3).

My husband sent for me [from Italy] (Interview #4).

...I got married and came here [from Italy]. I came to be a housewife and mother (Interview #6).

My father came [from Italy] for the job at Inco... (Interview #10).

My husband was already here. My husband had a job at Inco (Interview #14).

I was married by proxy, an arranged marriage. My husband was working here (Interview #17).

Women who came to Coldtown to be with their male kin folk and who had their lives largely organized by their family responsibilities would organize their groups to support their families and their ethnicity. If, and when Italian-Canadian women were organizing, they would not be organizing as women, as workers, or as feminists.

Italian-Canadian women, because of racism, language barriers, and formal educational barriers, have frequently found themselves streamed into certain job ghettos. Coldtown has never had large factories which, in other communities, have been sweat-shops for immigrant Italian-Canadian women. On the other hand, the non-existence of factories has meant fewer job opportunities for minimally formally educated Italian-
Canadian women. Most of these women worked for kin-owed businesses and/or worked as full-time homeworkers (Jagessar, 1992c). Coldtown's women were, as Iacovetta (1986) says about Italian-Canadian women elsewhere,

Motivated by a commitment to family, southern Italian women linked their self-identification as women and others to the paid and unpaid labour they performed for the benefit of parents, husbands and children. Whether at home or at work, they took on dirty and difficult jobs and cut costs where ever possible. In the process they developed a conception of feminine respectability that was rooted in both their peasant and immigrant working-class experiences, and that expressed the pride of women who saw themselves as indispensable to their family. (p. 215)

These patterns for Italian-Canadian women's lives are in transition. What might be defined as Coldtown's cruder masculinist aura may be eroding partially as a result of a higher educational institution being added to our terrain and an expansion of health-care services in recent decades (Saarinen, 1988). A diversified economy diversifies women's opportunities and enhances their lives. Many problems remain, but as with First Nations people, these new institutions changed some women's opportunities and for many changed their views of self.

**BLACK AND SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN IN COLDTOWN**

Visible minority women can come from anywhere in the
world or they can be multigenerational Coldtowners. Of course, they only become defined as "visible minority" in the context of a dominant white culture. In Coldtown there are over three hundred permanent resident Black women and, perhaps, a few hundred students who might define themselves as 'Black' women. An enormous amount of literature has become available about Black women's views of the western world. Some particularly stimulating resources include Brand,(1991), Brown (1989), Holland (1990), and hooks (1990,1984). Holland recommends that when considering Black women we remember to focus on the wholeness of their lives.

3-D: depression, discrimination, and deprivation. At the root of their depression and self-deprecation lies a history of abuse, exploitation, and misuse of themselves, as babies, as girls, as women, as working class women, as black women...(Holland, 1990, p. 256).

I was unable to ascertain what class backgrounds are most common for Black women in Coldtown but my personal observations are that most of them have professional backgrounds and/or are attached to men with professional backgrounds. Most of the Black women I encountered directly or indirectly through my observations and activism with WWINFEW were teachers and/or university students.

The second large group of visible minority women in Coldtown could be defined as South Asians. There are approximately one hundred South Asian families who are
permanent residents of Coldtown and area and approximately another few dozen who are students at the college or university (Jagessar, 1992). The vast majority of these women are from a middle-class or upper-middle-class family background (Jagessar, 1992). Most are well educated and many hold a Masters degree from either their birth country or Canada (Jagessar, 1992).

The majority of South Asian women in Coldtown are relatively recent immigrants or first generation Canadian-born. They have come here because of employment opportunities in the medical professions, the college or the university. Employment in these sectors has just been created over the past three decades as Coldtown opened a university, a college and became a centre for health care in the north. Some of the struggles they might experience emerge as a consequence of their status as "immigrant" women as much as from their status as "South Asian" women.

**LAYERING OF CLASS, RACE, GENDER AND STATE**

**IN VolvMENT**

Bernadette: I think it's [WWINFEW's] a very unique organization. I'm not sure if they have one in Toronto 'cause I never checked. I'm sure they do but here in Coldtown it is a unique organization and it should be and must be...Yeah [I still believe in the WWINFEW group and what they're trying to do]. Like I said we all reacted to the same tension the same way
whether they were from a different culture. We are just human beings whether our skin is black, yellow, red, or white. We are the same. We face the same type of obstacles sometimes. Sometimes we don't. But the ones that don't [have those obstacles] can help the ones that [do] have [those obstacles].

Having offered some basic information regarding the historical realities of First Nations women, Italian-Canadian women, and Black/South Asian women I will return now to describing the town of Coldtown and additional national historic and historic patterns that may have shaped Coldtown, and thus, contributed to the shape of WWNFEW. Obviously there are thousands of facts that are national and which filter down to shaping Coldtown. The following is only a brief pedestrian outline.

Coldtown, as a non-urban/non-central geographic point, has usually been given few resources and political/economic recognition. Many small Northern communities experience this limitation (Dunk, 1991, pp. 118-120, Hunter, 1986, pp. 178-180; Kuyek, 1990; Mastronardi, 1990). Canadian-born white Anglophone and white Francophone women constitute at least sixty percent of the female population of Coldtown (Saarinen, 1988). As stated elsewhere, white Anglophones and white Francophones can be very diverse in how they would identify in regards to their ethnic (German, Scottish, Polish, etcetera) or religious (Catholic, Protestant, etcetera) identity pegs. Between 1951 and 1970 the percent of the population
represented by white Anglophones and white Francophones has remained relatively stable (O'Neill and Andrews, 1986, p. 29). In recent years Coldtown's been designated 'officially bilingual' and this may be encouraging more Francophones to come here and/or to remain here.

As discussed in chapters two and three, the questions we ask largely ascertain what answers we receive. The last three decades have brought forward enormous changes for women and for ethnocultural minorities in Canada (for example, The Royal Commission on the Status of Women; policy changes regarding First Nations Issues; changes in immigration rules etcetera)

Some of the hard-won gains accomplished during the 1970's and 1980's (such as affirmative action programs and the financing of some women's services) are being erased in the 1990's (see for example: Brodie, 1995; Cooper, 1995; Lakeman, 1993; Ng, Kwan, and Miedema, 1991; Ng, Walker and Muller, 1990; Palm 1993). During the 70's and 80's the state changed some of its ways of interacting with women and ethnocultural minorities as a result of Royal Commissions and other factors (see for example Agnew, 1996; Armour and Staton, 1990; Bannerji, 1995; Bear and The Tobique Women's Group, 1991; Bissandath, 1994; Li, 1988, p. 10; Pal, 1993). The 70's and 80's were marked by dramatically increased openness (and/or rhetoric) to ideals of multiculturalism (Li, 1988, p. 10) and discussions about

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changing demographics (Halli, Trovato and Driedger, 1990).
Feminism, socialism, and other progressive ideologies and practices also became more tolerated (at least at the level of discussion and politicians' interests in photo-oppotunities) -- in the 1990's a retrenchment is occurring.

Much of what happens in Canada around issues of racism, socioeconomic oppression and sexism is steeped in stereotypes and myths. Dunk (1991, pp. 101-132, Li, 1988) and others discuss this pattern. McAll (1990) points out how myths are created, maintained and relevant to this discussion. He points out some of the myths about multiculturalism:

At the heart of the idea of multiculturalism is the notion of unity in diversity. What is held to make Canada an entity distinct from other entities is its enormous physical extent and the diversity of cultural groups that are scattered across its surface...A myth has meaning in two directions. It serves both to explain and either to justify or to undermine an existing reality (McAll, 1990, p. 167)

McAll furthers his ideas:

Myth can thus be seen to grow out of a present reality, either reinforcing it or demolishing it. And in growing it spreads its root system back into the past, which it reworks and reinterprets better to explain how the reality that it sees came into being, and on into the future in order to provide the basis for what it would like to see existing (McAll, 1990, p. 167).

McAll's ideas are relevant to the development of Coldtown (and WWINFEW) in that in the distant past women from different cultures were defined as being worth less than men and as
being placed into a hierarchy with white Anglophone men at the top and white Anglophone women second from the top. Historically racism was explicit. Now there is a **mythology** that all Canadian women and all Canadian people are equal in their diversity.

In some ways the rhetoric is more disturbing than the historic ways of proceeding. Presently, historic causes for contemporary problems are denied and mystified. It is convenient for the dominant groups to first exploit others and then to say "well now we're all equal". WWINFEW arose at a time when there was this mystifying mythic "gloss" seeping out of Ottawa, Queens Park, Municipal government and elsewhere.

To understand the organizational development of WWINFEW I need to understand the distant and recent backdrops that shaped the lives of the women in this community -- these individual women blended their energies to constitute the organization of WWINFEW. How did their lives come to need "enhancement" and how did they come to need their "options expanded"? Marie describes some of the painful layerings of economic oppression, race, gender and how these may relate to the role the state plays:

I don't know how you describe it [Coldtown]. Whether you describe it as a one industry town. A [blue collar] town. But, it's expanded and diversified [it's economy], there's the university and other major institutions, but there is still very much this small town mentality. Of rugged individualism
and when you use the word 'feminism' you get a gasp. You get two responses. One is: 'What is that!' Or you get a lot of anger. You get, people say: 'Why do we need something like that in the first place? I mean we already have cultural events [said sarcastically]! They say, 'Why do we need an ethnic women's organization [said sarcastically again]?'

Marie continues describing historic and layered backdrops to WWINFEW:

Yes [people in Coldtown wanted us to dress up and dance in costumes but that's all]. There wasn't a lot of acceptance even within social service organizations. Yes [there was] very little acceptance, in terms of understanding, even appreciation about WWINFEW. What we did, what we stood for, what we were trying to do or hoping to accomplish. There wasn't a lot of understanding, acceptance, empathy, patience. Then, I'm bringing this in. I've described the larger circle [the economy, the agencies] I'm bringing this in to here [hands moving in closer to the body]. The next smaller circle would be other women-centred organizations that dealt with women and race and other things.

Marie proposes that WWINFEW was ahead of its time:

Yes [organizations in Coldtown had a separatist rather than coalitionist attitude]. Sometimes I felt that the organization was about twenty or thirty years ahead of its time in terms of what it saw happening. Maybe those other organizations did need that time in isolation to develop themselves, their structures. Maybe it was just that we were too soon.

Changes in our economy were motivating some women to participate in and/or resist change. Our two largest resource extraction companies were decreasing their workforce in Coldtown during the late 80's and early 90's. Ethnocultural minority women and women of low socioeconomic status are
always among the first to experience the consequences of cutbacks whether those cutbacks result from the loss of employment by their husbands or from the loss of their own employment (Amott and Matthaei, 1991). Dave Patterson, a past President of Local 6500, United Steelworkers of America explained what one of our large companies was doing in Coldtown:

[This company's name] is just another four-letter word. This is demonstrated by the obscenities Canadian workers have to endure while governments in Ottawa and the provinces sit on their hands and allow [this company] and others to continue their rape of our natural and human resources. This situation can only be corrected when we begin to realize that these resources have to be developed in balance with the welfare of those who produce corporate profits (Patterson, quoted in Swift, 1977, p. 9).

The dynamics he is critical of in the late 1970's had escalated by the late 1980's. Patterson is expressing feminist compatible insight. Elsewhere Patterson says:

Transnational corporations play a strategic role in an international system of inequality and injustice. As such they are specific instruments of oppression (Patterson (quoted in Swift), 1977, p. 14).

T. M. Davis, while Chairman of the Regional Municipality of Coldtown in 1988 said:

While our local mining companies have finally returned to the profit columns after the massive setbacks of 1982 and 1983, they nevertheless have huge debts to service. Mining, as ever, remains a
risky business and, although it has been good for [Coldtown] over the years, we can no longer rely on it as our sole economic mainstay (Davis, 1988, Report III On The State Of The Economy, p. 1).

This same report advocates that our economy become diversified by expanding our health care facilities, expanding our emphasis on developing human creativity (through educational facilities and social services). In the years immediately preceding WWINFEW's initiation some people were recognizing the need to begin seeking balance between human needs, the natural environment's needs and the "needs" of global capital. However, the needs of women were not often enough put on the table (for example women's need for childcare, supportive cooperative housing, an increased minimum wage -- these resources are seen by mainstream/male-stream leaders as luxuries).

Coldtown was built on the labour of workers in the spheres of mining, lumbering and agriculture (especially male-defined and male-dominated spheres of employment). Women's ghettos were, and are, small in Coldtown. As one of the first women employed as a miner in Coldtown expressed,

Clerks, waitresses, bank tellers, behind the cash register, baby-sitting. It's the only jobs available for women in [Coldtown]. There weren't even real estate salesladies around at that time. There was nothing for women. (Penny, 1983, p. 11)

These aspects of Coldtown's history/herstory may have
contributed to Coldtown being a more resistant community in regards to empowering women's perspectives. Women were not encouraged to work in the mines and there were (and still are) too few other meaningful and rewarding employment opportunities. Ethnocultural minority and working class women experience more of Penny's "nothingness for women". Of course some women have found and utilized opportunities and succeeded autonomously. These heroic women succeeded more often in spite of the structures in place around them than as a result of the structures in place around them.

These larger realities (single industry resource extraction towns, economic boom/busts, erasure of women's needs, etcetera) must be understood as arising from a provincial, national and global context. As Smith says:

These changes do not arise from a logic within the local setting. They are like the flows of lava from a volcano, each transforming the landscape in radical ways, each laying over its predecessors, but unconnected with them other than by succession. The logic of transformation is elsewhere. (1989, p. 94)

Coldtown represents a "typical layering sequence of change". In other words, by the time WWINFEW arose more than a century had already been invested in separating and oppressing ethnocultural minority and/or women of limited economic and social resources. These types of layered suppressions and erasures are simply done by (almost always) white Anglophone and Francophone men who are socioeconomically empowered
sitting in rooms and making decisions that do not take into consideration the needs of anyone who does not share the same cluster of identity pegs as themselves.

In the years immediately preceding the initiation of WWINFEW, our major resource extraction companies were constricting their interests in Coldtown and unemployment and poverty were increasing nationally and locally. Within this setting some ethnocultural minority and low income women were not only experiencing more troubles, but they were also becoming more conscious of the origins of those troubles as a result of our university and college programs and other forces for enlightenment. People were becoming somewhat more enlightened about the ways that racism, socioeconomic oppression, and sexism interconnect. The fact that the federal and provincial governments allocated some monetary support in an attempt (or, more cynically, in an effort to appear as though they were attempting) to redistribute resources and create a non-racist, non-sexist society built upon equal opportunities and this meant that individuals could contemplate coming together to create "resistance" organizations.

The various arms of the Canadian State participate in

6I discuss "the Canadian State" and think of it simply as groups of people (usually white Anglo and Francophone men who are middle age or older and of high socioeconomic status)
shaping who people become, how they define themselves, and how they interact together. The State helped to create divisions among groups of people and the State helps to maintain those divisions. During the 1980's and the 1990's various forms of funding from the different arms of the government (Secretary of State, Citizenship, Canada Employment, Northern Mines And Development, etcetera) were available to provide consciousness-raising opportunities for people from all kinds of backgrounds and with all kinds of interests.

These assumptions about change, where people are in a social hierarchy, and how they came to be there in that hierarchy and "texts" form part of the "relations of ruling" (Smith, 1989, pp. 38-39). These learning opportunities usually focus on "presentist" interpersonal characteristics found in people from different ethnocultural heritages. Community activists sometimes accidentally become implicated in the process of myth making. The layered background of historical context regarding how people have evolved into separate "ways-of-being" is usually erased. The role that the state has played in dividing us from each other is erased. This backdrop of activity of the Canadian State is an

sitting together doing what feels and is best for themselves form where they are physically, emotionally and intellectually situated. The State is constituted by people doing multitudes of things everyday that coalesce into policies, programs and legislations.
important one to remain focused on while contemplating women's organizations.

Amott and Matthaei (1991) assert this significance when they talk about historical interconnections. They describe how women become segmented from each other as a result of their race, their location in a layered socioeconomic structure, and the relationship they have with paid and unpaid work. We must remember that the State plays a major role in deciding what "types" of immigrants are allowed into Canada (as domestics, independents, family class, etcetera), what forms of educational opportunities they are encouraged to partake in (through Immigrant Settlement Adaptation Programs) and other supportive programs and through the availability of ESL (English as a Second Language classes and student loans programs), and how much the minimum wage will be, etcetera. The State participates in producing women's oppressed positioning and women's experience of their ethnicity.

We see these three social categories [gender, race-ethnicity, class] as interconnected, historical processes of domination and subordination. Thinking about gender, race-ethnicity, and class, then, necessitates thinking historically about power and economic exploitation (Amott and Matthaei, 1991, p. 11).

Coldtown's women share positions in relation to capitalism and patriarchy. We share positions with each other but our segregation/experience of racism has divided us and hindered
us from seeing how we do share positions of "otherness". In chapter six I will discuss how women's organizations, ethnocultural organizations and social service organizations emerged on this terrain called Coldtown. In Chapter five I discuss my personal, political and professional experiences of being in Coldtown and in WWINFEW. In this chapter I have described how ethnocultural minority women have emerged from diverse experiences. Their coming together from 1988 to 1996 at WWINFEW placed them in vibrant opposition to much of what had gone on around them for decades and in opposition to much of what continued going on around them.
Si [during an interview in 1992]: Being involved with [WWINFEW] has changed my life. I will never be the same person I was. I could never go back to being the same person I was. Through WWINFEW I have learned about the entire world. Through WWINFEW the entire world has come and put itself right in front of my face and right in my heart. I've learned about women from Nicaragua, Australia, Vietnam. Now when I hear these words, [as opposed to] in the past as an Anglo, the white Trash, sort of a bush-girl that I am, I had never met anyone from other countries like that, at least not who had shared their stories with me. So, in a way, I feel like that through these women I have had a chance, to discover the whole world, different layers of the world, different perspectives and intensities and I feel I've been enriched by that. The world has all this intensity that it didn't have before. I feel I'm a much wiser person. Sometimes more courageous. More bitter. Things that used to be simple now aren't...

SELF-ANALYSIS AND SELF-DISCLOSURE AS METHODOLOGY

WWINFEW emerged in Coldtown in response to lived realities. My sense of WWINFEW emerged in response to my lived realities. As stated earlier in this text feminist research and feminist documentation involves self-analysis and self-disclosure on the part of the investigator/practitioner. I am using my own experience as a "case study" to teach others what I have witnessed and experienced and I am displaying my standpoint. Ristock and Pennell (1996) also emphasize how important it is to disclose our own locations and
intersectionality:

Both researcher and participants bring with them social histories of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and other power-associated differences in social position that reverberate throughout their interaction, whether the researcher pays attention to them or not. Feminist researchers, though, tend to be particularly aware of these power issues, especially in cases where the researcher belongs to a dominant social category relative to the research participants (p. 65).

Exploring through the rivers of ideas that constitute the "bodies of knowledge" relevant to my role inside of/outside of WWINFEW has been exhausting.

As was discussed in the chapter on feminist methodology Reinharz proposes that we often define a special relationship with the reader, that feminism is a lived perspective which frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studied, and that feminist research includes the researcher as a person. Personal internal difficulties have arisen both in the living of these dimensions of the process and then in the writing of these dimensions of the process. Within this chapter I have tried to expose my own role in the story, the meaning for me of being involved with WWINFEW, and the issues WWINFEW existed to respond to.

In this chapter I try to describe some of the messy and complicated thinking and personal changes I have gone through in the decade since 1988 when my involvement with WWINFEW
began. Sunfire, a WWINFEW President, describes the process of closing and opening to these memories of WWINFEW and to the process of change that results from passionate involvement.

Well, when you first asked me [to do this interview] I didn't think I would have anything to tell you and then all of a sudden there were [many things I wanted to say but] it's sincere and it came from my heart and I've enjoyed the experience of having conjured up these memories that I had not thought of in many years...

Sunfire continues describing how she had put her memories "away in a place":

I put it [my WWINFEW experiences] in a place. I closed it up and said well this is a part; it's so different than where I am now and so that's what happened. I put it in the other place...all this time actually Si I've been thinking that that person is different than the person I am now, but in truth I am the same person, I am the same person on the inside. And so, it [doing this interview] made me feel really good.

She expressed that having a chance to talk about this gave her a sense of closure or a sense of making peace with it all and sorting it out:

Yes there was some closure involved [in doing this interview]...I really thought I had lost my sense of passion for some small justice in the world and [now] I don't think I have.

Sunfire actually discovers during the interview that her passion has not been extinguished.

Well, it's still there. My passion is still there. My everyday world takes care of the practicalities but in my heart you know that's the passion that fuels the person and I think I could marry the two, it would be okay. I
always thought I had to keep them separate. So for me this [interview] has been a real learning experience and who I was [then and who] I [still] am [now].

As Sunfire did, I experienced insights about myself as I was interviewed.

An important step that I took in the beginning of my research process in 1992 was to have another feminist researcher, Morgan Gardner (an OISE doctoral student), interview me on tape answering the questions that I was going to ask my interviewees. In the last portion of this chapter I directly utilize that material to describe how I was thinking in the beginning of the research process.

MOTIVATIONS AND QUESTIONS

Why was I involved with a group like WWINFEW? How did who I was shape how I perceived the group, was perceived by the group and now, retrospectively, assess my experience? These things are infinitely in motion. Even as I compose this text my sense of things is changing. The very process of thinking through my thoughts and formally sharing them in an academic document like this one is remapping the geography of my sense of self in relation to WWINFEW and in relation to WWINFEW activists. In writing/expressing my self-experience in this manner I am what Denzin (1992, p. 35), refers to as the 'worldly' or 'flesh and blood subject'. Below, I share some of
my internal journey regarding my identity pegs.

RECOGNITION OF PRIVILEGE

I recognize that at this exact moment in my life I have a multitude of privileges. My skin is white and this means that I can walk the streets of Coldtown and not be noticed as different from some undeclared "norm". I have always lived in Northern Ontario and, therefore, I have never felt total social isolation the way a new immigrant woman might feel coming to the North and leaving behind (in another country) her kin and social network. I have never had to apply to come to this beautiful country and no one can ever expel me from this country. I have never personally witnessed war, famine, or drought. At this moment I have an excellent education, advanced English language skills, a computer, a car, a home, a job, functionally good health and regular contact with people who love me. I have every reason to expect these privileges will continue to be available to me for decades to come. Few of WINFEW's women had this array of privileges. I try to be conscious, accountable and responsible in how I live my life and in how I experience my identity pegs. I try to be part of the solutions rather than part of the problems.

At the same time I also was born into (and lived in for fifteen years) a family where poverty, violence, emotional and
material chaos was the taken-for-granted norm. This “imprinting’, I believe, always stays with a person in some way. In my case I feel I have a strong empathy with people encountering oppression -- I also often have a powerful sense of hope because I have managed to recreate a life for myself that is without poverty, violence and chaos.

ETHNICITY/CULTURE

In Germany they first came for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me -- and by that time no one was left to speak up. -Pastor Martin Niemoller (political button)

The meaning of my own ethnicity? My father is a German immigrant who grew up in Germany during and after the war. During my childhood he told stories of knowing about bombing deaths, searching for food in dumps, and stealing food from farms by scavenging for potatoes after the harvest. He tells of being beaten repeatedly by his father. His birth family was a series of tragedies and horror stories.

Although I do not know these people first hand my sense is that they were very poor, very violent and very coarse people. He ran away as soon as he was legally able to and came to
Canada to work in the mines in Northern Ontario. He always had a love/hate relationship with Canada. It was the country that saved him from his family's violence and poverty. It was the country that never let him get ahead because it defined him as "an illiterate labourer". This life-experience of having a love/hate relationship with Canada is a life-experience that some WWINFEW women have also expressed. Also, my father's choice (forty years ago) of residence in Coldtown because of the mining employment opportunities links my life to Coldtown in ways similar to many WWINFEW women.

My mother was adopted as a baby (and an only child) into what might be defined as a second generation Scottish-Canadian family. My mother's family was quiet, Protestant, hard-working, and frugal. My grandfather worked in the mines and my grandmother was a homeworker. My mother tells of what sounds like date-rape, an unwanted pregnancy, and a shot-gun wedding to my father. To my mother "ethnocultural heritage" would be a meaningless concept. It is the "taken-for-granted" place in which her life began and continues. Her "ethnocultural heritage", similar to most white Anglophone Canadian-borns, is like the water a fish never notices.

The above briefly outlines my ethnic heritage as I believe it to be. Every other woman within WWINFEW has her own story of her self and every woman in WWINFEW might have a
different story to tell about how they perceived and processed my ethnicity.

Denzin (1992) summarizes how many SI thinkers imagine our world view is created and shaped. He concisely communicates connections between how different 'fathers' of SI perceive how humans perceive the world:

...Blumer makes his human agent free; free that is, to define situations in ways that transcend the very material conditions of life that Marxism, Critical Theory, and existentialism say shape human consciousness. For Blumer (and Mead) consciousness determines existence. For Marx, Mills, Sartre, and the Critical school, human consciousness does not determine existence; nor does existence determine consciousness. Between consciousness and existence resides communication and culture. These two processes dialectically structure existence and consciousness (Denzin, 1992, p. 164).

My 'culture' or ethnic background and the communications I continually have had for thirty-seven years with others about their ethnic backgrounds have shaped my consciousness. My consciousness shapes how I am approaching the writing of this document and the thinking behind the writing of this document.

Organizations and our 'organizational selves' are entangled. None of us leave our complex multidimensional selves behind when we enter organizations (or when we enter research settings). As Mills and Simmons say:

...People do not leave their selves behind when they come to work. The workplace is charged with emotionality, family concerns, sexuality, worries, hopes and dreams: try as they may, persons cannot divorce their selves from the workplace.
Organizations are composed of persons with diverse psychological needs and behaviors which inevitably come to influence, and are shaped by, working relationships (Mills and Simmons, 1995, pp. 96-97).

My own ethnicity shaped how I experienced WWINFEW. This point (the point being that ethnicity was a constant filter for perceptions), I emphasize, applied to every other activist/participant at WWINFEW. The meaning to me of my own ethnicity has erratically shifted and oscillated among the spaces of white Anglo Canadian-born-German-Scottish. Often this shifting was subtle and I only became conscious of it months later. Just as we are "imprinted" with a location in the socioeconomic structure we are "imprinted" with an ethnocultural identity in childhood but this identity is permeable and ever potentially open to shifting.

When I was a child I, as have most children in the Western world, watched shows like Hogan's Heroes and Laugh-in. These shows displayed relatively minimal violence in their depictions of what they proposed were Germans' identity pegs. I also watched a whole array of war movies. These shows usually portrayed German people as being male. Females were hardly ever shown and if they were shown they were some barely noticed sexual object silently moving about in the background. The males were almost always soldiers, loud, aggressive, duplicitous. In the movies they were usually shown in squads
and swarms; killing squads, hunting swarms, bombing squads. These images of German men are superimposed on my images of my father. In my mind "German" came to be a reflexive synonym for "violent, cruel, self-absorbed, intolerant, controlling, manipulative and focused to obliterate any dissension".

If these were/are my images of "Germans" and if I might be identified as being half German, what does that say about me? When I read about the Holocaust and realized that people who could be thought of as my Aunts, Uncles, Cousins, or Grandparents might have been involved (either through omission or commission) with these unspeakable crimes I was stunned. The feelings associated with being the post WWII generation of Germans are complicated (see for example Sichrovsky, 1987). How could any people do these horrific things to other people? How could I be related to a group of people who seemed to have been bypassed when the potential for empathy was being given out? Six million Jewish people (and many thousands of disabled people, intellectually challenged people, homosexuals, gypsies and dissenters) could not have been tortured and killed unless a few million Germans both allowed it to happen and made it happen. How few Germans could have been innocent? Those who were silent and who looked away were not innocent; maybe they remain implicated by their apathy.

The questions have been raised for me again and again and
in different ways about how I might have developed as a person had I been born and socialized there (in Germany). Recently, watching movies like "The Music Box" or "Schindler's List" I again asked questions. I do not forget that women, of course, were both victims and perpetrators in Nazi violence and oppression (Bridenthal, Grossman, Kaplan, 1984; Fogelman, 1994; Hirschman, 1974; Koonz, 1986). Would I have been any different had I lived in that historic place and time? Would I have been innocent? Would I have been courageous? How far would I have been prepared to go in resistance? Would I have looked the other way?

My father displayed episodic violence towards all of the members of his nuclear family. I often think that he brought the worst and ugliest of Germany and the German heritage here to Canada with him. He shared this dimension of "cultural authenticity" regularly with us; through imposing his physical violence, his psychological violence, and his sexual violence. He seemed to be playing and replaying some type of bizarre game or movie of 'Nazi versus the vulnerable Jew' right in the privacy of his own home. Everyone outside of our nuclear family politely looked the other way. When his children had bruises, were afraid of people, were dressed inappropriately, and were pathetically withdrawn -- no one noticed.

If anyone did in fact notice they thought it was not
their responsibility to intervene or if they thought of intervening they decided that maybe this was "just" part of the "German way". As an adult I have had the odd experience of being told by people who were my school play mates years ago that "back then everyone knew he was doing that to you but we didn't know what to do about it". I have often heard it said that the "Canadian way" is to be polite and distant. Perhaps it is a truly authentic Canadian cultural characteristic that in the face of any type of trauma or distress the thing to openly demonstrate is cool detached politeness.

My mother's parents are polite. They believe that a woman married for life and "she had made her own bed to lie in" and, therefore, my father's violence continued. They believed that a man is the king of his own castle. They believed that privacy and the sanctity of the family should prevail. They believed that few things were more shameful than to be an unmarried mother or to be a divorced woman living on welfare. Their beliefs were commonly held in the late 1950's (and this theme, unfortunately, still exists in many people's minds today). My mother never explicitly told them where the bruises came from and her parents never explicitly asked. Many of WWIFEW's women also experienced or witnessed these types of silences and abuses.

Having consented to date the wrong man my mother (from
the world-view within this cluster of Scottish and/or Protestant and working-class identity pegs) ended up sealing her own fate for the rest of her life. My maternal grandparents looked the other way whenever they might have been exposed to something they did not want to know. It was not "their place" to say anything about their daughter's husband. Particularly, it would have been rude to say anything because, nonetheless, he did work and pay the bills. Had he been lazy and perpetually unemployed my mother's parents might have felt entitled to speak out against him. To my mother's parents being polite, working hard, minding only your own business, and remaining silent on all else might be said to be part of their authentic cultural heritage. They demonstrated their love for their grandchildren by buying us presents, teaching us manners, and feeding us wonderful food. Their love for me protected me and strengthened me but it also left me as a child with too few resistance strategies. I do not remember many comments or conversations in which our family reflected on their own situated ethnocultural identity pegs.

SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIOLOGY OF THE FAMILY

During this childhood and early adolescence of violence I was accidently learning to be a social worker. Many researchers and therapists have written about the dynamics of
physical and sexual violence against women and children (Bart and Moran, 1993; Bartky, 1990; French, 1985). Elsewhere I have described my experiences of oppression and reclamation (Transken, 1995b, 1993a). Much of what is said about oppression demonstrates that (in an attempt to survive) the oppressed victim has to make a sophisticated art-form of trying to imagine and respond to whatever the oppressor is thinking. The oppressed can experience some degree of self-empowerment by anticipating the next time the oppressor is going to kick, hurt, demand service, or expropriate resources from the oppressed. With a complex knowledge of the oppressor's world view the oppressed can often respond effectively and in a timely manner. Many ethnocultural minority women are very wise in regards to the thinking processes of the dominant cultures. Not a day went by during these first fifteen years of my life when I did not ask myself; 'What mood is he [my father] in? What does he want? What is his next move? What does he expect from me next? How can I avoid making him mad?

Social work was the profession I chose because I was a 'natural' at it. When I signed up for psychology classes and social work classes and was able to achieve 'A' marks on assignments I was surprised only because I had failed at many other things previously. I was not surprised that I could
figure out what the dynamics of wife assault, incest, rape, child abuse, poverty, etcetera were. Later, as I started reading more and more about different cultures and learning about the dynamics of racism there was always a cluster of themes I could empathize with. For example, feeling different from the crowd (my father started sexually abusing me when other little girls were still playing with dolls) or feeling my voice could not be heard (although I tried communicating to others what types of violence were going on in my family no one heard me or responded). Racism is about people looking the other way. Racism is about people taking advantage of other people, imposing their views and will on them, exploiting their labor, and disregarding their feelings. Racism is about attempting to erase the needs and views and feelings of another person or group of people. My father felt he was entitled to erase the needs, views and feelings of other people (his family).

Since I evolved accidently into a social worker and since social work as a discipline was accidently responsible for my connecting with the women's movement it plays an important role in my intellectual development regarding feminism and organizations. I propose that the manner through which agencies and self-help groups evolve out of community organizing efforts and the activist's personalities shapes the
final character of the organization.

**SOCIAL WORK, FEMINIST ORGANIZING AND ORGANIZATIONS**

Over seven hundred hours of my time were formally given to what I will call the Centre Organized by the First Feminists (COFF). As a social work intern I was mandated to provide service to a social work agency (and this service was supervised by a faculty consultant). Therefore, as described above (and largely because of the degree's requirement for supervised work in a 'professional' social context) I deepened my knowledge of women's issues. Many of the other women at COFF were social workers. The discipline of social work is a woman's profession. The two movements (social work as a profession and the women's movement as a formalized entity) have grown on somewhat parallel paths, have often informed each other, and have often shared the same activists (Briskin, 1991; Dale and Foster, 1986; Gordon, 1988; Levine, 1989; G. Walker, 1990). What did I learn from social work and community organizing theory that is ir/relevant to women's organizing and women's organizations? What I learned came to me from a small group of distinct and significant voices.

Some of these social work voices included: Jane Adams (Addams, 1938; Davis, 1973; Lasch, 1965), Emma Goldman (Goldman, 1972; Haaland, 1993), Margaret Sanger (Chesler,
1992; Sanger, 1971), Saul Alinsky (1972), Carl Rogers (1961, 1969), Paulo Friere (1968). It is worth noting that during my professional development most authors in social work program text books were white and Western. It is also worth noting that most of these voices that I have identified above are associated with the radical fringe of social work.

During my first few years of social work training there seemed to be three general themes that I was exposed to. These themes are important because I encountered them again during my interviews with WWINFEW women (and in the text of my own 1992 WWINFEW interview these themes are expressed). One theme was that: all will go well, everyone will be happy, life will be good and harmony will prevail as soon as we all identify the problems, articulate the problems and get organized. The second theme I perceived was that people are intrinsically good in the world and that if we can just get enough of the good people together we can form a coalition and resist and re-educate people. The third theme I absorbed (and later observed in some WWINFEW women’s behaviours and interviews) is that the Canadian government is generally quite good and caring and that if we professionally research, document and demonstrate our case for change then justice will prevail.

As can be seen elsewhere in this thesis, these themes appeared at WWINFEW and added layers of complexity to an
already complex terrain. These three optimistic themes did not prove themselves to be reality based. My personal struggles with trust and cynicism and some WWINFEW women's struggles with trust and cynicism have evolved considerably since 1988. Many of us began our involvement with WWINFEW believing optimistically in the above -- and we concluded our involvement believing the opposite (i.e. identifying and articulating problems may serve only to isolate you; people may not be intrinsically good and those who are good may not care at all about helping you; and the three levels of government do not exist to make our kind of justice prevail -- in fact they may exist to make unjustice prevail).

**COMPLEX CONNECTIONS**

Having now described some aspects of my childhood, my own ethnicity, my professional development, and the meaning of these attributes and experiences to who I am today. I can return to the connections between "ethnicity" and "organizations". Below, read how one of WWINFEW's board members describes the complex connections and issues she experienced at WWINFEW. She witnessed some of the problems regarding organizational behaviour of volunteers at WWINFEW who were from cultures and socioeconomic status-imprintings other than her own:
volunteers they show up in the office only when they feel like. They miss days because there is no more motivation [for them], like there would be if there was a salary there. Always been a problem. Every time I went to WWINFEW and I stop by just to say hello I always see different people. Those people never know who I was. They didn't know who I was -- I was one of the founders! If there were people there for a long time [i.e. if there had been permanent employees] they would treat me differently. They [new volunteers] treat me like I was a stranger [because they never met her before], a complete stranger. They say, 'Can I help you?' A bunch of people who have no training in immigrant issues. So they don't even know how they have to treat an immigrant. They don't know they have to be patient. They don't even know that they have to shake hands. They don't even know how to welcome them [immigrants] and make them feel comfortable. So you [WWINFEW] will be losing people instead of gaining them. This has happened to me. But I knew about it. A newcomer would come to the office and the people just look up, they not even stand up, shake hands, and say 'hello can I make you a coffee?'. I always told you an immigrant needs to be served. That is what they [immigrants] will do when you come to their houses. They will serve you. You don't have to go and make your own coffee. That would be insulting [referring to the unspoken assumption at WWINFEW that people serve themselves a coffee]. That was missing.

The class and ethnicity background of the above quoted Board member make her believe she should be served and recognized as special when she walks into a women's organization. Every person has a socioeconomic status and ethnicity template that prepares her to expect things from an organization. These complex connections (between past socioeconomic status imprinting and ethnicity imprinting and present expectations and behaviours) are not always
explicated. As a white Anglo low socioeconomic status imprinted / middle socioeconomic status presently woman I am trying to explicate my behaviours and assumptions.

At present, I am a feminist social work professional who has worked on anti-racist projects, in anti-racist organizations, and in organizations that were 'mainstream' and had explicitly stated goals that, on the surface anyway, had nothing to do with racism one way or the other. There have been some people during my recent explicitly anti-racist activities who have said, either directly or in a covert manner that a white Anglophone Canadian-born person like me has nothing to say about racism and should not be allowed to work on anti-racist projects. I have been surprised by these comments. I have heard people say that 'Only people of color have any right to be talking about these issues!'. For me these types of comments are quite strange and they always lead me to think back on the literature I have read and the movies I have seen about Germany and the Jewish people and WWII. Would someone say, 'Only Jewish people had a right to be involved in that war?'. Would someone say, 'The racism, the Anti-Semitism that happened during the Holocaust was only an issue for Jewish people and no one else should have involved themselves!'. Would I have had the courage and fortitude that Fogelman (1994) so movingly describes?
It seems to me that few have more of a responsibility and a right to stand up and say 'No' to racism than white Anglophone Canadian born people. We must. It is largely our ancestors who made the mess. We have directly and indirectly benefitted from colonialism. Everyday white Anglophone Canadian-born Settlers live on land that was appropriated. We have also directly and indirectly experienced a great deal of pain and loss from being the oppressors. Eight of the forty-one WWINFEW interviewees that I write about in this thesis could be defined as white Anglophone Canadian-born women.

Further, we [non-ethnocultural minorities, non-First Nations, non-visible minorities] are often positioned in social service agencies, administrations, policy centres, political centres, etcetera where we can have a voice, be heard, and demand change. Often (because of ethnocentrism and exclusionary practices) there are no First Nations people, immigrant people, or visible minority people in these places of influence. When we do see a moment of opportunity to bring about change we are morally obligated to take it. Sometimes, our colleagues and peers who are white Anglophone Canadian-born will be inclined to tune out information that might change their minds about issues when that information comes to them from people whom they perceive to be 'different' from themselves. Sometimes, hearing about (and I mean deeply and
meaningfully hearing) a new way of approaching an issue will be most effectively done if the speaker is someone they (white Anglophone Canadian-borns) perceive as being 'the same as' themselves.

We must do all we can to bring people from diverse ethnocultural heritages into the places we Settlers presently dominate. New voices, new perspectives, new approaches will enrich all of us. The bridging and teaching must come about from all sides and there must be committed engagement from all sides. As a white Anglophone Canadian-born person of German and Scottish heritage I believe I not only have a right to speak about racism and oppression I have a responsibility to speak out about racism and oppression. The white Anglophone Canadian-born women at WWINFEW shared this orientation to the organization and to the mission of the organization. I believe that many white Anglophone women in feminist grassroots organizations share this orientation and share a deep (although often troubled and awkward) commitment to change (Albrecht and Brewer, 1990; Bulkin and Bruce Pratt and Smith, 1984; Chater, 1994; Frankenburg, 1993; Green, 1987; Katz, 1978; Maguire, 1987; Rave, 1990; Wolverton, 1983).

**EVOLUTIONS AND LAYERS OF FEMINISMS**

How did I evolve into my feminism? Through my
observations in women's organizations and through the forty-one interviews I discovered that my own pattern of entrance to women's organizations is fairly common in that my pattern was not premeditated, was erratic, and motivated by different incentives at different times. As stated previously the first women's organization I became involved with was called COFF. Initially, I was just a "mail-box member" who received my monthly newsletters, occasionally accessed the library, and rarely attended events (because I was too busy, afraid that I did not fit in, and because I was unsure of what I could offer to the organization). Eventually, I became more involved.

Eventually I had friends who were involved in different ways and their involvement invited, reinforced and expanded my own involvement. First I became more involved by attending a few events (Take Back The Night Marches, attending speeches and presentations) and after about one year I became an active volunteer. Soon my organizationally assigned title was that of "volunteer recruiter and coordinator". Later, I completed both a three hundred hour and a four hundred hour social work internship at COFF. By the end of my four and a half years of involvement I was President of the organization and almost all my friends were COFF activists. There was an over-lap of time during which I was President of the COFF and also a founding member of WWINFEW. During my five years with WWINFEW I was
involved in every dimension of the organization except for being on WWINFEW's executive. WWINFEW's constitution discouraged white Anglophone Canadian-born women from being on the executive. Executive positions (President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary) were reserved for ethnocultural minority women and only when no one else could be found and when a position had to be filled would a white Anglophone Canadian born woman be allowed to hold an executive position. No white Anglophone Canadian-borns ever held the position of President or Vice-President even in an "acting" or interim capacity.

A third women-centred organization I have been an intermittent participant in since 1989 served again to build my knowledge base (and to build my list of questions). This third organization I will refer to as "Professional And Property Owning Women" or PPOW. Here, in contrast to COFF and WWINFEW, PPOW women use Robert's Rules of Order, advocate primarily for socioeconomic status empowered women's issues and follow a very structured process. PPOW is almost exclusively a white Anglophone and Francophone Canadian-born women's organization. Direct and indirect costs of membership in PPOW were over two hundred dollars yearly. Costs of membership in COFF and WWINFEW were less than ten dollars a year.
During this decade as a feminist activist within these three organizations (COFF, WWINFEW, PPOW) I discovered that women often became like extended families to me. These women were frequently like my sisters. Often, like biological sisters, we argue, disagree, decide to not speak to each other, feel sad and lonely, apologize and become best friends again. Also, painfully, some of these sisters were my arch-rivals. Some of these women would be mutually locked into spiteful but subtle challenges and counter-challenges. These diverse relationships webbed into mini-dramas which erratically played themselves out. To be a participant in these organizations in any way implicated you somehow in one or another of these mini-dramas. Alliances ongoingly formed and dissolved. Dyads and triads evolved and dissolved and reappeared and reconnected with other dyads and triads. These intense mini-dramas always fascinate me. Researchers have documented how women’s relationships to each other can be complex, and inter-woven with subterfuge, love, and fears around fusion, or rejection (Agnew, 1996, pp. 8-9, 21; Bannerji, 1993; Brown, 1994; Bunch, 1983; Cameron, 1989; Dechant, 1996; Farge, 1987; Freeman, 1995).

As an evolving feminist the interplay between the individual women's lives and the organizations' lives and the
evolution of the wider community's life always fascinated me. My questions were sometimes met by silence, confusion, anger, solace, kindness, empathy and/or enormously long discussions. In this thesis I can only hope to articulate and explore a sample of these questions: To what extent do women actually define these collages of people and activity as "organizations"? When does a group of active women change from being a friendship network to being a project/self-help group to being a formal organization with a distinct life above and beyond its present individual members? How do "feminist" organizations actually connect "the personal and the political"?

What are the relevant motivational factors that find some women devoting dozens of hours monthly to the organization while others drift away quickly and/or do not feel compelled to get involved? How is it that some women decide 'this is my fight and I intend to wrestle this issue to the end!' and other women decide they can not be bothered? How is it that some women look the other way when the whole group is participating in producing the mirage that the 'empress has on golden threads' when actually she's stark naked? How can racism be taken out of the organization's practices and participants?

Why are we always faced with chronic under-resourcing in
these women's organizations? What more can we do to bring about the changes in the world that we envision? How have women's organizations evolved over the decades? Could we have evolved differently? How can I be a better feminist and/or a better member of the organization? Does being a "good feminist" sometimes conflict with being a "good member of the organization"? How do women activists reconcile all of these contradictions? My mind has been tangled up and tired out by these questions. A central and guiding question connecting all the others is, 'How can we do what seems to be undoable and how can we do the undoable well?'.

While discussing my thinking about feminist organizations it is necessary to ongoingly discuss my personal, political and professional evolution. The three spheres intersect and inform each other. The validation of these intersecting spheres is often thought to be intrinsic to feminist process and feminist research. How does my identity as a woman and my identity as a "socioeconomically-located being" intersect?

ALL OF US ARE SOCIOECONOMICALLY-LOCATED BEINGS

Kim: Actually yes. I was frustrated while I was there [at WWINFEW as a Board member]. I'm a very active person [as a volunteer]. I've been involved. I don't have to have an actual position. Don't even give me a [formal] position [at WWINFEW]. Then the only time I was there was when there was a Board meeting and then at times we would just read this is
going on and that is going on. Second this or second that (referring to making motions at meetings). I would not want to keep asking what is this because it looked like everybody else knew what was going on.

In the previous sections of this chapter I have described what meaning it has had for me to come from a German/Scottish white Anglophone family, to be Canadian-born, and to discover feminism. My socioeconomic background or "socioeconomic status imprinting" has also been somewhat implicitly displayed. Socioeconomic status has enormous meaning in regards to who we are in the world (Allison, 1994; Bartky, 1990; Baxter, 1988; Burnett, 1989; Cameron, 1989; Rosen, 1987; Rubin, 1976). In this section I want to provide more information about my socioeconomic background because I am certain that socioeconomic background creates and shapes the way I experience and question organizations. My belief is that all the women at WINFEW, COFF, or PPOW are influenced as organizational participants by their socialization into their socioeconomic positions. Their socioeconomic imprinting forms a filter through which they perceive organizational meanings and send messages to the organization.

My father, as explained previously, came to Canada and began working in the mines in Northern Ontario. He eventually had other employment experiences but these were entry level service sector jobs. Throughout the developmental years of my
life he did not effectively utilize opportunities to learn to read and write in English. My mother did not complete her higher education and did not fully invest the formal education she did have. Her employment experiences were also entry level service sector jobs. Neither of my parents were involved in community groups, volunteer organizations, or formal meetings during the fifteen years I lived in their home.

Partially because of their minimal literacy and their minimal sense of entitlement they did not become involved as fully assertive citizens. Partially because of their non-existent leisure time they did not become involved in social groups. Partially because they did not have money for nice clothes, child care support, transportation, or membership fees they did not attend, or talk about attending, any kind of community participation event. The violence in our home also limited what types of social interactions took place there. We only had a few brief visits per year. These were always male visitors who were there to visit with my father over some type of transaction (the sale of a horse, the rental of a tractor, the purchase of a second hand car, etcetera).

There are other homes where children are taken to meetings with their parents. There are children who know about P.T.A. meetings, Church meetings, co-op housing meetings, choir group meetings or athletic group meetings. There are
children who are taken on protest marches and who learn about voting and group membership. There are organizations like Girl Guides, summer camp programs, or the 4 H. Club, where young people learn they have a right to voice their opinions, talk in front of peer groups, ask questions of others and/or document the proceedings. My youth involved experiences opposite to this. My childhood was lived in rural isolation and this instilled in me (I can see in retrospect) a sense of disentitlement.

Organizations with their rules, regulations and procedures were something new to me when I approached them as a young adult. I am not alone in this pattern. Paula, an immigrant working low socioeconomic status visible minority woman describes her initial experiences with WWINFEW. She begins by describing her hopes and then describes things she learned:

My hopes [when I came to WWINFEW] were, first, to meet new people. I came [to WWINFEW] to understand more and get involved with Canadian people. I came to understand the philosophy and the ways of thinking. I guess, this was one of my goals. I need people around to see how they think and a group so it was curiosity [to] see how they do things. [It] was my first experience.

Paula continues by describing her learning about organizational dynamics:

I see people, most of the members were having a calendar and they set up the meetings. They all looks to me to be very busy people. They have meetings once or twice on the
same day and I saw how they organize a group with a chairperson who is the one who leads the meeting. The chairperson organizes the opportunity to speak and everyone takes turns and speaks and everybody gets involved in decisions and how they proceed and how they sign the attendance sheets. They discuss things and people share their opinions. Although I was more of a spectator more than these others who were active, I was having a learning experience.

Si: So, there were lots of little goals and big goals that you had while you were involved?

Paula: Yes, yes. I see all these people getting involved and talking about issues, and problems and getting finally a decision. Sometimes this was hard because there were so many people with different points of view and it was for me a learning experience. I really appreciate that time [with WWINFEW]. I was a newcomer and I was very young in Canada. My roles were so many and so hard to cope with, like a mom and a wife and becoming involved in the community. So it was one role on top of my other roles to face it, a challenge. I took it as a good thing for me.

Similar to Paula I had a lot to learn about the "appropriate" behaviors to engage in within organizations.

My first voluntary and self-initiated contact with any organization was the COFF that I described above. Again, I talk about the meaning of socioeconomic locations here because I proceed on the assumption that many women of low socioeconomic status and/or rurally isolated women have experienced these same patterns of silencing, erasure, and disenfranchisement (Mills and Simmons, 1995, pp. 14-18 and pp. 29-32; Struthers, 1994; Taylor and Watters, 1994).

Organizational efficacy might be defined as "micro-political
behaviours" and "micro-political behaviour" are sequentially learned clusters of skills (Dawson, Prewitt And Dawson, 1977; Milbrath and Goel, 1977).

Organizations, we low socioeconomic status women are taught, are places in which, or from which, other people do things to us, for us, above us. We internalize a belief (through our interactions with 'generalized others' and 'significant others') that we do not do things to these organizations. For many women on the outside of the culture of democracy / full citizenship some of the few organizations we could even name would be organizations such as the Children's Aid Society (which had taken neighbourhood children away maybe), or Welfare (which cuts people off if something 'bad' is found out). We working-class rural women, if we are noticed at all, often sense that we are perceived as alien intruders or imposters. We internalize a sense of 'self' in regards to organizational identity that we are objects that are to be placed somewhere or replaced by someone more entitled and authorized than our own 'selves'.

Women from these types of backgrounds do not readily imagine ourselves inside organizations as "the President", "the Treasurer" or "the Human Resources Committee Chairperson". The symbols that we are taught about ourselves and about formal achievement and organizations are seldom in
parallel harmony. Many of the women in WWINFEW initially expressed feelings of disentitlement. Ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic status background prepared many of us to feel disenfranchised and disconnected from civic responsibilities and rights. These feelings of disentitlement were felt by many women in WWINFEW and these feelings of disentitlement have been indoctrinated into many of us from many sources and for many years.

DEVELOPING A SENSE OF EFFICACY

A main theme of this thesis is that much of the research that has been done on organizational development and dynamics does not accurately describe the realities of feminist anti-racist social service/self-help organizations. Unfortunately, there are some painful contradictions and unexpected outcomes in organizations that are attempting to create safe, meaningful, effective alternative feminist-centred anti-racist places. The rhetoric and hopes of the feminist movement may not be so readily realizable in a world where women are immersed in (and insidiously taught to internalize) sexism, racism, socioeconomic oppression, and other oppressive ideologies/behaviours. Our women-centred organizations are powerfully influenced (and boundaries are created) by the non-feminist world. Our buoyant feminist dreams and our leaden
day-to-day practices do not harmonize. Often, we (individually and collectively) are afraid to confront, or are unable to confront, this disharmony.

Since 1988 I have been living this project: being part of the project of creating WWINFEW, watching it live, watching its demise, and then writing the organization's biography and post mortem/epithet have impacted upon my mental state in many ways. Writing this has been necessary, absolutely inevitable and -- of course painful. I began this project hoping to write a completely happy story. I have concluded by writing a very unhappy story with some happy moments. Feeling so connected to the social change dimensions of this organization and its hopes for a different state of affairs inhibited me from feeling strong enough to write for long periods of time. My hope is that other women will benefit from these struggles and not have to repeat our mistakes. This has been one of the social change goals that has kept me motivated to sit at the computer and do the work of observing, analyzing and documenting WWINFEW’s biography.

In the preceding pages I have described my personal identity pegs. The flesh and blood realities of who I am shaped my participant observation and my research process. New research approaches can be blended to make us more able to participate in turning our feminist dreams into practicable
realities. We may have to dream differently. We may have to
dream harder. We must document more adamantly and more
extensively what we are doing and why we are doing it. We must
analyse and document how each of us perceives, experiences and
responds to our subtle daily contradictions. My own
experiences in feminist organizations have involved joy,
celebration and enlightenment. My own experiences have also
involved pain in that I have witnessed and/or experienced
racism, socioeconomic oppression, exploitation and simple old
fashioned cruelty.

**INTERVIEW #1**

Before I interviewed the other women from WWINFEW I
arranged to be interviewed and I became "a pilot study". Also,
thinking through and documenting my own answers explicated my
own positioning, experiences, beliefs and feelings. When
Morgan Gardner interviewed me I was thirty-three and had been
active with WWINFEW for 61 months. Note also that this
interview took place thirty-three months before WWINFEW
closed. After much reflection I have decided to include the
full interview in these pages. Since I was one of the founding
members of WWINFEW my interview text also points to some of
the most significant dimensions of our beginnings that no
other interview text ended up documenting. Finally, I have
included the whole transcript so the reader may achieve a sense of the flow of the other forty-one interviews. In the remaining chapters of this thesis the other forty-one interviewees' experiences, beliefs, thoughts and feelings will connect with and/or contradict my own.

Morgan: What does the word feminism mean to you Si?

Si: It is just a fabulous word. The word 'feminism', to me, I could go on for pages and pages about what that word means to me. It is a totally different world view. It is an opening up and reassessing of everything: the language that we use, the way our houses are built, where our houses are built, religion, herstory, politics, economics -- every discipline. The food we eat, how we eat it, where we eat it. Everything. The word 'feminism' to me opens up a whole different world view."

Morgan: How did you first come to know about WWINFEW?

Si: In the very beginning, my self and two other women who were working with an organization as employees. Initially [a government program] said that if you could find twelve people together who would promise to do the volunteer work of caring for a new refugee then you could bring this person here and originally this 'host' program was being utilized by Church groups.

For example, a whole congregation would say, 'we will take responsibility for one year for a refugee. The government would then pay, like a welfare wage to that refugee person and help the new refugee with housing. The group was consenting to help the person find an apartment, help them integrate into the community, bring them to their dentist's appointments and their doctor's appointments, do the paper work, get them enrolled into an E.S.L. class. Initially, we were thinking, 'Oh let's see if we could get twelve women together who would sign a contract to help a refugee woman?'

Statistically refugee women are the largest group of refugees but they are by far the smallest number of refugees brought in by governments. Governments prefer to bring in a middle-aged or a young man by himself or a man
with his wife and children. The government is very disinclined, for example, to bring in a disabled older woman. Or a woman who is at high risk in her own community, for example, a lesbian woman in a refugee camp in Vietnam or something. That's what we were thinking about. Initially, that was the very first spark of 'Let's bring some women together and do something!'

Then it became: 'Well how can we just do something for one woman and how can we just bring one woman in [to Coldtown from another country] when there's other women with other problems who are already here?' Then: 'Well what about other immigrant women?' Then, 'What about visible minority women and then what about First Nations women who are having problems?' 'Well working class women also have problems.' One thing led to another and led to another. So that was how it first kind of came together.'

Morgan: What were your hopes and goals when you first became involved with WWINFEW? Where those hopes and goals met?

Si: Well, in retrospect, I can see how, the word 'naive' comes to my mind but also 'stupid' because I should have known better. Originally, our goals were, we thought, well if we can get, let's say, three First Nations women, and three Black women from outside of Canada, and three second generation Black women, and three Polish women, three Ukrainian women. We had this idea that if we could have a mosaic of women as an advisory committee then we could do a research project and identify concretely the needs.

We did, we interviewed 131 ethnocultural minority women and 251 social service providers and I had the hope and I had the goals and I had the belief and the faith that once we solidly documented all of these needs and issues that the only thing left to do would be to go and market it. For example, we'd say to Canada Employment and Immigration, okay, so we have discovered that there is high unemployment among First Nations women and see this is a fact. For sure for sure it's true. Now we've got proof. Then, they would say, 'Okay' and give us money to do blah blah blah blah blah. I really believed that. I didn't realize how deeply I believed that until I discovered it didn't come true.

My hopes and goals were that we would get a meaningful substantive representation from women from all the different potentially different communities and stakeholders in this. That we would professionally
research and document, in a believable and meaningful way, what the issues were and that then, the government of Canada, which I at that point believed in, that there was Community and Social Services that will deal with these issues and Canada Employment will deal with these issues, and United Way, which is so caring about the community will come forth with some money for this part and Health and Welfare Canada will say 'this is important'.

All we had to do was go and document everything and then go and market the segments. That was totally my hope, my goal, that was my faith, my belief. And all of that was shattered a bit and another bit at a time. Where they [government funders] didn't want to fund it. No my hopes and goals weren't met.

Also, we weren't effectively able to connect and recruit women from the potential stakeholder groups, so on that side I was also left saddened and disappointed. Then in terms of marketing it [the needs assessment and proposed programs] to the different government 'benevolent givers' that's how I had imagined them at that time and 'caring responders' that didn't come true... Yes, the part of it of documenting the needs and concerns did come true. We do have a lot of documents and reports and statistics and testimonials. We have buckets and buckets and buckets of transcripts. It's there collecting dust.

Morgan: How would you describe your involvement with WWINFEW?

Si: I was a member of that original advisory committee, as a volunteer, for about five months. For about four of those months I was working full-time on it [what became WWINFEW] as a volunteer. In effect, I got fired. I was kind of in a situation of either I would quit get fired from that job [my job in an ethnocultural organization as a social worker]. The three of us [who were instrumental in trying to get WWINFEW started] left that organization. We left that organization because we had been told that immigrant women's issues [as 'women's issues'] weren't for us to deal with and didn't have to be talked about. There were no issues that were specific for women and that if we wanted to do this we had to do it on our own time.

So we were responded to with some real hostility from some spheres of the organization. So we left. So that left me with all this free time to work as a
volunteer on these issues. So, we all worked really hard and we recruited [volunteers for the advisory committee]. Then after about five months, I was now on unemployment insurance, and WWINFEW got a government program to hire people who were on unemployment insurance and I was one of the people who was hired [for a top up on my unemployment insurance]. So I worked as a volunteer community organizer, then I worked for pay for about eight months or a year as paid researcher, then as a coordinator [as a volunteer], then on the hiring committee, on the fund-raising committee. I've done all kinds of government grants...Yes, I've been a volunteer, a staff member and a Board member.

Morgan: How would you describe WWINFEW as an organization?

Si: [As an organization] It's all kinds of things. It is a female friendship network. It's an advocacy group. It is a self-help group. It is a social service agency. It's a popular education centre. A place where women can learn skills, computer skills, clerical skills, etcetera Concrete marketable skills. It's a place where white Anglo Canadian-born women can learn about other cultures. It's a place where women from other cultures can learn about each other. It's a place where women can learn leadership skills. It's basically been all kinds of different things at different times.

In that five years it has been, depending upon who's there, different things. For example, at one time, we were all involved for about two whole weeks in protests and rallies and sit-ins regarding Oka. Supporting Oka. During that two week period it was a political action group. At other times when there was, let's say, no employees for about five months, then it was just a place where you could drop in now and then for coffee. I don't know what is it. ...What is it not? That's a different question. It is not profit-oriented! It is not a capitalist expansionary product-producing place! I have to think about that question.

Morgan: What would you describe as two of the strengths of WWINFEW?

Si: One of the first strengths is that, in spite of the racism in the community, in spite of the divisions in the community that have existed for, sometimes, hundreds of years. Divisions like for example between European women
and First Nations women. Three hundred years or two hundred or what ever - in spite of that we still have been able to have women from these cultures working creatively together. That's a strength I think. That in spite of all of the forces that are against us. In spite of the fact that the government works against us, resists funding us, tries to infiltrate us. In spite of the fact that most of these women are working full-time, raising children, and going to school, and doing other things, they still manage to find the time and the energy to make something happen here [at WWINFEW].

A strength is that we have been working to surmount these barriers that exist between us. In spite of all that most of the women most of the time have tried to be kind and caring to each other. There have been exceptions to that, of course, but most of the women most of the time have tried to be responsive and empathetic to each other. Even if they weren't able to fulfill each other's expectations. Okay, like, in your religion you believe this and that, well I don't believe that. But, let's set that aside for a minute and try.

Morgan: What do you think are two of the weaknesses of WWINFEW?

Si: This is what I am seeing right now. I think that we have been trying to be everything to everybody. And I'm wondering if that is even possible at this herstorical moment in the universe's unfolding. We are trying, yes, we want lesbians to be part of the group and heterosexuals and able-bodied and differently-abled and every race and every culture and every religion. It seems that we haven't been able to prioritize our issues.

In our original needs assessment we found that women needed child care, women needed affordable housing, and employment and training, and issues like wife-assault [were important]. We discovered about a hundred things. What we have done is said, all one hundred of these things is equally important to us. This can't work. This can't work. It just can't work in the real world. We have to say, okay, in 1994 the two main issues we are going to deal with are housing and affordable day care or whatever. Then we could say, in 1995 we will say we focus on education and whatever.

I just don't see how we can have people from all these different positions and all these different identities all working on all these different issues at the same time. When pragmatically we don't even have
money for the phone or the rent. It's too much. Related
to that is that, there's a sense that nothing ever really
gets done. I think it is one of our weaknesses that we
have not admitted this [that people from all these
different positions and identities cannot effectively
work equally on a hundred issues at the same time]. And
what has happened then is that a hundred people come and
they each are trying to do a hundred different things and
then they sort of burn out or they start fighting with
each other or they get disillusioned or they blame each
other or they feel 'what is the point'. they feel that
now that they've worked on these other ninety-nine issues
they really want to work on this issue which is closest
to my heart and other people aren't prepared to work on
this one with me although I worked on those other issues.
They get over-whelmed and disenchanted and there is this
sense of intensity and chaos. I think that this is a
weakness that we haven't recognized this.

Morgan: Could you describe two things about the women
you met at WWINF EW that you really liked, appreciated
and/or valued?

Si: One of the things is, for me particularly, as a
working class woman. There has been a lot of women who
have come to us, low-income, working class. Ones who have
been with us in these different types of training
programs funded through Canada Employment, Stay program,
etcetera. These are for women who have had a hard time
getting into the work force or a hard time finding
themselves. For me it has been a real joy and a treasure
to participate with them in discovering their strengths
and their potentials and their creativity and all the
things they have to offer the world.

For example, they may have had a job before at an
office supply store where they just did mindless
photocopying and this is the only type of job they have
ever had before or maybe flipping burgers or something.
They come to us, and we say 'oh you are Muslim or you are
an immigrant or tell us what Lebanon was like'. That is
so interesting. Tell us what that means [to have had
those experiences or about being from that culture].
People would listen to their stories and really listen
and would value it and say 'this is something really
special' as opposed to in those flip-a-burger jobs. The
places they worked before many times the message was 'be
quiet, do your job, be obedient, flip your burgers!'.
[Being with these women] That was one of the things I
really enjoyed and valued.

The second thing that I really liked was that they were even there. That they stayed. That they tried their best. Again, in spite of all of that chaos, intensity or confusion or pain. Sometimes it is painful. For example, sometimes it is really painful to leave your country, or being a refugee. Now sharing your story is kind of like, you relive your story of pain. It takes courage to share that story. That was one of the things that I liked that people often volunteered and went, sort of, above and beyond the call of duty and gave that extra time and extra offering.

Morgan: Can you describe and discuss two things about the women you met at WWINFEW that you sometimes were not comfortable with and/or were puzzled by?

Si: There have been some women who came there [to WWINFEW] just to learn how to type. just to learn how to do computer skills. To me it was disappointing or heartbreaking. Maybe its wrong for me to be imposing all kinds of stuff there. To me we're putting in front of them this opportunity for them to learn about women from all over the world, different cultures, different religions, world views, approaches, ideologies, beliefs, values and so on. When they refuse it. Throw it back in our faces and say 'hey, look! I came here to learn how to type! I don't want to hear about lesbians, or racism! I want to learn how to type, how to put the ribbon in the typewriter, how to turn the computer on. So get out of my face with any of this other stuff!'

So that has been very disappointing to me. That hurts me to witness that. Intellectually, I guess I can understand it. It hurts me though to witness it. It also hurts me to see women hurting each other. Competing with each other. Fighting with each other. Putting each other down. Becoming bitter, burnt out. Leaving us in anger. Quitting. Some of them say 'Enough is Enough! I want to go back to my job flipping burgers. It was a joyful job flipping burgers! It didn't explode my mind or my identity or give me nightmares or nothing! I just flipped burgers; one, two, three, four, five, six!

Morgan: Could you discuss things about the community of Coldtown that you feel makes the going harder for WWINFEW?

Si: Increasingly, the more I have been thinking about it,
the more my consciousness had been raised, I think that this community has all kinds of things going on that make it hard for a place like WINFEW to exist. Which, on my courageous days makes me say 'All the more damn reason for us to exist! All the more reasons we should fight!' A community like Coldtown, I think is built on a mining community. This gave us an identity. Sort of working class, rugged individualist, each man for himself, get a job, pull up your socks, Protestant work ethic. A certain masculinist working-class identity as a community.

A concrete example of that is that about two years ago the municipal government had this big debate on the front pages of the papers about whether or not they should officially call someone in the municipal government a 'chairperson' instead of a 'chairman'. It was voted down. They said it was against tradition and that this community wasn't ready for it! So that gives you a sense, we have the municipal FATHERS of this community. Not the municipal MOTHERS.

There's also that the community was founded by Francophones and Anglophones and there is always this big fight going on between them. We've been designated as officially bilingual. So while that big fight is going on there's this one little voice that pops up now and then that says 'Well what about Chinese people? What about Black people?' And meanwhile there are these two big voices booming away. There's also this Catholic thing. Sometimes I think that because there is such a strong Catholic voice it makes it harder for other religions to be heard like Hindus, or Muslims. There is always something in the paper about the French Catholic school board wanting something or doing something.

Then each of the remaining ethnocultural minority communities are very small. This is different from, let's say Toronto, where you have a critical mass of people, let's say the Chinese community. There you can have whole streets, restaurants, places that people can kind of form a coalition around and/or get strength from. In Coldtown you might have, let's say, two Vietnamese people, six Cambodian people and nineteen Portuguese people and thirty-seven Hispanic people. It's tiny and factioned. There's also high unemployment and high poverty. When there is [high poverty and high unemployment] people don't want to take risks and have, the Chinese celebration day, let's say. There's also the weather is very very cold and for a few months of the year people just don't want to come out and get involved in anything. Also, there's dispersion. The population is very spread
out and there isn't very good public transportation. I think there is a whole cluster of little things that come together to make it really hard.

Morgan: Could you describe your happiest moment while involved with WWINFEW?

Si: This may sound selfish but, as I said, in the very beginning I was a volunteer for the first four months or so. We'd applied for all these different grants and so on. There was nothing. We didn't even have money for coffee or anything. When we had our meetings people would bring things. We'd applied for this grant from Canada Employment, myself and these other two women had done the actual application. We were the key people. When that cheque came in I remember being so excited. Because now we went from having nothing to having thirty-six thousand in our bank account and I had been part of that process. Of achieving that money. To me that meant we could get incorporated, we could have our own phone line, we can buy a coffee pot. We exist! The money gave us a resource pool from which we could make things happen. At the time, if you remember my original goals and hopes were that once we did the research we would suddenly have all these pots of gold given to us from all these different representatives of the government. So I thought well this money is here. At the time I saw it as the first in a joyful buffet of opportunities. I thought, 'Now see, they know this [WWINFEW] is important, this is timely, this is credible' I thought, we'll get the money and off we'll go.

Morgan: Could you describe your saddest moment while involved with WWINFEW?

Si: There's a couple of competing ones. I guess the first that comes to my mind, we were trying to form coalitions. Trying to make connections, you know, with the First Nations community, different communities. Things were coming together. Again I guess that I had a simple vision. I thought, I guess, that three or four women from each community would come and get involved, be enthusiastic, see this as a creative thing that they wanted to be part of.

One day we got this letter from a woman's group which said something like 'You cannot speak for us! You will never speak for us! We want nothing to do with your organization! You want to take funding away from us and
we will do everything possible to thwart you in your efforts. We have already sent letters to all government representatives and all potential funders saying that we do not support your existence!' I remember feeling really sad and really kind of stunned about that letter. That they would see us as a threat and as an enemy. They clearly saw us as an enemy. An enemy that had to be stopped with a vengeance.

I guess in a way that, when that happened, it was for me, like a mourning process. Because I had this really optimistic kind of vision of things. This was the first of many of these disillusioning moments where my dreams or my hopes or goals or visions or optimistic perceptions of things just sort of died. For example, there is no THE Black women's community! There are maybe twenty-seven different units or factions or perspectives. People aren't just going to get along! They aren't just going to agree! They may at different moments agree on one or two things. I'll just describe that as my saddest moment, out of the five years, when we got that letter. All the other sad moments after that were just repeats of that. Not from that specific group but repeats of where my idealism was broken off in scales and chips until it all fell away.

Morgan: Please discuss what you think the meaning of funding processes are for WWINFEW.

Si: The meaning of funding is phenomenal, enormous, amazing, insidious. It is like it shapes the women's relationships with each other, whether they are volunteers or Board or staff or clients. It shapes the relationships women have with themselves as individuals.

For example, if you get hired to do A, B, C and you go in there and you throw your whole heart and your whole body and all your skills and talents and your resource pool into achieving A, B, C. but from step one it was not possible to achieve that because you were given too little money then you start to doubt yourself. You say to yourself 'Okay, I was hired as coordinator and I was supposed to achieve these ten goals during this six month period but I was only able to achieve six of them then I might walk away from that experience feeling that I was inadequate, unprofessional, that I let the group down, that I let myself down.'

It shapes women's relationships with themselves. It shapes women's relationships with each other. It shapes one organization's relationships with another
organization. Like that women's group that wrote us that nasty letter, they clearly saw us as a threat trying to steal their money, among many other things possible but they were thinking 'well we're getting only ten thousand dollars a year and if that group is trying to get half of our ten thousand a year or tries to get all of our ten thousand a year..' You see, the two groups were interacting with each other around the money.

It shapes the organization's relationship with clients, the people who need our service. Sometimes, because we're not getting enough money we provide a half ass service or even at times a terrible service because we're not getting enough money. I'd put the question differently. I'd say there is absolutely no dimension of this organization, whether in its concrete manifestation or in its human manifestation that is not impacted upon by funding processes.

Morgan: Please describe and discuss two things about WWINFEW that you would change if you had the power to bring about two changes.

Si: Well, of course, the money thing. What would be my dream if I could have it come true would be for us to have a hundred thousand dollars a year of core funding that just came to us from the Federal government and the provincial government because I think they should cost share the responsibility of helping us to help ourselves. Give us a hundred thousand dollars a year we will then report what we do but we will do what we do according to what we think needs to be done. That is the first thing that I'd like to see.

The second thing that I'd like to see is that it be made part of our constitution is that every year all of our activists (the staff, the Board, the volunteers) they get a one week all expense paid retreat where they get to talk about what they are doing and why they are doing it. A chance to reflect. To know each other. To teach each other and to develop their skills. So that they can be leaders and movers in the community and so that they can also get to learn to be kind to each other and to themselves. This second thing is contingent upon that first thing of funding, but that's what I'd like to see.

Morgan: What barriers do you imagine there would be for the changes you would like to see happen?

Si: Well, I haven't had time to put them into
alphabetical order but the barriers would be that right now both the federal and provincial governments are restricting funding for social services and organizations.

Secondly, even when they don't restrict funding they demand all kinds of accounting and they demand what they define as professionalism. So they tell you how you're going to spend that money to the penny rather than you telling them how you're going to spend that money. The community, all that factioning I was talking about earlier, even if the government said 'yes, we'll give them at WWINFEW a hundred thousand dollars a year' we would then have all these other little groups and organizations would all rise up and say, 'Damn it you better do that for us too!' I think that in a way if we got that kind of money everybody else would hate us for about five years because they'd all say 'well you stole that money from us!' They'd say 'the fact that you got that money meant that we didn't'. That's how it might get experienced. That would be a barrier too. Well, I think that if the funding was there all the other things we could then lobby about. We could then teach a course about how to be leaders in the group. The funding would then change how the other barriers are. We could have hope of fixing or changing all the other barriers.

Morgan: What do you imagine WWINFEW will be like in the future?

Si: On different days I imagine different things [for WWINFEW's future]. There are days when I think 'it's over'. There are days when I think 'we came together as a group and we were hopeful, excited, visionary women. We had our, because we were innocent and optimistic we were prepared to fight hard and try a lot of different ways to do what we wanted to do.

But now, some days I think, now that we have lost our hope and become bitter that we are almost dangerous. That once you've lost your hope and become bitter and burnt out and angry you are almost dangerous to the cause. It is almost better, I think sometimes, that people like that go home and bake cookies. Rather than they get together because they take it out on each other. They may become dangerous to each other or to the cause. On pessimistic days I think the hope is gone. The image we had of what was doable is gone. This isn't the right historic time. A time of restraints, cut backs, conservatism, and back lash. This is not an excellent
time to start up an anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-sexist community activist organization.

Then there are other days when I think this is exactly the time we should be out there fighting and resisting because if we weren't how bad would it be then?! Right! Some days I think this is futile and other days I think we have to keep going. We are going to keep fighting. We are right on the cusp of making something happen. The optimistic days I think hey you turn on the t.v., you open a newspaper and everybody seems to be recognizing racism, sexism, classism. All these issues are starting to come to the front of the agenda and maybe it is our time and maybe we will get recognition and funding and validation from government and the community and maybe we'll be able to make it happen. Maybe this is just the cloud before the sunshine.

Morgan: Do you have any summary or concluding thoughts and feelings about WWINFEW that you would like to share?

Si: Being involved with this organization has changed my life. I will never be the same person I was. I could never go back to being the same person I was. Through WWINFEW I have learned about the entire world. Through WWINFEW the entire world has come and put itself right in front of my face and right in my heart. I've learned about women from Nicaragua, Australia, Vietnam. Now when I hear these words, [as opposed to] in the past as an Anglo, the white Trash, sort of a bush-girl that I am, I had never met anyone from other countries like that, at least not who had shared their stories with me. So, in a way, I feel like that through these women I have had a chance, to discover the whole world, different layers of the world, different perspectives and intensities and I feel I've been enriched by that. The world has all this intensity that it didn't have before. I feel I'm a much wiser person. Sometimes more courageous. More bitter. Things that used to be simple now aren't. Like going and buying groceries can become an enormous political thing in my head. I ask myself well where did this come from? If I eat grapes were those workers unionized or what? All kinds of things that I wouldn't have thought about one way or the other and that wouldn't have entered my consciousness. That knowledge will be with me for the rest of my life. Even if WWINFEW were to just cease to exist tomorrow I really believe that almost every woman has been increased. She's been expanded. She may feel angry. She may feel bitter but she has been expanded and
has a wider space. In that alone WWINFEW is a success. I wish I could come up with all the answers we need or find the people who have all the answers we need to make it all more doable. I feel kind of helpless. I wish I could be more help full, H E L P F U L L. That's about all I can say except that I could say that about ten thousand times.

**PRESENT REFLECTIONS?**

As I read this interview text now, I am noticing how much insight I did have about some of the problems we faced. I am also dismayed that this insight was somewhat useless in that it was not invested in ways that made any difference. Also, I feel saddened that the organization has closed. I feel sad that the excitement and hope I once felt did not harvest the fruit I once imagined it would harvest. Also, again I am struck by how much this organization, the women in it, and the thinking about both have changed my sense of my self. The remaining chapters of this thesis wrestle with many of the puzzles and themes expressed above. In this chapter I have used self-analysis and self-disclosure as a method of teaching about my insider/outsider location with WWINFEW. I propose that many of my core experiences were similar to other women's at WWINFEW -- and similar to other women in other social change organizations. Our motivations, socioeconomic locations and imprintings, ethnicity-imprints, and expectations all shape how we experience organizations. Also our unique
configurations of identity pegs shape how we experience other organizational insiders/outsiders -- and how we impact on the organization itself.
CHAPTER SIX: DEFINING, CREATING, BEGINNING, CONTINUING AND DOING THE UNDOABLE SOMEWHAT WELL

Kila: It is a hard winter for us [immigrant women in Coldtown]. Because it is winter we should make those women [who are lonely immigrants] come out more often. Because winter makes you more home sick more often. More everything because there is no one to talk to. Only the television. It makes you more unhappy. That's why we should do something. An organization like WWINFEW [can] make those women do something. Interest them. Some interest for women. Some kind of thing we should do to get them to come out.

In late 1988 a few Coldtown women who had been involved in different ways with poverty issues, women's issues, visible minority women's issues, First Nations women's issues and/or immigrant settlement issues decided to formalize and/or regularize our collective efforts. By beginning with these interest groups as a defining body we were embarking on a project that had the potential to be far more radical than any of us imagined. We also were positioning ourselves to interface with other visible minority women's groups, immigrant women's groups, multicultural/ethnosppecific groups, women's groups, and social services organizations. Many WWINFEW interviewees suggested our project was too ambitious. Rachelle, for example, said:
Perhaps they [the founders of WWINFEW] were biting more than they could chew. Like there were perhaps too many goals and too many directions at one time instead of just narrowing down to one or two like something manageable? And the focus was maybe too broad.

Maybe the vision was too ambitious but we initially thought we had enough assets to see us through. Other women's organizations which were created specifically to address one issue such as the delivery of abortions, crisis care after a sexual assault or breast cancer screening may have less organizational upheavals than a place like WWINFEW which was created by a diversity of women to respond to a diversity of issues.

Some of WWINFEW's founders had already known each other for years before; some of us knew each other from one or more other context. Each of us had been witness to and/or instrumental in a variety of more isolated attempts to identify and respond to the concerns and needs of vulnerable women in Coldtown. At that moment in our herstory our vision of what was desirable, what was achievable, and of our shared perfect future was as vague as it was infused with warm-fuzzies and glowing optimism.

The women who initially committed themselves to the project (which became WWINFEW) were from very diverse ethnic, professional, academic and experiential backgrounds. Within a
few months we had representation from women who defined themselves as connected to the following communities: Spanish, Italian, Vietnamese, Francophone, Black (Canadian-born), Peruvian, and First Nations. By the end of our first year we also had regular input from women who self-identified as Lebanese, Finnish, German, French (from France), Swedish, or Ukrainian. Many women felt they belonged in more than one ethnocultural community because their family heritage was mixed. There were some white Anglophone Canadian-born low socioeconomically-imprinted women, like myself, who also got involved.

It was a difficult, erratic and stimulating year. We were moved forward by the "Spring time" energy described by Remington (1991). This "Spring time energy", most typical during the 1970's phase of feminism, was distinctive in its volunteer involvement and level of optimism. All of us at WWINFEW had learned and accomplished a great deal within a few months. It is hard to describe the euphoria we shared.

At WWINFEW in early 1989 we were inexperienced change-agents looking for a step-by-step guide to success. I remember reading and sharing a quote with the women who were then involved at WWINFEW. It was read over lunch breaks. It was photocopied and passed around. It had obvious and layered meaning to us.
Traditionally power has been viewed in terms of the haves and the have-nots, with the strategies of social change focused on the have-nots organizing and developing enough political power to take resources away from the haves. A feminist reinterpretation of power expands the concept beyond and away from one's ability to dominate, control, and influence other persons toward one's ability to become empowered to achieve one's aspirations. The achievement of one's aspirations occurs non-coercively, collaboratively, and collectively and results in true participation with the strengths of all participants maximized and liberated (Chandler, 1986, p. 153).

At that time not enough had been written about how to do community organization with women, by women, for women from all kinds of economic, educational, ethnocultural and experiential backgrounds. This area of research remains underdeveloped (Callahan, 1997).

In 1988 we did have access to some encouraging and guiding works regarding ways to approach community organizing (Dale and Foster, 1986; Van Den Berg and Cooper, 1986; Weil, 1986). These works, and many others (Freire, 1968; Rogers, 1961, 1969) initially energized us about what might be possible. Our fresh enthusiasm and innocence did not prepare us for the many resistances encountered. Elsewhere, I describe elements of our diversity, but presently I will describe elements of our commonality.

One of the main areas of service need that we all seemed to share immediate concern for were "mental health", "personal consciousness raising" and/or "emotionally supportive
services". Different people used different words, but it seemed we had a core orientation around the theme of women and day-to-day supportive nurturing services. Our formal needs assessment (Wilkinson, 1990) was conducted in 1989 and we created the questions in a grounded way. The survey involved 131 self-identified immigrant, First Nations and visible minority women and confirmed to us that these issues were important. Our findings regarding ethnocultural minority women and the absence of supportive services have been mirrored elsewhere (DeSantis, 1990; Macedda-Villanueva, 1990). WWINFEW centered closely around helping ethnocultural minority and/or low-income women find and/or keep their "mental health".

After collecting surveys from two hundred and fifty social service providers about what they thought the needs of ethnocultural minority women were in Coldtown and, not surprisingly, we discovered that Coldtown's helping professionals were not as enlightened as we wanted them to be regarding race, socioeconomic status or gender issues. Through WWINFEW we wanted to organize something: free childcare services so women could get out and be with other women, a regular meeting place for support, translation services that authentically worked for women, speak-outs, a therapist, a hot-line, an extensive friendship network -- we were not positive about precisely what we wanted, but consensus seemed
to exist around creating some response to what we termed "women's mental health needs". As others have done, we also linked socially "enforced" unemployment and underemployment to women's sense of health and well-being.

Later some of us understood more clearly that women's discomforts were related to embedded poverty issues, racism issues and gender oppression issues structurally organized and reorganized into either "ethnic issues" or "women's mental health issues" with a blame-the-victim stance (Gabriel, 1996, p. 183). WWINFEW women got less because other people get more (for example more access to meaningful employment or affordable clean housing). Initially we did not, exclusively 'psychologize' women's problems (i.e. rape, incest, wife-assault are not only women's individual concerns; these concerns are caused by social structures). Instead we tried to 'sociologize' women's problems. In the last third of WWINFEW's life this changed.

In addition to some of the sources already cited we had our knowledge about the roots of our problems informed and developed by Brittan and Maynard (1984), Bulkin (1984), Bunch (1987) and Burghardt (1982). I remember seeing, reading, and passing around Das Gupta's book (1986) and Ng's book The Politics Of Community Services: Immigrant Women And The State (1988) almost had the cover worn off of it. Pierre-Aggamaway
(1983) and the women who wrote *Enough Is Enough* and the women who wrote "You Can't Change The Indian Act" (Bear and The Tobique Women's Group, 1991) confirmed to us what we already knew: many First Nations women were not getting a fair deal. Freire (1968) and Rogers (1961, 1969) assisted us in defining the learning process within the organization. There were many authors and researchers who served as distant faceless mentors for one or more of the women who nourished WWINFEW's development in our 'Springtime' phase. But, in retrospect, even this mentoring was not enough to fortify us against co-optation and internal strife.

We believed that women needed emotional and mental support and that 'packaging' 'problems' under the label of "immigrant" or "women's mental health issues" might be more saleable to government funders. Further, defining these issues in these ways meant that our work was somewhat more comprehensible to people from other organizations because we were reproducing their language. We also thought this type of language would be less frightening or alien to some women not yet familiar with our evolving feminist cross-cultural community organization. We "worked up" ethnocultural minority women into being themselves the problems in need of fixing so that we could get support and resources. We had to "advertise" these women as "victims" so that we could "sell" the idea that
they needed fixing. Eventually though, maybe some of us began to believe our own spin doctoring.

**CONTINUING IN SPITE OF THE CHALLENGES**

Rachelle: Because WWINFEW was an all women's organization, and I think that of all the experiences, I think perhaps it is one of the most difficult and perhaps that's why it's not as successful as I was hoping it would be. It's because there are too many women and women have different ideas and they want their idea always to be the, the right one or the one that should be acted upon, you know. Like I don't think they are as willing to cooperate or to support the other person's idea and I think that is perhaps some of the problem. This is too bad but I find that this is general for women. I don't think there are too many women that support one another. If anything they stab one another in the back you know, they are more opportunists, they're more ummm, they're not as loyal and this has been my experience. So as far as WWINFEW, although it had some good starts and some great ideas, I don't think the ideas or the people involved are willing to back one another, support one another and to work towards the goals of the organization rather than the individual ideas. Like I think they're more out to fulfil their ideas, like the members' specific ideas, rather than the goals in general.

As Rachelle describes above (and as I discussed in chapter four) we had individually internalized some dimensions of sexism, racism, socioeconomic oppression, and were thus divided. The second (and related) continuing challenge was our inexperience. The third challenge was our demographics and Northern location and as stated by Reddin (1991) and Miles (1991) there can be negative views of feminism and fears about
speaking out in smaller communities. A fourth challenge was that we did not fully comprehend the complexity, tensions and contradictions inherent in this type of work (Ng, Walker, Muller, 1990, 309-318). Below April touches on many of the difficulties encountered.

It's harder here [in Coldtown] to get funding. It's harder too knowing what the agency is about. People think that Coldtown does not have agencies like WWINFEW. Yeah. They think 'no 7-Eleven and no WWINFEW'. People think they wouldn't have anything like WWINFEW because there are not enough [ethnocultural minority] people. There are not enough ethnic groups. A lot of people that don't know that there is a lot of different cultures in Coldtown. It is not a mainly white community at all. I find it very diverse for a smaller city. People don't realize there are agencies where you can go, where you can learn. Where you can find people who have the same common goals or interests as you do [as an ethnocultural minority woman].

April very thoughtfully and insightfully continues describing some of the barriers that WWINFEW encountered:

The second problem is that services in Coldtown are not all linked. Each agency works in isolation. Each doesn't know what the other does. Some don't care [what others do] or they are resentful [about what the others do]. They're resentful because of funding reasons. They're also too busy. They can't be bothered. They forget what they're there for too. They're too caught up in their own work. Most agencies are becoming work oriented, not people oriented. They are forgetting that they're supposed to be there for the people and instead they are there for the paper. Just to answer the phone and get the paper out of their face. Even counseling you can be talking about trying to kill yourself the night before but if your hour is up your hour is up and you have to go. Maybe not that insensitive. They'd rush it right there. They'd say, 'Yeah, on your next appointment you can tell me more about
that...[how you tried to kill yourself last night]'. I know that some of us at WWINFEW we would stay way past closing just because someone was so down and that they just wanted to be around someone. That was what was different about WWINFEW.

As April suggests we quickly discovered our distinctions and our challenges because there were organizations in this community which had staked out 'their territory'.

Interfacing organizations may have misunderstood our intentions. Pal (1993) suggests that funding guidelines (for government programs for agencies that intersected with or competed with WWINFEW) were never clearly focused:

...funding guidelines have been confused and vague from the beginning, that program administrators rarely know what they are supposed to be achieving through funding, and that groups are jealous of their rights and their funding, making program development very difficult (p. 13).

Some organizations may have felt slighted or threatened. The financial resources available are finite and the more people that are competing for this money the more stressed each group may feel. Here Sunfire alludes to competition for funds. She was our advocate for a grant proposal and the leader of a competing organization met with Sunfire.

Yah, and the whole idea [was upsetting] of being hauled up in front of [another ethnospecific group]. Fighting over some piece of pie you know. We weren't, I don't know, ethnic enough or something, where ethnicity becomes a race for money, you know whose more ethnic, whose more visible?

Sunfire continues describing the "hierarchy of pain" theme
that entangled funding issues:

My people suffered more than you or so I, you know it's a necessary evil; unfortunately I never felt like we [at WWINFEW] were doing that. What I mean to a certain extent, I think we were always filling a mandate or a mission but our mission always was very elastic depending on what grant we were working with.

At the time we did not always recognize the subtleties of competition for what they were. Some of our activists who attempted to warn the more innocent among us of the bad, the mean, and the ugly of funding were often written off as cynics by other WWINFEW activists. Funding realities arose again and again (covertly or overtly) throughout WWINFEW's life -- boring as it is to think about and to write about -- funding realities are always seeping into the daily lives of these organizations and this fact needs to be constantly restated. Sometimes, like prisoners in a prison camp we fought with each other over resources and privileges instead of with our captors and guards.

There was a continual sifting of past ego and style conflicts. In Coldtown everyone has some close or distant contact with almost everyone else (often whether it is wanted or not) within their own ethnocultural communities. There was more than one situation in which we (as a group) were told we would have to chose who we wanted to side with. Some of the ethnocultural communities are very tiny numerically and the
feminist community is also relatively small. It is, therefore, difficult to ignore past or present personality conflicts (For example, one known feminist activist is the ex-wife of another activist's husband and these two women, according to a well known but never spoken about protocol, are never both invited to the same event). In a geographical area like Toronto there is less likelihood of people having these overlapping personal connections). Returning to Goffman's (1959, pp. 17-76) ideas of performances, backstages, and front stages: some people (whatever their alliances and identity pegs) felt they had to be vividly clear about who was authorized to perform which identities and who belonged on which stages.

Some of the potentially aligned groups and organizations are more patriarchal and conservative than could comfortably be worked with given WWINFEW's beliefs and goals. Having defined ourselves as "feminists primarily concerned about low income ethnocultural minority women's issues" created barriers that were difficult to work around (there were days when I felt like we had successfully alienated everyone everywhere). I remember that some individuals and some groups or organizations did not even bother to return our phone calls or respond to our correspondences. Everything we did not necessarily want to know about the pains of race,
socioeconomic oppression and gender slowly began to ooze into our organization.

Although we did not always realize it at the time definitions became important. For example, a prerequisite to "community" development is the shared definition of being a "community". As Ng, Walker and Muller (1990, pp. 14-16) and others (Cox and Ephross, 1998, p. 84; Gabriel, 1996, p. 182; Jary and Jary, 1991, pp. 66-67; Kramarae and Treichler, 1985, p. 103; Ristock and Pennell, 1996, pp. 12-33) discuss there are many ways the word "community" can be used. Of course, many of Coldtown's ethnocultural minority women identified with their ethnocultural community far more intensively than they identified as part of the "women's" community. Many seemed to feel defensive that WWINFEW women were "against men" because we were interested in only talking about women's experiences. This resistance to a shared definition of community (even if the definition lasted only long enough for a lunch hour protest and picket) was perhaps the most painful and most difficult for WWINFEW activists to understand and know what to do with. This pain continued to make its presence felt. These issues of gender versus ethnicity versus socioeconomic oppression have now been written about extensively (Agnew, 1996; Alperin, 1990; Bulkin et. al, 1984; Cameron, 1989; Gabriel, 1996; hooks, 1981; Johnson-Reagon,
1988; Li, 1988; Mies, 1988; Ng, 1991). No doubt an enormous amount of writing on these painful ambiguities will continue to be presented. It is an ongoing challenge to understand, accept, and constructively and creatively work together in coalition when so much history/herstory (local, provincial, national, global) splinters and divides us -- and when we have not come to a full consciousness about these splinters, divisions, and processes.

ORGANIZING ACROSS CULTURES, CURRENTS, AND SOCIOECONOMIC LOCATIONS

Si: So you were aware of the issues and you had a clear sense of what kinds of goals you would like to see responded to by this new organization [WWINFEW]?

Marilyn [a teacher and one of the first WWINFEW women]: I had a good sense, of course I didn't know what the organization would accomplish because we were just starting out. There was no doubt in my mind that there was a need for an organization that worked with women. Because, for example, the immigrant women did speak differently when they were alone [without men] in the class. They spoke differently. They brought out different issues and so the need for a support group for women seemed to be very apparent. I didn't know how it [WWINFEW] would actually pan out. In the back of my [mind] I was also aware they [the women] are the ones that are the busiest so how on earth are they going to get out to a meeting [and add volunteer work to their burdens]? That was something that I was aware of. At the same time there was a need for some focus on immigrant women. I've been involved in teaching E.S.L. elsewhere and here and I'm aware of the needs around access to language programs.

Mary Weil (1986) outlines a model of community
organization which she labels "The Feminist Perspective Articulated By Women Of Colour". This format for community organization has many distinctions. Her model proposes that the goals, which are the focus in feminist cross-cultural organizing, are the "Elimination of all human oppression. Elimination of discrimination related to race, low socioeconomic status, and gender. Solidarity within groups and among minority and other oppressed groups."

The "emphasis on strategy for change" as Weil articulates it is:

Articulating feminist frameworks for women of colour. Connecting feminism to racial and economic oppression. Building solidarity within oppressed groups. Supporting development and advancement of minority groups. Emphasis is on common humanity and needs as well as recognition and support of the uniqueness of cultures and subcultures (Weil, 1986, p. 195).

At WWINFEW we proceeded, initially, with her model as one of our idealistic guideposts. We tried to focus on "common humanity and needs". Weil makes recommendations that the major roles or activities of change agents should be in the areas of: education, re-assessment, consciousness-raising, preservation and development of each unique culture, development of alternative programs and supports, and the development of a political response to personal troubles (Weil, 1986, p. 196). Day by day at WWINFEW we tried to do what Weil made sound so easy to do.
The concrete steps that we took throughout this whole process to connect with women from various locations and groups included: attending the events and socials put on by the different ethnocultural communities, women's groups and/or social service organizations. We were always phoning the leaders and activists, sending flyers/letters/information to the leaders and activists, and advertising our existence in places we thought people from these communities might frequent (Laundromats, grocery stores, adult upgrading and ESL bulletin boards). We also approached individual women in restaurants, bus stops, shops, and on campuses. We made sure our work was discussed in as many local newsletters as possible. We made sure to make the most of our personal and professional networks. We also made every effort always to hire immigrant, First Nations, or visible minority women to do the work in progress. Our style of feminist cross-cultural community organization meant that we were sometimes trying to be all things to all people, and of course, this is undoable. This style of feminist community organization often meant that everyone was a little uneasy with us (we were even uneasy with ourselves in that we were unsure that we were doing the right things).

In contrast to how academic texts might sometimes suggest we experience the world and expect the world to unfold our
"theory base", initially, in 1988 was eclectic, ad hoc, accidental and not fully explicitly articulated. It might be described as including six loosely discussed and agreed upon principles:

1. Ethnocultural minority women have common interests as women.

2. Multicultural organizations or ethnospesific organizations do not prioritize women's needs.

3. Different or distinct ethnocultural minority groups are often similarly oppressed by the majority groups.

4. White Anglophone and white Francophone Canadian born women do not necessarily understand and/or prioritize the needs and issues of ethnocultural minority women.

5. Collective formalized action can empower ethnocultural minority women and formal organizations are an effective channel through which to bring about change.

6. Compromises are necessary if coalitions and collective actions are to be built and successfully maintained.

There were four practices which emerged out of the above theoretical principles.

1. Be nice to everyone you meet and go out and meet as many immigrant, visible minority and First Nations women as possible.

2. Ask everyone what they want and how WWINFEW can meet their needs.

3. Ask everyone what they can do for WWINFEW and how they personally are prepared to get involved.

4. Identify which low-income women are unhappy and identify what WWINFEW can do about this unhappiness.
Ours was not an extremely high-brow theory base, but in retrospect, I think it was an appropriate theoretical foundation for who we were then and what we were trying to achieve.

To my knowledge "Theory" was never discussed by the whole group. Subgroups, dyads and triads of women may have discussed "theory". The whole WWINFEW group had informal theory and discussed instead what we were going to do. We often responded to issues and opportunities in an ad hoc way without always reflecting on each response's long-term implications and intersections. Each woman proceeded with her own unique and in-process theory base. This often created problems:

Rachelle: I suppose at the beginning [experimentation is good] but after a certain time, like you test what doesn't work, when it's something new you want to test, but after a while you ought to come to a consensus that you have to have some kind of a firm direction or firm guidance...And structure. So then everybody must accept that and not make allowances for this or else you'll be destroying that again. And you can't change your structure every time when something new comes in, because then you never progress, you never go ahead, you always start from square one again. And so perhaps I find a weakness, although it's good to get everybody else's opinions and feelings and all that, but then if you want to build something you ought to go on.

And here April describes how an ad hoc approach without deep
analysis impacted:

Weaknesses [at WWINFEW] involved trying to integrate everyone's ideas into something that isn't conflictual. It is very hard to identify and plan out all our ideas. The second weakness was the Board at the time. I felt that the Board at the time was not involved with the vision at times. A lot of times the Board did not validate the work that staff was doing or the things that staff was saying.

Note how April describes the pattern of Board members individually doing what they priorized rather than what the staff or the constitution or other Board members priorized -- the needs of the whole collective were sometimes lost sight of.

April continues describing how it sometimes seemed that each woman had her own ad hoc theory base, vision, and agenda:

The Board was not always supportive. For example, when I was the book-keeper and I wanted a cheque signed for something standard and specific. I was the book-keeper and I couldn't find people to sign cheques. Sometimes one person would sign [all cheques have to be signed by two people from an option of three or four authorized individuals] and then I couldn't find a second person to sign. I'd feel not validated. Things would be debated. I'd have to wait until the next meeting. I'd have to wait a week or something. Or they'd miss the next meeting cause they couldn't make it. I'd end up scrambling. The onus would be on me as the book-keeper to phone them, find them, and visit them and make it happen. I think they [these signers and Board members] had too many things happening in their own lives. Too many other organizations. Other commitments. I feel like if you really believe in an organization you should focus on that one thing. You should put a lot of energy into that one thing instead of treating it like a grain of salt. Like a grain of salt in this one and a grain of salt in that one. It just doesn't do it, doesn't do nothing.
Focus on one or two organizations that you really believe in and put all your energy into them. Some of these women had ten organizations or five or six. They were lacking the energy too. They were too divided.

Remembering some of the facts and themes discussed in chapters one and two: many of the women April is referring to above had more than one part-time job, children to raise, extended kin to care for, and many different social causes they felt obliged to participate in because they possessed multiple identity pegs. Most WWINFEW women felt they were doing the best they could do with what was available to them. Most WWINFEW women were hesitant to criticize each others contributions during these interviews.

This uncertainty about what we were doing and who we were is awkward to talk about. During interviews and/or before consenting to be interviewed women expressed concern about disclosing our messiness. I also have been extremely hesitant to write about or reproduce anything that might be misinterpreted as unflattering to any activist at WWINFEW or to any activist in the wider community. Remington (1991) expresses similar conflicts when writing about women's organizations.

As my search for the root causes of problems deepened, I became increasingly aware of the danger of analyzing a community of which I was a member. In part because of my membership, I knew well both the blemishes and beauties of women's organizations. Presenting both of these honestly not only destroyed
some of my own dreams and illusions but put me in the position of articulating our weaknesses and family secrets. This position was never comfortable... (Remington, 1991, p. 3).

Some of Coldtown's activist women are my friends, some of these women are my colleagues: almost all of these women are (or could become) my comrades. Ristock and Pennell (1996) also discuss this problematic. Our dirty laundry needs to be gently and cautiously washed because we have to continue wearing these clothes. Conflicts existed but were often covert.

In Coldtown, as has been shown, there is a limited sense of "a group", "a coalition" or "shared oppression". There are many formalized spokespersons who may speak (or claim to speak) for a faction or a fraction of some number (minute or large) of people. Those who speak, those who are members of some organization or group, those who may vaguely and passively align themselves with that group or organization are different and perpetually shifting voices. These divisions and shifting connections are sometimes part of a divided and conquered pattern (i.e. internalized oppression).

In the following paragraphs what I am attempting to do is profile how we originally imagined some support would come to WINFEW from the community. We imagined that some groups and organizations would "be on our side" and we imagined that others would resist us or ignore us. In many cases we were positively surprised and in other cases negatively surprised.
This text is partially an attempt to assess and understand these surprises. The information that I am using to base these group profiles is based on pamphlets from these organizations; direct contact; discussions with past or present clients who have used these services; information given to me from funders, staff, Board members; volunteers who have worked within these organization and who have subsequently worked with WWINFEW; and information presented by the mass media.

**UN/ALLIANCES AND DIS/CONNECTIONS**

Kim: ...You have to just keep trying [to build coalitions] and not give up. Because that is the basis for it's [WWINFEW's] existence otherwise you would be diverting from the goals and the vision of the organization. People have to just keep trying and trying if you believe in something deeply. It doesn't matter how long it is going to take as long as you keep trying, so long as you achieve it. Patience and determination is important. It might help if they have any grants coming in. [The thing] is to get [more people] from those diverse groups. That way it will be easier because then people will feel involved. People will feel they're connecting.

The original group of women who invested their energy in making WWINFEW into an entity assumed that at least eight other existing groups would be unconditional enthusiastic supporters of WWINFEW. Our original advisory committee/Board made phone calls, wrote letters, attended kindred events sponsored by these many groups and organizations, took people
to lunch, and everything we could think of to make
connections. We were innocent. We were misguided optimistically.

**VISIBLE MINORITY WOMEN'S GROUPS (VMWGs)**

Kim [a Black immigrant woman Board member of WWINFEW] I
would say that the ideals and the goals [of WWINFEW] are
very very good. But I think that it is still a very young
organization. It needs a lot of structuring. It needs
lots of commitment. But it's a good organization. To me
it's just starting, it's growing now. It's small, growing
and needs a lot of expanding. Needs more people involved
instead of so few. When it comes to issues as well it
could be more diverse. But it is definitely an
organization that is needed in the community, I would
say.

There were many possible minor and major forces pulling
against sharing in WWINFEW's goals. One inhibition might have
been that WWINFEW could have been, mistakenly perceived as
anti-family (in that we were pro-choice; validating of women's
right to leave an unsatisfying marriage, etcetera). Agnew
states:

The experience of discrimination by women from Asia,
Africa, and the Caribbean increases their dependence on
the family and ethnic community. Immigrant women who are
confronted by attitudes and behaviors that are racist or
classist are reluctant to identity with members of a
dominant group on the basis of gender. As newcomers,
they value the emotional shelter of the family and the
sense of belonging in their ethnic group. They are
likely to consider relations outside the family and
community as stressful and alienating, while relations
within the family and community affirm their dignity and
identity as women (1996, p. 70)

Most of these visible minority women's groups (as formal

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organizations) were relatively new players (Adamson et. al., 1988; Agnew, 1996, pp. 146-148). Most of these organizations
or groups had only existed in Coldtown since the mid-80's. More than one WWINFEW activist that I interviewed suggested
there was an issue around "who was first off the mark" in Coldtown. Some visible minority women may feel that they
started their groups before WWINFEW was initiated and that, therefore, WWINFEW activists should not have "arrived on the
scene". From their standpoint WWINFEW activists should have joined them rather than having their women being asked to join
WWINFEW. This may be a valid request and it is certainly a discussion that is much wider than just the experiences of
women in Coldtown (Agnew, 1996, pp. 144-166).

Since these VMWGs were relatively new in our community (and relatively new provincially) some groups' membership were
focused on creating and structuring their own organizations and had minimal energy left to share with other organizations.
visible minority women's organizations may have identified primarily with national and provincial goals rather than local
priorities. They may have had very few members in Coldtown (compared to a geographical area like Toronto, for example)
and, therefore, may not have had excess woman-power to allocate to other organizations' activities. They may have had
a demographically small pool of women from which to draw
membership and they probably had a minimal resource base.

As visible minority women they may have had a long-standing distrust of organizations and groups that were not exclusively centered around visible minority women's issues. A distrust of other groups may be well justified historically (Agnew, 1996, pp. 7-9; Bulkin et. al., 1984; Hall, 1991; hooks, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Ware, 1992; Yamato, 1988). At least one WWINFEW activist suggested that these types of organizations have (not unexpectedly) an "in-group/out-group mentality". These are volatile times and groups often develop (understandably) a protectionist mentality.

There were past personality conflicts between some key activists from these groups and some key activists from WWINFEW. For example, one of our past Presidents was the past President of one of their organizations and she explained to me that some people felt she had gone against them by consenting to be our President. Personality conflicts can also be a "box" in which larger structural issues get put (Remington, 1991; Ristock, 1990, 1991). There was also a fear that every dollar another woman's group got was a dollar that visible minority women's organizations would not get. This fear was reality based and it was a fear subtly cultivated by funding sources.

What were the possible minor and major forces that could
have lead these organizations to work in coalition with WWINFEW? VMWGs and WWINFEW had some elements of a shared vision for the future (elimination of violence against women; more employment opportunities; social services and supports; etcetera). We had potentially shared definitions of who the "enemy of the moment" was (for example when rallies or pickets were being organized against racist events or behaviours). In these times of scarce resources and backlash there is a necessity for small resistance organizations to look toward each other for confirmation, validation, and support because we are all vulnerable.

Due to a lack of resources (they did not have an office that was ongoingly staffed and providing any type of direct social service) they faced the inability to provide nine-to-five referral and counselling (for example) to their client group (although they may have an effective self-help network). As a result of their small numbers in the North permanent government funding will probably never be allocated for exclusive visible minority women's services because their "demographics don't justify it" (as funders said about WWINFEW). For these and other reasons government project

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'In many meetings I attended this line of "demographics don’t justify it" was stated by project officers. This was their excuse to avoid taking responsibility for WWINFEW and for other programs that tried to respond to the needs of vulnerable and oppressed women.
officers were encouraging coalition building among funded groups and agencies.

On a positive note WWINFEW had visible minority women volunteers, Board members, committee members, and staff members. Many visible minority women participated in our research projects. We had four (out of a total of eight) Presidents who identified as visible minority women. Each of these women were connected to at least one other organization (preceding their involvement with WWINFEW and/or simultaneous to their involvement with WWINFEW) which assisted visible minority women. Right until its closure WWINFEW hoped to continue expanding its formal and informal connections with women from Coldtown's visible minority women's community.

FIRST NATIONS WOMEN'S GROUPS (FNWGs)

FNWGs were also relatively new as formal government supplemented and/or bureaucratized organizations. They had a small number of activists and often they could only recruit enough women to keep their own activities going and had no women that the group could spare to work on WWINFEW's Board or WWINFEW's activities. There may have been some FNWG women who have feelings of caution about some versions of feminism as an ideology. As the chapter describing Coldtown's history/herstory articulated, there are historically grounded
fears of being the victims of racism when working in a group that was not exclusively First-Nations centered. Also, there may have been suspicions around socioeconomic oppression issues. Women at WWINFEW may have been perceived as being centered around different socioeconomic locations and orientations (i.e. more focused on the needs of women from a middle level of socioeconomic status than FNWGs).

On the other hand some FNWGs did have recognition of what benefits they could receive by working in coalition. For example, WWINFEW helped to organize the local pickets and roadblocks in support of the First Nations people at Oka. "Oka" was a controversial and well publicized land claims dispute in which the army was called in; people were shot; roads were blocked; and many people felt forced to take sides. During Coldtown's local Oka-support protests WWINFEW women showed up in large enough numbers to make our presence felt. Also, at another time, we picketed Coldtown's courthouse in support of a First Nations woman who had her parole revoked unjustly. Further, we participated in a protest against Secretary of State when this federal funder proposed substantial cuts to First Nations peoples programs such as those offered by the Friendship Centers.

There were many successful relationships with shared key activists. At least two past Board members from among the
executive of FNWGs were dedicated and very active members of WWINFEW's Board. WWINFEW provided paid employment for First Nations women (some of our researchers, and other contract positions were held by First Nations women). By providing employment, WWINFEW concretely demonstrated how strongly we valued First Nations women's contributions. Our second President was a First Nations woman. Two of our four Coordinators were First Nations women. WWINFEW provided internships for First Nations women social work students. Some First Nation women consented to be interviewed during our many research projects. First Nations women demonstrated a consistent interest in attending our events and seminars. WWINFEW hosted events or highlighted their talents (through food, their dancers, fashion shows). Many pieces of First Nations' women's religion, world-view and praxis are consistent with a feminist approach to counselling and to community organization. There may be a significant number of First Nations women (related to hundreds of years of white assimilationist efforts) who have familial connections to other ethnocultural groups and these familial connections may have lead some First Nations women to feel particularly open to WWINFEW's vision of building on our commonalities rather than segregating on the basis of our distinctions.
IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S GROUPS (IWG)

Rachelle: I think perhaps Coldtown is a hard working community and it's I think 100% immigrants even if they are Anglo-Saxon and all that, but there's immigrants [here]. And so it was established, it's not that old, so it [Coldtown] was established by hard-working and independent people in the sense that they had no government and... a pioneer spirit. They [the first waves of immigrants] have no government subsidies of any kind. No soup kitchens, so it was hard going. And these people, most of them still alive, they're still here. They're the ones that pay the taxes so these are the people that contributed to this community to the growth of this community and all that and I think they have a sense, and they're all immigrants, and there was no consideration paid to them and I'm one of them. There's no consideration by anybody neither by present society or by government like they [the social service organizations] don't give them any special status, any special consideration or nothing and yet they went through all these hardships and hard work. So I think with, when women or any other newcomers demand certain programs that is a burden to the tax-payer and these people are the tax-payers, the ones who never received anything, you know. So I think there is a certain resentment [among older immigrants] if you wish. That they feel that they're respecting too much and they are comparing their lives when they came to ones that they come now. And talking about newcomers and those are the ones that are talking about newcomers, and so it is kind of a tough life that sort of makes them say 'well we had a tough life you know, why do these people [new immigrants] expect an easy life from us when we came with nothing. We did it with nothing. We're paying taxes now and they're still expecting from us and you know they're demanding this of us and yet we don't receive any consideration. And on top of that they expect us to volunteer too!'

There are enormous diversities within the "category" of "immigrant woman". In the above quote from Rachelle she compares recent waves with previous waves of immigrants (she
also incorrectly asserts that Coldtown is "100% immigrant").
Also, many "immigrant woman" are, of course, "visible minority" women. Some immigrants freely chose to come here and some were forced to leave their birth country (due to war for example). Pragmatically, the question often distills down to "which identity peg/s does the woman herself pick up and prioritize?".

On the other hand, these immigrant women's groups were almost identical in their potential connections and disconnections from WWINFEW. Past personality conflicts with some key activists shaped how the IWG activists in Coldtown perceived WWINFEW. During WWINFEW's years of existence it might be said that some IWG were extremely weak locally (i.e. three or four women met once or twice a year). There may have been conflicts nationally that had filtered down to a local level. Some IWG which were more locally centered, issue specific, and traditional seemed to be able to connect consistently with a large membership base (i.e. those IWG which had bi-yearly bake tables at Churches or Beauty Pageants and prizes for "Miss [whatever their ethnic group]" seem to have a better attendance than more political feminist IWG which organized conferences or rallies).

Some IWG activists (both more traditional ones and more radical ones) became very active with WWINFEW. Some of their past Board members came on our Board at WWINFEW. WWINFEW
obviously did have a shared definition of what the problems were for immigrant women. Immigrant women constitute larger numbers in the population of Coldtown than some of the other groups (discussed in this text) that organizations existed for. IWGs were very diverse 'groups' [or permeable in their periphery] in that, for example, if one immigrant woman did not find her needs met at WWINFEW that did not necessarily mean another woman from her immigrant group would feel inhibited about becoming involved with WWINFEW (in contrast, for example to at least one VMWG where women actively phoned new WWINFEW activists and vigorously attempted to dissuade them from becoming involved -- even stating the ultimatum "if you get involved with them we do not want to see you here!). "Immigrant" women may not see this label as being meaningful or as a "commonizing" or primary identity peg. They may define themselves or accept the "identity pegs" of "Polish", "Swedish", "Italian" or "Canadian". They may be more interested in assimilating than standing out (and visible minority women -- by definition -- do not have this same luxury of choosing to "pass".

The strong religious orientation (Catholic, Muslim, Hindu) of many immigrant women (and non-immigrant women) may have lead them to feel a contradiction with some of WWINFEW's positions (i.e. pro-choice, accepting of divorce, non-
homophobic, accepting of women who have given their children away for adoption, etcetera). Some of WWINFEW's activities (i.e. attending rallies and sit-ins) were too "extreme" or "radical" for some women to feel comfortable with. Some immigrant women felt conflicted in that if they had volunteer time to offer they might prioritize giving that time to their ethnic Club and/or the Church and/or their extended kin network.

Some of Coldtown's immigrant population are aging (Italian, Finnish, Polish, for example). Many of these immigrant women had limited English language skills and WWINFEW did not always have (and even when we did we were not necessarily perceived to have) simultaneous translation available at WWINFEW events. Among some immigrant women there were different values, beliefs, and practices regarding self-disclosure and discussion of personal problems. WWINFEW regularly hosted events that focused on issues like incest, rape, wife assault, or menopause. Some immigrant groups treasure and protect their privacy around personal and familial problems (as do many Canadian-born people).

The first Canadian-born generation of women from these ethnocultural minority communities is likely to be well-educated (compared to her mother's generation) and more open-minded to life choice alternatives for women and sometimes
more interested in becoming involved in feminist issues. These women though often had familial pressures to succeed academically and professionally that placed their focus elsewhere from WWINFEW. Further, this group of women often had childcare and family responsibilities that inhibited their volunteer interests. Additionally some of these women may not identify as "Italian", "Polish" or whatever their parents' birth identity was, they may identify as "Canadian". Statistically there were large numbers of immigrant women potentially available for participation at WWINFEW. The "category" of "immigrant" women is much larger numerically in the geographic area of Coldtown than the "categories" of "First Nations" women or "Visible Minority" women.

Some immigrant women's associations seem to exist to recapture the past and keep it static and to insure that the next generation maintains the language and customs of the past (for example among the Ukrainian community there seems to be a lot of energy invested in involving young people in learning about traditional dancing, costumes, egg-painting, etcetera). These singing, dancing, and language retention priorities did not necessarily immediately connect with those of WWINFEW. Second generation women may not be activists on the basis of an old country identity. Further, the born-in-Canada generation women may already have such a supportive network
that they do not feel a need to become involved in organizations like WWINFEW.

WWINFEW had many Board members, staff, and volunteers from diverse immigrant women's communities. Six of our eight Presidents were immigrant women. We hosted events that focused on immigrant women's interests (speaker's nights, films, sessions to train translators, seminars about sponsoring relatives, resume writing, etcetera). Many women from the immigrant communities were very supportive in regards to participating in various research projects WWINFEW embarked upon (casually adding numbers, it seems to me, that about three hundred immigrant women were interviewed during one moment or another in WWINFEW's herstory about some research project or another that we were involved in).

There are multiple and intersecting identity pegs that are salient. In addition to people organizing themselves around their ethnic backgrounds people, of course, organize around their religious backgrounds and sometimes the meaning of religion becomes entangled with the meanings of ethnicity, national identity, identity as a visible minority and/or as an "immigrant". For example, within the Muslim Women's Association women seem to have arrived in Coldtown in tiny numbers from a variety of birth countries (Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Ceylon, etcetera). Women who identify as
Muslim (and immigrant and visible minority) sat on WWINFEW's Board and were involved in many other capacities.

Possible minor and major forces pulling against immigrant women sharing in WWINFEW's goals might include that members needed time to develop a sense of trust (this theme existed with all women but it may have been a more significant factor for immigrant women because some of them were brand new to Canada and its customs and there were often language barriers -- First Nations women and visible minority women who were Canadian-born did not have the same number of barriers in regard to understanding Canada's customs and speaking English). WWINFEW diversified its activities (hosted fashion shows, beauty make-over days, food festivals) in the last two years of its life and these activities seemed to be within the comfort zone of larger numbers of traditional immigrant women. During all of its existence WWINFEW made efforts to promote businesses owned by traditional women (dress shops and dry cleaners, for example) and this helped some immigrant women feel closer to WWINFEW.

MULTICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS (MO)

Paula: ...I see many of the activities that WWINFEW was offering were already being done by [a MO] but, apparently, only on paper not really in practice. What WWINFEW wanted to do was actually get things done and see results right away because this other organization was
not doing it. I saw all the time this other organization was not doing it. I saw all the time this group [WWINFEW] trying to do it. Apparently, it was always that. There was always confrontation because this other organization was repeating over and over 'We already have that [service], We already have that and we already have this'. But we knew they didn't really. They just had it in paper, on the table, but not touching the real people so that's why this organization [WWINFEW] came about to enforce it...They were talking about the needs [the other MO organization] of immigrant people but nobody took the time to ask these type of people [immigrant women] so WWINFEW did it. They went and asked these people through a survey about those needs. They [WWINFEW] came out with the needs in reality. Then WWINFEW wanted to solve those problems.

Si: So, that was an important thing, to at least go to the people, immigrant and visible minority and First Nations women, and ask them? Ask them 'what do you think the needs are?'

Paula: Yes, because..., in my understanding the MO never went to the sources to get the information. They assumed that something was wrong. There was nothing that was written and I know that WWINFEW did that [asked the sources and wrote a report].

Some MO's are relatively mature or older organizations in Coldtown and as Ahrne (1994) says, "A major obstacle to creating new organizations, that is, new forms of collective action, is an old organization (p.17). Pal also validates this problem that once an organization exists it is difficult for a newcomer to find space on the terrain (1993, p. 55). WWINFEW's newness was a barrier to success.

Pal (1993, pp. 48 -49) explores the idea that some of the types of organizations resisting WWINFEW's existence were "reverse interest groups" in that they are funded and exist as
"government mouthpieces." and that they can exist as a support group for government policies and as a voting block. The idea that some of Coldtown's MO's were reverse interest groups is intriguing and certainly an idea that warrants further reflection.

MOs can be very narrowly focused ethno-specific organizations or, alternatively they can be creatively configured coalition organizations. For example, there is one MO which has approximately fifty member groups (WWINFEW was one of these groups). Sometimes these MOs, because their membership is diverse, must play to the middle-of-the-road position in regards to issues that arise. This need for compromise often meant that MOs could not support WWINFEW (or other groups) overtly on anything that might be thought of as controversial by even a few of the MO's member groups.

Coalitionist MOs may be organized so that each member group has one "delegate" or representative at an annual general membership meeting. These delegates then vote for a Board which will run the MO for the year. The new Board is constituted from among these delegates. From what I witnessed in Coldtown many member agencies of MOs are represented by men of higher socioeconomic status and they, of course, vote according to their perspectives on issues. This tendency towards the disproportionate involvement of men who possess
some degree of status, money, and empowerment may occur because these men: have more leisure time; are more comfortable doing public speaking and administrative tasks; have driver's licenses and cars; often have wives at home who take care of their personal needs like laundry and dishes (and these wives do the family's childcare); experience Board membership as a career move; and/or just enjoy taking leadership roles (because of their socialization into masculinity).

The perspectives of these middle and higher socioeconomically situated ethnocultural minority men and WWINFEW's were sometimes disharmonious. For example, at one point the cost of a local bus ticket increased substantially. WWINFEW wrote letters to the paper, made phone calls to politicians and tried to think of ways to resist this increase which we feared would impact negatively and noticeably on low income women. Although WWINFEW extensively reached out to MOs to ask for their participation in this protest no MOs publicly responded to this issue.

Sometimes these MO delegates and Board members were women, but again these women are often from a location of higher socioeconomic status. They are frequently women who have lived the traditional women's life in that they raised children, cared for the family's home, supported their husbands and
supported their kin network (being able to afford this lifestyle points to some type of socioeconomic status and comfort). Sometimes these women also had an understanding of issues which differed substantively from WWINFEW's understanding of issues. A brief concrete example: at one time we had a traumatized non-English speaking "picture bride" who had been rejected soon after her meeting with her Canadian-born husband. He was hostile, revoking sponsorship, trying to send her back, and she did not want to go because of the shame this rejection would bring for her in her birth country. When some women from her ethnocultural group were approached to offer her support, translation, and options, the best support that came forward was that she was offered the opportunity to work as a cleaning lady a few hours a week for one of the women (i.e. no friendship was extended, no emotional support -- just a cool phone call with the job offer).

Both MO men and women are often very interested in organizing expensive folk dances and feasts related to traditional foods and rituals. These are important activities but they are often activities that low income or low socioeconomic status ethnocultural minority women would not prioritize and/or activities that low socioeconomic status ethnocultural minority women could not be part of because of costs (i.e. entrance fee, the cost of a fancy dress, childcare
expenses, transportation, lost time off work, etcetera). People from other countries often bring their deeply entrenched attitudes, beliefs, and practices around socioeconomic rankings with them -- some people even hang onto their "special" middle or higher socioeconomic rankings and privileges as a prized possession.

Between MOs and WWINFEW there was also the overriding question again of "who should volunteer for who?" because there may be an inclination at MOs that WWINFEW women should volunteer for MOs as opposed to vice versa. WWINFEW was attempting to be a coalition of (ideally) women from any and all of the MOs. In this regard WWINFEW might have been perceived as quite threatening. WWINFEW, in effect, might have been perceived (and in effect would be interested in) adding the woman-power of MO women to WWINFEW's energies. WWINFEW's gains might be the losses of some MOs. Whenever volunteers from the MOs were organizing with WWINFEW as women this was potentially perceived as energy taken away from the MOs goals and needs. Some MO staff members and Board members felt uncomfortable about women learning about new ways of perceiving gender and power relations.

There are some forces though that did serve to connect the MOs to WWINFEW. MOs had many of the same government funders pressuring for coalition building, sharing of resources, and
the elimination of over-lap in service provision. Without funder's prompting some MOs did see the value of wide networks and coalitions. Network building and coalition building is an inclination that seems to be a stronger tradition with some cultural groups than others. An additional positive consideration was that WWINFEW had become a member of different MO and had sat on the Boards of some MOs. We had strategically planned these woman-power expenditures so that we could begin to build connections and shared understandings.

Some MO's activists felt it was important that their daughters and wives (or for the women, that they themselves) learn new skills and become "Canadian" and/or become more employable (at WWINFEW some women learned computer skills, organizing skills, public speaking, etcetera). Each MO was relatively small so that when employment or training opportunities come up at WWINFEW other MO people were usually interested. As Rothschild and Whitt (1986, pp. 127-141) discuss in regards to various types of social activist organizations staff people tended to move from a project with one MO to a project with another MO or sometimes to a project with WWINFEW. When a paid opportunity arose at WWINFEW it was usually greeted with enthusiasm.

WWINFEW was perceived differently by different people. Some people perceived WWINFEW as somewhat like a "purdah"
environment in that it was rare that a man actually even walked in our doors. Only women could be on the Board (there was an exception initially -- a researcher consented to be on our Board and his participation was linked to a funder's approval of our initial needs assessment) and the staff. Therefore, some MO men were pleased to have their female kin out enjoying 'their leisure time' at a safe place and in a way that did not cost any money. Of course, many men, regardless of their ethnocultural heritage wanted their partners and daughters and mothers to have wonderful learning experiences and supported them in whatever roles and activities they chose for themselves.

WOMEN'S SERVICES/SOCIAL SERVICES (WS/SS)

Jane: The only way you change people's attitudes is by showing people you can work together. If you see minorities coming together. When I was there, I had approached a Francophone women's group and said, 'You should be part of WWINFEW' and they said, 'Why, we are French?' and I said, 'Because you are a minority to the English' and after a big discussion they realized the commonality there. That, yes, because they are French they have experienced oppression in the workplace or, perhaps, not got the promotion because traditionally French people were viewed as [being] less intellectual and less professional. When you start to listen to this French women's group, you realize that all the barriers they were trying to break down and all the things that they were striving for were similar to WWINFEW. So, you see, if you start bringing all the minority groups together, then start bringing around other groups, the ones that aren't as visible, and have them feeling comfortable in WWINFEW
then you have over half of this society functioning in harmony, theoretically. Then the English have no choice but to feel comfortable with all the minorities because all the minorities then would feel comfortable and they would constitute a majority.

There are a variety of women's services (WS) in Coldtown (including a Women's Centre, The Sexual Assault Treatment Program, Elizabeth Fry, Big Sisters, The Women's Crisis Shelter, and The Women's Alcohol Recovery Home). There are also social services (SS) which are not designated as exclusively existing for women but which low-income or vulnerable women disproportionately utilize (such as subsidized housing, income maintenance programs, legal aid, etcetera). These services attempt to be all inclusive (i.e. for ethnocultural minority women and low income women). Sometimes the ideals that organizations set out for themselves are not immediately achievable.

Some of these services were perceived [by ethnocultural minority women] to draw their Board membership, staff, volunteers and/or activists from a too small pool of primarily white Anglophone and white Francophone, Canadian-born, well educated people. These perceived (and actual) patterns meant that women's services activists may be thought (by WWINFEW staff, board and/or volunteers) to misunderstand what ethnocultural minority working-class women's issues were. A pattern that sometimes plays itself out is that few or no
ethnocultural minority women sit on the Boards or staff of these agencies and, therefore, agencies do not fully appreciate the distinctive needs or issues of ethnocultural minority women. Then, because an agency is perceived as not understanding, ethnocultural minority women may feel inhibited from becoming involved at a board or staff level.

Some women from WWINFEW believed that the women from some of these WS agencies are the women that their mothers always warned them about (i.e. "bad girls" and/or too militantly feminist). Activists with Amethyst, a woman's alcohol recovery program, also describe how some women were initially afraid of the "feminist" label and approach (Galey, Gillies, Gurr and Mennie, 1996, pp. 12-15). As possible as it is for WS providers to have stereotypes is as possible as it is for service receivers to have stereotypes. Conversely, some WS, rather than being perceived as being "too feminist" or "too Eurocentric" are perceived as being "too professional" in that services are provided in a controlling or "us" and "them" manner. "Formal helping" provided by strangers is not a comfortable relationship for women from some ethnocultural groups. Disclosure of very personal issues (for example, of sexuality, rape, incest) is almost unheard of among some ethnocultural communities. Again, as Cox and Ephros (1998, pp. 13, 103, 128) our socioeconomic imprinting has meaning for
how people think about reaching out for social services.

Some of these women's services felt threatened because WWINFEW competed (sometimes successfully) for the same funds. Like the other alternative organizations discussed here many WS/SS workers may already be over worked and underfunded. These times of scarcity and competition incline people to be less generous, patient, or open to change. This is unfortunate. April, like all WWINFEW women wished things were different:

I would like to change the way other organizations viewed us. We wanted to be viewed as not their competition. Not as their rivals. They saw WWINFEW as getting their money. They thought we were money wasted on services that were not needed. Out of their ignorance, not knowing anything about us. Not knowing anything about why we existed.

Like the other groups of organizations some WS/SS also had past personality conflicts between their key activists and WWINFEW key activists. The reverse is equally true: some key WS/SS providers had been very helpful in regards to furthering WWINFEW's mission. As with every other group of organizations there are potential connections and encouraging signs. WWINFEW and these service organizations sometimes organized around the same issues (for example, the rape-shield law, anti-violence campaigns, Take Back The Night Marches, breast cancer screening issues, etcetera).

Another encouraging (and sometimes discouraging) sign was
that, again, our funders expected us to share and get along. This was problematic when the sharing was done on terms favorable to the mainstream and less favorable to WWINFEW. An example of this is when "professionals" from other agencies are paid to sit and listen to our volunteers teach professionals about racism, sexism and socioeconomic oppression. This type of arrangement is exploitive in that some people are being paid to absorb or appropriate other women's knowledge. The transmission of knowledge was defined as not worthy of financial recognition and this is unfair to ethnocultural minority women. WWINFEW women's wisdom was downgraded to 'just a testimonial' or a 'personal story' and thus not worthy of an honorarium.

Now I have provided a basic sketch of the dynamics that brought other groups and agencies (visible minority women's groups, First Nations women, immigrant women's groups, multicultural organizations, women's and social services) closer to WWINFEW and which pulled these agencies and groups away from WWINFEW (and from each other). If these organizations and groups could have clearly recognized their commonalities with each other and with WWINFEW our collective mission would have been strengthened. As activists with a women's alcohol recovery program state in their conclusions about their own organization:
Working cooperatively with other organizations can help to avoid turf wars and competition for funding that profit no one. Joining forces with community groups means that we have a stronger voice to advocate for change. However, working together in partnership requires energy, diplomacy, communication skills, commitment and clear goals (Galey, Gillies, Gurr, and Mennie, 1996, p.86).

I will now return to the internal dynamics of WWINFEW.

BACK TO THE INSIDE OF DOING THE UNDOABLE

Somewhere a long time ago I was told that "if you are doing anti-racist feminist community organization and it doesn't hurt, you're not doing it right". If this is true then WWINFEW was doing it right because it did hurt. Rothschild and Whitt (1986, p. 156) while referring to workers' collectives suggest, "High expectations and the sense of mission in collectives may lead to more intense, engaging work, but engagement exacts a price: stress." At WWINFEW we were stressed and ours was a continual frantic balancing and compromising act that felt sometimes like doing magic on a highwire with no net. At WWINFEW we did what could almost not be done and we did it relatively well and with very minimal support from those who should have been be supporting us. In our ninety-four months of continual courage to meet the hostile environment around us we were heroines.

External realities dynamically constricted our internal
realities. Government financial support was grudgingly given to us (and others) and in the receiving of these types of "project" funds often our authentic visions (and other organizations' authentic visions) were dissipated. At different moments in our organization's evolution we were handcuffed in our ability to resist. One major restraint was that a strong coalition among and with other potentially involved groups remained to be achieved. Social service and self-help groups have not always adequately and fruitfully identified how issues of race, socioeconomic oppression and gender interact. Race, socioeconomic oppression, and gender oppression are the very skeleton on which Canadian society hangs its flesh. Our oppression is central: the eradication of race, socioeconomic and gender oppression would fundamentally and dramatically alter Canadian society.

Coldtown's groups largely remain divided and conquered. Groups whose members intellectually and academically know and understand racism, socioeconomic oppression and sexism may not pragmatically, concretely, and behaviourally demonstrate this understanding. WWINFEW was somewhat brazen in its audacity to pose the questions we posed. We were pragmatists in that we did not always expect to have our questions heard much less validated.

Internally, we faced the same problems that have been
identified as affecting other organizations (Adamson et al., 1988; Briskin, 1989, 1991; Christiansen-Ruffman, 1990; Galey, Gillies, Gurr and Mennie, 1996; Hernandez, 1988; Iannello, 1992; Reddin, 1991). We had problems knowing what our own powers were and knowing how to use our own power, as Remington also found in the women's organizations she studied:

...power problems include the tendencies of women's organizations not to imagine and plan for large-scale success; to get hung up on details, feelings and wishful thinking; to settle for not enough resources and less than competitive wages and benefits; to bring down women of accomplishment, energy and ambition; to bestow considerable responsibility while withholding comparable authority; to have difficulty establishing adequate boundaries between work life and personal life and among workers, and to focus on struggle and crisis at the expense of accomplishment and success (Remington, 1991, p.68).

As described throughout this text there are many external forces which created divisions within the organization. Even oppressed populations have learned how to deal with conflict through the tools of patriarchy and capitalism -- often we reproduce exactly what has been done to us. Although WWINFEW did not identify completely as a collective we did attempt to demonstrate collective decision making as much as possible. Ristock expands on what some of the internal problems can be for organizations like WWINFEW.

...all too often destructive experiences...occur within collectives. Feminism is typically cited as the reason for these difficulties. Individual women are judged as less feminist or as holding the incorrect feminist views.
when they are different. Thus a feminist ideology is transformed into an oppressive rule-setting, prescriber of acceptable attitudes and behaviours (Ristock, 1990, p. 176).

Parallel problematics exist to those of holding "Incorrect feminist views". At WWINFEW (and other women's organizations) people were trashed for holding "incorrect anti-racist views" or "incorrect anti-class oppression views". People were sometimes trashed for wearing makeup, for wearing clothes that were too nice or for wearing clothes that were not nice enough, for being friends with the wrong people, for a variety of things that women were not always ready to admit they trashed other women for.

We were an organization composed of women of different ethnocultural backgrounds, religions, sexual orientations, levels of feminist or anti-racist consciousness, commitment and passion, duration and intensity of invested time, academic backgrounds, skill levels, and orientation toward risk-taking. Some women were volunteers and some women were paid. Of the women who were paid most were almost always on different wage rates as a result of the pay scales provided through various government programs.

If WWINFEW wanted to have a long-term future we would have had to continue struggling to cultivate a consciousness of our ambiguities and accept the necessity for coalition-building. As Ristock emphasizes:
..an analysis of our contradictory positions within society is a necessary and positive step in order to build solidarity and foster alliances among women who work in these important alternative structures (Ristolock, 1990, p. 174).

We also would have had to ensure that our leadership and herstory were not lost. WWINFEW had many complete turnovers of activists. During our brief existence we had eight presidents, six co-ordinators and over a hundred women who worked with us as volunteers or through some government programs or projects (many were with us for just a few weeks).

Remington assures us that WWINFEW's difficulties in these regards are common for women's organizations. Remington found that:

The difficulties in moving forward were exacerbated by the continual loss of experienced leaders and by the groups' isolation from each other -- their inability to share knowledge and strategies and to break out of a situation in which they were competing for the few funding dollars available for women's organizations and issues (Remington, 1991, p. 68).

In Coldtown we were all competing for similar funding and this competition had shaped how we did or did not support each other. Of great interest is that during the last two years of WWINFEW's life it shifted its fund-raising activities to include selling cosmetics, hosting beauty make-over days, serving "exotic" food to a largely white socioeconomically comfortable audience, and hosting a fashion show. This shift was related to a different kind of leadership from what was
originally active at WWINFEW:

Dawn: Number one [problem right now] is that of having a very weak executive. An executive that doesn't have the strength. Not strength as much as 'the voice' or?...A vision. That's one, but the people who are on the board right now are not able to express themselves in the openness. Or, let's say men's groups are able to express exactly what they want. These women who are very weak cannot speak up to be on par with the men. Do you know what I am trying to say? When you are talking about feminism you have to have women who know what they want and who know where they are going before they can actually lead an organization. The ones who are leading the organization right now are very meek and mild and, if a man will say something to them they will immediately shy back even if they know what their focus is. They don't have the strength to stand up and say 'No! This is what we want and this is how we want to say it!' So I think that is the unfortunate weakness that there is over there right now.

Dawn continues describing how changes in fund-raising activities shifted who was active with WWINFEW and the consequences of these changes:

I think they [the new leadership] are afraid of getting political. Let's put it that way. There are a lot of women out there, I suppose, who are still very docile. Still afraid of speaking up. Still afraid of the ramifications that it might have or [afraid] of their husbands, their brothers, or whatever. They don't have the inner 'assertiveness' okay 'assertiveness' not 'aggressiveness'. Aggressiveness is when you start getting on to the feminist groups and that is where I find the aggressiveness is going, towards the real feminists. I think assertiveness is what is lacking there. Yes. That is probably the word I am looking for.

This type of community raised money (from bake sales and entrance fees to events, etcetera) may have strengthened our independence from government but it altered our organizational identity. These money-raising activities (selling beauty
products, exotic food, fashion, etcetera) are activities that WWINFEW's founding mothers probably would not have felt comfortable with. Nonetheless, these "traditional" women's activities brought thousands of dollars to the organization. These funds were matching funds (some government programs will back each community raised dollar with one government dollar) and made a substantial contribution to our financial well-being. Further, many new women learned about WWINFEW. As organizers we know we are supposed to begin "where women are at" and ethnocultural minority women and/or low income women are at many different places.

In summary, in this section I have described how WWINFEW struggled to define itself. We began with one vision and closed the organization while struggling with a different vision. The inside of WWINFEW was shaped by a multitude of forces, most of which were outside of our control or influence. We could not necessarily change how other organizations or groups perceived us, responded to us, or understood their own role in the larger social structure of Coldtown, Ontario, Canada or the Globe. We could not necessarily change the theory base or ideology of other organizations or activists.

Our original vision at WWINFEW was closely connected with creating a nurturing supportive environment for ethnocultural
minority and/or low income women. The clients, friends, personal connections and/or kin we saw falling through cracks in services and social networks in 1988 remain vulnerable, today. We enhanced some women's lives through our social opportunities (information sessions, speak outs, film nights, etcetera). We sat on numerous committees and advisory groups (anti-wife assault, anti-date rape, anti-violence, etcetera). The work we did in these locations was diffuse, often unrecognized, and difficult to assess and quantify in regards to its direct impact on women's lives. Women marginalized by their ethnic communities and/or their economic circumstances were sometimes able to get emotional support from WWINFEW, but this support was largely offered by over-burdened volunteers.

Our 1988 "reputable" research "verified" that ethnocultural minority women's needs were not being met. The vision of social justice we believed in during 1988 and 1989 has been recognized as the foolishly misplaced trust that it was. We documented and proved our case and were led through a series of surrealistic tunnels by a nonbenevolent government. We received only project money and even that was inadequate for whatever project was offered to us. Most funders promoted "volunteerism" as a magic word for us to live by. Immigrant, First Nations and Visible Minority and/or low income women have been doing the subtly enforced volunteerism of the world
for a long time. Another word for "mandatory volunteerism" is "exploitation" or "neglect".

WWINFEW faced many challenges on a day to day basis. Feminist cross-cultural community organization was far more difficult than we imagined. Those whom we assumed would be on our side were not necessarily there for us. The theory that we had in 1988 of "be nice to every one you meet" had to be reassessed because not everyone we met was nice to us. The other three parts of our approach (be helpful, do what you can, identify how women are disadvantaged and work to change that disadvantage) remained salient but even these ideas had to be more focused and selectively applied. We never settled the work of defining ourselves and prioritizing our services. We tried to simultaneously be many things to many people. Being many things to many people is undoable when you are situated in a hostile and resource-starved terrain.
CHAPTER SEVEN: SERVICES PROVIDED BY WWINFEW

Marie [a WWINFEW employee]: Yes. Well when I read my job description I was supposed to be all things to all people at all times. The expectation was, sometimes, that not only was I supposed to help raise funds, to care for people's feelings, because I was the only one who could do that. I was supposed to make sure that other people were taken care of. Even doing [one thing] took all my time, doing all that. Then someone says, well why don't we have more money?...I think that it showed up [chronic over work] within the organization, but it was coming from a place much larger than the organization. Meaning funding bodies were expecting us to do miraculous things with fifty thousand dollars. When you know damn well, that if you look within government bodies, the resources that they have -- not just their salaries but the resources they can draw upon to [do their work] it is just not realistic! [If they were to do the work] what they give women's organizations fifty thousand dollars to do -- and I kid you not -- they would get four hundred thousand dollars to do the same thing [the same amount of work]. And then they say, 'What's wrong with you?' And that was sometimes internalized in the office. That there was something wrong with the women there or their ability to do the work or them. Rather than looking at it as a funding issue or an issue of something a lot larger?

Like most grassroots women's organizations WWINFEW could be thought of as providing a diffuse and impressive array of services to women within WWINFEW and to the wider community. As Ristock says about the women's organizations she studied, "...their membership is usually more diverse [than consciousness raising groups] - some members have political interests, others have service interests -- and always they
have a product to deliver (p. 42)." This chapter attempts to map out exactly what those politics and services and products were and the differences between the formal profile (as stated in the grant proposals, constitution, job descriptions, formal documents) of what existed and the informal profile (as stated by women's own telling of their experiences) of what existed. A quality of organizations like WWINFEW (that seems so obvious as to be almost unworthy of declaration) is the ongoing service of providing "emotion work" which is done by everyone. Ongoing emotion work was one of our "services" and emotion work is:

the effort we put into ensuring that our private feelings are suppressed or represented to be in tune with socially accepted norms - such as looking happy and enthusiastic at a friend's party, when we actually feel tired or bored. Emotional labour is the commercial exploitation of this principle; when an employee is in effect paid to smile, laugh, be polite, or "be caring". An essential feature of the job is to maintain the organizationally prescribed demeanor or mask. This can be fun; an exquisite drama. It can also be stressful and alienating (Fineman, 1993, p. 3).

WWINFEW women had the pressure on them to be nice to each other and all women. Many women were not able to always deliver this smooth intensity of nurturance partially because they were emotionally depleted and exhausted. In reality few of us ever can. The contradictions and complications around the emotion-work women do as volunteers / staff in 'caring" organizations or "caring" groups has been documented elsewhere
(Baines, Evans, and Neysmith, 1991; Bartky, 1990; Butler and Wintram, 1991; Chandler, 1995; Harman, 1989, pp. 55-66). My sense is that this contradiction (between some idealistic expectation and our reality-based behaviors) had meaning for all the informal and formal services we provided. The meaning was that people had high expectations that three types of services would not only be effectively provided but also provided with a deeply caring attitude.

WWINFEW's services could be grouped into at least three categories: educational services; anti-racism services; and female friendship networking services. The "service" of providing a context in which female friendship could flourish is a significant and interesting finding. This "service" is one not discussed in the literature on organizational structure and my proposal is that friendship is often the adhesive that holds an organization like WWINFEW together. The provision of educational services and anti-racism services was our formal reason for existing.

**WWINFEW AS SERVICE PROVIDER OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES**

Education is usually thought of as something that happens within the credentialed and formally sanctioned halls of academia. This type of education is highly valued and, it
might be said, this type of education is focused on providing validation for certain segments of society to have their world-view accepted, prioritized and reproduced. Grass-roots education and popular education are seen as something worth less. Women who have been excluded from the mainstream (because of racism, socioeconomic oppression, sexism, and other "isms") still often hunger to empower themselves but not necessarily through formal higher education.

WHAT WERE THE GENERAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

Marilyn: I do remember [what my original goals and hopes were when I became involved with WWINFEW]...[As educators] we were very aware of the barriers they [immigrant women] faced. Also men face these barriers but in particular we were aware of the problems immigrant women were facing in getting employment because of their cultural, social, family relationships they, of course, were concerned about childcare, etcetera. Therefore their attempt to get back into the workforce was more difficult than it was for the men. Men didn’t have to worry about the logistics of childcare, transportation and family and all that...We were seeing women with fairly technical trades or training or education in their own countries and there was nothing for them to go into. The women tend to be fairly specialized as well, which is that you have to be quite flexible and quite broad in your range of skills. It wasn’t just the women [immigrants having trouble finding work] but because the women were further channeled because of, maybe not being able to be involved in heavier -- or not wanting to be involved in heavier work -- as the men. The women just tend to have more difficulties in terms of getting employment in their area. There were many many barriers for them that applied to both men and women but the additional problems around the perceptions of women in the
workforce, their difficulties at home [inspired me to become involved with WWINFEW].

As a response to our 1988-1989 needs assessment, "A Survey Of The Needs Of Immigrant, Visible Minority and Native Women In The Coldtown Area" WWINFEW attempted to provide a wide variety of services and programs. The separation then between "educational" and "social services" is somewhat academic and not always an authentically experienced aspect of WWINFEW.

English language skills and educational achievement are important indicators of personal empowerment. Of the immigrant women we surveyed in 1988-1989 we found that four percent were "very unconfident" while speaking English. Thirteen percent were "unconfident" and forty-seven percent were "confident". This question was responded to in regards to everyday interactions such as buying groceries or talking to people in their neighborhood. Eleven percent estimated their reading ability in English to be at below a grade four level. Eighteen percent thought they were below a grade eight level. Twenty percent thought they were between a grade eight and ten level. Thirty-three percent of the women thought that their writing skills would be below a grade eight level.

Only ten percent of Native women said they felt "unconfident" while speaking English. The remainder felt "confident" or "very confident". Twenty-nine percent of them rated their present reading ability at a grade nine to ten
level. Twenty-four percent rated their present reading ability at between a grade eleven and grade twelve level. Thirty-eight percent rated their present writing ability to be between a grade nine and ten level. Nineteen percent thought their writing ability was between a grade eleven and twelve level.

Of the visible minority women eighty-two percent rated themselves as "confident" or "very confident" in speaking English. Ten percent rated themselves to be at a grade four or less level of reading, thirteen percent rated themselves at a grade five to eight level and sixteen percent rated themselves to be at a grade nine to ten level of reading. Fifteen percent thought they could write at only a grade four or less level. Ten percent thought their writing skills were somewhere between a grade five and grade eight level. Seventeen percent thought they could write at a grade nine or ten level.

In is clear then that there were many women in Coldtown who have low levels of formal educational achievement. This is a reality for women within all three ethnocultural groups surveyed. When asked how difficult it was for them to continue their formal education most of the women expressed interest in doing so. Unfortunately many of them also expressed that it was very difficult for them to consider that option. Thirty-one percent of the immigrant women said they thought it would be "very difficult" to consider continuing their formal
Twenty-four percent thought it would be "difficult". Nine percent thought it would be "very easy". Five percent of the Native women thought it would be "very difficult" to go further with their formal education. Fifty-eight percent thought it would be "difficult". Five percent thought it would be "very easy". Twenty-seven percent of the visible minority women said it was "very difficult" and twenty-five percent said it was "difficult". Only twelve percent thought it was be "very easy".

In summary, it appeared that within these three groups of women, as is well documented elsewhere (Canadian Women's Studies, 1989: Das Gupta, 1986; Horsman, 1990; Moreno, 1989; Ng, 1990; Ng, 1988; Warren, 1988; Wismer, 1988), there were many who had not reached their full academic potential. A large portion of these women were stuck in minimum wage jobs, intermittent unemployment, and limited future opportunities. Collectively, less than ten percent of these women perceived furthering their formal education as a "very easy" thing to do.

WHAT WERE THE BARRIERS?

Adult women learners require many special considerations (Astin, 1976; Cless, 1976; Gaskell, 1991; Kornbluh, 1984; Miles, 1990; Research Center On Women, 1977). Women who are
ethnoculturally disadvantaged have special needs and perspectives (Bannerji, 1991, p. 67-107; Kalia, 1991; Omolade, 1987). Working-class women have additional special needs (Arnold, 1985; Arnold, 1991; Baxter, 1988; Horsman, 1990; Kornbluh, 1976). As Darkenwald (1982) has said in regards to involving working-class people in educational pursuits,

The most serious difficulties are clearly with the lower-lower class level, the very poor, with the most unstable work life, and the most desperate sense of alienation, who have the fewest group memberships of any social group. Yet they are the most in need of the most fundamental kinds of education, those contributing to survival in an industrial society beginning to run short of unskilled jobs...(p. 147)

Therefore, when the ethnocultural minority adult low socioeconomically located women WWINFEW surveyed stated that they experienced "difficulties" they are not overstating their case.

Women responding to WWINFEW's inquiries (regarding their difficulties in continuing their formal education) were not necessarily commenting on their belief in their own intrinsic cognitive potential (although many were also insecure in regards to their potential). They were referring to socially constructed inhibitors: lack of affordable child care, the necessity of working long hard hours at a low paid job, minimal support and encouragement from relatives, an absence of transportation, and/or the inability to set aside the
needed money for tuition and books.

A primary inhibitor was the fact that for them to substantially change their situation in life through formal education they had to invest a great deal of time and resources. For example, a woman who has a grade four education and who is working at minimum wage as a baker's assistant would have to upgrade for perhaps five or ten years before she might secure a job that would bring her more than minimum wage. Many women in these situations have had to develop a day-to-day orientation to the world. Setting their sights on "five-year-plans" is sometimes completely outside of their orientations.

HOW DID WWINFEW ATTEMPT TO RESPOND?⁵

A lot has been written about adult education and/or feminist pedagogy (Arnold, 1991; Astin, 1976; Bannerji, 1991; Women's Studies Quarterly: Special Feature On Feminist Pedagogy, 1987; Boud, 1985; Briskin, 1991; Cless, 1976; Compton, 1984, p.480-485; Darkenwald, 1982; Freedman, 1990, p.603-

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⁵I thank the editors of Feminism And Education: A Canadian Perspective II for publishing a much earlier version of this material on education in the context of places like WWINFEW. This earlier version was titled, "Women Across Cultures: A Case Study In Cross-Cultural Feminist Adult Education In Northern Ontario." Toronto: Center For Women’s Studies In Education. May ’94.
The pedagogical process that WWINFEW engaged in might be described under many labels: "popular education", "participatory research", "critical pedagogy", "community organization", "grass-roots activism", "Rogerian group facilitation", "volunteer management", "human resource development", "micro-politicization", or "job-skills training". Any one, or a combination of these labels, might be used with some degree of accuracy.

What the different potential pedagogical labels have in common is an emphasis on process and an emphasis on exploring power relationships. They focus on the personal and the political dimensions of life in equal portions. WWINFEW was committed to recognizing the personal and the political aspects of oppression. Some of the concrete ways through which we tried to help women learn how to learn was through film nights, speakers, participating in rallies and protests, personal sharing/consciousness raising, feminist Rogerian supervision, assigned reading, public education (through letters to the editor, speaking at/with other organizations,
action oriented research), and representation through our members on a variety of community committees (Advisory Committee Against Wife Assault, The Women's Health and Breast-Screening Committee, Legal Education and Action Fund, Non-profit Housing, The Multicultural Association, Race Relations, etcetera). While achieving those concrete goals the processes women were engaged in achieved additional goals.

ORGANIZATIONAL REALITIES

As a small underfunded organization there were many daily limitations we faced. Therefore, participants were actively involved in every dimension of running and managing the organization because their help was a necessity. Through this expectation many women learned about things and learned how to do things that they had never done before in their lives. For example, Bonita, a First Nations woman was there [at WWINFEW] on a short-term training project exclusively focused on developing her computer skills:

Okay. While I was there I was doing my internship and this was mostly computer work but the stuff I was inputting in the computer I was like reading and taking in that, like ah, I think it was a survey and I just got myself more familiar of what was going on in Coldtown. 'Cause like I was new to Coldtown too.

Bonita continues by describing things she liked about WWINFEW. Note also how she came away with new learning and role models
of what leaders could be like:

The leadership I guess was what I noticed when I was there and one of the other things I noticed was it almost seemed like you were being brought into a family, I guess. That's what I remember when I was there. Seeing the leadership of this one woman and that they can turn around and just treat you like family as well.

Much has been written by feminists about how we can learn collectively and individually in this type of process (Adamson, 1988, McKenna, 1991, p. 109-128).

Some of the organizational goals and needs included: grant applications/reports, media work, public relations and negotiations with other groups/organizations, the development and "nurturing" of our Board, participant selection/support skills, book-keeping and financial management, office administration, fund-raising, leadership/networking, research, program design and goal setting. Initially, as an organization we developed an ethic of "unanimous perpetual learning". Each woman was subtly expected to try to recognize what needed to be done, how it might be done, and how she could teach everyone else how to do what she had been doing. This teaching usually benefits from taking place in a medium of "advanced empathy". This was, as Rogers (in Kirschenbaum and Henderson, 1989) has said,

A further element that establishes a climate for self-initiated, experiential learning is empathic understanding. When the teacher has the ability to
understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, then again the likelihood of significant learning is increased (p. 310).

Also relevant to this original organizational ethic of perpetual unanimous teaching/learning are Freire's 1968 comments:

Fed up as I am with the abstractness and sterility of so much intellectual work in academic circles today, I am excited by a process of reflection which is set in a thoroughly historical context, which is carried on in the midst of a struggle to create a new social order and thus represents a new unity of theory and praxis (p.12).

Freire would have been excited by some of WWINFEW accomplishments. For a time at WWINFEW we did create a process of reflection and a unity of theory and praxis.

**IDENTIFYING, CREATING, AND USING LEARNING MOMENTS**

Initially every woman was to be part of the process of creating, identifying, and utilizing learning moments. Some examples of what is meant here by learning moments include: initial contact (contract writing process); Board meetings, staff meetings, attendance at and discussion of external speakers, presentations or films; attendance at and discussion of internal speakers, presentations or films; internally and externally organized socials; the writing of Minutes, memos,
reports; the receiving of Minutes, memos or reports; one-to-one learning sessions; phone-arounds; assigned formal educational opportunities (classes, workshops, etcetera); protests, rallies; doing speeches, presentations, assigned readings; and the writing and reading of logs.

**CHALLENGES AS A 'TEACHER' IN THIS CONTEXT**

As previously described these socioeconomically deprived ethnocultural minority women have barriers and burdens they are pushing against. These challenges are faced by some women every single day. As Baxter (1988), for example, has so appropriately said about women and poverty:

"...it [talking about poverty] is repetitive, but poverty is boring and repetitive. You may find yourself getting bored as you read this...bored with the sameness of the women's problems and the solutions they suggest. Take that bored feeling, multiply it a million times, and you will begin to get a sense of how boring it is to be forcibly poor." (p.13)

Life is a day-to-day turmoil for some. The need for child care and transportation created at least one small "crisis" a week at WWINFEW. Many women frequently missed work days due to these two issues.

Another regularly encountered barrier involved overcoming the overt and covert resistance set up by participants' family members. Many of the women we worked with/who worked with us had experienced male violence before they became involved at
WWINFEW. Some of the women experienced violence while being involved with WWINFEW. As Lloyd (1991) and others (Das Gupta, 1986, pp. 72-74; Thompson, 1983, pp.178-179) have described, this is a very tragic, but common aspect of the process faced by women who are beginning to discover their potentials.

During WWINFEW's brief existence we had more than one Board member who had to leave us because her husband was beating her. In one case the participant's husband told her that she was to have no more contact with us. She asked us to never phone again because he became angry when we did. A staff member who was with us for six months was regularly beaten by her boyfriend. She would call other staff members in the middle of the night because he had threatened and abused her and then "put her outside". Two different boyfriends at different times actually verbally threatened/harassed their women partners on WWINFEW premises.

In regards to covert resistance some women reported that their husbands/boyfriends would not drive them to WWINFEW, would not take care of the children while they attended/participated, or would not give them the money for a course/tuition/entrance fee. Some men phoned at WWINFEW to "check up on" women during their work day or during activities. Women also reported that the men in their lives would be "difficult" or would argue with them about being
involved in WWINFEW or about the ideas that WWINFEW "puts in their heads".

One of the challenges, therefore, was a strong need to establish a meaningful level of trust, acceptance, respect, and a shared orientation. The quality of relationship could not be stressed enough (Rogers, 1989; Shapiro, 1991, pp. 74-75). Trust and relationship were important in that if a woman was experiencing any resistance at home we wanted her to feel welcome to discuss that with other women at WWINFEW. During WWINFEW's first years we continually struggled to ensure that all participants tried to recognize and understand the unique needs found in each woman: this was a primary aspect of our organizational culture. We tried to take one day at a time and we tried to take nothing for granted.

Another ongoing challenge was to connect women's individual experiences with larger patterns and, hopefully, develop a feminist analysis of their lives. Wilkinson and Schneider (1991, p.14) suggests there are three stages to developing a feminist consciousness. The first stage is the experience of "disorienting dilemmas". The second stage is constituted by "a shift in perceiving events as personal to seeing them in a social context". The third stage involves "establishing social contact and support with other women" in this third stage a woman can authentically process her perceptions and
experiences. If these are the three stages of feminist consciousness development, then WWINFEW was trying to facilitate the process of developing that feminist consciousness. Some WWINFEW participants found that feminism helped them out of their pain -- others, maybe, found that seeing their world for what it was caused them too much pain. Denial and false-consciousness were sometimes used as familiar cocoons.

**FORMAL EXTERNALLY IMPOSED ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES**

Most of our financial support came from government training or training-linked sources and thus most of our woman-power came from these programs. Another central channel through which we found woman-power was through other organizations who used us as a training base. Therefore, almost every participant (except the freely dedicated volunteers) come to WWINFEW with some type of externally imposed role or responsibility. Some core participants were funded to achieve a very specific goal by a certain date. For example, "to interview 131 immigrant, Native and visible minority women within six months regarding their social needs" or "produce a volunteer recruitment video within two months". Most participants came to the organization with loosely or tightly dictated formal achievement expectations.
Rogers (1969) refers to these externally imposed expectations as, "institutional press" and articulates how both students and teachers are impacted upon by it (p. 40-43). He suggests that creative negotiations may take place in which everyone's needs are met. A brief discussion of this "institutional press" or the differences in women's roles/expectations/contracts will highlight how diverse the group of women active at WWINFEW was. Then I will highlight WWINFEW women's methods of creative negotiation.

In its first years WWINFEW invited in community service order workers. Community service order workers (CSO's) are people who must "do time" in the community for a "good cause" as a way of compensating for having shop-lifted, been caught with drugs, or some other non-violent offense. These were usually young white Canadian-born women. CSO's could, basically, be asked to do anything that our organization requested from them (i.e. from cleaning or painting the office to organizing protest rallies). These women were usually with us for very brief periods (i.e. less than two weeks).

WWINFEW accepted many social work Interns (college or university level and from the Anglophone, Francophone or Native program streams). Social Work Interns committed to between 100 and 400 hours of work with their chosen agency. During their time with WWINFEW they demonstrated a variety of
interests from micro-counselling, to community organization, to fund-raising. Each Intern developed her own work plan.

WWINFEW worked with "Section 25" workers. These were women who collected their unemployment insurance with a "top up" amount of money. They had to fit themselves into a pre-existing job description which Canada Employment had validated as consisting of "a collection of job-readiness enhancing skills." These positions were designated for "employment disadvantaged" women. These women were with WWINFEW for a duration of one week to fifty-two weeks. Their goal, as set by Canada Employment, was to be looking for a job full-time while in their placement. This, as can be imagined, created potentially conflictual orientations both for the Section 25 workers and for their co-workers.

WWINFEW hired women through federal student employment programs. These were called the SEED program or the WOW program. These programs were usually three weeks to three months in duration and dictated that only women below a certain age and who would be entering high-school, college or university full-time in the fall semester were eligible. Only women who were full-time students in the previous semester were eligible to be hired through these programs. These women were of different ethnocultural heritages. Most of them had minimal previous formal employment experience.
Citizenship funded us for ten-month positions but the women hired had to work the full ten months (not more and not less!). Women hired through this program had to be immigrant women who had not worked for our organization before and who wanted to be trained in regards to "management skills". The expectation seemed to be that she must be "employment disadvantaged" but simultaneously rapidly upwardly mobile! The supervision and documentation required for this position was, relative to other programs, enormous.

There were a variety of other programs and, therefore, restraints, that WWINFEW faced in regards to the participants who were with us. The ones described here are adequate to communicate what collective woman-power and what the collective orientation might be at any given time. These external realities created daily contradictions. To add one more indicator of the meaning of these formally and externally imposed limitations I will describe one of the employees who was with us for a long time period. She was on the payroll for about two and a half years. In that time we had to "creatively define and redefine" her as eligible for three different programs. She was a "Futures" worker, then a "Section 25" worker, then a "SEP" worker. In this time she was defined as, a "clerk typist trainee", an "assistant co-ordinator", and a "book-keeper trainee". During the transition from one program
to another this woman was left with no income. She was a young single mother. Only her commitment and dedication to WWINFEW work enticed her to remain with the group.

Each of these externally imposed realities created differences in time-frames (some women were with us for three hours and some for a year). Each of the woman, as stated, had a different academic background and usually one that included minimal formal education. Some of the woman (because they have been involved with so many unkind and oppressive social service organizations) had stereotypes and attitudes towards "professionals" (Social workers, Board members, government representatives, etcetera). These different programs that sponsored WWINFEW also attracted women of different ages, political orientations, sexual orientations, and religious differences. All of these differences and unique backgrounds were, of course, also grounded in and mediated through their unique ethnocultural backgrounds.

Each aspect of Rogers' "institutional press" was creatively and daily negotiated. Much discussion took place between participants and their external contacts regarding how to continue this negotiation. This negotiation was an important aspect of the learning process itself. Perhaps, precisely because there were so many women from such diverse backgrounds and because WWINFEW was doing a variety of formal and informal
activities we were able to negotiate a "space for resistance" that funders and other more conservative community interests were not (at least initially) able to repossess. As Weiler says, in "You've Got To Stay In There And Fight" (1990, p. 219) we must recognize that there is an:

"...importance to rethinking the role of the state and the impact of state policies on classroom practices and teaching. Rather than dismissing educational reforms as cooptation or expressions of dominant class and gender interests, ...the state itself embodies competing interests, and that state educational policies have contradictory effects at the grass-roots level."

For much of WWINFEW's time, at our grass-roots level we were able to 'teach' in a reform oriented manner. The teaching tools and processes involved Rogers (1969) insights and methods of negotiating institutional press (p. 40-44).

TEACHING TOOLS AND PROCESS

It should be stated though that there are other external realities that brought disappointment into some of WWINFEW's "graduates" lives. Rachelle has had multiple professional experiences in organizations like WWINFEW. She describes the intersections between high unemployment, racism, ageism, and sexism -- and suggests how government funded programs can shape outcomes:

they,(places like WWINFEW) go and get funding, government funding to provide programs for immigrants
or older mature women to help them to either educate them or to help them re-enter... They have a program for these people and all that and these people give it 110% and they usually come out of the top of all their classes because they come from the old school that you have to work hard and all that. Besides they want to prove themselves so they normally excel at what they're doing and yet these same organizations, even though they have an opening for a job that qualifies, that these people are qualified to do, these same organizations then end up as you mentioned earlier as I described to you, they end up hiring Anglo-Saxon Canadians. Usually young and just out of school and I mean, here are these women that they, at the beginning they said they valued their experience -- they only needed the Canadian work experience, and yet they don't get the job. So to me that's a contradiction.

Rachelle seems to be over looking the fact that the funder often dictates what type of person can and cannot be hired. The programs that she is referring to here often told WINFEW that only women under twenty-five who were returning students could be hired. Rachelle continues to show herself to be implicated in judging harshly and dividing women from and against each other:

So what happens is these programs are actually just for the benefit of the few that get the program and the few other ones that they are given the jobs. So I feel that these people were exploited rather than helped. And besides, not only that but they also built the expectations of these women.

Rachelle continues by emphasizing that the increased expectations of women amplifies their pain when they confront oppression or disappointment:

They build the experiences so that they might do
something different that they have this opportunity and all that and then they are turned down. So I think that it's best that they don't give these programs because at least these women they don't expect anything. They say there's nothing available! They're very willing to live out their lives the best like they did to that point and that's it. Then you're hoping for change and there is no change. In fact it is worse ...it is also a very great disappointment.

Rachelle identifies the many contradictions inherent in this type of social activism that was done at WWINFEW. On the one side we enhance people's consciousness and hopes -- on the other there are still only so many jobs available. Rothschild and Whitt (1986, pp.146-159) summarize their studies on this topic by suggesting that raised expectations which become unfulfilled expectations are often worse for the workplace and the workers' sense of well-being then not having raised expectations in the first place. In spite of the ongoing contradictions we continued trying to teach women new skills, processes, and world-views.

I will now describe some of the actual specific day-to-day methods through which women were teaching and learning. Not all of these tools and methods were used at all times with all participants. There were times when we were down to one participant, when we had an organizational crisis, or when women chose to not be part of this process and chose some other way of being part of WWINFEW.
WWINFEW attempted to effectively harmonize this ever-shifting ad hoc group of women with diverse needs through pairing new participants with more experienced ones. This process redistributed knowledge, power, and responsibilities. Each participant was given a "supervisor". This term has a potentially negative authoritarian connotation but it was utilized because funders/project officers required participants to have a "supervisor". This is, as Ng (1988) and others have expressed, one of the ways funders altered the original non-hierarchical vision of a feminist collective. Nonetheless, these were realities we struggled with and attempted to adapt to our authentic visions and goals. The role of "supervisor" was manifested through a variety of tasks and techniques.

The supervisor's task was to be a mentor, "big sister", peer counsellor and skills trainer as the moment required. In The Alverno Research Centre On Women report on their off-campus experiential learning for women program, they describe the role of a mentor in much the way we often would have described the role of supervisor:

The concept of mentor occupies a central role...in two important ways: first, the faculty mentor is to be involved in the course design that specifies behaviours, assessments, and other ways to measure outcomes of mutually agreed upon goals; second, the mentor's responsibility is to provide feedback and support to the student throughout the placement. (p. 12)
Supervising was usually a new role for the woman who did it at WWINFEW. Both participants learned from the process.

In the pre-acceptance/pre-hiring stage of contact we, as a team, assessed what activities were coming up and what roles a new participant might play. We discussed who was ready/able to be a supervisor to the new participant. Then we met with the new candidate/participant and provided a full overview of WWINFEW. Most importantly, at that time, we explored what strengths the woman had. This sometimes involves a process of "translation". For example, a woman who has never worked in the paid public sphere but who has lots of friends must have well developed "people skills". If she had done informal volunteer work then the accumulated skills from these experiences had to be sought out and articulated. These strengths were then talents we encouraged her to begin her placement developing even further.

Once accepted into WWINFEW the first thing the new WWINFEW participant did was begin her "log". One of our major tools was the "log". Freire (1968, pp. 102-110) and others (Horsman, 1990; Omolade, 1987, pp.35-38) have described how significant the process of examining and documenting perceptions can be in regards to consciousness raising. Every woman kept a log in which she entered the concrete specific things that she did each day.
Here she also kept track of her hours and her "plan of action" (we were on flex-time and each woman arranged her own hours in relation to her goals). She also entered the names and some identifying information about women she has been in contact with (identifying information is encouraged so that she develops networks and so that information about women contacts was not lost to the organization). This log was a place where she could document the struggles she was having. It was open to the other participants. People could comment on each other's learning process. It was used as the center-point for intermittent assessments of learning progress. The log was never judged in regards to formal language skills.

The log was an important way for women to feel they were "accomplishing something". It was a tool for them to track their progress. It was also a way for supervisors to articulate new information and alternative approaches that might be taken. When new participants entered WWINFEW they were invited to read the logs of women who have gone before them. They could read the logs of women who have come to WWINFEW through the same programs and the logs of women from very different programs. Through this initial reading and discussion and observation they shaped their "contract".

New participants developed a "learning contract" with their supervisor. This "learning contract" was a version of Rogers'
(1969) "method of evaluation" (p. 43-44). Basically, this document became their agenda for their time with WWINFEW. They stated what they were interested in learning and how many hours they were prepared to devote to that area of personal or professional growth. Sometimes this included vague goals such as, "improve my self-esteem", "learn more about my culture", "come to understand women's issues", or "explore what professional goals I want to set for myself". The learning contract was a combination "job description" and "personal growth objectives" document.

Women participants were encouraged, through dialogue with their supervisor and team members, to be specific in how they planned to achieve their goals in their learning contract. For example, "I will read three books and discuss each one with my supervisor", I will attend three film nights regarding women's roles", "I will spend five hours talking to Native women about their issues". Concrete steps like these were usually supportive of helping the women feel grounded in their learning.

Almost everything in the learning contract was negotiable except for those aspects that were externally dictated. If there were activities that had to be done to keep the organization's goals from failing then these formal achievement or "reality-based" requirements could be
redistributed among the group. This was done through team
discussion and supervisor/participant discussion and then the
involved individuals changed their learning contracts.

Team meetings were developed almost like consciousness
raising groups, therapy groups, or strategizing groups. Much
has been written on the potential power of small groups in
this context (Freedman, 1990; Rogers, 1989, pp. 339-357). Team
meetings occurred at least once weekly. There was a flip-chart
on which people wrote the keywords around which they wanted
discussion to center. All participants were encouraged to add
their words. At the team meeting each person shared what she
had been doing, what she has been learning, and what she
needed help with. Women who have been part of the group longer
shared first so that the example was set for newer women.
These team meetings usually lasted approximately two hours but
some were as long as four hours. Chairing the discussion was
alternated for each meeting. Taking of minutes was alternated
for each meeting. The process of the taking of minutes was
explained in detail because it was important teaching and
group solidarity building tool. Women who were not at the team
meeting could feel they were part of the group and they could
learn what others were working on by reading the previous
minutes. The learning about, taking, typing, editing, and
discussion of "The Minutes" could be almost a whole week worth
of activity for one woman. This knowledge helped women understand how organizations worked, how information becomes "solidified", how some information is "selected out", and, of course, women also improved their typing, spelling, computer and communication skills.

The production of a variety of reports, letters, and media work was done in the same manner as the minutes. Sometimes every person in the group was involved in the writing of one letter. Dialogue took place around why a certain word was used instead of another word. Discussion took place about why this or that piece of "paperwork" was even being produced. What did the government expect from us? Why did that agency interact with us in this way? Who funded this work? Who are those people and why have they been able to tell us what to do? These kinds of questions were talked about in a non-censored way. As Alinsky (1972) says,

The organization has to be used in every possible sense as an educational mechanism, but education is not propaganda. Real education is the means by which the membership will begin to make sense out of their relationship as individuals to the organization and to the world they live in, so that they can make informed and intelligent judgements. The stream of activities and programs of the organization provide a never-ending series of specific issues and situations that create a rich field for the learning process (p. 124).

At WWINFEW participants assisted in the organizing and staging of demonstrations. Being a participant in even one active protest can be extremely empowering and attitude
changing (Rose, 1989). We, for example, protested in support of the women from Oka. A group of eight women from WWINFEW marched one afternoon. The next day we participated in blocking the central highway for the afternoon. During this protest we talked about the role of Native women, the role of police, the role of social service agencies, and how some people lose out without understanding why and/or how that happens. We also had an enormous amount of fun meeting new people and feeling that we were part of an adventure.

We were participants in a sit-in to resist Secretary of State budget cuts. Secretary of State was one of our financial supporters at the time. A lot of discussion centered around what this meant to be 'biting the hand that feeds'. Of course, a lot of networking occurs at these kinds of protests. Parallels were drawn between what it means in our own individual lives when we attempt to 'bite the hand that feeds'(i.e.: when we defy our husbands, fathers, bosses, etcetera).

These protests were excellent moments in which participants were able to learn about other services that existed in the community and how they were funded. Again, at protests we had a lot of fun. Fun is a significant component of the learning process and one that we attempted to invoke at every opportunity. Low income ethnocultural minority women too
seldom have fun in their lives.

The organizing of events such as protests, film nights, socials and Board meetings were effective teaching / learning processes. Women were assigned to do phone-arounds. With their supervisor they worked out a 'script' of what had to be said. They discussed the whole meaning of the event: it's goals, who we were expecting to attend, what ideas might be discussed at the event, who funded it, etcetera. They were given an opportunity to listen to their supervisor as she made a few calls. The new participant then made her first calls with her supervisor there beside her. If any difficult questions came up they were discussed.

For women who were excruciatingly shy this process was an important skill developer. For example, Bonita describes how she felt as a result of doing phone-arounds and other activities.

In the short time I was there I found myself coming out a little bit. I used to be like shy and like when I was there, when I was there [at WWINFEW] I just let myself come out. I think my initial, my first goal, or goals, of becoming assertive and sure of myself were met.

Our phone-arounds were vital. Some of the recipients of WWINFEW received very few phone calls in an average month. We were attempting to break through their isolation. We found that just sending isolated ethnocultural minority women a notice (as some other organizations might do) would not be
enough to meaningfully connect with them. Even if they did not eventually attend that specific event they felt validated and important because they had been given that personal contact.

Events that we presented, through WWINFEW such as film nights and speakers nights were also vital. These were evenings at which we attempted to show films by women, about women, for women. They focused on women from different ethnocultural minority communities. We had some films in different languages. We had speakers at these evenings who were from the highlighted ethnocultural community discuss how they felt about the issues presented. We tried to localize and personalize the issues displayed in the films.

Our ever-present flip-chart was used to trigger discussion. Words that were usually displayed included: "incest, rape, pornography, wife-assault, sexual harassment at work, divorce, single-motherhood, poverty". All the issues of the women's movement were presented as "key-words". Facilitators (social work interns, Board members, and/or women who have attended other film and speaker nights) attempted to establish a respectful nurturing environment in which these issues were struggled with in regards to racism, socioeconomic oppression and sexism. We tried to address the questions of, "How are we all the same?", "How are some groups of women different?", 

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"What might we do as individuals and as a group about this?"

During the first four years of WWINFEW' "herstory" we had, for example: two First Nations' women's nights, two Black women's nights, two Italian women's nights, one Finnish woman's night, two Old-European women's nights, and two Asian women's nights. We also presented "theme" sessions. For example: women and leadership, women and health, or women and employment. All of these evenings were open to, and attended by, women from all different cultures. There are many other events that I could describe, but these were among the best attended and they serve to highlight WWINFEW's educational work.

WWINFEW was a unique organization. Through using the teaching/learning tools of: the log; peer supervision; self-creation of plans-of-action and learning contracts; open-discussion team-meetings; conscious and extended use of "the Minutes"; conscious use of and attention to the production of reports, letters and other media; protests; phone-arounds, and film and theme nights we were working to resist racism, sexism and socioeconomic oppression while we were also attempting to develop marketable skills in our women participants.

**STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

Our strengths as an anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-
socioeconomic oppression and, marketable skills development environment were many. Women were able to explore things in ways they had never before attempted. The participants built their self-esteem; everyone discovered community resources; and women came to recognize and validate commonalities. Women recognized the connections between the personal and the political and the connections among themselves. Some of the varied and meaningful concrete skills developed include: word-processing, fund-raising, media management, human resources management, book-keeping, office management, counseling, and communications skills. Individuals developed contacts/references that lead to employment. Many women discovered aspects of themselves that they wanted to further develop through formal education. Some women learned to recognize and assert their personal rights in ways they never would have considered previously. Many women affirmed or reaffirmed a sense of personal autonomy and identity.

There were weaknesses too that were part of this process. There was an enormous amount of participant/staff burn-out and turn over. Some women felt hurt in the process of breaking down the 'isms'. Some women reported that being part of this process was like sponging up the anguish of the world. This pain was not unique to WWINFEW (Fisher, 1988; Lloyd, 1991).

Some women reported that they felt a great deal of stress.
This was primarily experienced by the core women in relation to confusion of goals (i.e. individual versus organizational, personal versus political, short-term versus long-term, etcetera). The work of voluntarism was often an additional burden on already over-burdened women. Some women were unable; initially to thrive in a "freedom to learn" environment. My experiences with WWINFEW (and as a therapist working in a variety of contexts with women) have shown me that women who have had most of their choices made for them for most of their life can sometimes feel threatened and overwhelmed when they are suddenly encouraged and expected to make their own choices.

ANTI-RACISM TRAINING AS A SERVICE PROVIDED

In addition to the types of education described above WWINFEW should also be given credit for providing anti-racism education to the community on a variety of levels. First, of course, through the dozens of women who moved through our organization (remember that I defined "WWINFEW activists" to be women who had been active for more than three consecutive months and these were the forty-one women I interviewed -- there were dozens of women who were involved for only a few weeks) and learned about ethnicity in a different way than they had been exposed to before. Many of these women brought
those insights back to their families, friends, classmates, etcetera.

One of our major roles in the community was to provide public education through going to schools and speaking about the issues. Often we were interviewed by the newspapers, radio, or television on issues relating to ethnocultural minority women. We spoke to service clubs and organizations and helped enlighten them. Our research projects were distributed widely throughout the community. We responded to phone calls from the wider community helping people to sort out some type of problem. Further, many of the ethnocultural minority women themselves did not know about other ethnocultural minority communities and their issues. WWINFEW was situated to play the role of border worker or bridge-maker between ethnocultural minority communities.

Finally, because we came onto the social terrain, many social service and women's organizations began to pay attention to our issues. They felt threatened because we were potentially going to reach out for their resources (government money, donations, volunteer helpers, etcetera). I infer that some of these organizations felt threatened because I was told this through informal conversations with funders, staff and volunteers from these organizations and from the overt behavior of these organizations' activists which seemed
centred on discrediting WWINFEW. They began shifting their attentions more in line with the priorities that we had defined and thus we were indirectly responsible for some types of education taking place. By pushing these organizations to live up to their stated missions we forced them to educate themselves more deeply about the needs of ethnocultural minority women.

**FEMALE FRIENDSHIP AND NETWORKING AS A SERVICE**

Bonita: Well, my happiest moment [at WWINFEW] was when I was doing volunteer work...when they had movie nights with some of the women there and they would talk about different cultures. That was one of the happiest times I've had there. And just getting out from, getting out of my house and seeing other people, just meeting women. That was, that was [said with a happy expression] different...The saddest moment I have, I'm surprised that it still sticks in my head was, it was at one of those movie nights. I remember this lady coming in and she was talking about her country and that it was in turmoil and just seeing her and, in turmoil and knowing that her family was in that country and they were dying or she didn't know about them. Just seeing her turmoil made me sad because I used to just look at my nice picket fence in my head and everything was honky dory and just to see how there's other women out there that are having a really tough time, it was sad, I think.

Women's relationships with each other are the necessary foundational components of our social movement and of our

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"This section highlights and reworks some of the findings of my 1993 M.A. Thesis titled *Working Class Women's Friendships Within Northern Ontario's First Nations, Italian-Canadian, and White Anglophone Communities.*
feminist organizations. The way we interact with each other in our day to day face-to-face contacts has implications for all of our political, economic, and social visions for the future. Elsewhere I have written about the meaning of female friendship and its dynamics in regards to cross-cultural issues (Transken, 1993b, 1994b). One of the major motivators for WWINFEW women to get involved and stay involved was female friendship. Maybe this would not have been so had WWINFEW existed explicitly to link women in friendship and maybe this would not have been so had this been the only reason WWINFEW existed but it certainly was so in the context of WWINFEW as it was with its other stated formal goals. Some brief examples of how research has shown female friendship to be important are cited below.

Aries, in her study "Close Friendship In Adulthood: Conversational Content Between Same-Sex Friends" (1983), shows that women friends share conversations about their daily activities, their personal and family matters, and "worldly issues." In a related study, young adult graduate students who were single or divorced were shown to value female friendships more than married women. Reisman (1990) found that women were very self-disclosing in their female friendships. Women reported feeling more "... at ease in relating to other women than to men" (p.65). An especially interesting comment made by
Reisman is that "what would seem a matter of concern is the discrepancy between the intimacy expected in spousal relationships and the discomfort experienced in them, particularly by women" (p.80).

Berzoff (1990) discusses female friendship and "fusion." Fusion in the relationship between a child and mother or between spouses is, apparently, usually viewed positively. In contrast, fusion between women friends is viewed negatively by some in the helping professions according to Berzoff. This negative view of female friendship may be another example of how patriarchy has attempted to tell women what is best for them. Berzoff's research and her work as a therapist conclude that fusion is a commonly experienced component of female friendship and that it is very empowering and growth promoting.

Palladino (1990) discusses how frequently heterosexual women experience erotic feelings for each other when they become close friends and how this fear of lesbianism creates ambiguity and confusion for some women. She suggests that the social pressure toward heterosexuality interferes with women's authentic expression of platonic heterosexual affection for each other (and, of course, it also often inhibits their expression of lesbian affection for each other). Eroticism and intimacy, she suggests, are natural feelings women may have
for each other.

Block and Greenberg (1985, p.14) discuss a survey in which women were asked to identify the "three persons they would most like to be with." Female friends were mentioned ninety-eight percent of the time; husbands were mentioned sixty-four percent of the time; mothers or daughters were mentioned sixty-seven percent of the time. Gouldner and Strong (1987) in their findings from extensive interviews with seventy-five middle-class white women found that female friendship and regular verbal interaction with their friends was defined as very important especially for women who were single and employed or who were full-time home workers (p.61). They describe a "renaissance of friendship" among middle-class women (p.94). Within their conclusion they also state:

Beyond being just one of the optional relationships in life then -- to be chosen or rejected on the basis of convenience and whim -- friendship may be making a bid for first place or rivaling first place as a provider of the intimacy and support needed by every woman at some period of her life....The absence of a support system provide by friends can have serious consequences: it can be detrimental not only to her emotional stability, but also to her physical health. (p.150-151)

The existing research and literature regarding women's bonding establishes that this is a complex and central relationship in many women's lives. There are components missing from the whole picture regarding female friendship. Some of the missing components include analysis of the
meanings and dynamics of friendships build between women of very different socioeconomic locations and an analysis of the meanings and dynamics of cross-cultural friendships. At WWINFEW women were learning how to make friends, keep friends and be a good friend and this dimension of their experience was often more important to them as a "service" than any other dimension of WWINFEW's activities.

FRIENDSHIP AND THE 'TEXTS' FOR THE RELATIONS OF RULING

Friendship can empower us to resist our oppressions and friendship can also constitute one of the relationships through which we teach/learn and perpetuate our oppression. According to Smith, our everyday ways of interacting with and relating to each other perpetuate the hierarchies and barriers in our society. She discusses two related concepts which are particularly relevant to women's friendship relationships with each other: "texts" for behavior (Smith, 1989 p. 38-39) and "the relations of ruling" (p. 38-39).

Texts, according to Smith, are not just documents. Texts are also the internalized understandings of the world around us and what is expected of us within that world. Part of the way we know what is expected of us is through the perpetual sharing (implicitly and explicitly) of the texts for behavior.
These texts do not have to be written down. They are usually so well understood that we take them for granted and only notice them when someone has breached them or broken these silent and invisible rules. Texts might be thought of as embedded in our sense of 'manners', 'protocol' or 'etiquette'.

These texts form part of the necessary adhesive ingredient in the relations of ruling. Smith suggests that there are processes, or ways of interacting and relating, which constitute the relations of ruling in which we are all participants. We not only know the rules that our society binds us with; we ongoingly participate in recreating and maintaining these rules. In these interviews I was learning how women's friendships in the "world we enter every day" are partially organized by forces outside of ordinary women's individual psychological idiosyncrasies. The interior and exterior design of our private homes and the size of our living-rooms, the terrain of our neighborhoods and who is/is not resident in our neighborhoods (as chapter four discussed), and the geographical organization of the towns we live in shape our friendship behaviors. The opportunities are limited and within these limited opportunities we make choices that are only partially 'free'. In tensions with these forces outside of ourselves is the possibility of a raised consciousness that is actively and mindfully engaged in
expanding that partial freedom.

Although the feminist movement has made these dynamics visible, it is a pattern that is often forgotten or obscured as we proceed with our daily activities. Smith (1987) explains how it evolves that women do not place themselves and their own needs at the forefront. She says:

Women are generally means to the enterprises of others, or means to the enterprise built into an organizational process. They hold only a piece of the action, sometimes a piece essential to the action, but they are not at its centre. The consciousness required in this type of relation is organized quite differently from the agentic model. (1987, p.66)

Many of these divisive forces are situated far away from any individual two women. These divisive forces are often extra-local. Often the women who need each other the most are the ones who let each other down the most. Often the women who let each other down the most are the ones who have the fewest choices available to them because their choices have been covertly decreased by the multiple forces of racism, socioeconomic oppression, sexism and heterosexism around them.

Female friendship is an ambiguous relationship. This relationship contains both elements of rebelliousness against a status quo and elements of mutual indoctrination towards acceptance of that oppressive status quo. The fact that we do make and maintain female friendships is an act of resistance.
The fact that within these friendships we often prop each other up in our roles as handmaidens to patriarchy and capitalism shows how we participate in each other's continued oppression. We are trained to collude with and implicate each other in the maintenance of male-power. As one financially dependent First Nations woman with three children said about her husband:

He laughs at some of my deepest thoughts when I know women wouldn't laugh at my deepest thoughts. He's a companion but on a very different level. My female friendships compensate for what he doesn't have. Without my female friends I wouldn't have been able to marry him ... 

The ongoing emotional support of her women friends enables the above quoted woman to continue in this primary heterosexual relationship. Economic dependency may make her relationship with a man necessary.

Female friendship might be said to be one of our most loosely defined and simultaneously one of our most important relationships. Our everyday ways of interacting with and relating to each other perpetuate the hierarchies and barriers in our society. The world and our interactions in it could be organized differently.

Patriarchy, Female Friendship and Wwinfew

Nancy: The brown bag lunches [were my happiest moments
at WWINFEW]. We'd always have these brown bag lunches and everyone would attend those. We'd get talking with a lot of people from other organizations. We'd communicate with other organizations as well as with ourselves. We'd make connections with each other. We'd talk about community events. Everyone would make each other aware. A lot of networking was going on.

If "patriarchy" is what often interferes with women's support of each other what do we mean by "patriarchy"?
Adrienne Rich defines patriarchy as "not simply the tracing of descent through the father...but any kind of group organization in which males hold dominant power and determine what part females shall and shall-not play..."9 In a patriarchal world even the words that are commonly used to describe women describe us in regards to our relationship to men: "married," "single," "divorced," "separated," "widowed."
We are never considered as: "intimately-female-friended," "without-one-female-friend," "permanently-split-from-our-best-female-friend," "temporarily-split-from-our-female-friend," or as "a woman-whose-best-female-friend-has-died." These terms sound slightly silly to our indoctrinated ears. Why is that?

Raymond (1986) discusses the relationship of patriarchy to female friendship. She says:

The woman who is man-made is primed for hetero-relations. The literature, history, philosophy, and science of patriarchy have reinforced the supposedly mythic and primordial relationship of women for man...." (p.10)

Female friendship, Raymond says, in this context then is "regarded as second-rate, insignificant, and often preliminary
to hetero-maturity" (Raymond, 1988, p. 11). Women who refuse to be defined in relation to heterosexuality are "loose women." She uses this term to communicate that these women have loosened themselves from the definitions imposed upon them by patriarchal others (p. 74).

Loose women are people whom patriarchy does not like. Patriarchy minimizes, interferes with, or makes invisible women's relationships to each other while simultaneously reinforcing the relationships females "should" have with their fathers, husbands, boyfriends and sons. This might be said to be an effective strategy of "divide and conquer". Patriarchy is any example of a barrier between women which men benefit from.

In contemporary mainstream western society the examples of patriarchy's interference between women are almost endless. Patriarchy's interference can be seen in the fact that most women buy presents and organize parties for their husband's birthdays but not for their female friend's birthdays. Women remember their wedding anniversaries but there is no such thing as "friendship anniversaries." Often, when women start dating "that special man" they drop out of their female friends' lives. Frequently women will automatically cater to the unstated whims and desires of the men around them, but will feel resentful if the women around them state even a few
of their whims and desires. Patriarchy has infiltrated our minds so that men and often women expect women to attend to men's needs.

**Feminism**

Bernadette: I can't remember what my [job title was with WWINFEW], but personally I wanted to meet other females from other cultures, that was at a personal level and that was what I was hoping to do earlier when I was going to just meet at say a movie night. But when I was working, yeah I got to meet some other cultures that were working and our hopes and goals for that particular project were half way met before I was finished work [placement].

Feminism and female friendship can be seen as challenges to male bonding and male authority. Much has been written about lesbianism (which might be thought of as the most intimate demonstration of female friendship) as posing a dangerous challenge to patriarchy and male power (Mackie, 1991; Raymond, 1986; Resources For Feminist Research, 1990; Rich, 1980; Stone, 1990). That female friendship is experienced by men as a potential threat to their control over the women in their lives has also been demonstrated through the experiences of helping professionals who work with women in crisis. Therapists who work in battered women's shelters will state that their women clients are usually virtually friendless because their abuser has been able to corrode and undermine their connections to other women (Chalmers in Storrie, 1987;
As L. Walker says of battered wives, each woman becomes 
"[a]n extremely isolated individual -- because ... his
 domineering and jealous nature often prevents her from seeking
the friendship of others" (p. 103). Or as G. Walker says of
the battered woman, "She seldom has any social-support system
because of the isolation imposed by the way abusers control
any contact with friends or family" (p. 161). Female
friendship can serve as a vital reality-check on what is
happening in our lives.

What would women's relationships be like without
patriarchal interference? Janice Raymond (1988) has described
this imagined female friendship as "gyn/affection." Raymond
defines the woman who values woman-centred friendships as:

... the original woman -- the woman who searches for and
claims her relational origins with her vital Self and
with other vital women. She is not the creation of men
since she does not proceed from their conceit.. And she
does not deny her friendship and attraction for other
women. She is her Self. She is an original woman, who
belongs to her Self, who is neither copied, reproduced,
nor translated from man's image of her. She is, in the
now obsolete meaning of original, a rare woman. (p. 5)

Many women are struggling to develop into this type of
original and rare being. Some of WWINFEW's women were
struggling to develop this dimension of their humanity.

Raymond (1988) talks about her visions of feminist
community which must involve a strong dimension of friendship.
Her thoughts here link the individual friendship activities that we chose to engage in on a day to day basis with the micro-political significance of those cumulative friendship activities. Raymond explains:

Feminists have talked much about the ideals and realities of community and sisterhood. Many different schools of feminism have stressed the political nature of feminism and feminist action in the world. I would suggest that such discussions have lacked a certain vitality and vision because they have not considered friendship as a basis for such community. Thus, what often emerges in feminist theory is a formal, and often derivative, characterization of feminist community based on leftist egalitarian and collective theories of association that lack a deeper and inner meaning. Friendship invests the idea and reality of feminist community with a "moreness" ...

In a variety of ways large numbers of women (whether by conscious ideologically-motivated choice or by pragmatic coincidence) are becoming "loosened" from traditional patriarchy's confines. These women in the process of "loosening" and becoming part of 'the moreness' are members of a community that is in rapid transition. Some women were experimenting with and investing in this moreness.

**FEMALE FRIENDSHIP RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS**

Rubin (1985) explained to us almost a decade ago that women's relationships with each other were often without rituals and ceremonies. She said, "...There are no social rituals, no public ceremonies to honor or celebrate
friendships of any kind, from the closest to the most distant -- not even a linguistic form that distinguishes the formal, impersonal relationship from the informal and personal one". (p. 4) My findings among WWINFEW women were similar to Rubin's findings. Women themselves seem, in some ways, to neglect the dynamics and processes of this relationship. Women's responses to talking about female friendship reveal how seldom they consciously discuss what meaning it plays in their lives.

An interesting aspect of the ambiguity of the meaning and ritual of female friendship and the vague boundaries or vague progressions within this relationship surrounds the possibility for misinterpretations and mistakes cross-culturally. Anything that evolves around "a feeling," "sharing personal information," "inclusion in a conversation," "something that should just happen," or "body language" is certainly open to cross-cultural confusion of messages.

Griffith and Campbell's (1989) book which outlines the volatile fourteen-year friendship and working relationship of a First Nations woman and a white Anglophone woman describes with much sophistication how these cross-cultural messages can become painful. Griffiths, a white woman, is sitting with a group of First Nations women:

I sat in the kitchen with four other women in complete silence, drinking tea. It was the silences that made me feel white. I wanted to say, "All right, let's get a real conversation going here." I got the feeling that
communication was happening, but I couldn't tell what it was. I ended up with a constant half smile on my face, trying to catch the jokes before they were made. Or maybe they weren't made, just thought. I felt disconnected, as if I had huge white hands dangling from a body not standing on the ground. (p.21)

Elsewhere, Maria Campbell, Griffiths' First Nations friend, describes how she felt about these "constant half smiles" on Griffiths' face:

She always looked like the Virgin Mary, passive, a blank look in her eyes, smiling, she never stopped smiling, smiled so much I just wanted to smack her and smack her so she'd stop that smiling...(p.15)

Campbell and Griffiths' confusion of messages and meanings is a powerful example of what can be clumsy, awkward, or difficult while trying to make and maintain friendships with women from a different culture. At WWINFEW cross-cultural and inter-cultural female friendships were initiated and maintained and the complexities and dynamics were not always explicated.

THE MEANING OF ETHNICITY

Bernadette [A First Nations Woman]: I only got to meet three of them from very different cultural background, they come here to Canada or they've been in Canada for quite a while and they're feeling lonely -- one of the ways to get rid of loneliness is to express that loneliness. Not just by meeting other women but by proclaiming your culture, feeling great about your culture, explaining all those different little things. Those females had a grand old time telling me about their culture. There was always smiles on their faces but you
Female friendship has different meanings within different ethnocultural groups. Understanding these background factors (the historicity of race, socioeconomic oppression, gender, regionalism, etcetera) assists in understanding each ethnocultural group's female friendship beliefs, values, and practices. Understanding these forces makes clear how limited the possibilities sometimes are for women.

Women often came to WWINFEW to initiate female friendships (rather than for formal achievement goals or for altruistic visionary goals). In fact, some women came to WWINFEW, met a few women they felt confident they could build friendships with and then left or drifted off from the formal confines of the organization. Many women's entrance into the organization, experience inside the organization, and reflections from the outside after leaving the organization were filtered through the ever-changing lens of friendships.

For some women their friends, their feminism and their social activism are all intensely connected to the same people in the same place. Some women's definition of 'feminism' includes consciously cultivating female friendships. Emma, a First Nations woman activist with WWINFEW, said that to her "feminism" means "becoming better friends with women...and learning to count on other women like they should learn to
count on me...we should stick together as a group because as a group we are stronger than if we were just one woman trying to fight for something..." April, an Anglophone Canadian-born white woman, said that to her "[Feminism is about] Being sensitive to each other as women. Being empathetic to women from other cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds and being able to identify with them..." These blendings of feminism as an ideology and friendship as a praxis are important to consider as an activity that takes place on the site of organizations like WWINFEW: the provision of this site and the provision of the space in which to develop the relationship was one of the "services" that WWINFEW provided to the community.

Friendship connections are also a significant resource through which women come to be involved in women's organizations and through which they come to know about women's organizations. Below women describe how they discovered WWINFEW and became activists with the group.

Paula: "[I became involved] Because a friend of mine that I met at the [an ethnocultural specific organization] mentioned to me the need to create some kind of group to face these kinds of issues. She invited me to be part of the group."

Si: So your involvement came about because of a friend?

Paula: "Yes. I was asked to be a volunteer [Advisory member and then Board member]."

Nancy, another WWINFEW activist, said she became involved
because "I knew the coordinator. She was a personal friend."
As a result of a long standing friendship Nancy became a
volunteer when her friend was hired for a paid position. Sue
answered similarly by saying she became involved because
"Somebody who was already involved with WWINFEW came to me and
asked if I'd like to help them out." Cadeja had more than one
reason for becoming involved but her friend's engagement with
a similar organization motivated Cadeja to become involved
with WWINFEW:

Cadeja: ...I was looking for something new. Something to
learn and to feel myself in and to be myself in...this is
what I was looking for. A place to feel comfortable in
and to feel liked for who I really am. My very good
friend E. was working at another [non-profit
organization] and she seemed to be able to be herself and
we had been friends for years. So when I went to get a
job, I read about WWINFEW, so when I saw that -- well I
had just traveled all around the world -- I thought god
that is exactly for me....

Similarly Kila reported first hearing about the organization
and becoming involved, "Through a friend who was involved",
and Donna said, "I think someone told me about it. I bumped
into somebody, through a friend [I heard about WWINFEW].
Through a friend, that's right. I was with a friend and, at
that time, I told them I was looking for a job."

Most women learned about WWINFEW and/or first heard about
WWINFEW (directly or indirectly) through a female friendship
relationship. Friendship and networking were the third most
frequently cited reasons for women becoming involved with
WWINFEW (the first two reasons were employment and employment related). The interesting point I want to make here is that the building and initiating of friendship might be thought of as a secondary, informal or accidental goal of this organization. WWINFEW provided the "service" of connecting women to each other. This is an intriguing pattern. One of the very motivators that inspires women to become a member of the group is the one thing that is often over-looked or even implicitly down-played (i.e. board members being friends with staff, staff members being friends with funders, volunteers being friends with volunteers in other 'competing' organizations, etcetera). Traditional organizational analysis research and theories would not explicitly take up this discussion.

If women come into feminist organizations through a relationship with a friend and/or make friendships once inside the organization what does this potentially mean for organizational dynamics in regards to group decision making? How does information flow when friendship network information channels are different than what some women inside the organization want as the formal organization's information channel? How do women assess the consequences of decisions when there are conflicts between friends inside the organization? Are women able to separate the personal and the
organizational? To what extent and with what consequence? What meaning does this have for the long-term shape of the organization and how conscious are the organizational-friendship players of these dynamics? Should we be reflecting on how to make visible and explicit these friendship-organizational dynamics or should we be reflecting on how to further erase and suppress them?

As explored in the earlier sections of this text women have mixed meanings regarding who is 'in' or 'out' of a friendship relationship and who could potentially become 'inside' or 'outside' of a friendship relationship. Female relationships are not clearly defined in the dominant capitalist patriarchal Canadian culture. Neither are our roles inside small feminist grassroots organizations always clearly defined. At WWINFEW there were many complex dynamics going on in regards to these dimensions of relationship.

The women that were involved with WWINFEW identified many things about some of the women they met at WWINFEW that they really liked, appreciated and/or valued. Many of the characteristics they described -- and this is a very pivotal point -- were friendship characteristics rather than organizational development characteristics. Below Sue, Kim, and Kila are referring to friendship traits. April, Carol and Cadeja have a mix of personal friendship and organizational
traits that they liked.

Sue: "Some women were really friendly, easy to talk to."

Kim: "Friendliness. I felt that the women were friendly. Yeah. They were friendly."

Kila: "They always smile when you go there and they hug you and they say, 'How are you?'. Somebody asks about you and says, 'How are you doing?' And all those times you see each other. It makes you feel good."

Note how April equates feelings of safety with the random blurring of lines between the private sphere and the work sphere. She finds it appealing that women can blend being 'friends' and being 'co-workers'.

April: Women I met at WWINFEW, each one brought new life to the organization. Each one gave the group a rebirth of ideas. Every woman had two sides. One minute we would need to get things done. The next minute we'd be passing by the coffee machine and we'd talk about what happened last night. When going to work we weren't afraid to go to work. It felt safe and comfortable to be at WWINFEW to talk about our private lives....

Carol: Commitment to WWINFEW and a real desire to help other women. That's what I liked. Some just do the things that they have to do because it has to be done.

Cadeja:...One thing that I really value and really is the friendships I was able to conceive out of the whole ordeal. Out of the whole experience I was able to keep in contact with certain people who, I felt good about, who taught me something. That taught me something that I am going to hold onto for the rest of my life. And that is very important to me even if I don't see these women, who I got so close to and whom I will always love. Even if I never see them again there will always be a little place in my heart where they sit. In twenty years if I see them that we will be able to sit down and feel the same way as we did twenty years ago. That was something that I really loved. I will always thank the whole organization for that.
Through the above quotes it becomes quite visible that WWINFEW provided an important service as a friendship building terrain.

FRIENDSHIPS AND NETWORKING

Kim: Women at home [in my birth country] are very close. The way our culture is women, I can go and just drop my kids off at cousins. I know they will be clothed and fed. They might even be sleeping when I pick them up. To me because we are immigrants from a third world country. When women are uprooted they need that kind of network and support. WWINFEW could play more of this role of socialization.

As in the above described comments finding other women (for potential friendships) with similar backgrounds and similar interests was commented on explicitly or implicitly in almost all of the interviews. Usually this was identified as a secondary goal -- not an insignificant goal-- although for the women who did identify female friendship as a goal, friendship was a really important source of support and connection. Kila, an immigrant visible minority woman, for example, presented as a very lonely and mournful woman during this interview. Her body language, her voice tone and her comments gave me the impression that she really missed the companionship of women that she had been able to find within the walls of WWINFEW. Unfortunately Kila eventually left WWINFEW because of
interpersonal tensions experienced with one other woman:

Kila: "I went there to meet friends. I was very excited to meet other women from other places in the world. And to get out with friends and not stay home as much as before."

Si: Where those goals met?

Kila: "Yes. I did have lot of friends. Some good friends. I enjoyed everything when we were together. [I enjoyed] when we were together and discussing things. Fund-raising things they keep us busy I think [Said with a sour tone]. This [the friendship] is the reason I was involved and kept involved."

Below Carol talks about wanting to help other women but she adds a comment that makes clear that she was also interested in developing meaningful friendships. She seems somewhat unsure of exactly what she wanted from the relationships with other women. Unfortunately, during Carol's tenure, WWINFEW events and processes were somewhat weak in facilitating and enriching her interests in friendship building and enhancing.

Carol: "It's hard to say [if my goals of meeting others and learning about other cultures were met]. I learned what they eat but then nothing else really. Nothing really much because when we met, they didn't have that sharing and knowing of each other. When we met it's always 'what are we going to do to make money for WWINFEW?!' There was no really time when it was just a matter of you're relaxed and getting to know you, getting to know the other members. No time to get to know the other person and their ethnic group. Whenever we met it was 'how are we going to make money for WWINFEW?'. There was nothing that was just a fun meeting...Should have had a pot luck or something where we're just getting to know each other."

In the quote below, Emma, a First Nations woman, talks about
how her feelings towards the organization shifted when a
friend of hers left the group.

Emma: "...when L. wasn't there I felt sort of 'out'. I
shouldn't feel that way because, you know, I'm not like
that."

Si: so if I'm understanding what you just said, you got
involved because of L. and then when she wasn't there
anymore because of health issues then you felt that it
wasn't the same for you?

Emma: "Well yes, that and I just didn't feel I could
contribute. I just didn't feel I was smart enough..."

As the interview continued I had a sense that Emma had felt
supported and encouraged by her friend. When her friend was no
longer there to help her think through the meanings of
different issues on the formal decision-making table Emma
resigned from the board. Her involvement was enriched by, and
contingent upon, her friendship relationship.

Below are some of the summary or concluding thoughts and
feelings about WWINFEW that WWINFEW activists wanted to share.
Note, for example, how Kim is relating one organization to
another organization through the meaning of individual women's
friendship or non-friendship connections to each other. She is
not thinking through formats like organizational charts or
through Robert's Rules of Order. To Kim, an immigrant visible
minority woman, the interpersonal relationships (of people to
each other within the organization and to people inside the
organization to people outside of the organization) should be
the primary connectors. She recognizes though that not everyone in organizations relates that way. She wanted to bring about change in WWINFEW in regards to this aspect of interpersonal behavior and organizational dynamics.

Kim:... The first thing is to bring harmony in women and in different women as individuals, not as organizations. Because that is what I got out of it. For example, [someone saying] that organization we have problems with them so maybe we shouldn't deal with them too much. To me that is negative. That is a very negative way of thinking. To me it should be thought of as you have a problem with an individual from that organization. You have to deal with that member of that organization. Otherwise that organization is good. It is a member of that organization whom you cannot deal with. It is not an organization in conflict with another organization it is an individual in conflict with another individual. It should not be made into organizational conflicts...

In the same way that Kim reflects on the meaning of relationships and gives primacy to these relationships Cadeja below talks about what she still feels about, and what she still thinks about, long after leaving WWINFEW (under complicated and painful circumstances that involved both personal and professional challenges).

Si: I'm going to throw one last question at you. Even given all this [troubles that you have described] would you do it again?

Cadeja: Oh yes! Even with all the bitterness and pain I would do it all again. Even with the pain I've experienced, a lot more good came out of it. Because I can forget about all these little pains and all the little crappy things. I have life long friends and like I said that I could see [these friends] in twenty years. I'd do it all again just for that. I can get my office skills anywhere. I can't get that [friends] elsewhere. Yes, I'd do it all again.
Tasha, a Francophone white Canadian-born woman, became involved with WWINFEW because a friend invited her and she wanted to maintain the friendship. She became an activist with WWINFEW and here she notes another aspect of the connection between friendship and participation in an organization.

Tasha: ...A lot of times volunteers, they'll volunteer at a company or at an agency because of their friends. When those friends leave the organization we lose those friends. They leave the organization and we have to find new volunteers. And the organization, because we are on such little funding, we depend on our volunteers to help.

The way women learn about our feminist organizations, the way they enter the organizations and feel connected while there is related to the meanings and patterns and practices we have for 'doing female friendship'.

All of this has multiple layers of meanings in relation to how we 'do feminist organizations'. For example, Gloria Steinem makes a related point in her 1993 book A Book Of Self-Esteem: Revolution From Within. She describes the tension we feel as our feminist organizations become larger and she points to the significance of small groups. She implies that we experience these organizations as 'psychic families' rather than as 'social service organizations'. Her idea can be applied to point out the problematics of what we experience and what may be happening to us as government funders and
outside forces infiltrate our original visions:

....the effectiveness of a psychic family depends on four principles: that someone who has experienced something is more expert in it than the experts; that shared experience and desire for change can bind us to each other; that mutual confidentiality and commitment are to be honored; that everyone participates but no one dominates. Size has a lot to do with how feasible it is to put these principles into practice: the healers and wise women of pagan times knew what they were doing when they made covens of thirteen witches -- small enough so everyone could talk, large enough for diversity, and an uneven number so that decisions were not deadlocked (p.179)

My sense is that women experience organizations like WWINFEW as a 'psychic family' of sisters. It is frequently their hope and among their primary goals when entering the organization that they will make friends and that these friendships will be supportive, meaningful and enduring. Many of these women desperately need social support from caring individuals who have similar ethnocultural backgrounds and/or who can adapt to and re/create a new version of their ethnocultural background.

Regrettably, my sense also is that this barely spoken longing that women feel that motivates them to become involved in the first place is frequently minimized, placed on the periphery, erased or challenged. Once inside the organization women may meet women who give primacy to tasks and/or who are too emotionally drained from other spheres of their lives to give substantive friendship energy to their 'sisters'.

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Sometimes everyone wants to lean on everyone else’s shoulder — sometimes everyone wants to give away their own pain but not accept anyone else’s pain. Sometimes these uneasy dynamics are creating shadowy undercurrents that accidentally affect the formal operations of the group and the most disturbing aspect of all of this is that women may not have the language, the knowledge, the courage or the time/resources to discuss these undercurrents. The organization might benefit — and individual women might benefit — from putting these questions out for regular contemplation. How do we do female friendship? How do we do cross-cultural female friendship? How do we initiate and build cross-cultural female friendships within the context of our organization?

Fineman (1993) talks about emotions in organizations as powerful strengths and weaknesses that simmer below the formally acknowledged surface. Fineman refers to organizations as 'emotional arenas'. Feminist organizations are magnets for women's emotions for a variety of reasons. One reason is that issues such as incest, wife-assault, poverty, rape, abortion, etcetera are being disclosed/discussed/responded to. Another is that women are coming to the group looking for female friendships and, instead, are often finding themselves on the fund-raising committee or the political action committee where their friendship goals are set aside. Further
as a feminist activist wrote to me after being presented with
an earlier version of the ideas in this chapter:

...my feeling is that women expect so much from a women's organization, that disappointment and then anger are almost inevitable. And...women have been deeply socialized into producing two behaviors/beliefs that make working together difficult. We often internalize and take personally criticisms that really apply only to our work. I have seen men criticize each other soundly, and then continue to work together amicably. But for women that separation seems to be harder. Also, we try to be 'nice' and understanding for so long that when an outburst happens, it may be over something quite trivial, and it may be very intense...(J. Russel, personal correspondence, August 1994)

Maybe we need to devise formally managed ways to build
emotional management and friendship management into our
structures. A 1954 book titled *Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Book Of Etiquette*, describes in great detail how young women had their 'coming out' parties when they were interested in marriage (pp. 113-115). Perhaps, feminists should create 'coming outs' for our debutantes. This could be a ritual of readiness for friendship. Women entering feminist organizations could 'declare themselves' and have 'friendship sponsors' like the young women of the middle and upper class had in Vanderbilt's elegant world.

Female friendships and, particularly, cross-cultural friendships might be said to be among the most potentially powerful relationships because these relationships open our minds to many more options and insights. Cross-cultural
friendships help each of us recognize our unique strengths and unique ways of problem-solving. The insights gleaned in this research from the way women's cross-cultural friendships proceed might help women in the way we initiate and maintain cross-cultural contacts within our individual lives and within our organizational lives. It is my hope that this knowledge will be implemented in ways that mean the women's movement and mainstream organizations can become more inclusive. When one woman, or one group of women, is oppressed, all women are vulnerable. We are only as strong as the weakest link in our chain of women marching into the future. I believe all women have a responsibility to attempt to fortify that chain. Our personal lives can be strengthened through consciously widening our friendship network. Our organizations' lives can be similarly strengthened. Our organizations are only as strong as our ability to initiate and maintain female friendship networks that incorporate organizational goals, organizational activities and experiences within a framework that nurtures female friendships.

CONCLUSION

WWINFEW provided a variety of formal and informal services. Our main formally acknowledged and advertised service was encouraging women to enhance their marketable
skills and this educational program was paid for by a variety of government sponsors. These government funders were not focused on enhancing women's whole lives in a holistic way but these funders were instead focused on just giving women a small nudge forward into the workplace. This nudge (toward the paid workforce) was a gesture that had positive benefits. WWINFEW was able to negotiate that space in a variety of very positive and nurturing ways. A spin off service that WWINFEW provided involved again another array of consciousness raising opportunities both for oppressed and vulnerable populations and for service providers and the wider community. The implicit and somewhat invisible service that we provided was a safe place for women to initiate and maintain female friendships. Often these friendships were the most substantive life-changing and enhancing resource or activity that women came away from WWINFEW with. Many of these friendships will endure for years and thus, in them, WWINFEW continues to live.
CHAPTER EIGHT: FEMINISTS(?) DOING ORGANIZATION WITH UN/SHARED DEFINITIONS

Smile: ...it's the only organization in Northern Ontario for only immigrant women, visible minority and Native women. And my hopes was, to try to participate to help those women as best, most possible, as best as I can. And like to give them information they need, some education about the modern way here to live, and the Canadian mentality, and how to get used to the life here. How, for example, to learn the language or where to work, or information about where, for example, like computer skills, and job search, and how to make friends, how to be integrated.

In previous chapters I have discussed how Coldtown’s herstory divided women from each other; how personal life-experiences (or the cumulative array of “identity pegs” that we have) shape how women interact organizationally; how complex the process of defining and designing an organization can be when women are attempting to create an anti-racist, feminist, service center which cared about women from a low socioeconomic status; and how women at WWINFEW provided both formal and informal services to each other and to the community at large. This chapter constitutes further discussion of how vulnerable to misunderstandings oppressed women (ethnocultural minority women, low income women, emotionally traumatized women) can be within an activist context because meanings are not always made explicit.
Secondly, this section is a testament to WWINFEW women's ability and their willingness to negotiate with each other while getting on with the tasks of bringing about woman-centered and/or anti-racist change in the world. This entangled commitment to negotiate differences is one of the fascinating distinctions of organizations like WWINFEW. My third goal in this chapter is to demonstrate that when the organizational activists do not have clearly and explicitly known and shared meanings, definitions and visions, and ways to practically manifest the shared meanings, definitions and visions then funders and funding troubles come to dominate the activist's agendas. When we can not set our own agenda someone else often comes onto the terrain and subtly sets the agenda for us.

As can be seen in the preceding chapters an abstract and diffuse agreement seemed to exist among WWINFEW activists that women need to work together. It is clear that the experience of trying to do the UNDOABLE somewhat well is far more challenging than most of us initially imagined. Doing diversity, as promised in WWINFEW's mission statement, was more problematic, volatile, and time-consuming than WWINFEW's founders (or funders) seemed to have anticipated. Similar organizations have faced these problematics, for example, N.A.C. (Manji, 1995; Philp, 1995; Vickers, Ranken, Appelle,
have also struggled. A primary aspect of what is problematic is that meanings and assumptions are not given enough explication. As only one example (and there could be many examples) of this problematic, I explicate and discuss WWINFEW women's meanings and assumptions around the word 'feminism'. I propose that we probably had diverse and unexplicated assumptions, definitions and meanings for dozens of key words and concepts that we were engaging with and working around on a daily basis.

One of the most obvious and unintended tensions within the organization emerged after the initial shaping of the organization. Once the constitution and by-laws were constructed no formalized and regularly available facilitated forum existed for women to articulate to each other what 'feminism' (or other concepts) meant to them.

Another dimension of this problematic of assumed/unclear meanings may be around emotion work and emotional intensity generated in places like WWINFEW. Rothschild and Whitt (1986, pp. 64-66) state:

The familial, face-to-face relationships in collectivist organizations may be more satisfying
than the impersonal relations of bureaucracy, but they are also more emotionally threatening. Intense emotions may constrain participatory organization. Interpersonal tension is probably endemic in the directly democratic situations, and, for better or worse, members often perceive their workplaces to be emotionally intense (p. 65).

They continue by quoting someone from a collective who warned that even "plants die here from the heavy vibes (p. 65)."

WWINFEW was always emotionally intense. Note how April wanted to ask questions but felt awkward and silenced because she had witnessed situations where people had been rebuffed for asking too many questions.

April: Some women forgot we were all there for the same reason. Some women thought we were there to be biased or racist or prejudiced or homophobic. We were trying to learn [and we asked questions]. For example, at a staff meeting people would be bringing out things up out of the blue. They thought they were being treated like they were blacklisted. No one knew what they were talking about. Yeah no one else knew what they were talking about. That was really hard to deal with. For example, if there is a new person and they are from the Chinese community and others weren't familiar with the Chinese culture we might be asking them a whole lot of questions and they might feel singled out but we were trying to learn. The person might get defensive and think 'they don't like Chinese' and this was silliness really. Everybody wants to learn [about people from another culture]. How they gonna learn without asking questions?

By asking questions April was trying to clarify meanings.

Continuing with the discussion of meaning making and definitions, for example, three WWINFEW women said they did not know what feminism meant to them. The remaining
interviewed women often had dramatically opposed definitions of how they understood and practiced their feminism. These distinctive and unarticulated base-line differences in orientation to 'feminism' shaped everything these activists engaged in. Also, while not necessarily intending to, women often participated in offending and/or disappointing each other. Some women personalized/psychologized differences that were, instead, political/sociological differences.

Unexplicated differences existed among WWINFEW women. When asked what 'feminism meant to her', some women, like Dakota, answered concisely and with limited ideological and emotional content. Dakota said feminism meant, "Self-sufficiency and standing on your own two feet." When asked 'if there was anything she wanted to add to that definition?' she simply answered, "No!". Julie also had nothing to add to her definition of, "In my own words [what is feminism]? I would say it means 'peacemaker'." Neither did Nancy add to, "Equality. Equal opportunity.". In contrast to Dakota, Julie and Nancy, some WWINFEW women had multiple paragraphs of response when asked to define their meanings for 'feminism'. This huge and unexplicated range of differences, I propose, exists in many women's organizations.

In the last sections of this chapter I demonstrate my points about 'doing diversity' through comments the WWINFEW
women themselves shared with me while they answered the one question 'What does feminism mean to me?'. The way women define 'feminism', 'activism' and 'organization' sets the tone for what they do together and for how they experience each other. Below is an example of how Anna, a WINFEW employee, defines 'feminism'. Note how she felt alienated and judged by someone who thought through the template or filter of a different definition of 'feminism'. Note also that Anna is very conscious of the diversity of possible meanings for the word 'feminism'.

Anna: Goodness. I think 'feminism' has meant many things and people interpret it in many ways. I believe, for myself, without labeling myself as a feminist or not or who is a feminist, I believe 'feminism' is a tool for survival. It is a way of understanding your lived experience in a context of the people around you. I was once told something very interesting and that was when I came to the conclusion that feminism is a tool for survival. I was told by a friend when I was in university, 'How can you be Catholic and be a feminist!?' and I responded with, 'How can I not be a feminist and be a Catholic!?' and how do you survive Catholicism if you are not a feminist? And so I was angered by that and I felt judged by her. But, yet it was good because it really made me understand, you know, what it is and the divisions between feminisms, feminists, as well.

Si: It forced you to kind of refine and reflect on what it [feminism] meant?

Anna: Yes, and that we [women/women activists] judge each other on the choices we make and we condescend quite a bit...when you are in the situation and you are experiencing intense oppression, and that's the whole gamut and range of what that is like, then how can you not need something to help you survive it? That's what I believe it [feminism] is [a tool to survive oppression].
As discussed in Chapter two, SI is a sociological theory which explores how people make meaning, believe the meanings they have co-created, and how the meaning they co-create determines outcomes. Moment to moment outcomes in turn again contribute to our construction of meaning. In the next section of this text I attempt to connect information from WWINFEW women, women's organizations and insights from SI. Every organization like WWINFEW, if it is to exist effectively for a long time, must find successful ways to explore the meaning making process.

**SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM, MEANING MAKING, MAKING ORGANIZATIONS, AND DOCUMENTING OUR MEANINGS**

SI is about how people make meaning of the world around them. Notice how Marsha makes meaning of what significance feminist theory has for her:

Marsha: Feminism means a whole range of things to me. It means acceptance, of who you are, and not to be divided on the basis of your race, culture, ethnicity, gender. It also means accessibility, that um, no one should be excluded from anything on the basis of race, gender, culture, and/or sexual orientation or any of those things. Feminism also means for me a community. It means working together...and um, that's why I'm more drawn to it because women generally tend to have this, coming together and pulling their resources together rather than using what they know to dominate or control...(pause) It basically means sharing: sharing of information, sharing of knowledge, sharing of skills, to enhance each
other...pretty idealistic, eh?

The way women make meaning of "feminism" and then apply this meaning to the way they "do" their activism in feminist grassroots organizations is complex. Grassroots feminist organizations are attempting to do enormous and often contradictory things -- these organizations are just the collective efforts of many women trying to do their feminism. The path they have set for themselves is cluttered, rocky, intense and challenging. Using SI we can make better sense of our positions and our praxis. Potentially contradictory goals of, practices of, and beliefs about feminist organizations can emerge even from women who sat side by side and worked together on what they may have thought at the time was the same plan and the same future linked to similar definitions of 'feminism' and 'reality'.

Feminists studying, writing and publishing about their own organizations is a somewhat recent phenomenon. There are sparse documents available from these centred-within, or 'flesh and blood subjects' (Denzin, 1992, p. 35) positions. I speculate that one reason is that these organizations are relatively new (many feminist grass-roots organizations are younger than a decade). While new, the organization and its activists are primarily (if not exclusively) focused on creating the organization and doing the work of responding to...
their chosen issue. Activists situated in this way are not inclined to extensively document the process.

A second reason that the literature is so sparse is that many women who are activists within these organizations may feel conflicted about documenting the weaknesses and struggles of the organizations they are committed to (Banks, 1994; Burghardt, 1982; Ellis and Flaherty, 1992; Loseke, 1992; Maguire, 1987; Reiling, 1994; Renzetti and Lee, 1993). As Freeman (1995) discusses, many feminist grassroots insiders resent and are suspicious of women they define as 'academics'.

A third reason few documents exist describing what feminist anti-racist grassroots activists do is that insiders/activists are so chronically over worked that they don't have time and energy left to research and write about what they do. Below, Shari, a WWINFEW activists points out what might be one of the painful binds that feminist activists (or people who are women activists inside feminist organizations) often experience. She has not had time to think about what words mean to her (much less write volumes of scholarly text) because she is so busy working.

Shari: I haven't ever thought about that [what the word feminism means to me]. Um, to me it's ah, being a woman, um, I suppose ah, doing the things that you want to do without any hassles from anyone, just being yourself, as a woman.

Si: Okay, that's a good definition. Could you give just
off the top of your head a couple of issues that are feminist issues or that feminists worry about?

Shari: That I worry about?

Si: That, that a person who's a feminist, or if you define yourself as a feminist, what are some issues that feminists worry about?

Shari: These are hard questions. (Laughs) I don't have time, I never have time to sit down, you know, to stop and think about these things. I'm so busy at work that I [long pause].

Si: Well, maybe that right there is an issue for women that we're always so busy at work that you know between, I know you have children and a lot of kin that you care for. Maybe that's an issue for a feminist, like you? If you define? Do you define yourself as a feminist?

Shari: (Sigh) I, I don't know. I just, you know, like ah, figure myself as an individual I really don't want to be um, compared with anyone else.

Shari had been active with WWINFEW at a decision-making level. Most activists within these organizations do not have the time and resources available to them to discover theories like SI and adapt these theories to their grounded pressing needs. Reflective analysis is often a privilege or luxury for women like WWINFEW activists. It is vital that time be made for reflection and assessment of each other’s meaning making templates.

A fourth reason that limited texts are written from the centered-within standpoint may be that those women who are most passionately drawn to research and writing might not be as passionately drawn to actually being inside these
organizations and doing the day-to-day work of keeping them open (such as vacuuming, raising funds through bake sales, keeping the washrooms clean, answering the phone, responding to mail, etcetera). By not being day-to-day workers (by being perceived as 'others', 'outsiders', 'academics') in these organizations writers may not be as trusted by the day-to-day workers to appropriately and meaningfully document the stories that need to be written. When women organizational insiders lose track of each other's definitions they become vulnerable to misunderstandings and they become less able to negotiate around the setting of practical priorities. Thus, if our own organizations do not have resident researchers we are less likely to reflect deeply on who we are and what we're doing.

**WWINFEW WOMEN'S MEANING OF THE WORD 'FEMINISM'**

"What does the word 'feminism' mean to you?" was the first open question in the interview schedule. The diversity of meanings for the word 'feminism' was startling once I began reflecting on WWINFEW women's answers. Within some individual women's answers there were many dimensions. The themes that emerged are used to organize their responses below. Some women gave specific examples of feminist issues as a component of their definition. A few WWINFEW women commented on how feminism has a potential risk or is a label that stigmatizes.
Some activists identified woman-woman bonding as an important part of what feminism meant for them. The importance of a cross-cultural/anti-racist dimension was mentioned by a minority of the WWINFEW women. Ten WWINFEW women had no definition of 'feminism' or had ambiguous definitions or made comments that might even be defined as non-feminist. Below I present some examples.

**WITHOUT DEFINITIONS, AMBIGUOUS, OR NON-FEMINIST**

Carol thinks, it seems, that women should have different roles and be equal in some aspects of their lives. Some feminists might define Carol's version of 'feminism' as 'even non-feminist' in that she suggests women do have a specific role to learn as women.

Carol: "It means to not really segregate the males from the females. But it is for you, you should learn your role in society as a woman. You should not be confused about the role of a female; not to be under the man. To be equal to the man in some aspects."

Kitty, an immigrant woman, initially did not know what the word 'feminism' meant although she had been a board member at WWINFEW for over a year during the later time of WWINFEW's existence. Because she seemed unable to answer the question I repeated the question and added another. When asked, 'What does the word feminism mean to you? Have you heard that word
before, feminism?'

Kitty: "No."

Si: Okay. Often it means like women's rights.

Kitty: "Okay."

Si: Okay, so if the word 'feminism' doesn't mean anything to you but 'women's rights' does [mean something to you], what kind of issues do you think are important for women right now?

Kitty: "In my opinion I think that um you have to have freedom to choose, if they [women] want to do it for their family or their own life..."

Si: Okay. So it's about choice. It's about being able to choose.

Kitty: "Yes. Yes."

Sue, like Kitty, couldn't give a definition of the word 'feminism' although she reflected upon it throughout the whole interview. We returned to the question again at the end and she didn't know what to say in regards to this question. Both Sue and Carol had been employees of the organization for longer than three months. Anita, a woman in her thirties, and also involved for more than three months, provides another example.

Anita: "Oh that's a tough one."

Si: That's why I start with a tough one. It gets easier after that.

Anita: "Oh. I hope so. Um, I never really thought about it much 'cause it, I don't identify myself in that category."

Si: Oh that's okay. You can say that too. That's fine.
If you could give a few words though of what the word means to you. Like when you think of a feminist maybe what kind of a person do you think of.

Anita: "Um, looking out for her own, for herself. Somebody who looks out for herself."

Anita, when asked about specific issues feminists might care about, identified equal pay and abortion as two feminist issues. Tasha initially has 'no idea what feminism means to her'.

Tasha: "Umm.....I have no idea (laughs)."

Tasha: "...I never thought about it really, I just ahh...feminism it's just Umm...women, a woman who is like, women, like a group of women fighting to be noted. Like to, not be noted but to have the same umm, what's the word I'm looking for?"

Si: Opportunities? Rights?

Tasha: "Yeah opportunities and umm, you know when a man does something, it's noticed and it's like --"

Si: Recognition?

Tasha: "The same recognition as the other gender."

Kira provides us with a good example of the ambiguity some women feel toward feminism and toward other feminists.

Kira: "Well, it's a difficult question for me since I've had some positive and negative experiences with feminism. I have also been discriminated by feminism or feminists who didn't give me, give you the opportunity to believe what you want to believe. So that's where I'll start my definition. Feminism to me is a matter of opening your mind and allowing other people to believe the beliefs that they want to believe, um to be out of some kind of norm, to be open to new ideas and that there doesn't have to be one preconceived idea that everybody has to have. Feminism to me is not a word that means the same to
you as it does to me."

Kira continues describing what feminism means to her:

Kira: "...It [feminism] is something that comes from within and what you believe is wonderful and appropriate as it is my definition. So, therefore, it's difficult for me to put parameters on what the word 'feminism' should be. Feminism to me is a matter of choice, it's a matter of change, and it's a matter of freedom and I think that's how I would define my feminism."

Mari also sounds ambiguous and uncertain about what 'feminism' means to her.

Mari: "Feminism, hmm. Ah, I guess lady like characters."

Si: Ladylike?

Mari: "Yeah."

Si: Okay. Anything else that comes to your mind when you hear the word feminism?

Mari: "Not 'feminism' but if you said 'feminist'."

Si: Well feminist, like what is a feminist? What does a feminist do? What kind of a person is a feminist?

Mari: "To me if you feminine you're more like a lady like. If you're feminist you're more of a controlling lady. That um, make yourself more dominant."

Si: Okay. Okay. Can you think of some issues that are feminist issues?

Mari: "Um, let me see. Hmm. I don't know if they're just feminist issues the ones that I'm thinking of or if they're just issues that I think of like um, let me see you have got all this stuff going with abortion. You've got the pro life and then the other stuff and then you have women who want to work in the society but then you have other women who would prefer to stay home."

Worth noting is that Mari does not define herself as a
'feminist'. The way she phrases her responses suggest she identifies me as a feminist 'you [feminists] have...' or 'you [feminists] have got all this stuff going with abortion' and as someone different from herself. In other words, Mari did not say 'we feminists have...' or 'we have got all this stuff going with abortion'.

Below Marilyn talks about feminism's meaning for her. Some feminists might define Marilyn's definition of 'feminism' and her inferred solution to women's problems as being victim-blaming. Also, some feminists might feel offended by Marilyn suggesting that women 'gave up their power'. When asked 'what does feminism mean to you?' Marilyn, an immigrant, a visible minority and a single mother, answered, "Justice." and added the following comments.

Marilyn: "I've always felt that in feminism we cannot empower ourselves by putting down another group. And so a lot of feminists get involved in a lot of male bashing and blaming and stuff like that and I think if we want to blame anyone we should blame ourselves because in the past we've given up our power to everybody and we can't reclaim it by blaming everybody for taking it away. We gave it up and we just have to take it back. But we don't take it back by blame. We take it back by empowering ourselves."

Si: By assertiveness?

Marilyn: "That's right. By empowering ourselves by realizing who we are, what our goals are, and what we want and how do we go about getting it. And not assuming that all the problems that we have in life are the result of other people. Right? It's usually because of ourselves. If we are afraid to do something we can't
blame someone else because we have that fear. We can't blame other people for you know, say they made us do it or they did it to us. We have to have the courage to stand up."

Si: Umm-huh. So to you feminism is about assertiveness, about courage, about reclaiming?

Marilyn: "It's about power, but personal power, and not power at the expense of anyone else."

Marilyn seems to imagine feminism as an attitude that once arrived at soon puts resources and opportunities into women's lives. If the conversation had gone further her feminism might have shown itself to have commonalities with feminists like Paglia (1994) and Wolf (1993).

Marie's definition of 'feminism' is interesting because she recognizes that there are many definitions of 'feminism' and that hers has gone through many evolutions. But, her definition could be experienced by some other 'feminists' as against the goals of feminism because Marie (as part of her First Nations identity) thinks the individual woman's needs must be subordinated/blended to the needs of the whole community.

Marie: "Now? Today? That word [feminism] has meant a lot of different things to me. What it means now and what it meant five years ago are different. That word has evolved with my experience. 'Feminism' actually while I am doing a lot of work in reclaiming my culture is not a word that you use. It is not part of the vocabulary anymore. You [within my culture] look at the world in terms of wholes and you can't discard the men in that process. You look at the men and the family and the community. So the value orientation has changed for me. It is not an individual orientation anymore. Independence and equality; it's not
about that anymore. It's more equality, freedom, peace, serenity for the community. The individual doesn't count. They count in terms of the work that they do. They are needed in the community, yes. But in terms of the ego or the personality, no, that's irrelevant."

Marie's version of feminism (i.e. an approach that recommends the whole community be responded to rather than the needs of individual women) might be harmonious with some aspects of ecofeminism as voiced by women like Gaard (1993), Lahar (1993) or Mies (1988).

**SPECIFIC ISSUES**

As part of expressing their understanding of the word 'feminism' some women offered examples of issues that were 'feminist issues'. Here is a listing of specifics that were directly discussed or commented upon: jobs, education, poverty, single-parenting, equal pay, abortion, walking down the streets in safety, celebrating womanhood, home-working, working collectively and through consensus, being more than an object for sexual purposes, becoming better friends with women, violence, sexual harassment and the importance of being able to secure more money for women's cultural activities and interests. Employment and employment related issues were commented on most frequently and most extensively.

It is important to recognize how wide the range of issues
is in the 1990's. In one organization women can have a huge
and dramatically diverse range of priorities. We do not always
make these priorities explicit and vivid to each other.
Instead covert conflicts and intermittent waves of women
leaving the organization are what we make obvious to each
other. This is tragic and unnecessary. In the next section I
discuss feminism as a stigmatizing and diffuse label because
it points to how unexplicated many of our reasons for existing
were among our activists. If there was one word that every
one of us should have had a deep understanding of, and a
somewhat shared orientation to, the word "feminism" was it.

FEMINISM AS A STIGMATIZED LABEL

Many women acknowledged that to define themselves as a
'feminist' involved taking risks and/or being stigmatized.
Joy, for example, usually heard the word "feminist" in the
context of a slur before her time with WWINFEW.

Joy: I don't know. When I think of 'feminism' I guess I
think more of women's lib, women's rights. But I find it
does have a very negative or when it is spoken of it is
spoken of, often, in a very negative perspective.

Both Bonita and Emma (middle-aged First Nations women) began
their knowledge accumulation process with a negative image of
'feminists' but then shifted to a more positive image of
feminists.
Bonita: "Feminism. Um, when I first saw the word it looked strong to me, felt strong. Um. Almost like a negative in a way, like in terms of um, I guess with having a partner and stuff like that but right now to me, feminism would mean getting back part of myself, my voice. That's what it means to me."

Si: So kind of claiming your right to speak out on things.

Bonita: "Yes, yes."

Si: It also sounds like the word feminism can have different meanings at times for you.

Bonita: "Yes, it had. First it was like, um, well feminism was in the beginning was, "Oh what a bitch!"...

Si: Oh, okay. Sort of like a swear word almost, well yeah, "you're just a feminist"! Is that what you mean?

Bonita: "Yeah but now it's come to a positive in my life."

Emma initially equated 'feminists' with 'lesbians' and considered both with some degree of discomfort.

Emma: Okay. At first when I first heard the word 'feminism', 'feminist', it was a very negative word because I wasn't educated about feminism before I took some courses and until I started working with women...To me they were, I know this sounds terrible but I thought they were lesbians, okay. That's where I came from. That was where my head was at...

That these women remember or know that many people reject feminism and feminists and yet these women either identify as feminists and/or remain involved with feminist causes is a testament to their courage. These particular three women, Joy, Bonita and Emma (like many other WWINFEW women), were
vulnerable women in that they had multiple oppressions that they are resisting (as immigrant women, visible minority women, First Nations women, poverty-stricken women, unemployed women, minimally formally educated, and/or as single mothers) and yet they had been involved with WWINFEW. Their time with WWINFEW constituted their first experience of activism with an overtly feminist organization. We should always take the time within our organizations to celebrate women who take risks and move forward in spite of their initial fears and ambiguities.

BEING SENSITIVE TO, AND BONDING WITH, WOMEN

A few women made reference to their alliances with women, trusting women more, and finding ways to support the women they come into contact with. It is surprising that only a few women made mention of this dimension of 'feminism' because elsewhere in their interviews (as discussed in chapter seven) they refer extensively to the meaning of friendship. Emma expresses this theme of being sensitive to and bonding with women.

Emma: "...it [feminism] means becoming better friends with women. ....And learning to count, on women. Just like they can learn to count on me. Like we should always maybe, I feel we should always stick together, women because, as a group we are stronger than if there's just one woman standing for something. And I really believe in women...."
Since this theme (of bonding with women) might be thought of as minimally controversial I had expected more women to express this theme as part of their definition of feminism.

THE CROSS-CULTURAL AND ANTI-RACIST DIMENSIONS

Interestingly, given that WWINFEW existed to enhance the lives of ethnocultural minority women, only a segment of the WWINFEW women included any reference to cross-cultural/anti-racist awareness in their definition of 'feminism'. On the other hand, some women may have in the moments of the interview used the word 'feminism' in a limited way while actually practicing an anti-racist feminism. Many people still separate their 'feminist' actions from their 'anti-racist' actions when they give voice to these activities. April's comment is a concise example of some of the comments that WWINFEW women made which clearly communicated that their definition of 'feminism' included an anti-racist or cross-cultural dimension.

April: "[Feminism means] Being sensitive to each other as women. Being empathetic to women from other cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds and being able to identify with them [women from other cultures and other socioeconomic backgrounds]."

Marsha and Jane, as you will see below, also discuss race/ethnicity and the enhancement of all women's lives as a
foundational component of their 'feminism'.

POLITICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

Some women had clearly thought through their positions/ideology of 'feminism' and knew how to extensively articulate those positions/ideologies. To these women 'feminism' was a whole world view and a life-style that was multidimensional. These were the women within WWINFEW who might have been assisting other women to develop their sense of the multidimensionality possible in the meaning of this word.

Kim: "To me it [feminism] means equal access to the social, political and economic opportunities in the country by women as well as by men. Equal. Equality. It also means being able to hear and listen to women's issues. Specifically, instead of calling them 'men's issues'; we are different. Although not so different. But the differences should be appreciated and taken into consideration."

Marsha: "Feminism means a whole range of things to me. It means acceptance, of who you are, and not to be divided on the basis of your race, culture, ethnicity, gender. It also means accessibility, that um, no one should be excluded from anything on the basis of race, gender, culture, and/or sexual orientation or any of those things. Feminism also means for me a community. It means working together....and um, that's why I'm more drawn to it because women generally tend to have this, coming together and pulling their resources together rather than using what they know to dominate or control....(pause) It basically means sharing: sharing of information, sharing of knowledge, sharing of skills, to enhance each other.....pretty idealistic, eh?"
Marsha adds further depth and texture to her meaning of the word 'feminism'.

Marsha: "Oh yes, I see it in [a group Marsha is involved with] all the time. In a number of ways the women here all have a variety of skills, everybody has their own speciality, and um, we share that, or we can access that when ever we want to. We see the things in a collective, how its so important that each person have their uniqueness in terms of skills, ah, can take whatever they have, whatever project and go with it. And the whole organization just works very smoothly because people are doing....eh...using the skills they have. Sometimes a difficulty arises from that, but I don't know if you want me to say that....um....sometimes information is not shared freely, um, for whatever reason. I don't think its always because people want to with hold it, but when its not shared....For instance, if you have a particular skill, if you are an administrator, and I have counseling skills I don't know what to do in administration, I don't know a lot of it, and I would expect you to give me as much information. I don't know the right questions to ask, and that could be a problem because there is an assumption that you should tell me and there is an assumption that you should know what to ask. So, that's where some problems come. But I see it at [this group I am involved with] all the time. If there is a crisis going on at [my group] here its just amazing to watch the women come together and work. Its just amazing to see how many, um, resources and the commitment the women have. They just get to it...."

Ruth: "Feminism to me means celebrating womanhood in a society which has always traditionally celebrated malehood...and....it just means becoming more aware of who we are as people and....also how we are blocked in society from fully evolving into people...real people, I guess. That's all I can think of."

Jane: "Perhaps my definition isn't as traditional as a lot of people's is. To me feminism is about the right to be an equal in society, the right to achieve whatever you want to achieve. To not be oppressed because of your sex or your race or your colour or your income...Feminism to me isn't about denying being a woman. [Instead] It is about women and men not having any barriers between them."
Kim, Marsha, Ruth and Jane have complex definitions of the word 'feminism' and hopefully these definitions are shared with others in WWINFEW. Unfortunately, there is little evidence that these women had regular and substantive opportunities to do that sharing and explicating. Very few comments were made by WWINFEW women that demonstrated they had learned what they knew about feminism (or what aspects of what they knew) explicitly from other WWINFEW activists.

A key point in this is that women assumed the other women knew as much or as little as they themselves did and that women assumed other women shared their definitions of feminism. Some women may have felt embarrassed to admit they did not know as much as other women seemed to know. The evolution of university courses and degrees in Women’s Studies, book shelves in bookstores labeled "Women's Issues" and a conference circuit that some feminists follow might be thought of as having created an elite or an intelligentsia (women who can quote the buzz words, name the newest book titles, remember the conference speakers’ first names, understand obscure theories) and an underclass (women who are uninformed of the larger body of academic knowledge but who know about their own pain and who want their lives to be different). There was a huge range of knowledge about feminism
and definitions of feminism that WWINFEW women held in their minds as potential templates guiding their own organizational behavior.

Some of this range in WWINFEW women's knowledge of feminism might have been related to their socioeconomic oppressions and backgrounds; the duration of their involvement with the Women's Movement; their interest in the topic; or their opportunities to learn. Some of the range may have emerged in regards to when they were involved with WWINFEW: the first cohort of activists may have been more deeply informed about and committed to feminism and the last cohort may have been more deeply informed about and committed to their ethnocultural communities and to traditional roles for women. Diverging or converging levels of knowledge and diverging or converging definitions of what we are doing and why we are doing it in a feminist organization has the potential to divide and destroy us or bind us together into whole and powerful organizations.

CONCLUSION

As discussed in chapter two, SI is a theory which helps us explicate meanings. In this chapter I have tried to further apply this theory and document the diversity of meanings that women within the same organization held in their minds for the
word 'feminism'. My findings were that many other words/concepts that were core concepts of WWINFEW's process have this same unexplicated multidimensionality. Throughout this whole discussion I have used the word 'feminism' as one example.

A second quick sample of this problematic can be found in how women talked about WWINFEW as an 'organization'. April described the 'organization of WWINFEW' as safe, trustworthy and open and Mari (a woman of the same ethnocultural heritage and involved at the same time) described WWINFEW as an untrustworthy, unsafe place that had 'strange things happening'. April did not want to leave WWINFEW and Mari felt she had to get away from WWINFEW.

April: "It was the most grass-roots organization that's ever existed. Funding proposals and things like that were done like a family. Even though that was a lot of work [involving everyone in things] and there was a lot of work to be done we never turned people away. We didn't lose the personal touch. That pretty well sums it up. It was very personal and I think that the women that did come in knew that they could come in no matter what we were doing. We always had time for them. We didn't have money to maybe ship them into a course or whatever but we always had time to talk to them. And we always had stuff to tell them and they could tell us things. And we always made time for them and I think we were really hospitable when people did come in. We weren't rushed and too busy for them. That's what I mean by personal."

In contrast, Mari felt that strange power dynamics were active in the organization.

Mari: "I think I decided to forget all about it [the organization]. There just seemed to be a different agenda
on [a person in a leadership position's] mind and there just seemed to be some power play or, I don't even know if I am describing this correctly or what. There just seemed to be something happening and I thought 'this is not for me'. This looks like it will take my energy away from the goals that I see this organization should be leading towards. I just thought I am not going to be involved. There was something nasty about power-tripping. So that's why I stopped being involved. I didn't like the dynamics. I wish I could remember better why."

These unexplicated diverse meanings and differently prioritized issues situate women to experience misunderstandings and conflicts.

The fact that in spite of these potential arenas for conflict, the organization stayed open for as long as it did and that many of these activists are involved in the community and that most of these activists are still involved in other resistance organizations is a testament to their tenacity and commitment. These diverse meanings and diverse perspectives were not among the discoveries I had anticipated explicating when I began my research. I had initially expected to find much more consistency throughout the forty-one interviewees experiences and definitions.

During WWINFEW's first two years there were many forums through which activists could refine and share and, potentially, harmonize their definitions of what they were doing at WWINFEW and why they were doing activism. Then the organization gradually shifted to focus only on workplace oriented training forums and then finally it began shifting
into forums for traditional women's worldviews (beauty make-over days, dances, food fairs, etcetera) and people stopped talking about feminism and what it meant.

In its last year there was no formalized manner for women within the organization to explicate the meanings for the different words/concepts they were using every day. There was no 'planned' way for them to realize their commonalities and their uniqueness. Further, there was no formalized way for women who have dramatically different or 'outer range' views (i.e. like Paglia (1994) or women who do not define themselves as feminists to be identified and excluded or for them to exclude themselves). Any person who was female was able to become involved in almost any way with WWINFEW. Limitations on participation were only built into WWINFEW's constitution against men and white Anglophone Canadian-borns. Much of the preceding discussion has suggested that some immigrant, visible minority and/or First Nations women were becoming influential members of WWINFEW even though they did not necessarily share a deep understanding of, or a commitment to: 'feminism'. By "influential" I mean I have only interviewed staff, volunteers, or Board members who had been involved for more than three months. Thus, in their involvement they "influenced" each other, the shape of the total organization, and/or the well-being of clients. By welcoming these women
quickly and unreflectively into the decision-making level of the organization either these women had to change or the organization had to change. Some change, of course, happened on both fronts but the conflicts and contradictions dissipated desperately needed and valuable energy.

WWINFEW women often made false assumptions and were hurt or angry when their assumptions were not duplicated by others. By knowing more fully what we were up against, by learning from each others' mistakes and weaknesses and each others successes and strengths we could have become more effective and more able to demonstrate our concern for each other. Further, if we were to face the reality that we had to survive on limited human and material resources then we should have been very reflective and efficient in how we invested those resources. To realize success we must minimize our repetition of mistakes. To minimize repetition of mistakes we need dedicated feminist anti-racist grassroots organizational activists to respectfully speak about their worldviews, meaning-making templates, discomforts, and challenges. We need to make our shadow-sides more visible to each other. Feminist anti-racist organizational activists at WWINFEW also needed to learn how to energetically repeat each other's successes. Effectively explicating our meanings would have been an important aspect of creating successful interactions and successful
organizational solidarity. Unfortunately the organization gradually stopped doing consciousness-raising activities and became focused on the funders demands and fund-raising. The drift in this direction meant that some of our most vibrant feminist-informed activists drifted off. This made the organization vulnerable. Many progressive organizations are similarly situated and vulnerable.
CHAPTER NINE: MAKING SENSE OF WHAT HAPPENED AT WWINFEW

Marie: ...when we did that [special event] ...to me that was really wonderful because for that to happen, the office, all the women really had to come together. All of us, those that worked [for pay] and the volunteers all had to come together. That was an example of what the organization was really trying to do. In order to do that everyone was contributing. When everybody's ego was set aside. To me that was a concrete example, those days just flowed. It just happened. It was easy. It was really good. All the women who were part of that they were touched. Some were touched in ways that I don't think they realized at the time. Some were just awakening. When we did that [event] everyone was touched and they described that. To me that was very powerful. I was part of that. I was one of the people who helped create that environment for that to happen. I think that was WWINFEW at its best.

DOING THE UNDOABLE?

In the above quote, Marie (like Igraine quoted at the beginning of this text) is engaged in the process of meaning making and meaning sharing. Marie, kindred to her other sisters at WWINFEW, wanted to feel she belonged, feel she mattered and feel that she was contributing to changing the world for women. She wanted to feel that she was empowered and that she was instrumental in empowering others. Marie and all the other interviewees from WWINFEW have had a chance within these pages to describe their experiences. Some of these
WWINFEW women went much further, since their time with WWINFEW, in their explorations of the rivers of anti-racism; socioeconomic oppression; feminism; organizational analysis; social work, voluntarism, self-help; SI; and/or women's mental health issues. Some of WWINFEW's women have made important contributions in Coldtown in regards to the remapping or reshaping of some of these rivers.

In chapter two I described how complex the seven troubled "rivers of knowledge" are that could flow through an organization like WWINFEW. To do the undoable we must deepen our understanding of the feminist perspective; the world views of people from very different cultures; the meaning of socioeconomic oppression; the shape of organizational dynamics; the meaning of social work/volunteerism and self-help; the significance of symbols and meaning making; and how all of these realities impact on (or with) women's mental health. All of these realities impact upon women's feelings and behaviours inside organizations, and thus, all of these realities impact on the final shape of women's organizations. To even begin these discussions with each other (before we actually engage in the challenging work of changing the material world around us) we must invest a large amount of reflection, courage and stamina.

In chapter three I have described how our approach to
asking the questions and documenting the answers to these types of struggles can, in itself, be a whole project. Discovering how to learn and discovering how to give voice to our stories and paradigms requires reflection and commitment. As Ristock and Pennell (1996, p.32) state "Research as empowerment does not isolate people by identifying some as "us" and some as "them"; it interrupts such binary thinking by simultaneously connecting and distinguishing individuals". In my work on this project I have been trying to simultaneously connect and distinguish individuals. At WWINFEW sometimes there was an "us" and "them" in relationship to one moment and one identity peg but these configurations were always reconfiguring and I have tried to authentically describe what I witnessed and what I have been told by WWINFEW women.

In chapter four I have tried to go far enough and deep enough backwards in time to explicate that some ethnocultural minority and economically deprived women in Coldtown have found themselves disempowered and dissatisfied not as a result of accidents or as a result of their own individual psychological problems. Their "self-esteem" declined and became a troubled identity-peg as a consequence of many large social forces. The very foundational underpinnings of Coldtown are linked to the oppression of ethnocultural minority women and the socioeconomic oppression of many women. They have
constituted the invisible work-force that helped the men go into the mines. The women came here to Coldtown to care for their husband's personal needs and the women often remained stuck and delegated to the private sphere. First Nations women experienced losses hundreds of years ago and the consequences of those losses are still being felt in the day to day life of First Nations women in Coldtown.

Some visible minority women have experienced oppression as a result of colonization in their birth countries and in response to that, and other realities, they have come to Canada (and Coldtown). Each individual woman has come here to Coldtown for her own unique reasons but her main motivation has usually been related to this community's more recently diversified economy. Most visible minority women ended up in Coldtown because their kin, or they themselves, found work in the health care sector or as educators.

All of these distinctive paths leading into the realities of their lives today has meant that women are divided from each other. When people talk about equality and say "we are all equal now" it is important that they first engage in "compensatory renumeration" to those individuals who are not stepping onto the playing field with the same personal, social, and material resources available to them as individuals from the dominate culture. Ethnocultural minority
socioeconomically oppressed women in Coldtown have emerged from a hundred years of unequal treatment. In 1988 when WWINFEW came on the scene some of the assumptions we were fighting against were that all the women at WWINFEW had resources available to them in equal richness to other organizations and groups. We came to exist because we were underresourced -- but as soon as we existed as an organization the message we received from the wider community was: now you are equal fend for yourselves.

My own experiences with WWINFEW have changed my life forever. I propose that most women who became involved with progressive women's organizations come away from the experience with changed values, attributes and beliefs. I am so grateful that I was given the opportunity and privilege to spend time with these wonderful activists. Some of these women will remain my friends and comrades for years to come. Their faces, voices, struggles, creativity and pain have imprinted on me. My hope is that they will feel that this document has done justice to the complexity, turmoil, and beauty of their lives and their accomplishments.

In retrospect, as I discuss in chapter six, our largest struggle at WWINFEW was to define ourselves (and to define ourselves effectively in relationship to material realities). We had many things in common but we also confronted the ugly
and saddening truths that we have distinctions that can create insurmountable problems. Immigrant, First Nations, visible minority and socioeconomically oppressed women have been so divided from each other that discovering a language and process of reconnecting is like clearing a forest to plant a garden -- or maybe like planting a forest -- or even like accepting a forest that is already growing and caring for it like a garden. Each endeavor involves investing lots of sweat, coordinating efforts, responding effectively to unpredictable weather, displaying patience, finding healthy seeds, using strong tools, securing many people's cooperation, and hoping for luck.

For the years of its existence WWINFEW was able to make a positive difference in many women's lives. We helped women develop their understanding of what their educational needs were. We informed the wider community of what ethnocultural minority socioeconomically oppressed women's needs were. A unique pedagogical process was beginning to take root during the initial phase of the organization's existence. Anti-racism efforts and cross-cultural understanding were enhanced on a variety of levels: in classrooms, community groups, the media, individual women participant's world views and in the world views of kindred organizations.

Female friendship and networking turned out to be one of
the most popular and enriching "services" that the organization provided. This turned out to be a somewhat surprising finding. On a day-to-day basis female friendship initiating was a taken-for-granted dimension of what we were doing. In the forty-one interviews women expressed both joy that they had found friendships and deep sadness that some of these friendships had become wounded as a result of organizational conflicts. Female friendship, unfortunately, is one of the "services" that does not fall into the "mandate" of any government funder. There is no ministry of female friendship. There is no municipal, provincial, or federal responsibility to deliver this service to women. In spite of this absence of financial support for the work of connecting women to each other this will be one of the legacies of WWINFEW: WWINFEW women continuing to know and visit and care about each other.

Chapter eight outlines how hard the struggle was to keep the organization's doors open and to continue delivering our services. Continually fighting to find the rent, payroll, and supplies to do our work soon wore us down and changed us. As the financial realities became grittier and harsher so did the women's relationships with each other. Often the dynamics of the organization were shifting and changing and no discussions were taking place about what was happening. Many women have
been socialized to avoid, gloss over, or divert overt conflict. Eventually, some women were drawn to the organization to sell make-up, cook traditional meals, participate in fashion shows and do other activities that are associated with traditional femininity. As more of these women came into the organization some of the politicized or university educated feminist women felt uncomfortable. There was also some awkward and contested terrain because some women said that these traditionally feminine activities were an important part of their "cultural authenticity" and other women did not know how to engage with this idea and challenge it. We became very confused around meanings and meaning-making. We began to lose sight of our vision, our faith, or our alternative paradigm. We lost our confidence and our trust and without these foundations we began to dissolve as an organization. We ended up letting go of our shared vision for a different way of being together. To some extent we gave up our "Sight" of a different way -- and we gave it up of our own free will.

TEXTURED LOSSES AND GAINS

As stated earlier the pseudonym of WWINFEW seemed appropriate to me because we had "won a few" and "lost a few" in our efforts to make connections and social change. Coldtown
was too cold a terrain for this organization to take root in at that historic moment. Maybe some day in the distant future? Maybe the vision of WWINFEW can materialize without the manifestation of a formal organization? Maybe there never was one vision but for a short time we pretended that there was.

The experiences of WWINFEW activists highlight how overwhelming and painful it can be to resist conservative agendas which were encroaching more aggressively just as WWINFEW was born in 1988. The insidious processes and realities of funding positioned us to lose sight of what our original purpose was. Maybe WWINFEW did not successfully narrow itself down to a single "marketable" purpose and this was problematic. Marilyn suggested that our commitment to many purposes and vaguely defined goals blocked us from arriving at a single purpose. This, she suggested, was our fatal flaw.

Marilyn: I work with hundreds of organizations that are grass-roots and that emerged from nothing. I see a lot of this. I'm not talking now just about constitutions, by-lays, etcetera but what I'm talking about is that you DO need A purpose. You do need A clearly defined and agreed upon purpose. When that isn't there then I see that organizations are very vulnerable to winds of whatever. Vulnerable to the change of Board members or whatever. They're highly vulnerable.

These WWINFEW women also highlight the complexity involved in trying to be many things to many people. The complications related to financial processes were not far beneath the
surface as WWINFEW women describe their organization, its accomplishments, its challenges and its ultimate closure. Note how April and Joy describe the constraints of funding:

April: It's always a life or death issue for an organization. That's the saddest part. Funding also effects the whole structure. If you don't have money you can't have a professional environment. Can't have computers, pamphlets that are professional, you can't provide transportation for the clients. A lack of funding drops the morale of staff. That's the biggest thing. Who wants to work when you can't work [for money]. No money. Everyone wants to be rewarded in some way. In an organization like WWINFEW financial rewards come much later. Staff become caught up in their own problems. You need enough to just live anyway. Not to drive around in fancy cars but enough to live, just for survival.

And Joy, a staff member compares WWINFEW's struggles to those of a poverty-stricken family:

They [WWINFEW] needed all kinds of money. Funding was a big question. A big problem, lack of money. It would be like yourself if you had no money to run a household. You can't do it. You can only not do it, your visions would always be stopped. You might think of doing all these wonderful things for your children but if you don't have the money you just can't do it. So, obviously, it would change everything and after a while even the basics are going behind. Like your rent is behind and your phone is behind. You're going to get discouraged and this adds extra pressure. There's pressure that didn't have to be there. It did add a lot of pressure. You're making proposals and applying for different grants. If the grant comes in then we can do this, but there was never any surety about anything. No sense of stability or you can do this. It made it very hard.

Si: Could you comment on how you think it changed how people related to each other?

Joy: I guess in the time I was there people were,
anxious. People were anxious about this proposal or that proposal. There was a sense that we were always against a wall more or less. You couldn't look into the future because you just didn't know if there was a future. It wasn't a secure environment - it was a very unpredictable environment. For staff and volunteers. And how much energy are people putting into an organization with the thought in their mind of 'Will it be here next month?' 'Will it be here next year?'

However, not all of WWINFEW's women were conscious of the impact of financial deprivation on their relationships with each other, with the organization, and with other organizations. Note Julie's confusion about what happened:

Generally I had a very positive experience. I want to say though that, at the end, I don't know what happened. I felt like I had been away even though I had been there physically I don't know what happened! I sensed some kind of chaos at the end! I didn't have too much commitment for the organization so I was not able to know what was happening at the time. Something was happening. I knew, certainly, that something was happening. It was the end almost of my contract too. I felt bad, in a way, because I should be more involved to find out what was happening. What was all this conflict? I don't know what all this conflict was. Actually I don't want to know.

My belief is that many women did not want to know because they felt helpless, overwhelmed and hurt.

Most of these interviews took place in the six month period preceding WWINFEW's seemingly sudden closure. A few interviewees shared premonitions that the organization was doomed. For example, Marie said:

I don't think it [WWINFEW] is going to be around. I don't. It seemed like its credibility in the community and with funders right now is, I don't think it is
very strong [in its credibility]. I don't know if it will exist. I don't want it to go mainstream. I want it to be autonomous. I'd love to see it having its own funding body where the women are generating the wealth through a business. With that it is also doing the work that it wants to do. I would like to see it be a place where women are very diverse, diverse experiences and world views and religions. To have them come there and have it be okay. So if feminism meant [to them] a fashion show, and if that was cool, then [WWINFEW should say] 'How can we help them to do that?' They could come there and it would be okay whatever it was. If women wanted to learn particular job skills or whatever and that's what they saw, their vision, then, [WWINFEW should ask] 'What do they need? What resources could be provided?' However that was defined to just be able to provide support and the resources. To me that is the kind of work that I am involved in now in another community.

Even though some women saw WWINFEW's impending closure, nonetheless, (and sadly) none of these women were able to prevent the closure.

Very little of the path we were trying to pioneer was simple. In contrast to the stereotype that feminist organizers are just 'naturally' warm, co-operative, and able to come together in solidarity and able to move mountains a spoonful of dirt at a time, feminist organizing efforts and organizations are startlingly complex and difficult to maintain. Not all of us were able to do the emotion work or intellectual work required. Below Jane expresses some of her frustrations:

Jane: Sitting on the executive of any non-profit can be a frustrating experience especially when you perceive that things should tick like a clock. They should be in sync. They should work together and when you get this inner
[group] squabbling! Like I say, you are not looking beyond [instead] you are just looking at your narrow needs and what you perceive your needs to be at that time. You are not thinking of the general membership. You are not thinking of the horizon that is over the next hill. You are thinking of the here and now and what can I do to put down my sister. And that is always wrong. And I maintain that to be wrong of any organization.

WWINFEW closed after sixty-four months of existence. April describes her feelings about resource losses and the emptiness and sadness that this type of outcome could inspire in her:

April: My saddest moment was not when I actually left. It was a few months before I left. There was no money. No staff. Everything we'd worked so hard for was slipping away. 'Is it going to phase out and die?' I asked myself. When I actually left then I asked myself 'Am I doing the right thing?' by leaving. I felt like I was giving up something or that I couldn't make sure that it didn't die. I had to leave it to other people and that made me sad and it kind of scared me. It was like 'What are these people going to do?' It [WWINFEW] almost becomes like a part of you. A part of your body. 'What are they going to do to my thing?'

There was never adequate and assured funding that allowed for the full-time permanent pay of even one staff. All staff were contract and/or part-time. This staff turnover resulted in interpersonal competition, underdeveloped knowledge, blaming, silencing and exhaustion among WWINFEW insiders -- our meaning making was shaped by the realities of funding and vice versa.

Chronic material deprivation inhibited women's ability to deeply commit to the organization's long-term future. Joy, involved in recruiting volunteers, found our instability
inhibited women from getting involved:

...they [the volunteers would] go to another organization that they know has been here [for a long time]. Especially if you are doing volunteer hours, a lot of times it doesn't matter [where] you just want to go out and help. So, you're not going to go some place where you're not sure it's going to be there six months down the road. They're going to go to an organization that is well developed.

While the organization was fragile women's limited commitment gave funders an excuse to limit their financial commitments to the organization.

There were constraints and complications created by existing funding processes (such as mandatory reports, the production of extensive statistics, conference or project topics being chosen for us externally, etcetera). Sarah describes the hoops we had to jump through in our exhausting efforts to keep the organization open:

I think probably at the point when I left it was very disorganized at that point and I think it went through a period after that where it got even more disorganized. I found that the promise of it, in terms of being able to do all these things, it was just, the way in which the government structures, forced the organization, in terms of staffing and in terms of having to jump through these hoops and just not being able to keep up with the paper work. The books [account's and money management information] were all in disarray. There was, no one seemed to know what their responsibilities were and it was, it just seemed to be disintegrating and I felt very panicky about it at that time. I thought 'I just can't see how we can do this!' At that point, there was a fairly, I think about a third of the board resigned at that point...
Activists' misunderstanding of, or innocence, in regards to how financial realities can create subtle but destructive undercurrents positioned us to be divided and conquered. Activists often directly or indirectly held each other responsible for the troubles of the organization rather than holding funders and other interfacing organizations responsible. Insiders' motives and interpersonal dynamics can be both intense and complicated (Transken, 1994c, 1994d).

Many of the organization's insiders either did not know how to assess indicators of trouble, left when they perceived trouble, did not know how to reorganize the group to turn away from trouble, and/or put their personal needs to prove a point too high on their agenda for the organization as a whole to benefit. The ability to work through trouble when it is in front of us is actually a skill cluster that can be learned and passed on but often this skill cluster is not consciously cultivated. Many WWINFEW women, it seems, were socialized to avoid and deny overt conflict.

Given all these diverse forces creating potential disharmony the organization became that much more vulnerable to the covert and overt oddities and unpredictability of charismatic leadership. Jane describes what she was seeing at WWINFEW in the final months of the organization's life:

...They've dwindled down again. They are having a bi-annual meeting now. If you have to start changing your
board twice a year because certain people insist in not holding their positions to an election your membership is not going to stay. Word gets around. ...if things continue as they are, either WWINFEW will continue with a very small executive and in that small office with the bingos [as the primary funding source]. Or it will mend itself and get a new executive. People aren't impervious to change. If I was really impressed with who was there you might see me becoming a little more active. Health breeds health. Tyranny breeds tyranny. Dysfunction -- as a current person has been calling the group and saying the group has always been dysfunctional -- dysfunction breeds dysfunction. This person [the tyrant], for example, will attract people like herself. This will perpetuate the circumstances.

A major factor in WWINFEW's closure was that from the beginning of WWINFEW's existence its right to be part of the community was resisted by other social service organizations (women's organizations, multicultural/ethnicity centred organizations, mainstream social service organizations). These organizations wanted to claim their share of government money and community money, but did not, or could not provide appropriate and effective services for low income ethnocultural minority women. Some of these organizations continually lobbied funders to discontinue support for WWINFEW.

One of the most tragic aspects of the whole unfolding of this organization's story is that very few of the activists were able to really see the whole big picture of how the organization was situated on the terrain. The few WWINFEW activists who did deeply understand the big picture were
unable or unwilling to meaningfully to translate that
knowledge to the whole membership of WWINFEW.

**CHRONIC UNDERFUNDING**

Sarah: I think that it [WWINFEW's future] depends upon
the strength of where the organization is now. If it is
now all into generating funding and focusing on that and
all of the energies including the emotional and social
energies are focused on trying to maintain funding then
it will just collapse...If out of that experience there
is still the kind of thing in it [WWINFEW] that we had in
the beginning of the pot luck and the socials and then
those women are going to have enough strength and
feelings of connection and feelings of their self-worth
to take that into more informal organization and
voluntary organizations in other ways...So, that again,
is why that part [social connecting and friendship
building] is so important. It has on the surface the
appearance of having no importance at all -- it is just a
getting together to have a little pot luck. But, in fact,
its social function, is very important!

During its seven years of existence WWINFEW's budget ranged
from a low of approximately thirty thousand dollars to a high
of one hundred thousand and these funds came from places like
Northern Mines and Development, Secretary of State,
Citizenship and Culture, Canada Employment and Immigration,
Oxfam, Bingo licenses, or special events profits. Compared to
the weight of the many societal issues the organization was
attempting to respond to these amounts of money were always
minuscule. At no moment in WWINFEW's herstory were we
adequately funded to address the concerns that women faced.
Therefore, the whole organization was chronically anemic as are a multitude of similarly designed organizations right now in Canada.

At some moments in our ninety-four month herstory we were more hopeful because some government sources are more keen to allocate start up financing than to continue providing funding after the initial start up phase. The first third of WWINFEW's life seemed to contain more optimism. Activists were more committed to a new and exciting project with the unspoken belief in their hearts that once things got started the government would begin carrying their fair share of the responsibility for the well-being of ethnocultural minority women.

 CONSTRAINTS AND COMPLICATIONS

WWINFEW's first major project was a Needs Assessment and this Needs Assessment confirmed there were huge unmet needs in many areas of women's lives and these findings were not unexpected. These findings have been "discovered" all across Canada. Regardless of these "scholarly findings," WWINFEW always had to be proving and re-proving that ethnocultural minority women's needs existed and that WWINFEW was effectively responding to these needs. In the beginning most of us were hopeful that once we had clearly and vividly
documented the struggles women faced then the documentation demands would subside. Unfortunately, this did not prove to be the case.

Every dollar of resources that entered the organization demanded excessive documentation. The statistics and formal processes of recording were too complicated for many volunteers and underskilled staff to produce. Our staff were underskilled in that many were new immigrants unfamiliar with such processes. Others were at WWINFEW specifically to learn and develop employment readiness skills. All staff were underpaid. Since WWINFEW was usually able to only offer minimum wage, no benefits, no security, and contract work we were limited in the skill levels that were possessed by the employees we could attract and keep.

A further ongoing structural complication existed because the government had pernicious conservative agendas and they offered us "Trick Packages". An example of what I mean by "trick packages" involves our organization being told we were eligible for a small amount of monetary support, but that first we had to raise a percent (usually around twenty percent) of funding for the project within the community and then the government funders would cover the other eighty percent. As most of us who have done any community fund-raising understand it costs money to raise money. Creating
fund-raising projects involves advertising, labour costs, transportation costs, and supplies. Also, this type of fundraising is facilitated when volunteers speak fluent English and French, have cars and drivers' licenses, home computers, leisure time, childcare resources, appropriate social contacts, high self-esteem, etcetera. Most WWINFEW women did not have these resources, privileges and opportunities. Additionally, some women experience some types of fundraising activities as quite humiliating:

Carol: Another thing I don't like [about fundraising] is that we ask businesses, we call businesses and we ask for a plate [of food or a] pie or whatever. We are always begging.

Si: So it's like we are either applying for some obscure government grant or we are begging for food or something from the community?

Carol: That's right. With this [type of behavior] we are putting ourselves down in the community. Okay fine. We can ask for big things from them [the businesses] but not just for food or dessert or whatever...To me I don't mind asking a restaurant for food if it is for the soup kitchen.

Si: So you feel like it makes us into hobos or street people or something?

Carol: Definitely....

Carol continues describing how she felt humiliated to be asked to do these things.

Si: So if you are begging for someone else [ie: a cause Carol is not personally associated with] that's different but if you are begging [for ethnocultural minority women] and so that [WWINFEW] can organize a dance and sell
tickets at thirty dollars a plate, that's different?

Carol: But we have to raise the money. Call this restaurant [she felt she was told] and ask "can you bake a cake for us?" To me it is just putting down the name of WWINFEW.

Carol did not feel enthusiastic about being a member of WWINFEW's activist group as this type of fundraising activity became more and more frequent during WWINFEW's last year of life. She may have projected her resentment onto any WWINFEW activist who asked Carol to do fundraising.

Further, when every non-profit organization in the community is vigorously competing (Globe and Mail Special Sponsorship Section, 1996) for their percent of community money then socioeconomically oppressed ethnocultural minority women are forced into a comparatively weakened position. The struggles that WWINFEW women faced in the first place are not the inevitable forces of nature -- these problems are socially constructed (remember chapter four about Coldtown's layers and evolution). Not all potential financial contributors to social causes share a feminist anti-racist world view.

In addition to the above factors, my impression is that in the last few months when WWINFEW became vulnerable those women who were the most versed in prophesizing organizational dynamics and/or who had the largest array of options available to them moved on to other projects. Paula gives us an example
of how some WWINFEW women responded to conflicts among other WWINFEW women:

There were two women who were always confronting. It seems they were both fighting, trying to fight for power. They had the attitude and they wanted to lead the group. That I wasn't ready for. I wasn't ready for that kind of arguing. That made me uncomfortable. Both of them were really good women and I didn't want to be on one side or the other side. So, I'd have to try to find a way to be in the middle in the group. Sometimes you have to vote for things. Then I wasn't comfortable. Cuz if I'm on the other side of this woman or that woman! It was my concern to hurt the feelings of someone else. "A" always seemed to be the type that, she seemed to be always confronting. Nothing will change her mind. Then the other woman was always the same; nothing would change her mind.

Paula left the organization as a result of her discomfort with this type of interpersonal conflict. This pattern of exiting when confronted with too much conflict and discomfort quickened the organization's closure and facilitated mean-spiritedness among the few who remained to finalize the organization's "burial". Also, the few who remained to close the organization felt bitter, disenchanted, abandoned, and exhausted. These multiple dynamics, described above, came together to predispose the organization to weakness. Many feminist grassroots organizations are presently facing these threats. Recent conservative government agendas have brutally intensified these dynamics.
THE FINAL CRITICAL INCIDENT

Joy: ... They [core activists at WWINFEW] weren't seeing any of it [their energy] being given back to them. It was like having a door closed in your face all the time... For example, with my job they thought this money was coming through a grant and when it came through the plan was there would be this much allocated [for Joy's wages] but only a percentage of it came [from the government] and then they also had to do something else with it [the money]. It was all a lot of broken dreams. I had only experienced that for a couple of months and these other women had experienced that for years, for some [of the activists] many years. It was always empty promises and they were getting discouraged. And because they weren't able to keep the volunteers there wasn't a lot happening. They [the few remaining activists] were doing it all themselves. You could see the discouragement and the burn out...

In the concluding few months of WWINFEW's life a critical incident occurred in which the last energies and final hopes of the organization's supporters and activists were thrown on the table for discussion and disposal. Using the Civil Court system an immigrant, visible minority, religious minority economically vulnerable woman, who had been employed as a project worker, charged the President of WWINFEW (who was an immigrant, visible minority, economically vulnerable religious minority woman) with "racism" and "wrongful dismissal". If the women remaining at WWINFEW had maintained their faith, vision, and distinctive paradigm we might have been able to reestablish the organization. Had we been working together with a single goal, Sight or vision for a future, and
confidence in each other's Sisterhood then we would never have ended up in court with this situation in front of us. I will not describe the details of the case but I will state that this was the final blow which resulted in even more factioning and people felt forced to "take sides" because subpoenas were issued.

The organization closed a few weeks before the court date. Some WWINFEW activists suggested that the few insiders doing the work of keeping the doors open decided to give up and close WWINFEW with the belief that this move would mean they would not have to go to court. Neither "side" in this last factioning won. Ethnocultural minority women in Coldtown lost. Coldtown lost the opportunity to enrich its community with the fully vibrant contributions of these interesting, creative, passionate and diverse women. The diffuse, complex and covert impact of chronic underfunding directed most of WWINFEW's life and led to WWINFEW's downfall. There may have been other ways that this story could have unfolded. We lost our "room of our own" to some extent because too few of our activists were conscious of how resource deprivation was shaping our thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Hopefully, other organizational activists can refocus their thinking, feeling and behavior as a result of learning from our experiences. WWINFEW's doors are shut and our organization is closed but
maybe others can rethink, reshape, and resist so that their story unfolds with more resiliency.

**WHAT WERE THE 'WINS' THAT WWINFEW WOMEN TOOK AWAY WITH THEM?**

We can be proud of the fact that we learned a great deal. As individuals, it seems to me, every single woman walked away with more knowledge than she came forward with initially. Dawn, for example, describes how she personally and professionally developed through her time with WWINFEW:

I think it was a great learning experience, for me, once I got in there. Sure, I learnt a lot...I met with some very interesting people. I think it was good for me, in the sense that when I came here [to WWINFEW] I was one of these very shy and afraid to speak out, terrified of what I would say or that I'd sound stupid or that I was terrified of men. I think this was a great learning experience where I was able to verbalize my thoughts. I really wish that it [WWINFEW] had maintained the original vision.

Some dimensions of this knowledge were painfully acquired. Marie comments on both the memorable pain and the still accruing gifts she received from WWINFEW:

I would say that it was one of the most growing experiences that I have ever had. In the time that I was employed there I think I had about five times that amount of experience in that time. Personally, it was filled with learning and growing. I was pushed in so many ways to do things. As tough as it was and as painful as it was, at times, I wouldn't change a thing. It prepared me better than my university degree did to deal with reality. What I have learnt there I can take and it is
mine to apply and use anywhere I go. So it was a learning and growing experience and I wouldn't change it...

Marie continues by sharing a very personal moment that will be a lasting memory for her:

I have those pictures. I still go back and I look at those pictures and I look at how the place looked during that time. It was so neat. It really looked like something. One situation, I'll tell you about. I had just broken up with my partner. He basically just walked out. Being the stoic person that I was I went to work anyways and there was this woman. She was there. When I came in she took one look and asked me, 'What is wrong?' and then I was just breaking down and she was holding me. She said, "Well did you trip him on his way down the stairs?" [laughter]. She was tremendously supportive. That was a really good thing, sharing and teaching. There were some really good times. I remember a couple of times saying to myself, "Hey I am actually getting paid for this!"

Most of the women seemed to feel grateful that they had their experience with WWINFEW. Most of them came away with professional and marketable skills. Most of them came away with a deeper and richer understanding of other cultures, their own culture, and how to negotiate the space between cultures. Julie talked about how she remembers the organization:

Each and every worker that I met there, we all had a very unique personality. As much as I remember people were open minded and I didn't have any difficulty. It was my first working experience [in Canada and in Coldtown]. There was a time when we worked as a team and that was the time we were very comfortable with each other. When I think of this organization this kind of warm memory comes to me first. Even though my last experience was kind of chaos and conflict but it doesn't overpower my warm memories that I experienced in the beginning and in the
middle of my [work] period.

Most of the women felt they had gained friendships and special memories. Note how changed and buoyant Cadeja is:

Oh yes [said with an enthusiastic tone]! Even with all the bitterness and pain I would do it all again. Even with the pain I've experienced, a lot more good came out of it. Because I can forget about all these little pains and all the little crappy things. I have life long friends and like I said that I could see [these friends] in twenty years. I'd do it all again just for that. I can get my office skills anywhere. I can't get that [friends] elsewhere. Yes, I'd do it all again.

Most of the women can also feel proud of themselves in that they gave their best efforts for a time to a cause or purpose that was larger than themselves. I was touched by Rachelle's comments on this theme:

...some of the women, [from WWINFEW] I would say were really committed. They believe in what they're doing and they believe it will make a difference and that's great so I can add that because there's not too many women... I don't think that there is too many that are willing to stick it out thick or thin you know no matter what happens and to be there. And but there is some that believe that and there is some that are willing to take criticism for what they're doing because they believe in what they're doing so that's admirable. Of course they say that one person can make a difference, but maybe we expect, in this day and age, we expect instant results. Perhaps, I'm guilty of that too. We expect a change to happen right away. But one person cannot change the whole too much in a short time and certainly not a very noticeable change so I admire these few women that they're willing to stick there so I admire their [stamina]...Their integrity, you know because it takes integrity. You get a lot of criticism when you're involved in things like this there's a lot of criticism that one has to be able to take and respond to.
We can also take pride in the fact that we made some of the other competing/kindred organizations reassess what they were doing for ethnocultural minority women. My observation is that the organizations who resisted our efforts have now begun offering workshops and support on the issues we cared about. For example, the COFF regularly includes information in its newsletters about ethnocultural minority women's issues. This had rarely happened before 1988 when WWINFEW came on the scene. Similarly, Coldtown's multicultural organizations and ethnospecific organizations have begun offering workshops on issues like wife assault and sexual abuse. Again, these types of staff trainings and discussions were not taking place until after WWINFEW pushed the discomfort buttons and was perceived as attempting to take material support away from these organizations. The wider community of mainstream organizations has opened up their doors a little wider to issues of diversity. These are accomplishments that, I believe, every WWINFEW woman can state she was part of winning.

Steinem (1996, quoted in Biggs, p. 375) says, "The Future depends entirely on what each of us does every day... a movement is only people moving." My hope is that WWINFEW women are now in Coldtown and elsewhere trying to continue moving creatively into their future, rekindling their faith and spreading their faith that a different kind of world (a non-
racist, non-sexist, non-socioeconomically oppressive world) can be brought into existence if enough of us share in a vision, trust each other, talk about alternative paradigms and organize. Maybe most of WINFEW women are now just doing the undoable somewhat well somewhere else?
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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND CONSENT LETTERS

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FORMAT

A. Age________

B. Which Ethnocultural group/s do you identify with?

C. On average, over the past five years, what income group would you fit into (please answer this question according to only your own income - not your husband's or father's or any other family member's income)

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D. From when to when where you involved with WWINFEW?
From ____________________ To ________________
From ____________________ To ________________

E. Have you been involved with other organizations before WWINFEW? If so, what types of organizations? What ways were you involved with these other organizations?

F. What does the word "feminism" mean to you?

G. Interviewer's notes about the interview setting:
1. How did you first come to know about WWINFEW?

2. What were your hopes and goals when you first became involved with WWINFEW? Where those hopes and goals met?

3. How would you describe your involvement with WWINFEW?

4. Briefly, how would you describe WWINFEW as an organization?

5. What would you say are two of the strengths of WWINFEW?

6. What would you say are two of the weaknesses of WWINFEW?

7. Could you describe two things about some of the women you met at WWINFEW that you really liked, appreciated and/or valued?

8. Could you describe two things about some of the women you met at WWINFEW that you sometimes were not comfortable with and/or were puzzled by?

9. Are there things about the community of Coldtown that you feel makes the going harder for WWINFEW?

10. Could you describe your happiest moment while involved with WWINFEW?

11. Could you describe your saddest moment while involved with WWINFEW?

12. What meaning do you think funding processes have for WWINFEW?

13. If there were two things about WWINFEW that you could change what would they be?

14. What barriers would there be for the changes you'd like to see happen?

15. What do you imagine WWINFEW will be like in the future?

16. Are there any other thoughts or feelings about WWINFEW that you would like to share?
Dear Potential Interviewee:

I am a student completing a Ph.D. project at O.I.S.E. (the University Of Toronto) in sociology. My topic is an organizational analysis of a particular organization that you have had contact with. I am interested in how organizations such as this one arise, evolve, and interact with the communities they connect with. By learning about how women in these types of organizations experience the world we can help each other achieve our goals more successfully. Also, we can come to understand how we have faced similar problems and challenges.

The name of this town, the name of the actual organization, the names of all people involved, your name, and potentially identifying characteristics of individuals will be changed so that confidentiality is protected. I am trying to interview an equal number of past and present Board members, volunteers, and staff.

At any time during the interview you can change your mind and conclude the interview and/or take out parts of what you have said. The actual transcript of this interview will be seen only by me and possibly by an O.I.S.E. supervising committee of three professors. A finished copy of this thesis will be donated to the organization we are discussing. A copy will also be available at my home address (above) and you might borrow a copy of it when it is completed if you are interested.

Please examine the attached questions and if you feel comfortable answering these questions please sign this letter of consent.

Signature __________________________ Date ________________

Name (pseudonym or secret name) you would like me to use while referring to you within this interview and within the thesis's text:

______________________________

Thank you very much for your time, attention and commitment. Your sharing of your thoughts and feelings means a great deal.

Respectfully,

Si Transken,  
(Doctoral Candidate)  
B.A., Hon.B.S.W., M.A.