MAKING CHANGE:
Women Doing Community Economic Development

by

Jeannie Samuel

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Department of Sociology in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
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COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Community Economic Development (CED) involves marginalized communities working together to achieve financial benefits, as well as to develop new skills and support systems. Economic activities are the explicit organizing mandate for the CED project studied in this thesis, and the main reason behind the group's government funding. At the same time, within CED economic development acts as a catalyst for the building of skills and community amongst marginalized women. Many women active with the initiative identify the construction of community and the opportunity to learn about themselves, to learn about others, and to learn tangible skills as the main benefits of their participation in CED.

This thesis explores the experiences of a group of marginalized women participating in CED. It also examines the challenges and tensions involved in carrying out a women's CED initiative in the current economic climate of Ontario.
Many thanks to the women involved with "Designs" for sharing with me their experience and knowledge of community economic development. Thanks also to my thesis supervisor, Roxana Ng, to my other thesis committee member, Kari Delhi at the Ontario Institute for Education, and to Kathryn Church (not an official committee member but every bit as valuable!) for their feedback, guidance, and support. Finally, thanks to my friends and family who were so patient with me through the various stages of this thesis process.
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INTRODUCTION

Community Economic Development involves marginalized communities working together to achieve financial benefits, as well as to develop new skills and support systems. My research focuses on one specific women's CED initiative called Designs, a project located in downtown Toronto. The project seeks to re/connect marginalized women to the market place by facilitating women's production and sale of arts and crafts. According to the Project Brochure:

*Designs* was established one year ago as an innovative approach to address the issues of poverty and homelessness with women. Presently, thirty women are engaged in the production of hand-crafted items which are marketed at various craft shows, fairs and a consignment store. The collective goal is to create women entrepreneurs who will finally have an opportunity to experience meaningful participation in our economy (1995).

This thesis has two major research questions: firstly, what are the experiences of a group of marginalized women participating in CED? Secondly, what are the challenges and tensions involved in carrying out this women's CED initiative in the current economic climate? These two research questions enable me to situate women's day-to-day experiences with CED within a larger framework of economic and social relations.

Through my time with Designs I found that economic activities are the explicit organizing mandate for the project and the main reason behind the group's government funding. At the same time, many women active with the Designs initiative identify the construction of community and the opportunity to learn about themselves, to learn about others, and to learn tangible skills as the main benefits of their participation in CED. This is not to say that the

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1 The name of the project has been changed to protect the identities of the participants.
economic aspect of CED is unimportant to the women involved, but it is not necessarily their sole or even primary motivation for participation. I argue that within CED, economic development acts as a catalyst for the building of skills and community amongst marginalized women. Overall the process of CED involves a redefinition of conventional economic activity, calling into question traditional meanings of economic terms such as value and productivity.

In June 1995, the Conservative government was elected in the province of Ontario. Since it began its term in office, this government has followed the neoliberal economic trends being played out globally, intensifying a process of reconfiguring state responsibility with regard to social and economic welfare. The government imposed a series of cuts to social spending, health care, and education. These changes affect Ontario as a whole, but those who are poor and marginalized are feeling the impact most quickly and most intensely.

If ever there was a time for people to think about the bottom line, it is now. The economy is struggling at all levels to restructure its core, with great instability being widely experienced. There has yet to emerge a coherent picture of what is needed to nurture a sustainable economy, let alone how to face the human costs of getting there (761 Community Development Corporation Newsletter, Jan. 1996, 1).

Economic restructuring and adjustment is having a profound impact on many layers of Canadian society, notably marginalized women. Day-to-day economic survival for marginalized women is more difficult than ever, basic needs such as food and shelter are becoming even more difficult to attain (National Action Committee on the Status of Women, 1995).

Trying to survive as a CED project in Ontario in this current climate of economic restructuring has created numerous tensions within Designs. In a general sense, there exists a complex and at times contradictory relationship between the state and the community (Ng, Walker and Muller, 1993). These social relations are evident within Designs, and will be explored in this thesis.
For example, the relationship between Designs and wider social and economic forces compel members to publicly emphasize the project's role in re/connecting women to the market place. Aspects of the project that tie into the building of community and the development of skills other than those directly connected to economic activity are downplayed. The language used by Designs and the way the project defines itself are sites of struggle.

How we understand CED is fundamentally embedded in the analytical approaches to communities. A standard definition of community is a group of people who feel a connection due to a shared base. The base can be geographic, either in a rural or urban setting. A community can also be a group of people who share a social base, for example marginalized women, youth, the disabled, or different ethno-racial groups (Fontan, 1990, 11). Most literature pertaining to Community Economic Development approaches the idea of community from a geographic perspective (see Nozick, 1994, Quarter, 1992). There are also good examples of literature pertaining to CED with communities that have a social base (see Church, 1996, Church and Creal, 1996). My thesis deals with a social community of marginalized women.

The standard approach to community is useful at a micro level, but limited beyond this. From the standard approach it is difficult to understand community as a process, a site of shifting social relations. In their essay "Problematizing Community Organization and the State," Roxana Ng, Gillian Walker and Jacob Muller problematize the definition of community, noting the debate over its meaning (14). They put forward an alternative view:

Some analysts use the concept of community descriptively and try to comprehend the social relations or forces involved in establishing such a phenomenon. They seek to understand social production and reproduction. Such an analysis may focus on the working of the family, capitalism and "the state" in shaping the development of local relations. The emphasis is on the class character of capital, wage labor, and women's relation to the social reproduction of daily life, be it in
education or community care. Commentators who take this position consider as relevant the way in which the state and its various bureaucracies administer and regulate the needs of production and consumption (directly or through the labor market) and how those in government manage day-to-day activities so that capital accumulation may continue uninterrupted (1993, 16).

This analytical approach to communities is useful in linking CED to wider economic, political and social structures. In this thesis, I use the standard typology of a social community in chapter three. When analyzing Designs within a larger context in chapter four, I apply the alternative approach to community offered by Ng, Muller and Walker. Their approach allows space to analyze Designs within a larger framework of social and economic relations.

This thesis is divided into six chapters beyond this introduction. The first chapter is Context for Community Economic Development in the 1990s. Within this chapter I define key terms that are used throughout this thesis. I then take a brief look at some of the broad economic and social themes that situate a CED initiative like Designs. These include economic restructuring and its effects in Canada and Ontario. In the second chapter, Research Process, I examine some of the complexities of carrying out my research process

The third chapter, Designs: Women Doing Community Economic Development, looks in detail at a women's CED project in downtown Toronto. I begin with a description of the project's background and organizational structure. I then goes on to analyze the community, economic, and development components of the project, drawing on the lived experience of the project participants as well as input from project facilitators. The fourth chapter, Designs: Operating in a Macro Environment, analyzes the internal tensions that arise within the CED project as a result of various external variables such as state funding. Chapter five, Community Economic Development: Current Issues in the Literature, explores some of the main issues that arise in the CED literature
in relation to the themes highlighted in this study. The concluding chapter, *The Importance of Community Economic Development in the 1990s*, explores the necessity for, and possibilities of, CED work with marginalized women in this current climate of economic restructuring and change.
CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT FOR COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1990s

A. Defining Key Terms

A few key terms are used in this thesis: the state, community economic development, economic restructuring, marginalized women, poverty, homelessness, and mental health issues. This chapter defines these terms and explains how they are used in my research. It then goes on to describe the context for doing community economic development in the 1990s.

The State

In this thesis I use Roxana Ng’s definition of the state, as outlined in her work *The Politics of Community Services: Immigrant Women, Class and State* (1996). She explains that the state is not monolithic; it constitutes a set of social relations which

(a) legitimizes certain courses of action, thereby rendering other (alternate) forms of action illegitimate; and (b) organizes how people relate to one another. What is important to grasp is that these social relations are relations of domination and subordination: they are relations of power (Ng, 1996, 86).

I understand the state as a site of social relations of power, and that these relations are woven into projects like *Designs*. 
Economic Restructuring

The term economic restructuring is extremely broad and is now widely used to explain current changes in economic structures at global, national, and local levels. Economic restructuring can be defined as

... a series of cumulative and conjunctural crises in the international division of labour and the global distribution of economic and political power; in global finance; in the functioning of national states that are losing economic and political control of national economies; in the decline of the Keynesian welfare state and the established social contracts among labour, government, and business; and in the increasing exploitation of marginal forms of labour performed by women, youth, and minorities" (Bakker, 1996, 33).

In Ontario, economic restructuring has a very real impact on the day-to-day lives of women already living in long-term poverty. Affordable shelter and food are more difficult to attain; social assistance no longer covers basic needs. This thesis looks at how Community Economic Development counters some of those effects. It also explores how restructuring constrains the work of CED.

Community Economic Development

The main elements in Community Economic Development (CED) obviously include community, economic, and development. Yet how each aspect is weighted is the topic of much debate. There are two basic streams of thought surrounding definitions of CED. One fits into a liberal idea of economic development, and can be termed the business development stream (Fontan, 1990, 5). To illustrate this approach, author Jean Marc Fontan looks at the manner in which CED is defined by the Economic Council of Canada:

Community economic development is the improvement of job prospects, income and other aspects of the economy not only for our populations, but by these very populations themselves (p.6).
Fontan notes that this approach to CED is limited, in that it rests on the notion that a community is a uniform entity where "the wealth generated by some has a ripple effect on all of the people and institutions in the community" (p.6). He points out that this is not a true picture of a community. Communities tend to be made up of fairly distinct pieces, and the process of growth has an impact on these pieces in differing manners.

Another definition he draws on is from Swack and Mason, who define CED in terms of community empowerment. This fits into what is known as the progressive stream of CED (p. 5). In their view, CED is

(\ldots) an effective and unique strategy for dealing with the problems of poor people, powerless people, and underdeveloped communities. As an intervention strategy in an underdeveloped community it does not seek to make the existing conditions in the community more bearable. Instead, community economic development seeks to change the structure of the community and build permanent institutions within a community. As a result, the community begins to play a more active role vis-à-vis the institutions outside the community, and the residents of the community become more active in the control of the community's resources (p.5).

Designs fits more closely with a progressive definition of CED than a liberal definition. Still, the actual process of CED is far more complicated than one gathers from straight definitions. Thus, an exploration of the meaning of CED is ongoing throughout this thesis.

Marginalized Women

I use the term marginalized women throughout this thesis to include those women who have been marginalized from the formal economy, as well as often from formal social and political structures. I have included discussions on long-term poverty, homelessness, and mental health. I recognize that the above topics are not the only limits to marginality, but they are of particular relevance to women in the CED project analyzed in this thesis.
Aspects of Marginality: Poverty

*Designs* is a CED initiative for women who live in long-term poverty. In defining poverty, Vivian Shalla explains that

Poverty is typically defined in either absolute or relative terms, depending on whether it is perceived at one end of the continuum, as a problem of meeting basic needs for physical well-being, or, at the other end, as raising questions about society's tolerance for inequality in the distribution of income. Between these extremes lie numerous intermediate measures referred to as low-income cut-offs (LICOs), usually considered as "poverty lines" (1995, 1).

Shalla notes that "poverty lines indicate only the upper income limits of poor Canadians; the majority of the poor live on incomes much below these limits" (p.2).

Poverty in general is a growing concern in Canada. According to the 1994 Poverty Profile produced by the National Council on Welfare, the number of people living in poverty in Canada was just over 3.3 million and the poverty rate was 15.3 percent. In 1994, the number of poor people in Canada was nearly 4.8 million and the poverty rate was 16.6 percent (1996, 9). While the poverty rate for both men and women has grown over the years, the feminization of poverty deepened in the 1970s and 80s. This has led to a disproportionate number of women being poor. In 1989, there were approximately 1,001,000 men living in poverty in Canada, compared to 1,534,000 women. By 1994, the number had risen to 1,434,000 men compared to 2,011,000 women (National Council on Welfare, 1996, 81). These statistics do not take into account the depth of poverty in different "poor" households, nor the additional degree of poverty due to factors such as age and/or race.
Aspects of Marginality: Homelessness

Many people who live in long-term poverty, including women from *Designs*, find themselves either homeless or underhoused. In Toronto this is a special problem, given that it is one of the most expensive places to live in North America (State of the City Report, 1993, 61). The United Nations defines the homeless as people who live on the streets and people who live in housing which does not include access to safe water and sanitation, security of tenure and personal safety, and which is not affordable or within reach of employment, education and health care (State of the City Report, 1993, 64). The State of the City Report goes on to explain different variations of homelessness. The visible homeless classifies people living directly on the streets. The hidden homeless classifies people who are either hiding for safety reasons, doubling up for the night, or not using services where they are counted by official statistics. The underhoused/people at risk of homelessness category classifies people who are not counted because they are in and out of short-term shelters, women with children for whom the streets have added dangers, the temporarily employed who are intermittently able to pay for shelter, and those living in unsafe, inaffordable, overcrowded or insecure housing (p. 64).

Aspects of Marginality: Mental Health Issues

In recent decades, it has been recognized that many homeless people have been survivors of the mental health system. Deinstitutionalization in the 1970s and 1980s without adequate community support has left many psychiatric survivors in situations where they are either underhoused or without shelter altogether. This is an example of how state cost-cutting measures directly affect marginalized populations.
The mental health system treats women differently than men. The system rarely takes into account the added pressures many women face due to poverty, physical and sexual abuse, and the general stress of living in a patriarchal society (Burstow, 1992). Women tend to be prescribed more medication, and generally outnumber men as "patients" in the mental health system. The 1991 census shows that in Ontario there were more women than men hospitalized that year (Ali, Ali and Gutbi, 1996, 15).

I use the term psychiatric survivor to describe people who have had experience with the mental health system (see Church, 1995). Through their encounters with the system this group has traditionally been labeled as clients and/or patients. In recent years in Ontario, especially in Toronto, there has been a growing, active community of psychiatric survivors advocating for their rights as people who have been through and/or continue to use the mental health system. Psychiatric survivor-driven initiatives include participation in mental health legislation reform and in the start up and running of community businesses (Church 1995, Church&Creal, 1995). Many women who are members of Designs are psychiatric survivors.

B. Context for Community Economic Development in the 1990's

Overview

The reasons, strategies and implications behind economic restructuring are complex and far beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, it is important to include at least a cursory glance at the topic, since in many ways CED is, as Eric Shragge puts it, "a response to the failure of our advanced capitalist system to meet the basic needs of an increasingly large part of the population through the
market, supplemented by welfare State provisions" (Shragge, 1993, 6). Even these welfare state provisions are growing smaller. In order to better understand the complexities of a women's CED project like Designs, it is necessary to have a basic picture of the wider economic and social structures in which it operates. I have placed restructuring within a Canadian, and more specifically, Ontario backdrop. The intent of this discussion is to provide a broad context in which Designs can be situated.

Economic Restructuring in a Canadian Context

Canada, like most industrialized nations, has been going through a period of restructuring as it moves away from the model of a welfare state, which was premised on the expectation that governments were responsible for meeting the basic needs of their citizens (Brodie, 1995, 15). This is not to imply that governments have necessarily been successful in meeting these needs. Within the welfare state, many people were living in conditions of extreme poverty where they were homeless or underhoused. Nonetheless, at the level of discourse at least there was some sort of expectation of state responsibility that appears to be shifting.

Political economist Janine Brodie explains that a new ruling consensus based on neoliberal policies has become the direction for Canada and other western countries. The thrust towards neoliberalism rests on the belief that a reconfiguration of global reality has led to an economic environment where governments believe they must "maximize exports, reduce social spending, curtail state economic regulation, and enable market forces to restructure national economies as parts of transnational or regional trading blocs" (Brodie, 1995, 16).
The transition to neoliberal policies in Canada began during the tail end of the Trudeau era and increased in intensity throughout the Mulroney years. The identification of a growing national debt and deficit as a crisis was used as reason for chipping away at social programs, while in 1989 the apparent fear of being left behind in the international market place was used as leverage for signing the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. Trade liberalization is affecting a "hollowing out" of the state by attacking its role in providing economic stimulus, regulation, and a social safety net (Jessop, 1993). Although the Conservative government was tossed out in a major victory for the Liberal Party in the 1993 federal election, the new government has continued with the same neoliberal policies. The Liberals ratified the North American Free Trade Agreement in January 1994 and have continued to use the "need" for deficit reduction as a means of justifying the erosion of Canada's social safety net (Brodie, 1995).

The official discourses shaping economic restructuring in Canada are critical to the process. They are constructed in such a way that we are led to believe restructuring is our only option for dealing with the economy.

The central theme of restructuring discourse is that we have no political choices left about how to shape our collective lives and future other than to follow a market-driven approach to the globalization of the international economy (Brodie, 1995, 49).

The front page of the Toronto Star on February 9, 1994 ran a quote from Finance Minister Paul Martin that illustrates this restructuring discourse:

We'll all suffer over debt- -Martin
"... interest on the debt is growing faster than the economy.
We are in hock up to our eyeballs. That can't be sustained."
- -Finance Minister Paul Martin (Toronto Star, 18. 10.94, 1)
The current fiscal crisis has sparked a need for solutions, and given the rhetoric, the only possible solution given is government austerity. According to contemporary restructuring discourse, austerity means an increase in individual responsibility. Austerity also implies a retraction of collective provision for well-being, now considered a luxury.

The restructuring discourse leads us to believe that we all share equally the impact of debt and deficit reduction, and indeed, with macro-economic restructuring policies in general. In Isabella Bakker's article "Deconstructing Macro-Economics Through a Feminist Lens" (1996), she notes that it is untrue that all members of society share equally in economic restructuring. She challenges the discipline of economics as a whole, arguing that it is not "universal, value free scientific inquiry, but rather, gendered discourse" (Bakker, 1996, 31). Bakker concludes that discussions around economic restructuring and macro-economic policies should include a gender analysis, as this will help us better understand how the "newly emerging order"(p.51) is increasing the benefits of some members of society and intensifying the difficulties of others. Marginalized members of the population (women, minorities, youth), are hit hardest and fastest by restructuring policies (Bakker, 1996, 33). They are the first to feel the loss or diminution of social services, child care, social housing, and other social support systems in our society (National Action Committee on the Status of Women, 1995).

I am not arguing that women were treated particularly well during the era of the welfare state. Analysis of this era shows that the Canadian state was "an agent of social control, patriarchal, classist, and racist" (Brodie, 1995, 22). Nonetheless, as the welfare state collapses, women's economic status worsens. A document by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women
demonstrates the deterioration of the situation of women in Canada during the past decade. They find that with the push for competitiveness on an international basis is causing an undercutting of Canada's social services, wages and other welfare state benefits. These elements of the welfare state are thought to raise the costs of Canadian production in the international marketplace. This effects of a globalizing economy have been devastating for women:

More and more women are being pushed into part-time, casual employment as full-time, full year jobs disappear. Women make up almost three-fourths of the part time work force.  
The value of the minimum wage decreased by 48 percent between 1976 and 1992. Women make up 60 percent of all minimum wage earners, and a large amount of the working poor are women.  
Equal pay for equal work remains an elusive goal. The wage gap between women and men in Canada is the highest of all the countries of the OECD. The total income gap between men and women in 1990 was 58.2 percent.  
The federal infrastructure program contains no job creation strategies for women (NAC, 1995: 3-4).

Economic Restructuring in Ontario

The restructuring process in Canada has been taken up full force by the current provincial Conservative government in Ontario. Elected in June 1995, the government has wasted no time in imposing its new agenda. The Conservative Party was elected by a wide margin in Ontario, based on the proposed policies laid out in its campaign document The Common Sense Revolution (1995). The document spells out five proposals that fit neatly into a neoliberal agenda: "1) cut provincial income taxes; 2) cut non-priority government spending; 3) cut government barriers to job creation, investment and economic growth; 4) cut the size of government; 5) balance the budget (Common Sense Revolution, 1995, 4).
Like the restructuring rhetoric at a federal level, the language used by Mike Harris and the Conservative Party implies that we have no choice but to greatly decrease the responsibility of the state in Ontario.

It's time for government to make the same types of changes all of us have had to make in our own families and in our jobs. If we are to fix the problems in this province then government has to be prepared to make some tough decisions. (Common Sense Revolution Document, 1995, 1)

... It will not be easy, but it can be done, and it will be worth it. In order to create the jobs we so badly need, and to renew our economy, we will have to set priorities and stick to them. Tinkering with the system will not be enough. It is time for fundamental change, and change is never easy (Common Sense Revolution Document, 1995, 1-2, Emphasis in original).

Seeing the economic crisis in Ontario as something we have no choice over implies that we have no choice but to cut social spending. This serves to remove agency from the state, thus diminishing the extent to which public responsibility will be taken around ensuring collective well-being.

Once again, it is important to recognize the underlying assumptions are that restructuring has an equal impact on all Ontario citizens, and that sacrifice is necessary now for a better life tomorrow.

I have been troubled by these realities for some time. I fear that Janet and I cannot hope for a better future for our children. I want to do something about it. So, today I'm putting forth a plan to help build a better future (Common Sense Revolution Document, 1995, 1-2).

The assumed equality of impact is an important part of legitimating restructuring policies, making it more palatable to the middle class.

The language used in the above quote sets up the discussion in a manner whereby difficult decisions are now largely the responsibility of the family. This rhetoric is an important indicator of the present social climate. Personalizing the language employed within the Common Sense Revolution Document builds on
the current ruling sentiment that it is time for individuals and families to take greater care of society, and for the state to take less responsibility.

The changes in government spending have been anything but easy, and the impact has certainly not been felt in the same way across all sectors of the province. Restructuring has hit first and foremost the most vulnerable members of the Ontario population, especially marginalized women. During the first year of its mandate, the provincial government has dramatically cut funding to key social service, health, and education sectors (Ontario Federation of Labour, 1996). Most immediate has been the 21.6 percent reduction in income across the board to those on General Welfare and Family Benefit Allowance, excluding, for now, the disabled. This has had a particular impact on women since more women than men are on social assistance (Ministry of Community and Social Services, Statistics and Analysis Unit, 1996). This decrease of funds has been matched by the cancellation of many new public housing contracts, cuts to health and education (despite their being deemed "untouchable" during the election), cuts to child care, women's shelters, and legal aid, to name just a few of the changes to date (Ontario Federation of Labour, 1996). Economic restructuring is moving full force in the province of Ontario. It is within this wider context that the women's CED project that I have analyzed in this thesis is struggling to operate.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH PROCESS

Methodology is the gathering of data and the making sense of it in an orderly way, as well as the study of methods. Methodology, theory and ideology are intertwined. How you go about doing your research is inextricably linked with how you see the world (Kirby and McKenna, 1989, 63).

A. Some Basics

The research and writing of thesis took place from February to December of 1996 in downtown Toronto. It was conducted using qualitative research methods, including a three-month field work component. The field work consisted of participant observation and opened-ended interviews with women from the CED initiative Designs. I interviewed five project members who I refer to as Meredith, Jane, Lucy, Naomi, and Michelle although these are not their actual names. All of these women are marginalized from the mainstream system. Like all members of Designs, these women have a diverse range of life experiences. Some are psychiatric survivors, some have been homeless, all live in long-term poverty.

I also interviewed three staff people: Suzi, Margot, and Jennifer. Suzi is the project coordinator, Margot is a craft facilitator, and Jennifer worked mainly as a marketing/craft facilitator until her contract ended in the summer of 1996.

B. Research Process

The main theme, the story I want to tell in this chapter, is often written out of the final versions of academic studies: the bumps, the ebbs and flows that are part of any research process. This chapter describes the evolution of my understanding of the intricacies involved in conducting research, especially research with vulnerable/labeled/marginalized communities. Through the
many steps, starting with the initial conception of my project, to the research proposal stage, to involvement with the CED group, the data gathering and the data analysis stages, I learned an important lesson: doing qualitative research is a complicated process. It is by nature messy, unpredictable, exciting and thought-provoking in its illumination of the social relations prevalent between the researcher and the research participants. In carrying out my thesis, the research process emerged as a second story, somewhat separate from the details of women doing CED, yet too important to write out of my final version. Through documenting my research process, this chapter begins to explore what Kathryn Church calls "the question of location and ethics in participating with a marginalized group" (Church, 1995). This is a key question for anybody doing research with marginalized communities.

In her book Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles (1991), Margot Ely stresses the "need to make more public the interplay between the emotional and intellectual in our ethnographic research, since the interplay is an essential ingredient" (p.1). This statement resonates clearly with me. I found the process of conducting this research to be not only an intellectual, but emotional, endeavor as well. It is the emotional aspect of the research process I am trying to incorporate in this chapter. I had a general understanding of these pieces prior to beginning my project, but I found that there was a big leap between the thinking (knowing something intellectually), and feeling (having a gut understanding) stages of research. Before embarking on this project I thought I understood how complex and potentially problematic research dynamics could be; going through it brought this knowledge into a whole new light.

Thinking I have some sort of grasp on the issues faced by a community is nothing compared to trying to delve into actual social relations that are
constituted around power dynamics. As a researcher, I occupied a particular position in relation to the women who were research participants. This whole process was full of knots, some of which I have tried to unravel as I write in the complexities of the research methodology within which this thesis is framed.

**Getting Started**

When I first began agonizing over a topic for my M.A. thesis, I was full of apprehension. I felt paralyzed by what was happening around me as I saw the dismantling of the social safety net (previously full of holes anyhow) pick up speed in its disintegration. My job as a community worker with homeless and underhoused women meant I saw daily the effects of economic cuts on the lives of marginalized women. I wanted to examine something that seemed to be an alternative to current economic strategies, community economic development appeared to be a possibility. I knew I wanted to focus on the economy; I wanted it to relate to women, particularly to women who were marginalized. Writing about CED was a possible way of meeting my feelings of paralysis head-on.

This led me to the "how to." I balked at the idea of doing ethnographic research. "Oh no," I thought, "I am not doing that." I had heard plenty about the pitfalls and ethical dilemmas of doing ethnography, the uneven power dynamics, the difficulties inherent in trying to interpret other people's words and experiences. Compounding this with the fact that I was wanting to do it with marginalized/labeled communities whose stories had repeatedly been misused by institutions, and I was convinced I should stay clear of the ethnographic route. My misgivings around ethnography tied to my own
location in the world. As a university-educated, middle-class person I occupy places of privilege in the world. Yet as a woman of colour who has spent large chunks of my life in predominantly white circles, I was acutely aware of the concept and reality of being the "other," of being on the margins of certain circles. I was uncomfortable with creating a dynamic through research where participants felt they were being scrutinized.

Still, I was worried. How could I think about these topics, and how could I tease anything out of them without actually connecting with people? As I began to review the literature written about CED, I was struck by the fact that most of it gave little insight into people's lived experience with these sorts of projects. What stories were getting lost along the way? What was not getting told beyond insular communities? What was not getting documented that perhaps could add a little to the debate around women doing CED?

Contact with a woman named Kathryn Church, herself well connected to CED projects with marginalized communities in Toronto, led me to the group that became the core subject of this thesis. The group, Designs, is a small CED initiative that has been running for just over two years now. We encountered each other at a time of great transition for the project; as I write up this research project I know that some of the details will already be outdated. The change in the project is too rapid. I could stay there for years trying to document the process, yet would never fully get at it. This thesis represents an analysis of what I could take in during the short time I was with Designs.

Initial Contact

As I mentioned above, my initial contact with Designs came via my connection with Kathryn, who had been involved for many years in the
psychiatric-surgeon movement as a researcher and an activist. Most recently she had completed a study about CED with long-term unemployed people in downtown Toronto, and was thus well aware of the work of these communities. When I explained my interest in looking at the experiences of women doing CED, she suggested that Designs might function as a possible case study. They were a group that had been operating for close to two years by that point, and were in a state of transition. She felt they might be open to the idea of a researcher being involved in documenting their process. She paved the way for me to meet with the project facilitator, acting as a bridge between myself and the community of Designs. In this way she helped me through one of the difficult first stages of research: the entry point.

In early January, 1996 I met with Designs' main project coordinator, Suzie. I explained my research interests in terms of looking at the experience of marginalized women doing CED, and my desire to work with Designs as a case study. We also spoke about the possibility of my sharing my documentation with them in some other, non-academic form that could be useful to the group. The facilitator was enthusiastic and cooperative. We agreed that I would spend Thursday afternoons over the course of a few months in the craft studio with the women from the project. Once I was familiar with the women and the project, I would try to interview four or five participants about their experiences participating in CED. Before I began my Thursday afternoons with the group, I also met with another Designs staff person, Margot. She was a craft facilitator, meaning she would be directly in the studio with me. She also was open and welcoming to me.
Diving In (Participant Observation)

In early March, 1996 I began to spend Thursday afternoons at Designs. The manner in which the project was structured meant that a small group of women were given studio time on a different day each week. There was a core group of women who came every Thursday afternoon; there were a handful of others who were in and out of the studio some Thursdays. Some faces I came to expect, others I was never sure of.

Looking back on my journal entries from this period, I recall feeling nervous, curious, and welcomed the first afternoon I spent with the project. There were four women present, working on their crafts, along with the craft facilitator. The main project facilitator floated between her office, where she was deep in administrative details, and the craft studio where the participants worked at their crafts. The agreement I had with the facilitators was that instead of a formal introduction, I was to introduce myself to women individually, and casually explain to them what I was doing. The facilitators would also explain my presence to them, again informally. Our intent was for women to know that I would be documenting their project, but not create a dynamic where they felt they were being objectified as research subjects.

I remember feeling awkward with these introductions. It was always difficult to explain in clear language my academic context. The gulf between academia and this community project was particularly evident to me during those first moments of introduction. It was also hard to know quite what to do with myself once I was actually in the studio. I had no craft background and did not consider myself particularly artistic. I knew I could not just sit there, so I chose to dive in. I tried my hand at a few crafts, settling on beading. I began slowly to have conversations with women. Over the months the topics were
diverse, from politics to the types of candy we ate as children. The stories were not to be written into my thesis. They were merely an entry point for me to familiarize myself with some of the project members and pave the way for formal interviews. The time in the studio also gave me a chance to get a sense of the project as a whole. Informal conversations with the facilitators added to the picture.

During the three months that I went to Designs, I also attended two craft sales and two project-wide meetings. These different events highlighted various layers of the project, helping me begin to unravel the day-to-day realities of women doing CED. The longer I was around, the less uncomfortable I began to feel about being present in the studio and with the group. I began to lose some of my many reservations about doing field work. Things were unfolding nicely.

On May 28, 1996 I wrote in my journal:

Today was great. Lots going on, with excellent discussion going on amongst the women. They often included me, which I guess is a good sign. I think they might be getting used to seeing me around these days; they seem to have lots to say. I am also beginning to feel more comfortable. It all takes time I suppose. After the craft session I had a moment to speak with Margot, the craft facilitator. I wanted to thank her for being so helpful and accommodating with me while I had been in the studio these past months, it would have been impossible to be there without her support. I told her I was excited about what I was seeing and looked forward to going further with it. She told me it was a two-way street, that it was really useful and helpful to have me around doing this work, that it’s important to be reflective. She felt it was good for the women and the project to have that space. This was a relief to hear. I have from the beginning hoped that this could turn into a reciprocal process, but was unsure just how possible that would be at the start. It seems more promising now.

Things Were Going Way Too Smoothly . . .

It was interesting for me to go back to my journal and read my notes, for I had no idea at the time of the above entry that difficulties was imminent. I have chosen to write this moment into my final thesis because in many ways, this
difficulty and the group and my own response to it is one of the most important pieces of my research process. Afterwards, the more I spoke with other researchers, the more I began to feel that field work is littered with these types of stories. They just rarely seem to get written into the final product. Yet this juncture offers a glimmer into an important set of social dynamics existing both within the group, as well as between myself and those from my case study.

This tension emerged as the topic of interviews came into focus, and I began the transition from person-in-the-studio to Researcher. My original intention was to ask for four or five participants who would be willing to be interviewed individually. I would also interview the three project facilitators. Further into my field work, I decided to do a group interview instead. The decision was based on participation in the project's recent general meeting. It seemed that the women drew strength and voice from each other, indicating that a group-style interview might be most comfortable.

I spoke with the facilitators about the idea of doing a group interview where women would be invited to have lunch and talk about their experiences with the project. They agreed. In an effort to make it a process that would be useful not only to my research but also to their project, I met with each one of them individually to gather ideas about what sorts of questions would be helpful to ask, what types of information they felt would be useful to the group. On May 29 (the day after my journal entry noted above), I presented my idea to the group. I explained again the nature of my research, and put forward the idea of doing a focus group centered on sharing experiences about Designs. I explained that it would include a lunch, and hoped people would attend. I also explained that I was hoping to tape record our discussions, but that the tape could be turned off at any point if people requested this. I mentioned that I would post signs to remind
people of the date and time. A few women asked me details about the upcoming event after the meeting. I went home feeling like things were continuing to unfold smoothly. The next day I dropped off posters to the craft facilitator.

A few days later I received a phone message from Suzie, the project coordinator. She said she needed to speak with me regarding my upcoming focus group. Her tone was nervous, and I was alarmed. I went down to meet with her, and she explained that a few women had complained about my presence at Designs, and that she felt it was necessary to cancel my focus group until we could address their concerns. I was, to put it mildly, devastated. All my worst fears about research, about power dynamics, about the role of a researcher, had come true. Somewhere along the way I had become confident and somewhat complacent. This new twist was a rude awakening.

Reflections

The following is an extended excerpt from an e-mail conversation I had with Kathryn Church soon after the above incident occurred at Designs. I wrote a letter about the situation to Kathryn via e-mail. A few days later she answered in a format where my original post was kept intact, with her own responses inserted throughout the letter. In the following dialogue, my voice appears in lower case letters, Kathryn's is in capital letters. I have included parts of the conversation as a way of showing the research process that was unfolding, bumps and all. My interpretation of the event and her subsequent responses were a valuable means of beginning to work through some of the dynamics present in the process of doing this research.
Yikes. I spoke with Suzie yesterday who told me there were problems with me being at Designs. She told me that she had called you about it before she spoke to me, so you know the deal. I'd really appreciate your advice as to how I should handle this situation/what to do.

I felt completely, 100% traumatized after talking to Suzie, I think I'm still in a state of shock. I feel indescribably awful that after all my wanting to figure out how to do my research in a respectful way, I seem to have done just the opposite.

OKAY. SO HERE IS A PROFOUND CONTRADICTION. BETWEEN DESIRE, INTENT AND OUTCOME. IT IS FOR EXPLORATION.

I never had any specific, set questions or anything like that when I'd be in the studio. I saw it as pretty casual. I didn't even realize I was asking lots of questions.

I THINK THIS SENTENCE IS IMPORTANT "I DIDN'T EVEN REALIZE I WAS ASKING LOTS OF QUESTIONS." LET'S HEAR THAT REALLY LOUDLY AS A STATEMENT ABOUT HOW YOU AND I ARE, WHERE WE ARE IN THIS LOCATION IN CONTRAST TO THE WOMEN AT DESIGNS. WE ARE IN THE POSITION OF ASKERS OF QUESTIONS, TO THE EXTENT THAT IT BECOMES SOMETHING THAT WE DON'T EVEN REALIZE WE ARE DOING IT.

Sometimes I'd ask something and get a fifteen-minute response. I certainly had no idea that what I was saying would be perceived as intrusive but clearly I have. So I feel (beyond) awful. I guess I should have been more careful/aware/sensitive about my role as an outsider, a new person, and most of all, a capital R. researcher.

I've been trying to pick it apart to identify what my mistakes have been.

AGAIN, AS I SAID IN MY OPENING COMMENTS I DON'T THINK THAT YOU SHOULD NECESSARILY THINK OF THIS AS A MISTAKE. WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE IS THAT YOUR WORLD AND THEIRS HAVE COME INTO CONTACT AND THERE HAS BEEN A REACTION. IT COULD HAVE HAPPENED (PERHAPS ESSENTIAL THAT IT HAPPEN) ANYWHERE, FROM ANY BEHAVIOR (RIGHT OR WRONG ACCORDING TO THE TEXTBOOKS). YOU ARE BASICALLY A SENSITIVE, AWARE PERSON. IT ISN'T THAT YOU HAVE BEEN CLUMSY. IT IS THAT YOU (FOR ALL YOUR OWN SOURCES OF DIFFERENCE) INHABIT A DIFFERENT WORLD FROM THESE WOMEN. AND HERE IT IS SHOWING ITSELF. YES, IT IS ABOUT BEING IN THERE AS THE CAPITAL R RESEARCHER.

The conversations at Designs haven't touched on any in-depth issues (or that was my perception, but I must be wrong) the way they do in my job, because
that's not my role at all. Yet I think I forget that a question is a question and a
conversation a conversation until you’re a “researcher,”

DON'T LOSE THIS POINT. A QUESTION IS A QUESTION UNTIL YOU ARE A
RESEARCHER (IN CONTRAST WITH HOWEVER YOUR ROLE IS
DESCRIBED AT WORK). THEN SOMETHING ELSE IS HAPPENING....

and then I guess it's “research,” or seen to be, with all the understandable, lousy
historical connotations that it brings, and that women from Designs have
every reason to be wary of. I can’t believe I've been perpetuating that process (or
rather I’d better believe it, but it's a rude shock). One of the things I had talked to
Suzie about before I started was that I just wanted to hang out in the studio, talk
to women casually, etc. so that hopefully later I could do some interviews. I had
said that anything that came up in the studio that was said/that I heard would be
confidential, that the only stuff directly from women that I would use would be
interview transcripts that they had checked. Otherwise it would be more general
project issues. I think a problem has probably been around lack of clarity
around me being there, purpose, etc. I should have gone with my gut on
this one I guess but I didn’t realize that 'til now.

I DON’T SEE ANYTHING WRONG WITH THE APPROACH YOU TOOK
INITIALLY AT LEAST IF WE THINK ABOUT IT BY THE BOOK. HOWEVER, IT
HASN'T WORKED IN THIS SITUATION. (SO WE DISCARD IT AND TRY
SOMETHING ELSE.) . . .

PERHAPS WHAT WE SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF IN THIS
SITUATION WAS SOME PRODUCT (SINCE THIS IS CED) THAT YOU
WERE PRODUCING AND INTRODUCED THAT UP FRONT. LIKE WRITING
A DOCUMENT ABOUT DESIGNS. EVEN WHILE I AM WRITING THIS I FEEL
THAT YOU WOULD HAVE STILL ARRIVED AT THE PLACE YOU ARE AT
NOW. BECAUSE THESE WOMEN HAD TO PUSH BACK AGAINST THIS - IF
THERE IS ANYTHING GENUINE HAPPENING THERE AT ALL, THEY HAD
TO PUSH BACK, TO ASK WHERE THEIR PLACE IS IN IT, TO ASK HOW
MUCH CONTROL THEY HAVE OVER IT, TO TEST THE BOUNDARIES,
WHETHER THEIR COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES APPLY, HOLD IN THIS
SITUATION AS THEY PERHAPS FEEL THAT THEY ARE DOING IN OTHER
ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT.

I also wonder if it would have been better for me to have not said much of
anything while I was in the studio. My fear with that is that in not interacting I’d
be seen as just "observing," perpetuating the feeling of being studied.

I AGREE THAT THIS IS A REASONABLE FEAR. I AM ALWAYS TROUBLED
BY THE FACT THAT I HAVE SO LITTLE TO SAY TO THE PEOPLE I AM
"STUDYING." IT IS A MARK OF OUR SEPARATION, OUR DIFFERENCES. IN
THE END I THINK I COME DOWN ON THE TALKING SIDE. I AM THINKING
HERE ABOUT PSYCHOANALYSIS, WHERE THE ANALYST IS REQUIRED TO BE SILENT IN THE FACE OF THE SPEECH FROM HIS/HER CLIENT. THAT IS TO ENSURE THAT THE CLIENT’S PROJECTIONS EMERGE AND ARE AMPLIFIED RATHER THAN THE ANALYST’S COMMENTS. YOU DON’T WANT TO REPLICATE THAT KIND OF MODEL HERE, WHERE YOUR SILENCE ELICITS THEIR FANTASIES ABOUT YOU (THEMSELVES). WE DON’T WANT TO REPLICATE A PSYCHOANALYTIC MODEL IN THIS SITUATION. YOU WANT TO BE AS CONCRETE AND KNOWABLE AS IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE. WHAT YOU ARE DISCOVERING IS THE LIMITS OF THAT, REGARDLESS OF YOUR CARE.

Maybe it had to come to this for me to say that, though, maybe if I’d done it differently it might have had an equally (but different) set of bumps. Ah, but would I feel this lousy about it?

GIVEN WHO YOU ARE YOU WOULD FEEL LOUSY ABOUT APPEARING TO CAUSE ANYONE DIFFICULTY. THIS IS HOW I AM TOO. BUT HERE IS AN OPENING INTO AN ASPECT OF THE GENDERED PIECE OF YOUR WORK. YOU AND I ARE BOTH AS FEMALE SUBJECTS EXTREMELY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH CAUSING TROUBLE. HOW DOES THIS COME INTO WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING AT HERE? IT ISN’T JUST THE WOMEN AT DESIGNS WHO ARE CONSIDERING IN TERMS OF GENDER RELATIONS. IT IS OURSELVES AS WELL.

So I’m not sure quite where to go next. What I agreed with Suzie was that I’d come in on Thursday and talk about all this to the Thursday group. Apologize obviously for discomfort I’ve created and try to clarify more what my research does and DOESN’T involve, what my intentions are and aren’t, why I’m doing it, why it seems important to me to try to document women’s CED given what’s going on in a bigger picture etc. Try and get a sense of what the concerns are and what I could do to address them (I’m not sure people will say these to my face, maybe I should leave after explaining and leave space for them to speak more freely?).

ASK THEM AND SEE. THIS IS A GOOD PLACE FOR YOUR TO START FROM 'I' - TO EXPRESS WHO YOU ARE IN THIS SITUATION, NOT JUST TALKING RATIONALLY ABOUT THE RESEARCH. I FIND THAT IT IS SO DIFFICULT TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT RESEARCH IN THESE SETTINGS. BECAUSE PEOPLE HAVE A CERTAIN ‘TEMPLATE’ ABOUT WHAT RESEARCH IS AND YOU HAVE TO EXPEND A LOT OF ENERGY DECONSTRUCTING THAT BEFORE YOU CAN THEN REPLACE IT WITH THE MODEL YOU ARE WORKING ON WHICH INTENDS TO (BUT IS OBVIOUSLY PROBLEMATIC AS WELL) BE MORE EMPowering. CONCENTRATE ON EXPRESSING YOUR FEELINGS AND NEGOTIATING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM WHICH MAKES SENSE TO THEM. . . . THE GIVING UP OF OUR FANTASIES
OF THIS PROCESS IS OFTEN WHAT HAPPENS WITH WORKING IN THIS SECTOR. MY IDEA OF WHAT THE DISSERTATION WOULD BE ABOUT AND HOW IT WOULD BE WRITTEN CHANGED COMPLETELY IN THE COURSE OF MY INVOLVEMENT. . .

I know I need to try to have this discussion in as open a manner as possible, leaving my ego at the door so to speak, as well as defensiveness.

TRY. BUT ALSO RECORD ALL OF THESE FEELINGS AS DATA.

. . . I guess it leads me to another concern(s): how do you do research with a group, try to establish some sort of rapport, want to be supportive, yet critical at the same time? What's the line? How do you find it?

I STRUGGLE WITH THIS ALL THE TIME, SOMETIMES SUCCESSFULLY AND OFTEN TIMES NOT. I THINK THAT YOU ARE BEING PRESENTED WITH WHERE THE LINE IS FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW.

How do you decide what sorts of issues make their way into your final writing and what things are best left as contemplations in your own head?

THIS IS A VERY ACTIVE ISSUE FOR ME. RIGHT NOW I TRY TO ALLOW MYSELF FULL REIN (REIGN) IN THE WRITING, WRITING WHICH IS VERY INFORMED BY THE CONCERNS OF THE SURVIVOR COMMUNITY. AT THAT I KNOW I AM OVERLY CAUTIOUS. THEN I MAKE CHANGES BASED ON HEARING THEIR VOICES, THEIR CRITIQUE IN MY HEAD. IT ALSO MAKES A DIFFERENCE WHAT AUDIENCE THE PIECE IS FOR.

This conversation about the situation provided me with feedback I was able to reflect on in the months following this incident. The results of some of that thinking have been woven into the rest of my thesis. There are many tangents not written in as well; analyzing the research process is ongoing in my mind. I think it will take on a different sort of clarity once I have completed the thesis and I am able to step away a little from the research context.

Shortly following this rupture with the project participants, I went to speak with the Thursday group to try to begin to work through this dynamic. On June 6, 1996, just prior to the meeting, I wrote the following entry in my journal:
This is so bizarre. I feel like I'm on my way to my execution date or something. It's 1:00 PM and I'm waiting to go in and talk with the Thursday women. Amidst my angst and sore tummy, I have to admit that there's this wee part of me that is finding this whole eruption quite interesting. It has all been valuable food for thought—for better or for worse. As I'm about to enter the studio for our discussion, it keeps running through my mind what an important role reversal this is in many ways. Generally, as a worker, and more broadly as someone who enjoys privilege in terms of education, support systems, economics, etc., I often hold more access to power than Design women. But here I am, going into a situation where they, as the project participants, have control over the next steps of this research. I actually feel intimidated in a sense, which is not a bad thing necessarily. It's important that boundaries are being challenged between what I'm doing, the whole institution of research. At this point, they hold the thread as to which direction my thesis takes, how it will happen. It strikes me that this scenario is positive (I wish my stomach agreed with my head), in that it seems to be a great example of how much ownership the women feel over their CED project. Something perhaps we worker-types all underestimated.

My meeting with the group was difficult but fruitful. I remember feeling utterly exhausted at the end of it, but interested by the outcome. Women's responses to me ranged from a couple of people being very vocal in their concerns, to people being neutral (or silent), to extremely forgiving. In terms of concerns, one woman told me that it was true that I had explained to her what I was doing, but that she had been busy doing her art and hadn't actually understood clearly. She said that once she fully realized I was a researcher, she was scared. Another woman echoed this, explaining that she hadn't understood either and felt misled. She told me that I had to understand that lots of women had been in hospital and interrogated by psychiatrists, it was hard not to lump me and what I was doing in with that. I thought that this kind of dynamic was something I was sensitive to before starting my research, but it took on a whole new meaning when reiterated by her. Knowing it in my head and having it put to me in a scenario where I was the "interrogator" in this case was a very different feeling than what my intellect had understood. I think finally my gut got it. This same woman said she was worried about having even good things
written about *Designs*, that attracting attention might also attract "the welfare police."

While not easy, the afternoon was an excellent discussion around research dynamics, with the project members setting the direction. At the end of the discussion we agreed that I would move on from the studio portion of my research to the interview stage. The project members decided that I could seek individual volunteers, those who felt comfortable could talk with me about their experience doing CED. Following my afternoon discussion with *Designs* members, I also was able to debrief with the two project staff, facilitated by the woman who had originally connected us at the start of my research process. This was a helpful meeting in terms of being able to talk through some of the dynamics that had emerged.

Prior to beginning my thesis, I had read a range of work on research methods and methodology. Nothing in the literature had fully prepared me for what I encountered. I am not sure it could have even if this problem was mentioned specifically. The whole episode forced me to consider what my expectations had been when embarking on my research, and what my fantasies had been in terms of how I envisioned my thesis.

A central question at the outset in terms of research design had revolved around what sort of research methodology to choose. In theory, I found myself drawn to a participatory research model. I liked its explicit goal of breaking down barriers between the researcher and the researched in terms of power and knowledge sharing within the research process (Hall, 1993), and its commitment to a larger project of social change (Tandon, 1983). Yet in practice, even before starting my project, I felt that using a straight participatory research model would be problematic, and that presenting it as such would be misleading. The study
represented my personal interests. It was not something sought out by the women who would end up being the research participants. It seemed presumptuous in these circumstances to expect that my research could have the types of liberatory outcomes described by Hall and Tandon. I told myself I would do a small scale study using a qualitative research methodology, drawing on authors like Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna (1989), and Margot Ely (1991) who stress the importance of a respectful process that acknowledges the researcher's own location within the research dynamic.

In Margot Ely's book, *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles* (1991), the author talks about "letting go and learning to trust the process" (p.32), and learning to "trust oneself as a flexible instrument" (p.32). These words took on a new meaning for me once I was embroiled in my research. While I agreed with her sentiment, it surprised me just how difficult it was to follow her advice. Upon reflection, I realize that I began this process at heart looking for a neat formula within which to fit my research, even though at an intellectual level I was acknowledging the messiness inherent in the work. I wanted a model: participatory, qualitative, whatever - something I could cling to. In reality, the research embodied different elements of these methods. In her article *Research as Praxis* (1986), Patti Lather looks at the notion of research as praxis, whereby one builds empirically grounded theory. She notes that

Building empirically grounded theory requires a reciprocal relationship between data and theory. Data must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of a priori theoretical frameworks, but which keep a particular framework from becoming the container into which the data must be poured (p.262).

My complications with *Designs* was a jolt away from the smooth formula I was unconsciously constructing. It deepened my understanding of the extent to which I was not seeing or feeling some of the dynamics occurring in the research
process. Kathryn Church explores the topic of the role and location of the researcher in her book, *Forbidden Narratives: Critical Autobiography as Social Science* (1995). In it she recounts her experiences doing doctoral research with a group of psychiatric survivors. She draws on theories from feminism and post structuralism, noting that they "sensitized me to the fact that from where I was situated in the various locations on my map, some people, issues and forces are visible while others are obscured" (p.35). That was exactly what was happening in my time at *Designs*. Some aspects of the project I took in, others I missed. On the other hand, no matter how aware or sensitive I or any other researcher may try to be, there will always be an element of chaos. We all carry multiple identities and locations. As a researcher, the key is to constantly try to be reflective of these dynamics, to see them as an essential component of the overall research one is doing.

**Weaving it Together Again (Interviews)**

Following my adventures in the craft studio at *Designs*, I moved on to the interview stage of my research process. With the help of the craft facilitator, I sought five women who would be willing to speak with me about their experiences doing CED. I offered to pay $20.00 per interview, based on my understanding of the importance of valuing the stories of marginalized women in a manner that would be practical to them. I fully expected five women to step forward who had not been part of the Thursday group--five women who had not been involved with me and would see this as a neutral process. To my surprise, all five of the volunteers were from the Thursday afternoon group, including the two who had been most vocal in their concerns over my presence. This brought me full circle back to my original reasoning when designing my
research. At that point, I had felt it would be necessary and respectful to spend some time becoming familiar with/to the group if I wanted to interview members. I reasoned that it would be much more difficult to find volunteers for interviews if I came in as a complete stranger. In the end, I am unsure, beyond the obvious financial incentive, why these five particular women agreed to be part of my interview process. I do know that the only women who agreed to participate were ones I had already met on numerous occasions through our Thursday afternoon sessions.

The five members I interviewed became members of Designs through different avenues. One woman was staying in a shelter and heard about Designs while there; another woman found out through a Drop-In Centre. One person was linked to another agency and heard about the project through a staff member there. The other two found out through word of mouth, either from a friend or through contact with another similar project. Three of the five members I interviewed had been with the group since the beginning of the project; the other two had come in the past six to eight months.

I met with the women one morning in the craft studio to do the interview. I gave them the choice of being interviewed as a group or individually. They chose to be interviewed as a group, although one woman arrived a little late into the process and another was late enough to need to be interviewed separately. The group interview lasted about three hours. Once they began to speak about their experiences, the stories came flooding out.

Anne Oakley (1981), in her article Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms, warns that feminists must be sensitive to how they carry out sets of interviews (p.30). She claims that traditional interview techniques are structured around a masculine model of sociology and society, and assume that
the interviews are a one-way process, see the interviewees as raw data, and do not value the social interaction that takes place during the interview process (p.30). She argues that part of doing feminist research involves conducting interviews in a manner that is based on respect and reciprocity; that is, the researcher should be prepared to engage in conversation (p.41). I tried to be conscious of this information as I conducted the interview, structuring the questions as discussions that I was also part of. To me they felt like a success. In the end, while feedback from the women regarding the interview was positive, it is impossible to say to what extent I felt it was a success based on my own location, and to what extent the women involved actually felt comfortable.

I also interviewed the three staff people. They offered different insights than the project members into the workings of CED and Designs. I asked them open-ended questions that would help me to better understand the project and its relationship to external forces. The three staff had quite different roles. One was a full-time coordinator, the common thread between the members and outside actors such as the steering committee and founders. The second worked part time and is almost entirely a craft facilitator. She works in the studio directly with the members. The third also worked part time; she was a marketer/facilitator. Her role was to do some craft workshops with the women, but mainly to assist in the marketing aspects of the initiative. I interviewed the three of them separately, asking open-ended questions to draw out their experiences with the project.

In terms of the interview process, it is interesting to note that while clearly committed and enthusiastic about the project, the facilitators offered a much more critical view of CED in general than members. For the myriad of excellent things they acknowledged about CED, they also noted the bumps that came along
with it. I would speculate that the members felt it was important to highlight to me the best parts of their experience with CED. After all, this is a project in which they are deeply invested, and I would be writing down what they said. The workers are also deeply invested in the project. Yet in their roles as workers and mine as a researcher and a community worker, there were moments where our locations converged. In this particular context, it might make it safer for them to be more critical of the project than the members.

It was clear that from the participants' interview, Meredith's voice came through most directly. Among the facilitators, Suzie's was particularly strong. I struggled with how to deal with this imbalance. In the end I have relied heavily on their insights in my actual text.

Following the interviews, I provided each person with a written transcript of our conversation. I asked them to read through it and let me know if there were things that had been misunderstood or that they wished deleted. Three of the five participants responded to this, one to say it was fine and two to clarify or add to their answers. I found it interesting that it was in this consultation stage over transcripts that some of my best (albeit off the record) conversations with two of the women occurred. It makes me believe that a critical factor in doing research with marginalized groups is having lots of time to build relationships.

Beyond my interviews with Designs members and facilitators, I also had two informal interviews with government employees. Other methods of data collection involved analyzing documentation from Designs' early days, and literature surrounding CED and economic restructuring.
C. Dealing with the Data

Once I actually had my data, interpreting them posed a new set of challenges. Two methodological issues arose for me in terms of analyzing the information. One revolved around a central concept within my research project: the idea of experience. I am interested in examining women's lived experience doing CED. The abstract notion of experience is drawn out and problematized in some of the literature related to feminist research and theory. I am including here the perspectives of three authors on the subject.

In her book, *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987), Dorothy Smith offers a feminist critique of traditional sociological research methods. She then offers an alternative framework that takes women's everyday experiences into account while analyzing them within a larger framework, one that she terms the "relations of ruling" (p.3). She defines the relations of ruling as "a concept that grasps power, organization, direction, and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by the discourses of power" (p.3). She argues that any analysis of experience must take place with these relations of ruling in mind.

The everyday world is that world we experience directly. It is the world in which we are located physically and socially. Our experience arises in it as conditions, occasions, objects, possibilities, relevances, presences, and so on, organized in and by the practices and methods through which we supply and discover organization. ... Locating the sociological problematic in the everyday world does not mean confining the inquiry to the everyday world. Indeed, as we shall see, it is essential that the everyday world be seen as organized by social relations not observable within it. Thus, an inquiry confining itself to the everyday world of direct experience is not adequate to explicate its social organization (p.89).

A distinction must be made between the everyday world as problematic and as phenomenon. To aim at the everyday world as an object of study is to constitute it as a self-contained universe of inquiry. The effect of locating the knower in this way is to divorce the everyday world of experience from the larger social and economic relations that organize its distinctive character (p.90).
Dorothy Smith argues that there is a direct interplay between the relations of ruling and everyday experience. "A mode of ruling has been created that transcends local particularities but at the same time exists only in them" (p.108). Smith's analysis of experience helped me to consider the stories from Designs' women not only as talk, but as part of a larger context. This is explored in detail in chapter five.

Joan Scott (1992) deconstructs the notion of experience in her article *Experience*. She looks at the perspective of historians who draw on people's experience as a basis for their work, and points to the need to examine the concept of experience in terms of its many complexities.

It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces (p. 25-26).

It is clear that the women from Designs do not merely "have" experience. Their experience is a dynamic process which influences who they are and how they see themselves in the world, and vice versa. It is their experience and what it tells us about Community Economic Development that I try to explain in this thesis.

Chris Weedon also problematizes the concept of experience in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1987). She argues that while the feminist focus on women's experience which brings together the personal and political is crucial, it needs to be drawn out more. It is not enough to assume "that women's experience, unmediated by further theory, is the source of true knowledge and the basis for feminist politics "(p.8). There is a need for a theory that is "able to address women's experience by showing where it comes from and
how it relates to material social practices and the power relations that structure them" (p.8). She feels that post-structuralist theories of language, subjectivity, discourse and power may be useful in helping to understand experience and its relation to social power (p. vii). In this thesis I have situated the experiences of women from Designs within a larger framework of social relations. My intent is to make clear that their experiences are part of and mediated by a range of other social factors.

The second methodological challenge I encountered in analyzing my data revolved around how to present the data from my interviews and in what form to write the information. I was conscious of the fact that as I drew on clips from our conversations, I was filtering, shaping, translating the stories to fit my academic form. Ruth Behar discusses this issue in her work, Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story (1993). As a U.S. anthropologist of Cuban origin, she recounts the life history of a Mexican woman. She examines the complexities inherent in translating, not merely linguistically, Esperanza's story into a form that would be acceptable to the author's academic audience. She uses the analogy of crossing borders to represent the process of translating one person's words to another context. This is what I feel I am doing with the words of Designs women. I am cautiously trying to cross borders between their lived experience as women on the margins doing CED, to the academic community who theorizes about CED and its related phenomena. It feels like a bumpy ride.

Ideally I would like to have been able to present my interviews as a story or as a number of stories, but I simply do not have enough data to draw on to utilize this format. The reflections I had from the women and the facilitators were based on single interviews; they were not enough to develop actual stories.
I was left with the unsatisfying task of sifting through my pages of transcripts, identifying themes, and illustrating them with quotes from the interviews. This fragmentation of our conversations will inevitably shift the original meaning, as will the filter of my own analytical lens. While I can be aware and try to be sensitive to the dynamics between myself and the women I interview, as Behar notes, "we cross borders, we don't erase them; we take our borders with us" (p.320). At the same time, I feel that in some respects my own experience as a woman of color living in a predominantly white setting can add a particular reference point that at least sensitizes me to the notion of location (while not being able to avoid its implications). Behar echoes this, explaining that

I will take my place with other "halfie" ethnographers, who know from experience what it is like to be placed in situations of being "other," of being the represented rather than the representor, and who therefore are unable "to comfortably assume the self of anthropology. . .the self is split, caught at the intersection of systems of difference. Under these circumstances, you become an ethnographer but refuse to speak from a position of unsituated authority. . . (p.339).

In my thesis, I am left feeling that no matter how carefully I strive for a respectful research process, I could still potentially leave research participants feeling misinterpreted and misrepresented by my final product. I believe this is a question of research form and academic structure, a signal of the distance between the world of Designs and the world of academia. It is also because, as Joan Scott and Dorothy Smith note, there is no lone truth about experience. By necessity, the stories I tell are mediated by my own set of experiences both with Designs and the rest of my environment, and the interpretive lens I apply to my accounts.
D. Summary

I entered the group with some trepidation (fear actually--was I really going to try and do this type of research?!). But I was excited as well, it felt like an opening, a way to try to construct a more respectful process than is often the case in the academic world. It felt like a way to draw on the importance of women's everyday experience in CED and make some connections to a larger economic and social picture. Once I collected my data, I chose to focus on the topics highlighted in the following two chapters because they were themes I felt were rarely mentioned in much of the literature I was coming across about CED.

A question running through my mind after reading some of the available CED literature was: why is the majority of work written about CED so uncritical, and so often devoid of people's experiences and stories? Now I realize more fully how complicated that question is. I realize that as you start to have contact with a group you begin to feel like you do not want to be critical. You see what they are striving for, and you want to write something that supports this struggle. As an academic in a place of privilege, you perhaps begin to feel guilty--"who am I to write negative things about this process when I am not invested in the same way?" There are always so many questions of what to include and not to include, what stories to tell. Nonetheless, I have tried to document the experiences of women from one group doing CED, and to think about what this means in a bigger picture. This thesis is intended for the academic community. Thus I have written the story in an academic format. This was a struggle. I kept wondering about the distance between my words and the community the words were explicating. Finally, I decided that it was too difficult to write for multiple audiences. I have spoken with the group about using my data to also write about them in other, less academic forms that might be of more direct use to their own.
project. It is my hope that in this sense, there will be an element of reciprocity to my research process, where I am able to return something to the community of women who have shared with me their experiences of CED.
CHAPTER 3

DESIGNS: WOMEN DOING CED

A. Overview

During my time with Designs I was able to document the day-to-day experiences of a group of women engaged in community economic development. The project is organized on the principle of providing economic literacy to women who have been marginalized from the mainstream economy. The project revolves around the production and sale of crafts. Economic activities are the public mandate for the project and the general reason behind the group's external funding. In questioning women active with Designs many identify economic literacy as part of their experience with CED. But the construction of community and the opportunity to learn about themselves, to learn about others, and to learn tangible skills beyond the economic realms are listed as the things they most value about their participation in CED. This is not to say that the traditional economic aspects of CED are unimportant to the women involved, but it is not necessarily their sole or even primary motivation for participation. I argue that within CED, economic development acts as a catalyst for the building of non-economic skills and for the construction of community amongst marginalized women. CED in this sense serves as a means of redefining concepts related to the mainstream economy, concepts such as productivity and value.
B. Background Context: Funding

*Designs* emerged mid-way through the Ontario New Democratic Party's (NDP) term in office. During the former provincial NDP administration, there was a fair amount of support for CED, including new funding initiatives. In a 1994 government report titled *CED Strategic Review*, the authors noted:

The Government has sought to provide increased resources to initiatives and ideas which were already present in communities and social organizations. What was distinct about the Government's overall project was that it related these themes to broader economic policy, to the restructuring of industry and the supply side more generally, to regional and urban economic policy, and to provincial strategies on the environment. It sought to connect the micro to the macro, the marginal to the mainstream (p.7).

One of the broader economic policy goals of the government was social equity. CED had a role to play in achieving this goal for so-called equity groups, which the province defined as "low income households, youth, women and visible minorities" (p.2). The vision was as follows:

The provision of employment opportunities for equity groups was in part advanced through legislation on the hiring practices of large employers. This was complemented by the promotion of new enterprises by equity groups, by providing access to training, finance, economic information, and low cost work space. This new enterprise strategy was conceived in terms of CED, with communities of interest being given access to public resources in order to pursue their own strategies of self reliance (p.6).

Whether it was successful or not at achieving its goals, at a policy level the former government explicitly wrote in *CED*, recognizing a need for ongoing support, as a part of larger economic strategy promoting greater economic development strategy.

Support for CED during the past government administration came in a number of forms through various ministries. A few major programs that had CED components included New Ventures, Green Communities, Jobs Ontario
Community Action (JOCA), and Job Link. New Ventures was run by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, and involved the backing of bank loans by the government. Green Communities included, among other aspects, support for CED initiatives with an environmental focus. Unfortunately, neither of these programs were particularly relevant to the direct needs of marginalized women, given the programs' very specific focuses. For example, New Ventures was intended to back small business initiatives for people unable to normally obtain credit from a bank. But basic factors such as a permanent address were necessary, therefore it required that the applicant have a certain amount of stability in their lives, not necessarily the reality for many women living in long-term poverty. Green Communities was geared toward CED with an environmental focus, an important component in CED work but again not necessarily accessible to homeless or underhoused women. This wide range of programs is not inconsistent with the contention over the definitions of community and of CED. Clearly, different CED approaches will be appropriate for different types of communities. One implication of this is that policy support for CED does not necessarily mean developing structures that are appropriate for marginalized women.

Jobs Ontario Community Action (JOCA) was a $300 million program which ran over three years, and included the establishment of two local financing tools, Community Loan Funds (CLFs) and the Community Investment Share Corporations (CISCs) the funding of community infrastructure, and was intended to help communities develop strategic plans (CED Strategic Review, p.10). Of the $300 million allocated, approximately $40 million was for business development and small enterprises. Women had better luck accessing JOCA
funds than programs like New Ventures; 21 women's projects were approved through JOCA during its first year.

The program that best fits the needs of CED projects for women who were living in long-term poverty was Job Link. Established in 1994 through the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Job Link's broad mandate was to "encourage self-reliance among welfare recipients" (CED Strategic Review, 1994, 11). One of the components of Job Link was their Innovations Fund, which supported CED initiatives for people facing serious barriers to employment. Indirectly, Designs' was funded through Job Link, as one project within an umbrella organization. Their mandate was to act as a community development corporation for urban Toronto CED projects involving communities that had been marginalized from the labour force for long periods of time.

My intent in outlining the former government's policies around CED is not to paint a glowing portrait; no doubt further research into the layers of these various funding programs would reveal numerous flaws. At the same time, it is important to demonstrate the context in which Designs began: a time period that involved explicit support at the state level for projects of this nature. The current government has taken a dramatic shift away from this direction, a theme I will discuss further in chapter four.

C. Organizational Structure of Designs

Designs was created by the a network of women involved with CED in downtown Toronto. The Network came together in 1993 with the objective of supporting and linking women interested in CED. Network members were women who were involved in anti-poverty activities throughout Toronto. The Network was intended as a site for skill sharing and support amongst women
engaged in economic activities. Members identified two primary areas of concern: (1) women facing significant barriers to employment, and (2) systemic barriers which inhibit many women from attaining economic independence (Church and Creal, 1995, 43). In 1994 the Network received a $10,000 from the City of Toronto’s Homeless Initiative Fund to support their work.

The Network held a well attended workshop on how to start a business on Family Benefit Allowance; after that the grant money lay dormant for a few months. Members then tried to do some workshops around business ideas at various drop-in centres and shelters across the city, but they quickly learned that this was not the best approach. Given the dire economic situations of the women the Network was targeting, it was important to design a CED strategy that would allow women at least the hope of quick monetary return for their involvement. After speaking with drop-in and shelter agency staff from different organizations, the group decided to hire facilitators to run craft workshops for the women. The objective was that women would learn skills necessary for the production and marketing of crafts. Ideally, the workshops would support homeless women and women living in long-term poverty to earn needed dollars. These workshops were situated in drop-in centers and shelters throughout the city, places where the facilitators were likely to come into contact with women who were homeless or underhoused. Response was amazing. Women who were using drop-ins and shelters heard about the groups and began attending. The groups averaged at least 15 women each, indicating a very high level of interest by extremely marginalized communities. Attendance was regular, also a sign of high interest. In early 1995 the various CED craft groups merged and the project was renamed Designs. This new, amalgamated group obtained studio space and sponsorship from a Toronto-based community
development corporation whose mandate was to support CED for people experiencing long-term unemployment.

One of the craft facilitators was hired as a full time co-ordinator. In addition, part-time facilitators were hired intermittently throughout the project. At the beginning of this thesis project there were two part-time facilitators; there is now only one. Designs has a steering committee made up of one project member as well as a number of community workers from Toronto. The project is governed by a Board of Directors, the same one as its corporate sponsor.

In its life span of barely two years, Designs has grown and transformed at an astounding pace. The group's membership has grown from zero to 30 core members. An average of five women a week are turned down due to lack of available space in the project. Members are all women from downtown Toronto who are either homeless or underhoused. Many have also been through the mental health system and identify themselves as psychiatric survivors. All the women involved have been marginalized from the mainstream economy for various reasons, all have been living in long-term poverty and face barriers to formal, permanent employment. The changing economy has only added to these obstacles.

Designs is located in an old building in downtown Toronto. The project has one small office and a craft studio. The craft studio is arranged with a number of tables and chairs, shelves cupboards and supplies. The women use the craft studio on a regular basis. They each have defined days they can attend to work on their art and craft products. The amount of time they can attend the studio is limited by the capacity of the organization. The studio is a vibrant and busy place, with women coming in and out, trying new projects and talking with one another. Women decide what they want to make; products include
jewelry, ceramics, paper maché sculptures, and candles. A craft facilitator is in
the studio during the daily sessions to support the work the women are doing.
Members of Designs either buy their own materials, or purchase them from the
project at cost.

A regular part of Designs is project-related learning. Women identify
projects they wish to undertake (e.g. candle making, beading) and through
consultation with the facilitators, workshops are arranged. Generally
workshops take place once a month. The facilitators offer technical advice and
assistance when needed. Workshops are also conducted around the more
business oriented aspects of the project, for example sales, marketing, and the
pricing of products. Starting in March, 1996 these business workshops were
organized by a part-time marketing facilitator whose job was to assist women in
the marketing of their arts and crafts products. Unfortunately, due to funding
constraints the organization could not renew her contract after August 1996.
However, marketing aspects of the project continue to be arranged, organized by
the group members and the remaining facilitators.

D. Designs: CED as Lived Experience

Through their collective activities, the women are involved in defining
CED (in practice) as well as experiencing it. In speaking with women from
Designs, their interpretation of community economic development and its
impact on their life emerged. I have isolated three aspects of community
economic development: the process of community building, the internal
contradictions of the economic goals, and the types of personal development the
women undertake.
I have selected parts of our conversations that appear to be consistent with these themes. That has necessitated selecting and choosing and a certain reordering of the pieces. To compensate for that, I have tried to use longer quotes so that the connections the women made at least to some extent come through in their own words.

What's in the ECONOMIC aspect of CED?

At Designs, women are involved in the process of making arts and crafts with the intention of selling them at craft sales, consignment stores and other suitable venues. The economic aspects of the project have provided women with some of their best and worst experiences doing CED. An analysis that focuses on the economic portion of Designs points to some of the challenges faced in carrying out economic activity.

On the one hand, the project is about teaching women economic literacy. Economic literacy has the explicit goal of reinserting women into the marketplace and facilitating that reinsertion through the transmission of narrowly defined economic knowledge, such as marketing skills, business plans, and product development. The women involved with Designs have their own perspective on both what it takes to achieve economic literacy and what is trying to be achieved through CED. The craft sales, where women take their work and try to sell it, epitomize the economic aspect of CED, and the tensions inherent in it. On the one hand, skills are applied; on the other hand, many of the undermining aspects of marketplace participation come to the surface.
Economic Literacy

An important organizing point for the project revolves around the notion of economic literacy. *Designs* defines economic literacy in the following manner in their information brochure:

SUPPORT ECONOMIC LITERACY
What exactly does this mean, you ask? Well, with regard to *Designs* and the work that we do, it means that we gain access to concrete economic activity through the sales/marketing of our hand-crafted products. The effect created by earning real dollars means that while we regain our dignity and self-esteem, our living conditions are improved. Through our involvement with *Designs*, we've gained skills such as developing business plans, identifying target markets, record-keeping, calculating profit margins and production/labour costs (*Designs* Brochure, August 1996)

In keeping with this definition, the project has been an important site for economic literacy as defined above. Economic literacy involves concrete skills designed to link women to the marketplace. It is a means of learning business skills in order to earn cash and improve basic living conditions. During the interviews, project members make reference to different manners in which they were involved in economic literacy activities.

Jeannie: What about skills in the economic piece of the project?
Jane: That's evolving.
Jeannie: Can you expand a bit?
Jane: Yeah, like a couple of things that came out of the workshop I did last week was to do some more workshops. I think that's gonna be doing some more business development type of workshops. The idea of developing a business. I'm not sure how far that will end up going into detail, like business plans or whatever.

Meredith: Yeah, that's developing for me too. I'm sitting on the Fundraising and Finance committee. Sitting in meetings and finding out about what we stand for so that we can go out there and do fundraising.

Jane: I'm on the business development committee.

Meredith: In a few months' time we're going to do full-fledged fundraising. The committee has Jennifer, Suzie, Lori. We're thinking of the theories that have to do with fundraising.

Jeannie: And the business development committee is separate?
Jane: Yeah, it's different. We're doing some stuff looking at marketing. We're looking at stuff to do for that, for *Designs* and individuals. Also that got us talking about doing some workshops and stuff on business development. Like sales, and next week one on marketing.
Through that, it's sort of coming out doing more development of individual's business's and Designs as a whole.

The women discuss their involvement in the Business Development Committee, which focuses on marketing, sales, and the general development of both Designs and women's own individual business initiatives. They also talk about the Fundraising and Finance Committee, which helps build the financial infrastructure of Designs.

The fact that the women see the economic aspect of the project as evolving suggests that time is a key factor when undertaking CED initiatives, especially with marginalized communities. Any small business takes time to take shape. Still, I would suggest that the task of creating a safe, supportive space conducive to learning and feeling grounded during the first part of the project has been a necessary precursor to arrive at a stage where some women are more actively involved in the component that involves connecting to the marketplace.

Jennifer, the project's marketing facilitator, was surprised at the high degree of interest some of the women expressed around the economic literacy portion of Designs:

I wasn't really expecting them to be too excited with something called business development, but I was actually quite surprised. We had quite a big turn out for the marketing workshop. We addressed issues, like there are a couple of people who are really afraid of selling and being a sales person. They feel they can't approach strangers or talk to somebody who comes up to the table, they're very shy. So we talked about those kinds of things and what kind of techniques you can use.

One challenge may be keeping the project flexible enough to accommodate new women who may not feel immediately comfortable taking on the economic aspects to a serious degree. While some women suggested the need for Designs to operate more as a business, they also were clear that they would not want that to happen at the expense of the supportive community atmosphere the project
has created. It appears that a fine line exists here between how much emphasis needs to be placed on the business components of the CED initiative.

The definition of economic literacy given by the project revolves around the goal of women gaining skills and access to the mainstream economy, a system many have been marginalized from for long periods of time. Suzie, the coordinator at Designs, explained economic literacy in the following manner:

... I think it's...defining for a community, or within a community, that they have access to economic activity, especially for a community that's been told that they'll never have access to economic activity.

Contradictions. . . (Craft Sales)

The tensions that are part of Designs' goal of economic literacy became evident when women spoke of the actual selling of their arts and crafts. Selling their products has provided women with some of their best and worst moments doing CED.

Women from Designs participate in a number of craft sales throughout the year. Generally, the organization will buy space at tables in shows for women to sell their work. Depending on the show, women may or may not have to pay a portion of the table fee. Over time, numerous questions tied to the sale of goods have emerged. These include how to deal with women feeling bad when their work does not sell, and the competition that can emerge amongst women once they are placed in a direct market setting as opposed to the comfort of the craft studio.

A best day. . .

Michelle: Well, for me, it would be a year ago, September, last September, when we had a crafts sale, and a lot of my stuff sold.

Jeannie: So it felt good to have lots of your stuff sell?
Michelle: Yeah. And I only paid, what, $2.50 for the table, and stuff sold. So I made my—I actually made a profit on that sale.

The biggest day for me, I feel was when we had one of our big sales, the Christmas sale. It was one of the first times that I was able to really sell any of the projects that I'd made. I made a fair amount of money that day, so that was good. It was good because people looked at the artwork itself and I got to hear the different comments being made. It was the first time I ever really sold anything. And that helped. That was a big day. (Lucy)

A worst day...

There were three very bad days for me. One was last year at Harbourfront, I didn't sell anything, and twice this year at Harbourfront, I didn't sell anything, so I decided to forget about Harbourfront. (Michelle)

More on Harbourfront...

Michelle: You gotta have at least a few people selling a lot of stuff, and most people selling even just one or two things before it's a profitable venue.
Jan: And like, people were going down there, right, and selling nothing.
Michelle: That was me.
Jan: I don't think you're the only one though, I think other people went there and sold nothing, maybe sold one thing for the whole day, it's not worth it.
Jeannie: Frustrating.
Naomi: Yeah, I sold zilch, or last time I went I sold one thing for the whole day.
Jan: It's not worth it to go down and sit there all day and sell only one thing.
Naomi: Yeah, it's sort of weird too, we get placed in bad spots and nobody's passing us by and it's all up and up expensive stuff.

The issues around the actual selling of products is an ongoing challenge for the women, and the project as a whole to reconcile. Some of the women are able to sell their products on a regular basis, some are rarely able to sell things, and most women fall somewhere in the middle. A challenge is that some women simply have more commercially viable products for sale than others, while some have products that are less time intensive and/or have a wider market possibility.
One of the challenges for this particular CED initiative is that while it holds tremendous appeal for the women, the arts and craft basis of the project is a difficult and volatile business option. This is due to the fact that crafters generally have a hard time running a viable business, since their work is time intensive and generally more expensive than mass produced items. The coordinator notes that perhaps CED is more economically possible with businesses that do not revolve around arts and crafts. Yet it is the making of arts and crafts that many of the women enjoy. This suggests a disjuncture between the value women from Designs place on their work and the market value assigned to their products.

When women do sell their products, the results are important—extra money for basic necessities, as well as a sense of pride and accomplishment. Some women noted that having people ask for a business card or comment on their work, even if it did not lead to a sale, felt good. But not being able to sell things is also often difficult in terms of its effect on women’s self-esteem. The above comments suggest that there is more than a loss of anticipated revenue when the members products do not sell. The women invest a great deal of time and energy into making their products, hoping people will acknowledge their efforts by choosing to buy their goods. Not selling products can be extremely disappointing.

Through the sale of arts and crafts, women are learning the skills laid out in the project brochure’s definition of economic literacy. Concurrently, they are also encountering first hand the difficulties of the marketplace. The difficulty of supporting women having a hard time selling their products has been noted since early on in the project (Designs Report, 1995).
A further challenge that revolves around the selling of goods is tied to the tension between the role of the individual and the role of the group. This was highlighted by one of the members during an interview, where she explained the difficulties that occurred between women at a sale one day around lack of table space on which to place their products. The debate centered on the question of whether space should be given to women on a first-come, first-serve basis. This woman noted that this would prevent women who experienced obstacles to arriving early, such as poor health or small children, from taking part in the sales. The issue was later resolved by the group in favor of not adopting this policy. Instead, they decided to have people attend certain sales on a rotational basis if there was limited table space. This would decrease the number of women at any one sale, allowing more room for members' products. Those whose turn it was to participate in a sale could arrive at the time that was best for them, providing they informed the group beforehand if they thought they would be late.

Another example of this tension came up over the question of whether or not women should be able to sell the same products. At this moment they do, but there has been no official discussion of the issue. Generally it has been manageable for women to make and sell the same products. In some cases they even help each other learn how to make a certain item. But it has created some tense moments as well. For example, one woman showed up at a sale and was very unhappy when another woman was selling the same product as she was, something she had not known prior to the sale.

Women's experience with the economic aspects of the project point to the delicate balance *Designs* strives to maintain at the moment: women's own individual need to try to produce and sell their products to obtain cash, versus
the operation of the group, the construction of a supportive environment where women share skills and support each other. On the one hand the women are redefining economic activity by placing great value on the process involved in making their products—the support, friendship, and skills they gain from each other. This will be highlighted in the following sections of this chapter. At the same time, the experiences of the women I interviewed demonstrate that they are still caught within the very real structures of the macro economy.

What's in the DEVELOPMENT aspect of CED?

The notion of learning emerged as a strong theme throughout my discussions with the women from Designs. I have discussed the development of economic literacy in the previous section. In this section I link the idea of learning other non-economic oriented skills to the development piece of CED. In this sense I refer to the development of the individual as well as of the group in a non-economic manner. Members talked about learning about themselves, learning about others, learning new skills, and also regaining old skills that they had not had a chance to use in many years. For some of the women, learning and gaining skills are the most important part of their experience with the project. For these women, development goes much further than (although it does include) merely gaining tangible skills. In the group interview, learning in a safe environment was also touched on, connecting back to the importance of a strong community feeling. Being able to learn by taking risks and try new things without fear of reprisal was highlighted.
Learning

The women I spoke with explained that Designs is an environment in which they could try new things and experiment.

I think people are really supportive of one another. Like right now I'm teaching a member beading. I think that's what happens here. Everyone kind of, if I want to learn something, I'll ask Margot and she'll help me, or like there's always someone here. Nobody knows exactly how to do something, but they're willing to put their finger in and suggest something. Like we experiment. Like the plaster... NOBODY knew what they were doing with the plaster, but we thought ok, we'll try it out... (laughter) Margot read the instructions, and... collective experiment! It's fun actually. So I guess how we go about exploring things as a group together, and we're not afraid of doing that. So that is a big gift in itself, to be able to do that. If you think about a lot of businesses, they stay the same, and they have their product and that's it. But for us, it's not like that. So that's the one thing I'd like to stay the same. The exploring. (Meredith)

Staff are on hand in the studio to help the women with different art and craft techniques. While they have a wide range of technical knowledge, they also are open to trying new things themselves. In this sense, a climate is created where learning feels like a mutual experience between staff and participants.

It was neat the other day too, when she (i.e. Margot) had this wood she wanted to get cut up. I had a jig-saw here, and she didn't know how to use it, and I said "oh you can use this it's easy" right, and then she's in there doing it. (Jane)

Through Designs, some women also felt they gained enough confidence to try new things outside the studio.

... the good thing though about Designs is that on my own, despite the obstacles, I've been able to go out there on my own and do things. Like I signed up for a workshop in clay at Harbourfront, and I don't think I would have been able to do that if it wasn't for this place. (Meredith)

Members felt that CED was a far more practical and effective means of gaining tangible skills than the government training programs that are offered.

The training programs out there aren't practical and aren't supportive. And to find out about them is impossible! It's a system of have nots and have, and the system will never change. It's not a system of teaching skills. (Meredith)
Also, education is a big one. They push education, yet they're cutting back on projects. How can people get the education if they're cutting back on projects? The government says people should work, but if they can't get the skills for the job, how are they going to get the job? (Lucy)

The women who form the membership of Designs have a diverse range of life experiences. This makes working as a group both challenging and rewarding. Women highlighted the fact that through Designs, they have learned valuable skills necessary for working in a group. These skills include patience, tolerance, and a respect for a variety of opinions.

I've learned to love and appreciate some of the people here, and I think that's a very, very important skill. I don't always agree with people's opinions, but I've learned that they have a right to an opinion, and even if my opinion is different, their opinion is just as valid to them as my opinion is to me. (Michelle)

Learning how to agree to disagree on things, but respectfully. (Jane)

I think the skill I learned is learning to accept diversity within a group. There are people who have different characteristics, which sometimes trigger things within me. So I have to think about this and accept people for who they are. . . It's like life. Life is a mixture of people, diversity. With that is a complexity of different thoughts, emotions, personalities. It's about learning all of that. (Meredith)

When asked about what was most important to her about her involvement with the project, one woman replied that learning about others and different ways of life was a real benefit to her participation in Designs. She felt that through this, she also learned more about herself.

. . . Through the different variety of people who come into Designs and these CED projects you learn how people live. It helps you to understand what's out there. I've also learned a little more about different cultures. As you meet people you learn about where their background and culture, what their different cultural things are. It really helps, because as you go along you know this is out there, but you don't really go into the background to know this is there. It's not until you work with different people and talking with different people and seeing how they do things. . . you know, that's neat. (Lucy)

Through participation in Designs, some women learn to say "no" and make time for themselves. This is no small feat, given societal pressures on
women to always accommodate, make time for others, and be caregivers constantly.

Its helped me to sometimes (not all the time) limit what I do. I'm the type of person who does too many things. Some days I don't know which way I'm going and miss appointments and stuff. Its helped me, the ways different people take things, to think to myself, "hey, you don't have to do everything. Others can do that too." I'm learning through Designs to say no. To say that time is filled up, my time at Designs is important, and if I set a day to be there, I'm going. You realize its important. (Lucy)

Women identified that some of their most frustrating days doing CED are also valuable learning experiences, in that they help them work through obstacles in productive ways.

I remember a day here, I'll never forget. I started to do latex. I didn't know anything about it, how to use it, what it is. I went out and bought it, and was working on it. I didn't feel like I had staff support, and I got really upset. I was working on it for about a day, the next I went in and yelled at Margot. I said, "look I need support around this, I don't know what I'm doing, help me." Now I'm learning a lot more about Margot and her style. It's her style to watch somebody go through their own learning, that they have their own control over their own work. She doesn't want to be meddling. I kind of took my frustrations out on her, but then I learned about how she is as a facilitator. Which is really good. She allowed me to think out my frustrations, she listened, she didn't ridicule me, she allowed me to vent out my frustrations. That's a really big thing, I don't know a lot of people who could take that. When I communicated to her, she realized my frustration. The next day she was there for me, step by step. Since then, it's been good for me. (Meredith)

Yeah, one of the difficult days was when I came in, and I wasn't feeling that well, I had a headache and was just feeling down. And nothing I was working on was turning out. I had to take it apart and do it again. That's very discouraging, when things go like that. You think "this should work, why isn't it." Then you think, maybe I can't do this at all. Maybe I should just throw it away and forget it. But you think, no, you can't do that. Still, it's a hard day when that happens, when nothing you do works. You end up so frustrated, with bigger headaches. Then you have to say, "time to put it away today, work on it another day." (Lucy)

The women also felt they each had a variety of tangible skills that they brought to the group and have been able to share them with other women in the project. Sometimes it was also an opportunity to try out old skills they had not had the opportunity to use for many years.
Yes. There have been things I've been able to show people how to do. I've done a lot of reading, and I know where to find things. Not everybody reads a lot or likes to do that, so I've showed people where articles are, or how to find them. (Lucy)

Jane: I gotta say, I think that probably the best day for me was on Tuesday when I did that workshop 'cause I was really nervous about it, and then it just went really good. I think people got a lot out of it. Am I wrong?

Naomi: No, it was good.
Jane: And I like doing that kind of thing, so, it's kind of exciting.
Jeannie: Was that a new thing to do, had you done that before?
Jane: Oh, I've done 5 or 6 hundred workshops, so... But I haven't done any in about a year or so, or two.

Overall, the issue of learning emerged strongly throughout my conversations with women from Designs. Clearly the development aspect of this women's CED initiative goes far beyond development of economic activity. Learning encompassed a range of areas, from tangible skills to abstract notions of self and identity. These learning experiences enable marginalized women to feel they have more control over their own lives, and more choices and possibilities of who and how they want to be in the world.

What's in the Community aspect of CED?

One of the clearest pictures to emerge through my conversations with Designs women about their experience doing CED revolved around the notion of community. In this section I approach community as a group of people with a shared social base (in this case the experience of being marginalized women), as discussed in chapter one. The members I interviewed described participation in the project as something that led to an increased feeling of social support, a place where they feel less isolated, a safe environment where they have a sense of
belonging. The craft studio offers physical space that becomes a site for the construction of community.

Women describe the craft studio as a space where they bring together their vibrancy and energy, exchanging stories, information and laughter.

Naomi: Yeah, we're also buzzing around and...interacting about the sales and about how to do it or about marketing and stuff like that, how to do it, how it went, and other things too, not just that, obviously, things throughout our day, and sort of things during life, and we support each other in different little ways, like Margot's gonna get me a bike...

Jane: Yeah, like if we know that there's this thing happening somewhere or whatever...

Naomi: A sale...

Jane: A sale, or other things too. We talk about politics sometimes, ... You know, that's one thing about this place, right ... That a lot of times you're joking around, and having fun. I think that's important.

Some of the women identified the project as having a profound impact on their lives in the sense that it provides them with a place where they feel stable and safe. For example, Meredith explained that Designs is a place where she feels able to decrease her sense of isolation and loneliness.

Before there was Designs, I spent a lot of time by myself, and the isolation... is debilitating. ... Having a place to come to, to work in a creative setting for me has impacted on my life 'cause it's given me an outlet for my creativity, and that's part of my own healing process. And also its cut down on the isolation, so it's helping me emotionally.

Jane talked about Designs as a place where she could go to and try new things. Through this she felt she was gaining confidence in herself.

I get out of the house. Just too, getting some more confidence in myself, sort of like finding out what I like to do and stuff like that. ... I don't have a phone, and like I'm really bad, 'cause if I get in a mood where I don't want to be around people, then I just get like that for days and then nobody sees me, but then I like coming here so... and the other thing is its sort of got my brain working, I mean I can say, "so I didn't like that, but what else can I do," and sort of thinking ahead instead of just sitting there and thinking "oh, there's nothing." And talking about ideas with other people too, and not having this big pressure of "you should do it", you should
do it, you should do it now, but people being supportive and letting you have your own time to get to doing something. But also pushing you a little bit, but not condemning you because you just didn't do it like... yesterday or something.

The word "healing" came up a number of times when women described their experiences at Designs. Michelle explained that besides being a way of making extra money, doing arts and crafts has been a healing process for her.

Well, it's provided me with, well, crafts is like a therapy for me. And it's also something to do, and it also gives me a little bit of extra money.

Lucy also spoke about the healing aspects that came along with her involvement in CED.

Its helped. Its brought some self healing because of people and who I talk to, I talk to lots of different people. Its brought some peace and settlement.

Meredith echoed the sentiment that Designs was a place she was able to pursue her own healing journey.

The most important part for me about Designs is it helped me a lot in my own healing. Its brought me out of my own isolation. Its helped me in a really difficult time in my life. That's the most important part for me, that I have an outlet for my creativity. Creativity is expressing what's going on inside me, so it's part of my own healing journey. Also having supportive people to be around. Having a space to go to, not being by myself so much, that's the most important part for me. I guess my feelings would be described by my art. I can't really describe it in words, it's through my art that you see how I feel about Designs.

Naomi explained that the community that was constructed within Designs spilled out beyond her attendance in the craft studio.

Well yeah, its had an impact to some extent. That thing I talked about giving some focus. . . . It's also stabilized some good sorts of relationships. Definitely. Yeah, it's really been neat. It's been a, well. . . .An overall, support or something. I mean, during the day I'll call up Margot and we'll talk about everything, from why I didn't make it over to the Island, and just ah, yeah it's been like a wash over, an overall thing. . .

Having the physical space the studio offered is a big support to some of the women. Meredith explained that the studio gives her a place to go. She also
talked about it as a source of practical support that is part of being involved in this CED initiative.

I have a lot more energy, a lot more energy. And, I'm a lot more optimistic, and... joy is coming back into my life. And I love just having just a place, a studio. There's a lot of practical support. There's a lot of agencies out there that just give you seminars, and you attend for six weeks, and there's this hierarchy that exists and they're talking down to you and you're supposed to figure it all out and ok, and you've got your self esteem in six weeks and you're supposed to go out there and be great. But it doesn't work like that. So here, it's like practical support day to day, there's actually a place to come to that we can come to and claim as our own space. It's really refreshing to know that we can come in here and just create, a place to go to... Not only that, but others are here and we can talk.

*Designs* provides TTC tickets for women to travel to the craft studio on their scheduled days. Snacks are also available while women work in the studio. These practical supports in terms of food and transportation recognize the reality of poverty in women's lives, and the necessity of providing support that make it accessible to women living on the margins.

Well, anyway. After having stressed a lot, even when that starts to go away you still have bits of it, and it's just not an overall good condition. So today, I had to get the heck here, and I don't think I had anything nutritional in the fridge. So you can do that when you come here. Eat. Cause if you're gonna start fainting or something, you can't work. So that's something I wouldn't want to change. Well there's lots of things I wouldn't want to change. Like the general support and stuff.

Some of the women talked about the sense of community as the most important thing about being in *Designs* for them. For example, Jane explained:

Well you could sit at home and do this stuff, like if you had a place at home to do it, but it's the fact that coming together, and seeing people and chatting, and getting ideas from people and stuff, and you know, that kind of thing, sort of being like, and people see what you're doing, and comment on it, and you know, like that whole kind of thing altogether.

Much of the CED work that has been publicized and supported has involved communities defined in a geographic sense (Nozick, 1994). There is often little acceptance or knowledge of communities formed out of common
interest or concern, i.e., social communities. This is true not just of general public knowledge, but amongst academics and practitioners involved in CED as well. This was highlighted at a recent international conference on CED attended by a researcher and practitioner of CED with psychiatric survivors. They found that they were the only ones present who had approached the community aspect from a social perspective, and found that many of the other conference participants found it difficult to comprehend their frame of reference (Church, 1997).

There is a definite need to continue to push for the inclusion of social communities within the debate around CED. It is through this entry point that many marginalized communities, for example homeless women, find space for themselves within CED. In urban North American societies, the ideal of being grounded in a particular community, in a geographic space, is simply not the reality. For women living in long-term poverty in urban settings, this fact is heightened. Many factors contribute to this instability. For example, the current affordable housing crisis raises the possibility that they will have precarious housing situations, making the requirement of connection to a geographic setting in order to take part in CED one more barrier. Social communities offer space for people to gather around issues and experience of importance in their lives, issues with which they define themselves. They could be psychiatric survivors, women facing long-term poverty, ethno-specific communities, or any number of groups.

There are similarities and differences between CED carried out by social and geographic communities, a topic too broad to delve into in this thesis. But certain overlaps can be noted. It seems that in a project like Designs, one that involves homeless women, what begins as a social community also takes on
geographic connotations. What I see with that particular project is that the social aspect is key; women connect there on issues of common concern. Yet at the same time, the physical space—the craft studio—becomes in a sense a geographic community for those involved. While many of the women may have frequent changes in their housing situation, *Designs* can become a sort of "home," a place of stability and belonging. It is a physical space they can go to talk, to see other people, to support each other, and to eat. In that way the actual work site takes on some of the characteristics of a mini-geographic community. This community can also spill out and overlap with the geographic community in which it is located. This became apparent with *Designs* when two of the members left the studio and went out into the surrounding neighborhood to talk to the local businesses situated there. They found support and response to their project overwhelmingly positive, raising the possibility of alliances between these two definitions of community—the geographic and the social. These potential partnerships could become very important in the future as the project seeks support from players other than government.

Gender also plays a critical defining role within the community constructed in *Designs*. When I asked about whether it was important that *Designs* was an all-women's project, Jane said it did not really matter to her, although she recognized the importance of having women-only spaces. Michelle felt it was very important, since "women are more marginalized than men, that they are threatened by men sometimes, and that it's important to have staff who are women." Meredith noted that it was of vital importance to her. Having a women-only project made it feel like a safe space for her, a space of emotional and physical safety.

There's no sexism there, and I know that sexism restricts us in all aspects of our life. . . . Women have been so oppressed generation after generation, so that there's not
enough feeling of self worth. There's a regaining of self worth there. If men were here the power and the voice, the attention would go to the men.

Overall, women strongly emphasized the feeling and importance of community that came from their involvement with this CED initiative. They felt that it was a site of social support, practical support, and a safe physical environment that gave them a place to go to. For some of them, the gender dynamic was an important factor in the feelings of safety and support. Designs acts as a social community made up of women living in long-term poverty. At the same time, the community that is constructed by the women is also a site of contestation, where complex social relations take place between community members as well as external actors. This community is not only a place of support; it is a site of struggle as the community interacts with wider structures. This will be discussed in chapter four.

E. Pulling it all together...

Kathryn Church and Liz Creal note in their report Working The Margins (1995) that "there is a fundamental problem with viewing community business as a strong economic strategy for re/turning marginalized people to work" (p.50), and that "... the most significant pattern is that of people on the social margins attempting to use CED as a means to redefine who they are in the world" (p.54). It was clear from the women I was in contact with that CED was of critical importance in helping women redefine their place in the world and begin to take greater control over their own lives.

Through their involvement with CED, women from Designs are also redefining the meaning of "economic activity." The women I interviewed link their experiences in CED to a wider picture, explaining that CED is a model that
helps stitch together the fractured relationship between marginalized people and the economy.

... I think what we have to understand about economics is that it has to be connected with a spiritual consciousness, and as well, a social consciousness. I don't believe in business equals profit. I think that business is about caring for the earth in a responsible way, caring for people, creating a purpose and value with people. And community economic development is striving for that. It strives for creating...I'm not sure if "families" is a word I want to use, but it's a supportive environment for business. It's a new model that's out there; it's an alternative way of business. It's not about money. And I don't think the earth can continue in that way, where the economy is only about money. 'Cause there are human souls and beings that are involved. (Meredith)

Well, I guess to me community economic development doesn't only measure its success in dollars and cents. It's success of the growth of the individuals, it's success of the quality of life of the individuals. That's where the success is and to make huge amounts of money is not necessarily the most profitable thing. (Jane)

Nobody addresses the class issues that exist in Canada and CED is something--thank god for it because all the other institutions aren't addressing the issue of class. They're just giving seminars and all of that. But it's not a practical support; it's not a practical model. That's what CED is about, it's about addressing the huge gaps that are out there. (Meredith)

These women's interpretation of CED implies an alternative way of participating in economic activity, one that takes into account the needs of people and the earth. Even though the making of crafts is a time intensive process, women in Designs are redefining the economic term "productivity" to encompass the non-monetary benefits they get from their work.

Women's comments about their work at Designs also suggests a new definition of the economic term "value." Value is generally understood in terms of the market value of a commodity. Suzie, the coordinator for Designs, points out the gendered nature of arts and crafts. She notes that women have been teaching each other different arts and craft techniques throughout history, and that through this process they valorize women's work to one another.
I often think it goes back to the very ancient view. Think of age old quilting bees. Women's work is valuable to other women. So as a group, you place more value on your work. I think that's the part women get out of it. When I see two strangers who see each other once or twice a week for two or three months, then all of the sudden they are sitting next to each other teaching each other how to bead, different techniques. That's the part they get out of it that's important to them. Learning different techniques, companionship. (Suzie)

As a result of being a part of Designs, some of the women learn to value their own skills and strengths. For example, one of the women spoke about the importance of having her work recognized through the sale of her products.

It has had an impact. It's enabled me to know I can do things, and feel that what I do has some value. It's enabled me to know that I do have certain skills that are of value to other people, as well as to myself. I can get out there now and sell stuff, and know that what I have is worth selling. That the skills that I can do are good, that people will buy my work. Before I was thinking, "oh, that's no good." Even if I did sell it. Now I don't have any of those negative feelings. I have more positive feelings around what I do. (Lucy)

The responses of the women around involvement in CED fit within the framework of feminist economist Marilyn Waring in her work If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics (1988). Her book gives an excellent outline of the relationship between women and the economic system, linking women's daily activities to international systems of accounting. Waring in particular examines the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), an international system of accounting from which countries calculate their Gross National Product (GNP). She questions how the UNSNA is structured, what it is based on and what is included and excluded in it. She argues, "... It is my confirmed belief that this system acts to sustain, in the ideology of patriarchy, the universal enslavement of women and Mother Earth in their productive and reproductive activities" (p. 44).

While the valorization of skills through the marketplace has clearly been positive for some participants, the danger lies in women feeling that their skills
and work are not valuable if they do not manage to obtain monetary return for their products.

Waring's questioning of key terms such as value, labor, economic activity, and productivity are the subject of debate amongst CED practitioners, participants, and funders. Who determines the "value" of the work that is being done, who decides what parts of the project are "productive," and what parts of the project actually constitutes "economic activity"? Through their daily practice of CED, women at Designs seem to call into question conventional wisdom around these topics.

The value of the members' work is far higher than the potential revenue generated. It is also valuable in terms of the non-monetary benefits they described as being part of the process of making their goods. In terms of "productivity," an item may take a great deal of time to produce, making the return in the amount of dollars low per hours. Yet the time spent in the studio making the item may have been productive for the women in many other ways, as illustrated by their feelings about the construction of community and hands-on learning. Redefining economic activity entails counting these non-monetary aspects as valuable and productive.

CED can be a vital addition to the lives of marginalized women. Participation in an initiative like Designs has a significant impact on numerous aspects of their lives. The Community, the Economic and the Development threads are all critical here; there is a dynamic relationship between these various aspects of CED. Different women value the three aspects to various degrees, depending on their individual needs. Yet as the welfare state continues to shift and funding sources become fewer, will there be an increasingly large pressure for projects such as this one to place greater emphasis on the economic
component of CED? As this occurs, will there be a number of women who feel unable to access the new structures of *Designs* and projects like it? With the disappearance of so many social services, less housing, and less hope of any integration into the formal economy for many women, what support will there be for these women who are falling through the cracks? These are very real challenges faced by women doing CED. The challenges are part of working within larger structures and systems. This topic and its relationship to women's day-to-day experience with CED will be taken up in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4

DESIGNS: OPERATING IN A MACRO ENVIRONMENT

A. Introduction

Capitalist developments fragment people's experiences (e.g., by separating politics and the economy from civil society), while homogenizing other processes at the same time (e.g., by creating and routinizing management systems which are administered in similar ways at different sites). We emphasize that these processes are enacted in social relations, which are embodied in ordinary everyday activities. (Ng, Walker and Muller, 1990, 315).

*Designs* presents an interesting paradox. On the one hand, it is a strategy for mending the fractured relationship between politics/the economy and civil society. As I showed in my last chapter, by weaving economic activity back into daily life and attempting to redefine concepts of labour, value, and productivity, *Designs* acts as a site of resistance against dominant economic trends and the economization of social relations. But at the same time, the project operates within larger social and economic structures. Accordingly, the world of *Designs*, and thus, women's experience with the project is mediated by the set of relations operating between the community and the state, "... activities of ruling do not take place merely in the formal state apparatus. They penetrate relations in community life" (Ng, Walker and Muller, 1990, 314). As both a site of resistance and domination, women's experiences within *Designs* becomes an example of being both "in and against the state" (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980). These social relations are present in the day-to-day activities of *Designs*, they are part of women's lived experience doing community economic development.
One analytical approach to thinking about the broad structures that influence the operation of Designs is to say they are part of the relation of ruling. Dorothy Smith defines the concept of a ruling apparatus as

That familiar complex of management, government administration, professions, and intelligentsia, as well as the textually mediated discourses that coordinate and interpenetrate it. Its special capacity is the organization of particular actual places, persons, and events into generalized and abstracted modes vested in categorial systems, rules, laws, and conceptual practices (Smith, 1987, 108).

The ruling apparatus penetrates the everyday activities of Designs. Ng, Walker and Muller point out that "the issue of the relation between broad social structures and the everyday level at which people live their lives is often characterized as the 'macro' and the 'micro' problems where the two levels of understanding do not meet or are deliberately kept separate. . . . Precisely how this interrelation of local and 'macro' operates needs to be addressed if there are to be advances in this problem area" (p.19).

In this chapter I explore examples of how the relations of ruling are embedded in the actual workings of Designs, and thus how they mediate women's experiences with the project. The intent is not to create a dichotomy between micro and macro spheres; I want to begin to demonstrate the fluidity that exists between these areas. I touch on three fields where this relationship plays out: funding and organizational structure including decision making, the use of language, and project identity.

B. Funding

A key issue with most CED projects, especially among extremely marginalized groups, revolves around gathering enough funds to start and maintain the work. In the past, CED initiatives have sought financial support
from foundations, businesses and government, but government has often been the major source of cash. This frustration with finding resources is articulated by Margot, one of the Designs’ facilitators:

... One thing that drives me crazy is that most small businesses figure between two to five years before you start to break even. You certainly need income support for at least two years. Designs has barely even been functioning for two years. We haven’t even established ourselves, so we’ve done miracles. I don’t know why people expect us to be up and running when they wouldn’t expect that from other businesses? Shouldn’t they be more generous?

Most CED initiatives are not self-sustaining within any short period of time, but then this is generally the case for small businesses of any kind.

CED initiatives that involve marginalized communities are less likely than traditional small businesses to become self-sustaining. This is due to the barriers CED projects must factor in. For example, in Designs many members are on social assistance and thus limited in the number of hours they are able to work without financial penalty, due to government earning restrictions. Also, the women have other stresses in their lives that do not always make it possible to commit to consistent participation in the CED initiative. For example, with women who are homeless or living in long-term poverty, precarious and often changing shelter arrangements can affect their ability to take part in CED. For participants who are psychiatric survivors, medication can limit the number of hours they feel able to work. These barriers are echoed in other CED projects with marginalized communities (Church and Creal, 1996). While CED offers numerous benefits for the women involved, a project like Designs operating in its present form requires a substantial amount of outside funding. The precarious nature of funding to CED projects like Designs itself creates a difficult climate of uncertainty:

You never know. You never if you have funding to keep your staff. You never know if you have money to keep your project. (Suzie)
In their book, *Community Organization and the Canadian State*, Ng, Walker and Muller argue that

As the character of corporate capitalism changes in relation to changing economic requirement, both in Canada and globally, the management and regulatory systems in the state also change. Increasing unemployment and social dissension make it necessary to develop new ways of containing and accommodating marginalized sectors of the population (p.314).

Up until a year ago, provincial government funding was key in supporting many Ontario CED initiatives. With the election of the Conservative government in June 1995, support from provincial government sources has become increasingly difficult to access.

It is difficult to ascertain whether state support on the part of the NDP government toward CED should be seen as a manner of containment and accommodation, or rather if it was the result of successful struggles waged on the part of marginalized communities to gain access to state support and resources. In either case, there has been a shift in the situation and possibility of substantial state support for CED related activities in the immediate future looks bleak.

A letter written to client groups from Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Al Leach exemplifies this new stance:

In the November, 1995 Economic Statement, the government announced that the Jobs Ontario Community Action (JOCA) program would be terminated. At the same time, the government reviewed the Community Financing programs, and assessed the status of projects announced prior to the freeze on JOCA in July, 1995.

As part of the Community Financing review, which is now complete, staff examined the Community Loan Fund (CLF) program created by the previous administration under the *Community Economic Development Act, 1993*. The new government is committed to local economic development, job creation and to promoting a positive business climate, but believes these goals will best be achieved without government provision of financial assistance to businesses*. Accordingly, the government has now decided as a policy matter to terminate the Community Loan Fund Corporation program (Al Leach in a Letter to Community Based Client Group, 1996, My emphasis).
One of the few exceptions to be found in terms of state funding to CED at the provincial level is in the Ministry of Health. It has established a Community Investment Fund (C.I.F.) through its Community Mental Health Program. Designs, under the umbrella of its new corporate sponsor, has actually received two years of partial support through the Community Investment Fund. The new corporate sponsor works specifically with psychiatric survivors, the sponsor's terms of reference are "to create economic opportunities for and with consumer survivors of mental health services" (see Designs Project Brochure, 1996). There is a strong link between homelessness and mental health, and many of the women who have always accessed Designs are psychiatric survivors. Given this frame of reference, Designs is able to fit within the mandate of the Community Investment Fund.

The fact that the Ministry of Health has opted to support CED initiatives among psychiatric survivors is a huge tribute to the successful work psychiatric survivor community businesses have demonstrated in recent years (See Church, 1996). In a climate where cost efficiency is everything, survivors have adopted the language of policy makers to successfully argue that investment in CED is a cost saving health measure. They show that the positive benefits experienced by psychiatric survivor participation in CED help to lessen hospital stays and the frequency of use of other support services (Trainor and Tremblay, 1992).

Women I interviewed from Designs connect their experiences with the project to state funding. They are fully aware of the need for outside support, and call on the government to provide this. They link this financial support for CED to their potential sense of well-being and self-worth derived from participation in CED.
I think that one part is that government funding should be increased to CED projects. CED helps people become more self-sufficient and feel more secure physically as well as mentally. (Lucy)

Jane, a Designs member, explains the benefits of funding CED in even more concrete terms:

... it is a proven fact that people who have what's sort of known as "a real job" not putting plastic spoons in a bag for 10 cents an hour, but it's that whole thing that it makes you feel better about yourself, it gives you a purpose, a reason to get up, that whole kind of thing, and it's a proven fact that for anybody who's had any kind of hospitalization or anything, that when people have jobs that are in a supportive environment and are a real job, they have less hospitalization, and therefore that costs the government less money. So it's well worth their money to invest it into community economic development, 'cause eventually that will end up being viable income for people. (Jane)

She contends that CED is actually cost effective in the case of psychiatric survivors, in that the benefits derived from involvement in CED projects decrease the need for expensive hospital stays. These views expressed by women involved with Designs show that contestation between community and the state in terms of making claims to resources (on the part of the community), and determinants of how and if these resources will be distributed (on the part of the state).

It is clearly a positive occurrence that there is enough support through the Ministry of Health to continue to fund psychiatric survivor-run CED projects in Ontario. This ensures the livelihood of Designs in some form for the next two years. Still, the actual mandate of the C.I.F. is unclear, as is how it will be implemented, and how inclusive or exclusive membership will become for low-income women who are not consumer survivors of mental health services. For other Ontario CED initiatives involving low income women that are not supported through the C.I.F., for example women's CED projects from ethno-specific communities, the chance for state funding at this particular time appears
They will need to struggle to garner support from businesses, foundations, and possibly create other sources if they are to try to carry out their projects.

C. Organizational Structure

*Designs* has 30 members (marginalized women who take part in the project) and one full-time facilitator. At the beginning of my research in the spring of 1996, the project also employed two part-time facilitators, this has been decreased to one part-time facilitator due to lack of funds. There is a high demand for membership on the part of other marginalized women. The coordinator notes that she must turn down an average of five women weekly due to lack of space. Until the fall of 1996, *Designs* was part of a larger umbrella structure called the 761 Community Development Corporation, an organization devoted to the promotion of community economic development amongst the long-term unemployed. It is referred to as *Designs*’ corporate sponsor. This sponsorship role has recently been taken over by another umbrella organization, the Ontario Council for Alternative Businesses. This organization exists to foster and support community businesses within the psychiatric-survivor community. *Designs* is governed by the Board of their corporate sponsor.

One of the successes that can be noted in examining CED projects involving marginalized communities in Toronto is their commitment to creating participatory, inclusive organizational structures (See Church, 1997). *Designs* is no exception to this ethic. At the same time, the funding situation at *Designs* places a number of organizational constraints on the project. These include limits on the number of staff available, pressures on organizational structure, and tensions around decision making. By examining these
constraints, one can see examples of how the relations of ruling penetrate the community of Designs and influence women's experience with the project.

In terms of staff, Designs' C.I.F. resources will not keep them hired at full capacity. There is enough money to finance only one full-time co-ordinator. The renewal of a municipal grant will help pay project expenses for the next year; it is unclear at the time of my writing of this thesis if there will be support for other staff people. Such a situation places a greater workload on the main project co-ordinator. Women will have less access to the support of a craft facilitator, decreasing their opportunities to share and learn new skills. The overall situation has led to a rethinking of the project's entire structure:

Realistically, it's not going to happen, nobody's going to totally fund a project like this anymore. So I don't want to turn it into a traditional business, but in order to generate revenues and in order to be self sustaining, we need to take on more traditional business practices than what we have now. (Suzie)

The possible implications that will result from these changes will be discussed within the discussion on project identity, further on in this chapter. Suffice to say, the experiences with CED described by women in the previous chapter were based on the project's current structure. If this changes due to funding constraints, so too might women's experience as participants in Designs.

A further aspect of organizational structure that is a site of contestation is the process of decision making. Some women expressed their experience with decision making within Designs as positive in nature.

First of all, we talk about an issue if it comes up. Or the staff comes to us and says this is a decision we have to make. What do you think? People are talked to, they don't make arbitrary decisions. Members are asked, in a group, and they give their input. Then it's taken to the steering committee, they're given all the facts, what the members said, good and bad. The steering committee makes the final decision, but based on what members say. I think that's good, I don't think decisions should be made arbitrarily. If people don't feel comfortable with what's done, they're not going to work around it. (Lucy)
Although she recognized the efforts made by staff around decision making, another woman was more frustrated with the topic:

...It's been decided to have general meetings to address issues and make decisions. Because when you have a group it's hard. It felt like there were 2-3 members who decided things. Members who were quiet just went along. That's a big deal for me, how decisions get made. For example, when we make decisions we're in a big group. Not everyone's comfortable in that. So maybe one way would be to split into small groups. ... There was a lot of tension building around a lot of things ... (Meredith)

Meredith notes how difficult it can be to make decisions, especially in a large group. She relates her experience with this to the challenges and oppression faced by marginalized women in society. In this sense, the larger social relations that Designs is embedded in find their way into the day-to-day workings of the organization:

I think staff do try to get the input from women, but I think because women come from many different backgrounds and experiences, they're not used to having people ask them what their opinion is, to having a voice. It's an aspect to explore more. ... Because I think women have been affected by oppression very differently. It makes you think for yourself, it's a survival mode. When I came into Designs, I felt like a lot of women were in that mode, a sort of "fend for myself" thing. I really felt that, and I think lots of decisions were made in that spirit. I feel like I've been able to challenge that. I think staff try to be supportive and helpful, they don't want to tell people what to do. So if one person is very vocal, they'll usually accept that opinion. I'd like to see them challenge themselves to really take a closer look at the ones that are quiet, to look at different issues, to find out what they're thinking. (Meredith)

One of the women at Designs linked her day-to-day experience with decision making directly to the immediate power structures of which Designs is part. Her example revolves around decisions that are sometimes made by the director of their project's corporate sponsor organization:

Well, it's supposed to be membership involvement, and membership decision, but sometimes the decision comes down from our corporate sponsor. ...(Michelle)
Another member took this reasoning around power relations a step further, noting the connection between funding structures and the types of decisions in which she could be involved:

Jane: Yeah, well that also has to do with funding and net requirements for funding from government and stuff. It’s one of these things that ideally it’s nice...this is my opinion, anyway...ideally it’s nice to have the members really have an intricate part in decision-making, but sometimes in reality, that doesn’t happen.

Jeannie: Any idea why?
Jane: Some of it has to do with the funding requirements, I think sometimes it has to do with that.

Suzie, the main project facilitator, summed up the constraints around decision making. She explains that through receiving external funding, a structure is created delineating "negotiables and non-negotiables" within group decision making. She notes that this can at times be problematic within the project, since not all members agree with or understand the distinction between what areas of decision making they can and cannot influence at Designs:

Suzie: ... What Laurie calls the "negotiables and non-negotiables." Ok, so the mandate of the project, the administration of the money, those kinds of things are really non-negotiable. The focus, the direction of the project is not negotiable. Although...members think it is. Or, thought that it was. It's not negotiable because we apply for funding saying that this project is about this and we are going to do this, and that's how you get money. Once you get money, you have to fulfill what you said you were going to do, because if you don't, your funding is taken away. That's the portion that some members get and some don't. It's been explained several times, but some members still don't get it, and think that they have decision making power in that way, and they don't. The only way they can contribute to the decision making power of that is by being on committees, having representation on Steering committee, Finance and Fundraising committee, Business Development committee, the Board of the corporate sponsor - in those ways.

Jeannie: So negotiables are the internal workings of the project, not so much the big picture.

Suzie: Exactly, it's the internal workings, in the implementation of the other stuff. Of the structure itself. But mostly, the implementation of the structure is my role. What else is negotiable? Let me think.
For example, you were witness to when we had excess money in the budget and I wanted to move it around. I consulted with the members to find out where they wanted me to move it to, without making some arbitrary decision. . . . The negotiables and non negotiables are the most difficult for the membership to understand why. For me too, when I'm a member of anything. The bottom line is that this is what this organization is about, if you want other stuff there are many organizations who do that. But we don't. That's probably the worst thing you can tell a member, but it's the truth, it's honest. You have to be honest.

The project is a complex site of social relations. The administration of funds and the process of defining organizational structure and decision making exemplify complex relationship between the community of Designs and the state. Roxana Ng discusses a similar scenario in her work, The Politics of Community Services: Immigrant Women, Class and the State, where she analyzed the workings of an employment agency for immigrant women:

From the experience of the employment agency, it becomes clear that the notion of the state as a set of apparatus, standing above and apart from community groups, is inadequate in understanding how the state works. In this study, we saw how the incorporation of and funding requirements penetrated the employment agency's internal organization so that some of its members became part of the administrative processes of the state. As already suggested, the board members were the internal representatives of the state who oversaw the welfare of the agency, while the coordinator took on the responsibility for administering and executing the tasks required for funding and other purposes. They were the ones who carried out the activities of ruling (Ng, 1996, 86).

Within Designs the facilitators who administer funds, along with the board members of the project's corporate sponsor who take responsibility for the final welfare of the project, are examples of those who carry out activities of ruling on behalf of the state. But it is not a simple, one-sided dynamic where communities are passive recipients, feeling the impact of state power. Women who are members and staff at Designs are also agents in this process, demanding and claiming space where possible. It is true that facilitators do carry out activities of ruling through administrative tasks. Yet they also try to create
structures and spaces that are participatory and inclusive, fostering a climate that is supportive to the women involved. They are definitely not merely objects being acted on by some larger set of structures. This is evident in Meredith's comments around decision making. While she is at times frustrated, she also feels it is necessary and possible to push for changes in how decisions are made within Designs. Such a climate enables women not only to carry out their tasks oriented towards economic activity, but also to learn about themselves and others, and to construct a sense of community. In this sense, women experience the project both as a site of ruling as well as a place of contestation and resistance to state and wider societal practices.

D. Project Identity

It was clear from my analysis of Designs that the project struggles over questions of identity. This pertains to their public image, as well as their internal identity as a project. The way language used by Designs to portray its public identity reflects another example of the complicated set of relations that exist between the community and the state. The language employed by the project is encoded in documents. "It is through documentary processes of various kinds that ruling can take place simultaneously at different sites, not simply in the formal state apparatuses, but also in local communities. . . " (Ng, Walker and Muller, 1990, 316). In the case of Designs, documentary processes include funding proposals, funding reports, and promotional materials.

As projects like Designs struggle to survive in these times, they are faced not only with difficult choices about project structure and content. They are also forced to make decisions about their public identity. They must strategize
around how to package themselves and how to market the group. Such decisions are tied to what type of language is acceptable within a wider social and political context at this given moment.

During any historical period, some discourses prevail over others and thereby have a greater influence in shaping our political reality at that time. Such discourses help us interpret our social relations and institutions, what we consider to be a social problem and its appropriate remedies, where the sphere of political negotiation begins and ends, and who we believe we are. (Corrigan and Sayer, 1995, 28).

During the short time I have been with Designs, I have seen their descriptive language begin to change in subtle manners, more "acceptable" in the current political and economic climate. A critical challenge for Designs lies in what I call negotiating restructuring discourse. In their project brochure they have switched from calling themselves Designs... A Women's Collective (1995) to Designs... A Women's Entrepreneurial Initiative (1996). There had been ongoing debate as to whether or not they were a collective in the first place given their hierarchical project structure. But it is interesting that in seeking a new title Designs chose to focus on the entrepreneurial aspect of its project. It is an indicator of how relations of ruling are being played out within Designs, encoded in documents such as publicity brochures. In this current climate of restructuring, the word entrepreneurial is much more politically and ideologically acceptable than the word collective, particularly to funders. In this framework, discourse is a means by which phenomena are both categorized and hierarchically ordered. Here, in Designs' process of public self description, it becomes clear that there are subtle shifts in searching for salience. They strive to fit into what is now considered a "high value" category, the formal economy. The use of this discourse can be both strategic and coercive.

The second subtle change in the project brochure occurred when Designs corporate sponsorship changed hands. Their first corporate sponsor was funded
as an organization targeted at people facing long-term poverty. As such, the 1995 brochure reads: "Designs was established one year ago as an innovative approach to address the issues of poverty and homelessness with women." Their new corporate sponsor is specifically oriented towards psychiatric survivor-run businesses. Designs' new, July 1996 project brochure reads: "Designs is a women's entrepreneurial initiative comprised of women facing long-term poverty, some of whom have lengthy histories with the mental health care system." Prior to receiving financial support from the Ministry of Health Designs did not need to make explicit reference to the mental health care system in its project literature. This new funding arrangement has altered that, suggesting that funding requirements influences the form in which a project like Designs promotes itself.

In her book, *In A Different Voice*, Carol Gilligan identifies language that reflects attributes typically thought of as female. This includes words connected to health, healing, and emotions (1988). This bias in language is embedded in the relations of power in our society. I would argue that these power relations play out in the language of restructuring. Words such as health, healing, and any sort of reference to social support, emotions or nurturing are now risky topics for the public image of a CED project like Designs. The cutting of social and health service programs across Ontario make their reticence to use these words hardly a surprise. These services affect women most directly both as users and employees within this sector. The implicit message conveyed to people involved with CED stresses the need to use descriptive words like business plans, target markets, and calculating profit margins, tangibles, measurable sorts of words that demonstrate the rational, cost effective nature of the project. It is this language that has been
adopted to some degree by *Designs*. It has not yet dramatically shifted the project's identity, but one wonders if it is only a matter of time.

All speech is performative in the sense that it does things to people. It redefines them in their own perceptions, in those of others and in restructuring the conceptual universes in which they are perceived (Pocock, 1984, 39).

On the one hand a women's CED project like *Designs* operates in a manner where they are redefining meanings of profit, of labour, of value, of production and productivity. Through their day-to-day experience they are creating a sort of counter-discourse in action. In this way their work fits with that of feminist economists like Marilyn Waring Isabella Bakker, who challenge the supposed scientific neutrality of economics, arguing that it in fact has a built in gender bias (Waring, 1988; Bakker, 1996). Yet they do this within wider structures that have little acceptance for these activities, and even less acceptance for the words that go with them. As one government employee said to me, "the word community is simply no longer acceptable or fashionable in our department" (Ministry of Municipal Affairs Employee, personal communications, 1996).

We have reached an interesting juncture when a group funded by the Ministry of Health, economic mandate or not, feels forced to make sure that the word "healing" is not part of their outward appearance. In practice, a careful balancing act is being played out between the economic and the community/development aspects of CED, but at the level of discourse, it is hard not to give the economic component major prominence. A profound challenge revolves around how much the project will change itself at the descriptive level, and how these changes in their description to the outside world will influence the inner workings of the project.
The language and structure *Designs* employs represents its overall identity as an institution. The formation and articulation of this identity is a current area of struggle amongst those involved with *Designs*. The tension revolves around how much to emphasize the social and health elements of the project and what it means to be *Designs*. The tension over the degree of emphasis on economic elements of *Designs* is closely tied to the very real concern regarding funding available to CED projects in this current economic climate. The above discussion illustrated the tension over public identity. Closely linked to this external identity is the project's search for its internal identity. This struggle also exemplifies the social relations that influence *Designs*.

As I have been writing this thesis, the Fundraising and Finance Committee, composed of two staff people and a steering committee member, has been extremely busy writing a Framework and Business Plan for the project. These documents are intended to portray the vision of *Designs*, and how it will function as a business. Suzie explains that this process has thrown them into an identity crisis, since they have been forced to question who the project is and what its purpose is all about:

*We're going through an identity crisis about what is CED. What is CED to us. What are we doing? What business are we in. Are we a business, or are we a social service?... When I look back at any of the (original) objectives, I think to myself, actually I don't even think, lights go off in my head, and say social service agency... It's really hard, because we do support one another. But not in the way some members want us to function. (Suzie)*

As was illustrated in the previous chapter, the women placed a strong emphasis on the social aspects gained from their involvement with the CED project. Some of the women echo Suzie's sentiment that the project must become more business oriented.
Well, one of the things I was thinking about is that Designs is supposed to be a business. We're not doing, or we weren't, we're doing more now, but we weren't running like one. Now it's been changed, we're trying to work more as a business. We're supposed to be generating money, that's what Designs is here for. To generate money for the women. That's what we're here for. Before we weren't really doing that, now we are more. This is not an Arts and Crafts group per se. Some people thought they could come in and do arts and crafts and talk and stuff, that was their perception at first. Then we had to step back and think about that, and think about how we explain that. People thought of it more as a healing, therapeutic thing. That they could do art and talk. But it wasn't set up like that. It's supposed to be a business. So now we're making it more of an entrepreneurial thing. Small business, people learning how to set up a small business if that's what they want to do. Sales and marketing workshops. (Lucy)

Nonetheless, Lucy also pointed out that the one thing she would like to see stay the same at Designs is the interaction between people.

We shouldn't get so business-like that we can't have interaction with different people. Talking with people, getting ideas, just being social. Being able to communicate, sit around and have a coffee and talk. We should be business-like and have a business, but not to the point where we can't do those things, where we exclude everybody else.

Currently the project is attempting to redefine the model in which it works. Members and facilitators are contemplating four different options. The decision will likely be made by a full meeting involving the membership, the corporate sponsor, the steering committee, and the staff. Suzie explains that in terms of "negotiables and non-negotiables" around decision making, this question of project structure and identity will be "negotiable in terms of which option." But

what's not negotiable is that we can't, won't become a support group, about healing, etc. We do that stuff, but that's not the mandate. The mandate is economics. Economic development. (Suzie)

Any large change in the organization will likely result in a loss of present members, ones who feel unable to adapt to the new structures. The staff are aware of this, but recognize it as a process of growth and change, which can also
be healthy. The worry they express lies in what options will be available to
women who no longer are able to "fit" the new Designs model.

Suzie: I already know that no matter what we do, no matter what, we're
going to lose at least half our membership. Every time you make a
major structural change you lose at least half your membership. At
least half I'm saying. Especially if this goes to something like a
production model, something I'm not crazy about, personally. But if
we went that way, we'd probably lose 90% of our membership.

Jeannie: Do you think there'd be other women to fill those spots?
Suzie: Definitely.
Jeannie: Would they be women from the same communities?
Suzie: I would think so.
Jeannie: And the 90% you'd lose, where do you think they would end up?
Suzie: I think they would splinter off. Some would end up doing their own
craft businesses, or attempting it. Others would end up in craft
programs. Others would say forget crafts, I'm doing something else.
It would be a splintering. And I don't know what would happen,
really. Whenever you approach the structural changes, you know
you'll lose folks. When we changed from giving the supplies to
charging, we lost twelve members, just by doing that. And that was
something that they voted on. The membership. There was a
general meeting, they took a vote. The next week, twelve people
gone, never came back.

Jeannie: So how do feel about having to make these changes?
Suzie: No organization is healthy without change. None. So I think it's
healthy for the project, if it's going to stay alive. It's probably
unhealthy for some of the members, it's another disruption in their
life. That's the part that bothers me. But you can't control it.

The daily experiences of the women who are part of Designs are embedded
in the debate around the organization's internal and external identity. At the
same time, members' experience with CED also point to another type of
contestation being played out in the realm of identity. In this case, I refer to
women's personal identities as opposed to the identity of Designs as an
organization. Members of Designs are women who live in long-term poverty.
The very material implications of poverty are both created and reinforced by
ideological structures of society as well as government policies, and affect
women's day-to-day experiences in a profound manner. Poverty often carries
with it a strong social stigma. Women from Designs explain that involvement
in CED helps to counter this stigma by redefining one's sense of self-worth. In this manner, through CED they are redefining their relationship with the state and societal structures.

I don't think anyone grows up with the purpose of "I'm going to be on welfare, and I'm going to be poor". I don't think poverty is very much understood. I think there's a social stigma attached to anybody on welfare, that they're "bums" and that they're "lazy." The issue is of poverty. And when you're very poor, you can also become poor in spirit. You're just surviving. .... I think that business is about caring for the earth in a responsible way, caring for people, creating a purpose and value with people. And community economic development is striving for that. (Meredith)

I think CED projects help people to eventually lessen their dependence on social assistance. People in CED who are able to make a few dollars extra over their budget are able to depend less on stuff out there like food banks. If they have a few extra dollars they don't have to depend on a food bank. That way, it will gradually phase out these things. It makes you feel better about yourself if you can go out and buy something that you couldn't before. (Lucy)

These women illustrate the sense of pride and self-esteem they associate with shifting their frame of reference from one of individual dependency on the state to their potential ability to generate at least part of their own finances. Ironically, as the letter from Ontario provincial government minister Al Leach demonstrated earlier, current government rhetoric also urges a decrease in individual dependency on the state, yet they offer next to no viable options for carrying this out.

In their article "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State," Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon trace how the meaning of the word dependency has shifted through history to become an ideological term with multiple, contradictory meanings (1994, 311). They note that in preindustrial English usage, the word dependency did not have the pejorative connotation it has now (p. 312). The rise of industrial capitalism and the development of wage labour created a shift where the "worker" became the primary image. With these changes, the meaning of the term dependency began
to slowly hold derogatory inferences. According to modern connotations, dependency is bad, independence is good.

While *Designs* members are clearly proud of their shift in the perceived individual relations with the state and society, they recognize the government continues to constrain the depth of this shift through its policies around social assistance and part time earnings.

... I really think it's cheesy of the government to only let you earn $160.00 and then they deduct 75% of it, they take 75% of it away. It's like giving you something but then taking it away again. (Michelle)

Michelle's comment demonstrates a contradiction in CED and its relationship with the state, one that is played out at an everyday level. On the one hand, the government urges a lessening of individual dependency and the need for greater self sufficiency. The women from *Designs* also express a desire to be more self sufficient and less poor. Yet government policies limit the amount of earnings possible through CED if a person is on social assistance. This ensures that while a woman might learn to re/connect with the marketplace, she will likely remain poor, despite her involvement in the project. These government policies are yet another example of how relations of ruling penetrate a community and affect the lived experience of women doing CED.

E. Conclusions

Women's experiences with *Designs* demonstrate the fluid and often paradoxical set of social relations that exist between marginalized women, the project, and broader social, political and economic structures. On the one hand CED is the site of struggle and resistance on the part of the women involved. By demanding certain needs be met by the state, they demonstrate agency in relation
to the larger structures they are part of. At the same time, CED and women's experience of it is mediated by regulations and rules that penetrate the inner workings of the project. This can begin to be seen by looking at the areas of funding, organizational constraints including decision making, language, and identity.
CHAPTER 5

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: CURRENT ISSUES IN THE LITERATURE

In this chapter I look at the key literature on Community Economic Development (CED), and discuss how they inform my own research study. I have identified various examples of CED literature; this is by no means an exhaustive list of the writing available in the field.

Exploring the literature written on CED proved to be an eye-opening experience. I was struck by the relatively large amount of material available on the topic, yet at the same time, the few examples that took up CED from a sociological perspective. It is difficult to understand from the literature that CED is a process that has a direct impact on the day-to-day lives of those involved in the initiatives. Much of the writing around Community Economic Development does not document people's experience with the initiatives.

Some of the available literature was disappointing in its lack of willingness to problematize the practice of CED. It is difficult to know why the discourse around CED has been taken up in this way. I speculate that it is due to CED's ongoing struggle to be accepted as a viable alternative to conventional economic development. In recent years, positive writing on the subject of CED makes it more likely for projects to receive support and recognition from the state and other possible partners. While this is indeed important, such an approach to writing on the subject makes it difficult to think through the structural constraints and the complicated social relations that are integral to CED.
One main book on CED is *Community Economic Development: Perspectives on Research and Policy* by B. Galaway and J. Hudson (1994). This book is a collection of nineteen essays examining specific aspects of Community Economic Development. It identifies gaps in the field and suggests areas for further research and policy work. The information is a useful contribution to the literature, but each of the articles tries to deal with broad topics in a very limited space. This allows little room to develop an analytical perspective on the subject matter. For the sake of brevity I have chosen only to discuss two chapters most applicable to my own research study.

Chapter six in Galaway and Hudson's book is titled "An Integrated Development Model for Building Sustainable Communities in Canada" by Marcia Nozick. In the essay Nozick argues that globalization has resulted in the breakdown of communities, and that CED must be more than just a means of job creation. Rather, it should be part of an integrated, holistic strategy to build sustainable communities. She describes five components for an integrated community development strategy: 1) creating local wealth through economic self-reliance, 2) community control over land, capital, industry and planning, 3) meeting basic needs of individuals, 4) becoming ecologically sustainable, 5) building community culture. Nozick concludes by restressing the need for an integrated approach to community development, noting that urban CED in particular is currently practiced in an ad hoc fashion.

The article lays out a detailed vision of an integrated development model. Within this model, Nozick's whole argument rests on an implicit definition of community that is geographic in nature. Her vision seems of limited application to CED practiced by social communities, as is the case with *Designs*. Some features of her development model are found in the context of *Designs*, in
particular the goal of meeting basic needs of individuals in the community, and the effort to build a community culture. Still, there is little discussion of the numerous obstacles one will encounter in trying to implement an integrated development model, even obvious ones such as the power relations internal and external to a community. It is an excellent vision, but difficult to transfer to the actual practice of CED.

Chapter eleven, "Making Communities Work: Women and CED," by Lucy Alderson and Melanie Conn attempts to infuse a much needed gender perspective into CED theory and practice. The authors describe four main features of Women's CED. The first is the redefinition of the meaning of productivity. Conventional definitions of productivity focus on "profit created by labour through the efficient production of goods and services" (p.121). This does not recognize the importance of unpaid work done in the home and community, mainly by women. In "Women's CED" (a term used by the authors throughout the article), productivity is redefined to include all work, paid and unpaid tasks done by women. The second feature is the establishment of what the authors call a multiple bottom line. In conventional economics, the financial bottom line is key, while other aspects such as social, cultural and ecological ones are secondary. Women's CED stresses the need to integrate non-financial objectives, creating a multiple bottom line. The third feature of Women's CED is the development of collective resources. Conventional economics emphasizes the importance of personal/corporate competitiveness as keys to economic success, while Women's CED strives for more cooperative relationships amongst all actors involved in the CED process. The fourth feature the authors identify as part of Women's CED is inclusivity. They mean inclusivity in the realm of decision making as well as in the realm of project
membership. Women are often excluded from decision making in conventional economic development. Also, participants in conventional economic development are not always diverse in terms of gender, race and class. Women's CED tries to include women in CED planning at all levels, and encourage the diversity of participants.

The article briefly notes some of the policies that enhance or restrict Women's CED, and concludes by stressing that the practice of mainstream CED could be greatly improved by integrating the assumptions and objectives put forward by a Women's CED framework. The Women's CED framework overlaps with ideas suggested by Marilyn Waring in her book If Women Counted (1988). Waring also calls for a redefinition of key economic concepts such as productivity and value.

The authors of the article stress the need for a Women's CED framework to be integrated into mainstream CED practice. They also want the framework to be integrated at a policy level. When I apply their framework to the work being done by Designs, I see that there is strong overlap with their objectives and Designs' practice. Within Designs, women are redefining the meaning of productivity, establishing a multiple bottom line, developing collective resources, and involving women in the decision making of the project. There is a similar overlap with the Women's CED framework and the work being done by other CED projects involving marginalized communities (See Church and Creal, 1996). While overlap exists between the authors' framework and the practice of CED with marginalized communities such as Designs, the Women's CED framework is hindered by the realities of working within larger economic and social structures. The authors to some extent explore the challenges to their proposed framework, but further writing is necessary around in this area.
I have grouped three articles together in my summary of the CED literature, because they take a similar approach to CED. The articles are P. Boothroyd and C. David's "The Meaning of Community Economic Development" (1991), the Edmonton Social Planning Council's "The Nuts and Bolts of Community Economic Development" (1982), and Mike Lewis's "Community Economic Development: Lessons from the Trenches: Directions for the Future" (1994). All three articles look at the different definitions of CED, and offer examples of various CED projects throughout Canada. They each give a broad overview of CED, but do little or nothing to problematize the practice of CED. They address issues such as the challenge of finding funding, but do not analyze the topic within a broader political/economic context. These articles sound like promotional material for Community Economic Development. They serve to promote the practice of CED and strive to place it on the agenda of policy makers. Although there is a definite role for this sort of information, its lack of critical reflection does little to develop new strategies around the practice of CED within this current economic climate.

Eric Shragge's book, Community Economic Development: In Search of Empowerment (1993), is one of the truly useful pieces for my study. Unlike many of the other writings on the subject, it offers a critical and perspective of CED, noting its complexities, benefits and constraints. This book is a collection of eight essays, the first one fairly theoretical, the rest a series of case studies that integrate theory and practice. In this summary I will draw on points from Eric Shragge's essay, "The Politics of Community Economic Development," and also look briefly at Art Stinson's essay, "West End Community Ventures And Community Economic Development in A Recession Economy: A Critical Period For A Pilot Project."
Shragge places CED in "a broader analytic framework" (p.1). He uses a definition of CED that links social and economic development, mobilization and advocacy for social change, and the building of alternative community institutions (p.1). Shragge notes that in their need for resources, CED projects have often formed so-called partnerships with the state. This has led to tensions as state priorities often differ from those of the CED projects. The author's discussion of the relationship between CED projects and the state is useful in this economic climate where groups are struggling to reconfigure their identities according to new funding guidelines. Negotiating its relationship with the state has been an ongoing issue for Designs. Shragge concludes that

... for CED to become a force for social and economic change, a minimum of two conditions must be fulfilled. First, the CED project needs a strong sense of itself as a political, social, and economic organization with a clear vision of its goals and practice. Empowerment of people in the local community through direct participation in a social process is the second condition. An outreach and educational strategy is necessary in this process (p.16).

In relation to Shragge's conclusion, Designs continues to struggle to define its identity as an organization, including its goals and practice. The women who are participants are deeply affected by their direct participation in CED. Yet the public outreach and education strategy the group has pursued places greater emphasis on the group's economic activities, downplaying the social process. This tension reflects the challenges faced by CED projects operating within a macro framework.

Art Stinson's essay in Shragge's book describes a pilot CED project called West End Community Ventures, located in an urban area of Ottawa. The article describes some of the difficulties of carrying out a CED initiative during difficult economic times. The project's mission was "to establish local leadership, to create economic opportunities and to foster community development" (p.132). In early 1990, Ventures received one of the first large CED grants given by the
Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services. The project was given quite a bit of flexibility in terms of how to implement its activities, and carried on from there. The article then explains that mid-way into its three-year funding period, the project faced serious cuts to its budget as the Ministry of Community and Social Services withdrew funding from CED initiatives pending restructuring. The remainder of the essay describes how the project evolved in its new context.

Stinson’s article presents a useful structural overview of the effects of budget changes and how these forced the project to evolve and learn. These changes parallel the process Designs is currently a part of. Yet in Stinson’s essay, I found it difficult to get a sense of the impact these changes had on the actual people involved in the project. Once again, it seems that CED is written up in a manner that erases the lives of the people who are integral to the process. While his article includes useful information, it adds to the illusion that structural changes based on economic constraints do not affect the everyday lives of participants. The final paragraph of Stinson’s essay makes a brief reference to the impact of the project on the lives of the participants, in an almost apologetic manner.

In this paper claims have been made that Ventures has perceived a change in attitude in the community, that hope is replacing apathy among those previously marginalized. This is difficult to prove by statistics or any other measurement. Certainly over a short term of two years no spectacular change can be expected. Nevertheless, numerous individual case histories of increasing self-esteem and courage to undertake new initiatives support this view. That such changes are fragile and that discouragement is frequent is undeniable (p.141).

One piece of literature on CED that I found extremely useful given my desire to document the lived experiences of women doing CED was Kathryn Church and Liz Creal’s report, Working the Margins: Qualitative dimensions of
community economic development among people who experience serious barriers to employment" (1995). The report highlights CED projects that work with marginalized people living in poverty. In this way it relates to the initiative that I documented. Working the Margins is one of the few reports I read that approached CED as lived experience; from their work I get the impression that CED initiatives have texture and bumps.

Church and Creal's report is the result of a two-year study carried out in urban Toronto documenting the involvement of people in fourteen CED projects. The main research question was broad: "what are the meanings of "health" and/or "empowerment" in the context of CED amongst people who face severe barriers to employment? (p.4). The research project utilized qualitative research methods, including a series of interviews and focus groups to gather data. The researchers used the strategy of storytelling to present their data, and divided their results into three categories: 1) intact storylines, where involvement in CED had been a good experience, 2) partial storylines, where respondents had mixed feelings regarding their experience with CED, and 3) broken storylines, where involvement had left participants with negative feelings. Church and Creal recognized that each of the stories they encountered fit in a general sense into one of these three categories. Still, they also noted that each storyline also involved to some degree a mix of the other two storylines.

The report found that CED has both multiple purposes and outcomes for all involved. In their closing comments, the researchers note that based on their data, "there is a fundamental problem with viewing community business as a strong economic strategy for re/turning marginalized people to work" (p.50). Instead, its strengths lie in human development, especially increasing support systems, and opportunities for learning. My own findings with Designs fully
support this report. The actual economic benefits from involvement in Designs vary from member to member, but in general are limited. Yet the other benefits, including the development of a range of relational skills and membership in a strong community, are immeasurable benefits.

Another essay by Kathryn Church, "Business (Not Quite) As Usual: Psychiatric Survivors and Community Economic Development in Ontario" (1996) uses a similar style in documenting the CED initiatives taken up by psychiatric survivors in Ontario. Church looks at the complexities involved in psychiatric survivor-run community businesses by profiling three important CED projects. She describes the impact involvement with CED has on survivors' lives, and the implications this has for CED practice. Church concludes that "psychiatric survivor-run businesses are engaged in an ongoing struggle to balance the 'community' and the 'economic' aspects of their operation" (p.30). This balance is the same one Designs seeks in its own current evolution as a project.

Overall, much of what is written about CED is of limited applicability to my own project. While all of the writings provide a solid outline of CED and some of its surface features, there is little writing that problematizes the complexities of CED. Unfortunately, much of it also writes out the lived experience of the people involved in CED day to day. Exceptions to this are the work done by Church and Creal (1995), and Church alone (1996). The literature also does not often address the complex macro issues that are integral to carrying out CED, particularly tensions that can arise in projects' relationship to the state. Exceptions to this are found in Shragge's collection of essays.
CHAPTER 6
THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1990s

The women from Designs demonstrate that Community Economic Development is a complex, multifaceted endeavor. While there are many challenges involved with carrying out CED initiatives, it is evident that CED can play an important role in the lives of marginalized women. I will conclude this thesis by outlining three manners in which CED can serve as an important survival strategy for marginalized women.

1. CED as a site for earning extra dollars

The point is straightforward: women doing CED might not earn large amounts of money, but they could earn some extra dollars. With the current Ontario government cuts to social assistance and services, the attack on rent control, and the general difficulty of making ends meet, these extra dollars can make a monumental difference to marginalized women. Women are being hit hardest by the cuts to social assistance, it stands to reason that CED projects where they have even even a chance of earning dollars to try to make ends meet are of critical importance.

2. CED as a site of learning

As the women interviewed from Designs clearly articulated their participation in CED is a critical means of developing skills. Some skills are tangible and concrete, for example basic book keeping and the production of various crafts. Others are intangible, for example learning about other people and learning about oneself.
In Ontario, CED is currently one of the few forums in which marginalized women will have access to any sort of skill building activities. The federal government has no current job training strategy for women (NAC, 1995, 4). The situation with federal job training programs is in a state of flux as responsibility gets passed on to the provinces. The provincial government is on the verge of implementing its new, much talked about Ontario Works Program, commonly known as Workfare. Women from Designs were vocal in their opinions about Workfare as a means of job training.

Meredith: They're not realistic, they're such hypocrites. . . . How much is it going to cost for them to administrate workfare? How much are they going to pay people to sit up there and administrate it?

Jane: When they could take that money and put it into CED and have people working and gaining skills so that they'd have marketable skills and be able to look at creating a job, because there aren't jobs out there for people to have.

The point around skills is that there are very few places where marginalized women can get training in today's climate. There are even fewer places where they can get training in a supportive, caring environment. A place where women feel some sort of control, ownership, and support make CED a setting conducive to learning. For women who have been seriously fragmented by the system this is of utmost importance.

3. CED as a site of hope

Supports and services across Ontario are being adjusted, slashed, restructured, cutback, whatever term we care to use. It is hitting many layers of our society. For women already marginalized by poverty, the combination of all the cuts can make the situation feel hopeless. Women have explained that their participation in CED offer them support, learning, and maybe some extra dollars.
At its best, CED is a way for women to reconnect with the economy in a manner that the redefines the meaning of economic activity. It weaves together a relationship between the economy and civil society. For women who have given up hope of ever being active in the economy, for women who have been isolated, and for women wanting to learn, CED opens up a range of possibilities. It is this sense of possibility that is a key outcome of CED. In a desperate era, CED projects like *Designs* act as a site of hope in women's daily lives.

Due to economic and government restructuring and its impact, never has there been a more important time for women facing long-term poverty to take up CED. At the same time, the constraints of restructuring make it even more difficult for CED initiatives with marginalized communities to survive.

It is the non-economic elements of CED, the learning and the community aspects, that sets projects like *Designs* apart from conventional economic development. Yet given the current climate of attack on health and social issues, there has been a real urge to emphasize the economic components of *Designs*. This could be a dangerous path for the project to follow. It is difficult to know how much the economic aspects can be highlighted without taking precedence over the other important elements of the initiative. I think that it is ultimately more strategic, albeit frightening, for CED projects like *Designs* to argue for space within a macro framework based on their strengths. Pushing for inclusion at the level of social and health policy as opposed to the economic realm may ultimately be a more viable option for the survival of projects like *Designs*. There is a need for further writing and strategizing about how CED can be inserted into social and health policy frameworks.
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APPENDIX 1

Interview Guide for Designs Members

1. Could you describe for me what you do here at Designs?
2. How did you get involved?
3. How long have you been part of the collective?
4. How do feel about it? What is the most important part for you?
5. Could you tell me about one day that was particularly good for you here at Designs?
6. Could you tell me about a bad day?
7. How do decisions get made here? How do you participate in this setting?
8. Has working here had an impact on your life? How?
9. If you could change one thing about your work here at Designs, what would it be?
10. What is the one thing about what you do at Designs that you would like to stay the same?
11. Have you learned new skills from being part of Designs?
12. Do you feel that you had particular skills that you brought into Designs? Have you been able to share them with other members?
13. Is there anything you think this government should be told about community economic development?
Interview Guide for Designs Facilitators

1. How long have you been involved in Designs?
2. How did you get involved?
3. What is your role in the project?
4. Could you describe what types of activities you do?
5. What do you like best about the job?
6. What are the biggest challenges?
7. What have you learned through working here?
8. How would you compare the project objectives to the actual activities?
9. How do you manage the dual roles of being a project facilitator with the women on the one hand and having to deal with the administrative aspects of running the project (e.g. fundraising) on the other?
10. How do you see CED in relation to the larger economy?
11. How confident do you feel of the project's survival in this current economic climate?
12. Is there anything you think this government should be told about community economic development?