Hearing Their Voices: Stories of Feminist Administrators

By: Heidi J. Wurmann

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
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MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

This research asks: what are the experiences of women administering feminist agencies? The results add to the discussion around feminist human service organizations and contribute to the conversation around whether their survival is possible. The study uses qualitative methods and employs a feminist narrative methodology. Six feminist administrators from Winnipeg, Manitoba participated in semi-structured interviews. Their stories speak of passion for their work, for feminism, and for their clients. A number of themes emerged including the impact of conflicting values, the importance of structural change, and a client focused orientation. Implications for feminist organizations include being open and flexible about organizational structure, the need to confront internal and external conflicts, and be open to different ideas for solutions to those conflicts. Implications for the discipline of social work include incorporating knowledge of administration into all levels of social work education. Further research that looks at a broader range of feminist administrators' experiences is necessary.

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Chapter One
Introduction

In this research, I studied women who were administrators in feminist human service organizations. My specific research question was: what are the experiences of women administering feminist agencies? I wanted to hear the voices and stories of feminist administrators of feminist human service organizations. I was interested in their values, their day to day experiences, how their organizations function, and how they perceive themselves within their organizations. This research adds to the larger discussion around feminist human service organizations, particularly in the Canadian context, as well as contributes to the ongoing conversation around whether survival of feminist human service organizations is possible. My central interest as a researcher is on the strengths and resistance of women doing work on the feminist margins of mainstream society.

Based on the literature, the research complements work done in this field. The perspective of women administering feminist organizations adds to and expands the knowledge that currently exists about alternatively structured human service organizations. A better understanding of feminist administrators' perspectives and experiences informs and provides further understanding of how feminist human service organizations function and the impact these organizations have on both staff and those they serve. The majority of the research around feminist human service organizations has come out of the United States leaving a gap concerning the Canadian experience. In addition, a review of the literature shows that research does not often come from the perspective of social workers or the profession of social work. It has been of particular interest to learn if social work training has any impact on how women administer these

agencies.

Personal Purpose and Significance

Before discussing this research in detail, it is important to locate myself. Identifying oneself at the onset of research is a process that is important to researchers who follow different epistemological traditions, such as those labeled feminist, Aboriginal, and post-modern (Absolon & Willet, 2005; Devault, 1999; Fine, 1998; Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006). The process of locating oneself recognizes subjectivity and positions researchers as "classed, gendered, raced and sexual subjects…" (Fine, 1998, p.142). For many researchers, locating oneself has become standard and 'good' protocol because it provides some context for the researcher (Absolon & Willet, 2005; Kirby et al, 2006). This is important for both the researcher and other readers/consumers of the research. I am a white, straight, middle-class, university educated feminist who was the administrator of a small, rural women's centre for three years. I am dominantly located in most aspects of my life. In other words, I am privileged in many ways. I had a safe, secure childhood, I have had the opportunity and choice to pursue post-secondary education, and I have been able to follow employment in my chosen field. However, many of my beliefs and values, namely my connection with feminism, has placed me at odds with the dominant, or mainstream, culture.

My experience as the administrator of a women's centre in rural British Columbia had a major impact on me. This was an agency that had women's empowerment and political action as part of their organizational goals. I learned first hand how difficult it can be to remain true to your values (both individually and organizationally) when people,

organizations and governments with whom you are at odds, surround you. While I personally struggled to remain true to my own values, on an organizational level there were similar struggles. Surviving as a marginalized island within a sea of dominance gave me some much-needed insight into the experience of marginalization. I felt conflicted on many levels while doing my work; however, it was around issues of funding where these conflicts became the most visible.

The organization was reliant on government funding. This funding allowed the organization to provide services for women in the community. These services were based on feminist philosophy and values. And yet, the many strings that were attached to the funding were made of a dominant yarn. Sometimes I felt like our organization had to compromise our values in order to receive funding. Other times we chose to stick by our feminist values and beliefs. These battles were constant and exhausting. They also raised many questions for me. How do other feminist human service organizations exist? How do the women who run these organizations survive? Is it possible to remain true to one's values, either personally or organizationally? Can one create and administer an open, feminist human service organization when financially one is in crisis all of the time? Can it be done when there is no security, when there is high stress and low income and the agency's policies conflict with other agencies that one works with as well as with government and funding bodies? My underlying reason for pursuing this research is that I am interested in examining whether and how feminist human service organizations can continue to exist within the dominant society.

It was asking these questions that led me to be curious about the experiences of other women who administer similar agencies. What are their stories? How do they handle the

day to day activities inherent in administrative work? Do they experience value conflicts

and if so, how do they cope with the choices that need to be made? Do they

compromise? Are they supported by their organization? Do they have social work

training and does this assist them with their administrative work? Do they have other

professional or managerial training? While an administrator at a women's centre, I often

found myself 'doing the work' in isolation. Hearing other women's stories and learning

from them would have helped me greatly. It also would have raised my thoughts and

feelings from a personal place to a larger, political place. I do not think that I can be

alone in these feelings. Human service organizations that are structured differently and

follow a path that deviates from the mainstream, (sometimes called alternative

organizations), would also benefit from understanding the experiences of their

administrators and learning how they could better support these women. This research is

important because of the continued existence of feminist agencies across this country.

Based on my personal experience as an administrator of a feminist organization, I

bring with me to this research some clear thoughts and assumptions. While most of these

assumptions have been implicitly stated in the above discussion, it is important to be

explicit about some of my assumptions. This will allow readers to be aware of my

subjectivity and it also allows me to be aware of how my subjectivity may impact the

research. Because my experience included conflict, both personal and organizational, I

have assumed that this will be true for others. I have also assumed that women who

administer feminist human service organizations do so partly because of their personal

values, beliefs and passion for the job. These two broad assumptions may have impacted

how I prepared for and interpreted the research; however, I have done my best to keep their impact minimal.

Definitions and Overview

This research, while acknowledging the slightly different roles occupied by managers, administrators, and executive directors, uses the term administrator to encompass these roles. This is being done because the focus is on small, grassroots human service organizations, which out of necessity often call on one person to fill all of the aforementioned roles. Also, feminist or alternative organizations do not always use these labels and often have roles that are more fluid and broadly defined. Other definitions of import for this research include human service organization (HSO), feminist administrator and feminist organization. Hasenfeld (1983) states that HSO's work with people and have a mandate to "protect and to promote the welfare of the people they serve" (p. 1). When discussing feminist HSO's, however, this research uses the definition put forward by Martin (1990), who defines a feminist organization as "pro-woman, political, and socially transformative" (p. 184). However, the main criteria for defining a feminist administrator or organization in this research, is that these labels are self-defined by the participants.

This document provides a thorough discussion of the research. It begins with a literature review in chapter two. This is followed by a discussion of the research process including an explanation of how the research was designed and conducted. The research is qualitative and follows a feminist, narrative methodology. Chapter three explains the philosophy behind the research and the steps taken to complete it. Chapters four and five

present my analysis, which focuses on both narrative descriptions and themes. The

document concludes with a discussion of the implications for both feminist human

service organizations and the discipline of social work.

Before beginning this discussion of the research, it is important to conduct a review of

the literature. The following literature review will be divided into two discreet sections:

one will focus on feminist organization theory; and the other will focus on the empirical

studies done in the field.

Chapter Two
Literature Review
Feminist Organization Theory

Feminist organization theory has had a relatively late entry into the scholarly discussion and debate related to how and why people organize. It was not until the 1980s that academic discussion linked organization theory and feminism. Witz and Savage (1992) saw this as a result of a clash between the largely male, well funded area of organization studies and the female, anti-establishment, critical area of feminism. The intersection of feminism and organization theory has been intense and rife with diverse ideas, arguments and opinions. The study of feminist administrators of organizations was a micro topic and needed to be placed within the larger theoretical context of feminist organization theory. To that end, this section of the literature review will begin by looking at the two distinct traditions grounding this theory as well as the philosophical approaches within it. This will be followed by a more in-depth look at the ideas and assumptions that form the basis of feminist organization theory.

Before this discussion, however, some clarification of terminology is needed. Defining terms can be a difficult process. That comment is perhaps an understatement when attempting to define the term feminism. However, we can find commonalties among many definitions of feminism. These include: that women as a group, compared to men, are oppressed; that structural inequality between men and women exists; that feminism is focused on change; and that feminism, and the ideas it espouses, are of a political nature (Adamson, Briskin & McPhail, 1988; Calas & Smircich, 1992; Martin, 1990; Riger, 1994).

There are a variety of definitions or ways of defining organizations. Hasenfeld (1983) defined human service organizations as having a central function to "protect, maintain, or

enhance the personal well-being of individuals by defining, shaping, or altering their personal attributes" (p.1). This was a more mainstream way of viewing human service organizations. Perlmutter and Crook (2004) put together a list of characteristics for alternative organizations. These characteristics include: a commitment to social change; a democratic internal governance structure; meeting the needs of special populations not served by mainstream organizations; ideologically and personally committed personnel; small in size; and in a marginal economic position. A broad definition of organizations was created by Martin (1990) as "any relatively enduring group of people that is structured to pursue goals that are collectively identified" (p. 185) and she defined feminist organizations as "pro-woman, political, and socially transformative" (p. 184). This literature review will be using Martin's broad definitions in order to allow for a full range of study around feminist organization theory.

A final term that is important to clarify is gender. It has long been understood that the term 'sex' refers to biology while 'gender' is socially constructed (Calas & Smircich, 1992). In other words, the society we grow up in creates definitions of gender that are collectively agreed upon and passed down through the socialization process. This research proposal, and literature review, not only works with this premise that gender is a socially constructed term, but that gender *relations* are also socially constructed and perpetuated.

There are two distinct traditions that ground feminist organization theory. One can be described as practice and the other as critique (Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004).

Practice

The practical side of feminist organization theory began in the 1960s through the creation of grassroots, community organizations aimed toward improving the lives of women (Gutierrez & Lewis, 1995; Scott, 2005). This happened long before active feminist scholarly discussions of organization theory (Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004; Iannello, 1992). This pragmatic, practical approach to theory building partly explains feminism's late entry to organization theory. It also provides great strength to feminist organization theory as it is one which is rooted / grounded in, and supported by, practice. Ashcroft and Mumby (2004) spoke about these practical applications being a reflection of feminist values – a "commitment to do more than talk within the walls of an ivory tower" (p. xxiv).

These practical models of feminist organization theory incorporated specific ideas about how organizations could/should change and work differently in order to create organizations which would allow women to be equal, valued and work to their potential (Martin & Knopoff, 1997). Such organizations, which tended to be small, volunteer driven and non-profit, incorporated ideas such as: non-hierarchical structure, consensual decision-making, shared leadership, and demystifying expertise (Adamson et al, 1988; Ferree & Martin, 1995; Iannello, 1992; Martin & Knopoff, 1997). Iannello (1992) also emphasized that these grassroots organizations re-framed the idea of power from "domination over" to "empowerment" and worked to integrate the two seemingly separate worlds of the public and the private. Halford (1992) argued that one of feminism's greatest contributions was in showing how the boundary between the public life and the private one is socially constructed and serves to prop up patriarchy. What

happens in our private lives has repercussions for the larger public sphere. For example,

by giving voice to violence against women, something that was relegated to the private

sphere, feminists showed that this issue was indeed a public one affecting us all. These

early grassroots feminist models of organization were also seen as a clear rejection of

mainstream models and were practical attempts to provide services using feminist values

and process (Adamson et al, 1988).

This practical history should not be seen as simply laying the foundation for feminist

organization theory. Ferree and Martin (1995) argued that there is, and should be, a

continual reciprocal relationship between practice and scholarship and that this is the best

way to keep feminist organization theory grounded in the real experiences of feminist

organizations. As Ashcroft and Mumby (2004) stated, this connection between practice

and theory is also part of the feminist attempt to create social change and improve justice

and equality for people in a very real, practical way.

The practical experience of feminist organizations has changed over the years.

Scholars have looked at feminist organizations to study how they change and adapt in

order to better understand how that can be reflected in theory (Ferree & Martin, 1995;

Martin, 1990; Riger, 1994). Martin (1990) put forward a convincing argument for

broadening what we define as a feminist organization. She emphasized that we must

study feminist organizations to have that information inform theory in order to ensure

that feminist organization theory does not fall into a trap of the ideal. Expecting that

feminist organizations live up to some kind of ideal is not only unfair, but also not always

grounded in reality. While it is important to strive for an ideal, the reality is that there are

many ways that feminist organizations exist and carry out their work. "Feminist

organizations are profit making as well as not for profit, hierarchical as well as collectivist, national as well as local, illegal as well as legal, dependent as well as autonomous" (p. 185). The outright rejection of bureaucracy, as another example, is being tempered by the discovery that some feminist organizations have grown to a size where they feel it necessary to incorporate some bureaucratic practices (Riger, 1994) while others have found that some bureaucratic structures can support racial diversity in the organization (Hyde, 1995; Scott, 2005). This practical side of feminist organization theory continues to inform and be informed by theory.

Critique

The critical side of feminist organization theory looks at traditional or mainstream organizations and organization theory with a feminist or gender lens. Like all feminist thoughts and actions, this is an inherently political activity. As Calas and Smircich (1996) have stated "feminist theory is a critique of the status quo, and therefore *always political*" (p. 219, emphasis original). Feminists have critiqued mainstream organization theory by challenging many assumptions – some of which form the basis of the discipline. They have challenged many of the masculinist bases of "science", "objectivity" and "rational decision-making" (Calas & Smircich, 1992; Ferguson, 1984; Leonard, 2002). These assumptions were portrayed as neutral when really they supported male constructs. "In the seamless integration of men and masculinity with the more powerful spaces, linear time and dominant heterosexuality of organization, 'Woman' is seen to be the difference from 'Man'; she is the 'Other'." (Leonard, 2002, p. 68). Ferguson (1994) has asserted that studies of organizations without a feminist critique are

grounded "within an interpretive domain that is implicitly male/masculine,
white/western, and bourgeois/managerial" (p. 89).

Feminists have also critiqued how mainstream organizations and organization theory
are built on a public/private dichotomy (Acker, 1990; Halford, 1992; Martin & Knopoff,
1997; Mumby, 2000; Ramsey & Parker, 1992). This dichotomy has further layers
including male/female, social/natural, rational/emotional and political/apolitical.
"Feminist theory exposes this distinction, as an artificial and patriarchal construction"
(Halford, 1992, p. 157). Mumby (2000) has reiterated that the ability to deconstruct this
dichotomy is one of the main strengths of the feminist critique. These "arbitrary
constructions [that] maintain and reproduce men's dominance over women" (p. 12).

One of the major critiques of organizations and organization theory brought forward
by feminism has centred on the concept of gender, specifically the prevailing mainstream
notion that organizations exist as gender-neutral or gender-blind entities (Acker, 1990,
1992, 1998; Britton, 2000; Calas & Smircich, 1992; Ferguson, 1984; Iannello, 1992;
Mills, Simmons & Helms Mills, 2005; Witz & Savage, 1992). The issue of gender and
gendered organizations is primary to feminist organization theory and will be discussed
in more detail in a later section of this literature review.

Another strong critique of mainstream organizations and organization theory has
centred on bureaucracy. As was mentioned earlier, feminists reacted to bureaucracy in a
very practical way in the 1960s by creating new, alternative forms of organizations.
Some of the first scholarly feminist critiques also focused on this area (Acker, 1990;
Ferguson, 1984). Ramsay and Parker (1992) spoke of the bureaucratic structure being
built upon both patriarchy and capitalism. They further added that this structure creates a

double oppression for women as they are oppressed as subordinates within the organizational hierarchy and as women within the structure and process of patriarchy. Norton and Morris (2003) add that bureaucracy, with its environment and culture, ensures that hierarchy and status are "embedded in a masculinist organization culture" (p. 479).

Bureaucracy has also been critiqued for its justification of privilege (Martin & Knopoff, 1997). The argument is that the structure of a bureaucracy promotes power inequalities and, in fact, improves the status of those within whom the power is already invested. Calas and Smircich (1997) stated that the feminist critique has shown that the apparent neutrality of bureaucracy is actually sustained by inherent patterns of domination and subordination, while underplaying the impact of the private sphere on the public.

Philosophical Approaches

There is no one 'feminism' and feminist organization theory also has multiple viewpoints and philosophical approaches. Calas and Smircich (1996) discussed the many different feminist theories and made a distinction between liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, Marxist, socialist, poststructuralist and third world/postcolonial feminisms. While the distinction between streams of feminist thought is made, Calas and Smircich (1997) also emphasized that commonalties exist – particularly in relation to gender and gender relations. These theoretical feminist approaches "developed and changed in response to one another: although they may look discrete and unified, their boundaries are blurry and blurring" (Calas & Smircich, 1996, p. 219).

These feminist approaches are also mirrored within the area of organization studies. While the liberal stream of feminism has been relatively prolific in organization theory, it has focused on adding women to management positions or ensuring that women are treated fairly and equally rather than focusing on creating a separate feminist organization theory (Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004). In other words, this approach has focused on changing the system from within (Adamson et al, 1988). This literature review will touch on the liberal approach to feminist organization theory and will reference some liberal feminists; however, the main focus will be on the radical, socialist and poststructuralist streams of feminist thought as they relate to the building of feminist organization theory. This in no way negates the important contributions made by scholars who follow liberal or other feminist approaches. Indeed, as was mentioned earlier, liberal feminists have had, and continue to have, a large impact on feminism and feminist organization theory.

The post-colonial approach also has had an important impact on feminism in that it has brought a much needed criticism and "suspicion of 'gender' as a stable and sufficient analytical lens that can be applied unproblematically across cultures and histories" (Calas & Smircich, 1996, p. 238). This approach has been able to focus on the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, class, and race within the particular context of North/South or Western/Nonwestern relationships (Calas & Smircich, 1996). Feminism and feminist theories have gained from the inclusion of these approaches. However, as was mentioned previously, the radical, socialist and postmodern feminist approaches will be the ones looked at in more detail in respect to how they relate to, and have influenced, feminist organization theory.

The radical approach to feminist organization theory focuses on making significant change and reform within organizations (and society) and sees those changes as necessary in order to truly remove gender from organizations and make them gender neutral (Acker, 1990, 1998; Calas & Smircich, 1997; Martin, 2003). Radical feminism, and therefore a radical approach to feminist organization theory, is also woman centered and focuses on creating an organization (and a society) where men and women are no longer in a dominant/subordinate relationship (Calas & Smircich, 1996). The radical approach to feminist organization theory is very closely related to the practical grounding of the theory. Many of the grassroots organizations of the 1960s and 1970s exemplified the values of radical feminism (Ferree & Martin, 1995; Iannello, 1992).

Socialist feminism sees patriarchy and capitalism as two separate, but related phenomena that affect a woman and her status is "determined by her role in production, reproduction, the socialization of children and sexuality" (Calas & Smircich, 1996, p. 232). Socialist feminism also recognizes the intersectionality of gender, class, race and sexuality and this sets it apart from liberal and radical approaches to feminism (Calas & Smircich, 1996). Socialist feminism then, takes this approach to feminist organization theory. It argues that there is an arbitrary distinction between the private and public sphere and that organizations, families and society are all connected through gender relations (Calas & Smircich, 1996). This focusing on the inherent gendering of organizations has become a focal point of feminist organization theory and, in fact, has created a whole separate area of gender organization theory (Acker, 1990, 1992, 1998; Britton, 1997, 2000; Gherardi, 1994; Martin, 2003).

Poststructuralists focus on the construction of language and knowledge and the relationship between those two constructs as well as how they both relate to the construct of power (Calas & Smircich, 1996). Feminist poststructuralists also have gender as the central focus of organization studies. There is a particular focus on how gender arrangements are constructed and supported by organizations. Much of the recent work in feminist organization theory has come from this perspective/approach (Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004; Britton, 2000; English, 2005; Leonard, 2002; Mumby, 2000; Norton & Morris, 2003).

Gender

As has been mentioned, gender serves as the core of feminist organization theory. It, therefore, deserves a special focus in this literature review. Two primary works that looked at gender and organizations were Moss Kanter's *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977) and Ferguson's *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy* (1984). These two texts were early contributors to the discussion of gender as an issue within organizations. Kanter, however, focused more on structure than on gender in her analysis (cited in Acker, 1990). In other words, Kanter discussed the way an organization was structured and how that affected individuals without a corresponding discussion of how the structures themselves may be inherently gendered. Ferguson (1984), coming from a radical approach, presented bureaucracy as the male oppressor. However, it was Acker (1990) who first presented the idea of "organization as a gendered process" (p. 145). In particular, Acker (1990) argued that organizations, and concepts within it such as 'job' and 'worker', are inherently gendered because in their supposed neutrality, they are really

espousing the ideal male. This idea of organizations being fundamentally and inherently gendered has been influential and the idea has been adopted by many (Acker, 1990; Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004; Britton, 1997; Calas & Smircich, 1992; Martin, 2003; Martin & Collinson, 2002; Martin & Knopoff, 1997; Norton & Morris, 2003; Stivers, 2002). Britton (1997) has agreed, stating that a "policy or practice will be defined as gendered to the extent that, although it may be gender-neutral on its face, it reproduces and sustains gender stratification and/or gender-based inequality in an organizational or occupational context" (p. 798).

Ashcroft and Mumby (2004) argued that the inherent gendering of organizations involves a struggle over "meaning, identity and difference" and that this struggle ends up privileging certain interests (p. xv). In other words, the gendering of organizations is directly related to power. When an organization is structured to value males and male attributes, there is a corresponding increase in power for those who fit into the valued attributes. This ensures that those with power are able to accumulate or increase their power (Bishop, 2005). Britton (2000) noted that the assumption of an inherently gendered organization may limit the capacity for change without a complete rejection of current organizational structure. Britton (2000) and Gherardi (1994) argued that gender exists everywhere and does not necessarily imply inequality. Their liberal feminist argument focused on identifying and understanding "the factors that give rise not to ungendered organizations but to *less oppressively gendered* forms" (Britton, 2000, p. 430, emphasis in original). Martin and Collinson (2002) argued that the end result of this focus on gendered organizations is that feminist organization theory has been able to

"frame organizations as systems of power relations that are embedded in gender, arguing that they cannot be adequately understood unless gender is acknowledged" (p. 258).

Feminist organization theorists have also argued that organization theory itself is gendered in that there is an assumption within the literature that workers and managers are male and that they fulfill male stereotypes relating to power, attitude and obligation (Acker, 1990, 1992; Calas & Smircich, 1992; Martin, 1990, Mills et al., 2005). They argued that the focus on the gender-neutrality of organizations creates a disjuncture between theory and real organizational life (Acker, 1992). Acker (1992) further argued that "gender neutrality, the suppression of knowledge about gender, is embedded in organizational control processes" (p. 256).

Gender theorists, and those feminist organization theorists coming from a socialist approach, have also discussed women's reproductive role within organizations. Acker (1990, 1992, 1998) argued that within the ideal of a gender-neutral organization, there is no room for the idea of human reproduction. In fact, Acker (1998) stated that this "non-responsibility for human reproduction and survival" is one of the ways that organizations are privileged in our society and it underpins the ideal of the male worker (p. 198). This gender-based argument also includes issues of care. Care, of children, adults or elders, is still seen as "women's work" and is undervalued (Kittay, 2001). Care work is rarely recognized by organizations and there is an assumption that workers do not take part in any "caring" roles nor do they have caring responsibilities and concerns. When care work is considered at all, it is seen as something that exists outside of and distinct from the workplace (Acker, 1998). This is another way that gender-neutral organizations support a gender-neutral worker who is, in essence, male (Kittay, 2001).

Assumptions

There are a number of assumptions that inform feminist organization theory. Some of this discussion may be a reiteration of previous sections of this literature review. The following assumptions have the ability to both overlap and affect each other and also to stand alone. For example, some theorists may believe that organizations and hierarchies are inherently gendered and that they work together to oppress women (Acker, 1990; Ramsay & Parker, 1992). Others may see organizations as gendered, but aspects of hierarchy as a possible way to create structure and deal with power within a feminist organization (Martin, 1990; Riger, 1994; Hyde, 1995; Scott, 2005). It should also be noted that not all feminist organization theorists agree with all of the following assumptions nor is there any consensus that a feminist organization must meet all of these assumptions. Six assumptions are discussed below.

The main assumption of feminist organization theory revolves around the issue of gender. The primacy of gender and the theory of gendered organizations, as was discussed earlier, have proven to be the backbone of feminist organization theory (Acker, 1990, 1992, 1998; Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004; Britton, 1997; Calas & Smircich, 1992; Martin & Collinson, 2002; Martin, 2003). "Gender is constitutive of organizing, it is an omnipresent, defining feature of collective human activity" (Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004, p. xv). Recognizing gender within organizations is important in order to expose its role in creating and supporting inequality. A move towards equality is difficult if gender issues remain invisible (Martin & Collinson, 2002).

An important second assumption of feminist organization theory revolves around the idea of creating new forms of organizing. Mumby (2000) argued that organizations need

to be reconceptualized and that feminist organization theory proposes alternative forms of organizing in order to express nonpatriarchal and noncapitalist forms. Feminist organization theory does not want to simply make women fit better into existing organizational structures. Instead, it asks what changes need to occur in order for women's capacities to be valued and fully developed (Martin & Knopoff, 1997). As was mentioned earlier, alternative forms of organizing formed the basis of feminist organization theory and many feminist organization theorists argued that new, alternative forms of organizing must continue to be created (Ferguson, 1994; Ferree & Martin, 1995; Gil de Gibaja, 2001; Laiken, 1999; Martin, 1990; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; Riger, 1994). A key piece of feminist organization theory is the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice – that necessary ability to both inform and ground theory with practical experience (Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004; Ferree & Martin, 1995; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000).

Iannello (1992) argued that hierarchy is a tool of the dominant ideology and feminist theory should argue for a more egalitarian, horizontal structure. This idea that hierarchy is about power, domination and control (Adamson et al, 1988; Iannello, 1992; Ramsay & Parker, 1992; Stivers, 2002) emphasizes why some feminists feel that a non-hierarchical structure is an important part of feminist organization theory. This third assumption is somewhat contentious. Martin (1990) argued that organizations can still be feminist even with a hierarchical structure. She used national organizations like the National Organization for Women (NOW), a liberal feminist organization, as an example. Others have agreed with Martin (Britton, 2000; Riger, 1994) or have put forward research that has shown that hierarchy can assist in the creation of a racially diverse feminist organization (Scott, 2005). However, it is still an important assumption for the theory, as

many feminists believe that a hierarchical structure is part of how an organization oppresses subordinates (Acker, 1990; Martin & Knopoff, 1997).

Mainstream organization theory defines power as domination over others. Specifically, this power is connected to the control of resources and the distribution of legitimated power and authority (Hasenfeld, 1983; Mills et al., 2005). Iannello (1992) argued that feminists ask, "Does power always mean domination in an organization? Are there other understandings of power?" (p. 11). Feminist theory uses the word empowerment and this term references power as an ability to accomplish things (Iannello, 1992). The egalitarian focus of feminism also means that power is not held by few, but spread to all (Iannello, 1992; Ferree & Martin, 1995). The issue of power is a primary one for most feminists; however, poststructuralist feminists have a particular interest in power and how it is constructed and maintained (Calas & Smircich, 1992; Leonard, 2002). Poststructuralists, as influenced by Foucault, focus on power as it relates to the creation and nature of knowledge as well as exclusion and marginalization (Chambon & Irving, 1999). The issue of power is, of course, closely related to the issue of gender. Martin and Collinson (2002) argued that "power relations are embedded in gender" and that without an understanding and acknowledgement of gender one cannot adequately understand power (p. 258).

A fifth assumption of feminist organization theory falls under the idea of shared leadership and democratic/consensual decision-making (Adamson et al, 1988; Iannello, 1992; Martin & Knopoff, 1997; Mumby, 2000; Ramsay & Parker, 1992). Mumby (2000) felt that it is feminist organization theory, with its ability to reframe and reorganize that will push organizations to have a more democratic and participatory structure for

decision-making. This democratic/participatory structure allows for a focus within feminist organization theory on ensuring that voices previously silenced, in particular women's voices, are heard (Martin & Collinson, 2002; Stivers, 2002).

As was previously discussed in this paper, feminists argue that there are false dichotomies that underlie organizations and organization theory where the male aspects are valued and the female aspects are undervalued (Acker, 1990; Halford, 1992; Martin & Knopoff, 1997; Mumby, 2000; Ramsay & Parker, 1992). This can be seen as the sixth assumption of feminist organization theory. Mumby (2000) saw feminism as having provided a way to re-frame and radically re-think the relationship of the public and private spheres as well as the other dichotomies that are built upon false notions of the male and female,

In summary, feminist organization theory has a short, but complex history. It came out of the practical experiences of women in the 1960s and 1970s who were determined to create new, alternative forms of organization. When academic discussion began, it focused on critiques of mainstream organizations and organization theory. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990's that there was a beginning of a clear theory specifically related to feminist organizing. The primary assumption of this theory centers on gender and gendered organizations. The other five assumptions discussed in this literature review include: creating new organizational forms; creating a non-hierarchical structure; ensuring that "power over" is transformed as empowerment; pursuing shared leadership and democratic/consensual decision-making; and re-framing false dichotomies (i.e. public/private; male/female) that underlie organizations.

Empirical Studies

In addition to reviewing feminist organization theory, it is important to situate the study within the framework of related empirical studies. Searching for relevant empirical studies in order to contextualize this study was not a straightforward task. There are not many studies that have researched the specific experiences of feminist administrators in small, feminist human service organizations in Canada.

As was mentioned in the first section of this literature review, feminist organization theory incorporates ideas from practice and theory has been built upon practical ideas. However, a few academics charge that some theorists are showing signs of a classic mind (theory) /body (practice) split (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000). In other words, their focus on theory limits them from seeing how or if their theory works in practice. The connecting of theory and practice in order to fully acquire knowledge was labeled by Karl Marx as "praxis" (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Marx felt that until theory was put into action there was no real acquisition of knowledge. This need for praxis was voiced by Meyerson & Kolb (2000) when they spoke about the need to move "out of the armchair" and develop a framework to "bridge the gap between feminist theory and practice" (p. 553). Specifically, they focused on the need for theorists to use their work in a proactive manner – essentially moving into the field with their ideas in order to create change within organizations. This active and inter-active academic stance may be a way to influence the perception of academics held by some women working in the field. For example, based on my experience within the Women's Centre movement in British Columbia, front-line workers felt animosity and mistrust towards academics. They felt that academic work was not useful to them and there was anger that politicians listened to academics instead of front-line workers. Consequently, attempting to bridge this gap

with an inter-active focus is an important aspect of my research. The majority of empirical studies found through this search, however, seemed to focus on gathering empirical data about practice in order to better understand and inform theory without a corresponding commitment to use their theory to actively engage in, inform and improve practice. This may be simply be a by-product of searching for articles in academic journals. However, it is of interest because my research is focused on applying the results to practical settings. The empirical studies found through this search were also not limited to feminist human service organizations. The search was broadened to include additional non-profit organizations including collectives and other alternative organizations.

The twenty studies, which were found to be relevant, discussed human service organizations in three distinct geographical regions. Six of the studies came from Canada (Christianson-Ruffman, 1995; English, 2005; Karabanow, 2004; Foster & Meinhard, 2005; Laiken, 1999. Neal & Gordon, 1998) and twelve represented organizations in the United States (Arnold, 1995; Barnett, 1995; Campbell, Baker & Mazurek, 1998; Disney & Gelb, 2000; Gil de Gibaja, 2001; Hyde, 1995; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; Riger, 1994; Scott, 2005; Strobel, 1995; Valk, 2002; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1996). The final two studies discussed organizations in Australia (Broom, 1999; Carmody, 1997). While these three countries have distinct cultures, histories and frameworks for their organizations, they are similar enough to provide useful empirical information and help to provide the context for this study, which takes place in Canada. The human service organizations represented in the studies include women's health clinics, rape crisis centres, sexual

assault centres, transition houses and political groups. They were described in the literature as non-profits, coalitions, collectives, feminist and voluntary organizations.

The focus of these studies also varied. Six studies centered on the individual level: English (2005) and Neal & Gordon (1998) interviewed board members; Carmody (1997), English (2005), and Vinokur-Kaplan (1996) concentrated on staff; and only one study explored the views of clients (Broom, 1999). Four of the studies explicitly bridged theory and practice (English, 2005; Karabanow, 2004; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; Valk, 2002). The remaining studies used the organization as their primary unit of analysis.

Organizational Success

A common theme of these studies centered on a desire to learn what "works" for an organization. Specifically, these studies wanted to delve into how alternatively structured organizations "survived" or were "successful" (Disney & Gelb, 2000; Campbell et al, 1998; Karabanow, 2004; Valk, 2002). Many can be divided into research that focused on organizational "success" or organizational "struggle". The distinction between "success" and "struggle" as presented is a somewhat arbitrary distinction. These two concepts often go hand in hand – success perhaps coming out of struggle. What emerged from the literature was that the creation and use of new or different organizations is always a struggle and whether there is success often depends on how that word is defined (Disney & Gelb, 2000). Disney & Gelb (2000) stated that while many who study organizations equate the notion of "success" with survival over time, they have expanded the notion of success to include "achieving substantive policy reforms, creating resources for further mobilization and challenging ideas and cultural norms" (p. 46). Other mainstream

theorists have argued that organizational success should be primarily related to meeting the goal of service to the client/consumer group (Hasenfeld, 1983); however, that notion of organizational success was not prevalent in these studies of feminist organizations.

Campbell et al (1998) explored the sometimes-thorny debate of how to measure success in their research of rape crisis centers in the United States. They found that some organizations "successfully" survived by adapting their structure and their politics while other centers were "successful" by remaining alternatively structured and/or engaged in social/political action. "These results suggest that rape crisis centers have not become monolithic social service agencies. Some have become more mainstream, others always were more traditional, but still others remain free-standing collectives" (Campbell et al, 1998, p. 480). In Karabanow's (2004) research into street youth services, he found that these organizations followed tenets of anti-oppressive practice. He argued that "street youth organizations that engage in such practice orientations have been found to have much success in attracting hard-core street populations" (p. 58). Riger (1994) took a different method and researched a number of feminist organizations in order to develop a model that actually sets out the stages that a "successful" feminist organization would go through. The model grew out of recognition that very different organizations, each with a feminist ideology, seemed to be challenged and confronted by similar issues (Riger, 1994). Her argument was that organizational "success", if connected with growth or expansion, could include a change in organizational structure, even the adoption of bureaucratic features.

Alternatively, many of the studies under review focused on the struggle that organizations face when trying to structure themselves in a way not considered

mainstream (Arnold, 1995; Barnett, 1995; Hyde, 1995; Laiken, 1999; Strobel, 1995).

One major struggle for feminist, or alternatively structured, organizations "is the fact that

their belief system and the context in which they must survive are incongruent" (Laiken,

1999, p. 226). Laiken's (1999) case study showed that for an organization that does not

fit with the mainstream world around it, existing and thriving can be extremely taxing on

the people (both staff and board) who are a part of that organization.

Other struggles faced by organizations include the difficulties faced by putting

theoretical structural ideas into practice (Hyde, 1995; Laiken, 1999; Riger, 1994). Laiken

1999) argued that there are very few examples of feminist organizations that "in practice

successfully demonstrate[s] an actual restructuring of their organizational design" (p.

232) and this makes it difficult for new organizations wanting to change their

organizational structure. There were a number of collectives studied (Arnold, 1995;

Barnett, 1995; Strobel, 1995) although many of these collectives and coalitions no longer

exist in that form. Arnold (1995) argued that there are inherent conflicts and

contradictions that exist between collectives/coalitions and alternative organizational

structures.

Organizational Structure

All of the studies under review speak on some level about organizational structure.

This theme, which snakes its way throughout the research, finds particular resonance in

some of the studies. One group focused on the creation of unique organizational

structures such as collectives, collaboratives or other potential alternatives to hierarchy

(Arnold, 1995; Gil de Gibaja, 2001; Karabanow, 2004; Laiken, 1999; Valk, 2002).

Arnold (1995) researched the use of coalitions and collectives within the battered

women's movement in the United States. She concluded that organizational structure is

intimately tied up with the ideological positions of the organization. When there are

conflicts over ideology, there are also conflicts over structure, which can lead to struggle

and even the break up of the organization (Arnold, 1995). In contrast to that idea is

research that finds that for organizations to be successful in the search for new structures,

there had to be a corresponding shift in functions and interactions within the organization

(Gil de Gibaja, 2001; Laiken, 1999). In other words, a commitment to new processes and

functions allows for successful implementation of new structures. Gil de Gibaja's (2001)

exploratory research found that in some cases traditional administrative functions were

changing in order to incorporate new collaborative ideals and structures, while Laiken

(1999) in her case study found that the board and staff of a feminist agency renegotiated

their interactions in order to create a new organizational design. Valk (2002) discussed

how a unique structure, while only lasting a short time, can have a lasting impact. Her

case study of a lesbian feminist collective showed that by putting theory into practice,

even when the organization did not last, the process still "generated energy and anger that

sparked the creative process and encouraged the growth of lesbian feminism" (Valk,

2002, p. 331).

Another group of studies paid more attention to how organizations changed or adapted

their structures over time and under pressure (Campbell et al, 1998; Disney & Gelb,

2000; Hyde, 1995; Scott, 2005). Much research has been done on alternative

organizational structures that have "failed" or changed over the years. Hyde's (1995)

case study of a feminist health center that changed to a more hierarchical structure from a

collective one showed that changing the structure does not always equate with failure for the organization. In this case, the collective changed its structure in order to be more culturally inclusive and diverse (Hyde, 1995). This idea is echoed in research done by Scott (2005) who found similar hierarchical changes in structure could assist feminist organizations in becoming more racially diverse through the use of formal hierarchy for women of colour. Campbell et al's (1998) research on rape crisis centers showed that organizational structure can change and be somewhat fluid while still upholding the goals and values of the organization. It also showed that an organization's structure, while clearly reflective of the organization's internal politics, could also be reflective of the current external politics (Campbell et al, 1998).

Disney & Gelb (2000) argued their research showed that feminist groups can take on a number of different structures to suit their needs and continue to survive. "There is no one structure which emerges among feminist organizations as necessary or sufficient for group survival" (Disney & Gelb, 2000, p. 61). This idea is congruent with Riger's (1994) model of organizational stages that encompass a variety of organizational structures. It also reinforced Arnold's (1995) comments that the important question for an organization is not whether a specific organizational structure is the "right" one, but rather whether the particular structure fits with the organization's goals, values and ideology.

Conflicting Values

Another common theme in this literature was found to center around conflicting values. These conflicting values were present between an organization and society

(Campbell et al, 1998; Disney & Gelb, 2000) as well as within the organization (Arnold, 1995; Hyde, 1995; Laiken, 1999; Valk, 2002).

As was briefly alluded to earlier, the external 'political' situation can have an effect on an organization. These external forces can affect the success or failure of an organization and the structure it creates (Campbell et al, 1998; Disney & Gelb, 2000). "It has been suggested here that the changing political climate in the United States over the past decade has forced centers to adapt to more conservative funding and service policies" (Campbell et al, 1998, p. 479). As was mentioned earlier, Laiken (1999) observed that external conflict can occur when the ideology and values of an organization conflict with that of the mainstream society. For example, pursuing a nonhierarchical structure can be difficult if your funders force a more traditional structure on the organization. This conflict with the larger political and economic context can affect the structure and processes of the organization and can particularly impact the staff (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1996). English (2005) also examined external relations when she researched the conflict between feminist organizations and their government funders by focusing on the women's experience of the power dynamic.

Internal conflicts can be a challenge for any organization; however, in those that espouse participatory decision-making, inclusiveness or diversity, and non-hierarchical structure, internal conflicts can become monumental. Arnold (1995), for example, saw an inherent conflict between coalitions or collectives and the creation of organizational structures. She felt that the creation of structure automatically conflicts with the ability to work collectively. Laiken (1999) found that these internal conflicts are compounded by a propensity for women's organizations to avoid conflict and a reluctance to clearly

identify the conflictual issues. Sometimes the internal conflicts led to the demise of the organization (Valk, 2002). Riger (1994) found that internal conflicts can damage the sense of community within organizations, which is something that typically "motivates many women to join feminist organizations" (p. 288). However, research also shows that while internal conflicts are difficult and challenging for the organization, they can also lead to a commitment to work through the conflict as well as create a willingness to radically change aspects of the organization (Campbell et al, 1998; Disney & Gelb, 2000; Hyde, 1995; Laiken, 1999; Scott, 2005). As Riger (1994) noted, "conflict is an inevitable part of organizational life" (p. 290). How organizations deal with the conflict is often of greater importance than the conflict itself.

The Individual as Focus

As shown in previous sections of this literature review, the most common theme found in the literature was a focus on the organization itself. Most of the studies spoke to individual people but only to ascertain how they experienced or perceived the organization or to illuminate the structure of the organization. The exceptions to this rule were few.

English (2005) studied how administrators, Executive Directors and board members interacted with their funders and she had a particular interest in power dynamics. She took a post-structuralist, Foucauldian perspective as she looked at how these women (both paid and volunteer) worked with the government to secure funding while simultaneously working against it and challenged it's policies. While her focus was on power and power relationships of the female staff, the organization and the government,

English (2005) also focused on the perceptions and understandings of the individual women who made up the organization. By analyzing the words and experiences of women in feminist agencies, she explored and made visible the "complex dynamics of power relationships between feminist organizations and in government" (English, 2005, p. 150).

Carmody (1997) explored the views of individual women working in feminist organizations, which in her case were sexual assault centers in Australia. Her focus was not on the organization itself, but rather on the coordinators and their personal experiences doing the work. She was interested in how dealing with sexual assault victims affected workers both personally and professionally. In particular, there was a focus on social policy and how changes and implementations of social policy affect, and are affected by, the professionals who are charged with carrying them out (Carmody, 1997). Carmody (1997) found that "women experience their work differently and attach different meanings to it" and this affected how they interpreted and implemented social policy (p. 465).

How volunteer board members define their work was at the centre of a Canadian study by Neal & Gordon (1998). They looked at a woman's organization, which was governed by a board of directors and felt that it was important to "consider what women who accept volunteer positions on community boards of feminist organizations identify as their work" (p. 131). These women described their work as ranging from giving advice to representing a constituency to assisting in providing services, making tough decisions and providing interpersonal support (Neal & Gordon, 1998). In general, perhaps like

much feminist work, board members described their work as being challenging / frustrating and invigorating at the same time (Neal & Gordon, 1998).

Vinokur-Kaplan (1996) also interviewed individuals within organizations. She researched the experience of social work administrators during the 1980s in the United States, which was a period of fiscal conservatism and cut backs in social service agencies. The goal was to research the job satisfaction rates at this time in order to provide information that would assist with future social work education and management training (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1996). She concluded that in both non-profit and public sector agencies, "social work administrators overall continued to be alive and happy and, in the case of the nonprofit sector, prospering" (p. 104).

The one study under review, which focused primarily on the experience of clients, was one that looked at Women's Health Centres (WHC) in Australia (Broom, 1999). In particular, the focus was on the original appeal of these centres for women and whether that appeal still exists. Broom (1999) argued that the appeal for WHCs continues to be strong. The study stated that this appeal came from women not only wanting women-only health services, but also the chance to be involved in decision-making, attend a publicly funded centre and have a feminist space and analysis of women's health. The impact of the centres, according to the study, exists no matter how many women access them (Broom, 1999).

The Organization as Focus

Of those studies that focused on the organization, there were a few with a particularly 'political' perspective.   Karabanow (2004) focused on how street youth organizations

were structured alternatively by following anti-oppressive constructs. He found that these agencies had structures that were flexible, innovative and participatory and this allowed organizations to connect with and assist marginalized populations like street youth (Karabanow, 2004). The anti-oppressive framework laid out in his research showed a similarity with a feminist framework and could be accessed by other organizations seeking to structure themselves alternatively.

The political nature of women's groups was the focus of Christiansen-Ruffman's (1995) research. She was interested in how or if groups self-defined their work as political and how that impacted the organization. The impact of politics was discussed by other studies under review (Campbell et al, 1998; Disney & Gelb, 2000), but Christiansen-Ruffman (1995) took a unique approach in that the research focused on group members' "conceptions of the political" (p. 381). She found that many women did not view their work as political because they did not focus on "government" politics.

The importance of collaboration and coordination for women's groups was the focus of research by Foster and Meinhard (2005). They found that women's organizations were more likely to collaborate than mainstream organizations. This inter-organizational relationship not only reflected the internal values of women's organizations, but also contributed to their survival or success. Women's groups with more narrow mandates were particularly likely to work at creating bridging and bonding relationships with other organizations (Foster & Meinhard, 2005).

Summary

Taken together, the studies under review reveal a substantial body of empirical research in the area of feminist or alternative human service organizations. These studies showed the struggle that exists to create organizations that are structured differently or which follow different ideologies and values. The "success" or "survival" of these organizations seemed to be connected to how (and why) these organizations are structured as well as the possibility of value conflicts, both internal and external to the organization.

The majority of studies focused on the organization as the main unit of analysis and there appeared to be a strong focus on organizational structure in the research. Only a few studies came from the perspective of the individuals involved in the organization. These studies with an individual focus researched how staff experienced their work in relation to social policy (Carmody, 1997), job satisfaction rates for administrators (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1996) and how staff and board members experienced their work in regards to the power dynamic (English, 2005). Board members and their definition of work (Neal & Gordon, 1998) and clients' experiences of women's health clinics (Broom, 1999) were also researched.

This distinction around the unit of analysis has been made in a somewhat arbitrary fashion for the purposes of this literature review. While the distinction can still be made, it is important to note that there are areas of overlap and connection. For example, interviewing individual workers in a sexual assault centre not only illuminates their personal experiences, but also sheds light on the policies and structure of the organization and how it affects, and is affected by, staff (Carmody, 1997). There are also examples of

studies whose main focus was the organization, but whose research also provided insight into the experiences of staff and other individuals involved in the organization (Arnold, 1995; Hyde, 1995; Laiken, 1999).

These studies all used qualitative research methods with interviews being used as the primary method of collecting data. Document analysis was another popular method to collect data as an addition to interviews. Almost all of the studies' researchers come from an explicitly feminist perspective. However, many different methodologies were chosen to focus the research. Hyde (1995) and Laiken (1999), for example, both used the case study to research feminist organizations that were struggling with structural change. English (2005) in her search for the power dynamics that surround feminist organizations, used discourse analysis and poststructuralist methodologies. Carmody (1997), who like English (2005) was interested in the views of the individual women who worked in feminist organizations, used an ethnographic-inductive methodology to research sexual assault workers.

While providing more depth to the current academic theories and research is important, my research is also about providing the "women in the field" with information and support. What the review of the literature showed is that, while feminist human service organizations are far from homogenous, there are commonalties in some of the struggles that they face (Campbell et al, 1998; Disney & Gelb, 2000; Laiken, 1999; Riger, 1994). Administrators' real lived experiences, both positive and negative, can be shared and provide real, concrete information and support for the women who are currently in the role.

This research begins to fill a gap in knowledge specific to the Canadian experience. It is significant to learn how the experience of Canadian feminist organizations differ from other countries, in particular, the American experience. It is of interest to gain knowledge around how Canada's particular history and development of its social welfare state impacts the growth and tenacity of its feminist human service organizations.

Chapter Three
The Research Process

This study used qualitative research to explore the experiences of feminist administrators of feminist human service organizations. As Esterberg (2002) stated, "Often, qualitative researchers begin where they are," (p. 26). I chose to research feminist administrators, of whom I am one. Because of my personal knowledge, I was interested in learning more about the experiences of feminist human service organizations and the feminist women who work there.

According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research is "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem" (p. 15). Qualitative research attempts to "make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994 cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Because I was looking to understand the experiences of feminist administrators in feminist human service organizations, this form of research was a good fit. I was looking for a detailed description from the perspective of the participants, which is what McCoy (1995) said, is the focus and concern of qualitative research (cited in Thyer, 2001).

Shaw and Gould (2001) spoke about qualitative research being a process which "slows down the perception and invites exploration" and that by focusing on the familiar with new, detail-focused eyes, the researcher is able to be in "a state of wide-awakeness" (p. 8). In other words, qualitative research is about bringing very detailed, or "rich, thick description," to an experience. Some qualitative research also focused on social context. As Strega (2005) stated, "Understanding the 'reality' of an experience or process or phenomenon is contextual and must be grounded in the experience of those who have had

the experience or process or phenomenon," (p. 206). This attention to context found in

some qualitative research is echoed in social work practice (Sheppard, 1995). A social

worker looks at individual personal problems within the larger context of the person, their

family, and the larger society or environment. Sheppard (1995) described social work

practice as the "methodology of everyday life" (p. 287). In this way, qualitative research

and social work are an excellent fit.

Qualitative research is holistic in its scope but it reaches that holism by focusing on or

inquiring into the particular (Shaw & Gould, 2001). Social work as a field of study also

takes a holistic approach. This is another reason that qualitative research was a good fit

for this project. I was looking to understand the experiences of women within the

specific context of administering a feminist human service organization in Canada.

Creswell (1998) stated that qualitative research has the following characteristics. It

asks the questions *"How"* or *"What"*. It researches topics that need to be explored. It

focuses on providing a detailed view of the issue. It wants to study individuals in their

natural settings. It provides an opportunity to bring the researcher/writer into the study

itself and it advocates the use of the pronoun "I" and the use of narration or storytelling.

Qualitative research also speaks to people – audiences are receptive to this type of

research. Creswell (1998) stressed that qualitative research works "to emphasize the

researcher's role as an active learner who can tell the story from the participant's view

rather than as an 'expert' who passes judgment on participants" (p. 18). All of these

aspects of qualitative research ensure that it is a good fit, not only with social work, but

for researching feminist administrators, particularly as the research strived to hear their

voices and their stories. As Creswell (1998) stated "We [qualitative researchers] let the voice of our informants speak and carry the story through dialogue" (p. 20).

As a feminist, it is clear that feminist ideas and values are the basis for much of what I do. This also holds true for research. Feminist analysis guided me throughout the research process and assisted in laying the foundation for how this research was planned and carried out. My feminist and social work beliefs around making the personal political and working towards social justice meant that my research was focused in the same way. The 'personal is political' is "a lens for seeing women's individual problems within the context of oppressive social conditions that [keep] women subordinate to the dominant group," (Valentich, 2005, p. 146). Doing feminist research is itself a political act. This is because one is choosing not only to research the invisible (namely women), but one is choosing to research them with a different lens, a different worldview. Kimpson (2005), when speaking of feminist research, stated that, "...women's lives and experiences are the subjects of research and that making these visible and developing knowledge about them constitutes a political act" (p. 74).

At the heart of feminism, and therefore feminist research, is the idea that gender inequality is systemic in our society. "Feminism argues the centrality of gender in shaping our consciousness, skills, and institutions as well as in the distribution of power and privilege" (Gottfried, 1996, p. 1). As Devault (1999) stated "Feminists believe that women have been subordinated through men's greater power, variously expressed in different arenas" (p. 27). Gottfried (1996) had a similar argument when she said "In feminist research, gender functions as a 'basic operating principle" (p. 1). Devault (1999) saw three key ways in which research supported by feminism is different from other

research. Firstly, this is done by placing the focus on women. Specifically, this implies shifting the focus away from men and attempting to, "reveal the locations and perspectives of (all) women," (p. 30). Secondly, according to Devault (1999), feminist research works to minimize any harm or abuse of power within the research process. Finally, feminist research is different from dominant research because it focuses on research that is important to women "leading to social change or action beneficial to women" (Devault, 1999, p. 31).

Another aspect of feminist thought concerns the need for reflexivity. Reflexivity is critical reflection – it is about locating oneself in the research and explaining "the nature of research within the same framework as is used to theorize about the objects of study" (Kirby et al, 2006, p. 39). In essence, the researcher herself is a source of information. Reflexivity is about the researcher considering her own experiences, power and place in the world and how those things combine to affect the research process (Kirby et al, 2006). Being explicit about one's process throughout the research as well as locating oneself is an important tenant of feminist research. Self-reflexivity is a process that allows feminist researchers to acknowledge the multiple positions that both the researcher and participant occupy as well as critically examining the sources of social power involved in the research relationship (Deutsch, 2004). This reflexivity not only sets feminist research apart from dominant research, but it is also part of its political nature. Kimpson (2005) acknowledged this when she stated "This feminist 'self-reflexivity' about the research process constitutes a significant challenge to traditional understandings of the researcher as male, neutral, disinterested, objective, and disembodied" (p. 74).

Connected to this idea of reflexivity is the belief that feminist research acknowledges the researcher's subjective experience. The feminist researcher in fact, acknowledges "the limits of objectivity" (Deutsch, 2004, p. 888). Based on this idea, research is seen as bi-directional in that both the researcher and the participants are seen as subject, object and researcher (Deutsch, 2004). Bloom (1996) cautioned that this awareness of subjectivity must become more than simply a self-justification of privilege. Rather, she stated that researchers need to, "increase our curiosity about the ways that identity and subjectivity are actively produced both in the lives of researchers and respondents and in the field as part of the research process" (Bloom, 1996, p. 178). This focus on subjectivity is another way that feminism and social work fit together as social work also works to reflect subjectivity (Sheppard, 1995).

To that end, self-reflexivity becomes an important tool for researchers who are closely tied to their research topic. As has been mentioned before, my intimate connection to the topic under study meant that I had to pay attention to the assumptions, values and beliefs that I held before beginning the research. For example, my experience of the difficulties of administering a feminist human service organization led me to assume that these women would experience similar challenges. It was important that I was explicit about my assumptions and that I worked hard to be open about how my subjectivity affected the process. A personal research journal was kept throughout the process and this was a place where self-reflexivity was practiced. I took note of my thoughts and feelings about the research process as well as my thoughts about the information gathered, including things about which I was surprised or challenged. I attempted to be as open and transparent as possible about my values and assumptions during the interviews as well as

the analysis section. By constantly "checking in" and assessing what I was thinking and how I was reacting, I was able to keep my subjectivity a part of the process, rather than allowing it to lead and affect the research.

Feminism and social work, in my mind, have much in common and it makes sense to approach social work research from a feminist perspective. Core ethics and values of the social work profession such as dignity and worth of the person, commitment to social justice, and the importance of human relationships (Perlmutter & Crook, 2005; CASW Code of Ethics, 2005) are reflected in feminist research. While quantitative methods are an important part of both feminist and social work research, qualitative, feminist research makes a good fit with the social work topic of exploring the experiences of feminist administrators of feminist human service organizations.

Methodology

The particular methodology chosen for this research was narrative analysis. Narrative analysis has the story as its object of investigation (Riessman, 2001). It is based on the idea that stories are used "as a metaphor for explaining how knowledge and experience are structured" (Brownlee, 2005, p. 251). One of the arguments for narrative research is that there is a natural fit between research which focuses on human lives and human wellbeing and how people construct and tell stories (Carson & Fairbairn, 2002). The stories told by feminist administrators were reflective of their lived experience. The stories revealed how feminist administrators made sense of their work.

Narrative research focuses on the experiences that an individual has of specific events. These individual or unique experiences, then "become a part of a much larger experience

of culture and social relations within a community" (Overcash, 2004). In other words, while aspects of the story are looked at in detail, it is still the larger story told by participants that is the main focus of narrative research. The personal is political, that basic tenet of feminist thought, fits well with this narrative idea of focusing on the particular within a specific context. Fraser (2004) talked about doing narrative research as a way to "attend to context" (p. 181), be open to many different conversations and dialogues, and break down the power relationship that is based on an expert/subject dichotomy. These aspects of narrative research, as framed by Fraser (2004), show how narrative and feminist ideas fit together and, in fact, have similar goals and values.

Narrative research recognizes that the process of telling stories "is always set within a historical and temporal frame" (Aranda & Street, 2001). This context is very important for narrative researchers. Both the participant and the researcher reflect upon the experience as they tell, listen to and re-tell the story. Riessman (2001) spoke of this "storytelling" as being a collaborative process between the "tellers and listeners" and she emphasized the need to be aware of the contexts of both when interpreting the research (p. 74). Part of this context and reflexivity is the focus on respecting the way participants tell their story. Carson and Fairbairn (2002) felt that narrative research is "more reflective and more respectful of subjects...because it involves listening to their story, to their version of events" (p.22).

Narrative research is connected to postmodernism with its focus on subjectivity, agency and identity (Riessman, 1993). Acknowledging subjectivity is about recognizing the context, both personal and political, in which knowledge is created (Kirby et al., 2006). It is, in fact, the subjectivity of stories that make them valuable because they are

rooted in time, place and experience (Riessman, 1993). This narrative focus on

subjectivity, agency and identity ensures a good fit with feminist research, which, as was

discussed earlier, has very similar areas of focus. One of the focal points of narrative

research, like postmodernism, is on knowledge and subjectivity and how those two

concepts are integrated (Daiute & Fine, 2003). The understanding gained through the

narrative process is "implicitly dependent on collecting multiple perspectives"(Daiute &

Fine, 2003, p. 67). The goal is to see how these multiple perspectives both converge and

conflict (Daiute & Fine, 2003). In other words, the focus on individual stories leads to a

focus on how a number of individual stories have similarities or differences.

All of these aspects are important to how I conducted my research. Fraser (2004)

spoke of narrative research bringing forward the stories of people - making their voices

heard – as well as recognizing and validating their strengths. Again, as I have mentioned

before, one of the main goals of this research was to bring forward the voices of feminist

administrators, validate their stories and do this from a strengths perspective. This focus

on the individual voice and validating those experiences is another way that narrative

research makes a good fit with feminism. Feminism too is about allowing the silenced to

share their voices by validating their experiences (Devault, 1999; Kimpson, 2005).

Fraser (2004) said that narrative research can "engage people in active, meaning-making

dialogues... [which] may help social workers move beyond a strict problem focus to

more generally explore social phenomena" (p. 181). How feminist administrators

perceive themselves and their work is what I explored.

Through this research, and through narrative analysis, I heard the voices of

administrators of feminist human services organizations and brought their voices out of

the shadows and into the foreground. "A critical aspect of narrative theory [for social work] is making the effort to listen to stories that fall outside of the dominant narrative, as they are seldom heard and the voices, knowledge and experiences associated with these non-dominated stories tend to be excluded" (Brownlee, 2005, p.252).

Methods

The specific method used to collect data for this project was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviews are not only one of the most common ways to gather qualitative information, but they are also the main way of gathering research for narrative analysis. The stories collected become the raw data used for analysis as researchers retell or restory the original story (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). "We use them [interviews] not only because we wish to delve beneath statistically driven generalizations that are made, but also because they have the potential to validate the knowledge of 'ordinary' people" (Fraser, 2004. p. 184).

Because I was looking for the stories of feminist administrators, it was important that I allowed the interviews to be semi-structured. This allowed for specific questions as well as some unstructured space for participant's stories. The main focus was not necessarily on asking the correct questions or guiding the participant in any particular direction, rather it was important to listen and process while the participant guided part of the conversation (Fraser, 2004). The challenge of interviewing in the narrative paradigm is to begin with as few preconceived ideas or questions in mind as possible (Carson & Fairbairn, 2002). This can be particularly difficult if the researcher is connected to the participants or to the issue under study (as was the case for my research). Self-reflexivity

was important in this instance. My personal experience as a feminist administrator, and all of the values, ideas and assumptions that go along with that experience, meant that I had to be vigilant about self-reflexivity. The researcher also has to acknowledge that in a narrative interview, they must be willing to give up some control and allow the conversation to be led by the participant while at the same time ensuring the research question is explored (Riessman, 1993). I had to be aware of my own assumptions and values particularly in relation to the challenges that I had experienced as the administrator of a feminist agency. I found that I had to work hard to remain neutral and follow the lead of each participant during the interviews. It was particularly important that although I had some set questions for participants, I remained open to the unexpected stories/ information/ experiences that came about through this process. This worked well and I was fortunate to hear some interesting stories from the participants that I was not expecting.

As this was research for a university thesis, the methods chosen for this project were influenced by certain parameters placed on the research. The expectations of the Faculty of Social Work, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the University of Manitoba Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board meant that questions prepared in advance (see Appendix A), and a less participant-driven research design was created. This was a challenge for me from a philosophical perspective; however, it was important that this research met the guidelines laid out by the aforementioned institutions. In future research, I would be interested in pursuing a more participatory research design where participants would play a role in the creation of the design.

The less structured interviewing style mentioned above worked to minimize the power imbalance that often occurs between 'researcher' and 'researched'. The idea behind this is that both the researcher and the participant can work together to democratize this process by building rapport and sharing information in the interview (Kirby et al, 2006). This equality, or democratization, is not necessarily reached by having the researcher and participant treated the same. Rather, this position is reached through a respectful environment, shared experience and meaningful involvement of participants (Kirby et al, 2006). My experience as a feminist administrator allowed me to empathize with and share some of the experiences of the participants. I believe that this assisted with allowing a more democratic interview experience. However, I had to be careful that I did not share too much about my experience as this research was about the participants. Enosh and Buchbinder (2005) argued that the researcher/interviewer must acknowledge that they are not simply passive actors in the interview process. Rather, the researcher/interviewer is "active in meaning making, constructing a version of reality through their interaction" (Enosh & Buchbinder, 2005, p. 589). This researcher/participant relationship is of utmost importance and will be discussed in more detail below.

As a feminist with experience administering a feminist human service organization, I am closely connected to the topic under study.   I have strong ideas and opinions about this subject. Being aware and honest about my opinions and assumptions was therefore an important part of my research process. My story was important because it could have affected both the collecting and analysis of the data. My connection to the topic gave me

insight into the issue as well as an ability to connect with participants. It also meant that self-reflexivity played a large role as I needed to be extremely cognizant of my process.

The number of women interviewed in the study was small in order to conduct in-depth interviews. I was looking for women who had been administrators of feminist human service organizations for at least one year. For the purposes of the research, feminist organizations are defined according to Martin's (1990) broad definition, which states, "[it] is pro-woman, political and socially transformative" (p. 184). It was also important that the organization self-defined as feminist or as an organization that followed feminist principles. Participants also had to self-define as feminists. The main geographical area was the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. A purposeful sampling strategy was used. A search of human service organizations in the province of Manitoba, who provide services to women, was made and this became the basis of the research population. However, these organizations had to meet specific criteria in order to become a part of the research. Specifically, the organizations had to be considered feminist, based on Martin's (1990) definition mentioned above (pro-woman, political, socially transformative). The most important criteria, however, was that the organization self-defined as feminist.

A recruitment letter (see Appendix B), which briefly outlined the research, was sent to these organizations with follow-up phone calls made to ensure that they met the criteria and to answer any additional questions regarding the research. The initial recruitment process was successful in finding an appropriate number of participants who met the criteria.

I decided not to include Aboriginal human service organizations in the research. This was done for two important reasons. Firstly, as a non-Aboriginal woman, I did not feel it

was ethical to conduct research with Aboriginal agencies. I do not have a clear

understanding of the culture, philosophies and values that underlie the work being done

in these agencies. However, participating agencies did serve Aboriginal populations and

may have had an Aboriginal administrator. Secondly, the relationship between feminism

and Aboriginal agencies is complicated and cannot be adequately explored within the

parameters of this research.

The goal was to have between six (6) and eight (8) participants to take part in one in-

depth interview. The final number of participants in the research was six (6). The

interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Participants were offered a second

interview in order to gather any extra information they may have wanted to share as well

as allowing them an opportunity to provide feedback on the research process. None of

the participants chose to have this second interview; however, three of the six participants

did provide feedback via e-mail that has been incorporated into the final thesis. The

interviews all took place in locations chosen by the participants; they all ended up being

held at each participant's office. The main condition was that the location was

accessible, comfortable, provided a level of confidentiality, and was conducive to audio-

taping (i.e. low noise level).

The first six respondents who met the criteria were included in the study. If more than

six women were to respond, then the first eight respondents would have become

participants. If there were more than eight respondents who met the criteria, then I would

have chosen eight respondents based on a series of criteria to create some variability.

Attempts were made to choose participants who: worked in different sectors of the

human services; have worked for different lengths of time in administrative roles; and

were of different ages. Fifteen recruitment letters were sent out to women-serving

agencies. Of those fifteen, seven met the criteria of self-defining as feminist agencies and

feminist administrators and six were willing and able to take part in the research.

The idea of collaboration between researcher and participant, or the building of

relationships, is a big part of narrative research (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). This

collaboration can take place at any and all stages of the research process. Ollerenshaw &

Creswell (2002) argued that this collaboration is all about the negotiation of the

relationship "between the researcher and the participants to lessen the potential gap

between the narrative told and the narrative reported" (p. 332). Chan (2005) spoke in-

depth about this collaboration process and the building of relationship. She argued that

relationship building is imperative to making sure that collaboration does not simply

become a "theoretically driven, contrived exercise" (p. 47). Time and effort should be

put into the building of relationships in narrative research and there should be recognition

that the relationship building is a tenuous and ongoing process (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000). There is an ethical side to this relationship building as well. Keeping the

participant's information and identity confidential is extremely important and it is the

researcher's responsibility to do this. However, once in a relationship with the

participants, the researcher is also bound by ethics to be respectful of that relationship

and be open and honest about the research process. This means that I attempted to be

open and transparent about my agenda for the research and I attempted to incorporate

input from participants whenever it was possible and feasible to do so. This specifically

occurred when I was able to incorporate participant feedback after the draft analysis had

been presented to them.

Once participants were chosen through a voluntary process, I set up the interviews. Specific questions were written (see Appendix C), however, there was also unstructured space within the interviews to allow the researcher to follow the interviewees as they told their stories (Chase, 2003; Fraser, 2004; Riessman, 1993). This was vital to hearing and understanding the participants' narratives. As was mentioned previously, the interview questions are attached to this thesis (see Appendix A) and they were approved by the University of Manitoba's Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board.

Analytic Techniques

The stories collected through the interviews were transcribed and then analyzed on both a thematic and line by line basis. "Taping and transcribing are absolutely essential to narrative analysis" (Riessman, 2002, p.249). In fact, Riessman (1993) presented the process of listening and transcribing as being the first step in the analytic process. Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) described the analysis of narratives as a process of restorying. It is through this restorying that themes and contexts of both the participant's and the researcher's experiences are illuminated (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Fraser (2004) talked about the ability of line by line analysis to produce fine-grained, highly detailed data. This played an important part in the process of bringing forward the voices and stories of the participants. As was mentioned earlier, while much of the analytic process is focused on detail and thick, rich data, the overarching focus of narrative research is always the story (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). The focus on particulars had to be balanced with distance. Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002) suggested taking a

step back from the actual transcripts in order to get some distance and ask larger questions about the story like "what does it mean?" and "what is the social significance?"

It was critical for me to be in this analysis process for the entire research project. I kept a research journal throughout the process to record my thoughts and feelings. These personal recordings were related not only to my personal feelings and perceptions of the research, including any ethical issues that arose, but it also provided a space for me to track my interpretations of the interviews. This was important, particularly after the first few interviews, in order for me to learn from and improve my interviewing skills and techniques. I took the time to note how participants interacted with me, and I with them, as well as noting the nature of our conversation. For example, Fraser (2004) stated that "noting points of agreement and disagreement between interviewers and interviewees is also advised because they often provide insights about the ways the conversations unfold" (p. 186). These notations became a part of my analysis.

As the researcher, I did the transcriptions myself in order to capture both the verbal and non-verbal information from the interviews (i.e. body language, pauses, and silences). Doing the transcribing myself was important, as Fraser (2004) states "because decisions have to be made about how to represent the utterances, transcribing is as much a form of interpretation and analysis as it is a technical activity" (p.188). Listening and re-listening to the interviews as I transcribed was also useful as I was able to reflect on my feelings about the conversation and take note of my performance as an interviewer.

As was mentioned earlier, the interview, through the sharing of ideas and experiences, can become a place where equality between researcher and participant is built (Kirby et al, 2006). This idea of the creation of equality within the research relationship is also

about the ethics of sharing information. It was an important step to share the analysis

with the participants (if they were open to the idea) in order to check for understanding

and to share the information and process with them. Fraser (2004) makes a careful point

that the participants need to know that they are under no obligation to take part in this

'member checking' process. As was mentioned earlier, three of the six participants did

take part in this 'member checking' process and their feedback has been incorporated into

the thesis. This sharing process is also important because the participant's responses may

help the researcher "to see other meanings that might lead to further retelling" (Clandinin

& Connelly, 2000, p. 60).

Once the transcribing was complete, it was time to read and re-read the individual

transcriptions and begin to code them or organize them into themes. The particular codes

and themes became apparent through the reading, re-reading and organizing process. The

process of coding the transcriptions includes the researcher making interpretive

comments (Chase, 2003). I had three copies of the transcriptions: one where I made

interpretive comments, one where I coded for themes; and one where I did a line by line

analysis. Fraser (2004) spoke about dividing the stories into specific ideas. She also

emphasized the importance of noting contradictions as well as silences and pauses in the

stories. I found this process interesting and illuminating and it assisted me in creating a

context for the stories. Fraser (2004) referenced the importance of noting the particular

aspects of stories or "different domains of experience" (p. 191). I took the time to note in

my journal about how the participants expressed themselves as well as how they

interacted with me as an interviewer/researcher. These notes assisted in creating context

and I found them useful for reflecting on how the participants seemed to view themselves and others.

Fraser (2004) made particular reference to the need to be aware of cultural references. As the researcher, I needed to be aware of this because I might not have the same reference points as my participants and this could have led me to misunderstand or completely ignore the underlying information. "Given that humour, metaphors, language choice and narrative style are usually mediated by time, place, gender, culture, class – and a host of other 'variables' that researchers may not have in common with 'their informants' – crossed-wires or other forms of miscommunications are possible" (Olson & Shopes, 1991 cited in Fraser, 2004, p. 194). This information was gathered in the demographic questions as well as noted in my journal entries.

The next activity while analyzing the transcriptions was to look for commonalties and differences "that exist among and between participants" (Fraser, 2004, p. 194). Themes and story points were grouped at this point in the analysis and patterns were noted. Chase (2003) suggested coming up with several broad categories that bring together codes and comments. It is important to clearly show the specific transcribed material that fits into each category (Chase, 2003). I have included many transcriptions from the interviews in Chapters four and five and it was important that the participant's own words were used to back up any analysis and discussion of themes that I made. Riessman (2001) also made the point that narrative analysis is not simply about content, but also context. It focuses on the "forms of telling about experience" and therefore narrative researchers need to ask, "why was the story told *that* way?" (Riessman, 2001, p. 74). I

asked these questions during the analysis process and recorded them in my thesis journal. These notes have become part of Chapter five – Discussion and Thematic Analysis.

Synthesizing and writing up the research findings is a vital component of any project. It is important to present the written report in a way that is understood and appropriate for not only my academic audience, but for the participants as well (Williams, Tutty & Grinnel Jr., 1995). All six research participants have requested to have a full copy (either electronic or paper) of the complete thesis sent to them. It is important that the research results clearly discuss the methods used and ensure that any themes or conclusions reached can be backed up with the words of the participants and with a clear audit trail.

Rationale

My rationale for the use of qualitative research, feminist research and narrative analysis has been made throughout this research design section. I have discussed a number of times why they were good fits for the particular issue that I researched, how they fit with the profession of social work, as well as why they are good fits with each other. I believe that narrative analysis is not only a good fit to research the personal experiences of feminist administrators, but also an excellent fit with the use of a feminist analysis. Both combine a need to focus on voice by bringing forward women's lived experiences with a focus on agency and personal politics. Social work also focuses on bringing forward marginalized voices through the pursuit of social justice and the belief in social and political action (CASW, 2005).

My experience is that administrators of feminist agencies are often silenced – even when they are screaming loudly – by the dominant culture. It is important to me that

when stories are told about feminist agencies, we hear the voices of the administrators. I believe it is necessary that we pay attention to the personal experiences of the women who work in feminist human service organizations. Feminist, narrative analysis has allowed for their stories to be heard.

Evaluation and Assessment

Evaluating and assessing narrative research can be difficult. How can we distinguish good research from bad? How can we judge someone's story or our interpretation of that story? Trying to prove validity, or trustworthiness as Riessman (2002) called it, can be a challenge. As Overcash (2004) stated, validity in narrative research is not about finding the truth: rather, validity is about whether a story makes sense to the participant who told it. Stivers (1997) talked about this search for truth as being a "dream of power over others" and therefore not necessarily applicable to narrative research (p. 408, cited in Overcash, 2004, p. 19).

In this research, the first way that validity was created was through the process of member checking. Riessman (2002) refered to this process as correspondence, which she said is about finding out what our participants think of the finished work. As was mentioned earlier, participants had an opportunity to read the draft of the analysis to provide feedback. They will also have a chance to read the finished thesis as a way to accomplish member checking. In this sense, the evaluation process has taken place during a number of stages of the research.

The second method used in the evaluation and assessment process relates to what Riessman (2002) called persuasiveness. Persuasiveness speaks to whether the

interpretation of the narrative is "reasonable and convincing" (Riessman, 2002, p. 258). Essentially, this is about the narrative that I have written and how readers respond to it. As was mentioned earlier, the finished research will be shared with the participants. This research has also been shared with the researcher's peers in order to check for persuasiveness (and their input has been noted and incorporated into the thesis). The reader ultimately decides if they are persuaded by the research enough to apply the information to similar issues in similar settings (Overcash, 2004).

A third important method used to enhance reliability or dependability of the research is the audit trail. An audit trail is literally a trail – an explicit pathway of the data collected and decisions made that can be followed (Johnson & Waterfield, 2004). I have kept a research journal throughout the process and I have been explicit in my analysis about the reasons for all decisions made. This has allowed for a clear description of the analytic process. Another important aspect of an audit trail is ensuring that the participants' own words and stories are used to back up all analysis. To that end, I have made extensive use of quotations from the interview transcripts in this final write-up.

Critical Analysis- Strengths and Limitations of the Methodology

The strengths and limitations of any methodology are based on interpretations. Many people will view them differently depending on their perspective.

The first strength that I see for using this methodology is that it is a good fit with feminist analysis and therefore a good fit for exploring the narratives of feminist administrators. Both feminist research and narrative research focus on bringing forward

voices – particularly voices that are often silenced. Both forms of analysis bring forward non-dominant voices (Riessman, 2002).

Another of the strengths of narrative analysis is its ability to create thick, rich descriptive information, (Fraser, 2004). The stories that are collected through the interviews allow narrative researchers to gather extremely detailed information. In particular, Fraser (2004) spoke of how line by line analysis produces data that she described as being "fine-grained" and how that allows the researcher to "get up close" to the material (p.186).

Riessman (2002) emphasized that people use narratives in their everyday lives and often those narratives are used to deal with difficult or traumatic times. By using narrative research, we validate and recognize that. Aranda and Street (2001) said that "there is a natural fear about exposing to the light of day and the scrutiny of others that which was previously hidden" and that the process of narrative research allows for a "corrective emotional experience or an activity of therapeutic restoration" (p.795). This is not to imply that narrative research assumes that participants will have these kinds of experiences during the research process. Rather, it is a statement that researchers need to be aware that participants could experience such a response and it also sounds a note of caution to researchers that care must be taken with participants. Providing participants with the emotional support that they need throughout the course of the research is an important ethical consideration when practicing narrative research.

A fourth strength is that narrative research "provides ways to make sense of language" (Fraser, 2004, p. 181). This includes both verbal and non-verbal language. This is partly done through the very detailed, line by line analysis of the interview transcriptions. It is

also done by focusing on the references to pop culture, to metaphor, to silence, to non verbal gestures – all of these things come forward as the researcher reads and re-reads the data. How participants use language and how it shapes and is shaped by their stories is an important part of the analysis process in narrative research. As Aranda and Street (2001) stated, "The research interview mirrors the rest of social life with language forming the major cultural resource that participants draw on jointly to create meaning" (p. 792). This focus on language is echoed in feminist research and reinforces the good fit that exists between narrative and feminist research.

Riessman (2002) believed that a core strength of narrative research is its ability and willingness to recognize subjectivity. In fact, narrative research (like feminist research) embraces that concept as a way to bring us toward a greater understanding of people's experiences. Practicing a form of research that is reflexive allows the narrative researcher to acknowledge and defend the choices that have been made while articulating the research question and methods (Carson & Fairbairn, 2002). Carson & Fairbairn (2002) argued that all research is "a product of human choice and influence' (p. 26) and narrative research, and its use of reflexivity, acknowledges this and is therefore an ethical methodology.

A final strength for using narrative research is its ability to assist in the democratizing of relationships, (Fraser, 2004). Specifically, it works to balance power between the researcher and participant. This attempt to balance power is done through the focus that narrative research places on the researcher-participant relationship (Chan, 2005). This relationship is vital to the research and often leads towards research that focuses on collaboration as a way to empower both the participant and the researcher. This

relationship must be continually negotiated and the roles within that relationship are often fluid (Chan, 2005). This is particularly true in the proposed research as I am not only a researcher, but also an administrator and a social worker.

Limitations also exist for this methodology. One of the main ones that I can see is that as a non-dominant form of research it may not be taken seriously and therefore the research findings may not as well. However, depending on who your audience is for your research, this may not necessarily be a limitation.

Another limitation, according to Riessman (2002) is the possible difficulty with evaluation. The values behind narrative analysis do not fit well with mainstream ideas of validation and evaluation. "…validation in narrative studies cannot be reduced to a set of formal rules or standardized technical procedures" (Riessman, 2002, p. 261). Overcash (2004) argued that attempting to impose ideas of validity testing on narrative research is "completely alien" and forces ideas of the empirical on narrative standards (p.19).

Fraser (2004) noted another limitation when she acknowledges that narrative analysis can sometimes ignore the political aspect. By focusing so closely on the individual interpretation of the participant's story and the researcher's retelling of that story we can miss the political piece of the narrative. However, the researcher and the participants can choose to make sure that connections are made between the narratives and the larger societal structures and politics. Fraser (2004) believed that narrative researchers can be political and that, in fact, they "should not only reflect 'reality' but also challenge taken-for-granted beliefs, assertions and assumptions, including those made by revered social theorists" (p. 182). This tendency of narrative research to lean away from the political can be minimized, I believe, by incorporating a feminist analysis to the research.

Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) saw the data analysis process in narrative research as a limitation. They stated that it is not only incredibly complex, but also that there has not been enough description and detail around how to actually do a proper analysis when doing narrative research. They also felt that there are dilemmas for the narrative researcher in the process of data collection in the field as they feel that there can be conflict over who tells the stories and whether those stories are accurate. This preoccupation on accuracy, however, is a contradiction for narrative research. Narrative research is focused on how people experience and interpret their stories not whether the story is accurate (Overcash, 2004).

A final limitation is in regards to interpretation. While from the perspective of the participants the story is true, narrative analysis recognizes that all stories are interpreted by the listener/researcher and therefore there is no such thing as the "true" story (Riessman, 2002). However, this can be seen as a limitation of all research and is not limited to narrative research. Phillips (1994) felt strongly that this inability to point to truth, or to accurately decide if a narrative is true, is a serious limitation of narrative research. He felt that narratives should meet some kind of 'truth' criteria in order to be considered 'good' research. As mentioned previously, however, this argument is contentious as it suggests using positivist criteria to determine the usefulness of narrative research.

Ethics

I have spoken about ethical and political considerations throughout this design section, but there are a few other important considerations that need to be discussed. As has been

mentioned previously, the thesis research proposal was submitted to, and approved by, the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of Manitoba. It has also met the criteria of the Faculty of Social Work and the Faculty of Graduate Studies. All materials used in this research were presented to the REB and have been included in this thesis document (see Appendices A through C).

Working within the small community of feminist social work administrators in Manitoba has meant that maintaining confidentiality was of utmost importance. The REB has strict guidelines to ensure confidentiality and the professional and philosophical values of social work and feminism echo the importance placed on confidentiality. This research has maintained these high standards in a number of ways. All of the participants signed a consent form (see Appendix C), which had been approved by the university REB. Names of participants and agency affiliation were used only in the recruitment and interview phase. Once the interview transcriptions were made, all names and identifying information were removed. I was also careful when using direct quotations in order to minimize any identifying statements. The data collected through the research process, including consent forms, tapes and transcripts, have been kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home during the research process. Once the project is completed and my thesis has been accepted, all paperwork will be shredded and the tapes destroyed in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

As has been mentioned earlier, special care will be taken to send a copy of the final thesis (and therefore the results of the study) to all participants. This will be done by registered mail or by e-mail depending on the wishes of participants.

Summary

This research design was created in order to conduct research to answer the question: What are the experiences of women administering feminist agencies. A thorough literature review was conducted in order to place this research into both a theoretical and empirical context. This literature review clearly showed the gap in knowledge that exists and how this research would fit.

I began the research design section by speaking about the need for this research to be qualitative in nature as well as that it was influenced by my feminist world-view. I then argued for the use of narrative analysis as my methodology and I laid out the specific methods to be used. The full design was discussed in detail, as was the rationale for my choices. Finally, I took a critical look at the methodology.

It was important to me that a methodology was chosen which fits not only with my own values, but also with the participants – the feminist administrators in Canadian feminist human service organizations. I believe that feminist narrative research does this.

Finally, this research has been completed in order to complete a thesis in the Masters of Social Work program at the University of Manitoba. Social work administrative practice could gain valuable information about how, or if, administrators of feminist human service organizations see themselves using social work skills in their practice.

Chapter Four
The Stories

In this chapter, I begin to present the findings that were obtained from the six

interviews conducted for this research. The questions asked in the interviews were

structured in order to be open to the larger stories being told by the participants.   This

first step in the analytical process focuses on the narrative descriptions and individual

stories. The chapter begins with a look at how the participants came to their present jobs,

discusses how they define feminism, what key moments in their work looked like, as well

as shares their future plans in relation to their work as feminist administrators. The

second part of the analysis is in Chapter five and focuses on the themes that emerged

from the examination of the transcripts and notes. This second part of the analysis is

influenced by feminist organization theory and the findings from that literature.

Throughout these two chapters, the findings are supported with the words of the

participants. Direct quotes from the transcripts are the best way to ensure that the

participants' voices are heard and that their stories are told as well as ensuring that the

research is reliable and valid. In order to ensure confidentiality, each participant has been

given a pseudonym. This has been done to protect the participant while at the same time

allowing the reader to see how many participants are quoted and how often their quotes

are used.

Who are the participants?

Before beginning to discuss the findings, it is important to discuss the demographics

of the participants in order to create a proper context for the data collected.

In line with the criteria laid out in the research design, all six participants self-defined as feminists and worked in organizations or programs that either self-defined as feminist or followed feminist principles. The six participants ranged in age from thirty to fifty-four years, with the average age being forty-three. Culturally, the group was quite homogenous. Five participants were white Europeans and one spoke of having some Métis heritage. However, none of the participants were particularly focused on their cultural background and none of them spoke of their cultural identity in a way that influenced or played a role in their stories. Exactly half of the participants had children, and of those three participants, two of them had four children and one had one child. Half of the participants also stated that they had a partner, including one of the participants with children.

There was a wide range of work and educational experience among the participants. Three had between 10 and 20 years experience in the human service field, while three had more than 20 years of experience in the field. Three participants also had 9 – 14 years of experience as a human service administrator. The other three had considerably less experience as administrators with one, three and five years of experience. There was also a wide range of time spent in the current job. Three of the participants had been in their current administrative job between one and two years, while the other three had been in their current positions for six, nine and fourteen years. All six participants had some form of post-secondary education; however, this education was varied. There was only one administrator with specific social work education (B.S.W.). The other participants had the following education: M.A. (Sociology); Business Administration

diploma; M.A. (Peace Studies); M.Sc. (Family Social Science); and B.A. (Philosophy/Women's Studies).

It is also important to discuss the demographics of the organizations that were administered by the participants. Three of the six organizations were women's centres, although they varied in size and in the demographics of the population they served. Two of these women's centres were in more "inner-city" areas with culturally diverse and economically disadvantaged clientele, while one was located in a more suburban, white area of the city. Two other organizations worked in the area of women's health, although one was a large, independent organization and the other was actually two women's programs within a larger health organization. The final organization that participated in the study was a family centre.

It is also important to take a critical look at the sample. Discussing the sample is important because it provides a context for both understanding and evaluating the analysis. The sample is small – only six participants were interviewed. This means that the information gathered cannot be generalized to larger populations. However, in qualitative research that is not a goal. The goal is to learn about an issue on a deep and specific level in order to gain more knowledge about a subject. As well, the population of feminist human service organizations in Winnipeg is not large and therefore there were limitations placed on the size of the sample that were not necessarily in the control of the researcher. There was a lack of diversity within the sample. This is partly due to the fact that I chose not to include Aboriginal agencies in my study as well as the fact that I did not include Francophone agencies in my recruitment (see Chapter three: Research Process for explanations). Both of these populations have a number of human service

organizations in the city. The participants did have a range of ages, education and experience, but there was very little cultural, linguistic or ethnic diversity. This issue of diversity could be looked into more closely for further research. Another important contextual aspect to the sample is that all of the participants, and their agencies, are situated in one geographical area – Winnipeg. This was a conscious decision made in order to keep the sample manageable and in order to ensure that the research could provide "thick and rich" research specifically about the feminist agencies in this city. However, it still impacts the analysis because the women and their agencies have all experienced similar social and economic histories (in relation to their work) within this particular city (Winnipeg) and this particular province (Manitoba). Again, this is something that could be expanded further in future research.

Coming to the work

The first question asked of the participants was to share the story of how they came to their current administrative position. As was mentioned above, while all of the participants had some form of post-secondary education, there was no single area of education that was more common in leading women to these administrative positions. Some of the women came to their work as former clients.

> **I've actually come full circle with this organization because I actually started out as a client here (Jolene).**

> **First of all, I make no secret of the fact that I…I'm a survivor (Lucy).**

Others highlighted the fact that they have always worked in areas related to social justice, and women's issues and that being the administrator of a feminist organization was an opportunity to bring together various aspects of their previous work.

> **I pretty much worked my entire career in either the area of women's
> stuff, status of women, women's equality work or health care...when
> this job came open it just seemed to bring both of those aspects of
> my life together really well (Karrie).**

> **I've had different experiences working in a women's organization,
> um, feminist organizations, and gender politics, gender issues have
> always kind of been with me, so, in whatever job I've had and this
> opportunity came up and, um, I applied and got it (Maggie).**

It was clear that for all of the participants, the work was closely related to the kind of

work they had always done or always wanted to do. Three of the participants even spoke

of their jobs as being "dream jobs" - positions that they had worked hard to get or that

were jobs that they were meant to do.

> **I had always wanted to work here. This was sort of my dream
> job (Suzanne).**

> **I knew it was my calling (Lucy).**

For two of the participants, coming to this particular job was strongly tied to the fact that

the programs and/or agencies were new, which meant that the participants were involved

with the organizations right from the beginning. This was a draw for these participants

because they saw great potential in being involved at start-up and having the opportunity

to put their vision into practice.

> **I love start up, I'm very clear in many ways on a vision, umm, which
> would be social justice, like, I never waver from that...So it was great
> for me because there was nothing really in place, so it was like, this is
> fun (Dana).**

While the six participants all answer to the term administrator, not all of them go by

such a label nor are these roles all the same in each of the agencies. What administration

meant to the participants, and the everyday tasks that they had to do in their roles as

administrators, varied. This variance depended a lot on the size of the organization, the

structure of the organization, the particular education and background of the participant

as well as the length of time that the participant had been in the position. What was made

very clear about administrative work for the participants was that the work was always

unique and brought different challenges on an almost daily basis.

Everyday is different (Lucy).

**It means 'jack of all trades' really (laughter). It means anything…
its the gamut (Jolene).**

Meaning of Feminism

As one of the important criteria for participation in the research was that participants

self-define as feminist, it was important that I find out how they themselves define the

term. In chapter two I discussed the broad range of definitions that exist for the term

"feminism" as well as the many philosophical approaches that frame those definitions.

That discussion made it clear that there are many definitions of feminism and therefore

many ways that it can be articulated by women who are working in the field. All six

participants discussed what feminism meant to them, both personally and in the context

of their work. Five of the six participants had thorough definitions of what feminism

meant to them and were able to clearly articulate this. The sixth participant provided a

definition of feminism, but did not go into the same amount of detail, nor did the topic

infuse the rest of her interview in the same way that it did for the other five participants.

Three of the six participants spoke of feminism as being a value that permeated every

aspect of their lives and it was clear that feminism was a guiding value for most of the

participants. Karrie stated that feminism has **"been a really guiding value in the kind of**

work that I chose to do" while Suzanne phrased feminism as **"it drives me, you**

know?" This feeling of feminism as an overarching value was probably best summed up

by Dana who remarked:

> **Feminism to me is my whole sense of being. It, umm, is actually,**
> **probably, my culture.**

In speaking about feminism, the participants spoke about choice, equality, respect and

empowerment.

> **It is about equality, it is about providing our clients with choices and**
> **its about me, personally, um, expecting to have equality and choices (Lucy).**

> **There is a belief in feminism that people are created equal and that**
> **they deserve to be treated with respect. And that everybody has a**
> **wisdom inside of them and they know what they have to do for**
> **themselves it's just that sometimes you can't see the forest for the**
> **trees (Suzanne).**

They referenced healing, hearing/recognizing voice, valuing women and social justice.

> **Feminism to me is social justice (Dana).**

> **For me it means, um, recognizing women and their voice, but**
> **also some of the qualities associated with femininity and**
> **nurturing those (Maggie).**

They spoke about making the invisible visible, about caring for each other and

recognizing strength.

> **It means, you know, standing up for ourselves, and, ah, having the**
> **strength to do that and knowing that we can (Jolene).**

Feminism was also framed as being about challenging people's beliefs, doing work in

collaboration and working from holistic perspectives.

> **Collaborative work is feminist. And it's feminist to understand**
> **that collaboration means issues (Dana).**

Of interest, was that almost all of the participants recognized that the definition of

feminism has changed over the years, both on a personal level and on a larger scale and

there was a recognition that this change or evolution would continue. For some, this

changing definition was about their own personal growth and their changing needs and

comfort levels.

> **In the 80's I would have said, get the hell out of the way, let's go
> sister! And put my fist in the air! (laughter) Um, and at that time
> I would have said the personal is political, um, and I still do, but
> not quite so strongly (Lucy).**

For one participant, there seemed to be a generational change. A younger participant felt

that sometimes her version of feminism didn't always fit with other definitions within her

organizations.

> **There was a more classical idea of feminism in this organization
> than probably I embody or have lived with...because I was more...
> more of a third wave kind of feminist (Karrie).**

For a couple of participants, there were challenges associated with being a vocal, visible

feminist. While it was a guiding value and an important part of who they were, they also

expressed anger over the fact that assumptions are made about feminists based on

stereotypes.

> **You are perceived by the community in a lot of different ways...and
> it's not always positive...it can be very isolating (Lucy).**

> **I get angry...when I hear people and their assumptions about who
> feminists are, umm, and usually its purely ignorance (Dana).**

Dana also mentioned that she did not always feel welcomed by the feminist community

itself and she felt that she had been judged for not being the "right" kind of feminist.

> **I didn't like their approach, um, how some people just really
> judge people harshly that they weren't the right feminist.**

It was clear that for many of the participants, feminism embodied a worldview or value

that guided how they saw the world, how they interacted with it, and specifically, how

and why they did the work that they did. Karrie summed up her definition of feminism as

follows:

> **We need to work to build a society that allows women to make those choices, but also, ah, builds their own capacity to make those choices. And I think the other part of it is a kind of analysis or worldview that looks at, ah, society as being created based on, um, patriarchy and based on a system where women aren't honoured for their whole selves and that is embedded in the culture in lots of ways, but that it's also embedded in us. And so part of our work as feminists is not only to remake the world, but to heal the damage that sexism causes in our own lives.**

Structure of Organization

A large part of the participants' stories was connected to their organization, and

specifically how their organization was structured. While these were all feminist

organizations, it became clear through the interviews that there was no single

organizational structure that was followed. There were six unique structures presented;

however, three of the six followed fairly similar patterns. This pattern involved a board

of directors overseeing the Executive Director (or Director) who in turn supervised staff

and/or volunteers. In one case, there was also a community advisory committee that gave

input to both the board and the Executive Director.

The other three organizations were structured a bit differently. One was a collective

where the staff and board worked together with a consensus model. Another participant

administered two programs that were part of another organization and therefore had to

work within a larger structure. A final organization worked with a team-based structure

that had a board of directors overseeing a steering committee, which in turn oversaw the

various program teams.

The six organizational structures are included below in Figures 1 – 6. It should be noted that these flowcharts are based on my understanding of the participants' stories of their organization's structures and therefore may not necessarily be accurate depictions. However, they do provide a pictorial view of the structure from my understanding of the perspective of the participants. It should also be noted that four of the six participants described their organizational structure from the 'top down'. Of the two who did not do this, one was describing a collective (see Figure 5.) and the other chose to describe the organization from the 'bottom up' (see Figure 6.). This latter organizational flow chart is also unique in that the participant chose to describe her organization less in relation to structure and more in relation to a process. Specifically, the process she described was from the perspective of a client making their way through the organization.

Figure 1. Organizational Structure – Organization #1
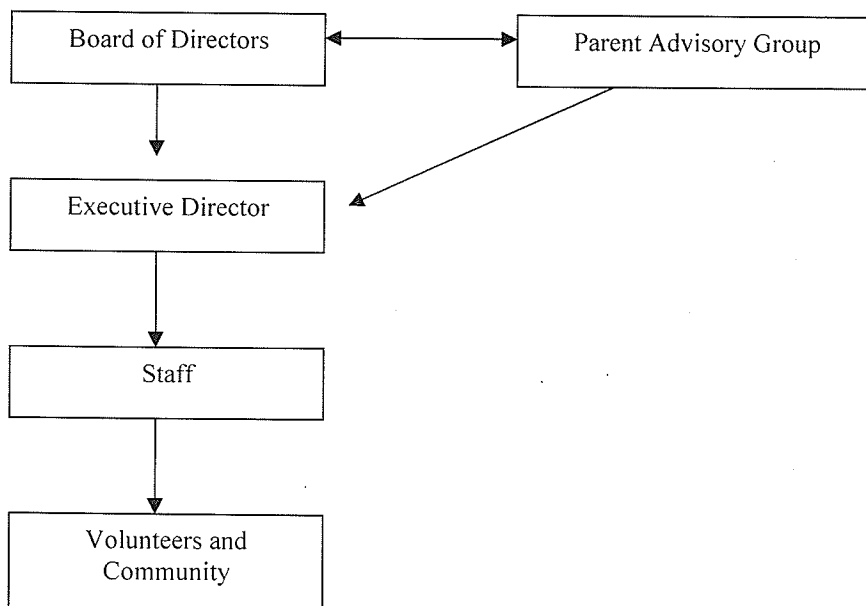
Figure 2. Organizational Structure – Organization #6
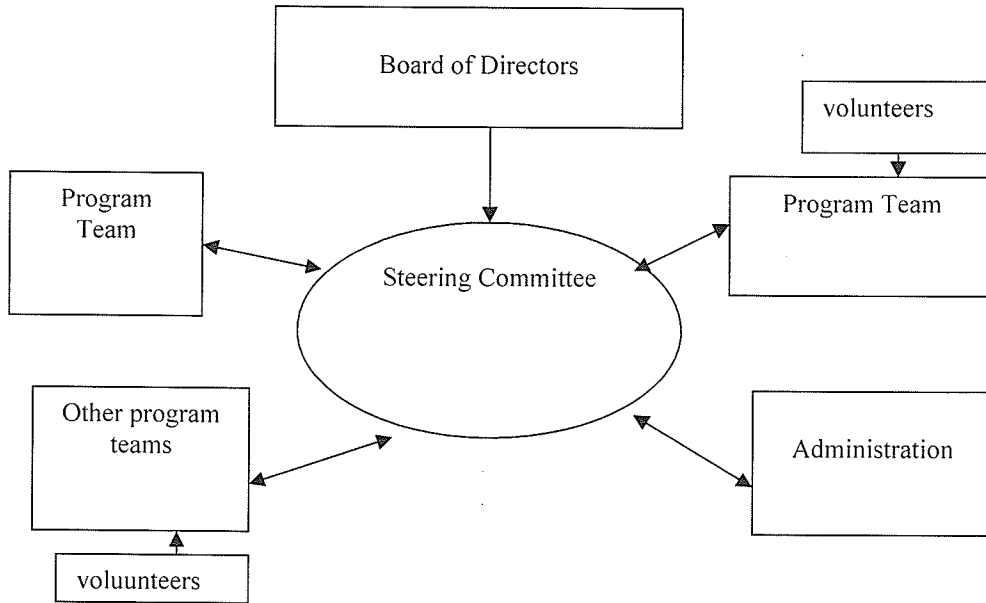
Figure 3. Organizational Structure – Organization #3
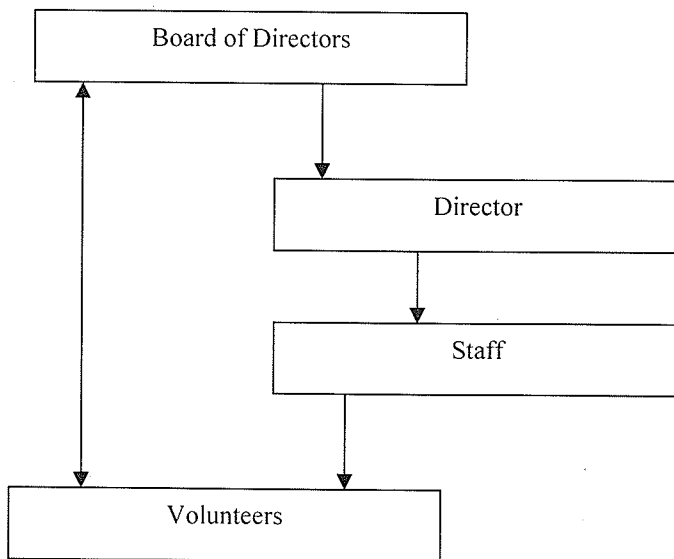
Figure 4. Organizational Structure – Organization #4
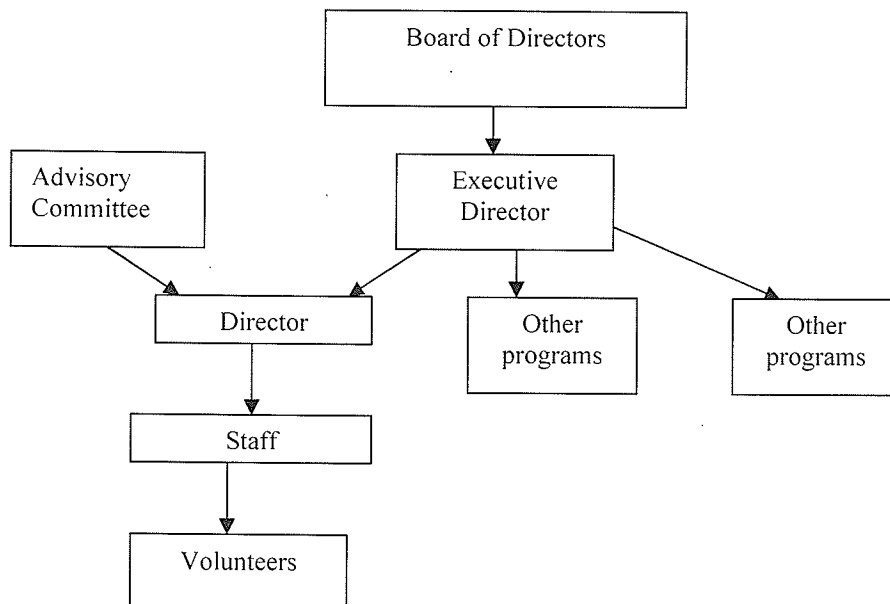
Figure 5. Organizational Structure – Organization #5
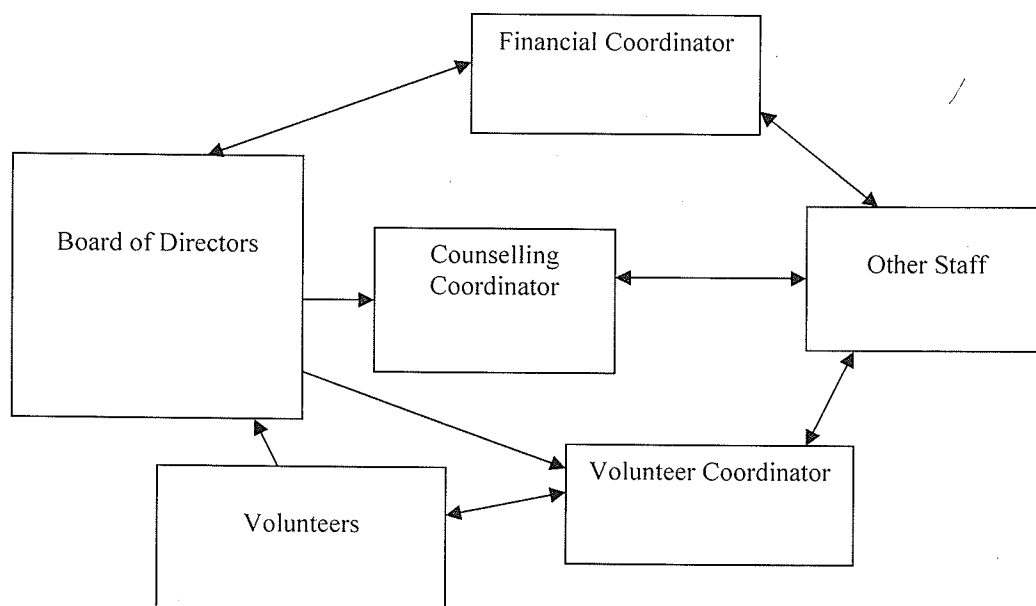
Figure 6. Organizational Structure – Organization #2

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┌─────────────────────────┐
│   1st Contact - Intake   │ ─────────┐
└─────────────────────────┘          │
            │                         ▼
            ▼              ┌─────────────────────────┐
┌─────────────────────────┐│   Independent Program   │
│      Programming        │└─────────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────────┘          │
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┌─────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────┐
│   Executive Director    │──▶│      Administrator      │
└─────────────────────────┘   └─────────────────────────┘
            │
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┌─────────────────────────┐
│    Board of Directors   │
└─────────────────────────┘
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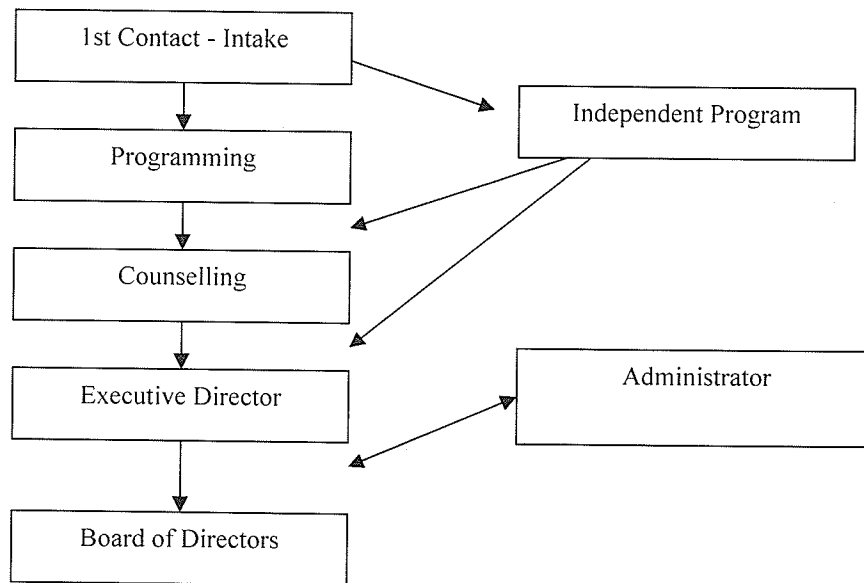
Two of the participants had experienced recent changes in their organizational structure; one was currently in the midst of structural change at her organization and a fourth participant hinted at possible structural change to come.

When asked how they felt about their organizational structure, participants had mixed feelings. Some were happy with both the structure and the support they received within that structure.

> **Yes, I have a board that supports me 110%. I have people that I work with that support me 100% (Dana).**

Some participants felt that recent changes were improving the situation – "**I think its better (Karrie)**", while others were hesitant about making any committed comments or decisions about the new changes.

While a number of participants remarked that some changes in structure could help the organization and make their role as administrators easier and clearer, Lucy clearly was unhappy with the current organizational structure.

> **No, I'm not happy with the structure. Sometimes there's a loss of communication, um, you're left out of the loop sometimes, the bureaucracy, the meetings, um, personally I'm not happy because I, I, to me the client comes first and I think that we're here to work with the clients.**

Key moments in the story

Participants all shared some key stories or moments that took place during their time as administrators of their organizations. These were experiences or stories that stood out or had a major impact on the participants. They were asked to share these moments, whether positive or negative and what came out was an interesting variety of stories.

A lot of the stories told centred around clients. Four of the six participants related at least one key moment that was about a client or clients. Maggie discussed the key moment as being when clients began to trust her.

> **It takes a while to build up trust...and, yeah, after about two months having a few people just make jokes with me, or relate to me that I was probably at a different level, that was probably a good moment.**

For some it was a positive story about the organization being able to help a client. For Lucy, the key moment was framed as an organizational or personal failure to help a client.

> **Um, most recently would be when my client was killed. That jumps out at me a lot...And then you always wonder, should I have done more? Should I have put in more supports?**

In fact, Lucy made it clear that all of her key moments were directly tied to clients.

> **Um, I think most people, other directors would say probably that**

success is, OK we got funding for this, you know, we got a grant for this. To me those aren't key moments. Key moments for me are seeing clients walk in with a smile on their face.

Key moments were also shared that were related to staff. Dana felt a key moment was being able to provide a healthy work environment for both herself and her staff. This story involved being able to see her staff happy and committed to the agency. Jolene related a key moment that had to do with the loss of a staff member and the ensuing stress for the organization.

Then a sad moment was when _____ left. Like, you know, it's just so, you know, she's a very dynamic individual and, um, I think [the organization] lost a lot when she left…it's been a stressful transition.

Some of the key moments involved broad ideas like vision, feminism and structural change.

A key moment was being able to take a vision and make it real…Um, I would say, seeing feminism in action (Dana).

Key moments, gosh. Certainly structural change has been a key moment in defining, you know, how we are going to maintain ourselves as a feminist organization in the big bad world (Suzanne).

I think the other thing that's been key is changing the management structure…they were very distrustful of any changes to the structure (Karrie).

Others were of a more personal nature.

My whole first year was a key moment. I mean, you know, it was just all the learning and everything that was going on (Suzanne).

Key moments shared by other participants also involved large, stressful events ranging from organizing a major event, dealing with a major housing or facilities crisis, and dealing with financial crisis.

A major moment for me was, ah, the first AGM. That was, that was

> such a big time and it was so rewarding in the end (Jolene).

> Other key moments, another one was when we, um, got kicked out of
> our building and we were homeless and sort of that struggle and what
> we had to do (Suzanne).

There were other comments made by participants that stood out in the course of their narratives. When Lucy was asked to describe administration, her answer reflected strong feelings about the work.

> Oh no! (laughter) Paperwork! Ah, frustration, politics, um,
> stress, the kind of job that, um, I'm probably sorry I took.

While her comments were the strongest, she was definitely not alone in her dislike of administrative tasks. At least half of the participants shared that they did not particularly like the administrative parts of their jobs.

Dana expressed the struggle that she felt trying to blend her feminist values with some of her administrative roles. Specifically, she struggles with having the power to hire and fire people within an organization that strived to have an egalitarian, non-hierarchical structure.

> This is where you'll have struggles. Is when it comes to feminism
> ...so, feminism when I first came here was like, we're all equal.
> There's no power imbalances. Well, as an administrator you always
> have a power imbalance because you are always going to be put
> into a position that you can hire and fire.

The other five participants had varying feelings about administrative jobs "fitting" with their feminist values; however, for the most part participants felt that within their own organizations they could ensure that their feminist values guided and fit with their administrative work.

> Oh, I think they go perfectly [together]. For me being a feminist
> in the world means that you have a great deal of integrity and a

**great deal of honesty and it means that you do things like face
your own biases (Suzanne).**

**I've been able to feel quite comfortable, um, in my role as well as
my values and to have them be compatible (Lucy).**

I think that they're generally a good fit (Karrie).

Future plans

Participants were asked to finish their stories by discussing whether they had any
future plans as a feminist administrator and whether those plans were connected to their
current organizations. What was made abundantly clear was that while participants were
committed to their clients, their organizations and their feminist values, they were not
necessarily committed to their work as administrators. Only two of the participants were
clearly interested in the administrative work that they did and saw themselves continuing
with it in the future.

Three of the participants were very open with the fact that their commitment was to
their agency and their clients and that they could not see themselves doing administrative
work at any other agency or organization.

**I would never become another Executive Director...I don't
like administration (Dana).**

**If I were ever to move from here, really, it would have to be something
that I could still be who I am as a feminist (Suzanne).**

**Yes, I'm not leaving. Um, to me it was a calling and I love the women
who come in (Lucy).**

Some participants saw their future as feminist administrators involving the enactment of
change within their organizations.

I see something…Big change (Lucy).

Future plans? Include people in meaningful ways. And I think, um, that mostly is around the board (Maggie).

Others saw their future ability to do the work impacted by finances.

I love being here and I love doing this stuff. I don't know how much longer I'll be able to keep doing it because of the finances…I sort of see this as, um, working in a feminist non-profit agency is kind of like my missionary work except I don't go overseas, you know, I'm here (Suzanne).

Karrie had clear future goals that would take her away from the organization and this particular administrative role. However, she was also clear about the impact that feminism would have on any future work.

I'll just, you know, continue to try and live the feminist principles in whatever work that I do.

Jolene saw a definite future both at her organization and in the administrative field.

Yeah, yeah definitely. I'm definitely going to be an administrator.

No matter the challenges faced by these women in their work, and there seemed to be many, they all expressed commitment to the work, the clients, the organization and feminism. As Lucy stated:

I don't want to make it all negative…You can't prove it, um, but it's nice to think that you made a difference in a child's life, in a woman's life.

The preceding information has been shared as a way to bring the participants' narratives forward. The focus of the chapter has been on their stories and their words in order to gain a greater understanding of their experience as feminist administrators. The next stage of the analysis will begin to look at the themes that came out of these narratives. The following chapter (Chapter five) will provide a thematic analysis that

uses the feminist organization theory literature as a guide. These themes will also be

accompanied and supported by the words of the participants.

Chapter Five
Discussion and Thematic Analysis

Introduction

This research has been done in order to add to our knowledge about the experiences of women working in feminist organizations. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the question: what are the experiences of women administering feminist agencies? This chapter continues the analysis of the findings begun in the previous chapter and makes reference to how the findings relate to the research question mentioned above. I discuss the themes that came out of the findings as well as how, or if, these themes relate to the existing literature. This thematic discussion complements the descriptive analysis presented in chapter four. I also share some of the data that was surprising to me as the researcher and speak to my own personal reflections.

A number of themes emerged from the analysis of the transcripts and research notes. Table 1 lists these themes as well as the frequency of each theme in the transcripts. Specifically, the table shows the number of interviews in which the theme appeared as well as the total number of times the theme was discussed. These 24 themes are discussed in detail and this discussion is supported with the words of the participants. I have chosen to keep this large number of themes discreet rather than combining them into categories. This is because the research is exploratory and the sample size is small. Until there is more data to support the decision to combine themes into larger categories, I feel it is important to keep them separate. This has been done with the knowledge that many of the themes do overlap and have areas of similarity.

Table 1. List of Themes

Theme:	# of Interviews where theme appeared:	#of times theme appeared in total:
Conflicting Values	6	31
Feminism as a Guiding Value	5	28
Structural Change	5	25
Vision/Values	6	23
Client Focused	6	19
Collaboration/Coordination	5	17
Non-hierarchical Structure	5	17
Community Connection/Capacity Building	5	16
Board of Directors/Policy	6	16
Organizational Success/Struggle	6	15
Funding	5	13
Leadership	6	12
Communication	5	12
Power/Empowerment	5	10
Team/Positive Work Environment	5	10
Voice/Being Valued	4	14
Shift from Front-line to Management	4	9
Flexibility/Creativity	3	9
Professionalism	4	6
Democratic/Participatory Decision Making	4	9
Problem Solving	4	8
Burn-Out/Workload	3	6
Proper Training	3	5
Compromise	3	6

Conflicting Values

Feminist organization theory literature contains a great deal of discussion about

values, particularly in relation to value conflict. This literature speaks about the

possibility for internal organizational conflict (Arnold, 1995; Egan & Hoatson, 1999;

Hyde, 1995; Laiken, 1999; Valk, 2002) as well as value conflict between the organization

and external forces (Campbell et al, 1998; Disney & Gelb, 2000; Laiken, 1999). There

can be value conflict due to political and economic change (Campbell et al, 1998),

ideological conflict (Laiken, 1999), or issues around power, in particular the relationship between power and funding (English, 2005).

Four of the six participants spoke about external conflicts existing for their organizations. For some, this was in relation to funders and their inability to understand how these feminist organizations chose to be structured and do their work. In particular, Suzanne shared how this external conflict had led her organization to make major structural changes. Her story emphasized that two radically different world views had collided and that her organization had decided to compromise some feminist aspects in order to remain viable. This kind of ideological conflict is reflected in the literature and often leads to organizations undergoing structural change (Campbell et al, 1998; Disney & Gelb, 2000; Laiken, 1999).

Maggie framed this conflict with external forces as miscommunication between two groups that is rooted in different values and interests. Dana also saw it as a conflict of core values. She expressed it as a conflict between internal needs and external expectations.

> **It's unrealistic to put any type of expectation on people and say even that I'm a change agent. And that's where all the funding sources are going. "Show an outcome." And its like, hey, this is about a process...People's lives change at their own will, we help facilitate it. It's about a process...We're supposed to be a little business – like here's an outcome.**

Lucy felt conflict because other people external to the organization had very different priorities and ways of working that she described as "**underhanded**" and "**engaging in dirty politics**". She felt this über competitive nature was not supportive and conflicted with her feminist values as well as those of her organization.

While half of the participants stated that there were limited internal conflicts within their organizations, three women shared stories about value conflicts that existed internally. Lucy was uncomfortable talking about this issue and found it difficult to discuss. She was clear that there was no conflict between her feminist values, how she administered the program, or with the values of the program itself. Her discomfort seemed to stem from a conflict with the larger organization to which her program belonged and the values that they hold. These conflicts often played out between her program, her funder (which has values similar to her own), and the larger organization within which her program exists. Grappling with the different expectations has been a challenge for her.

> **Sometimes there's loss of communication, um, you're left out of the loop sometimes, the bureaucracy, the meetings, um, personally I'm not happy because, to me, the client comes first and I think that we're here to work with the clients.**

Dana underwent some similar struggles where her organization's values of community development, feminism, and social justice conflicted with the values of a larger organization – namely the medical model and professionalism.

> **I'm not opposed to professionals, but professionals that have a clinical ideology or a very clinical, medical background that the nurse knew what was best for people or the dietician knew what was best for people…I kept saying well I think the parents might have some knowledge about their children.**

The organization went through some major staffing changes when these conflicts occurred and it is now structured with a community advisory committee that Dana felt made many of the conflicts non-existent.

Karrie shared her story of internal conflict that revolved around different definitions of feminism. Feminism was a core value for her, the organization and the staff; however,

how feminism played out was not consistent. She described the conflict as somewhat generational or **"second wave versus third wave"** feminism. This generational conflict is not unique to this feminist organization and the literature states that this can be common (Henry, 2004). Karrie shared that this conflict continues to exist and causes some stress within the organization; however, she did not see it causing major issues.

In the literature, these conflicts have been found to have major effects on feminist organizations, including damage to the sense of community within the organization (Riger, 1994) and sometimes even leading to the organization's demise (Valk, 2002). However, other research has found that both internal and external conflicts, when combined with a willingness and commitment to work through the conflict, has led to change and renewal for the organization (Campbell et al, 1998; Disney & Gelb, 2000; Hyde, 1995; Laiken, 1999; Scott, 2005).

Feminism as a Guiding Value

Another theme related to values that came up repeatedly in the participants' stories was 'feminism as a guiding value'. As the sample for this research consisted of women who self-identified as feminists who worked in feminist organizations, it was not totally surprising that this theme should appear. In fact, it could be argued that the theme was a direct consequence of the recruitment and sampling strategy. However, it is still noteworthy that participants spoke about feminism so frequently, both personally and organizationally, with such passion and commitment.

As was noted in Chapter four, participants used words like **"world view"**, **"guiding value"**, **"culture"**, **"whole sense of being"** and **"driving force"** to describe what

feminism meant to them. It was made abundantly clear that more than anything else, feminism guided their work, no matter what that work looked like. In fact, almost all of the participants (five of the six), when asked about their future plans, were clear about only one thing – that their future work would somehow be feminist in nature. A couple of the participants even said they could never work somewhere that was not feminist. As Suzanne stated,

If I were ever to move from here, really, it would have to be something that I could still be who I am as a feminist.

This strong connection and passion for feminism was not without its challenges. Participants did share stories of struggle, particularly related to how their vocal commitment to feminism was sometimes seen by other people. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Dana expressed anger at the misconceptions people hold about feminists. Lucy expressed feelings of loneliness and isolation connected to her feminist role and she feels that being an "out" feminist has had some negative repercussions on both her personal and professional life. Surprisingly, these struggles do not seem to have diminished the passion that these women feel for feminism nor has it made feminism any less important as a guiding value for them.

Other participants connected success in the organization to feminism. For Dana, success was about seeing feminism in action in her agency. She also spoke about the importance of the holistic approach that she felt feminism provides.

Cause you look holistically at what's going on in a person. You start seeing a person being multi-dimensional. Feminism gave you that.

For Suzanne, hanging onto feminist values and beliefs over time was one of the greatest successes of her organization. She particularly framed this success in the context of being feminist in a non-feminist world.

Anytime we hang onto our feminist values is a success.

Structural Change

"Structural change" is a topic that appears regularly in the literature about feminist organizations, initially as the practical, grassroots side to feminist organization theory, with community organizations being created with the intention of building organizations that were structurally different than the mainstream (Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004; Guiterrez & Lewis, 1995; Iannello, 1992; Scott, 2005). These organizations specifically changed their structures to be non-hierarchical, incorporated consensus models for decision-making and aimed to share power and authority within the organization (Adamson et al, 1988; Ferree & Martin, 1995; Iannello, 1992; Martin & Knopoff, 1997).

Almost all of the participants in this research shared that they had experienced, were experiencing, or were about to experience, structural change in their organizations. This was an important theme not only for the fact that it crossed over so many of the stories, but that it had such a major impact on the participants.

Dana shared many stories of the structural changes that occurred when she first came to the position nine years ago. For her, it was very important that the structure become flatter, or less of a hierarchy. This change reflected a focus on community development and capacity building rather than having a series of experts who provided information for women.

**I started hiring people from the community, or people with a
more community development perspective...**

This organizational change came about due to internal pressure or concern for the

direction in which the organization was moving as well as how it was or was not meeting

the needs of the community.

Lucy also spoke about structural change, but she framed it as a future possibility. For

her, this change was necessary in order for the organization to stay true to its feminist

values and, more importantly, to continue to meet clients' needs. Specifically, the

structural change that Lucy spoke about is one which would allow her program to be

more independent of its larger organization with its own dedicated board of directors.

The literature shows that structural change continued to play an important part of

many feminist organizations. Many of these organizations were seen to be incorporating

aspects of hierarchy and other bureaucratic structures (Britton, 2000; Hyde, 1995; Martin,

1990; Riger, 1994; Scott 2005). The rationale for decisions to incorporate these changes

varied from organization to organization, but the literature showed that it usually

happened because the organization grew significantly in size (Riger, 1994), was dealing

with internal and external conflicts (Laiken, 1999), or the organization was attempting to

be more inclusive and diverse (Hyde, 1995; Scott, 2005). Sometimes, organizations

changed their structure in order to survive and remain successful within different political

and economic climates (Campbell et al, 1998).

Karrie shared how her organization had recently changed from a relatively horizontal

structure to a more vertical one by creating a middle-management layer. This pressure to

change the structure came from internal sources, specifically herself and the board of

directors who felt that the organization was no longer functioning efficiently.

> **One of the things that's disappointed me about the job is how much**
> **of it is really, I will call it administrivia...there's me, and then there's**
> **like everyone below me or around me. And I've tried to bring in that**
> **kind of level of middle management to deal with some of those things**
> **that really should not be taking up my time.**

While there has been some resistance to this structural change, Karrie maintains that the

change allowed for power and authority to be diffused throughout the organization and

that the change has been a positive one.

Maggie's organization had also recently changed their structure to one that was

slightly more vertical in nature so that the role of administrator could have increased

power and authority in order to more adequately carry out its work. According to

Maggie, the pressure to make this structural change came from inside the organization as

it was recognized that there needed to be direct supervision of staff as well as a liaison

between the board of directors and the staff/volunteers. Most importantly, it was

recognized that some hierarchy was needed in order for the organization to function more

effectively and fairly.

> **They realized that the system wasn't working for various reasons.**
> **Um, I think, my assumption is, a lot of people in the positions maybe**
> **didn't have the training or the capacity to function in a consensus**
> **model and ah, maybe weren't given the support (Maggie).**

Again, this change in structure came about due to perceived inefficiency in the

organization and this participant also expressed that the change had been a positive one.

Suzanne was the fifth participant whose organization had recently gone through

structural change. She stated that she felt the pressure to change from sources external to

the organization. This external pressure was strong and came mainly from funders.

They made it clear that they were uncomfortable dealing with an organization that was

alternatively structured and stated that future funding would only come if and when the

organization made structural changes. Suzanne's organization responded by changing its structure from a collective, to one that was slightly more vertical in nature with one person taking on a more key administrative role in relation to communication with external forces.

> **My job has expanded to sort of be the one to go out and try and get funds (Suzanne).**

These changes were still relatively new and Suzanne noted that to date the impact of the structural change was minimal. Clearly, structural change was a strong storyline for these feminist administrators and one which wound its way through and around all of the participants' stories.

Vision/Values

Organizations with a clear vision and values tend to be well structured, well-planned and designed (Kettner, 2002; Lewis, Lewis, Packard and Souflée Jr., 2001). Definitions of feminist and alternative organizations often include being ideologically committed, focused on social change and having collectively identified goals and values (Martin, 1990; Perlmutter & Crook, 2004). The theme of values/vision was another strong one for the participants in this study.

As was just mentioned, part of the overarching value for these organizations was feminism. In all of the organizations, participants felt that the strong feminist values and vision allowed them to adapt their administrative roles to fit with their own, and their organization's values. A common story told in the interviews was that flexibility existed in the organization in order for this "fit" to happen. In this way, flexibility in the organization allows for structures and policies to change and adapt in different ways as

long as they continue to fit with the organization's vision and values (Arnold, 1995).

This seems to hold true for the feminist organizations that were part of this research. For

example, organizations that had some kind of hierarchical structure in place worked hard

to ensure that participatory decision-making or other avenues that allowed voices to be

heard were incorporated into the organization.

> **We have a participatory management philosophy...in some ways it's a really, kind of organic process, where, you know, decision items come in and they go out and through that we achieve some kind of consensus (Dana).**

This was not always easy and the participants had many stories that related how difficult

it could be, but most participants framed this challenge as forcing them to be "creative" in

their work. This "creativity" will be discussed further in the section on flexible job

descriptions.

A number of participants spoke clearly about vision and how important it was that

they hold a vision for their organization. For two of them, this was directly connected to

being founding members of the organization and therefore having a very personal, and

proud, connection to the vision and the organization.

> **I love start-up, I'm very clear in many ways on a vision, um, which is social justice and I never waver from that (Dana).**

For others, it was in relation to feeling that the administrator's role was about holding the

vision for the organization – being the one who saw the big picture. Karrie spoke about

this role.

> **My role is holding the vision for the entire [organization]. I think that most people who work here work in program areas so they have a clear vision of their program, but to have the vision of the entire [organization] and be able to make decisions based on the entire [organization], that's my role.**

In all of these examples, the participants were clear that they had to remain strong and firm in their values and, therefore, the organization's vision.

For Suzanne, value conflicts and recent changes had led to a need to compromise the vision of the organization.

Sometimes to get along in the world you have to compromise your vision.

This was a difficult issue for her and she sometimes contradicted herself when discussing the structural changes in her organization. For example, she stated that the changes did not impact the feminist values of the organization, but she also stated that the organization was forced to compromise its feminist vision. These changes are currently on-going at her organization.

Client-Focused

The stories told by participants highlighted strongly the focus that was placed on clients in the context of their work. Human service organizations are by their nature focused on clients. It is after all why they exist. According to Hasenfeld (1983), protecting or enhancing the well-being of clients, and meeting the goal of service to those clients, is the central purpose of a human service organization. Perlmutter and Crook (2004) add that alternative, or feminist human service organizations often look after the needs of individuals who are not being served by mainstream organizations. It was, therefore, not a surprise to find that participants spoke often about the clients that their organization served. While mainstream human service organization administrators also place an emphasis on clients and client needs – indeed, organizational success is defined in terms of meeting the goals/needs of clients (Hasenfeld, 1983) - in practical terms, they

are typically more focused on the needs of their staff (Kettner, 2002; Lewis et al, 2001).

It was noteworthy, therefore, to hear the passion and commitment that these feminist

administrators had for the women who received services from their organization.

The interviews were often punctuated with stories of clients who had impacted the

lives of the participants. Five of the six participants used client stories to support their

own story of the work they did and to highlight the work of their staff and organizations.

The sixth participant was the administrator of the largest of the organizations and seemed

to have very little opportunity to connect one on one with clients.   In essence, the

participants were saying that they were first and foremost accountable to their clients.

This accountability to clients could be a function of the size and structure of these

organizations and/or the feminist values held by both the organizations and the

administrators. Lucy made this idea explicit when she stated,

> **Accountability is probably number one...so when I think of
> the administrative piece I think about accountability. I can think
> of two groups – clients, as well as funders.**

Lucy also implicitly made her accountability to her clients clear throughout her entire

interview as almost every story and every anecdote was related in some way to her

clients. Other participants also emphasized how they feel accountable to their clients.

Karrie and Suzanne both talked about success being about ensuring that client goals are

met.

> **We're here for our clients and have we served them well to the
> best of our ability (Karrie)?**

> **Success is every time a woman meets her goals (Suzanne).**

Jolene was another participant who was clearly accountable to and focused on the clients

of the organization. She not only shared client's stories to illustrate her points, but, as

was mentioned earlier, she also described the structure of her organization from the perspective of a client who may be obtaining services there. For her, one of the greatest benefits of working in her non-profit feminist organization was the connection she was able to make with clients and the larger community

It was made clear that participants appreciated the length of time that clients were involved with the organization and how that allowed for relationships to be built. A few participants expressed that having these long-term relationships and therefore being able to see the long-term growth and change in clients was a privilege.

> **...the privilege of being in a [organization] is to see our babies that were 0, that now they're 9 or 10...you see them laugh, you see them cry. You get to see the whole person (Dana).**

Participants expressed a number of times that clients described these organizations as being like a family. The administrators who shared this observation definitely felt that this was a positive attribute of their organization and were proud of this achievement.

> **Moms that sit there and say that this is the best, this is their family. Those are moments (Dana).**

When the participants were asked to define "success" in the interviews, almost all of the answers revolved around the perspective of clients. This was the case whether it was framed as meeting the clients' needs or goals, ensuring that clients were "**happy**", or as clients continuing to use the services of the organization. What was most important to these administrators was that client needs were being met and that client successes took precedence over any other definition of success. This was interesting as this focus on client success seems to relate more to mainstream definitions of organizational success (Hasenfeld, 1983) than to the discussion of organizational success that came out of the feminist organization theory literature. In that literature, organizational success was

focused on survival of the organization as a unique, separate entity rather than on clients or their successes.

Suzanne shared that her organization had in fact been so client focused in the past that they were now feeling the repercussions.

> **Our philosophy had always been, you know, for every hour that I'm at a meeting, I'm not meeting with a woman and you know, jeez, what's more important. And so historically we have sort of chosen the women, right. It became very clear that if we didn't change those priorities we weren't going to be able to offer anything to the women.**

Other external forces, namely funders, were now demanding more of a focus as well and Suzanne's organization was in the process of shifting their focus and finding some balance.

Other participants also struggled with finding a balance between this intense focus on clients and their administrative work. Because their priority was the client, or front-line work, the administrative work often took a back seat or was thought of, somewhat bitterly, as simply taking them away from the important work of the agency. Lucy spoke strongly of this issue.

> **I miss the clients a lot...the first year that [the organization] opened I did all of the Intakes and that was wonderful and I just miss, I adore the clients...I still get actively involved in some cases.**

This focus on clients, as was mentioned above, sometimes clashed with other priorities and for a couple of the participants sometimes resulted in conflict. This willingness to focus so strongly on the client is a strength of human service organizations and one that needs to be supported. However, a balance needs to be struck between the focus on clients and the focus on the administrative role. For some of the smaller feminist

organizations involved in this study, the administrators did seem to be able to combine administrative and front-line work.

Collaboration and Coordination

Another important theme that came up in the interviews was the importance of collaboration and coordination in the organizations' work. While these two ideas do not always go together, I have combined the two themes together for two reasons. Most importantly, they often came up together in the participants' stories. Secondly, during my experience working as a feminist administrator, not only did I see collaboration and coordination become an important part of our work, but I also saw collaboration and coordination of services being emphasized as compatible ideas by our government funders. Foster and Meinhard (2005) found that collaboration and coordination was not only common but held to be important by many women's organizations in Canada. In fact, they found that small women's organizations were much more likely to collaborate in the process of their work than mainstream organizations. Egan and Hoatson (1999) report a similar focus on collaboration and coordination among feminist organizations in Australia. This research in Winnipeg found that five of the six participants spoke about the importance of collaborating and connecting with other organizations. The sixth participant, Suzanne, mentioned that her organization was in the process of putting more of an emphasis on collaboration and coordination.

Maggie and Karrie talked about the support gained through collaboration at both the organizational and personal levels.

Learning about other women's organizations in [the area]…asking them about policies or staffing issues. You know, just being supports

for each other (Maggie).

The executive directors sort of use each other also for support and, um, you know, just hashing out issues, because one of the things that is really true, that I didn't know before I did this, is that it is lonely at the top (Karrie).

Much like the participants in this research, Foster and Meinhard (2005) found that this collaboration and coordination was not only a reflection of organizational values in these women's organizations, but that it also was a contributing factor to the success or survival of the organization. Participants echoed this idea many times in their interviews. Many of them shared stories of collaborating on projects and programs. Sometimes this meant sharing their physical space with other programs, as Jolene spoke about.

Right now we have, ah, [name of other agency] working out of our building running their [name of program] program for women.

For other organizations, this collaboration meant that participants sat on community committees or worked with other agencies to put together collaborative grant applications for new projects and programs.

I'm partnering or working with a few other people in the neighbourhood to maybe write a joint proposal...I go to community network meetings (Maggie).

For Dana, it was clear that collaboration and coordination of services was vital to the organization's growth and success as well as their ability to meet client needs.

It's about forming coalitions to make movements...it's about partnerships, it's about all types of partnerships.

Four of the participants made special mention of the importance of this collaborative work and also that this was seen as one of the strengths of their organization – their ability to partner and collaborate with other organizations in order to provide needed services. As was mentioned earlier, Dana made a direct connection between her

organization's feminist values and their focus on collaborative work. For her, it was part of how feminists get work done – in collaboration with others. She also said that it was about feminism because you have to let go of ego and competitiveness in order for collaborative work to be successful. In her opinion, this is what feminism does. She told a story to highlight this point where the collaborative effort with unlikely partners ended up providing her with strong feelings of success and allowed for a unique opportunity to provide needed services.

Two of the participants shared that their organizations did not collaborate and coordinate services as much as they could and they both expressed an interest in doing more of this work in the future. Karrie expressed surprise that collaboration was not more important for her agency, while Suzanne stated that they had been so focused on their clients that everything else was seen as secondary. It is important to note that even the two participants who are not actively engaged in collaborative work recognize the importance of such work for their feminist organizations.

Participants were also clear that collaborative work with other agencies was important in order to learn from other organizations. This was particularly true of like-minded organizations or ones with similar values and goals. This sharing of ideas, challenges, policies and solutions, was seen as important for the success of their own organizations. This focus on collaboration as a way to ensure organizational success is reflected in the feminist organization literature (Egan & Hoatson, 1999; Foster & Meinhard, 2005). Participants also spoke about how important it was to share your knowledge and expertise with others and that this sharing had to go both ways. This was important support for the participants both on an organizational and personal level.

On that personal level, a number of participants expressed that connecting with other like-minded organizations was vital for their own individual ability to do the work. Four of the participants used terms like **"lonely"** and **"isolating"** to describe their role within their own agency and for them the connection with other people doing similar work was essential. These participants made it clear that without that connection the work would be much more difficult and more emotionally tasking.

Two of the participants ran programs that were started through a collaborative process, which saw many agencies come together with the intent of creating a new organization or program that could provide specific, needed services to women. These two organizations continue to be very open and positive about collaboration and coordination and expressed strong feelings about the importance of both processes.

Community Connection and Capacity Building

Closely related to the theme of collaboration and coordination, is the theme of community connection and capacity building. Feminist organizations have often seen themselves as creating new kinds of organizing and doing their work differently from the mainstream. Sometimes this new way of working centers around building partnerships and collaborating on projects as was discussed above. Sometimes this new way of doing work centers on connecting with community and building capacity on both a community and individual level. Martin and Knopoff (1997) state that feminist organizations have the goal of developing and valuing women's capacities as a primary focus. Building community and individual capacity is also seen as a way to empower people and,

essentially, ensure that power is held by the many rather than the few (Iannello, 1992;

Ferree & Martin, 1995).

For Dana, this focus on community and building capacity has led in the past to

structural changes, including the creation of an advisory committee made up of

community members. For Dana and her organization, community development and

capacity building, together with feminism, were the clear guiding values of the

organization.

> **Community level – our philosophy is that I don't have to own**
> **everything, I don't have to be an empire builder, but I must be**
> **connected to the community.**

Karrie also made this connection between capacity building and feminism. For her, this

meant that the organization was committed to empowerment, or capacity building, in that

clients were not just given choices, but also the tools to allow them to make these

choices.

> **We need to work to build a society that allows women to make**
> **those choices, but also, ah, builds their own capacity to make**
> **those choices.**

Karrie emphasized that her role was also about building the capacity of her staff and that

she needed to find out what their future goals were and work with them to make sure they

were met.

> **I really strive hard to build other people's capacity and, um, make**
> **sure that others, the folks around me and the folks that work here**
> **are developing in their careers.**

Other participants focused on the fact that a major part of their role was ensuring that

information was clearly and regularly made available to the community. This public

information and education process was one of the ways that both connections and

capacity were built in the community. Jolene talked about how her organization

specifically hires or uses other community organizations and businesses for special

events and meetings. Her organization also uses local media and does local presentations

to ensure that the immediate community members are aware of issues, programs and

activities. Suzanne also talked about the importance of educating the community.

> **Success happens every time we are able to do a workshop or**
> **provide information or referrals to somebody.**

A strong sense of connection with the community was another important story-line in

the interviews. Maggie, Jolene and Dana, whose clients live in a specific geographical

area, spoke about a strong connection to place and how their agency works hard to be a

part of that geographical community. The connection was built in a variety of ways

including: partnerships with other community agencies; hiring from the community;

creating community advisory committees; using and training community volunteers to

work in the agency; and ensuring that there was a "soft" intake where clients could ease

themselves into the program through contact with fellow community members.

Maggie discussed this focus on community capacity building with some hesitancy.

She felt that the goal was admirable and important. However, she felt that the model of

incorporating community members onto boards and advisory committees was perhaps a

"middle-class model". She felt that there was an assumption that including community

members onto these committees would automatically empower them, but without

appropriate tools, i.e. training, supports and mentoring, the idea was not always

successful. She expressed frustration around her struggle to do things differently without

having the proper resources or support to actually make it happen.

> **If we're going to be honest about mentoring people to be part of**

> **the revenue committee and help us write proposals or find meaningful**
> **work for people at that level – it takes a lot of energy and, um, boards**
> **are tired and they don't always have that energy so I'm, I'm personally**
> **a little bit conflicted about, um, our whole idea of empowerment.**

The theme of community connection and capacity building, therefore, was not without

some controversy and ambivalence.

Non-hierarchical Structure

Whether or not feminist organizations should have a hierarchical structure has been

another controversial topic within the feminist organization theory literature. Some see

hierarchies as gendered and oppressive aspects of organizations that are tools of the

dominant ideology (Acker, 1990; Ferguson, 1984; Iannello, 1992; Ramsay & Parker,

1992). This argument states that a flatter, more horizontal structure would allow for a

more egalitarian organization that is less oppressive to women.

What was found through the interviews was that five of the six participants observed

that their organization did have some kind of hierarchical structure, even though they

attempted to keep it as flat or horizontal as possible.

> **...this organization was trying to be as flat as possible (Maggie).**

> **...there's this false sense of we're not going to have a hierarchy**
> **so we don't actually have any middle management, right. So there's**
> **me and there's like everyone below me (Karrie).**

> **We are so flat because we are so relatively small. But there is a**
> **hierarchy if you're talking about money because I still make more**
> **money than most people here (Dana).**

The sixth organization was described as being a collective, an inherently non-hierarchical

structure; however, at the time of the interview, this organization was undergoing

structural change, which could see more formal, structured roles and a more vertical look

to the organization's structure. It was also accepted by most participants that the

agencies were able to keep the hierarchy 'as flat as possible' because they were

relatively small organizations.

As was mentioned previously in the section under "structural change", many of the

organizations had recently undergone change, or were currently changing. In every case,

this structural change involved the incorporation of some aspect of a hierarchy. The

literature discusses this idea of incorporating aspects of hierarchy as a way to create a

structure that can deal with power and diversity issues within a feminist organization

(Britton, 2000; Hyde, 1995; Martin, 1990; Scott, 2005). Maggie described her

organization deciding that the administrator's role should change to become one with

more power and authority, particularly around staff supervision.

> **...our board kind of supervised everyone and they realized that
> that system wasn't working for various reasons.**

Karrie spoke of how her organization created a middle-management layer, or another

rung in the hierarchy, in order to spread the authority for supervision and decision-

making. She felt that her role could not supervise and be the ultimate authority for the

entire organization and the solution, in her mind, was to create a middle group that held

supervisory authority and had the ability to deal with many of the smaller administrative

details. In a third organization, Lucy expressed that without a hierarchy, a lot of the

administrative jobs she had to do were difficult. She expressed that when there was not a

clear role or explicit authority to carry out that role, it caused some confusion and

potential conflict.

> **You know, when you move from colleague to supervisor...and then
> you get comments like "you're one of us"...don't think for one minute
> that I can't be that director because I will...It's interesting that in a**

**human service organization it's working with staff that can be the
most challenging.**

Lucy also stated that supervision, hiring, firing and conflict resolution were all easier

when the administrator had clear boundaries and some authority.

Despite these changes, most of which incorporated a hierarchy, the majority of

participants did not think this impacted their organization's commitment to feminism or

to their other values. Maggie stated that women's voices in her organization continue to

be heard even without being completely egalitarian – that even with a hierarchy you can

allow space for people's voices to be heard.

> **The whole idea of voice or invisibility...where voices are heard,
> where there is clarity and people, um, even in a hierarchy, which
> may exist and does exist to some degree here, even though we try
> and wash it out a bit, um, that there is still space for people to be
> heard or walk, steps for them to take, that there isn't a kind of
> top down, cover up kind of approach.**

A number of participants were clear that even within a hierarchy, those in administration

at the 'top', recognized that it was the front-line or the 'bottom' that was the most

important part of the organization. This is connected to the client-focused or client

accountability theme that was discussed earlier.

Both Dana and Karrie expressed that no matter how horizontal or non-hierarchical an

organization was, it was almost impossible not to have some sort of hierarchy. In their

mind, hierarchy, and power and authority, was inherent in the role of administrator.

> **When I first came here it was like, we are all equal. There's no
> power imbalances. Well, as an administrator you always have a
> power imbalance because you are always going to be put into a
> position that you can hire and fire (Dana).**

Dana also shared a story of trying to solve an issue in an egalitarian manner where all the

staff were involved and she was promptly told by the staff that they wanted nothing to do

with it. In other words, sometimes staff do not want the extra responsibility that a more

horizontal structure brings them. Based on these six examples, it seems that

organizational structure, and whether or not to have a hierarchy, is a topic that

organizations must struggle with in order to work through both internal and external

pressures. For these participants, incorporating aspects of a hierarchy seems to be one

way to work through these organizational struggles.

Organizational Struggle and Success

Another important theme to be discussed is organizational struggle and success. How

and if feminist organizations succeed and survive has been a large topic in the feminist

organization theory literature. As many feminist organizations have been structured in

ways that are alternative to the mainstream, it has been of interest to researchers to learn

how successful these organizations have been (Disney & Gelb, 2000; Campbell et al,

1998; Karabanow, 2004; Valk, 2002). The literature has shown that struggle and success

go hand in hand in alternatively structured or feminist organizations and that "success"

does not necessarily mean that an organization stays rigidly tied to a particular structure

or way of providing service (Disney & Gelb, 2000).

Five of the participants expressed the notion that doing what was needed to keep the

doors of their organization open was a success in their minds.

My job is to keep the doors open of the organization (Karrie).

Securing funding – now that would be a success (Maggie).

For four participants, the length of time that the organization had been around providing

services to women was a source of great pride and was seen as a success. Participants

were also clear that how the organization survived was just as important as that it

survived at all.

We're here and I'm determined to be here for the long haul (Dana).

In particular, Suzanne expressed that it was important that her organization still remained

true to its feminist values and that, in fact, this was one of its real successes.

> **Anytime we hang on to our feminist values is a success. Surviving
> for ____ years I think is a success.**

However, as was made clear in the previous discussion, remaining successful as a

feminist organization does not preclude making some structural changes in order to

remain viable.

Connected to the aforementioned topic of 'client focused', all participants related the

idea of organizational success to their clients. For Lucy, this focus on client success took

precedence above all else.

> **Success can mean a client's grocery money has lasted a whole
> month and we've helped her with that process.**

In fact, the struggle and success of clients seemed to both mirror and provide context for

any organizational struggle or success.

> **I try to measure it by what we do for our clients. Ultimately I
> think that is, you know, we're here for our clients and have
> we served them well, to the best of our ability (Karrie).**

For Jolene, part of her organization's struggle and success was her own story of

struggle and success. As a former client of the organization, she sees herself as an

example of what the organization can accomplish and she is therefore not only a role

model for clients of the organization, but for the organization itself.

> **I'm one of their success stories…and I hope that I'm a role**

model for them, you know?

Funding

The theme of 'funding' came up a number of times in the interviews; however, it was

brought up by participants in relation to their basic role as administrator and the topic did

not seem to impact the participants in a great way except in relation to other themes. This

theme was, in a way, embedded into almost all of the other themes and it was difficult to

separate it into a stand alone story. Four of the six participants stated that their

organizations were financially quite stable and five of the six stated that relations with

funders were quite good. In fact, Lucy described her organization's relationship with

funders and community agencies in glowing terms.

> **Very good with funders, very good interactions, they are just so**
> **supportive – I can't say enough about them. Very good relationships**
> **with other agencies – extremely good relationships.**

This implies that while funding is always an issue of concern for feminist administrators

of human service organizations, it was not at this moment in time the overarching story

for the majority of participants in this research study.

Five of the six participants spoke that their capacity as an administrator encompassed

a role as a liaison with funders and/or external agencies. This role involved being a

"buffer" or intermediary between these external forces and staff.

> **...being a bit of a buffer between staff here and, ah, and the**
> **external forces that we have to deal with whether that's**
> **government or funders or the public (Karrie).**

There was also recognition by a couple of the participants that negotiating these

relationships with funders was important even if it was difficult. For Karrie, negotiating

that relationship was a part of her job and part of how her organization remained viable

and independent.

> **So we're an independent organization in that way. Um, but we**
> **have responsibilities to the funders and that is always a negotiation,**
> **that relationship, you know, because our board and staff here I**
> **think feel very strongly about that independence, rightfully so.**

For Maggie, it was important to recognize the work involved in maintaining those

relationships, as well as recognizing why the relationship sometimes runs into troubles.

> **I mean they are all also working in their own worlds with their**
> **own demands and sometimes our worlds don't necessarily see**
> **eye to eye or I feel like maybe they don't understand the situation**
> **we work in and I probably don't understand their situation.**

This role was also closely connected to one which ensured that the organization was

financially sustainable. Participants clearly stated that it was the administrator's role to

make sure that funding was in place. Although this was sometimes done with the support

of the board of directors, most of the participants stated that they personally felt the

responsibility to ensure the finances for the organization.

> **...my job has expanded to sort of be the one to go out and try and**
> **get funds (Suzanne).**

> **...my job is to keep the doors open of the organization so that everybody**
> **else can do their work (Karrie).**

As was mentioned above, four of the six organizations in the research were financially

quite stable and the issue of funding did not cause the participants a great deal of concern.

However, for two of the participants this was not the case. Maggie had just been through

a financial crisis with the organization and it had caused a great deal of stress.

> **There was a moment...where we realized that we may not have**
> **enough money to cover our operating costs until March...that's**
> **been worked out, so that's a relief.**

Suzanne and her organization have been impacted by the issue of funding because the external funders were pressuring the organization to make significant structural changes.

> **We're in the midst of lots of changes right now...that is changing now because of funding restrictions.**

These two examples show how funders can still exert a great deal of power over feminist organizations and that they can have a lasting impact.

The impact of relationships with funders and the effect of that relationship has been discussed in more detail under 'structural change' and other topics pertaining to the funding story are also explored within other themes in this chapter.

Leadership

'Leadership' was a theme that came up numerous times across the interviews and is deserving of further discussion. Feminist organization theory emphasizes that feminist organizations have a commitment to shared leadership (Adamson et al, 1988; Iannello, 1992; Martin & Knopoff, 1997). The findings of this research both support and refute that assumption. While there was talk about being open with staff and the board of directors about problems and decisions, it was also made clear that the role of the administrator was to provide leadership and direction for the staff and the entire organization.

> **My position is more of leadership...giving some direction on sort of taking the next step (Karrie).**

Even when that leadership involved a more collaborative, sharing approach, participants stated that it was their role above all others to provide clear leadership. In fact, Dana's experience goes against the literature's call for shared leadership. She expressed some

frustration that when she attempted to involve staff and work with the entire organization,

they responded with little enthusiasm and simply wanted her to take the reins.

> **So I tried to engage everybody, that we are all going to be involved
> in this process and what it came down to was that most people turned
> around and said no way. That's your responsibility. You deal with it .**

While the participants brought up the issue of leadership, what exactly was meant by

leadership differed, even within a single interview. Sometimes, leadership was connected

to decision-making and conflict resolution.

> **Um, working with the executive committee to handle different
> conflicts or um, decisions that need to be made (Maggie).**

> **My job is to deal with conflict...and to deal with that conflict in a
> way that is respectful and constructive, but that ultimately moves
> the organization forward (Karrie).**

At other times, leadership was more closely tied to carrying a vision for the agency and

working with or providing direction for staff.

> **My role is a bit of leadership and a bit of holding the vision for
> the whole clinic (Karrie).**

> **At one level I guess it's, um, working with staff people and helping
> them run projects or programs that they're running. So, sitting
> down with them to brainstorm, um, a funding application, or sitting
> down with them to figure out how something that they are working
> with is going to be structured. Helping them work through other
> little problems that come out (Maggie).**

In all of the discussions that participants had around their roles as leaders, the

corresponding theme of communication came up.

Communication

Having good communication skills, or playing the role of communicator, seemed to be

connected to all of the participants' descriptions of their role as administrator. It was a

theme that was woven into most of their discussions. Feminist organization theory

literature usually speaks of feminist organizations having a commitment to open

communication, particularly as a juxtaposition to mainstream, hierarchical

communication (Adamson et al, 1988; Iannello, 1992; Martin & Knopoff, 1997).

Participants definitely focused on the importance of communication in their discussion of

leadership, of playing problem-solver and decision-maker, and taking on the job of

conflict resolution.

> **A lot of what I do is just move things forward…A lot of
> communication with the staff here and giving some direction on
> sort of taking the next step (Karrie).**

Maggie saw communication as the way to keep the organization healthy – that open

communication and clarity, in both oral and written communication, was vital for the

organization. **"All of that background work - policy stuff."**

Positive communication also played a role in how feminist administrators handled

staffing issues, how they worked with their board of directors and how they created and

maintained a positive work environment. Comments were made by several participants

that this communication needed to be open and that leaders needed to be humble when

staff communicated with them.

> **Staff were able to say that I was a jerk. And that I could do
> things differently…They got to really air it and it's hard as
> an administrator to sit there and say, I screwed up (Dana).**

This theme of communication is closely tied to the theme of voice, which will be

discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Power/Empowerment

'Power/empowerment' is another theme that is supported by the literature (Iannello, 1992; Ferree & Martin, 1995). In particular, Iannello (1992) speaks about feminist organizations working to change the meaning of power from "domination over" to the idea of empowerment. The theme was present in many of the participants' stories (it appeared in five of the six interviews) and, in fact, appears as an idea that is central to almost all of the themes. The actual terms "power" and "empowerment" were not always used by participants. One major way that the theme appeared was in the context of 'capacity building' as discussed earlier in this chapter.

'Power/empowerment' was spoken about by participants in the context of how they worked to try and level the power imbalance between themselves and their staff, with the understanding that there were some inherent power imbalances.

> **...you are always going to be put in a position that you can
> hire and fire. And that's a big distinction and no matter what,
> there is a difference. You can try and make it a level playing field,
> you can have the same pay, you can have an openness about
> talking and everything else, but there still is that distinction (Dana).**

This discussion of power imbalance made its way into the theme of non-hierarchical structure, which was also discussed earlier. This conflict of attempting to re-frame power while still holding power is supported by the literature. Arnold (1995) argued that having an organizational structure and therefore someone with the ability to influence others, automatically goes against the goal of working collectively. As was noted earlier, both Dana and Karrie told stories that supported this statement. Many participants felt that they had more power due to their position within the organization; however, one

participant, Suzanne, felt that her organization's collective ideal and ability to share

power continued to work even with recent changes to the organization's structure.

> **So, we're kind of moving to a tiered system. {*Has there been an*
> *impact?}* Not yet (Suzanne).**

For the most part, empowerment was not referenced in relation to staff members,

rather in relation to clients. This is connected to the fact that these participants and their

organizations are so focused on their clients. However, Karrie did speak about her role in

building capacity, or empowering, her staff members. In one story in particular,

empowerment was discussed with a hint of caution. We have already talked about

Maggie's story of how the focus on empowering clients, while a laudable idea, was not

always practical without more supports and resources available to the organization and

the clients. This is an important note of caution for other feminist organizations and their

administrators.

Team/Positive Work Environment

Many of the participants spoke about their work environment as a positive place and

how staff often worked together as a team.

> **We have, from my perspective, one of the healthiest work
> environments I've ever worked in. Because people engage, the
> gossip is minimal, people really work as a team (Dana).**

> **It's a team-based structure (Karrie).**

The 'team or positive work environment' theme also came up as a consequence of

being a feminist agency and focusing on non-hierarchical structure, open communication

and participatory decision-making.

> **We're one of the few collectives left in the city...you have to be**

willing to work together…but I think it works very well (Suzanne).

Jolene talked about the significance of a positive work environment and how informal

communication with staff was as important as anything else.

> **Success…is, you know, that I had a few giggles with the girls at
> work, which is, you know, always good for morale.**

This ability to create a positive environment and sense of community within feminist

organizations has been reflected in the literature (Riger, 1994) and this creation of a team

or positive environment is a way that feminist organizations create new ways of

organizing that are nonpatriarchal (Mumby, 2000).

Shift from Front-line to Management

Another theme that emerged from the interviews is the shift from front-line to

management work. This seems to be a common occurrence in the human service field

and one which is recognized in the literature (Perlmutter & Crook, 2004). Three of the

six participants had moved into their administrative roles from a front-line or direct

service position and, as was noted in chapter four, only one participant had specific

administrative or management training. Further connected to this theme is the fact that

two of the participants were former clients and the fact that all of the participants

expressed a strong client focus in their organizations. In other words, these are

administrators who, in a myriad of ways, still have strong connections to the front-line in

their organizations. This is an important story line to discuss further because it has

implications for the kind of training or education that human service workers could be

receiving and, in particular, how social work training could be incorporating more

administrative or management ideas.

For Lucy, this shift from being a fellow staff member to being an administrator has not been easy. She expressed that the boundaries were unclear and her new role as supervisor and being in charge of human resource issues has been difficult.

> **The staff here themselves would be the ones to say it: [Lucy], it's hard to see you as a supervisor because you're one of us**

More training in the administrative area, as well as some ongoing training, may have been useful in making this transition.

Lucy also commented that this switch from front-line work to administration was not her choice and while she understood the importance of the administrative role, she made it clear that the direct service work with clients was more important to her.

> **...the kind of job that, um, I'm probably sorry that I took...when I accepted this job, um, the person before me went on stress leave and didn't come back. And so I said, I have a love for my agency and I said I would come on board until she came back and she never did.**

Suzanne commented that she had a role that provided a balance between direct service and administrative work and she felt that both aspects of the job were useful and guarded against burn-out.

> **It's been a good balance...they really parallel. And I think if I was only doing the [front-line] part I would have burnt out a lot faster.**

This combining of roles could be something that organizations incorporate for other staff members who are moving into administrative positions.

Dana expressed that she chose to move into her administrative position because she needed a personal change from front-line work.

> **...it was time that I make a change from frontline and it was like, um, not that I knew how to do administration I just knew that I wanted from all the years of my experience was that I knew**

that I could do, or I thought I could, do management differently
than what I was used to or what I experienced.

While she appreciated the new challenges and what she has been able to accomplish in

her new position, she still does not seem to be overly fond of administrative work.

Again, the combining of administrative and direct service work may be a way to combat

this challenge.

Voice/Being Valued

The false dichotomies in our society and our organizations, particularly where 'male'

aspects are valued and 'female' aspects are undervalued, play a large part in the feminist

organization theory literature (Acker, 1990; Halford, 1992; Martin & Knopoff, 1997;

Mumby, 2000; Ramsay & Parker, 1992). Having an organizational voice that was heard

and respected was also brought up by participants in this research. Dana, in particular,

emphasized how hard her organization had worked to have its voice heard and respected

and that this was essentially how their clients' voices were brought forward.

> **...in Manitoba anyway, that if I went to government and said I had**
> **concerns they would actually listen to me. Um, because we've operated**
> **with honesty and integrity no matter who we're working with.**

This was seen as an important organizational role and a vital way that issues were

brought forward to those who create social policy

Giving voice to women, and issues of import to women, has been discussed in the

literature as a way to bridge the gap between the private and public spheres (Mumby,

2000; Halford, 1992). Specifically, the literature speaks about previously silenced voices

being heard through open communication and participatory decision making within

organizations (Martin & Collinson, 2002; Stivers, 2002). This focus on voice was an important theme for some of the participants in this study.

Three of the participants really focused on the recognition of clients' voices as a way to bring their issues forward or a way to make the invisible visible.

> **...empowerment, if we want to use that word, um, just helping people find a voice, or find their voice and how that can happen (Maggie).**

They felt it was the responsibility of their organization, and the people who worked there, to listen to women, allow them to speak, and when needed, speak for them. There was a corresponding recognition that sometimes there were repercussions related to speaking out. Lucy in particular felt the emotional effect of being singled out as the one who always spoke on behalf of her clients. In these organizations, the voices of clients had an impact on how programs were delivered. Lucy also shared how the creation of the program came about after hearing client voices in a series of focus groups.

> **The [funder] approached me and said, um, can I hold a focus group there, which you co-facilitate...so that was quite, ah, I think a good experience for clients, they were quite vocal about the way that they had been treated...**

Voice was also important from the perspective of staff. Half of the participants made specific mention that in order for the organization to run smoothly and in-line with feminist values, the voices of the staff had to be heard.

> **I think because we value what everybody does, you know, and everybody feels heard. We do consensus building when we make our decisions so everybody gets a chance to be heard (Suzanne).**

This was sometimes accomplished through structure, as was the case of the organization with a team-based structure, as well as the organization that followed a consensus approach to decision making. From the participants' perspectives, the voices of clients

and staff were heard and valued within their organizations. It may be interesting to do research with those groups to find out if they would be in agreement.

Flexibility/Creativity

'Flexibility/creativity' and the previously discussed 'team or positive work environments' were two themes that often appeared concurrently in the participants' stories. These two themes appear to arise in reaction to external influences and as a function of being an alternatively structured organization. As was mentioned earlier, the participants discussed the fact that the external challenges and restrictions from funders meant that they had to be creative. This creativity often played out as flexibility for staff in their jobs, which often led to a positive work environment.

> **So, how do I compensate for that, how do I make sure that I look at her and say like, OK, maybe you can only do this for 3 days and then we have to look at alternatives and it makes it difficult because you have funding sources that really have rigid expectations, but within that, um, usually you can be creative (Dana).**

This concept of "**being creative**" came up a number of times in the interviews, but specifically related to funding, budgeting and staff support. The participants used the term "**creative**" to describe pulling funds from one program to another, creating different job descriptions and creating flexibility in those jobs. This need for creativity in the work, while not exclusive to administrators of feminist human service organizations, did seem particularly important for these participants.

> **It's like we are in the dark ages and we just try to pull as much from this budget or that budget just to get it accomplished (Jolene).**

> **Basically what we always try to do is sort of pull money from all of our sources to top up the salaries so that everybody could be the same (Suzanne).**

Interestingly, while the participants felt they had to be creative because funding was

limited or rigid, the end result of that creativity was that the work environment was more

positive and staff appreciated the flexibility of their positions.

Democratic/Participatory Decision Making

Decision making, particularly in the democratic or participatory style, was brought up

in the interviews. It came up as a theme in relation to the role played by these

administrators. This topic was rarely discussed in great detail; rather it was simply

brought up in the sense that administrators had to make decisions.

Decision-making was referenced by participants in different ways. A few participants

highlighted that their role involved taking part in, and helping to ensure, that the structure

for participatory decision-making existed.

> **We have this participatory management philosophy and structure
> in the organization so, you know, I don't get to just issue a memo and
> say this is how it's going to be (Karrie).**

> **We do consensus building when we make our decisions so everybody
> gets a chance to be heard. You know, everybody gets a chance to
> voice an opinion (Suzanne).**

Others made it clear that they often had to make decisions quickly and effectively for the

good of the organization.

> **What I learnt is to be firm, but fair…I have had to make decisions
> that may not be the most popular decisions (Dana).**

> **So, we had to make that decision in one day…I approached that
> decision-making really from a set of business principles (Karrie).**

As was mentioned earlier, Dana shared how staff were not always interested in being a

part of a participatory process and feminist administrators were sometimes just expected

to make decisions on their own. Participatory decision-making has been seen in the

literature as an important part of feminist organization theory (Iannello, 1992; Mumby,

2000; Ramsay & Parker, 1992); however, participants in this research framed this issue

as being more about voice, particularly ensuring that silenced voices were heard. This is

also supported by the literature (Martin & Collinson, 2002; Stivers, 2002) as was shown

earlier in this chapter.

Problem Solving

Closely related to the role of decision-making, and also related to the aforementioned

theme of 'flexibility/creativity', is the topic of problem solving. Problem solving was a

fairly large part of the administrative role, according to participants. For some, problem

solving was part of the daily role of the administrators.

It's something new everyday – a different problem to solve (Jolene).

For other participants, problem solving was closely related to the values of the

organization. In other words, how problems were solved or the process that was used

was as important as whether the problem was solved at all. This focus on process is

reflected in the feminist organization literature and is part of how feminist organizations

have attempted to work differently from mainstream organizations (Adamson et al, 1988;

Ferree & Martin, 1995; Iannello, 1992). For two of the participants, this process

specifically included being open, being humble and recognizing diversity and difference.

> **Values – is that people hear. They do not judge...being
> culturally sensitive...so that we can all work through it (Dana).**

> **Integrity, honesty, yeah, and humility. You know, being able
> to make mistakes and own up to them (Suzanne).**

For Karrie, her organization was committed to sharing the problem solving process as well as evaluating how that process worked for members of the organization.

> **I think I also measure success a little bit in the process that we use. You know, did people learn something new along the way (Karrie)?**

This process of sharing problems among members of the organization was mentioned by a couple of administrators. However, Karrie specifically mentioned this as a way to share power within the organization.

> **I try really hard to share the power. I also try really hard to share the problems with people and involve, um, get peoples' input into solving those problems and be really honest with people about, these are the challenges that we're facing (Karrie).**

As was mentioned earlier, Dana discussed how sharing problems with staff was not always appreciated nor did it always work. It depended a lot on whether staff bought into the process of sharing problems and therefore sharing the work to find solutions.

For one participant, this challenge to problem solve was something on which she thrived. The ability to face problems and solve them was part of what kept her going in the work.

> **I love challenges...success to me is taking on a challenge that is big and walking out at the end of the day and saying, I knew I could do it (Lucy).**

Burn Out/Proper Training/Compromise

A final group of themes that came up were 'burn-out', 'proper training' and 'compromise'. None of these themes came up often enough to warrant an in-depth discussion; however, it was somewhat surprising for me that they were as minor as they were. My own assumptions were that feminist administrators would be over-worked and

needing to compromise their values in order for their organizations to survive and it seems that for these six participants that was not necessarily the case. There was definitely recognition that burnout existed and had to be kept in check by the administrator. In particular, this was related to part of their role in supporting their staff. It was also mentioned in relation to balancing their work role between administrative tasks and front-line tasks. Earlier we heard that Suzanne felt that this work balance had really contributed to minimizing burn-out for her.

Participants mentioned the theme of proper training in relation to the fact that many of them learned their administrative skills on the job.

> **I would say they've been learned just through practice and a bit through observation and having some good role models (Karrie).**

A couple of the participants also discussed the lack of funding available for training for themselves as well as their staff.

> **There's no, um, perks with regard to educating, getting yourself educated – and professional development is another one...specifically for admin, every single organization, non-profit, in this area, they're dying for good admin staff that know their stuff (Jolene).**

There were two participants who specifically mentioned having to compromise – as was mentioned earlier, Suzanne referenced how her organization had to compromise its feminist values somewhat, while Lucy felt her feminist values were compromised within the larger organization in which she worked.

Surprises and Personal Reflections

There were a number of surprises and/or personal reflections that came out of this research. Some of this was due to contradictions in themes among the participants'

stories while other surprises came about because certain issues in the literature did not make themselves clear in the participants' stories. Still other realizations were of a more personal nature.

The first surprise had to do with the issue of professionalism. The literature shows that feminist organizations have often focused on demystifying expertise and focused on building the capacity of women in general – in a sense working to ensure that "professional knowledge" is not valued over other knowledge (Adamson et al, 1988, Iannello, 1992; Martin & Knopoff, 1997). This was a strong theme for a couple of the participants; however, that theme manifested itself in very different ways. This was a theme that was filled with contradictions – both across the stories and within stories. Jolene, who comes from a background that saw her come to the work as a former client and one who is busy studying to gain professional certification in accounting, clearly valued professionalism and saw benefits to becoming a professional. Dana, who is a white, middle-class, educated woman, was quite anti-professional and struggled with how to provide services in her organization and build community capacity while still providing "professional" services.

I don't need people with those types of degrees and I said that I need people that will be able to engage people.

Lucy expressed some frustration that her board of directors used to be made up of community members and was now a board of professionals and that this had changed the way the board saw the organization. As was mentioned earlier, Maggie struggled with the inclusion of community members on her board and the resulting lack of professional support for her position. She made it clear that community members bring their own

skills and knowledge that are important to the organization, but felt there needed to be a balance with professional support.

On a more organizational level, there were also different opinions expressed in relation to professionalism. One organization, according to the Suzanne, was feeling external pressure to structure their organization differently, or more "professionally". This involved having positions with certain labels and roles that the external funding organizations would understand.

> **The need to see one person, they need to know who that person is, um, they want a name, they want a label.**

This pressure was a direct reflection of what funders expected of the organization and caused a great deal of stress and conflict for the organization. A second organization was also making structural changes to be more "professional"; however, the pressure to change was from internal rather than external sources. The administrator of this organization, Karrie, felt that they needed to show that they were indeed a legitimate voice in their field and that they needed to present themselves as the **"big player"** that they were. Whether this pressure to be more professional came from external or internal sources, these changes caused significant stress and conflict within both organizations.

Another "eye-opener", or realization, came in relation to the training and education that these feminist administrators possessed. None of the participants, except for one who had a business administration diploma and was studying for her C.G.A., had specific administration or management training. On top of that, only one participant had training as a social worker (BSW), although three participants did have education in related fields (Family Social Science, Sociology and Peace Studies). The vast majority of administrative/ managerial and supervision skills were learnt on the job. When this

information is combined with the participants' feelings of isolation and loneliness, it

seems that more professional support and training for these human service organization

administrators may be a good idea.

Based on a lot of the literature, I was expecting more of a discussion about the role of

the boards of directors in these non-profit agencies. The only real discussion in this area

occurred after direct questions and it was clear that there was not a lot of interest for these

women to discuss this particular issue. One participant did speak about her board of

directors in more detail and she seemed to work in close contact with members of her

board.

> **And then there is the work that is related to the board. So, ah, working with the executive committee to handle different conflicts or um, decisions that need to be made. Working with the personnel committee on hiring, on personnel issues, vacation time, whatever (Maggie).**

Interestingly, as was mentioned earlier, Maggie was also the participant who expressed a

note of caution around how empowerment or capacity building played out in her

organization and in relation to members of the board.

The other five participants mentioned their boards briefly and after pointed questions,

each responded that her board was supportive of her and the organization, although to

varying degrees. As was mentioned earlier, Lucy felt that her board was not as

supportive as it could be, partly because it was now made up of professionals rather than

community members. While some literature does speak of conflicts between

administrators (or Executive Directors) and their boards (Skotnitsky & Ferguson, 2005),

this was not something that the participants shared through their interviews.

A common response by participants in relation to boards of directors was that they did what they could in the context of being volunteers for the organization and busy in their own lives.

> **I mean, our board is fabulous. They're volunteers and so as such, their time is limited. You know, it would be great if they could be more involved, but um, you can't ask more of them these days because people are just being so stretched (Suzanne).**

Board members having busy lives and large demands on their time are ideas supported by the literature, particularly with boards that primarily consist of female members (Skotnitsky & Ferguson, 2005). The interaction of staff and board members of feminist human service organizations would be an interesting topic to explore in future research.

On a more personal note, there were a couple of findings that were somewhat disheartening to realize. It was not completely surprising, but it was notable how almost all of the participants remarked on the loneliness of the job. This loneliness was felt both within the organization and outside of the organization. Sometimes it related to the loneliness inherent in the role of administrator within one's organization and sometimes it related to the loneliness of being an organization that tries to work differently. While I had felt similar feelings while working as the administrator of a feminist organization, I had assumed that many of those feelings of isolation were connected to the rural setting and not necessarily to the work itself. Finding ways within and outside of the organization to combat these feelings could be very important for both administrators and their organizations.

Another disheartening realization was that very few, perhaps only one or two, of the participants seemed totally happy in their role as an administrator/manager of a human service organization. There was very little doubt that they were passionate and

committed to the agency, its work, and especially the clients; however, there seemed to be a strong dislike of the specific administrative role and tasks.

This chapter has provided a thematic analysis to complement the descriptive analysis presented earlier in Chapter four. Themes were discussed and connected to feminist organization theory literature. All of this research and analysis was done in order to answer the question: what are the experiences of women administering feminist agencies? This thesis will conclude in Chapter six with a discussion of the implications of this research for both feminist human service organizations and the discipline of social work.

Chapter Six
Conclusion and Implications

When I was working on the proposal for this research, I knew that I was curious about the personal experiences of women who ran feminist human service organizations. I wanted their voices to be heard for a number of reasons. First, I felt that this was a group whose voices are often silent. This is because not only are they a marginalized part of society and therefore rarely have access to those with power, but when they do have the opportunity to be heard, they usually choose to speak with and for those who are even more marginalized – namely their clients. The second reason I wanted feminist administrators' voices to be heard was in order to learn more about feminist organizations – specifically how they work and their likelihood for survival in today's society. The final reason for wanting to hear the voices of feminist administrators was a more personal one. As a feminist administrator myself, I was curious to learn how my experiences mirrored or differed from other feminist administrators of human service organizations. The six participants who took part in this research provided a wealth of information and stories to illuminate the experiences of women who administer feminist organizations. It is their stories and their voices that have guided this entire discussion. This concluding chapter will attempt to synthesize the descriptive analysis told in Chapter four with the thematic analysis from Chapter five and in the process come up with some implications, and possible recommendations, for both feminist human service organizations in the field as well as the discipline of social work.

Return to the Research Question

In the introduction to this thesis, I made it clear that I had one specific research question: What are the experiences of women administering feminist agencies? This question has been answered through this research and it has been answered in a way that makes it clear that while there are great similarities in experience, there are also differences. These differences highlight the unique experiences of each woman that participated as well as the unique human service organization within which each worked. However, the commonalities that exist between the participants' experiences provide valuable information about the experiences of feminist administrators. My research was also interested in the values held by these feminist administrators, how their particular feminist human service organization functioned, as well as how each feminist administrator saw themselves within the organization. It has become clear through the data collection and analysis that these six feminist administrators all have strong value systems that underpin their work and allow them to thrive within their organizations and within their discipline. The final focus of my research was that I had an interest in the strength and resistance of women who were working on the feminist margins of society. The research showed that while this can be a difficult and challenging place to be for these women, their passion for the work and conviction around how they do the work has given them strength to continue.

Evaluation of the Research

Before moving into a discussion of implications and recommendations based on the research, it is important to discuss how the research has been evaluated for validity and

reliability. This has been done in a number of ways, specifically member checking, persuasiveness and an audit trail.

The first and most important method used to check for validity and reliability of the research is member checking. This entails finding out what participants think of the finished work. Participants were all given the opportunity to read a draft of the analysis and to provide feedback. Four of the six participants took advantage of this opportunity to review a draft and three of them provided feedback, which has been incorporated into this final document. None of the participants requested a second interview in order to provide their feedback choosing instead to send their feedback via e-mail. The general consensus was that the draft reflected their thoughts and opinions and their feedback has supported the validity and reliability of this research. All of the participants will also be receiving a complete copy of this thesis document.

Related to member checking is the process of persuasiveness. This is about whether the interpretation of the participants' stories is "reasonable and convincing" (Riessman, 2002, p. 258). I relied upon the participants as well as my research peers to read my analysis and share with me whether my interpretation was persuasive or not.

The final tool used to evaluate the research was the audit trail. The extensive use of participants' words through direct quotations was an important part of this process. Both chapters four and five used the words of the participants to support the analyses presented. I also attempted to share my own thoughts, surprises and assumptions as I went through the analysis process. In this way, the decisions made in my analysis should make sense and be related back to the participants' own words as well as to my explicit thought processes.

Implications for Feminist Organizations

Based on the findings of this research, feminist human service organizations are alive and busy providing valuable services to the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. While challenges certainly exist, these organizations, and the women who administer them, continue to be vital and dynamic players in the human service field. Additionally, each has accepted and sometimes embraced change in order to provide services for their clients.

The information and stories gathered through this research has clarified some of the experiences of feminist administrators and brought forward some thoughts and ideas about how these women could be further supported in their work. Some implications of this research for feminist human service organizations are listed below

- Feminist administrators and feminist organizations are successful when they are open to change. Being flexible and open about new kinds of structures (not being dogmatic about their current structure) has been presented as a way to remain a dynamic feminist organization.

- The structure of a feminist organization does impact the entire agency, including staff and clients. It may make sense to regularly evaluate the organizational structure in order to ascertain how it is working and how it meets organizational and client needs.

- Feminism and hierarchy do not seem to be mutually exclusive (in relation to organizational structure).

- Feminist organizations need to be aware that conflict exists, both personally and organizationally. A willingness to confront that conflict and, once again, be open

to different ideas may lead more quickly to solutions. Also, the clearer and stronger the value base of the organization, the more likely it is that the conflict can be worked through and addressed.

- While a strong value base, like feminism, is important, it can lead to conflicts with other forces. Providing more support to staff and working on organizational cohesiveness may be important in order to deal with these external conflicts. This creation of community within the organization and with other organizations is also important in order to ensure that staff do not feel isolated and alone.

- Embracing change seems to be an overarching idea for dealing with both internal and external conflicts.

- Finding and hiring staff who are skilled is important, but it is also important to find and hire staff and board members who have similar values and are passionate about the work.

- Ensuring a strong vision and set of values for the organization actually allows for flexibility because everyone is clear about the base and can therefore incorporate new ideas and ways of working as long as it fits with the core vision and values. Being flexible seems to play a large part in the success of a feminist organization.

- Based on the findings of this research, feminist organizations may want to look at more support and education for boards of directors, including development work and knowledge about how they function and interact with staff.

- Organizations may want to build on the commitment and focus that feminist administrators have for their clients, but ensure that there is also some focus on

the administrative role. A balance between direct service and administrative work could be a key for this and may also help to alleviate burnout.

- It is clearly important for feminist administrators and organizations to have an environment where clients are the main focus, where they are part of an organizational family and where real connections are made. This type of environment is important for job satisfaction and therefore organizations should work hard to create this.

- A focus on collaboration and community connection is important for both staff and clients. This makes for a healthy organization and a healthy administrator as staff are able to receive both professional and personal support. There is also greater likelihood that the varied needs of clients will be met.

- Building the capacity of the community, staff and clients is seen as very important, but there is a caution that this takes commitment, training, tools and resources. Feminist organizations need to back up their commitment for capacity building and provide tangible support to the administrator and/or staff who are pursuing it.

- Making real and regular connections with the community is also important for ensuring that the organization has a clear assessment of the community's and the clients' needs.

- Many feminist administrators have moved into their positions from a front-line or direct service role. Organizations need to provide more support to these women and provide more training and mentorship. This connection to the front-line is

important and can be a real strength of the organization, but may be difficult for new administrators if there are not adequate supports.

- It is important for feminist administrators to allow client voices to be heard and to have their own voices heard and respected; however, organizations need to build in mechanisms or supports for this. Ensuring that one person is not always the "voice" of the organization may help with this (i.e. having a media committee or larger group that speaks on behalf of the organization and its interests).

Implications for Social Work

There are also implications for the discipline of social work. While only one of the participants in this research had social work education, there are social workers who are administrators of both feminist and non-feminist organizations and the findings of this study still provide important ideas for the discipline as a whole. In fact, the lack of social work training for the participants in this study speaks loudly. Social workers, and social work educators, need to ask themselves why these human service administrators have chosen other forms of training.

Here are some thoughts and recommendations for the discipline of social work.

- No matter what the role of a social worker, front-line or administrative, it is important for them to understand organizational structure and how it can affect both staff and clients. Incorporating information about organizational structure and other administrative skills into basic social work training would be beneficial.
- Connected to that, is that social work education, at all levels, needs to incorporate basic ideas and concepts of administration into their training so that if and when

front-line workers enter the administrative level, they are not without tools and training to handle the new role.

- The discipline of social work is value-based and this is a strength of the profession. It is also what makes social workers good administrators, but social workers have to begin to see themselves as potential administrators. An understanding and recognition of administrative roles and tasks may assist in changing social workers' attitudes towards administration. This is not a new idea for the profession (Perlmutter, 2005), but it is perhaps an idea that needs to be revisited.

- The suggestions made for feminist organizations (see the above points), are built upon many skills and values that social workers already possess. The discipline needs to ensure that they "sell" this fact and ensure that feminists working in human service organizations are aware of the benefits of social work training and how that training can assist them in the work that they do.

Implications for Future Research

The information gathered in this study is exploratory and preliminary. Further research that moved beyond the geographical confines of Winnipeg and explored the other provinces and territories of the country would add significantly to these findings. It would be interesting to learn how feminist organizations, and their administrators, are providing services to women in other regions of Canada. As well, studies that are able to look at the experiences of a more culturally diverse group of feminist administrators would strengthen and complement the findings of this research. In particular, research

that included Aboriginal agencies providing services to women is necessary and would be of great interest. Another area that stood out as needing more research is around feminist organizations and governance structures. It would be of particular interest to learn more about how feminist administrators interact and work with their boards, collectives, and/or advisory committees.

On a personal note

Conducting this research has been a gratifying experience for me. I was honoured to hear the stories of women who are doing difficult jobs with dedication and passion. I found the experience inspiring. As a social worker, I was impressed with the work being done in these organizations as well as the dedication these women had towards their clients. As a feminist, I was heartened to hear how feminism was integrated into both the personal and professional lives of these women. In the context of an ever-present societal backlash to feminism, it filled me with optimism for the future to hear these women speak. There were definite challenges - for these women, their organizations, and their clients – and I am sure that these challenges will continue. However, I am optimistic that armed with the proper training and support combined with their obvious passion for the work, these six women and their organizations will continue to flourish.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1.   Please tell me the story of how you came to take this job.

2.   Please tell me what feminism means to you.

   • Probe: How has feminism affected your life, particularly your working life?

   • Probe: Can you tell me some of the powerful emotions you have felt

      (excitement, joy, frustration, conflict, satisfaction)?

3.   Please tell me what being an administrator means to you.

4.   Please tell me about your experience as an administrator in this agency.

   • Probe: What do you do everyday (i.e. tasks like budgeting, supervision,

      program evaluation, communication with Board etc.)?

5.   What are the values that are important to you as an administrator?

   • Probe: Are those values similar or different to other values that you hold as a

      feminist? (As a social worker if applicable?)

   • Probe: Are those values consistent with the values of your organization?

6.   Please explain the structure of your organization and how it functions internally.

   Who does what? Who is responsible for what?

   • Probe: Are you happy with the organizational structure and how it functions?

7.   Do you feel well supported by your organization?

   • Probe: If so, what does that support look like? If not, how could you be

      better supported?

8.   Please tell me how you would define "challenge" and "success" in your work.

   What about for your organization?

- Probe: Tell me about challenges you face as an administrator.

- Probe: Tell me about successes you have had as an administrator.

9.   Please describe how your organization functions externally.

- Probe: How well do you think your organization works with other organizations?

10.   Please describe your interaction with the funders of your organization.

11.   Given everything you have told me up to now, can you step back and give me some key moments for you in the administration of this organization?

12.   Please describe any future plans you have as a feminist administrator?

- Probe: Within your organization? Outside of your organization?

* Do you want to add anything else about your experience as a feminist administrator?

Demographic Information:

1. Age _____   2. Cultural identity (if you chose to define) _____

3. Do you have children? _____   If yes, how many? _____

4. Are you caring for others (parents, other family, foster etc.) _____

5. Do you have a partner? _____

6. Years of work experience as a human service administrator _____

7. Years of work in the human service field _____

8. Years of work in other feminist organizations (different from above) _____

9. Years of work experience in current job _____

10. Professional discipline (Social Work or Other?) _____

11. What education do you have? _____

- Do you have any feedback, questions or comments about the interview or the project?

Possible General Probe Questions:

- Can you explain that a bit more?

- Can you give me an example?

- How did you feel about that?

- Tell me more about that?

- What was that like for you?

Appendix B

University Letterhead

Introductory / Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

I would like to introduce myself and let you know about some research that I am undertaking. My name is Heidi Wurmann and I am pursuing my Masters of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. I am supervised in this thesis research by Dr Lyn Ferguson and my committee members, Dr Alex Wright and Dr Lynn Scruby.

While living in British Columbia, I was the administrator of a feminist organization. I held this position for three years and during that time I learned a tremendous amount. I felt both joy and frustration while performing this job and I became curious about how other women in similar positions experienced their work. In particular, I found that our voices, those of women running feminist organizations, were often silent or ignored. I decided that I wanted those voices to be heard.

In my search for feminist organizations in Manitoba, I came up with a list of agencies that provide services to women. I understand that not all of these organizations would define themselves as feminist. You are receiving this letter because as the administrator of an organization that serves women, you may meet the criteria and be interested in being a participant in my research.

The purpose of this research is to better understand the experiences of women who administer feminist agencies. My specific research question is: what are the experiences of women administering feminist agencies? I want to hear your voice and your story of what it is like to be the administrator of a feminist human service organization. I am interested in the values you hold as well as the day to day experiences of being an administrator and a feminist. I am also interested in how your organization functions and how you perceive your role within the organization. By participating in this research, feminist administrators like you will become part of a larger process aimed at gaining a better understanding of feminist organizations, how they work and how they can continue to do the work that they do.

Your participation is important. Participation entails taking part in one in-depth interview (approximately 90 minutes in length). If you wish, you may also take part in a second interview (approximately 30 - 60 minutes in length) where you can provide feedback. This feedback may include your personal feelings and reactions about the research findings, information you may wish to add and thoughts about the overall research process. This feedback process is voluntary and there are no negative consequences if you choose not to take part.

Confidentiality is an important part of this process. I will be following confidentiality processes that meet the guidelines of the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba as well as the guidelines of the social work profession.

I will be making a follow-up call next week in order to find out if you are interested in participating and to answer any additional questions you may have about my research. If you would like to speak to me before that time, please do not hesitate to call me or contact me by e-mail. You can also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr Lyn Ferguson at 474-8273.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Respectfully,

Heidi Wurmann
MSW candidate
Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba

Appendix C

"University Letterhead"
Participation Consent Form

Research Project: Hearing Their Voices: Stories of Feminist Administrators
                          (M.S.W Thesis)

Researcher: Heidi Wurmann (University of Manitoba),
                          B.A.; B.S.W.; M.S.W. (Candidate)

Research Supervisor: Dr Lyn Ferguson (University of Manitoba
                          Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work
                          204-474-8273   fergusn@cc.umanitoba.ca

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This research is being conducted for my Master's of Social Work thesis. The purpose of this research is to better understand feminist organizations by exploring the experiences of the women who administer them. My specific research question is: what are the experiences of women administering feminist agencies? I want to hear your voice and your story of what it is like to be the administrator of a feminist human service organization. I am interested in the values you hold as well as the day to day experiences of being an administrator and a feminist. I am also interested in how your organization functions and how you perceive your role within the organization. By participating in this research, feminist administrators will become part of a larger process aimed at

gaining a better understanding of feminist organizations, how they work and how they can continue to do the work that they do.

Participants' names and organizations will be kept confidential in order to increase safety and decrease risk for participants. Once the recruitment and interviews are complete, names and agency affiliation will be removed from the interview transcripts. All data collected through the research process, including consent forms, tapes and transcripts, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home for the duration of the research. Once the project has been completed and my thesis has been accepted, all paperwork will be shredded and the tapes destroyed in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. I estimate that my thesis will be accepted and I will formally complete my MSW by December, 2007. All data will be destroyed by March, 2008. The confidentiality of this research is of extreme importance and is taken very seriously by the researcher.

Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with feminist administrators. These interviews will be recorded on audio-tape, transcribed, analyzed and written up as part of my Master's of Social Work thesis. Participants will take part in one in-depth interview. This will be an interview (lasting approximately 90 minutes) during which I will gather participants' experiences as feminist administrators. A second interview (30 – 60 minutes) will be offered as an opportunity for participants to review the draft analysis, make comments, and provide feedback on the research process.

As participants in this research you have the right to ask questions or request new information at any point in the process. This could be before, during or after the interviews. You also have the right to withdraw from the research at any time or to

choose not to answer questions. Your participation is voluntary and declining to

participate will have no negative consequences. At any point in the research process you

may contact me, Heidi Wurmann, or my faculty advisor, Dr. Lyn Ferguson, Associate

Professor with the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba, at 204-474-

8273. (fergusn@cc.umanitoba.ca).

Participant feedback is an important part of this research and therefore feedback will

be encouraged throughout the process. This feedback may include your personal

reactions and feelings about the research findings, information that you may wish to add,

as well as your thoughts about the research process and your participation in that process.

Providing feedback is voluntary and there are no negative consequences if you choose

not to take part. Please answer the following:

1. I would appreciate a second interview in order to provide feedback. ___ yes   ___ no

2. I would like to receive a copy of the final research findings.   ___ yes   ___ no

If you have answered "yes" to any of these questions, please indicate how you would like

to receive this information (hard copy or electronic copy) and include either a mailing or

e-mail address. I estimate that participants will receive the summary of results by

August, 2007.

Name: _____

E-Mail Preferred: ____

E-Mail Address: _____

Mail Preferred: ____

Mailing Address: _____

                         _____

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

This research has been approved by the Psychology/Sociology Research Ethics Board of the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-mentioned persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or e-mail _____. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____   _____
Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____
Researcher's Signature   Date