GOVERNANCE, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE ORGANISED WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

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'We walk in the footsteps of some exceptional women'

- Sandy Shulman –
Annual Report of The Fawcett Society 1987 - 8

ABSTRACT

This thesis responds to a great gap in empirical research on the organised women's movement, examining both its governance and ways of working, to see how successfully it is responding to the challenge of change. It does this mainly through seventeen case studies – eight traditional organisations from 'first wave' feminism, eight organisations from the women's movement in the 1970s and the Fawcett Society as a bridge between the two. The case studies were selected through a process of network sampling combined with a desire for balance in size, type and area of activity. They are examined through the lenses of a variety of research questions raised by the literature.

The methodology is qualitative, using a combination of feminist and organisational theory, voluntary sector governance and grounded theory. It draws on the researcher's long experience as a participant observer in the women's movement, but at its core are in depth semi-structured interviews with at least two participants, with different standpoints, from each organisation.

The research reveals a sector which is proving very adaptive in the face of change resulting from a range of contingency factors. It finds a much more 'hybrid' sector with traditional organisations beginning to dismantle layers of bureaucracy and hierarchy while the women's movement groups are building in more structure as they find it no longer appropriate to operate completely flat structures. All parts of the sector have struggled to overcome 'power illiteracy' and develop affirming models of leadership. In spite of the many challenges it faces, the organised women's movement is transformational both in its effect on the wider community and on individual women. I have certainly found it transforming, as have those interviewees who have been inspired to write up their own experience.

Although rooted in the literature, this research is action-orientated, intended to be relevant and useful to practitioners in the movement as well as academics. It ends with a detailed list of criteria and recommendations for the better governance and management of women's organisations, and proposals for dissemination.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION: THE GOVERNANCE[1] OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

This research grows out of a very active involvement in the organised women's movement[2]. Between 1984 and 1994 I helped to develop and then ran the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO), an umbrella body of around 220 women's groups large and small. Since 1994 I have worked as a researcher and consultant with a range of women's groups, as well as being a trustee or member of several others. In September 1995 I attended, on behalf of the Women's Art Library, the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing which, with its 30,000 women gathered in the NGO Forum on Women in Huairou, proved to be arguably the strongest demonstration of the power of women organising the world has ever seen. I have been very involved since, under the aegis of the Beijing Action Partnership, in encouraging the full implementation for women in Britain of the Global Platform for Action which came out of the Beijing Conference – and through Project Parity ('50/50 Building Democracy, Training World Leaders') and the Global Fund for Women in supporting women further afield. In June 2000 I was an NGO delegate at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in New York on Beijing + 5, to assess progress on the Global Platform for Action

In my case, therefore, theory and practice have been very closely interwoven. My practice has undoubtedly been illuminated and strengthened by the theory I have absorbed as an academic researcher over the last six years, but the theoretical side of my work is totally rooted in the practice and in a passionate involvement and belief in the potential power of women organising.

I use the word 'potential' because during my years as an activist or practitioner I have become increasingly aware of the fact that there is sometimes an imbalance between the ideals of the women's movement (and I use the term broadly to encompass the organisations which came out of both first and second wave feminism) and its potential to literally change the world for women and what happens in reality. Organisations which do achieve their aims and develop their governance to fit these aims illustrate just what a potent force for change - both in specialist areas like health, violence, domestic abuse, childcare, education and in the wider area of women's equality - women's organisations can be. Siobhan Riordan paints a vivid picture of the important role which women's organisations play in civil society:

- They are manifestations of women's issues and concerns
- They are organisational responses to the social problems facing women
- They are created to meet needs that are not yet publicly acknowledged
- They develop woman-centred service provision
- They have access to grassroots knowledge and expertise about women.
- They can access some of the most disenfranchised and marginalised groups in society (e.g. refugee women, black and minority ethnic women, disabled women)
- They are a source of empowerment for women. (Riordan, 1998: p.182)

Riordan's important and innovative work concentrates on trends within the broad women's movement rather than within individual, named organisations. It identifies three main themes – power, resources, invisibility – and certainly touches on issues of hierarchy and collectivity which, with power, will be key themes in this thesis. I have worked since 1996 in a small research group with Siobhan Riordan and with Margaret Page, whose work includes important research on the networks, alliances and coalitions which developed in the UK around the Beijing Conference (1997) and on the development of the concept of compassionate leadership amongst women in refugee organisations (1998). This thesis should be seen very much as complementary to their work.

Riordan places great emphasis on the value and significance of women's organisations. This is not incompatible with recognising that many have severe problems. For instance, organisations established to address injustice in the world outside can find themselves riven with power disputes; founder directors who had set up dynamic, innovative organisations stay on too long and can turn into difficult autocrats; complex organisations in urgent need of good management seem to find it very difficult to be good employers of high calibre staff so that chief executives find themselves in a 'no win' situation where the better they perform, the more they are resented; relationships between volunteers and staff are frequently uneasy. Other organisations, on the other hand, provide models of excellent and even transformational leadership and management.

Many of the problems which women's organisations are facing – falling membership, conflict between paid staff and volunteers – are common to the voluntary sector as a whole. Women's organisations, however, often seem to experience them more acutely and in ways that are uniquely theirs, and often to be less well-equipped to deal with them. This is partly due to the lack of funding which Riordan explores in nearly all her work, and is certainly not a new phenomenon (see Bowman & Norton, 1986), but also seems to be something to do with an illiteracy with power and difficulties in adapting structures in the face of new challenges.

Lindsay Driscoll, who has spent years working with women's groups as Head of the Legal Department at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (1987-95) and now as a partner in the solicitors Sinclair Taylor & Martin, cites case after case of acute internal problems and disputes in women's organisations.[3] Women may speak 'in a different voice' (Gilligan, 1993) but it is not necessarily one which promotes harmony, co-operative working or unproblematic mechanisms for the settlement of disputes.

This research was thus borne out of a desire to understand and learn from what is happening within the organised women's movement. It seeks to identify what it is about the structure or governance of an organisation which enables or disables it, allowing it, at best, to grow creatively and dynamically in response to new challenges or, at worst, to become mired in disputes arising from internal and external pressures which prevent it going forward. Although my field of study is women's organisations rather than the wider position of women, obviously external

contingency forces, notably funding ,or the wider societal forces which affect the status of women (see Wilkinson, 1997) play a crucial part. For instance, it has been an interesting time politically, moving from a political scenario where under the Tories the Government was 'not convinced of the concept of women organising as women'[4] to a Government which, as the Opposition Labour Party, introduced women only short-lists to achieve a large increase in the number of women MPs, which established a Women's Unit[5], has re-organised the Women's National Commission to make it much more accessible and at least in theory values the women's voluntary sector[6]. It is also a time when, if we are to retain the word feminism at all it seems we have to talk of 'feminisms' with almost as many interpretations as there are usages.

The aims of this thesis are thus:

- To develop a methodology for the analysis of the governance of women's organisations.

- By drawing on both archival and contemporary material, make an original contribution to the understanding and knowledge of the organised women's movement, the challenges which it faces and its ability to adapt its governance in the face of rapid change.

- Draw on the case studies, other examples examined and other expertise within the sector, to draw up guidelines for the good governance of organisations as a contribution to the development of good practice in the organised women's movement.

- Begin to redress the research deficit on women organising and stimulate further relevant research both within the sector and within the academy.

Chapter 2 examines key research questions - on appropriate organisation, structure and governance; on management, leadership and the use of power and on the ability to change and develop in response to external and internal contingency factors - and looks at what a range of literatures, mainstream organisational theory, theory on gender and organisation, on voluntary sector governance etc, has to say on these issues. This examination demonstrates that, although these more generic literatures do have some important relevance to the organised women's movement, on the whole women's organisations not only experience 'invisibility, isolation and marginalisation ... under-resourced and inadequately funded' (Riordan, 1997) but are largely invisible in the academic literature where women organising autonomously are not seen as legitimate or important enough to merit study by either mainstream or feminist researchers.

Chapter 3 examines in detail the methodology I use – a combination of feminist, 'grounded' and voluntary sector organisational theory, although my approach is eclectic and I have been prepared to draw upon any theory which illuminates the subject. The approach is qualitative, draws on a feminist research ethic and depends

substantially on a series of semi-structured interviews. These build into seventeen case studies – eight of traditional (or first wave feminism) organisations in Chapter 4, an in depth case study of the Fawcett Society (as an example of an organisation which provides a bridge between the traditional and the very modern) in Chapter 5 and an overview of the women's movement and in depth case studies of eight organisations which came out of that movement in Chapter 6. I explain my rationale for choosing organisations at both ends of the spectrum in Chapter 3. All my case studies are drawn from organisations headquartered in England, although several have a UK-wide or even an international dimension. Chapter 7 examines the links with the literature in Chapter 2 and evidence from the organisations examined. It analyses the patterns which emerge and the lessons to be learnt. Finally it recommends guidelines and pathways forward arising from the evidence which organisations might take to engage more effectively with the challenges they face.

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[1] There are many different definitions of the currently very popular term 'governance'. Billis and Harris (1996), for instance, define it as 'relationships between staff and management committees and between chief executives and chairpersons and between national headquarters and local associations' (p.8). I prefer a broader definition like that of Cornforth and Edwards, (1998, p.5) as 'the way organisations are governed'.

[2] I have settled finally on the generic term 'organised women's movement' as being the most inclusive, to encompass both the mass membership women's organisations, the organisations that have become an integral part of the women's voluntary sector, like Women's Aid or the Maternity Alliance, those that are a part of the black women's movement (e.g. the East London Black Women's Organisation) , those that have remained small feminist collectives, professional women's organisations and the other hybrid structures.

[3] Interview with Lindsay Driscoll, 15.4.97

[4] Interview with Richard Fries (Under-secretary of Equal Opportunities and General Department at the Home Office 1987-1991 and, at time of interview, Chief Charity Commissioner), 28.2.95

[5] By the end of 2000, however, it appeared that the Women's Unit would transmogrify into a generic Equal Opportunities or Citizens' Unit, see article 'Official: Men are the victims now' in the *Observer* 17.12.00

[6] Although Anna Coote argues in the *Guardian* 11.5.99 that these do not imply a real commitment to feminism or women's empowerment and asks 'why a government can do so much for women and yet be antipathetic to the women's cause' and Anne Perkins in the *Guardian* 1.6.99 writes of how the Women's Unit is 'far from the epicentre of decision-making. There is a suspicion that No. 10 is simply waiting for the unit to wither away from neglect.'

CHAPTER 2:
EXPLORING THE LITERATURE: FRAMING THE QUESTIONS

My research is an inquiry into the (broadly interpreted) governance of women's organisations which asks a series of questions around the following broad areas:

- What are the criteria against which to measure the successful governance of a women's organisation?

- How can organisations ensure that their governance and management empowers/ enables rather than disempowers/disables

- What helps organisations to cope successfully with change

Packed into these broad areas are more detailed questions under the following organising categories or principles under which the literature has been arranged (although obviously some of the boundaries between the different categories are very fluid):

I Appropriate organisational structure and governance

    (i)   *Mainstream organisational theory*
    (ii)   *Participatory democracy*
    (iii)   *Gender and organisation*
    (iv)   *Governance in the voluntary sector*

II Management, leadership and the use of power

    (i)   *Leadership and women in management*
    (ii)   *Women entrepreneurs*
    (iii)   *Conflict and the abuse of power*
    (iv)   *Conflict resolution and empowerment*

III Organisational ability to change and develop in response to external and internal contingency factors.

In framing and looking for answers to the questions that arise within these categories I will, as is clear from the list above, be looking at a broad range of available literatures - from mainstream management theory to feminist analysis of the autonomous women's movement - seeking to identify both what women's organisations share with more generic organisations and what, if anything, is unique to them.

I Appropriate organisational structure and governance

(i) Mainstream organisational theory

The question of structure - of what constitutes an appropriate structure for a women's organisation - is, as we shall see in the case studies, a key issue for the organised women's movement. But the question of organisational structure has been a key issue in mainstream organisational theory also, if framed rather differently and, at least until very recently, seldom if ever with women in mainstream organisations, let alone their own organisations, in mind..

Whatever relevance mainstream organisational theory may have to this research it is not in its emphasis on the importance of women in organisations. Mainstream organisational theory may have produced a huge corpus of work but it has only in the last twenty years attempted to come to grips with issues of women and gender in organisations. An introductory text like Pugh, Hickson and. Hinings (1964) includes only two women amongst forty two writers, has a single reference to the 'participation of women' in the index and is dedicated, revealingly, to 'our professional father figures'. Neither of the two women - Joan Woodward or Jane S. Mouton - show any apparent interest in the influence which women have on organisations or vice versa. Joan Woodward in particular gives an extremely mechanistic account of how differences in technology account for differences in organisational structure. Texts like Clegg (1990) and Perrow, Scott, Foresman et al (1979) demonstrate the complete lack of a gender dimension to the classic organisational theories which they analyse. (There **was** a lone female pioneer in organisational theory – Mary-Parker Follett 1918 – but she has so disappeared from view that it appears almost impossible to get a copy of her book or find out more about her). Hearn and Parkin, (1992) demonstrate just how typical this is of the literature as a whole. [2]

So for years organisational analysis remained a virtual gender-free zone, whether in Weber's delineations of the characteristics of bureaucracy; Frederick Taylor's Scientific Management School (where researchers explored the way in which the human and genderless machine could be adapted to organizational priorities); the Hawthorne Studies of the late 1920s and the subsequent Human Relations School, which prescribed concern for the worker, but a worker without gender. Even postwar initiatives in organizational analysis - such as the organizational psychologists or the Contingency Theorists - hardly raised the issue of gender. And although the more radical approaches to organisation from the mid-1970s did finally break the researcher/management collaboration and shift attention to the role of organizations in the process of domination and oppression, they very much continued in the vein of the 'male stream'. The assumption remained that most workers are male - and if they are not it does not really make any difference (see Mills and Tancred,1992). A more recent book on organisational change (Collins, 1998) makes no explicit mention of gender at all.

However, three other quite recent key organisational texts (Mintzberg, 1989; Robbins, 1990, Hales,1993) may only make the most fleeting reference to women

in organisations or their own organisations (for instance to the Women's Christian Temperance Union in Mintzberg p.231) but this does not necessarily mean they have no relevance and in fact each gives us useful analytic questions to ask of women's organisations, which have themselves, like all organisations, been undoubtedly influenced directly or indirectly by mainstream organisational thinking.

Mintzberg's words of wisdom on management were certainly not written specifically with women's organisations in mind but we shall see how his views on the contingency approach to organizational analysis - how, for instance, an organisation tends to become more formalized the older and larger it grows (Mintzberg, 1989: p.106) - and his detailed analysis of idealised configurations of seven organisational types

- Entrepreneurial
- machine (or bureaucracy)
- diversified
- professional
- innovative (or adhocracy)
- missionary
- political

can be very useful in looking at different aspects of women's organisations at different stages of their development. Mintzberg then moves beyond these types or forms, seeing them also as organisational cultures or forces for organizational effectiveness (for direction, efficiency, proficiency, concentration, learning, co-operation and competition) found in almost any organisation:

> Together ... these forces and forms appear to constitute a powerful diagnostic framework by which to understand what goes on in organizations and to prescribe effective change in them. (p.258)

I shall be attempting to apply this diagnostic tool when I look in depth at the case studies, bearing in mind that most organisations are combinations or hybrids of these forms (p.265) and that any form carried to an extreme becomes neurotic (p.264). Mintzberg also develops an elaborate model of the life cycle of organisations - through the four stages of formation, development, maturity and decline - explaining which forms are more prevalent at each stage (with the entrepreneurial stage often associated with the formation stage and 'enduring political configuration eventually leads to the demise of an organization' (p.293) 'Demise can be avoided through organizational renewal, either through gradual revitalization or dramatic turnaround' (p.294).

Robbins' analysis of organisation theory (Robbins, 1990) illustrates (literally) a very male and corporate bias.[i] He develops Mintzberg's common elements of organizations or configurations (the strategic apex, the middle line, the operating core, the technostructure and the support staff), pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of each of five structures or configurations, (simple, machine

bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy, divisional and adhocracy). He pays particular attention to Weber's model of (machine) bureaucracy with its theme of standardization, its inappropriate application of rules and regulations so that:

> Bureaucracies breed such devotion to rules that members blindly repeat decisions and actions that they have made a number of times before, unaware that conditions have changed. (p.316)

But he concludes 'You cannot ignore the obvious. Bureaucracies are everywhere!'

Robbins goes on, however, to have a 'closer look' also at adhocracy, defined as:

> a rapidly changing, adaptive, usually temporary system organized around problems to be solved .. excellent .. for responding to change, facilitating innovation, and coordinating diverse specialists. (p.354)

Both Mintzberg's and Robbins' organisational examples are taken entirely from the corporate world. From preliminary knowledge of the field of the organised women's movement, it seems likely that although women's organisations are unlikely to portray all the characteristics of either a bureaucracy or an adhocracy, they are very likely to portray some of them (and of the other structures which Robbins develops from Mintzberg) with the characteristics of adhocracy most likely to be 'the preferred structural design when an organization is in the formative years of its life cycle'. I will be testing this assumption in my case studies.

(ii) Participatory democracy

If Weber/ Mintzberg/ Robbins' views of bureaucracy constitute one end of a continuum of organisational types, at the other end is the form (structure is perhaps too solid a word) of participatory or 'unitary' democracy which swept Western Europe and North America from the late 1960s and included such diverse 'new left collectives' as:

> ....free schools, health clinics, and law communes to women's centers, underground papers and food co-ops ...almost without exception, these collectives assumed that their members had common rather than conflicting interests. Most adopted as well, either formally or informally, the unwritten rules of unitary democracy: face-to-face, consensual decision making and the elimination of all internal distinctions that could encourage or legitimate inequality among the members.(Mansbridge, 1983: p.21)

Many of the organisations which came out of second wave feminism in the 70s came out of this whole movement which included, but extended far beyond, the ideal of the feminist collective. Since so many women's organisations at least started with the ideal of participatory democracy (and its ideas at least have permeated the whole movement), a look at the wider literature gives us important analytic tools with which to examine individual organisations.

One of the most significant examples of this literature has been Rothschild-Whitt's examination of 'The Collectivist Organization: an Alternative to Rational-Bureaucratic Models' (1979). Probably for the first time, Rothschild-Whitt treats

the collectivist organisation (or the 'fully collectivised democracy') as a valid alternative to the bureaucratic hierarchy which had been considered virtually synonymous with the word 'organisation':

> the ideal-type approach allows us to assess these organizations not as failures to achieve bureaucratic standards they do not share, but as efforts to realise wholly different values ....It is in the conceptualization of alternative forms of organization that organization theory has been weakest, and it is here that the experimentation of collectives can broaden our understanding. (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: p.509) .

She identifies the main characteristics of 'formal bureaucracy which can be summarised as follows:

- Authority resides in individuals by virtue of incumbency in office and/ or expertise; hierarchical organization of offices

- Ideal of impersonality; relations are to be role-based, segmented and instrumental

- Differential rewards by office; hierarchy justifies inequality

- Maximal division of labour

and of 'fully collectivised democracy' as:

- Authority (is) resident in the collective as a whole; delegated, if at all, only temporarily and subject to recall

- Ideal of community; relations are to be holistic, of value in themselves

- No hierarchy of position

- Egalitarian; reward differentials, if any, limited by the collectivity

- Minimal division of labour. Generalization of jobs and functions. Demystification of expertise

although she also argued that :

> Just as the ideal of the bureaucracy, in its moncratic pure type, is probably not attainable; so the ideal of democracy, in its pure and complete form is probably never achieved. In practice, organizations are hybrid.(1979: p.51)

- a view fully endorsed, as we shall see, by the recent study by Bordt (1997). Although Rothschild-Whitt's original analysis is not specific to collectives in the women's movement, by the early 1990s (under the name Joyce Rothschild) she is arguing that 'values and moral principles often lead women to prefer an organizational form ... (which) she calls... 'the feminine model of organization'. This feminine model has six characteristics, summarised as:

1. Values members as individual human beings.
2. Non-opportunistic.
3. Careers are defined in terms of service to others

4. Commitment to employee growth.
5. Creation of a caring community.
6. Power sharing (information generously shared)

and 'may be more effective and the model of choice in organizations that are essentially managed by and for women' (Rothschild, 1993: p.537)

I have found this analysis extremely useful when looking both at the bureaucratic, multi-tiered traditional women's organisations and the loose, fluid, collective structures which came out of the women's movement of the 1970s, although I shall be arguing that both have become increasingly hybrid and the distinctions between them much less pronounced. The 'Feminine Model of Organization' is in fact open to debate with Riordan arguing that it can become part of the 'myth of power,:

> difficult to achieve , especially when organisations grow larger and more complex. And when women find they cannot live up to the ideal, they experience strong feelings of betrayal, anger and resentment. (Riordan, 1999: p.33)

and I shall be examining both the ideal, and the difficulties in living up to the ideal which organisations encounter. We shall see that bureaucracies and collectives may be 'ideal' types but in the real world very few now exist as anything other than stereotypes, with the reality being organisations which are hybrids, adapted from a range of different forms. Bordt's recent study of women's non-profit organisations in New York showed only 8 % identified as pure collectivist organizations (and only 19 % as bureaucracies) with the vast majority categorised as the hybrid forms of 'professional organizations' (19%) or 'pragmatic collectives' (45%) (Bordt, 1997: p.38)

At the same time as Rothschild was evolving her theoretical models of fully collectivised democracy, Jane Mansbridge (Mansbridge, 1983) was involved in a far more empirical study of the workings of one such participatory workplace, an urban crisis centre (Helpline) in a major American city. This study (which stands alongside the examination of another attempt at unitary democracy in a small town in Vermont which conducted much of its business through a face-to-face citizens assembly - the town meeting) analyses the strengths of such an organisation as Helpline - the commitment to consensus and the search for common interest, the struggle to try and ensure there is no abuse of power, the search (after its early entrepreneurial stage dominated by its founder) 'for a mode of governance that would satisfy its staff' (p.142).

But Mansbridge also illustrates very cogently the weaknesses as well as the strengths of trying to operate a pure unitary democracy: the endless time and repetition needed to reach consensus and how there are advantages and disadvantages to almost every aspect of the group's 'modus operandi':

> Problems of deadlock, repeating decisions, 'wasted' time, and lack of clarity are all, in one sense, problems of efficiency. Such costs of a consensus rule must therefore be balanced against the gains in efficiency from ensuring co-ordination, individual commitment, and a more comprehensive, informed decision. Insofar as consensus helps to produce a more humane, more loving, less coercive environment, this too must be taken into account. But

> consensus can also have negative effects on the quality of life, endangering as well as protecting the liberty of minorities. (p.169-170)

And Burrell and Morgan, although not writing specifically about flatter organisations, give an interesting insight into the ambiguity of consensus:

> Another strand of the Dahrendorf scheme which can be regarded as somewhat problematic lies in the distinction between *consensus* and *coercion*. At first sight the distinction appears obvious and clear-cut, focusing upon shared values on the one hand and the imposition of some sort force on the other. On closer inspection there is a certain ambiguity. Where do the shared values come from? Are they acquired autonomously or imposed on some members of society by others? This question identifies the possibility that consensus may be the product of the use of some form of coercive force ... a system legitimising the power structure (p.17)

One of the most ambiguous areas is in the treatment of conflict [ii]- how fear of conflict can lead to its suppression rather than to dealing with its causes, that removing many of the manifestations of power can lead to it re-emerging in other ways, e.g. the use of names, initials and jargons by the older participants, of how inequalities of gender, race and class can in fact be perpetuated. Mansbridge concludes:

> Although in this book I have subjected only the problem of political equality to close scrutiny, freedom is also in jeopardy. When the assumption of common interest makes conflict illegitimate, a polity may no longer tolerate dissent. (p.295)

This analysis will be extremely useful when we come to look at the problems which women's groups have had adapting from their early idealism and pure unitary democracy to the realities of facing conflict and dissent. I very much like Mansbridge's phrase of the need for both 'unitary trust and adversary watchfulness' (p230) and her aim:

> To show that preserving unitary virtues requires a mixed polity - part adversary, part unitary - in which citizens understand their interests well enough to participate in both forms at once. (p.302)

Another academic text which I have found illuminating is Oerton (1996). Although its field of research covers 'both women and men workers in flatter organizations' (p.7), it has a particular interest, as its title implies, in 'feminism and flatter organisations':

> In the early days of second wave feminism, many women were also attracted to collective working, arguing that it was a desirable and radical way to end (male) power and hierarchy. Women-only collectives, often following in the traditions of women's action and consciousness-raising groups, saw themselves as accountable in terms of feminist principles and politics. (p.5)

She identifies the challenge of actually giving a definition:

> Specifying what is meant by a co-operative or collective is not a simple or uncontested matter. Working co-operatively or collectively has been variously described as team, joint or democratic: in each case there is an emphasis upon the less or non-hierarchical structure

of the enterprise or project, and the attempt to create and foster 'participatory-democracy' in such settings. (p.15)

Oerton has a chapter on 'Gender, Agency and Resistance' in Part I which defines agency of 'women workers as self-reflexive, subjective agents, capable of disrupting dominant discourses and structures of capitalist and patriarchal power relations' (p.51). Part II describes the research fieldwork and then the constraints, marginalization and benefits of flatter organizations concluding, for one thing, that:

> Women workers and their flatter organizations are not marginalized solely by their location in the social economy nor by their location outside dominant discourses of gender, hierarchy and male domination, since neither of these conditions by themselves or in combination offer sufficient explanation. Women's flatter organizations are marginalized by being positioned in complex relations to discourses of feminism, separatism and lesbianism. (p.181)

I find this comment helpful in explaining some of the disputes which have taken place in organisations like the Women's Resource Centre and Rights of Women

I have also found Ferguson's book on bureaucracy and feminism (1984) by extension extremely useful, both for its insights into how bureaucracies, with their proliferating rules and controls, function and in the different responses from feminists to the challenge they present:

> The typically female values and experiences that the liberal feminists urge women to leave behind are precisely the ones that radical feminists seeks to preserve within their own organizations. Most nonliberal feminists, regardless of ideological differences amongst themselves, view the acceptance of bureaucratic values as synonymous with the abandonment of feminist values. They see their organizations as ends in themselves, not simply as means to an end ... Many of the most viable and active radical feminist projects – book stores, health collectives, newsletters and periodicals, battered women's shelters, rape crisis centers and so forth – are economically self-sufficient (if precarious) and minimize their ties with bureaucratic organizations. As the early manifestos of the radical feminists make clear, they are committed to an internal style of organization that is deliberately anti-bureaucratic: the groups are decentralized; they rely on personal, face-to-face regulations rather than formal rules; they are egalitarian rather than hierarchical. ... They are frequently more concerned with process rather than outcome (Ferguson,1984: p.189-90)

There are two other books which, although neither academic nor theoretical, give an interesting insight into the way 'flatter' organizations work. – Lamb, Morley, Southwood and Wright (1985), and Wajcman (1983). The first is certainly not gender specific to the women's movement. Indeed it explains how the 'particular set of notions about direct action, non-hierarchical organization, which became dominant' in the 70s 'had nothing necessarily to do with feminism' but 'were compatible (in a way that other traditions of organized politics were not) with the political criteria established by feminism.' (p.8) And the book explores many of the generic issues raised by collective/ co-operative working which, as we shall see, are highly applicable to women's movement groups. For instance, it is illuminating about the need for 'management' in any organisation, whatever its structure:

> In a traditional business organization it would be the responsibility of management to develop a strategic overview .... However , the wholesale rejection of management theory, as part of capitalist ideology, has had the unfortunate effect of throwing the baby out with

> the bath water. This perspective simply fails to disentangle the role of management as a necessary administrative function within any organization, regardless of its political purpose, from the particular 'command-structure' form of the management which has developed in traditional business organizations.... The dominant view of management among the radical movements – as merely a command structure capable of passing orders downwards – represents a serious misunderstanding of how management works. The left avoids the idea of management by calling people coordinators – as if the skill of management was merely that of stopping people bumping into each other.(Lamb et al 1985: p.32)

It is also very perceptive in its analysis of the tensions which, it seems, almost inevitably develop within collectives:

> The open collective's emphasis on integration and involvement of every member usually means that you can never go faster than the pace of the newest or slowest person in the group.

> Further strain is placed on the system by the fact that members of such collectives are often volunteers. Few people have the necessary time to devote to the task in hand, so large parts of the effective work of the collective will tend to devolve on to a small, committed group. The same kind of structural conflict emerges in many projects between the paid workers and their management committee. ...

> Such conflict frequently results in tension between those who know they will be doing the work and those who are there only for the generalized discussions of overall policy; between those who do most of the practical work and feel they have a better view of what is happening, and those who want political influence but are unable or unwilling to give a lot of time to the group's practical work. (p.38)

Finally, Wajcman maps the rise and fall of a women workers' cooperative, set up in Fakenham, Norfolk in 1972 to take over a small shoe factory. She both sets this in the wider context of the common ownership movement and new worker co-operatives in the 1960s and 70s and the role played by the Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) and examines the day-to-day challenges the women face in the co-operative: the initial exhilaration, the resentment that develop around the concept of 'management' and the conflict and tears which lead to its demise. As we shall see, this is very familiar territory in women's collectives.

We have looked at what mainstream organisational theory and the literature of participatory democracy has to say about appropriate structures of women's organisations. But there are also two literatures which relate to women more directly - what could be called the literature of 'women *in* organisations' and the literature on women's own autonomous organisations both of which come under the heading of Gender and Organisation.

(iii) Gender and organisation

We saw how mainstream organisational gurus like Mintzberg, Hales or Robbins were unconcerned with issues of gender. According to Mills and Tancred (1992) such gender blindness has led to considerable errors being made in interpreting how organisations operate. However until 1974 virtually no feminist analysis had been applied to organisational theory. In that year the first appearance of Acker and Van

Houten's paper on 'Differential Recruitment and control: The Sex Structuring of Organizations' presented a 'rare challenge to the male-stream paradigm' (Acker and Van Houten, 1992: p.9). This paper identifies the male bias in organisational research and identifies two areas in particular which have not been sufficiently examined in previous studies:

> (1) differential recruitment of women into organizational roles demanding passivity and compliance and (2) unique mechanisms employed in organizations to control women...
> (p.16)

Three years later a seminal book was published in America - **Men and Women of the Corporation** (Kanter, 1977). This study showed how men and women in corporations are affected differently by organisational structures, with imbalances of power and opportunity, and claimed that:

> No study of human behavior can any longer be considered complete that ignores the special roles, positions, and constraints affecting women in the public arena, as well as the men who have traditionally peopled organizational research (p.8)

Kanter's study tended to concentrate on the structural causes of inequity *within* organisations, on the roles of secretaries and even wives and the way in which 'problems of women and leadership in organizations reveal themselves as matters of power, not sex' (p.viii). Her influence has been attributed to 'the fact that she highlights the situation of women in organizations within a framework of male-stream organizational theory, focused ultimately on managerialist concerns' (Mills and Tancred, 1992 p.12).

Janet Wolff's work, published the same year, is more radical, arguing that:

> Organization theory cannot account for the differential treatment and experience of the sexes unless its traditional assumptions about the existence, rationale and functioning of organizations are critically re-assessed; and ...even a modified and sophisticated organizational approach must be supplemented by a sociological grasp of *extra-organizational* influences on organizations. Women's position in any organization is inseparable from women's position in society. (Wolff, 1977:p.7)

Wolff's paper, in an early version of contingency theory, examines different 'extra-organizational' influences - educational (how girls are taught to be 'female'), legislative (including the recently passed Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts), societal (e.g. how marriage and family patterns ensure women have 'two roles') deeply entrenched employment practices - and concludes:

> formal equality does not ensure operative equality...the constraints operating on women in organizations originate not merely in the organizations themselves but in society...The very question of women's role and position in organizations can only be answered by a macro-sociology which situates the organization in the society which defines its existence, goals and values. (p.20)

Mills and Tancred (1992) give an extensive overview of how the 'emergent feminist organizational analyses of the 1980s focused attention upon a number of key aspects of the relationship between gender and organization', citing names like

Burrell, Gutek, Hearn and Parkin, Lamphere, Ferguson, Grant and Tancred Sherriff (p.67). It does not include, except in the briefest possible reference, the development of women's own autonomous organisations, By the end of the 1980s, 'feminist organizational analysis had established a critical presence within organizational and management science - moving from critique, through a series of theoretical developments, to a range of empirical studies' (p.197). However while I would agree with Berman Brown's assessment that 'organisational theorising is not neutral but is male-gendered' (Berman Brown, 1995: p.197) and that 'from their beginnings in the early part of this century, organizational theory and research have been heavily weighted toward the study of male society' (p.199), it is discouraging to find that some of the supposedly most rigorous feminist organisational theorists cast so little light on the actual practice of women in organisations. In a much quoted chapter 'Re-writing Gender into Organizational Theorizing: Directions from Feminist Perspectives' Calas and Smircich (1992b) analyse the different streams in feminist theory and the parallels between postmodernism and feminism. They do so, however, at a level of discourse so theoretical and so removed from the experience and practice of actual women in actual organisations that it would appear as if they are more concerned to win prizes in the same male-dominated academy which they are theoretically critiquing. than to assist women to understand their organisations better. They raise the issue of the 'consequences of women's absence as knowledge producers' (p.236)[iii] while Berman Brown carries this further:

> the shaping of knowledge into a form which is rigorous, controllable, and influential has been, in the main, the work of male scholars and those female scholars who have co-opted into the world of masculine discourse. It is the feminist scholarly agenda which is attempting to replace this mode with inclusionary processes, embracing such 'soft' areas as experience and context. It is suggested that the inclusion within any scholarly project of the variety of interests, biases, perspectives, and needs of researcher and research subject/object would turn scholarship away from the passive or manipulative, freeing it to become active and dynamic. This is not an agenda which requires the 'feminisation' of scholarship, in the sense of weakening its scholarly rigour, but rather a plan to strengthen scholarly possibilities by including that which has tended to be left out. (p.198)

While I would question the characterisation of experience as 'soft' or that the 'feminisation' of scholarship need weaken its scholarly rigour, these are ideals all feminist scholars should have in mind. It is possible to be both rigorous and relevant.

Gillian Coleman (1991) gives just such a rigorous approach to how women experience their organisations. 'The aim, simply, is to make a contribution to change' (p.31).. It is an extremely interesting piece of research both in its description of the methodology and of the results, which show women often feel 'problematised and deficient' in mainstream organisations and concludes:

> In the on-going *process* of organisation, discourses are articulated and power is exercised, including gender, race and class power. The implication of this is that there is no such thing as a neutral organisational tool or practice – every aspect of organisational life, from accounting procedures, to performance indicators, to the structure of written reports is part of the process of formalisation and exclusion. (p.68-69)

It has to be said, however, that Coleman argues her own case in a way which is very dense, demanding and formal and, as a result, could well exclude!

In a later article Calas and Smircich (1996) analyse feminist approaches to organisation studies in a much more accessible way, identifying liberal (and women in management)/ radical/psychoanalytic/ Marxist/ socialist/ poststructuralist/post modern and third world/(post) colonial strands of feminist theory. Although I have not borrowed these categories wholesale I have found this analysis very illuminating and useful by making explicit categories which are often referred to but very seldom so clearly explained.

Almost every example we have examined so far has concentrated on the role of women in mainstream organisations. Kanter confines herself quite transparently to women 'in the Corporation'. Janet Wolff opens with the words: 'This paper will consider the position of women in organizations, in particular women at work and women in the trade unions' (Wolff, 1977.p. 7). There is no reference at all in either to the role women play in their own autonomous organisations in either a paid or unpaid capacity. Hearn and Parkin, however, point out almost in passing:

> Attention is therefore to be directed to women creating feminist organizations... with 'non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical structure ...no stars and no drudges' ... Within these situations there may be continuing debates on structure and structurelessness... which themselves shift according to political exigencies and practice . Such shifts are very much in keeping with that aspect of feminism that promotes practice as a basis of theory, a feature itself compatible with anarchist, existential and certain critical traditions.
> (Hearn and Parkin, 1992:p,55)

As a researcher who would argue very strongly for the necessary, but two-way, link between theory and practice, I find the link with anarchists and existentialists intriguing.

Hearn and Parkin go on to argue:

> Movement towards a more explicit consideration of women in organizations may be facilitated by research into all-women organizations but only up to a point. Even all-women organizations, such as Women's Aid, may depend upon other existing organizations, which are themselves male-dominated, for funding or other assistance. Many attempts by women to organise autonomously may persist in the short-term or for small-scale projects but attempts to move beyond this will usually lead to encounters, and probably conflicts, with male-dominated organizations. This is not to diminish the potential of such alternative ways of organizing as the non-hierarchical group... network, or telephone tree, it is simply to recognize the difficulty within a male-dominated society of researching alternatives to male-dominated organizations in isolation. (Hearn and Parkin, 1992 p.64)

I would agree that no study of women's autonomous organisations should take place in isolation from an understanding of women in organisations more generally. I would also agree that few, if any, such women's organisations operate in a totally 'man-free' zone, particularly if they are dependent on outside funding or patronage - an area which needs further, contemporary study (see case study on the Women's Institutes). And Cohen (1979) demonstrates how even all-women organisations can

directly serve the interests of men. But women's organisations are no different from any other in that they operate in a wider 'gendered' society. Hearn and Parkin, however, subtly belittle and stereotype women's organisations both as small, short-term, non hierarchical (the older women's organisations like the Girl Guides, YWCA, Women's Institute etc are none of these things). They also fall into the same trap which is described so often by feminist organisational analysts of assuming that the only 'real' subject of theoretical study are organisations dominated by men. Calas and Smircich argue that 'Many writers documented that in various societies the work women did, no matter what it was, was valued less than the work men did' (1992b: p.233). It is disappointing to find feminist theorists of such distinction setting such limits to women's own organisations as a legitimate and fruitful subject of research. Things should have moved on from the situation described by Berman Brown:

> From their beginnings in the early part of this century, organizational theory and research have been heavily weighted toward the study of male society. It is a truism that when researchers choose certain issues as important to research and describe, what they choose to investigate is that which is seen as being 'worthwhile' or 'interesting' or 'valuable', and the methods chosen to investigate these issues reveal how researchers see the subject they are investigating. The underlying and implicit assumption that leadership in organizations is really a male activity is revealed. (Berman Brown, 1995: p.197)

Even when excellent studies are conducted into women organising autonomously, such as Stott's classic study of the Townswomen's Guilds (Stott, 1978), they tend to remain 'largely unnoticed within organization theory, functionalist or otherwise' (Hearn and Parkin, 1992: p.51). Organization **Woman**, it appears, does not carry anything like the same clout or inspire the same interest as **Organization** (Whyte, 1956) or **Corporation Man** (Jay, 1972) Most studies of traditional women's organisations , moreover, offer very little analysis. An exception is Andrews (1997), which offers much more of a critique and includes an interesting analysis of past histories of the WI, which tell more about the period in which they were written than the organisation itself Another notable exception to this is Gaffin and Thoms' excellent history of the Co-operative Women's Guild (1983), which was my bible when writing the case study on the Guild.

However, fortunately, more and more researchers are turning to women's own organisations as perfectly legitimate subjects of study and it is this literature which is obviously the most relevant and useful to my research, although it is still sparse in comparison with the richness of the subject matter. As Oakley points out: 'Organizations such as the Housewives Register...and Women's Institutes have performed a probably important but completely undocumented mutual support function' (Oakley,1981: p.269) – although in fact in the same year an excellent account of the National Housewives' Register (Jerman 1981) was published. To set women's organisations in a historical/ political context I have found that two books (Smith, 1990 and Pugh, 1992) gave a very useful overview, the first of British feminism in the twentieth century and the second of the women's movement 1914-1959. A very important Special Issue of **Human Relations** (1994) on 'Gender and Organizational Life' examines the role of women not just in mainstream organisations but in their own groups and, using the example of the Texas Battered

Women's Movement, investigates how 'building a cohesive battered women's movement has been both facilitated and complicated by state funding' (p.692). It also includes a paper on 'Social Experiment in Publishing Ms. Magazine 1972-89' and there have been a number of studies written up on feminist publishing (see Ahmad, 1991). Tomlinson's article (1987) explored the world of women's professional networks or support groups (one of the fastest growing areas of the women's movement although there is an ambivalence in many as to how far they actually belong to the movement, with City Women's Network, for instance, considering feminism 'a dirty word'):

> As such these groups can be seen as part of the women's movement – although they vary considerably in how far they would regard themselves as feminist. Two, Women in Management and Women in Media formed in1969 and 1970 respectively, at the beginning of the current women's movement. The remainder (*including Women in BP, Banking. Publishing, Libraries Telecom...*) formed in the last seven years, in the period following equal opportunities legislation, but not all survive – there is evidence of groups collapsing because of inability to sustain the enthusiasm needed to continue. (Tomlinson, 1987: p.239)

Dobash & Dobash (1992) give a very comprehensive overview of the rise of the battered women's movement in the US and Britain, its adaptation to recent developments and how its ideology is reflected in the way it works:

> The style of work and relationships between women who live and work in refuges follows ideas about working with, rather than for, battered women and horizontal, rather than vertical, forms of organization including collective decision making and the involvement of women who have experienced abuse. (p.89)

They argue that the way refuges are structured are an essential and integral part of their purpose:

> At the most basic level, the stated preference for more democratic and participatory methods of working within shelters and refuges challenges prevailing patterns and provides an alternative model. The movement's attempt to appreciate and embrace cultural, ethnic and personal diversity represents a challenge to those who would ignore these vital concerns. ...The refuge itself constitutes the most highly visible and obviously concrete challenge to the legacy of indifference to male violence. (p.289)

Parkin and Hearn (1987) go further by arguing that the form of a feminist organisation is itself imbued with sexual ideology:

> The most obvious examples of less or non-patriachal sexual ideologies would appear to be feminist and women's movement organisations .... there are now a number of accounts of the impact of organisational ideology in such situations ranging from local organising, to national political organising ... While there is a growing number of feminist studies providing critical commentaries of particular organisations, one major strand of feminist theory and practice is critical of the dominant form of organising. According to this, the formal hierarchical, bureaucratic organisation is seen as patriachal in itself and alternative, less hierarchical, small-group and network structures of organising are preferred. In this sense the form of an organisation can itself explicitly represent or reinforce a particular sexual ideology. The substance of a sexual ideology can be displayed not only in the life of the organisation but in the form of the organisation in the first place..... in some, although relatively few, organisations, the explicitness of the sexual ideology will be increased through a specific consciousness of gender. This is most obviously the case in women's

> movement organisations and all the more so in lesbian organisations. Such all-women
> organisations may thereby have a more explicit sexual ideology and are to be clearly
> distinguished from other single-sex organisations where consciousness of gender is
> obscured, for example, some parent-teacher associations and some women's voluntary
> organisations. Thus not only is there a clear distinction between sexual preference and
> sexism, but also between the distribution of genders and consciousness of gender.
> (p.138-39)

Another very interesting and relevant article, (Fried,1994) points out how 'research on feminist groups has tended to neglect organizational theory' (p.564). It uses the Sexual Assault Hotline of a Midwest state university as a case study and carefully analyses the ideological differences between what she defines as 'politicized organisations' and 'service organizations'.

Fried also emphasises the importance of clarity of goals and their influence on organizational coherence and unity. It is particularly useful for my purposes because it examines how structures were developed through great struggle, the development of conflict due to fundamental ambiguity and the need for training in the ideas and practice of participatory democracy. To give a specifically UK perspective, Curno et al (1982) has a very interesting account of Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre, written by the Centre Collective, which explores the way in which 'we also try to pay as much attention to the form and process of our meetings and interactions as we do to its content' (p.176) and is extremely honest about the challenges the collective faces, particularly in the move to employing paid workers:

> This is a serious problem for any organisation employing paid workers. The group is no
> longer working collectively towards a common goal; a division develops between
> 'volunteers' and paid workers - a division with possible sources of resentment on both
> sides... Unless steps are taken to intervene in this process, the people who started the
> project in the first place, collective, can feel left out as information and experience
> accumulates in the hand of the paid workers. (p.177)

There is a considerable and useful literature on the development of the women's movement both in the US and the UK. Ryan (1992) describes the situation in the US but is very illuminating about how organisations work and particularly in the 'Struggles for Diversity', while Tobias (1997) gives a vivid impression of 'being there' as the US women's movement rose and then fragmented. In the UK there is quite a rich history of the women's movement, probably led by Campbell and Coote (1982), and Rowbotham (1989) and including Bouchier (1983), Holland (1984); Williams (1988); Lovenduski and Randall (1993) - especially Chapter 4 on the Autonomous Women's Movement – and Griffin (1995).

Gould was to write in 1979

> The role of women as organizational participants appears infrequently in the literature ...
> regrettably absent are descriptive case studies and interpretive analyses of the roles women
> play as creators or innovators of organizations. (Gould,1979:p. 237)

Eleven years later Martin argued how difficult it was to characterise feminist organisations when there is 'such a dearth of empirical research and theorizing

about their character, importance, role in the women's movement, or impact on individual women, the women's movement and society.'(Martin,1990 p.183) Both writers have gone some way to correcting this situation. Gould describes the attitudes towards 'hierarchy and structurelessness' in feminist organisations where:

> undifferentiated ability and participation was viewed as a fundamental organizational commitment. In hierarchical organizations 'leadership was equated with patriachal authority ... In organizations created by women, this tyrannical leadership would be replaced by sisterhood, mutual support, and the cooperative networks of friendship. (Gould, 1979:p.240)

(something which, as we shall see below, can be quite hard to deliver). She describes in detail her own participation in the development of a group for office workers in the early 70s, the debates around structure, approaches to power and its distribution and the divisions that developed in the membership between 'those who welcomed staff leadership, and a vociferous minority who felt that staff authority should be minimized and membership control maximized.' (p.246) (This balance of power and responsibility between the membership and staff leadership is a cause of conflict not only in feminist organisations but also in the more hierarchical women's organisations). A rare piece of empirical research on the women's movement was the study in 1994 on 'Involvement in Women's Groups and Campaigns: Why women do or don't involved'. (See Kelly and Breinlinger 1994 and 1995). This showed that it was feelings like 'a sense of deprivation as a woman' and 'being fuelled by anger' which persuaded women to become active in women's groups. Even when they joined groups mainly for support (e.g. those related to pregnancy, childbirth and children) 'it was often through the sharing of these experiences that women began to re-analyze their experience and develop a feminist conscience' (Kelly and Breilinger, 1994: pp. 4 and 6). Women join women's groups, it seems in order to effect real change. In a comment that will become highly relevant when we look at groups like the Fawcett Society, Kelly and Breilinger argue:

> Involvement in women's groups is not an expression of political disaffection .... But a commitment to do something positive to help bring about social change and depends on a feeling that change is a real possibility. (1995: p.53)

Martin helps us to define a **feminist organisation** and be specific about what are appropriate structures and practices. It does not have to have a collective structure but must be pro-woman, politically and socially transformational. Feminist organisations are very varied but to be an organisation they need to be a'relatively enduring (exists for more than a few sessions or meetings) group of people that is structured to pursue goals that are collectively identified.' (Martin, 1990: p.185). She argues that 'in actuality, few feminist organisations reflect a pure or ideal type' (p.186) and that 'feminist organisations ... change with time' and lists ten dimensions along which feminist organisations can differ, The first five are those on which an organisation will score (or not) as feminist:

- feminist ideology

- feminist values,

- feminist goals

- feminist outcomes

- founding circumstances

while the last five – structure, practices, members and membership, scope and scale and external relations – are not unique to feminist organisations but are widely discussed in the feminist literature, and indicate the 'rich variety of forms and practices that feminist organisations embody' (p.189). She ends this extremely useful article by concluding that, in spite of all the challenges they face, 'feminist organisations appear to be more varied, tenacious, and effective than those that have emerged in other movements' (p.202).

Another extremely useful and relevant example of how non-hierarchical organisations work, in theory and in practice, is Iannello (1992). Part One of this book locates the concept of hierarchy and non-hierarchy in organisational theory and feminist theory

> organization theory begins from the world as it is, a world in which
> hierarchies organize all aspects of life. It does not ask whether hierarchies should exist, but
> simply how they can be run more smoothly. Feminist theory... begins from the world as it
> ought to be, one in which gender hierarchies have been eliminated; thus it assumes the
> possibility for fundamental social change. (Iannello, 1992:p.xi)

while Part Two looks in detail at three organisations - a feminist peace group, a women's health collective and a business women's group - two of whom are run as collectives.

Iannello's analysis distinguishes between critical and routine decisions, and examines the dangers of people gaining power informally, with no procedural means of removing them. Under 'Non hierarchy' she identifies Rothschild-Whitt's typology of eight elements which make up the 'consensual organisation' : *authority* (which rests with the collectivity), *rules*; *social control; social relations* (stemming from the community ideal); *recruitment and advancement (*often based on friendship networks); *incentive structure* (normative and solidarity incentives are primary, material incentives are secondary*) social stratification* (striving to be egalitarian) and *differentiation* (division of labour minimized, jobs and functions generalized.

She also lists the factors which limit the ability of an organisation to achieve a non-hierarchical structure:

1. *Time (*although bureaucracies can also be very time-consuming and in a homogenous consensual organisation, the consensual process can move very swiftly).

2. *Emotional Intensity* (as a result of which conflict within the organisation may exact a much higher personal cost)

3. *Non-democratic habits and values*

4. *Environmental constraints* since such groups often form around issues that run counter

to the mainstream of society.

5. *Individual differences* (p.30)

In the chapters on the individual organisations, Iannello concentrates heavily on the process of reaching consensus, which some find too time-consuming and:

> An operative belief here is that women's groups are more supportive of individual members and better at creating a non-threatening atmosphere in which consensus can flourish (p.63)

The Peace Group operates under several constraints and 'this concern with process indicates that even in a group in which awareness of process is very strong, constraints on getting work done within it are an issue'. It raises the question 'At what point does task accomplishment become so important that it alters the process? At what point does an altered process hamper the group's ability to operate in non-hierarchical ways?' (p.75)

The Women's Health Collective have changed 'as a result of both planned and unplanned circumstances' ... to the development in 1986 of co-ordinator positions 'the need for these positions surfaced out of years of discussion about decision making in the group and the need to become more efficient as a business – a modified collective' (p. 87). It has done this in the face of external and internal constraints. 'Internal constraints appeared to be size, financial solvency, and the general needs of workers for job satisfaction and reward.' (p.87)

> There was resentment on both sides; The people doing the work were working without recognition and the other side thought there was power-mongering going on in secret. (p.90)

Iannello deals with a variety of other issues. For instance she shows how a move away from a consensual organisation arises from major concerns over *efficiency*, a feeling that the costs of rotation of jobs were too high, and, in what looks like a recognition of the 'life-cycle' view of organisations 'women began to want recognition in the form of job permanency and a salary reflecting their skills and experience... the women were feeling used... they wanted leadership and people with some degree of authority over specific areas ... there was a perception of a lack of control' (p.94)

She argues that the distinction between routine v. critical decisions is key to implementation and maintenance of decentralized organisations 'because it sets up the structure for maintaining authority at the centre while still allowing for delegation of responsibility to lower levels.' (p.95) and concludes that 'clarity of goals'(p.121) is an important element in a non-hierarchical model.

Another very relevant US publication which reflects the 'life-cycle'concept, is Riger's article 'Challenges of Success: Stages of Growth in Feminist Organizations' (1994). She does not see the development of hierarchy as inevitable:

> Other alternatives are possible, such as spinning off small, autonomous units from a larger organization or delegating routine decisions while deciding critical policy issues by the

entire group in a modified collectivist arrangement. The adoption of hierarchy is a choice made by organizational members, not an inevitability. (p.282)

The greatest change associated with growth... is the press towards *formalization of procedures and policies that accompanies an increase in the number of members* .... The centralisation of authority in the position of leader that occurs is part of the formalization *process that can create tensions in feminist organisations.* Judy Remington argues that the women's movement accepts powerful women only in a kind of maternal role, as nurturers, rather than as leaders strong in other ways (p.284)

Riger also analyses in some depth what she calls the 'founder's trap' (see page 34 below). She looks at the influence of funding and how while 'formalization in an organisation can clarify responsibilities and relationships ...it... is not without drawbacks'. She claims most feminists 'agree that hierarchy should be minimal and a broad participation should prevail'. (1994:p.287-8)

Bordt, in her rigorous quantitative study of women's non-profit organisations in New York, (Bordt, 1997) categorised the organisations under four categories - bureaucratic and collectivist at the two extremes but also the hybrid types of professional organisations or pragmatic collectives -and, drawing on Rothschild-Whitt's characteristics of the ideal types of collectives and bureaucracies, examines how each rate on different criteria such as material or normative incentives, formal and informal decision making, shared beliefs and time, differentiation (of jobs etc). Some of her conclusions are to be expected (e.g. that age and size affect the structure of organisations in fairly obvious ways e.g. small organisations are more likely to be pragmatic organisations' and large ones to be professional organisations.) But form or structure is also affected by constituency and organisational tasks and by ideology in a rather surprising way:

Organizations with a feminist ideology (of a variety of kinds) are more likely to adopt bureaucratic structures over collectivist ones. This finding partially challenges the feminist literature on both theory and practice that claims an affinity between radical feminism and collectivism. (p.75)

Iannello, Riger and Bordt were writing about the US. Organisational analysis is rather more sparse in the UK with the emphasis much more on the **what** than the organisational **how.** One very notable exception is Brown (1992) who looks in great detail at the development of two women's centres in which she was a participant observer. It is extremely useful on the development and detailed structures of collective ways of working . It argues that:

social orders based on collectivist-democratic and non-hierarchical forms of co-operation have to be constantly negotiated and struggled for, in order to create new forms of organisation which embody and enhance the value of collectivism. (p.4)

She questions Freeman's 'tyranny of structurelessness' (1984) but recognises problems of 'levelling down ... leaving an overall deficiency in skills', the 'possible shortfall in commitment' and the dilemma that 'leadership must still be accomplished by some means if successful organisation is to be achieved' (p.38).

The organisations with which Brown is concerned are women's centres:

it will be evident that the initial impulsion is the creation of something which offers an alternative - a previously non-existent facility and/or a counter to previous ways of working...Such small-scale and innovative organisations do not have sufficient momentum or received precedents to 'persist' without continual inputs of time and energy on the part of their members.' (p.57)

One of the key chapters is on 'Negotiated order, organising and leadership' but the core of the book is the case studies of two women's centres in which the author was both a participant and a researcher. These describe in great detail how the centres developed, how work was organised, decisions made, relationships with outside organisations developed etc. In the case of the first centre, it actually re-organised as a collective.

Problems which emerge are the familiar ones of the "perceived need to find some way of identifying and making operational the distinction between 'policy' and 'day -to-day' decisions'" (p.140) the perception that the 'commitment to creating and maintaining non-hierarchy was, in itself, a considerable drain on the available energy'. and the 'increasing distinction between the collective and the workers group' (p.145)

Brown argues that her examples illustrate the 'importance of shared core values for non-hierarchical forms of organising, skill- and task-sharing and participation by all' (p153) but these are necessary but not sufficient. She argues for 'two different modes of identifying success ... one based on the capacity to negotiate differences between members through a process of consensus and the other based on the identification and articulation of communalities amongst members' (p156) ... an important 'output' of their social organisation is the very nature and style of the organising activity itself (p.157).

Brown sheds light on how to manage key dilemmas, "how to achieve a 'sufficient' degree of order to provide a basis for action, but not 'too much' which would result in a loss of flexibility and an inability to perceive and respond to threats and opportunities" (p.162) and the concept of distributed leadership. And she concludes:

> The conditions for successful non-hierarchical organisation which have emerged from this study point to the need for all participants to be, or become, skilled organisers, thus creating a condition of distributed leadership, that leadership involves competence in building interpersonal and inter-group relationships which comprise a flexible social order, and that these relationships should lead to structural processes which create consistency between actors, processes and contexts. (p.176)

(iv) Governance in the voluntary sector

We have examined the issue of the structure of organisations - a key question in all parts of the literature. But for most women's organisations structure includes the wider concept of **governance** - broadly defined as 'the way organisations are governed' (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998:p.5) which is arguably most strongly discussed in the **voluntary sector**[iv]. Since most women's organisations are also

located within the wider voluntary sector and have to operate within the regulations, changing conditions and funding constraints affecting the charitable and voluntary sector as a whole an awareness of this framework and the growing literature of the sector is important and relevant. This literature also raises questions not raised by other literatures and in particular addresses issues that are key to this thesis such as what makes for a successful relationship between the narrower definition of governance (usually the responsibility of the Chair and Board of trustees) and management (usually the responsibility of staff, particularly the Chief executive if one exists).

This literature, like that of women in management discussed later, is positioned on a continuum between the practical, straightforward 'how-to' book intended for the practitioner – i.e. staff members or trustees of voluntary organizations large and small. Many of these are published by organizations like the National Council for Voluntary Organizations (NCVO), the London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC), the Directory for Social Change (DSC), the National Centre for Volunteering, the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF), The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) and the Association of Chief Executives of National Voluntary Organizations (ACENVO) etc. At the other end of the continuum, there is also a growing list of more theoretical, academic articles, journals or books produced or inspired by institutions like the Centre for Voluntary Organisation at the London School of Economics or the Public Interest and Non-Profit Management Research Unit (PiN) at the Open University. All these organisations (and they are only a selection) run associated training courses, learning sets, seminars and conferences.

At the more popular end of the spectrum a particular book that stands out is Handy (1990), with its analysis of power and of the cultures, structures and systems of organisations (including Handy's famous 'shamrock' organisation) Handy's more general books (1976 and 1991) are also useful. Like Handy's, very few of these 'practitioner' books are 'gender specific' but this does not mean they may not be highly relevant to women's organisations and it is interesting that the newly reconstituted Women's Resource Centre in London gives each of its new trustees a copy of Sandy Adirondack's classic 'how to' text **Just About Managing** (1998) as part of their induction. Another very useful 'how to' text (and very relevant to my thesis) is Laurance and Radford (1997) which advises both on maintaining effective communications internally (and thus reducing the danger of disputes developing), how to develop disciplinary and grievance policies and, if all else fails, how to seek outside help through facilitation, arbitration or mediation.

Another key text, which has been described from within the sector as 'a definitive guide which informs our understanding of the complexities of Britain's third sector and provides practical advice on how to achieve results in agencies seeking social change.'(see its introductory page) is Hudson's (1995). The book is grouped around different concepts of Boards, Management, People, Organizations and The Future. It is very useful on the 'life cycle of boards' (a concept found, of course, in Mintzberg and others in relation to organisations as a whole) and how to make Boards effective. In the chapter on 'Managing Different Types of Organization', Hudson describes **'organization life cycles'** from birth (informal, dominated by founders etc) to youth (new staff, attempts to systematize, muddled staff/ Board

roles etc) adulthood (strong leadership, systems in place, clear roles and accountability) maturity (established, older staff, less entrepreneurial) decline (membership and donations fall, Board members resign, needs change and new purpose) which have provided an extremely useful lens through which to look at many of the organisations I have researched. It is marked, however, that amongst the different classifications he uses to define organisations, whether the International Classification of Non-Profit Organizations by *activity*, classification by *purpose*, by *source of funds* or by *composition of the Board,* there is no classification by structure of organisation and hence no opportunity to examine the challenges of flatter organisation. There is, however, an implication that some of the characteristics of such organisations – 'informal structure' and 'consensus management style' – are part of the 'birth' cycle of organisations, with the assumption that they will grow out of them!

With all the changes brought about by the recent charity legislation, the interest in governance of voluntary organisations and the position of trustees has grown, with NCVO's Trustee Board Development Programme very much a key player and producing many 'how to' materials, such as their loose leaf **The Good Trustee Guide** (1999) They have recently helped relaunch the journal **Third Sector Trustee** (advertised as 'not an academic journal, nor is it a particularly light read'), sister journal of **Third Sector: The News Magazine for the Charities World.** None of NCVO's recent work has been specific to women's organisations but two reports it produced in the early/mid nineties (NCVO Publications, 1992 and Sargant and Kirkland,1995) identified a significant under-representation of woman as trustees on the boards of voluntary organisations, particularly of larger charities. This led to first a conference in July 1997, followed by a report (Akpeki, 1997a). which identified a three-pronged approach to the need to tackle the under-representation of women on boards:

- Finding ways of attracting women to join boards (a quantitative issue)

- Giving women a stronger role when they join boards, and enhancing their contribution (a qualitative issue)

- Helping women to be more effective when they are there on boards (a support/developmental issue) (p.1)

This was a pioneering and very useful piece of work and, although it is not specific to the women's voluntary sector, it is highly relevant to the dilemmas which women's organisations experience in first finding and then using their Board members to best advantage. A second report (Akpeki, 1997b) provides useful resource material on trusteeship for ethnic minority women.

The journal which is co-sponsored (with the Mandel Centre for Nonprofit Organizations at Case Western Reserve University in the US) by the Centre for Voluntary Organizations (CVO) at the LSE, **Nonprofit Management and Leadership,** is obviously more academic in orientation although it has both scholars and practitioners both as contributors and readers. It has also addressed the issue of women on boards twice in the last three years, although both times in a North American context. Bradshaw, Murray and Wolpin (1996) explored the impact

of women on nonprofit boards, the actual proportion of women – around 40%
overall as compared with about 35% in the UK example – and the influence of this
and the gender of the chief executive officer on board effectiveness, structure and
process. Shaiko (1997) identifies organisational barriers to leadership for women
and highlights the importance of female representation in governance positions.

Finally two fairly recent articles are actually **about** feminist organisations.
Metzendorf and. Caan (1992) examine whether the use and management of women
volunteers in feminist organizations is consistent with feminist ideology that
opposed unpaid work for women and suggests ways in which it can be made more
compatible with such ideology. It raises the question of an appropriate feminist
style of volunteer management and concludes that of the two traditions of women
managers in general management – the 'masculine, competitive and utilitarian
versus the 'feminine' tradition of 'cooperative and interactive leadership' – in
'feminist organizations the utilitarian style is more prevalent.'(p.265) It concludes
that while 'a nonhierarchical, participatory structure is recommended, this was not
evident in the organizations in our study' (p. 265). Although this was an interesting
article, with disturbing evidence of deterioration in the role of volunteers in feminist
organizations in the US, it tended at times to state the obvious ('Volunteers in
feminist organizations should use this experience to enhance their future careers',
should be given advocacy as well as routine tasks,) and one feels that volunteer
management in women's organisations in the UK in 1999 is much more
sophisticated than this (as the volunteer programme of the Women's Resource
Centre illustrates).

The Centre for Voluntary Organisations also produces a series of very useful
generic **Working Papers** on governance (Harris, 1993; Dowsett and Harris, 1996)
and stimulated important publications like Billis and Harris (1996) whose chapter
on 'How do Voluntary Agencies Manage Organisation Change' by David Wilson is
particularly useful. Gann (1996) gives a more practical approach. Finally, in this
highly selective trawl through what is an enormous literature, I would like to end
with a very useful book, Cornforth and Edwards (1998), which examines in depth
the role and effectiveness of different models of governance, and identifies three
main models that can be summed up as follows (the actual terms used are rather
confusing and have changed in later work by the same authors):

- **Agency model:** arising from a market perspective on governance, which sees
  the main function of the board to make sure that the resources of the
  organisation are safeguarded and to monitor and, if necessary, 'control the
  behaviour of managers'. This can be seen as a '**traditional** model' which
  'appears to underpin much of the prescriptive literature on non-profit
  governance and it mirrors the historical form that many early charitable
  organisations took. (p.12)

- **Partnership model:** arising from a managerial perspective, where a governing
  body 'can be regarded as the apex of a management hierarchy' so that it is
  believed 'that

  board members should be selected on the basis of their expertise and contacts so that they

are in a position to add value to the organisation's decisions rather than just select, monitor and control management; that boards, like managers, will require careful induction and training, that they will need to know how to operate effectively as a team. Ideas such as these are much in common in much prescriptive literature on non-profit boards. (p.12-13)

- **Political model:** this arises from a democratic perspective on governance which suggests that the 'role of the board is to represent the interests of one or more stakeholder groups in the organisation'. Many membership organisations see their governance in this light. Central to this view is that anyone can put themselves forward for election as a board members. Expertise is not a central requirement, as it is in the managerial perspective.' (p.13)

Cornforth and Edwards also emphasised the 'second important idea' of **contingency:**

> How boards are structured and behave will be influenced by the circumstances they face, for example the size of the organisation, its history and culture and the regulatory regime that it faces. Of particular importance is the influence of the state...(p.11)

Finally, for our purposes, Cornforth and Edwards are particularly interesting because one of their four case studies, the local voluntary organisation (LVO), is clearly a women's aid type organisation 'set up in 1975 by a group of volunteers concerned by the lack of support for victims of domestic violence in the area' (p.20) which has moved from being a collectively run organisation in the 1980s to a more conventional organisational structure now. Although it now had a conventional' Board, there was a lack of 'initial induction or training' (p.29) for this, and a CEO who 'did little to encourage the development of the board as a whole; indeed she seemed to perceive their working closely together as a threat'. Cornforth and Edwards explore the issue of 'patterns of power' in Board-Management relationships (alongside the conduct of board meetings and the level of information the Board needs) and concludes that in the case of the LVO there was

> a recognition among most board members that the CEO had a great deal of power. This stemmed from her expertise, knowledge of what was going on in the organisation and control of information. (p.37)

It was clear that the CEO, possibly based on past conceptions that 'collective decision-making had damaged the organisation' now saw the board 'not as a source of debate or control, but a formal rubber-stamping body, occasionally useful for their contacts.' (p.59) This meant that the overall role of the board in the LVO performed three main functions - as a '*source of information* and advice', as a '*backstop'* to take decisions that might be difficult or controversial' and performing 'a limited *stewardship* role, overseeing the work and finances of the organisation' (p.71). This will be a very useful template when looking at the governance and the key issue of 'Board-Management relations' in my case studies and illustrates what urgent attention women's organisations need to give this area.

For women's organisations this move into the voluntary sector has, as we shall see, had a profound effect. It has allowed small feminist groups run as collectives to transform into complex voluntary organisations providing a sophisticated range of services. It has turned workers into co-ordinators and then into Directors and the

infrastructure organisations which support the sector - NCVO, ACENVO and, more recently The Women's Resource Centre for women's groups in London - have been there to provide the new managers with support and model guidelines of good management. This has not so much diluted feminist models of leadership as opened the organised women's movement to a wider, more mainstream managerial model and meant that to a large extent the whole sector has been affected by the new managerialism, with access to wide-ranging management training and support. .

II Management, leadership and the use of power

Alongside the key questions of structure and governance - and inextricably linked with them - is the issue of management, leadership and the use of power. Of the mainstream organisational theorists, Hales' (1993) detailed analysis of power resources and the links between power, authority and influence is particularly interesting. He identifies four 'typical combinations of power, influence, legitimacy and response:

1. The use of physical power resources to influence through the imposition of threat of physical harm or restraint is invariably seen by those subject to it as non-legitimate and therefore evokes a response which takes the form of alienative compliance.

2. The use of normative power resources to influence through the provision of meanings, affects and moral persuasion is invariably seen by those subject to it as legitimate and evokes a response which takes the form of moral commitment.

3. The use of economic resources to influence through the provision of material rewards (or the threat of their withdrawal) may be seen as either legitimate or non-legitimate. It evokes a calculative response, which produces instrumental compliance...

4. The use of knowledge resources to influence through rational persuasion, rules and procedures which may also be seen as either legitimate or non-legitimate. This, too, evokes a calculative response which produces a response in terms of rational commitment... (p.32-33)

This gives a very interesting template through which to look at power in organisations. As organisations usually rather short on material rewards but very 'value laden' and strong on moral commitment, women's organisations usually fit most closely into the second category of 'normative power. Hales also discusses the challenge of managing by consent (very close to the concept of consensus democracy which I shall be examining in the next section) and concludes:

> The solution to the problem of legitimacy may, therefore, lie in a recognition that power in the sense of 'transformative capacity' or 'power to' now resides in the interdependence which is characteristic of work organisation. If the effective achievement of goals is the outcome of cooperation managerial legitimacy must, therefore, inhere in the manager's role within that cooperative effort and must rest upon shared goals and values...here is the recognition that consensus cannot simply be assumed to exist but must somehow be created out of disparities of power, conflicts of interest and potential dissensus. (p.44)

This sums up very cogently the challenge many women's organisations face and is a very useful way of looking at their management.

(i) *Leadership and women in management*

The question of leadership and power in women's organisations is also influenced by a more obvious area of study. *Women in Management* is a fast growing field, which covers both the popular 'how to' end of the scale (e.g. Bryce, 1989) as well as more theoretical analysis, not all of which is relevant to this enquiry. However, since management is a key theme in all organisations (including flatter ones) and women's organisations have, as we have seen, undoubtedly been influenced by the new managerialism of the 1980s and 1990s, much of it is extremely relevant although, as Calas and Smircich explain, it has not developed the same conceptual framework as organisational theory:

> the women in management literature paralleled the concerns of liberal feminism of the
> 1960s, sharing its concern for equity.

> Feminist theorists have taken a different turn, however, moving beyond the sex differences
> question, developing feminist scholarship into a major theoretical force that raises questions
> about the production of knowledge that the women in management literature has not.
> (Calas and Smircich, 1992a: p.224)[v]

As such it has remained as a discipline much closer to its subjects, to those women who actually manage, and a seminal article (Rosener, 1990) with its claim that 'The Command-and-control leadership style associated with men is not the only way to succeed' has been very influential and widely cited. Although it does not target women working in their own organisations, I have found its exploration of a participative, transformational type of management (with echoes of Carol Gilligan's 'morality of care' rather than 'morality of rights') very illuminating and relevant to women's style of management in their own organisations. Indeed I have found Gilligan's own ideas (located within the category of psychoanalytic feminist theory) of the psychological difference between men and women (already apparent amongst boys and girls in playground play) very interesting, even if they could be accused of essentialism:

> these different perspectives are reflected in two different moral ideologies since separation
> is justified by an ethic of rights while attachment is supported by an ethic of care
> ...(Gilligan, 1993 edition: p.167)

and they have an interesting light to play on the debate on the difference between men and women's management style.

However, a more recent article suggests that 'women in management' should be asking a different set of questions:

> The dominant question today - 'Why aren't women managers getting to the top?' - gets
> answered by resorting to gender-centered explanations grounded in the deficiencies of
> women or their sex role characteristics or in superficial structural remedies. As we move
> into the next decade, we require answers to a different set of questions such as the
> following: Why do top management hierarchies remain white male dominated? How are
> race, gender and class identities manifested in organizational life? Is a 'mommy track' a
> correct approach for managing family issues, those that affect both men and women in the
> workplace? Do organizations need to be redefined to maximize the differing values,

perceptions, and characteristics women of color offer the work environment? What is the role of women managers in transforming the oppressive features of organizations? Why is career success always defined as 'getting to the top'? (Bell and Nkomo, 1992: p.236)

Although these questions are not framed with women's organisations in mind most are highly relevant to the organised women's movement. Many women's organisations, for instance, face problems of reconciling caring and professional roles both as employers and in their policy/ lobbying capacity (e.g. New Ways to Work, Parents at Work and the Maternity Alliance). And the challenge of diversity is one which all women's organisations face, if only, in the case particularly of the traditional end of the spectrum, in its **absence.** Another extremely valuable book in the empirical 'women in management' mould is Colgan and Ledwith (1996). Although none of its case studies (which range from women in publishing, retailing, personnel management, Customs and Excise, trade unions, teaching, the NHS and the Toronto public transport sector) relate directly to the women's voluntary sector (apart from the detailed analysis of the development of the group Women in Publishing in Chapter 2) many of its arguments, particularly those contained in the concluding chapter 'Movers and shakers: creating organisational change' are highly relevant as women strive to be 'innovative change agents' in their own as well as wider organisations. Another extremely useful book in a similar empirical mould is written by a man, (Morgan, 1986) and analyses male and female stereotypes and strategies for the management of gender relations.

I have also been very influenced by the work of Judi Marshall. In her very personal book **Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World,** (1984) Marshall draws closely on her own experience as a female academic. She identifies two contrasting patterns in the frameworks through which analysis is conducted in the field of women in management – the 'reform' feminist viewpoint, in which the values of the male world of activities and characteristics are not significantly challenged but tacitly used as a positive model to which women should aspire.

> In contrast is the 'radical' feminist viewpoint which rejects using men as a model for women. It sought instead to understand women's inequality, the continuing low status in relation to men and to reaffirm women's own sense of being. It depicted women as oppressed with men, as the dominant force in society ... as their oppressors (p.8)

Marshall borrows from both viewpoints but steers a middle course, 'retaining the valuable elements in **both** of two apparently opposing positions ... and viewing them dialectically so that they can co-exist ... and be reconciled at a higher level' (p.8) Her account is unashamedly women centred:

> I decided to focus without apology on women's experiences, in the belief that they are valuable in their right own right. I particularly wanted to avoid merely adding women on to a world which has so far been interpreted through men's eyes. (p.11)

The choice between a 'reform' (or liberal) and a 'radical' approach is one which, as we shall see, faces not just individuals but women's groups as they adapt themselves to an increasingly competitive world and are often faced with the choice between being 'poor and pure' or funded and reformist.

There are also a growing number of journals, and hence articles, on women in management and organisations. These include the more theoretical **Gender, Work and Organization** and the more pragmatic **Women in Management Review.** These are overwhelmingly concerned with women in the public or private sector, rather than in their own organisations. A very interesting exception is Balka's article based on a computer project in a women's group from Canada (Balka, 1997) which argues:

> Attempts to facilitate a participatory design process in women's organizations may be hampered by poorly defined roles within organizations, limited financial and human resource availability, rapid staff turnover (related to both reliance on volunteer labour and reliance on government job training programmes that limit the length of time a person can be employed) and a general environment of operation that often occurs in relation to crises, such as chronically unstable funding and budget cuts. It may be difficult to engage women's organizations in participatory design projects because relative to other areas of concern (such as developing and maintaining egalitarian forms of decision making and providing clients with direct services, which are often perceived as much more pressing demands) women's organizations lack a commitment to organization building. (p109)

It is true that women's organisations are often totally preoccupied with the immediate task of providing a much needed service on few resources - and cannot even spare the time to participate in wider forums – but my research will show a considerable commitment to organisation building.

An article in the **Psychological Bulletin** (Eagly and Johnson, 1990) reviews the extensive research on gender and leadership style, identifying 'the dimension of democratic versus autocratic leadership (or participative vs. directive leadership') (p.236) concluding that 'the more democratic and participative styles of leadership are more prevalent among women than men. (p.249). However this is not a straightforward conclusion, with some believing that 'managers of each sex adopt the best of the other sex's qualities to become more effective, androgynous managers' (p.233) and alternatively that:

> Women may tend to lose authority if they adopt distinctively feminine styles of leadership in extremely male-dominated roles. Women who survive in such roles probably have to adopt the styles typical of male role occupants. (p.248)

This is obviously not directly relevant to patterns of leadership in women's organisations but it suggests the issue is more complex than often suggested.

There was another journal, sadly rather short-lived, which was very committed to the organised women's movement and to helping it network and organise better. This was **The Journal: Women in Organisation and Management,** (1991 - 1993). It is a great pity it could not be made to pay and folded with Issue No. 7.

(ii) Women entrepreneurs

Next, in this look at styles of leadership I would like to look at the literature on *women entrepreneurs* which clearly has relevance since organisations started by women are often run by and with, and sometimes **for,** other women. Goffee and

Scase's study (1985) sees a continuum of response to subordination which runs through the collective strategies of the labour and women's movement 'to those of a more individual kind which are normally associated with career mobility and entrepreneurial success' (p.24) and locks a description of the women's movement very closely into the reasons why women choose business entrepreneurship. However their argument that 'the major achievements of the women's movement have been outside the labour market: within it, rather like trade unions, it has achieved little in improving the occupational position of women.' (p.30) now appears rather dated and Hertz's book (1986) seems both populist and dated and hardly very relevant to women's organisations:

> Over the years the women's movement has become associated socially with the underdogs and politically with the left of centre. Hardly underdogs or socialists, the business Amazons felt that they could not identify themselves with organised feminism. (Hertz, 1986: p.204)

In contrast, Allen and Turner (1993), gives a very illuminating account of what Vokins calls 'The minerva matrix women entrepreneurs: their perceptions of their management style' (Chapter 4) with its strong emphasis on transformational leadership:

> The style of management practised by women entrepreneurs may be summarised as: team-based with a strong 'family' feel; co-operative in nature; enabling' (i.e. developing potential in employees); dynamic and flexible in purpose; quickly reacting to variants internally and externally; rooted in desire for high standards and competitive products/ services; medium risk taking; using intuitive decision-making; innovative; one preferring *win:win* strategies which result in satisfaction for all parties as against a *win:lose* where only one party gains. (p.53)

Many women managers in the organised women's movement would strife to be just such a manager and this ideal echoes closely Gilligan's relationships of **care**, as against relationships of rights or justice. Wilson (1995) is also illuminating on women's leadership and attitudes to power, arguing that: 'women are unable to become powerful in organizations because definitions of power are inappropriate to women's experience; woman are socialized into fearing power and using second-class power tactics to get what they want.' (p.78)

(iii) Conflict and the abuse of power

Burrell and Morgan (1979) have an extremely interesting discussion about the vexed question of *What is power?*, asking such questions as *Power or social control: Is power 'zero-sum' or 'non-zero-sum'; Illegitimate or legitimate power?*, and making the observation:

> The term 'power' is often used simply to characterise the non-legitimised use of power. A full development of the concept of power must also concern itself with the way in which it becomes legitimised in the form of authority. Whilst organisation theory has paid considerable attention to the notion of 'authority', it has paid relatively little to the concept of power in a wider sense. (p.215)

A discussion of leadership and the use of power leads inevitably to an analysis of the abuse of power and the recurring theme of conflict in women's organisations.

We have already looked at Riordan's rejection of Rothschild's idealised 'feminine mode of organisation' (see p.10 above) and how Mansbridge's argument that the fear of conflict can lead to its suppression rather than dealing with its causes (see p. 11). Riger (1994) devouts a considerable amount of time to the subject of conflict in feminist organisations. She argues that while:

> Setting priorities among goals can force painful choices on an organization. Not making explicit decisions about which goals to emphasise, however, can leave an organisation's members in a continuing state of dissatisfaction and distrust (p.294)

She argues the case for conflict resolution techniques that 'permit opposing parties to articulate their differences and seek common ground'... Yet some differences may be irreconcilable or not amenable to collaborative solutions. Developing ... an 'etiquette of conflicts' which permits differences to be negotiated while retaining connections between women, is a formidable task facing women's organisations today. (p. 295)

Riger also identifies a challenge - what she calls 'founder's trap' - very common to the organised women's movement of the woman who founds an organisation in a blaze of passionate commitment and often publicity but is unable to adapt to the changing needs of the organisation as it adapts:

> Founders who are used to controlling their organizations may find a more rule-bound, less subjective style of management anathema. They may be reluctant to step aside because of a proprietary interest in the organisation. The reluctance of founders to institutionalize leadership by establishing procedures and policies which do not require their personal judgement has been labelled the 'founder's trap'. Ironically, just as the organization attracts more clients or external funding, the founder's personal style of management may become inappropriate because of the expansion in organizational size. Especially when they have taken risks or made sacrifices to get the organization off the ground, founders may resent their sudden obsolescence and resist change. A critical challenge in this situation is to loosen the founder's control of the organization. In many cases this means the founders will depart... (there is) a long list of social movement founders, feminist and otherwise, who chose to leave or were rejected from organizations that they had begun. (p.285)

The situation described here is from the USA but, as we shall see, it is substantially true of the UK.

Riger concludes that:

> organisational growing pains, not personal deficits, generate many of the tensions in feminist organisations ...Recognition that tensions can stem from systemic factors rather than members' lack of commitment to feminism reduces the guilt and blame that confound the already difficult process of conflict management. (pp.295-296)

Fried (1994) also raises the subject of power. The whole issue of women and power and leadership, linked with the issue of how to deal with conflict, is one which recurs over and over again and has been quite crucial to my work (see Grant, 1999). It is an area which recurs in most of the books already cited with attempts to explode the feminist myth that (1) power necessarily has a negative connotation and (2) that women do not abuse power. Morgan identifies the possibility of 'potential or transformative power (1996:p.186), Marshall identified the difference between

'power with'·and 'power over' (Marshall,1984) and Kanter's picture of bossy
women bosses:

> It is a perfect picture of people who are powerless. Powerlessness tends to produce those
> very characteristics attributed to women bosses.
> (Kanter,1977:p.202)

Most of the literature on Women in Management deals inevitably with women's
style of management and leadership. Freeman, in her various critiques of the
shortcomings of collective structures -'the tyranny of structurelessness' – wrote of
the new recruits to the women's liberation movement in the 70s:

> Unfortunately, these newly recruited masses lacked the organizing skills of
> the initiators and, because the very idea of 'leadership' and 'organization'
> were in disrepute, they made no attempts to acquire them...(Freeman, 1975
> p,454)

and Phillips tellingly examines the internal disputes within the women's movement
in her chapter on 'When Sisters Fall Out':

> What gives class such intensity within women's politics is that we are all supposed to be
> sisters and when we fall out we do it with a vengeance. The very 'life-stylism' of the
> women's movement is partly the problem, for if it expresses a desire for homogeneity, it
> also implies an intolerance of difference. ... Women's groups convey an atmosphere of
> intimate engagement-and there must be few in or on the margins of the women's movement
> who have not felt left out in the cold. The strength of sisterhood is also its weakness: it's
> great if you belong, it's terrible if you don't ...Because sisterhood did not solve our
> problems ... we are inclined to turn on each other. The anger unleashed can be deeply
> depressing. (Phillips, 1987 pp.139-40),

Nicholson, however does not see this conflict as inevitable, explaining how :

> It is women's oppression, isolation and lack of experience that enable the continuation of
> the belief that women cannot co-operate. If there were more women to choose from as
> allies, and if women did not take the quality of relationships as seriously as they do, then
> this myth would be assuaged. (Nicholson,1996: p.155)

She describes the development of a support group for women psychologists
(POWS):

> Through working co-operatively, having a common purpose and sharing the tasks and
> commiseration for defeats on the way to success, the group not only benefited emotionally,
> but learned a great deal about patriachal organisations. That was beneficial in itself.
> However working together and achieving their explicit aims also gave each member of the
> group self-confidence and the impetus to carry on working as feminist psychologists.
>
> It was not a perfect group. After the initial setting of the section, there were various
> 'falling outs' However none now remains in a junior post ...(and) ...the POWS continues to
> thrive under a totally new group of women ... (p.156)

A decade later, Riordan, who has worked extensively with women's groups in
London, identifies what she calls 'power illiteracy' amongst such groups:

> Women have the ability to abuse power just as much as men. I believe that the 'legacy of
> sisterhood' has created an unrealistic and unnatural expectation of women and their
> organisations ... (power-sharing) has become an expectation that because of their sex,
> women will automatically share power and decision-making ... This is not always the case.
> And when women don't live up to this expectation strong feelings of betrayal, anger and
> resentment ensue. (Riordan, 1996, p.56)

This is an extremely important argument to which we will be returning.   .

In her detailed study of two women's centres, Brown (1992) identifies the need for a
'shared set of core values' but 'does not presuppose that the enactment of these
values is unproblematic or uncontentious' so that 'the potential for conflict on the
basis of difference is maintained' and 'inequalities of power and influence may
persist in spite of efforts to reduce them' (p.181). There was a particular problem in
achieving equality of power and influence with a mixture of paid and voluntary
workers and inequalities of power and influence were 'a persistent problem in the
review of organising activity within the autonomous women's movement'(p186).
The book ends: 'Women who are involved in organising as women are engaged in
a creative struggle to build the future through their actions in the present'(p.192).

Another text which engages with this struggle, and comes out of the 'anger and
frustration at the way in which power is sometimes abused and denied in feminist
organisations' is Bewley (1996, p.161) Just because there is no obvious hierarchy,
does not mean power does not exist. It can be gained 'through longevity in the
organisation and its accompanying information, knowledge and wisdom' sometimes
carried 'almost solely in someone's head':

> The power conferred through 'wisdom' is also sometimes related to notions
> of 'charisma'. A popular image used to describe this ... was 'queen bee'.
> Sometimes this charisma comes from 'wisdom' and experience, knowing
> 'how we did it last time'. Sometimes it is the consequence of direct or
> indirect manipulation (Bewley, 1996:p.169)

And Auckland's work (1999) examines these sorts of power struggles, and
the way in which non-hierarchical structures *and processes* (my emphasis) are
negotiated in the grassroots setting of feminist camps.

(iv) Conflict resolution and empowerment

The theme of conflict and conflict resolution has been recurrent and will appear
again and again in the research. It is an area which needs much more work. But
Cockburn's research (Cockburn, 1998) on three women's organisations operating
across deep divisions in areas of conflict (Northern Ireland/ Palestine and Bosnia)
offers very useful insights. All these groups operate through pain and struggle
which provide no easy answers or comfort. But they do offer examples of hope in a
bleak landscape and they do give relevant points for women's organisations to learn
from - for instance, the emphasis on differences as well as commonalities; the
shared experience on how to handle disagreement; how to build multiple bridges;

the capacity to 'hold together in the face of ethnic and every other sort of division.

Another extremely challenging and relevant article by Beres and Wilson (1997) follows the development of the Hungarian Feminist Network, born out of the hope and turmoil of post communist Hungary in 1990. Having had no previous experience of organising autonomously, the history of the Feminist Network, with no formal network or organisational structure' (p.174), mirrors very closely the development of feminist organisations in the UK fifteen years previously:

> Members felt that a positional hierarchy was bound to be a potential source of political rivalry and jockeying for position. The preference for a nonhierarchical, consensual model of organization stemmed in part from members' own personal inclinations, beliefs and values, and in part from having learned of the existence of this type of grass-roots organization from previous networking with other, mainly Western, alternative organizations. (p.175)

They illustrate how the 'emotional commitment to equality and nonhierarchical functioning' can lead to conflict:

> Such an arrangement works well when there is trust and common values among members. Often what is seen as effective and informal when things are going well becomes problematic and divisive when they are not..... once the organization began to experience rivalry, jealousy, and mistrust among its members, this informal method of communication (word of mouth) compounded negative tendencies.... Calls for efficiency and responsibility ... gained regular currency. It never quite seemed clear who was in charge of what. Members volunteered to manage tasks and activities , and thenceforth the general assumption was that a particular task or activity in question would indeed be appropriately attended to. Frequently, however, that was not the case, and disappointment over inefficiency and irresponsibility triggered intense rounds of blamism. The culprits eventually came to be regarded as deficient human beings. (p.175-6)

They also face the pressure from the outside world resulting in:

> a constant need to explain the group's lack of formal leadership....Since the network did not appoint or elect its own leadership, the media and other organizations did that for the group, which led to considerable tensions, rivalry and interpersonal conflict within the group and, ultimately to a covert power struggle. (p.177)

What rescues the group from seemingly insoluble conflict is the intervention, advice and training provided by a visiting American feminist and consultant, who acts as a change agent, allowing 'positive reframing':

> The emotional shift from a passionate belief in the virtues of an unstructured nonhierarchical organization to an awareness of the drawbacks that become visible when such an organization might be restructured was only achieved with outside assistance..... The process offered a structured step in consciously linking emotions to the needs of the organization and its participants. (p.177-8)

They go on to argue that emotions in voluntary organisations can be considered positively (as 'glue') as well as negatively ('as explosives'). They are particularly difficult to handle in non-hierarchical organisations because 'the lack of a formal hierarchy means there is no hiding place for personal differences and these can become magnified as feelings intensify' (p.178). The authors end with the enigma that emotions are both positive and negative:

> We conclude with a quotation from Putnam and Mumby: 'On the one hand, emotions are
> subjective, chaotic and weak. But on the other, they ignite creative energy and
> involvement'. Had the Feminist Network been 'properly' organised, it could never have
> achieved what it did. Its principal resources were its members' intellectual, emotional,
> spiritual and financial contributions and ingenuity. Analysis that leaves out or denigrates
> emotions cannot explain the Feminist Network's achievement. (p.181)

Finally there is a very illuminating analysis of power as *empowerment* rather than abuse in Sen and Crown (1988) which, came out of what Calas and Smircich (1996) call the Third World/ (Post) Colonial feminist approach to organizational studies, especially the chapter on 'Empowering ourselves through Organizations'. This identifies that:

> Empowerment of organizations, individuals and movements has certain requisites. These
> include resources (finance, knowledge, technology), skills training, and leadership
> formation on the one side; and democratic processes, dialogue, participation in policy and
> decision making, and techniques for conflict resolution o n the other. Flexibility of
> membership requirements can also be helpful (Sen and Crown,1988:p.89)

It identifies five problems organisations must overcome if they are not to reinforce existing relationships of domination:

- Marginalisation of women's groups from public policy

- We have not developed enduring and open channels for acquiring representation to deal with complex and bureaucratised decision-making bodies

- Reluctance to delegate responsibility. No one is authorised to speak for the women's movement... If responsibilities are never defined, everyone is expected to do everything ... Our mistrust must stimulate us, however, to devise innovative ways of sharing responsibilities develop structures which keep leaders accountable and responsive to the voices and needs of the membership at all levels.

- Difficulty in building alliances ... a process of dialogue and working on joint programmes is the only way to begin to build mutual respect for the strengths and capacities of each, and trust in each other's intentions.

- Our ability and willingness to share power within our own organisations - related to styles of conflict management and resolution

The authors identify two ways of checking such tendencies:

> First democratisation of organizations and widening of their membership base is essential
> since it distributes power and diffuses hierarchy. Secondly, explicit assertion and
> commitment to an ethic that rejects personal aggrandizement and a firm stance in that
> direction should be built into organization from the beginning.(p.95)

Both the identified problems and solutions spring from a Third World setting but they have a universality which makes them very relevant to the organised women's movement in the UK.

III Organisational ability to change and develop in response to external and internal contingency factors

A final key raft of questions is concerned with the capacity of women's organisations to change in response to both the external and internal environment. A concept which has recurred is that of the life cycle of organisations: the four stages of formation, development, maturity and decline defined by Mintzberg (see p. 3 above); Hudson's five stages (in the life of a voluntary organisation) of birth, youth, adulthood, maturity and decline (see p.25 above) and Riger's 'Stages of Growth in Feminist Organizations' (see p. 22-23 above) and this will be a useful template to apply to my case studies. Implicit within this will be the supposition that all organisations eventually grow beyond their pure collective stage (a view which Bordt's research on women's non-profit organisations in New York certainly seems to support) and I will be testing this against the groups from second wave feminism which I examine. Another key concept is that of the **contingency model of organisational analysis** , expounded at some length in Burrell and Morgan (1979):

1. The contingency theory of organisation analysis postulates that organisations and their functioning can be understood in terms of principles which apply to biological organisms.

2. It is based upon an open system which regards an organisation as existing within the context of a wider environment.

3. The organisation and its environment are seen as being in a state of mutual influence and interdependence. In principle the organisation is seen as representing a subsystem of a wider social system of which its environment is part (p.167-8)

(the full list runs to twelve points)

I will also be testing Mintzberg's contingency theory which discusses how far what happens to organisations is affected by 'contingency' or 'situational' factors such as:

· The age and size of the organization; its technical system of production; various characteristics of its environment, such as stability and complexity; and its power systems, for example, whether or not it is tightly controlled by outside influences. (Mintzberg, 1989: p.106)

Bordt's list of contingency or environmental factors (which she sees as predictors of organisational form) include ideology, tasks, environment, size, age, government funding, interaction with external agencies etc. (see Bordt, 1997: p.55-59)

The importance of contingency factors was also, as we saw,. emphasised by Cornforth and Edwards (see page 24). Some of these factors are obviously more relevant to women's organisations than others but the principle of looking at what contingency factors do apply should be illuminating.

Conclusion

As should be clear, I have had a very rich and varied range of literatures to draw on in approaching my own research and, as we shall see, many of the case studies spawned reading lists of their own. Behind it all I have literally 'taken as read' the wider feminist canon of De Beauvoir (1949), Dworkin (1988), Friedan,(1963, 1977), Greer (1971, 1984), Hite (1993), Millett (1970), Steinem (1983) etc. This literature, taken as a whole, has helped me to develop my research questions which include those:

- on appropriate structures for a women's organisation (and whether this varies at different stages of an organisation's life cycle)

- on how far women's organisations are able to respond to change (and how far this is dependent on contingency factors)

- on what constitutes good governance in the organised women's movement and how this can be best achieved

- on the particular challenges of participatory democracy (and whether this can ever be sustained in a mature organisation)

- on appropriate models of leadership, the challenge of conflict and the use and abuse of power.

which I will be examining in my case studies. And behind all these questions are the wider questions of:

- what is unique about the organised women's movement; whether women's organisations still have an important role to play in the 21st Century in meeting the needs of women- at a time when the question 'why women's organisations?' is frequently asked and there is a whole wider debate about the relevance of gender.[vi]

However this search also illustrates exactly what I already guessed from my own experience – that the field of women's organisations is a fairly empty piece of ground in empirical research terms (Gould talked about descriptive case studies being 'regrettably absent' and Martin of a 'dearth of empirical research'). There may have been some theoretical analysis, particularly of non-hierarchical organisations, but there has been very little empirical research which looks in depth at how individual organisations work, concentrating in particular on their structure and governance. And yet these organisations have the power to change the world: what enables or disables them from doing so is to me both a valid and an important area of research which I hope will be useful to the sector.

So a large part of what I have learnt from the literature is a desire to give research on women's organisations – and women's organisations across the whole spectrum, not just those with non-hierarchical structures - the legitimacy and attention they

deserve but has not always been accorded.

ⁱ The inside covers of the book are illustrated with small pictures. All nine of the experts portrayed - whether management gurus, leaders of industry or master craftsman - are male while women appear only as operatives doing routine tasks.

ⁱⁱ See separate headings in next section for a more detailed discussion of the theme of conflict and conflict resolution.

ⁱⁱⁱ There is an ongoing debate and a considerable literature about the role of producers of knowledge in organisational theory and development. , with constant references to the influence of the recent role of women as producers of knowledge both on **what** is produced and **how** it is produced

Hearn and Parkin argue that:

> Until those most discriminated against can themselves research and theorize, or at least
> have their concerns brought more centrally into organization theory, then the male
> domination of organization theory is likely to continue.
> (Hearn and Parkin, 1992: p.64)

Even when there are roughly equal numbers of men and women in the field of organisation development;

> women's experiences are not equally reflected in the extensive literature or research ...Out
> of about 1,400 articles published from 1985-1991, only 29 were by women authors about
> women or gender-related issues. Less than 6 per cent were written or co-authored by
> women on topics of general interest to the field such as corporate culture and strategic
> management. (Kaplan, 1995:p.53)

And, as she illustrates, many women in organisation development see their position as highly oppressive.

Berman Brown supports this view of lack of published material:

> Gender issues have been included in organizational theorising, but a feminist view would
> suggest that these issues tend to be underrepresented and that they are debated and theorised
> about in an inadequate and incomplete manner. The generalisation here is that like real
> women in real organizations, gender issues in organizational theorising tend to be
> marginalised, trivialised or misrepresented.
>
> As an indication of such underrepresentation, it is interesting to note that many articles
> which deal with a feminist approach to organizational analysis exist as unpublished
> · manuscripts or as conference papers, rather than as journal publications or chapters in
> books, which makes it more difficult for those interested in the topic to acquire them.
> (Berman Brown,1995:p.198)

The irony is that in order to get published, and thus become easier to acquire, feminist scholars too often feel the need to play the same elitist academic games which make them virtually inaccessible to those on whose behalf they are apparently writing.

^{iv} The 'voluntary sector' is famously fluid and difficult to define. The Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector concluded in 1996:

> The variety, spontaneity, and constant change that the space we may choose to call
> variously the 'voluntary', 'third', 'charitable', 'not for profit' or 'association' world defies most
> generalisations. (p.16)

^v See endnote ii above for a discussion on the production of knowledge

^{vi} See Sue Tibballs *The Sexual Renaissance: Making Sense of Sex Difference in a New Era* (The Women's Communication Centre, 2000)

CHAPTER 3:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As we saw in Chapter 2, my research is an inquiry into the (broadly interpreted) governance of women's organisations which asks a series of quite general questions around the following broad areas

- What are the criteria against which to measure the successful governance of a women's organisation?

- How can organisations ensure that their governance empowers rather than disempowers?

- What helps organisations cope successfully with change?

This leads on to more detailed questions of structure, governance and management including the suitability of participatory democratic structures to women's organisations, of the influence of voluntary sector governance, of appropriate leadership and management, of the causes of conflict and the abuse of power, of conflict resolution and empowerment and of the effect of contingency factors on the governance of the organised women's movement. More detailed questions appropriate to different parts of the sector will be outlined in Chapter 4 and 6 respectively.

My research methodology has been guided by these questions. It has also been located very firmly in a **feminist research ethic** and I have been strongly influenced by feminist theories on research methodology itself. As in Chapter 2 there has been a great richness of material to draw on. I have been encouraged by Stanley and Wise, who in their earlier book (1983) reassured me that it is alright to be personally involved in one's research:

> And so, we believe that all research is 'grounded' in consciousness, because it isn't possible to do research (or life) in such a way that we can separate ourselves from experiencing what we experience as people (and researchers). (Stanley & Wise. 1983: p.161)

and consoled me that most research is not the tidy, 'hygienic' process it is usually made out to be (and thus that I am not the only researcher to feel chaotic!):

> Our experiences suggest that 'hygienic research' is a reconstructed logic, a mythology which presents an over simplistic account of research. It is also extremely misleading, in that it emphasises the 'objective' presence of the researcher and suggests that she can be 'there' without having any greater involvement than simple presence. In contrast we emphasize that all research involves, as its basis, an interaction between researcher and researched.(p.162)

In their later article (Stanley and Wise, 1990)[1] they discuss the existence of 'multiple standpoints' (including black and lesbian standpoints) in language far

more accessible than many 'standpoint' theorists. (see, for instance, Harding, 1991 and Hekman, 1997 on feminist standpoint theory).

Cook and Fonow are also encouraging in emphasising that to research a field in which one feels at home and very involved is an advantage:

> In this way, the feminist investigator is able to locate herself as a subject in history so that her vantage point arises from the same social relations that structure the everyday worlds of the experiences of those she studies. (Cook and Fonow, 1986: p.6)

They go on to quote another extremely useful and relevant article by Mies (1983) which explodes the concept of *value free research* replacing it with *conscious partiality* and, quoting Paulo Freire, describes the research process as 'a process of 'conscientization'... People who before were objects of research become subjects of their own research and action' (Mies, 1983: p.126). Certainly one of the most gratifying results of my research is that so many of the interviewees have been inspired to reflect upon and subsequently write about their organisations themselves.

Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) argue for 'methods of gaining knowledge which are not oppressive (p.423), for a 'sociology *for* women, one that is in the interests of women, rather than only about women' (p.424) and for the way in which they were 'committed to bring our subjects into the research process as active participants' and found 'the research process affected us as researchers and in our own lives' (p.434). Susan Clegg argues (1975) that 'no one methodology exists as a protocol for feminists', although she cites Oakley's (1982) illustration of the need to 'accept one's position as a sharer rather than just a taker of information' (Clegg, 1975: p.92), the concept of 'collaborative interviewing'(p.93) and ends with the diverse strategies of 'complete participation, modified and an "interventionist" semiparticipant observation.' (p.94)

The organised women's movement has been an extremely challenging area to research. At one level there has been an enormous amount of secondary data available to be collected, as part of **desk research** (all the annual reports, newsletters, committee minutes etc and other publications which proliferate in every women's organisation – some publicly available but much of it internal documentation generously made available to me by the organisations). There has been the material gathered as a **participant observer** in AGMs, meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops, on the Board and in the offices of a range of organisations and as an interviewer, usually of **in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews** (usually face to face but occasionally on the phone) of a range of **key informants** from the organisations with which I have been concerned or involved. As well as the planned in-depth interviews and **data collection**, much of my data has been collected opportunistically by seizing opportunities which present themselves. A classic example of this was finding myself completely by chance in York between two conferences at the same time as the Mothers' Union were holding their ten year conference and celebratory service in York Minister (July 1998). This meant that carefully planned semi-formal interviews with the MU's Chief Executive were richly augmented by numerous brief meetings in the Ladies

or the lunch queue with rank and file members. There have been many other examples of such serendipity and I continue to be grateful to those who are prepared so generously to share their perceptions of their organisations whether in formal, in-depth interviews or in much smaller and more informal meetings.

My research locates itself firmly in **feminist research** and **co-operative enquiry** (see Reason and Rowan, 1981). It is overwhelmingly qualitative which is entirely appropriate for an enquiry which looks at organisations over time and in the process of change, rather than at snapshots of the state of the sector at any given moment - but it draws on occasion on current research which is highly quantitative (e.g. Riordan,1998a). Indeed I agree with Crompton and Jones that the long standing conflict between **quantitative and qualitative methodology** is a largely false dichotomy:

> ... in organizational research it is not a mutually exclusive decision between quantitative and qualitative methodology. In reality it is very difficult to study organizations without using both sorts of methods. In any event quantitative data always rests on qualitative distinctions. (Crompton and Jones, 1988: p.72)

In its methodology my research draws heavily on such writers as I cite above.and below. It is multi-sourced, as described above, and uses **multiple methods** (Reinharz, 1992:p.197) but key to it is the **case study** (which builds up a profile of an organisation from secondary sources and interviews) and the in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interview. In choosing this methodology I am, it seems, following in a well-established tradition of women researchers in the sociology of organisations:

> The dominant methodology used by women in the sociology of organizations has been the exploration of organizational processes through the use of case studies based on one or a combination of data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and analysis of written documents and records. (Sheriff and Campbell, 1981: p.36)

There, however, I hope the resemblance ends since Sheriff and Campbell characterise the approach of the work of such women as 'a sociology of women rather than a sociology for women' and thus unable to effect a 'critical reorientation of the field' (p.34). My own work is intended very much to be *for* women and to allow a critical reorientation not of women's position in wider organisations but in the way in which they operate within their own autonomous organisations.

The case study is, of course, by no means unique to feminist methodology. The strapline to Crompton and Jones' article (1988), for example, is 'Why Sociologists should not stop doing case studies' and the whole article demonstrates how successful the case study can be, in this case in researching white collar organisations. But the case study has, as Sheriff and Campbell argue above, has been peculiarly suited to **feminist methodology**, defined by Hammersley as:

> a key feature of feminist methodology is taken to be a central concern with gender. It is claimed that human social relations of all kinds are heavily structured by differences in the social position of women and men, and most important of all by differences between them in power. (Hammersley, 1992: p.187)

The strongest argument for the **feminist case study** has probably come from Reinharz (1992) who argues:

> Case studies of feminist movement organizations ... allow us to see if classical organizational theory has been limited because it stems from the study of male-dominated settings. (They) can illuminate why certain strategies succeed and others fail, or why certain movements catch on more than others. (p.172-3)

It is this understanding of the gendered nature of human social relations, rather than any specific concern with hierarchy versus particpatory democracy, which characterises a feminist case study.

One of the challenges of this research has been the criteria for selecting which organisations to examine. The organised women's movement is both wide and diverse. Riordan's research (Riordan,1998a) identifies at least 676 women's organisations. It would be impossible to attempt to give an overview of anything like that number. Nor have I been tempted to take the Brown approach (1992) of concentrating in great depth on only two or three organisations. Instead I have used **network sampling** [2] to select organisations which give a feeling for the range, richness and diversity of the organised women's movement both by size; how long they have been in existence; whether they fit into the category of 'traditional' or feminist (these are very crude labels, since many of the so-called traditional organisations were stalwarts of 'first wave feminism') - or neither; whether they are 'service' or campaigning groups; whether they represent minority ethnic groups; whether they employ staff or not; whether they are based in London or outside etc. At this stage, when so little detailed work on the organised women's movement has been undertaken, it seemed appropriate to go for a **'scoping' study**, concentrating more on breadth than depth, which would begin to map out the territory for myself and others to build on and expand. I have also been concerned to choose organisations to which I could have easy access. Crompton and Jones (1988) describe the problems which **access** can cause, how you have to 'negotiate access and .. establish the necessary rapport with your respondents' (p.70) and how 'grudging or forced access will lower your response rate and produce unwilling interviewees..'(p.70). This is particularly important since it is not just the interviews but 'you have to regard all the time you spend inside the organization as part of the research' (Crompton and Jones, 1988:p.71). I was, with very few exceptions, very warmly welcomed into organisations and given very generous access to information and interviewees.

Appropriate and successful, however, as this participant observer/ case study approach (which I will go on to expound in more depth) has been, it does of course have some methodological drawbacks. Burrell and Morgan (1979) point out how:

> Theories which seek to incorporate different levels of analysis do not always give the all round view which is sometimes sought. They may merely serve to strengthen and reinforce an approach which is, in essence, very narrowly founded. This is an issue which has considerable relevance for the organisation of research activities within social sciences as a whole. (p.401)

A more rationalist approach would recognise that some things are hidden from observers, however participant they might be, and that there is a need also to step back to get a wider picture or, as we shall see, a deeper level of interpretation. In advancing my own approach, therefore, I am not excluding the possibility of other approaches producing interesting insights, or of the need to be aware myself of the added dimension which such as deeper level of interpretation can give to the wealth of 'participant observer' material which my research elicited.

Returning to the case studies, in the end I chose seventeen organisations to be examined in considerable detail, as case studies - eight 'traditional' membership organisations in Chapter 4 and eight women's movement organisations in Chapter 6 – although in both cases the introductory and concluding sections of each chapter provide an overview of other organisations. Only the Fawcett Society gets a chapter to itself, chosen because it so effectively straddles the distinction between traditional and feminist and illustrates so well the challenges of change. On the whole I was pleased with the selection of organisations although there were inevitably others I would have liked to include. One of these was **Southall Black Sisters** which is a group I have much admired for a long time. But I had done a very detailed consultancy with them three years ago and was thus nervous of breaching confidentiality .

In particular, my decision to include both traditional and women's movement organisations in the same study was deliberate and well considered. There have, as we have seen, been some theoretical and empirical studies of women's movement organisations and some (but far fewer) studies of traditional organisations. But there has, as far as I know, been no study at all in the UK which compares and analyses from a feminist perspective organisations at both ends of what is essentially the same movement.[3] Indeed my research reveals that the two ends of the spectrum are not nearly as far apart as is often implied – and that it seems they are growing closer together. A recent study has, coincidentally, recently come out in the US (Bordt, 1998). This shows how the 'dichotomy often drawn in the literature between bureaucracies and collectivist organizations actually fails to fit the empirical reality' (Ferree, 1999, p.417); many organisations are in fact 'hybrids' and, when we account for differences between organisations, 'feminist ideology has little to do with it, and age and size do matter' (p.418) – again echoing Riger's (1994) concept of 'stages of growth' and contingency theories propounded by Mintzberg (1989) or Burrell and Morgan (1979:p.167).

Another challenge has been the choice of **interviewees or key informants**. Many of the challenges and conflicts around governance within women's organisations, as in the voluntary sector as whole, revolve around the relationship between the Board and staff - or Chair and Chief Executive (and Cornforth and Edwards, 1998, is very interesting about the fluidity and ambiguity of this relationship). I thus tried to reflect this double vision, **multiple standpoint**, by interviewing where possible at least a staff member and a committee member, past or present (ideally the Chair and the Chief Executive, where one exists), and usually additional members or staff members. Again I have used network sampling and **triangulation** (i.e. getting the view of two or three different people on the same event or organisation) and chosen

people who I knew would have interesting (and different) perspectives and a commitment to women's organisations. Interviews usually lasted for at least an hour, sometimes longer, sometimes with follow-up interviews in person or on the telephone. These interviews were designed to explore an existing agenda, with all designed to answer a common core of questions, but with space for interviewees to 'open out' and expand on different points or to introduce those of their own. They were usually face-to-face but, as indicated, sometimes by telephone – and occasionally augmented by written communications. Interviewees were interviewed as representatives of their organisations (except in the case of the focus group). All were interviewed knowing they were likely to be quoted. In the (very few) cases where this presented a problem, the actual words through which they were to be quoted were sent or read out to them in advance and, if necessary, amended so they were happy with the final text.

I have been much influenced by books like Roberts (1981) (especially Oakley's chapter on 'Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms', pp.30-59); Lee and Renzetti (1993) and Maynard and Purvis (1994). Several contributors to the last argue, as I do, 'that the point of doing research is to create useful knowledge which can be used to "make a difference"' (p.28) and voice the concern that 'masculinist hierarchy between theory and practice is being reproduced in academic feminism'. (p.8) But all these books helped me to define and refine my methodology and particularly my interviewing techniques, in the light of, for instance Kelly, Regan and Burton's views (1992 and 1994) and their claim:

> it is nevertheless still the case that not just qualitative methods but the in-depth face-to-face interview has become the paradigmatic 'feminist method'. Although the feminist position connects to broader debates within the social science about the accuracy, complexity, depth and integrity of data, this is not the principal ground on which the claim is based. Rather it connects to and builds on the view that feminist research is 'on'and 'with' women. Interviews are seen to provide the route through which inter-subjectivity and non-hierarchical relationships between women researchers and women participants can be developed. (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994: p.34)

Certainly I have seen all those I interview as very much partners in a shared endeavour (not 'them and us', but 'us and us') and many of them feel a vested interest in the outcomes of the research and in a strengthened organised women's movement.

I have been influenced by such writers to develop a methodology which seeks to empower the interviewees, rather than seeing them as 'a subject under surveillance'. The classic research tenet of needing to draw the line 'between necessary friendship and unwarranted involvement'[4] hardly seems very apt when so many of my interviewees have necessarily, after my long involvement in the sector, been friends or long-term acquaintances. I would concur entirely with Mary Maynard that in these circumstances :

> Research becomes a means of sharing information and, rather than being seen as a source of bias, the personal involvement of the interviewer is an important element in establishing trust and thus obtaining good quality information (Maynard, 1994: p.16)

Indeed many of my informants have been far more than interviewees but partners in an interrogation to whose outcome they feel a considerable commitment. They have shared with me the assumption that:

> Our desire to do, and goal in doing, research is to create useful knowledge, knowledge that can be used by ourselves and others to make a difference.
> (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994, p.28)

Not just my interviewees, but those in my research group[5], in the special focus group which met in summer 1996[6], those who have discussed my ideas in workshops at conferences and elsewhere, who have read drafts etc have all been generous and essential partners in this research. However, again, as we saw above, we do need to recognise that some of the pressures on organisations may not be apparent and to acknowledge that informants, however well-informed, do not have the whole story so there is a need to be open to a deeper level of interpretation of events. Keat and Urry (1975) explained how: 'For the realist, adequate causal explanation require the discovery both of regular relations between phenomena, and of some kind of mechanism that links them' (p.30) and went on to argue:

> The realist view of explanation can be conveniently summarized in the claim that answers to why questions (that is, to requests for causal explanations) require answers to how- and what- questions. Thus, if asked *why* something occurs, we must show *how* some event or change brings about a new state of affairs, by describing the way in which the structures and mechanisms that are present respond to the initial change. To do this, it is necessary to discover *what* the entities involved are: to discover their nature or essences. (p.31)

The questions I asked my informants were designed to 'open up' the debate, encouraging participants to contribute their own ideas and their answers have been analysed using a form of 'grounded' theory. I have also used a form of grounded theory to identify the categories under which the material is analysed in Chapter 7.[7] But, as Kelly, Burton and Regan have pointed out: 'The most basic, yet fundamental feminist question has always been 'why'? (1994, p.39) and much of my inquiry is directed towards the questions of why organisations develop the governances they do, why some can adapt more easily to change and why it is so important that they can so adapt - as well, of course, why we need women's organisations in the first place. At the same time, following Keat and Urry's advice above, I am also very aware of the need to be open to the *how* and the *what* questions and to look beyond the immediately apparent to more underlying causes and structural phenomena, much of which will be revealed in the debate about contingency and how different organisations respond to external events.

Being so closely involved in the sector, and hence the material, - such a very strong *participant* observer - is undoubtedly a strength, as it has given me enormous knowledge and access, but it is also a challenge in that I am often wearing multiple 'hats'. These leads to a challenge over confidentiality and the need not to 'lift' material I have gained access to in other contexts - as a Board member, or a consultant - and use it without permission in my research. This makes it 'sensitive' **research** but it is also sensitive in the sense that Renzetti and Lee describe:

> where research delves into some deeply personal experience...where it impinges on the

> vested interests of powerful persons or the exercise of coercion or domination.... where it
> deals with things sacred to those studied. (Lee and Renzetti, p193, 7.)

This is one reason why I have been careful to ensure that participants do not feel
unhappy about the way they are reported. Women often feel an extremely strong
commitment to their organisations and to attempt to critique them can be seen as
enormously threatening. It is also clear that organisations can be experienced in
very different ways according to who is experiencing them - a classic example of
multiple standpoints. An example is the Fawcett Society which was, until the early
1990s, perceived by many as having an ageing membership which was not very
welcoming to young women. Others, however, passionately argue about the active
involvement over time of many young women in key positions. Both perceptions of
course can be true but in the absence of quantitative data on the actual number and
percentage of women of different ages (Fawcett has never kept this sort of age
profile monitoring), just how successful Fawcett is or was in attracting young
women has to remain a matter of perception. This is an example of where having
some quantitative as well as qualitative research to draw on could have been
helpful! I am myself an active member of Fawcett (and currently on its Executive)
and it is painful to be seen in any way as critical of an organisation I both respect
and admire.

I have been very interested in the links between theory and practice in
organisational theory. In a book **Gender, Culture and Organisational Change:
Putting Theory into Practice** (Itzin and Newman, 1995) which lives up to its title,
cross -referencing theory and practice in a wide-range of organisational settings,
(although none of them women's organisations) the editors argue:

> Linking theory and practice is never easy: but our attempt to do so here has been based on
> core assumptions about the limits of developing theory (grand or otherwise) in isolation
> from practice, and about the importance of theories through and out of lived experience...In
> each case, the research process was not seen as a pure academic activity but had an active
> relationship with the development of change strategies. (p.4)

One chapter, on women chief executives in local government, involves an explicit
attempt to build theory *with* women rather than *for* women by working
participatively with the women concerned, seeing them as 'partners' in the research
process rather than as 'subjects' of research with little or no power and involving an
active relationship between researcher and researched (p.5).

Berman Brown argues that:

> Like all academic disciplines, organizational analysis uses a specialised language of
> expertise, and like most academic disciplines, it tends to be elitist and monopolised by men.
> (Berman Brown: 1995 p.199)

This seems to imply that being 'elitist and monopolised by men' is a single, self-
contained category which is exploded once feminism and organizational analysis
intersect. Would this were inevitably the case!

In an unusually accessible chapter, Calas and Smircich seem to share my

conviction that feminist theory must be rooted in practice, must be useful:

> Our advocacy of feminist perspectives does not stem from pure scholarly reasons - that is, that 'more knowledge is good'. It is a strategy for making a difference by doing differently. Our rationale goes back ....to recognising that the way scholars do 'organizational science' often defines the way society does 'organizational practice'. Thus having a socially conscious organizational practice may depend first on having a socially conscious organizational scholarship (Calas and Smircich, 1992a: p.234)

It is hard to see how much difference can be made in women's involvement in organizations unless such research is couched in language which means something to such women. Talking to other scholars, feminist or otherwise, in a language only they can understand may enhance academic reputations but it won't 'make a difference'

My research is not just inquiry but **action orientated**. It has become almost a cliche to say that feminist research should be not just **on** but **for** women but I have never felt that my research was only addressed to fellow academics and I have always been concerned about the problem of accessible language, arguing that 'talking to other scholars, feminist or otherwise, in a language only they can understand may enhance academic reputations but it certainly won't make a difference to women involved in organisations' (Grant, 1997: pp 10 & 11). Kelly, Burton and Regan describe how:

> In our cynical moments we ponder whether the masculinst hierarchy between theory and practice is being reproduced within academic feminism - demonstrated by the fact that the 'new' books which excite and exercise feminists are no longer held in common, that a language/discourse has developed which increasingly separates women inside and outside the academy. (1994:p.29)

Duelli Klein is more direct:

> We have to write and speak in plain and comprehensible language and avoid excesses of feminist esoteric jargon which would almost certainly be counter-productive to our aim of making our research accessible (and useful) to as many women as possible (Duelli Klein, 1983: p.100).

I would certainly concur. I fully hope that this thesis will be considered both rigorous enough for the academy and accessible enough to be useful to women working in the field. I intend that my research conclusions will not just sit on the shelves of a university library but will be widely disseminated in both published and workshop format way beyond the academy. When I take this research out into the 'marketplace', as it were, at conferences, seminars and meetings, I am extremely encouraged by the positive feedback from participants that it is important and useful (although even I have been criticised for using such 'malestream' words and concepts as 'management'). When I discussed my initial findings - and the first draft of the **Criteria for Measuring the Success/Effectiveness of a Woman's Organisation** (See Appendix I) - in a workshop at the Women Studies Network Conference in Hull in 1998 a participant from a local women's centre bemoaned the fact that when she went to the library for help in meeting the challenges she faced on governance and management (she didn't object to the word!) she found nothing

on women's organisations. The sector faces such challenges - and women like her show so much courage and ingenuity in the face of every sort of problem, including financial -that it deserves all the support it can get. I shall feel pleased and proud if this research goes a little way to fill that gap.

Conclusion and summing up:

I start from my position as a participant observer of long standing in the organised women's movement. My methodology is both multimethod and highly participatory, involving interviewees in a shared endeavour in which we both have a vested interest. Central to this research is the case study, built up from data collected from secondary sources and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I have used both network sampling (in selecting the 17 organisations as case studies and the people within them to involve) and grounded theory, particularly in identifying the categories under which to analyse my findings in Chapter 7.

My research is action-orientated, designed to make a contribution to women's organisations by making good practice and analysis available to the sector. It is designed to be both conceptually and linguistically accessible, not just to the academy but to the organised women's movement, its field of study. My methodology is grounded in the convergence of feminist theory with. organisational theory.. It is multidisciplinary, drawing as appropriate on sociology, women's studies, management and third or voluntary sector theory, particularly on governance and the ambiguity of roles between chair and chief executive. While recognising the legitimacy of other approaches (and the realist need to be aware of more underlying structures) it is a methodology which seems particularly appropriate to its field of study.

In the next three chapters we examine how effective this methodology is in asking the research questions of the organisations under study.

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[1] In a book *Feminist Praxis* (Stanley,1990) which as a whole is an invaluable blend of practical accounts of research with theoretical discussion of feminist methodology.

[2] Everitt and Gibson (1993) describe network sampling as follows: 'you decide how many people you want to interview . You then go out and find them: through existing contacts and networking'(p.258)

[3] See Rowland's view of the modern women's movement as a continuum:

> The modern women's movement began as early as the eighteenth century but experienced a peak of activity during the campaign for the vote for women. Since the 1960s it has again experienced a resurgence in Western countries. (Rowland, 1984:p.3)

[4]Oakley (1981: p.33). It is interesting that in the 1952 extract from Goode and Hatt on classic research methodology which she is quoting the interviewer is always he!

[5]This is a group of myself and two other researchers on women's organisations - Siobhan Riordan and Margaret Page (as far as we know the **only** current researchers on women's organisations) - who have met regularly since 1996. It has been a role model as an essential forum for exchanging information, creative debate and feminist support

[6]This was a core group of Margaret Laird, Margaret Joachim and Heather Mayall who joined me (representing between us involvement in around twenty women's organisations) for a day long seminar (July 13 1996) which looked at the strengths of the women's voluntary sector, the problems it faced and strategies for dealing with these problems. Several other women contributed by mail, fax or phone either before or after the event.

[7] See Corbin and Strauss's (1990) comment on grounded theory: 'One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that study is allowed to emerge.' (p.23)

CHAPTER 4:
'ORGANIZATION WOMAN' – THE STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

In 1978 Mary Stott, renowned feminist journalist and long-time campaigner for women's rights, was commissioned to write 'The Story of the National Union of Townwomen's Guilds'. She called this book **Organization Woman** (Stott: 1978) and dedicated it 'in affection and respect for Organization Women everywhere'. And although it is of obvious and specific relevance to the Townswomen's Guilds, what it says is also highly relevant to a sector which has played a crucial part in the life of the nation throughout the twentieth century. At its height the WI had nearly half a million members and even today it is estimated half the female population in the UK has been involved in some way with the Guides, while women's organisations were absolutely crucial in the fight for the vote and indeed for all other progressive legislation affecting women since. Two histories of the women's movement (Smith, 1990 and Pugh, 1992) document the enduring and cyclical nature of the movement (with the period 1945-1959 suggested as the 'nadir of British Feminism' in Pugh, Chapter 10) and, echoing the life cycle theories of Mintzberg, Robbins and Hudson which we explored in Chapter 2, show how organisations rise and fall (e.g. the Women's Freedom League, the Six-Point Group, the Women's Citizens Association all fell), while the very influential National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) became incorporated into the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds. This very much follows the 'stages of growth' (Riger, 1994) or 'life-cycle' view of organisations which we noted in Chapter 2.

A number of the organisations from the first half of the twentieth century (and before) which have survived and prospered are examined in this chapter – there are others, like the Married Women's Association and the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (which celebrated its 85th birthday in the year 2000) which have extremely impressive pasts but are finding it very difficult to survive in the changing circumstances of the women's movement today. The Women's Agriculture and Horticulture International Union, on the other hand, celebrates its centenary in October 1999 as the Women's Farm and Garden Association (it changed its name in 1920). It can look back to past achievements such as the Women's Land Army but continues to fight for the place of women in the rural economy, including lobbying at European level. I describe these organisations in origin loosely as traditional examples of 'first wave feminism' although within that broad category both Pugh and Smith distinguish between different strands, particularly between equal rights feminism (strongest in twenties and before), the new feminism led by Eleanor Rathbone with her concentration on family endowment and things which women did not share with men, and the post-1945 welfare feminism.

Stott is admiring but clear-eyed about the strengths and weaknesses of 'organization woman' and the organisations in which she operates. She notes how 'these self-help, mutually supportive organizations gave their members confidence and assurance in a largely male-dominated world' (Stott, 1978: p.3). She writes about the importance of rules and structures:

> ...as Kathleen Kempton, the thoughtful and experienced general secretary of the Co-operative Women's Guilds, said 'Groups without rules run into difficulties because they have no machinery to resolve differences'.
>
> (Stott, 1978: p.23)

But rules for their own sake can also be dangerous. She quotes a retiring warden of the WI's Denman College:

> 'Rules are a great hazard for women. When they get together the easiest thing to do is to put themselves into running a meeting and carry out all the procedures ... You think you are awfully good but you have ended up with a meeting with no content. (p.216)

Stott identifies a challenge which is found in almost all voluntary organisations but, as I shall argue and my research bears out, particularly acutely in women's organisations, of the relationship between staff and volunteers: 'The relationship of paid and unpaid officials has always been tricky, as many a large women's organization has found' (p.116) ...' the old story, which seems to run through big organizations, that voluntary workers are apt to be suspicious of those who get a salary for doing very similar work' (p.127).

This relationship can be particularly problematic when it is that between the chief volunteer and the chief of the paid staff, - the Chairman (and even today most are still called Chairmen, when not Presidents) – 'Organization Woman' herself - and the Chief Executive (although she is more likely to be called something like National, General or Organising Secretary).

> No paid chief officer of a national voluntary organization can have an easy life. To maintain a balance between being an efficient secretary to her immediate employers, the national executive, being a good controller and trainer of the head office staff, giving leadership to the whole movement and being available for collaboration with other organisations and able to answer questions from the media ... must be of nightmare complexity. (Stott, 1978: p.132)
>
> ...One great satisfaction of top office in voluntary movements ...is being able to travel all over the country, to be met, entertained, welcomed and honoured as a VIP by nice women whose admiration and gratitude shine from their eyes. It can be heady stuff, and not every woman whose talent for inspiring leadership is expressed from the platform is anxious to share the glory with her 'professional' colleague. Not every woman elected to high office in an organization really thinks of even the top paid official as a 'colleague'... Many professional women working for voluntary associations will privately assert that ... even very experienced committees tend to treat their professional staff rather as middleclass Victorian housewives treated their maids, cooks and governesses. Almost inevitably the voluntary workers tend to think of themselves as slightly superior beings because they are doing for nothing but love what the paid staff do for a salary... (Stott, 1978: p.132-3).

At one level, they thus fit very closely into the 'agency' model of governance, where one of the main functions of the Board is 'to control the behaviour of managers' (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998:p.12), although, of course, as mass membership organisations there is also a political dimension to their governance. [1]

I started with the hypothesis that the analysis which Stott gave of the organised women's movement twenty years ago remains substantially the same today. Certainly when I was Director of the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO) I became very aware of the whole vexed relationship between elected Boards and paid staff and the way in which many Boards are suspicious of evidence of leadership from women in paid positions, preferring senior staff to 'run' the organisation rather than in any way 'lead' it. This seems to be the case even when organisations are large and complex and urgently in need of skilled leadership and management. Evidence of good, high profile leadership is often met not with approbation but with remarks like: 'Who does she think she is?'

When I was at NAWO I used occasionally to attend the lunches arranged for General Secretaries of the large women's organisations. I have never met a group of professional women who felt less professional satisfaction in their work. Several gave priority to organising opportunities for training and development for the staff they were managing but were given no such opportunities themselves (some were not even officially 'allowed' to attend these lunches). Far from being given chances to develop, several were facing attempts to have their job description and their whole position eroded (in the words of one, 'whittled away under our feet'). The only one who admitted to finding her job reasonably satisfactory gave as her reason the fact that she had learnt to 'manipulate' her chair rather than be manipulated. Hilary Williams, the then high profile chief executive of the Guide Association who **did** manage to get her title changed from General Secretary to CEO spoke with feeling of how she had to go through three committees to employ a part-time secretary and of how the Association 'needs but does not want me' and how 'members are all, staff nothing'[2]. As we shall see, there was in the mid-nineties a number of precipitous departures of apparently well-respected chief executives of women's organisations amidst distress and acrimony. Whatever the reasons behind this they were extremely unfortunate in both personal and organisational terms.

The relationship between the Board and staff and particularly between the Chair and the Chief Executive is, of course, one of the most discussed and most vexed debates in voluntary sector literature (see, for instance, Billis & Harris, 1996; Carver, 1990; Dowsett & Harris,1996; Golensky, 1993). But my hypothesis is that, while women's organisations share many of the characteristics of the voluntary sector as a whole, they also have characteristics, including the potential for a more than usually difficult relationship between Chair and Chief Executive which seems to be peculiarly their own and for which I shall be attempting to account. Conversely, there is the potential for a relationship which, if it is really worked on, can be transformational and very empowering for both parties and the organisation as a whole.

Part of the difficulty with this relationship may be the fact that, in the case of the more traditional organisations, most Boards are still made up of women who have not been in recent paid employment and are thus uneasy with professional staff, who may be the same age as their daughters or even granddaughters, and sometimes even resentful that such staff are being paid for services which they give free. It may also be an internalised inability to acknowledge success and excellence in other women because of an upbringing that discouraged it in oneself. Eichenbaum and Orbach explain how:

> Envy is a common feeling for women because of their knowledge of the impossibility of getting recognition and acceptance for themselves, or of getting approval rather than punishment for self-development (Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1985: p.145)

But, of course, as we shall see in Chapter 6, power over staff is not abused only in traditional organisations, and the whole question of power and leadership has been a crucial question for second wave feminism.

To explore this and other questions further I interviewed key informants in what could be called eight 'traditional' organisations, all founded more than fifty years ago (and several more than a hundred) – most of which could be said to have come out of 'first wave' feminism, the fight for the vote. They are all registered charities, apart from the Co-operative Women's Guild and the British Federation of Graduate Women (which has a separate charitable trust), and have become an established part of the wider voluntary as well as the women's sector in the UK. These organisations are (in chronological order of date of foundation):

Mothers' Union (established 1876)

Co-operative Women's Guild (1883)

British Federation of Graduate Women (formerly British Federation of University Women) (1907)

Guide Association (1910)

National Federation of Women's Institutes (1915)

Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland (1921)

Townswomen's Guilds (1929)

Standing Conference of Women's Organisations (1940)

These were chosen to give a broad range of the sector i.e. one youth, one overtly Christian, one overtly political, one rural, one umbrella group, one international, two professional, two generalist 'way of life' organisations, one international etc. All are membership organisations although one has a membership of **organisations**, rather than individuals. They range in size from one very part-time paid employee working from home (the Standing Conference of Women's Organisations) to a paid staff of around 168, supporting numerous volunteers, in the case of the Guide Association and we shall see that size of membership - and whether it is rising or falling - becomes an important contingency factor in an organisation's governance.

In each of the case studies, which will each have separate headings, I will be drawing out the history and development of the organisations from secondary sources - published material, or material produced by the organisation themselves, e.g. annual reports, newsletters, constitutions etc. I will then be examining questions of its governance mainly through in depth semi-structured interviews with at least two people who are key players in the organisation chosen, whenever possible - to give triangulation - because they have different standpoints (such as at least one from the Board, ideally the Chair,and at least one a member of staff), as well as something to say. I have looked, wherever I can, for those who have a real interest in the solutions as well as challenges and thus become 'partners in the research process.' Although the interviews are semi-structured, with plenty of opportunity for individual expansion, they cover many of the same questions. For instance:

- What is the role of its governing body? Who is on it? How do they get there?

- What is the relationship between members as volunteers and paid staff? Does it bring out the best in both sides?

- What is the relationship between the Chair and the Chief Executive? Does the latter, as well as the former, have an 'agency' role? (and is the whole package of 'governance' capable of evolving in response to changing needs?)

- Does the organisation encourage good leadership and have the mechanisms to deal with conflict?

- Is the structure appropriate for the organisation as this stage of its development?

- What external contingency factors affect the organisation's development?

- From where does the organisation derive its income? Is it financially stable and viable?

- Is the organisation still relevant to women of today, including young women? If not, is it capable of renewal?

Each of these case studies will end with a short summary which will signpost the most salient points, to be picked up in the analysis of Chapter 7, and, at the end, will pin-point the main points already identified in the literature. The chapter will end with a broader look at some other relevant organisations, such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) founded in 1855; the Girls' Friendly Society (now known as GFS Platform for Women) founded in 1875; the National Council of Women (NCW) founded in 1895; the Business and Professional Women (BPW) founded in 1938 – and a summary of the chapter as a whole.

In-depth analysis of the research findings from the whole chapter will take place in Chapter 7.

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[1] *See Chapter 2 for Cornforth and Edwards' discussions on models of governance.*

[2] Interviews with Hilary Williams on 2.2.95 and 3.6.95

The Mothers' Union

The Mothers' Union (henceforth to be known as MU) is certainly one of the longest standing and most respected of all the traditional women's organisations. It was established in 1876 by Mary Sumner, to provide the sort of support and advice in caring both for children's physical well-being and their spiritual nurture and growth that she had felt she needed but did not receive on the birth of her first child. It went on to develop into a truly international organisation to encourage the bringing up of children within a Christian marriage, linked to the Anglican Church world-wide with, today, around 750,000 members (140,000 of them in the UK). The first mass meeting of world wide members was held in 1908. World Wide Conferences have been held every ten years ever since, with the most recent in York in the summer of 1998.

MU has faced many of the problems and challenges which other traditional women's organisations have had to contend with in a rapidly changing external social climate where, for instance, today:

> Nearly half of UK marriages now end in divorce, leading to large numbers of lone parent families. The preference for cohabitation or incidence of single parenthood results in four in ten of British children now being born outside marriage.(Lindsay, 2000:p.9)

For an organisation posited on Christian marriage this is likely to have an even more profound effect and we shall see how changing attitudes to marriage have radically altered the MU's own approach.

MU has faced many of the problems and challenges which other traditional women's organisations have had to contend with. There has also been the perennial problem of trying to involve young women. As-far back as 'the early part of the century the Mothers' Union had been worried about the reluctance of young women to become members, an anxiety which has recurred through the years. In 1917 the Young Wives Central Committee had been formed' (Hill, 1988: p.17). A separate department on 'The Fellowship of Marriage' did not really succeed in bringing in young wives and mothers and in 1946 this made way for the Young Members' Department. Ten years later the eightieth anniversary of the MU was celebrated 'with great emphasis on the Young Members Department and there were continuing efforts to recruit younger women into the Mothers' Union' (Hill, 1988: p. 21). Forty years later it was still grappling with the dilemma that, in spite of its name, it is increasingly becoming a middle-aged and older women's organisation[1]. But it is dealing with this problem from two directions - first by being refreshingly pragmatic about accommodating the needs of younger women and not putting them under pressure to conform to a certain image of an MU member. Alongside a picture of new recruits, in 1995, their enrolling member, or branch leader, Wendy Malkinson, is quoted as follows:

> I realise that many of them have full-time careers and other commitments, so I tell them that coming to meetings is not essential, they can come when they can without feeling guilty. This way I am convinced that modern, busy women will be able to take on all that MU offers.[2]

But the MU is also realistic about how, given the heavy employment and other commitments most young women carry, most women are not going to join until they are at least into middle-age. Even if young women had **time** to join they would only be likely to achieve the opportunity to have the sort of stake in decision making which they might be given in a smaller, more local organisation, by working their way up the various hierarchies of branch, deanery and diocesan levels of leadership. Success in the MU depends on 'being seen', working your way up the hierarchy. However, as long as the MU works relevantly and effectively **with** young women and they benefit from the MU's work, it should not really matter whether they are members or not, in the traditional branch mode of attending meetings etc. More important to the MU than the actual age of new recruits is the fact that members join who are committed to and energised by the MU agenda.[3]. Like all membership organisations, the MU is very dependent on its subscriptions for keeping it afloat financially although it has been unusually vigorous in developing its trading activities through its very active Marketing Unit set up in 1993 to provide 'publications designed to assist members in their Christian concern for families world wide: and seeks through its Media Programme to communicate the strength and variety of this work to the Church and to the community.'[4] Again, like most memberships organisations, it finds it impossible to put up its subscriptions above the rate of inflation, possibly, as its Administration Officer Sacha Choudri suggests because 'women are taught not to spend time or money on ourselves'[5].

Certainly in the range of their recent work the MU have demonstrated how substantially they have recovered from the trauma over whether or not to admit as members women who had been divorced which had dogged their activities, and certainly their image, during the sixties and early seventies. MU was born out of a commitment to bringing up children in the life and faith of the church; a belief in Christian marriage was followed, inevitably, with an active opposition to divorce. However, as divorce became more widespread, this opposition, and particularly the total exclusion of divorced people from membership, came to seem outdated and unkind. This 'uncompromising anti-reform stance' is now recognised as a great mistake which "by adopting a negative reactionary stance to an issue arising from profound changes in society caused a great deal of hurt among members and potential members in parishes and led to the foundations of its 'fuddy-duddy' image".[6] Precipitated by the breakaway of the New Zealand Mothers' Union over this issue in 1968, a strong impetus towards reform led to the setting up of a Commission in 1969 under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Willesden with the following terms of reference (incorporated into the *New Dimensions* Report):

> To examine the Objects of the Mothers' Union and to consider how its witness can be maintained and its work of strengthening family life extended, having in mind that the lifelong nature of marriage is the foundation of family life, and taking into account changes in civil and ecclesiastical law. (Hill, 1988: p.27)

After much debate the new Objects were defined, at the Special Meeting called in 1973, as:

1. To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding;

2. To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the Church;

3. To maintain a world-wide fellowship of Christians, united in prayer, worship and service;

4. To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children;

5. To help those whose family life has met with adversity.

The question of the terms of membership, i.e. whether people who had either been divorced themselves or were married to someone who had been divorced could be admitted to full membership, formed a key part of the Commission and stimulated a major debate throughout the MU, with no-one under any illusions about the importance of the question and its capacity to affect the whole future of the organisation. There was talk of reaching a compromise over a two-tier membership. But in the end:

> The voting was overwhelmingly in favour of 'One Class of membership open to all who:
>
> 1. Have been baptized (the words 'in the name of the Holy Trinity' were added later) and
> 2. Declare their support for the objects of the Society.'
>
> There were 254 votes in favour of this proposal and only 49 against. When the result had been achieved, the Bishops again led the members in prayer. No-one had envisaged such a clear mandate for change and there was an enormous sense of relief. (Hill, 1988: p.34)

This thus makes membership open not only to those whose marriages have failed but also those who have never been married

From the outside it looks as if taking such a brave decision over divorce freed the MU to tackle other contemporary problems with similar courage and lack of sanctimoniousness. A television programme in the BBC2 **Modern Times** series on 17 March 1998 entitled **The Godmothers** illustrated very movingly both the caring (for which the MU is renowned) and the courage. In it the filmmaker Lorraine Chawker sets out to show 'ordinary people doing extraordinary things'. At the same time it has probably challenged and modernised most people's image of the MU which, as one member admits, is 'hilariously stuffy – formidable women who boss the vicar, run the parish and wear hats. There's a sort of smirk at the idea.' I doubt whether many people who watched this programme would have been tempted to smirk although they might well have been caused to smile affectionately. The main protagonists in it could certainly be labelled as 'very nice ladies' and we saw them engaged in traditional MU activities, like movingly sewing little gowns for stillborn babies, or presenting a cow to their sister branch in rural Uganda (where, we were reminded, the MU had been banned under Idi Amin). But they were also working with prisoners' families and discussing such 'cutting edge contemporary issues' as drugs, euthanasia and lesbian membership of the MU.

In fact there is very little that the MU is not prepared to discuss - it has even earned headlines for taking on board the issue of prostitution. It interprets its fifth Object – 'to help those whose family life has met with adversity' – very practically, to include running prison creches and tea-bars, debt counselling, pioneering a Message Home Project (now transferred to the National Missing Person Helpline), providing holidays for those needing a break, child contact centres so that separated families can spend time together - a practical illustration of what the Past Central President Pat Harris called 'outreach to the marginalised'[7]. But courage can still take come at a price. In the winter edition of **Home & Family** in 1995/6, Thelma Gabriel wrote a moving and thoughtful article on coming to terms with the fact that her son was gay. She called it 'A Journey in Understanding'. Unfortunately, as we heard from **Modern Times,** she did not get a lot of understanding herself, with one Vicar so outraged by her article that he closed down the local branch of the MU, as he was fully entitled to do. The programme did touch on how vicars could consider the members of the local MU as 'women with attitude' and how many clergy took this sort of authoritarian stance. It did not consider the question of how the situation has improved since women priests began to take over parishes.

It has often been argued that many traditional women's organisations have a sort of hidden hierarchy of men – husbands, lawyers, accountants, key staff positions – who pull the strings behind the scenes. In the MU's case this hierarchy – priests, bishops, archbishops – is of course highly visible. I had a very symbolic illustration of this when I came upon the celebratory service accompanying the World Wide Conference in York Minister in July 1998. At the north door was World Wide President Christine Eames taking a photocall alone amidst a sea of world wide bishops in diocesan robes (wonderfully diverse in every way except their gender) while at the West door a flood of women (and a handful of men) swept out on a joyful tide of singing and dancing led by groups from Africa and the Caribbean. Interviewing a number of these grassroots members later in the lunch queue or the Ladies it was very apparent how important, indeed precious, the organisation was to them and how involved they had been in the debates taking place in the World Wide Conference (including the decision, after much discussion, to keep the name Mothers' Union). The Chief Executive, Angela Ridler, defines the MU as a 'way of life' organisation. It clearly is to many one which 'shapes the identify' of its members[8]. It will be very interesting to see how these dynamics change as women make their way, almost certainly painfully given past history and present experience[9], up the hierarchy of the Church.

So we can certainly say that the MU does have an evolving vision to allow it to respond to rapidly changing needs. It also has a flexible and adaptive organisational structure and is regularly overhauling this structure to make sure that it remains relevant. Many organisations are trying to adapt their structure in the face of falling membership and a desire to remain relevant. What is rare and refreshing about the MU is that it is doing it 'in the open' as it were, that it seems totally non-defensive about the need for change and very generous about sharing its experiences not just with the Church, but for the benefit of other organisations – and researchers. Although I had known and spoken to several members of the MU in the past, my

interviews with the Chief Executive Angela Ridler were as much on her initiative as mine. She heard me speak about my research at a meeting and expressed an interest then. She then sent me copies of the MU's **Submission to the Archbishops' Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England** and the revised Constitution and Corporate Plan and invited me to come and discuss it with her. Her ideas have been extremely illuminating and useful and she is a classic example of an interviewee who becomes a partner in the research process.

Angela Ridler has been very interesting about the position of paid staff – and particularly that of Chief Executive, whatever her actual title might be – in women's organisations. The job title can be very significant. The women's voluntary sector has tended to choose titles like General, Organising or Central Secretary for its senior staff post – while generalist organisations are more likely to go for Director or Chief Executive. The titles women's organisations use seem to be deliberately chosen to emphasise the *administrative* nature of the post, subservient to the elected Board and in more of a 'handmaid' rather than 'partnership' role with the Chair (often still called Chairman). These are posts filled with administrative responsibilities but with very little 'agency'. However many of these organisations are large and complex bodies demanding highly skilled managers and in this case Boards realise that they have to employ people at the sort of level that demands the title Director or Chief Executive. While her predecessor was known as Central Secretary, by the time Angela Ridler was appointed the post had essentially been upgraded to Chief Executive although the advertisement read *Central Secretary (Chief Executive)* until such time as the Constitution could be revised. Such a title certainly seems more appropriate for a job involving the management of a complex organisation with 40 staff. Many women's organisations seem to find it very difficult to allow their new Director, once appointed, to actually do her job, to resent rather than admire a high media profile, to offer little support and a great deal of criticism, to wish her to fade into the background on public events, with the Chair or President presiding on her own. They may realise that their organisations **need** the new managerialism but this does not mean that they find it easy to embrace the implications of this with enthusiasm.

Angela Ridler is honest about recognising **something** of this in the MU: 'Both roles bring something to the issues in hand and, although there can be tensions on the way, by focussing on end results favourable to the **organisation**, we usually find workable solutions'[10]. She certainly seems to have established an extremely warm partnership with the Presidents, both Pat Harris (who became Central President in 1989) and with Lady Eames who took over the renamed post of World Wide President (so named to reflect the increasingly international dimension of the MU's work, with the vast majority of its members overseas) in 1995 - and to have a strong commitment to consensual management and empowerment of **all** MU's stakeholders, whether staff, Board or ordinary members. Angela Ridler contributes this strong relationship between herself and the President partly to the fact that both parties to the relationship are dedicated Christians, sharing the same frame of reference. They are used to praying together about an issue, are attuned to listening to each other and have a pre-existing mutual respect which, while not avoiding all problems, does, she believes, make it easier than a secular relationship. One feels

sure it must also come largely from good management since the Chief Executive is well aware of the implications of managing a member-led organisation (where many members feel passionate and protective about the organisation) and of seeing this not as a threat but an opportunity. Indeed gauging the response of job applicants to the implications of this forms an important part of the recruitment process and all senior staff roles are as much about empowering members as doing their specific jobs.

When Angela Ridler first took up her post the skills base of the staff was very administrative, less professional. She was asked to bring in a strong professional team to support the members. This was something of a dilemma because there is a danger that members could feel patronised by professionals, and professionals threatened by members. There will always be **some** tensions between the two sides but Ridler firmly believes this can be a **creative** tension: any partnership is a risk but it does not have to be a destructive one. She also stresses that it is more important to focus on purposes than setting boundaries. She and Lady Eames are in on-going dialogue. People say that 'clarity in roles is essential but the membrane must be permeable.'[11] At its best this relationship is a synthesis of aspiration and the urge to succeed of grassroots women and what professionals have to offer. Christine Eames is a committed amateur who brings the added value of her experience and insight into the wider community. Her aspirations and vision are supported by Angela Ridler's ability to deliver/ achieve the vision in a member-led context – and to manage in a very affirming way, which freed others to develop a similar positive, female style of management[12].

It was the fact that the Chief Executive and successive Presidents found they could work so well together as a team, at a time when this sort of co-operation was particularly important, which helped and supported the radical overhaul of MU's structure and constitution from 1992/7 (this overhaul is still ongoing). Many organisations have overhauled their constitutions (and the MU had done it several times in the past). What is almost unique about the MU is that they were to do it so openly and to explain so fully **what** they were doing and **why**. In **The Submission of the Mothers' Union to the Archbishops' Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England,** they identify the need for 'more streamlined, less expensive structures' (p.5), the need to meet the demands of the new Charities Acts for better communication, to make full use of the expertise of both membership and staff, to affirm the world-wide nature of the MU, enable dioceses to encourage members to make a contribution whatever their family commitment and responsibilities. To sum up the overall first priority:

> We have to explore together how we can best serve the founding principles of the Mothers Union in the light of modern day values and pressures and the need to discuss what our conclusions say about the future direction and nature of the Society to which we all belong. (p.5)

What resulted, after several drafts and 'involving members at every level in the initial discussion' (p.3) was a much more streamlined structure both for staff and particularly for the Central Council. This had become extraordinarily overloaded with a total of 561 entitled to attend:

> This was intended to ensure a high degree of democratic involvement in the
> running of the MU, and to some extent was successful in this. However, as the
> years went by, the structures became increasingly cumbersome and confusion arose
> about what, in fact, Central Council was in a position to govern.[13]

In the new Constitution of 1995 the Central Council was dramatically reduced to 22
trustees, with the previous nine large sub-committees (somewhat incoherent bodies
differentiated by a mixture of function, geography, age etc.) streamlined into four
committees corresponding to staff departments - action and outreach, prayer and
spirituality, marketing, finance and central. Each of these committees, whose role is
advisory rather than executive, is led by a trustee. Their effect on the internal
workings of the MU have been very positive and they have also made it easier to
interface with comparable departments in other outside organisations, 'thus making
the membrane round the MU more permeable.'[14]

The MU thus seem to have responded extremely effectively to the findings of the
NOP poll which they had commissioned which found:

(i)   The research suggests that the MU must change if it is to survive and needs to
       adopt a confident approach to the future.

(ii)   It is recommended that the MU build on the organisation's core strengths and
       values.

(iii) It is suggested that the MU re-launch, re-brand, and re-vivify, harnessing all
       these positive 'brand' attributes.

(iv)   Such a re-launch would require 'root and branch' renewal.

(v)   The vision for the future is to attract champions who will inspire others to start
       these groups at parish level, targeting both younger, active women from their
       twenties on, but also pre-retirees, in their fifties, with time and energy.'[15]

MU emerges from this process with a strong sense of vision and with a rare
determination:

> To develop a culture in which the distinctive contribution of members and staff in
> terms of skills, abilities and experience is valued and used to the full and where
> members and staff affirm one another.[16]

Its work on promoting family life is seen as highly relevant by the present
Government. Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, came to speak at a recent meeting.
Its work in the UK is given a whole new dimension when set in the context of its
work overseas throughout the Anglican community and it has just produced an
excellent pack on the effect of the burden of debt on individuals and families. This
has recently been translated into lobbying action, with a call for a complete write-
off of Third World Debt:

> and the UK unilaterally to forego the £50million it is owed by the poorest nations. No

political party has ever been so bold. 'We have a mandate to be heard on behalf of women,' says Lady Eames, the quiet moderniser who heads the Mothers' Union.

We can bring issues out into the open, issues which impact on the lives of women. Debt is a good example: it is often women who have to make the tough choices in a poor African family,' Eames says the Union speaks not only for women, but for women in African nations especially: 800,000 women in the most heavily indebted countries are members[17].

On the home front the MU is about to launch a campaign highlighting the 'plight of older abused women', calling for a string of 'safe houses' round the country to meet the needs of such women, which the **Observer** calls 'a classic example of the new high profile approach to sensitive social problems'. This is all extremely impressive and it will be very interesting to see if this whole open, brave and outward thrust to its work redresses the MU's decline in membership and assures its future.

Afterword: In the event Angela Ridler decided not to reapply for the post of Chief Executive when her six year contract with the MU finished in Spring 1999. However the way in which the job had been transformed during her tenure was very obvious in the details of the job description circulated to candidates, with the emphasis on strong leadership, on having a 'free hand' to implement the Board's policies and decisions, on building mutual confidence, trust and openness with the Chair, on the fostering of 'a corporate culture within the organisation that values people for the contribution they make and encourages participation, enterprise and job satisfaction,' on an open management style. In view of the fact that Ridler attributed much of her success as a manager to a 'female style of management' it is hard to know what to make of the fact that in July 1999 the MU appointed a middle-aged businessman from the food industry as their new Chief Executive. This certainly temporarily raised the MU's public relations profile (with numerous interviews and articles) but its long-term effect on the morale and effectiveness of the organisation is hard to assess.

To sum up: *The Mothers' Union is one of the oldest women's organisations in the UK which, in spite of falling membership, still has 140,000 members in this country and around 750,000 world wide (which gives its work a strong international dimension). With its commitment to Christian marriage it has been affected more than most organisations by changes in the social climate, where 40% of children are now born outside marriage*

The MU is an overtly Christian organisation with strong links at all levels with the Church of England. It is led by an elected World Wide President and a Chief Executive who manages a staff of about 40 in Mary Sumner house in London. Under the last Chief Executive it was able to develop a very positive working relationship and model of leadership between President and Chief Executive and a very affirming style of management and leadership. Recently the MU has made dramatic moves towards more streamlined structures internally (including reducing its Central Council from 561 to 22) and towards a braver, more open approach to working and lobbying on behalf of its members, and other women whatever their marital status, both in the UK and overseas. This has resulted in very positive

media coverage. Expansion of its work is, however, limited by falling membership and hence reduced subscription income, although this is partly offset by a vigorous and successful marketing policy.

This case study thus seems to be a classic example of an organisation which, while retaining its core purpose, is making a concerted, and largely successful, attempt to adapt its structure and governance in the face of strong external contingency factors.

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[1] Interview with Rosemary Johnson, Past Central Vice-President, 16.5.95.

[2] *Home and Family*, March-May 1995, p.38

[3] Interview with Angela Ridler, Chief Executive of MU, 30.7.98

[4] *The Mothers' Union Annual Report 94-95* p.13.

[5] Telephone conversation with Sacha Choudri, Administration Officer, 7.7.99.

[6] *MU's Corporate Plan: The Way Ahead 1997 to 2000*, p.3

[7] 'Beijing: Pat Harris talks of her experiences at the International Women's Forum in China, *Home & Family*, December-February 1995/6, p.12.

[8] Interview with Angela Ridler 30.7.1998.

[9] Women in the Church are supported in this struggle by WATCH, Women and the Church, the successor body to the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW)

[10] Interview with Angela Ridler, 5.11.1998.

[11] Interview with Angela Ridler 5 11.1998.

[12] Meeting with Angela Ridler, 14.7.99.

[13] MU's Corporate Plan *The Way Ahead: 1997 to 2000 and beyond*, p.3-4.

[14] Interview with Angela Ridler, 5.11.1998.

[15] Adapted from Corporate Plan, p.12

[16] From *Corporate Plan*, p.8

[17] From 'Mothers ditch jam to tackle stickier issues' by Richard Reeves, *Observer* 13.6.1999

Co-operative Women's Guild

The Co-operative Women's Guild (henceforth known as CWG) was founded in 1883 (under the title of Women's Co-operative Guild or WCG) and, unlike so many other women's organisations, was neither middle-class nor non-political. In fact it was distinctly working class, grassroots, and soon became highly political:

> The Guild was founded in 1883 and from that day forward it has been known
> for its dedication to the rights of the working class and the underprivileged,.
> particularly women ... (it) provides working class women with the opportunity
> to voice their opinions from a national platform and the chance to help shape
> social change (Simmons and Vassey, 1990: p4)

However its leadership was certainly middle-class, although for Margaret Llewelyn Davies, legendary General Secretary from 1889-1921, the effect of this was mitigated by her great ability to relate to working-class women and 'under her leadership, the WCG grew into a rank-and-file organization articulating working women's most radical impulses' (Scott, 1998: p.263).

The Guild has always been closely involved in the politics and organisation of the Co-operative Movement, with the spreading of co-operative principles being initially 'the prime justification for the Guild's existence' (Gaffin and Thoms, 1983: p.18)[1]. However 'the Guild was and remains a self-governing organisation, and it was the primacy of its own internal sources of finance which, from the beginning enabled it to enjoy a jealously guarded independence' (p.47) - as demonstrated over its determined stand on divorce law reform in 1914 (p.49). It was strongly influenced by the 'first wave feminism' of the suffragist movement and:

> As a distinctively feminist wing of the working-class movement, the Guild's
> work during this period converged with, and importantly enhanced, the growing
> momentum of the women's movement (Scott, 1998: p.263).

It became increasingly involved in the Labour Movement, in the Trade Unions, and, with its famous white poppy demonstrations, in the peace movement (although, as we shall see, this involvement was in time to cease to be progressive). Over the years it was to debate and campaign on virtually every piece of progressive social legislation - from maternity provision (where their moving **Maternity: Letters from Working Women,** edited by Llewelyn Davies and published in 1915, very effectively boosted their campaign) to birth control, to child health, to divorce reform, to legalisation of abortion, to consumerism, to cost of living (their symbol, after all, being the woman with the basket), to employment and equal pay, to health and housing policy, to social security and pensions. And they were to do this so successfully that they were for years considered 'one of the most effective pressure groups' (Pugh, 1992: p.231). And active involvement in their own Guilds, with their emphasis on training in public speaking, was also to encourage Guildswomen to get involved in public life more widely, with strong representation on co-operative committees, on public bodies and even in Parliament, with three Guildswomen elected to the 1945 session of Parliament.

The strong influence of the Guild during these years was largely due to the weight of its numbers. In 1891-2, eight years after its foundation, its membership stood at 4 -5000 in 98 branches. By the outbreak of war in 1939 it had risen to an extremely impressive 87,246 members in 1819 branches. Its influence was not only strong and transformational in the public arena but also in the lives of its individual members. In a moving document publishing in 1983 to celebrate its centenary, member after member testifies to the way in which the Guild influenced and transformed her life, even when membership could get her into trouble with her husband:

> Half the time the men didn't want them to go out and half the time there was a
> scene when they got back sort of thing but they were determined to go. A
> penny a week it was to belong. Well I learned all I knew in the Guild
> movement. (Salt, 1983: p.36)

There is strong testimony to the way in which belonging to the Guild built confidence, opened doors into all areas of public life, made its members feel special:

> I was so delighted to be a Guildswoman ... And I always felt somehow that
> Guildswomen did have a very special part to play in life...It broadened my
> mind. I wouldn't have been interested in politics if it hadn't been for the Guild.
> (Salt, 1983: p.20-21)

Much of this pride and delight in Guild membership is reflected in the banners which were always an extraordinarily important part of Guild, as indeed of all Co-operative life, and prominent on all ceremonial occasions. Many of these banners are very beautiful and all 'are witness to the way women have traditionally worked, each banner is individual, some are highly skilled and may be the product of a designer and an embroideress' (Campbell and Wilson, 1994). Most of the images they display, with the famous 'woman with the basket' first commissioned in 1908 reproduced in many of the banners, also celebrate women as housewives, involved in the domestic economy. This demonstrates the interesting space the Guildswomen occupied as both *feminine* and *feminist* - a double identity supported by their 'Women's Corner' in the **Co-operative News** which, while carrying the usual domestic items, became increasingly concerned with women's rights.

Many of the Guild banners use political flower symbolism and none more effectively than the white poppies used in the peace campaigns for which the Guild was famous in the 1930s. This campaign, which symbolised the Guild's deep commitment to a pacifism which permeated its culture, was in a way both its finest hour but also symbolic of the start of its decline. This ideological stance was challenged by the war, when many members had to make the painful choice between pacifism and resistance to fascism - and the resultant split never really healed[2]. Along with this came the other wartime challenges of evacuation, mass bombing and increasing numbers of women going out to work:

> The war dealt the Guild a blow from which it never recovered. It started the
> war with a membership of 87,246 in 1805 branches and finished it in 1946 with
> a membership of 57,153 in 1714. (Gaffin and Thoms, 1983: p.117)

But it can be argued that its decline started earlier, even as its numbers were growing, and was caused as much by internal as external events. Gillian Scott argues that the Guild's increasing involvement in Labour Co-operative electoral politics meant:

> its militant advocacy of the rights of working women was superseded by the adoption of moderate demands for social reform, evincing henceforth little of its former sensitivity to gender relations...Lacking the imagination or the political will to think outside the Labourist frame, those advocating the moderate social reforms now promoted by the Guild tended to confirm, rather than contest, women's primary identity as wives and mothers. (Scott, 1998: p.267)

By hitching its wagon to a Labour or Co-operative Party or Trade Union train, the Guild in the 1920s and 1930s 'failed to develop a new and distinctive reformist agenda' which meant 'the regeneration of the Guild was inhibited by its adherence to a definition of family welfare rooted in the past and which had modest appeal to the enfranchised, educated and relatively prosperous women who grew up in the age of the welfare state.'(Thoms, 1994: p.101).

This was mirrored by an increasingly hierarchical and elitist structure:

> The Guild was steadily transformed into a more hierarchical and autocratic organization whose constitution enabled the leadership to maintain firm control of policy, and suppress dissenting voices. ... a two-tier structure consisting of a bureaucratic, elite leadership and a subscribing but largely impotent mass membership. Senior members of the Guild were able to 'represent their members' interests' on an array of national bodies, speaking for, yet unaccountable to, tens of thousands of women. The priority of the leadership was no longer to 'bring into active life;' ordinary Co-operative women but to put the Guild at the service of the causes which they supported. Chief among these, from the late 1920s, were right-wing Labour-Co-operative politics, a malignant anti-Communism, and an unyielding commitment to absolute pacifism. (Scott, 1998: p.268-9)

Scott argues that these effects 'gradually perished the fabric of the organization' (p.269) so that it had been 'running on empty' long before the watershed of the Second World War. The decline in numbers in the post-war period has been inexorable - from 46,495 in 1442 branches in 1960 to 26,059 in 946 branches in 1971 to 13,709 in 578 branches in 1981 (see statistics in Gaffin & Thoms p.268). 'By the early nineties this had fallen by almost 50 per cent while over the same period the number of branches declined from over 500 to under 300' (Postscript to Gaffin & Thoms, 1993). By 1999 it was down to 3,300 members in 108 branches. This is not enough even to sustain the structure (which needs 100 officers at the various levels), let alone revitalise itself, and the remaining Guilds are increasingly dominated by very old members (so that they have become 'the Wednesday Club' in many places)[3].

Could anything have been done to stop the decline of such a radical, important and indeed unique organisation for women? Certainly the Guild has attracted considerable interest and there have been no shortage of people to analyse its development at every stage. A Bibliography complied by Tarae Mizuta (University

of London, Institute of Education, 1988) lists 322 pamphlets, leaflets and articles on the Guild, plus ten books and six dissertations. Its centenary in 1983 was celebrated with an array of memorable Guild events (including a service with the Queen at Westminster Abbey and a splendid picnic at Stanford Hall) and by a whole range of celebratory publications. But the media and the wider world paid it almost no attention at all. Twenty years earlier, in a very widely quoted pamphlet on the Co-operative Movement's Auxiliaries, Brian Groombridge is ruthless about what needs to happen for the Guild to survive:

> There are too many Guilds receiving grants or material aid on a sufficient scale to keep them afloat, but not sufficient to encourage buoyancy. They are not prepared to do more to help themselves financially. Their subscriptions and their ideas were fixed at about the same time, in the thirties and earlier - decades which are part of history, not part of life, to the young Co-operators.
>
> A policy of tactful ruthlessness is called for with some of these branches. ... What is needed is a concerted and concentrated exercise in leadership ... The hierarchy would be at the service of the branches instead of being, as it often is at present, either a weight upon them, or a handy source from which to draw speakers ... everyone concerned will have to determine where the best and most useful results can be obtained, even if this means that some branches, now weak, will wither away altogether. It is better to prune than to watch the energies of these organisations ooze away through an excess of moribund pores.
>
> Will the objective need to be met by a response which is sufficiently drastic and urgent? (Groombridge, 1963: p.4)

Unfortunately the response to this report could not be called 'sufficiently drastic and urgent', although changes were made, including the change of name from the Women's Co-operative Guild to the Co-operative Women's Guild, with revised objects to go with the new name. But the decline continued although membership continued to be a valuable experience to many, including some younger women.

Susan King joined as a young mother, invited to a young wives group in 1974. She worked her way up the hierarchy, onto the National Executive Committee, and in 1992-3 became its second youngest President ever. She feels she owes an enormous amount to the Guild, which gave her the confidence and training to serve on the Women's National Commission and the Community Health Council as well as to become an active speaker and trainer within the Guild. But she is not optimistic about its future, citing what almost seems like antipathy to younger women (with children certainly not welcome at meetings)[4] and to new ways of doing things (such as having evening instead of daytime meetings). As a result she can count Guild members under forty 'on the fingers of one hand.' There **are** older members with progressive views, including a notable 90 year old, who wants to give back to the Guild what it gave to her, but on the whole, the 'old ladies' have lost a sense of vision, feel 'we've fought for it all' and now just want the Guild to 'see them out.' When urged by her to join a dynamic new group 'Women in Co-operation' they saw no reason to do so, suggesting the group should join them.

Sue King is particularly concerned for what this means in democratic terms. With so few people to take up positions, posts are 'blocked' at all levels. Jobs are no

longer 'time limited', instead you find women running 'their' branch single handed for years. The complicated structure of branch/district/section or region (not changed since the 1960s), with many branches very isolated, is no longer remotely appropriate to such a depleted organisation, but her attempt to change it fell on deaf ears. She used to give talks about 'the well-run branch' but there are now very few that would fall into that category. Less than half the Guilds now send delegates to Congress, which results in a serious democratic deficit, and there is little opportunity for the sort of training for which the Guild used to be renowned.

Sue King sees this as partly a problem of all multi-purpose groups, which gave women a really empowering voice towards the beginning of the century, but have now essentially lost their function. The Guild had a valuable function in her life - but means nothing to her daughter or daughter-in- law, who have so many other things to get involved in. She concludes, sadly, that it is too late for substantive change. The Guild should go out with a flourish in the year 2000 without enduring a slow death as its members die off. Its spirit, she says, will live on[5].

Much of this is echoed by Mervyn Wilson, who has been a close observer of the Guild for twenty five years. He sees the continued hierarchy as allowing its leaders to protect its importance long after it has outlived its usefulness. Where the Guild was once progressive, it is now regressive and out of touch with the new, younger groupings of women within the Co-operative movement. The continued existence of a declining CWG has in fact postponed, rather than encouraged, a serious debate on equal opportunities in the co-operative movement.

Mervyn Wilson also sees the pyramidal structure of the CWG as a bar to progress. It leads to a system of 'leaders and led', with no 'fast-tracking' and little desire from women who get to the top to assist younger women. In fact the women at the top have tended to be very competitive with each other and he has seldom seen such bitchiness between colleagues as between two senior Guild women. The generation gap between such women and the current generation of young women (not just daughters but **grand**daughters) is just too wide to bridge. There was a time when they could have taken advantage of their older membership and might have found a role in concentrating on older women's issues but this niche has now been taken with the expansion of organisations like Age Concern and AGLOW (the Association of Greater London Older Women).

The CWG had been run from its inception by a series of distinguished General Secretaries, several of whom stayed for a large number of years. Of these, Margaret Llewelyn Davies (1889-1921) was quite outstanding in leadership and development and certainly had 'agency'. The last in this mould was Kathleen Kempton who retired in 1983 after twenty years. But thereafter three appointments of well qualified younger professional women ended in acrimony or ideological clash, with Mervyn Wilson's judgement that the Guild was threatened by their ability. They now employ a General Secretary who is in effect an administrator.

The Guildswomen in **Of Whole Heart Cometh Hope** write with pleasure of the rituals of Guild meetings but now Mervyn Wilson sees the emphasis on form and

structure (e.g. the gavel and minute book) as a **substitute**, rather than a symbol, for ideas and vision. In fact he sees the Guild as basically beyond renewal, beyond thinking creatively. Local branches can operate at a very low level[6] because the local Co-operative society meets their expenses and most of these would be reluctant to be seen to turn off the tap to an organisation with such a distinguished history. However, everything indicates that to prolong the process of dying would not in the long run be in anyone's interest. Everything points to the conclusion that this impressive organisation should now wind up – a quick and honourable death rather than a lingering demise by a thousand cuts.

The Guild thus seems to reflect very closely the configuration of 'machine bureaucracy' which we examined in Chapter 2 which Robbins developed from Weber where:

> Bureaucracies breed such devotion to rules that members blindly repeat decisions and actions that they have made a number of times before, unaware that conditions have changed.
>
> (Robbins, 1990:p.316)

It also seems to have gone through the classic 'life cycle' described by Mintzberg et al and now be in a state of terminal decline from which it is unlikely to be rescued by either of Mintzberg's suggested remedies to such decline 'gradual revitalization or dramatic turnaround' (Mintzberg, 1989: p.294). It seems clear that this decline has been caused both by the internal features we have examined but also by compelling external contingency factors such as the Second World War (which made its pacifist stance so problematic) and the wider decline of the Co-operative Movement to which it was so closely allied.

But the Guild's spirit will live on in its extensive documentation, in its beautiful banners, in the memories of those involved. Mary Stott, the veteran journalist and feminist campaigner who worked extensively for the Co-operative Press in the 1940s and 50s and edited the **Women's Outlook**, has taken one of her watch words 'Doing is the Thing' from Eleanor Barton, General Secretary 1925-37 and remembers what an inspiring organisation they were: 'it was wonderful to meet working class women, and I loved their commitment to peace.'[7]

To sum up: *The Co-operative Women's Guild, established in 1883, has a long and extremely honourable history as a campaigning organisation on behalf of working class women and particularly the peace movement. However it was to begin to lose its purpose in the interwar years and its decline was accelerated by World War II. Changing conditions, including a decline in the wider Co-operative Movement, competition from other organisations and lack of attention to its very top-heavy hierarchical structure and governance has led to a drastic fall in membership, from around 87,000 in 1939 to around 3,300 members in 1999, with 108 branches and one paid employee, and a consequent democratic deficit with many elected positions unfilled. So although financial support from local Co-operative Societies allows remaining branches to carry on at a low level. it is felt by many that the*

CWG is now in terminal decline and it is time for it to wind up and allow more progressive contemporary structures for women to take its place in the Co-operative Movement.

What this case study demonstrates is an organisation which has seemingly reached the 'decline' stage of its life cycle, both unable and unwilling to adapt its structure and governance but, perhaps even more important, one which has outgrown its purpose. The literature we examined did not tell us much about this (and in some ways the sort of contemporary management literature which concentrates on an organisation's 'product might have been more useful in this context) but we will be examining it in further detail under 'Purpose and Partnerships' in Chapter 7

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[1] I am much indebted to this seminal book for information on the Guild up to 1983. Subsequent unattributed quotes are from this book. I am also very grateful to Jean Gaffin for her comments on this section (Interview 11.3.99)

[2] Interview with Mervyn Wilson, Co-operative Education Services Manager, Stanford Hall, 11.1.99

[3] Interview with Mervyn Wilson, 11.1.99

[4] Borne out by Jean Gaffin's experience of being the only woman with a small child at meetings of the Guild in the 60s.

[5] Telephone interview with Sue King, 18.1.99

[6] The *Branch Newsletter No.259* March/April 1999 is very thin and almost entirely given over to constitutional or administrative minutiae or news of social meetings.

[7] Interview with Mary Stott, 23.11 99.

British Federation of Women Graduates (formerly the British Federation of University Women) and the BFWG Charitable Trust

The British Federation of University Women (BFUW) was founded in 1907 to support the comparatively small numbers of women who were beginning to get places at universities. An article written to celebrate its 75th birthday in 1982 brings that moment to life:

> The meeting was on March 20th, 1907, yet we feel at home there. It could be today. The benches in the school library are uncomfortable; there are seventeen women – doctors, junior university staff, interested friends active in Manchester public life, the Head is an Assistant Lecturer in Chemistry at the University of Manchester and teaches part-time at the High School. She tells of the difficulties she and her friends have encountered in obtaining promotion on university and similar staffs and in getting funds which are vital to their research. Her solution is 'That a Federation of University Women be... formed to afford a means of communication and of united action in matters affecting the interests of women.'... Seventy-five years later our aims are basically the same ... From that inspiring first meeting of women so like those in any of our local associations today, a network of friendship and fellowship founded on passionate faith in the abilities of women has spread throughout the country and the world.[1]

BFUW changed its name from University Women to British Federation of Women Graduates (henceforth to be known as BFWG) in 1992 to make it sound less elitist – at a time when a great deal of higher education was not taking place in universities (although of course since then most of these institutions have become universities). BFWG declares itself 'a non-governmental national organisation with neither political nor religious bias which brings graduates together worldwide'. Its 'membership is open to all women graduates and those with equivalent professional qualifications'. It operates at both local, national and international level. It has both sixty local associations and a strong international dimension through its affiliation to the International Federation of University Women (IFUW), which has national federations in around 70 countries, and to University Women of Europe (UWE). IFUW is the only women's NGO with access to UNESCO.

This international affiliation was demonstrated in a unique way when in 1920 it bought from the London Country Council the 500 year lease of the beautiful and historic Crosby Hall. Apart from housing and providing a spectacular meeting space for the Federation, Crosby Hall, was, with halls of accommodation built on later, for seventy years to provide much needed and valued accommodation for women academics from all over the world[2]. During the war this provided the impetus for a lot of work for academic refugees, with different branches adopting a displaced person. A new wing was built in 1960 which housed its growing library.

BFWG has a renowned history, living up to its former gracious surroundings and even hosting royal visits[3] alongside serious work mainly on issues around the advancement of the education of women and women and science, but also on the environment, health, women into public life and so on. BFUW's membership had stood at around 8000 in 1968, and is reputed to have been even higher in the 1950s[4].

But by 1981, with the rise of second wave feminism, the burgeoning of other organisations and opportunities and particularly the massive increase in female enrolment at higher education [5] the BFUW was aware that 'we have a falling membership , and we suffer from the stigma of elitism and irrelevance.'[6] The increased involvement of women in higher education might seem to present an opportunity for increased membership but in reality the hugely increased numbers of women made the need to come together for support as women less and less relevant. Like other organisations, BFGW was to spend years grappling with these problems, particularly those of a falling and ageing membership, and this struggle continues with added urgency to this day, with members down to 1560 in 1996/7. A consultancy report carried in 1992 by one of BFGW's own younger members, Zena Cumberpatch, painted a very gloomy picture of the organisation's future prospects, characterising it as inward-looking, unprofessional, over-heavy on older members etc, and concluding rather direly, that the organisation could in effect disappear by being 'rescued' by another organisation, 'but by then it will be on their terms' or 'competitors will offer more and attract our prospective new members.[7]

One of the recommendations made by the Cumberpatch Report was to professionalise the organisation and upgrade the job of the Secretary and it has been a perception reached (often reluctantly) by many organisations that they cannot hope to become really professional and effective if they continue to be run overwhelmingly by volunteers, however well educated the volunteers may be[8]. The Fawcett Society (see Chapter 5) illustrates what a quantum leap moving from a secretary or administrator with little or no 'agency' to a Director who is allowed to direct can be to an organisation. This was one point that was not picked up from Cumberpatch and seven years later the organisation employs 'only secretaries' in the office, whom it was not felt appropriate for me to interview. (This is why I have not been able to give a staff view of BFWG). But even as late as 1999 there was a deep-seated suspicion, based on what was perceived as unfortunate past experiences with consultants or short-term contracts, about employing staff at anything but the most purely administrative level, and a feeling that what might be the salvation of others did not fit into BFWG's ethos. This is curious coming from an organisation of university educated women, many of whom are professionals in their own right whom one would expect to be in sympathy with the employment of professional staff. It also means that the honorary officers have to take on a very heavy burden of the running of the organisation.

We have seen above that the Federation had already decided to follow Cumberpatch's recommendation to change their name and they also took surprisingly strong action in another direction. One of the points identified as a point of dissension was uncertainty over Crosby Hall. This was precipitated by the fact that the landlord of Crosby Hall was demanding enormous repairs which made it impossible to stay there. A joint Committee of Governors of Crosby Hall (since 1971 a separate charity) and members of the Federation was set up to discuss the future. Surrendering the lease of Crosby Hall gave the Federation £3.5 million. This could have been used to re-finance a mini Crosby Hall and, given the affection with which the Hall was regarded, that could have been the obvious choice. But after almost a year of deliberation it was decided that with, hugely increased

numbers of women at university and changing attitudes to single sex accommodation, the time for all-women university accommodation was past and that the pressing present need was for help for women to finance their post-graduate university courses. So BFWG abandoned 'the focus of the Federation', something which had been very precious to it: 'No comparable organisation has such a prestigious building, a building of such beauty and of such historical value.'[9]. Instead it moved to fairly modest office premises in Battersea and invested its capital in the charitable company which had run Crosby Hall, renamed as the BFWG Charitable Foundation, administered from another small office in Great James Street. This also houses the re-organised and re-located Sybil Campbell Library, re-opened in October 1998 to provide 'a research resource for the study of the role of women'.

BFWG has always had a scholarship fund for women but this is predominantly based on excellence and is much smaller (£10,000 a year). The Charitable Foundation, which is administered by a Board made up of both men and women and with a company secretary from a commercial background, has around £110,000 to distribute each year. It does this on the basis of **need**, and contributes towards the living expenses (**not** fees) of postgraduate women in the second or third year of study or research. This responds to the compelling external factor that funding for post graduate research is very scarce and is a strong example of responding to changing needs.

However this does not sadly seem to have helped the BFWG halt the decline in its membership, and there is some feeling that having been so radical over Crosby Hall inclines the organisation towards conservatism in other respects[10]. The organisation tries to counteract this through a new mission statement:

> BFWG promotes women's opportunities in education and public life:
> works as part of an international organisation to improve the lives of women and
> girls; fosters local, national and international friendship.

through giving a more focussed role to each of two Vice Presidents (e.g. responsibility for the programme and public relations and responsibility for recruitment and membership) and setting up networks across subject areas[11]. However it seems very unlikely that this will be enough to halt the decline. The Conference Programme for the Annual Meeting in July 1998 reveals only 1560 paying members for 1997-8 (with a downward projection of 1400 for 1998-9) and the Regional Executives Annual Reports, although describing lively programmes of local events, are peppered with comments about 'membership problems', 'low' or 'reduced' numbers' and of the need and for recruitment. It also reveals a structure and governance which is extremely top-heavy and very complicated rules and regulations for such a reduced membership. Before the 1970s the Executive Committee had included representatives from all the local associations. These were then brought together in regional associations and the Executive Committee now consists of a Voting Executive of 20 (4 honorary officers and 16 regional representatives and six non-voting consultants, including the newsletter editor and the consultants on education and public affairs).

BFWG no longer have standing committees, since it was too expensive to provide the secretariat for them, but they do now have open forums on international affairs or education which in many ways are more democratic. Otherwise, as with many organisations with a reduced membership, there can be a great 're-cycling' of the same people at national level, while local groups find it increasingly difficult to find women to take on officer positions and many have to fold as a result (and once there is no longer a local branch, with monthly meetings, women tend not to renew their membership). Griselda Kenyon had tried to get round the need for local treasurers by giving BFWG a system of organising and collecting membership dues centrally but this had been debated and then voted down. The question of subscriptions remains absolutely key, since the organisation has very few investments and depends almost entirely on its subscriptions. Again, as happens with many organisations, members will be very generous at contributing to the scholarship funds, and in particular in supporting education for girls in Africa, but grumble if there is any increase in subscription charges or they are asked to pay too much for a dinner.

Does BFWG have a future? At one level it most certainly should as it has an international dimension with strong links and access both to the UN and to Europe which few other comparable organisations can boast, and thus a great deal to offer women with an interest in this sort of access. Griselda Kenyon envisages the possibility of a radical reorganisation which by-passes the local monthly meeting groups (thus developing in effect a two-tier membership, the traditional and the new) and develops a much more activist programme which builds on these contacts – and which markets itself much more strongly, appealing to the new pragmatism amongst women who are going to be more concerned about what they can get out of an organisation than what they can put into it. This international emphasis would not only create a new niche for BFWG and thus attract more potential members but would also give access to new sources of funding from the European Commission and the UN. It would give them something to offer which might rival the appeal of competitors like NADFAS[12] meetings on the fine arts.

Will this happen? Although BFWG does seem to have gone through the classic bureaucratic life cycle and be currently in decline, there is more chance that Mintzberg's alternatives to decline of 'gradual revitalisation and dramatic turnaround' could occur here. Interestingly, Griselda Kenyon, like Bridget Towle of the Guide Association, sees falling membership as an opportunity as well as a threat. So far membership has not gone down so low as to seriously frighten remaining members, but if it did (and the only way the organisation could keep going would be to draw very heavily on capital) then this might focus minds sufficiently strongly to envisage really radical changes both of governance, leading to a much streamlined structure and simplified rules and procedures, and of aims and objectives so that it could maximise and develop its assets in a really exciting and dynamic way.

It must be hoped that in the course of this modernising process BFWG could also overcome its suspicion of employing professional staff as it is very hard to see how this change could happen entirely with volunteers. And they would also face the

challenge of not abandoning their older members, who have been very loyal to them over the years, in this drive for change.

To sum up: *BFWG is an organisation for women graduates founded in 1907 with strong international international links through the International Federation for University Women and the University Women in Europe. For years it occupied and ran the historic Crosby Hall Foundation, offering accommodation for women academics, but when this was no longer viable it sold the lease and invested the money in the BFWG Charitable Foundation to give urgently needed grants for living expenses based on need to women post-graduates. This has not, however, halted BFWG's decline in membership, due to a combination of external events, including the huge rise in women students, and an over-bureaucratic structure. This membership is now down to about 1500 from 8000 in 1968 and this causes anxiety both financially (they are very dependent on subscriptions) and because it means the same people are 're-cycled' through a bureaucracy which is much too elaborate for its size. BFWG has never employed professional staff and now relies on its own volunteer capacity plus 'only secretaries'. There are plans for a change of emphasis, building on its assets of international and UN access, but radical changes in both structures and working practices will be needed if change is to be successful and revitalisation take place.*

This case study thus demonstrates an organisation which is grappling with the challenges of the need to adapt its governance - and modify its bureaucratic structure - and to update its purpose but so far with only limited success.

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[1] BFUW's First Seventy-Five Years, BFUW News, Spring, 1982: p.1.

[2] I am enormously indebted for much of the information as well as the views in this section to a long interview with Nancy Catchpole, (Chairman of the BFWG Charitable Foundation, President of BFUW 1981-84 and a member since 1966) on 20.7.1998.

[3] Visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother to Crosby Hall (1977) BFUW Newsletter, Vol 1. No.10, Spring 1977 p.1-2.

[4] I am extremely grateful for much of the unattributed information that follows to interviews with Griselda Kenyon, (who has been a member of BFWG for 30 years and was President 1993-1996) in person 23.2.99 and on the telephone 25.2.99.

[5] See statistics produced by the Equal Opportunities Commission in *Facts about Women and Men in Great Britain 1999* which shows, for instance, 452,9000 full-time female undergraduates against 425,9000 male

[6] Kitchenmham, B., (1981) Working together for true equality. *BFUW News* Autumn 1981, p.7.

[7] Cumberpatch Z., (1992) *Our Future Membership:Report for the BFGW,* March 1992.

[8] See Griselda Kenyon's comment that BFWG did not need a Director 'because we should be clever enough to run it ourselves' 23.2.99.

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[9] Jackson, M. Crosby Hall: Our inheritance, *BFUW News* Autumn 1981, p.4

[10] Interview with Griselda Kenyon, President 1993-96, 23.2.99.

[11] Interview with Nancy Catchpole 20.7.98.

[12] The National Association of Decorative and Fine Art Societies, founded in 1968, now has a membership of more than 80,000. Although it is not a women's organisation as such, it has a large percentage of women members.

The Guide Association

The Girl Guides Association, traditionally the leading youth organisation for girls in the UK was established in 1910 (and incorporated by Royal Charter in 1922) as a sister organisation to the Scouts. In 1928 it was to become a founder member of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girls Scouts (WAGGGS) which gives its work an important international dimension. Over the years it has played a key part in the life of young and adolescent girls in the UK, with the Brownie pack an almost iconic part of civil life, and, as the Annual Report of 1997 reminds us:

> Over 50% of women born in the UK have belonged to the Guiding Movement at some point in their lives. 103,000 adult Guiding volunteers in the UK give an average commitment of time worth £140 million each year (p.13).

Even the **Feminist Dictionary** acknowledges that 'the Girl Guides ... have provided many adolescents with many skills and with female companionship' (Kramarae and Treichler, 1985: p.177). A major review in 1968 led to a system of regionalisation, designed to reach out to people locally. Then a drop in membership (and a threat that the Scouts would admit girls) led to changes in the early 1990s.[1]. This included a change in name to the Guide Association (henceforth referred to as the GA), on the basis that there were '76,392 women aged 18 or over members of the Association, whether as Ranger Guides or as adult leaders'[2]. The Vision Statement which accompanied this change of name emphasised the involvement of women as well as girls (and the fact that it chose to remain a resolutely female-only organisation) and locates it strongly as both a women's and a youth organisation:

> The Guide Association, with more than 700,000 members, is the UK's largest voluntary movement for girls and women.
>
> Its purpose is to enable girls to mature into confident, capable and caring women determined, as individuals, to realise their potential in their career, home and personal life, and willing, as citizens, to contribute to their community and the wider world.
>
> The Guide Association believes that it can best develop these qualities in a mutually supportive, female structure, within an environment of fun, friendship and adventure underpinned by spiritual and moral values.
>
> The Guide Association will, therefore, create programmes to fulfil these aims and to attract and inspire women leaders to provide Guiding where it is wanted.
>
> Within this framework, the Guide Association will grow and contribute to the advancement of girls and women[3].

Changes were also made to the Promise Badge and other badges, letter-heads and so on.

This whole process was undertaken 'in the spirit of openness and honesty being encouraged throughout the Association'[4] and was rewarded with considerable coverage in the press. However the essential work of internal restructuring has only happened more recently and, as a result of such an obvious commitment to change,

the organisation presents an image of very focussed buoyancy. The effect on membership figures is more difficult to interpret for an organisation with so many complex layers of membership, with the uniformed members covering an age range of sixty years, from the Rainbow Guides (only established in 1987 for girls from the age of five), to Commissioners at the top of the uniformed service (although not necessarily of the age range), and the non-uniformed members, mainly the Trefoil Guild for older members of the guiding community. Comparing figures between 1993 and 1997 reveals, for instance, that although overall figures are down from a 'grand total' of 756,728 in 1993 to 698,141 in 1997 the figures in the five and six year old bracket, and correspondingly the membership of the Rainbow Guides have risen from 68,763 in 1993 to 92,036 in 1997 - with falling off beginning with the Brownies and becoming more dramatic the further up the age scale you climb, apart from a reverse in the case of Young Leaders where the numbers are **up** nearly two thousand[5].

Obviously the GA faces the challenge of involving young women, although this is as much about encouraging girls who have come up through the Rainbow Guides, the Brownies and Guides to stay on and become adult leaders - i.e. about retention - as about recruiting young adult women into these roles. The present Chief Guide (the name was changed from Chief Commissioner in 1996), Bridget Towle, is very concerned to empower and encourage young women and is determined to ensure that every committee in the GA has at least one woman in her 20s (and 30s, 40s and 50s - to ensure an age mix). 'The need to involve young women means you must be able to deliver change faster.'[6] Interestingly, however, (in this respect, as least, like the BFWG) she sees the continued steady decline in overall numbers (something the Guides share with almost every traditional women's organisation in the country) as an **opportunity** more than a threat since it will open up older members to the need for change.

This is much needed. The fact that the Guides, as a 'way of life' organisation par excellence, inspires such devotion in its members, so that 'they live and breathe guiding', is of course an enormous strength but it also makes effecting change very challenging. If you feel you own an organisation, any thought of change can cause outrage[7]. Another challenge which arises from such devotion is how to make members feel valued and needed as they grow older. The GA has a policy of 'retirement' from the uniformed part of Guiding at the age of 65 - although they can join the non-uniformed Trefoil Guild thereafter. Bridget Towle worries that this leaves a number of active women of 65+ feeling underused and with no real home in an organisation to which they have devoted so much of their lives. The treble challenge: to encourage young women to join or remain (as Bridget Towle argues, the organisation must keep recreating itself: 'We have to keep appealing to another generation or we won't exist - potential members will vote with their feet'), to use and retain the women you have, and to cherish your older members is something shared by **all** women's organisations.

The GA also shares the challenge of the need to establish a good partnership between the 'volunteers' who do most of the grassroots, hands-on work in Guiding and the staff of around 168 occupying headquarters premises in Buckingham Palace

Road In London. To most Guides or Brownies, and even to many leaders all over
the country, headquarters and its staff must seem very remote unless they make a
visit to the interactive Guide Heritage Centre which opened in 1996, or work their
way up the hierarchy to sit on various committees. The Chief Guide points out that
at Brownie pack level what matters is changes in uniform, badges or promises - not
structures or strategic planning at headquarters.

The person, of course, who represents the interface between the volunteers and the
paid professionals is the Chief Guide, elected usually for a period of 5 years, who
will herself have worked her way up the various layers of the Guiding hierarchy
and, as in all the other traditional women's organisations, it is her relationship with
the Chief Executive which is key. The present Chief Guide sees her role as to lead
(although not in the 'command type' structure of heroic leadership more popular
with their brother organisation the Scouts). She sees herself as an enabler, someone
who can make change happen, not just dream about it but actually deliver. She
certainly does not see it as just a ceremonial role. This of course raises the question
of where the boundaries around these two posts - one paid, one honorary - are set.
Although the senior staff post had previously been a General Secretary, in 1992 (as
part of the general review of its work) the Guides recognised the need for a well
paid, highly professional Chief Executive to manage their increasingly complex
organisation. They used the services of head-hunters and appointed a high profile
manager from industry, Hilary Williams, at a salary that was high even by generic
voluntary sector terms, who quickly found that running the GA was not easy: and in
fact 'more complex than running a commercial organisation and a great deal more
difficult.'[8] The new CEO felt that much of the governance of the Guide Association
was dysfunctional, with confusion between the expertise needed for running
Guiding as a movement, and the management skills needed to run the Association.
Inspired by the views of governance guru John Carver, she suggested a split
between a Board of Trustees no more than twelve strong appointed for management
and/or specialist skills and the equivalent of the Council to become the Parliament
of Guiding, representing all those at the top of the hierarchy of the movement,
which could concentrate on the **content** of guiding work, on promise and law,
rather than ratifying the accounts.

Whenever a relationship of this nature breaks down, as this one did after five years,
there are obviously multiple standpoints on what happened. It has been suggested
that this appointment was doomed from the beginning, with the size of salary .
causing deep resentment amongst the volunteers in the movement. Obviously there
was a clash of visions, with the Chief Guide believing very strongly in a
partnership, rather than a separation between the two parts of Guiding, and
differences in style which made it difficult to develop a working partnership.

The interesting thing is, however, not so much what went wrong as what has been
learnt from this unfortunate episode. Indeed it has been suggested that as a result of
the appointment of a high profile manager in 1992 the image of the Chief Executive
changed and subsequent holders of this position would slip more naturally into a
role which had become established by the end of five years.[9]

After an interregnum of nearly a year after Hilary Williams' departure, Terry Ryall was appointed, coming from a youth organisation rather than with a background in Guiding, at a reduced salary (from that of Hilary Williams) but with a job description which met her requirements of being allowed to manage. During this interim year a strategic planning process had been gone through with the Executive, led by consultants but without the involvement of staff. Much of this was around the difficulties experienced by the Guide Association in recruiting and retaining volunteer leaders. A piece of research was commissioned on this subject and the researchers have written up the research, under the title 'Volunteers in the Guide Association: Problems and Solutions' (Nichols and King, 1998), looking both at the Guide Association and the relevance of their challenges to the voluntary sector as a whole.

This research on volunteers shows how many guide leaders are recruited when their daughters join, and how perhaps a surprising number stay on when their daughters move on, through loyalty and friendship so that 'the balance between motivations and rewards changed with length of involvement and personal circumstances' (p.25). The main reasons for leaving are not daughters moving on but lack of other volunteers to share the workload, pressures of paid work and family, and increasing demand for specialist skills. The research reveals a changing pattern where women are no longer so likely to 'dedicate their whole lives to Guiding' (p.26) and the Guides need to be able to accommodate young women who can only give limited amounts of time.

The Guide Association has responded to these findings by developing local networks of specialist volunteers, increasing the skills base through internal training courses, establishing a new marketing and external relations department, building new district teams to support the very pressured post of District Commissioner and linking leadership training with NVQs. As the report ends: 'The next few years will show how successful these initiatives have been in retaining and recruiting volunteers' (p.30).

Although Terry Ryall regretted the lack of staff involvement in these processes, on appointment she was to take these documents and 'run with them', drawing on them, and all the expertise in the staff and volunteers, to produce first a **Briefing Document: A New Volunteer Structure for the Future** in January 1998 and then the pack **Guide to the Future** in November 1998. These documents are model blueprints of both the challenges the GA faces (the image, the difficulties of recruitment and retention of both members and leaders, meeting changing needs, ensuring the right skills, increased administration and securing the future of Guiding) and ways in which to address them. They describe eleven broad **aims** and then detail exactly what has to happen to meet these aims e.g.:

Structure: volunteer and staff

'The aim was to provide a streamlined and efficient organisation ... the resulting volunteer committee structure is more focused so that decision-making is faster and

more effective.'[10]. This reduced 38 committees down to nine. 'Bureaucracy disintegrated'. There might be 'fewer positions for people to hold but more opportunities to participate[11] (e.g. through forums of up to a hundred around particular issues.) At the same time the staff structure has been overhauled and fully integrated with the volunteer structures. Both charts are given and explained in full in the **Guide to the Future.**

Communication

The **Briefing Paper** gives a commitment to 'ensure clear, sensitive and effective communication throughout the Guide Association' and both Chief Guide and Chief Executive speak with enormous enthusiasm of radical attempts to improve communication throughout the Association and diminish the elitism of headquarters. Chief amongst these tools is a revamp of the rather staid **Guiding** magazine (re-launched in May 1999) in a format which will enable adult members to access information quickly and easily, together with a 'hotline' encouraging two-way communication and imaginative use of the Internet.

Volunteer/Staff Partnership at HQ

This is one of the most problematic areas for traditional women's organisations. The Guides' response is extremely impressive. Under the heading 'Partnership Protocols' in the **Guide to the Future** pack they spell out:

> The aim of the Association in promoting partnership working is that volunteers and salaried members of staff work in harmony together, each performing different roles, but working collaboratively to fulfil the aims of Guiding... (p.38)

But exactly **how** this should happen is not left to chance. Instead a series of **rights and responsibilities** designed 'to maximise the potential for partnership working between volunteers and staff' is listed. These are obviously, like Riger's 'etiquette of conflicts (Riger, 1994:p.295), borne out of a very informed understanding of how things can go wrong, including such rights as 'to give and receive open and honest feedback', 'to know each other's availability', 'to be valued and thanked for their work' and such responsibilities as 'to set deadlines which are realistic and achievable and meet them', 'to work together to resolve poor performances and other difficulties' and 'to keep in touch'. The document goes on to outline standards of good practice for staff and volunteers embarking on a new working relationship and concludes the section: 'It is recognised that in agreeing these protocols as the foundation stones for effective partnerships, it is not a panacea for the resolution of all problems between individuals'(p.40).

It may not be a panacea but these documents, and the accompanying **1999 Work Plan** convey a tremendous sense of purpose. This seems to be largely because they have been developed in full consultation with all sides of the Association, both volunteers and staff, and they are fully endorsed by both the Chief Guide and the Chief Executive, whose joint signatures appear on all of them. Indeed Bridget

Towle has been concerned with governance issues, such as the committee structure, 'which was working against us', and is anxious to ensure that in future committees are more streamlined and feed into the Executive Committee more effectively. The GA has also been very concerned to improve communication, which had been perceived to be very poor, particularly internally. They now have a web site and will use the re-launched **Guiding** magazine to maximum effect.. They are also striving to improve their strategic planning and are setting specific targets for all parts of the Association.

Bridget Towle believes that the Chief Executive and the Chief Guide need to share a belief in the mission of Guiding, a common purpose - it is delivering this purpose which will bring unity through trust. She accepts there is bound to be some tension between volunteers and staff, and between the post of Chief Executive and her own position, but believes that this can be a creative tension. Volunteers may feel they own the organisation, but the organisation needs professional staff of calibre to move it forward and these staff have to be given scope once appointed. In particular the Chief Executive needs herself to be empowered so that she can in turn empower the staff, which will in turn help to encourage the 70,000 adult leaders in the UK. Bridget Towle and the present Chief Executive, Terry Ryall, actively seek to build this partnership, arranging 'away days' together and putting pressure on each other to do better.[12].

Terry Ryall's view of the relationship, as Chief Executive, is very much a mirror image. She sees it as a relationship based on mutual respect, between two competent individuals who have no need to feel competitive. It is clearly understood that both ceremonial duties and leading the work of the Trustees are the responsibility of the Chief Guide, while the Chief Executive manages business processes and personnel. Their relationship depends on a very professional approach. A regular pattern of meetings is essential at which the Chief Guide briefs her on all the committees she attends. Terry Ryall sees it as the responsibility of the Chief Executive to 'manage' this relationship[13]:

The Guide Association faces all sort of challenges, including the decision over whether it should continue to try and be all things to all girls or concentrate on what it is really good at and 'do less better'[14]. As the Guide Association moves away from the 'agency' model of governance towards more of a partnership, managerial approach, both Chief Guide and Chief Executive are very confident that the GA has an important future, increasing in influence if not in overall numbers. One problem that they do not face quite as acutely as other organisations is money. The 1997 Annual Report reveals how the bulk of GA's income, more than £7million, comes from 'Members' trading'(from catalogues packed with Guiding merchandise and publications), amounting to three times more than income from subscriptions, and with around £500,000 from investments. It is thus far less vulnerable to falling membership than most organisations. The same Annual Report shows that the GA is grappling with the challenge of diversity, with photographs showing participants from all sections of society and reports on the Association's Muslim Network (funded by the DfEE).

Clearly the Guide Association is a complex and challenging organisation to govern, demanding, and at the moment getting, flexible and adaptive structures and the highest level of leadership, including a sensitively renegotiated relationship between Chief Guide and Chief Executive.

To sum up: *The Guide Association, established in 1910, is the leading youth organisation for girls with an overall membership of nearly 700,000 women and girls, ranging from the Rainbow Guides for girls from the age of 5 to the Trefoil Guild for older Guiders. Away from HQ, the Guides are an overwhelmingly volunteer run organisation and they are responding with vigour and imagination to an almost universal challenge in the voluntary sector of the increasing difficulty in finding volunteers. At HQ there is a staff of 168 led by a Chief Executive. There is now a very productive relationship between Chief Guide and Chief Executive and imaginative work has been done on protocols to encourage good working relationships between staff and volunteers. The GA has also streamlined its governance and done much to modernise its image and promote its marketing side, demonstrating that it is possible for a traditional bureaucratic organisation to develop a very effective partnership model of governance.*

This case study thus demonstrates an organisation which has done much to adapt its governance and to encourage good leadership at all levels, including the top, but which faces strong contingency challenges to its purpose in the face of so many alternative pressures and opportunities for young women and girls.

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[1] Interview with Margaret Banks (Executive Committee member 1982-92, Commissioner for Branch Associations responsible for dependent territories and Chairman of Staffing Sub-Committee 1992 to 1997) 14.12.98

[2] From *Hotline Special, Supplement to Guiding Magazine*, July 1992

[3] Ibid, p.3

[4] Ibid, p.1

[5] See Census of Membership in Annual Reports for 1993 and 1997

[6] Interview with Bridget Towle, Chief Guide, 2.11.1998

[7] Ibid and strongly endorsed by Margaret Banks

[8] Interview with Hilary Williams, 5.6.1996

[9] Interview with Margaret Banks 14.12.98. There had been appointments in the early '80s where similar lessons do not seem to have been learnt.

[10] January 1998, *Briefing Document: A New Volunteer Structure for the Future, The Guide Association*, p.4

[11] Interview with Terry Ryall 7.1.99

[12] Interview with Bridget Towle 2.11.98

[13] Interview with Terry Ryall 7.1.99

[14] See interview with Margaret Banks 14.12.98

National Federation of Women's Institutes

The National Federation of Women's Institutes (henceforth to be known as the WI) may not be the oldest of the traditional women's organisations, founding its first institute in Anglesey in 1915, but it is surely the most widely known. In fact with its 'Jam and Jerusalem' image (however unfairly earned) it has become an icon for all that is quintessentially English and rural and female. It is not, with its emphasis on women's homemaking role, the encouragement of crafts and the growing and preserving of produce, usually identified as feminist but a recent book (Andrews, 1997)[1] argues very convincingly that in its time the WI was undoubtedly feminist:

> The NFWI was the largest Women's Organisation in the post-Suffrage era, its most distinctive feature was that it was for women only. It campaigned for many causes which are associated with more overt feminism ... its history is one of conflict and contestation at local and national level...Within our culture women's organisations tend to be extremised and perceived as the threatening 'other' or trivialised; such as the Women's Institute Movement. To many in the NFWI between 1915 and 1960 the organisation was a hugely important part of their lives. It was very significantly a space with women's values and norms ... to trivialise (it) as 'Jam and Jerusalem' is therefore to trivialise them. To quote E.P. Thompson they need 'rescuing from the condescension of posterity... (p.xii)

Andrews goes on to look at what it might have meant to be an NFWI member at different points of time, the appeal of membership and its feminist potential' (p.xiii) and considers different aspects of the WI's work, from campaigning (for a 'way of life' organisation the WI did a remarkably amount of campaigning, although in a strictly non-party political sense), craft work at which the WI has always excelled, and giving value to the domestic sphere. Andrews also takes two extensive case studies - the extremely effective campaigns waged for improved rural housing and water supplies which dominated the WI agenda for the first 45 years of its existence - and the establishment of Denman College, near Abingdon.. Earlier in the book Andrews argues strongly that one of the most important things the WI gave its members was their own space: 'It could provide a significant female controlled public space for women who had, in rural areas, previously had few such opportunities' (p.67). Denman College, opened to the great pride of the whole movement in 1948, extended that space:

> Certainly for the majority of students Denman College, like so many of the movement's activities, from the monthly meeting to local WI classes and clubs, provided a space for women to fight the internalisation of their own oppression. They could gain self-confidence and acquire new skills in an all women environment free from the critical scrutiny of the male gaze...(p.138)

I find these arguments convincing and there is no doubt that the WI was, in its heyday, immensely important to thousands and thousands of rural women, with its membership peaking at 462,000 in 1956 (Goodenough, 1977). It has been argued that the enormous increase in membership in this post-war period must be attributed to the external, national emphasis on rebuilding homes and families after the War, with a parallel decline as these women began to leave through death or infirmity in the 1980s (Kent, 1988). This membership was, and still is, divided between more

than 8000 individual local institutes, each of them self-governing, each electing their own committees, and treasuring their democratic independence and they are in turn organised hierarchically into 70 county and island federations. There are committees at federation level also (on Finance, Environment and Rural Affairs, Home Affairs, Visual and Performing Arts, Home Economics, Sport and Leisure, Education and Training and Denman College), and those who want to can aspire to eventually reach the National Executive Committee, and stand for National Chairman, by working their way up through their local WI and federation. The WI is also represented on a wide range of public bodies and its views are still taken very seriously by Government and other 'powers that be'.

But where does the WI stand today, at the start of a new millennium? Certainly it has, like virtually all 'way of life' organisations, suffered a massive loss of membership – almost halved from the peak of 1956 to around 253,000 in 1999, spread over local institutes and counties. Although the WI could still claim to have more of a 'captive audience', at least in geographical terms, than most other such women's organisations (very few of which have branches in rural areas), women in the country share most of the pressures of combining jobs and families that their sisters in urban areas face – indeed these are often exacerbated by problems of transport and childcare experienced particularly acutely in the country. This makes it particularly difficult to attract young women. In 1995 I carried out a research project on **Where have all the women gone? The Experience of Women aged between 18-34 in women's organisations** which interviewed:

> women who had been involved at a senior level as an employee and a national committee member, alongside a county federation secretary and a young woman member from a village in Kent. All agreed that, although there are a few branches with thriving evening meetings, attended largely by younger women (alongside the afternoon meetings for older members) by and large the WI is failing to reach this age group. The young women who are involved tend to be following in their mothers' footsteps by becoming actively involved. Its National Executive and other committees are almost all made up of women in their fifties and beyond. In the WI network, to be young means being in your forties.
>
> The organisation is concerned about this situation: they want to ensure succession and an appropriate age 'mix'. There have been attempts made to meet the needs of this group in a variety of ways: more opportunities for sport, as well as evening meetings. However on the whole they seem pragmatic and realistic about their ability to give this age group what it needs and to compete with special interest groups like the National Childbirth Trust or the Pre-school Playgroup Association. There is an assumption that the WI is somehow just there and will continue to thrive regardless of failing to recruit young women: there is little genuine desire to change in order to make itself more attractive to young women. Nevertheless one should not underestimate the lifeline which the WI still offers to women of all ages living in isolated rural communities where there may be very few other sources of outside stimulus, support and friendship. Some such communities might be planning to set up separate groups which more closely meet the needs of younger women but for many the WI remains all there is on offer. Moreover an interviewee from Borough Green in Kent illustrated very well how younger women can still make the WI work for them. For her it had meant 'an awful lot, enjoyment, a group of friends'; she had learnt new skills and taken leadership roles at both local and County level. (Grant, 1995: pp.2-3)

And there are indications that the rate of decline has slowed over the last few years, with the WI's President making a concerted effort to get round the country and

meet new and potential members. Around 7,500 new members are now joining each year including members in their 20s, 30s and 40s (although the bulk are still the 'young retirees'). Some are now joining for traditional WI skills like home economics which are less and less likely to be available in schools[2]

What about the other challenges which face traditional organisations? Does the WI have the governance and structures which enable and empower it, bringing out the best in the Board, staff, volunteers, members and other stakeholders'? This is a problematic question to answer. On the one hand the WI is a highly democratic and participative organisation with even ordinary members having a large amount of decision-making power (fulfilling at least partly the Cornforth and Edwards 'political' or democratic model of governance)[3] although, of course, the actually exercising of this power - the translating of resolutions down to institute level and then back up again to headquarters, can be extremely burdensome, protracted and classically bureaucratic. Sybil Kent, after some time as a 'participant observer' in both the WI and the Townswomen's Guilds in 1988 wrote of the challenge of maintaining links between the centre and the individual institutes:

> So far as the missives from Federation intended to be read out at monthly meetings were concerned, these were often dismissed as 'having little relevance to what we do at grass roots level'... This gap in aspirations and awareness between the leaders and the led is ... much more marked in the Women's Institute, perhaps on account of its size, or because country women are inherently conservative and more concerned with the preoccupations of village and family life. This divergence of interest was documented over twenty years ago by Margaret Phillips in a study of women's institutes. (**Small Social Groups in England**, 1965, Methuen) as a 'tension between the leaders and the rank and file' with leaders realising that 'the Institutes are not things in themselves, but elements in an organisation, to which they owe both their formal structure and their policy. But the rank and file tends to see the Institute rather as a village group concerned with village affairs.' (Kent, 1988: p.31)

This divergence can also lead to a situation where local Institutes are much more willing to raise money for charity than to pay their subscriptions to headquarters, often feeling deeply resentful about the amount paid to staff 'while members work for free at local level' (Kent, p.37). This situation is endorsed by my current informants, although they point out that the WI is not actually allowed to raise money for charity. But, in spite of reserves, the WI is very dependent on subscriptions so very vulnerable to a combination of falling numbers and a reluctance to accept increased subscriptions (a recent 75p increase to £14.50 was very unpopular). They also regret the fact that so many members do not look beyond the local meetings 'and do not realise what else we do'. It is hardly surprising therefore that there is difficulty in building effective partnerships between paid staff and volunteer members with representatives from all sides admitting these relationships can be very uneasy and unhappy, with members feeling patronised by staff and staff feeling unappreciated by Board members[4]. An uneasy relationship between volunteers and paid professionals is a perennial challenge throughout the voluntary sector. Possibly it is more pronounced in the WI than in most organisations because there are still members, particularly those now in leadership positions, who have had limited or non-existent working lives and can resent professionals being paid for what they have done for years for free - and feel patronised by then. This is of course partly generational and the Treasurer,

Beryl Brown, points out that this is changing. The next generation are very unlikely to have the sort of time to devote to the running of the WI and this is going to pose strong challenges for its governance. But she also sees change as very difficult if not impossible while the 'die-hards' – those who cannot contemplate change in any form – are still around.

The WI has also had an unhappy recent history as an employer. Its last General Secretary, Heather Mayall, was greatly respected both as a manager within the organisation and outside, but was dismissed in March 1994 in circumstances which seem to indicate a traditional 'agency' model of governance where a major role of the Board is to 'control the behaviour of managers' (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998: p.12). Mayall had been brought back to lead the organisation, having worked for them from 1977-87, ending up as Head of Public Affairs and Deputy General Secretary. Returning in 1991 from a responsible post at the NSPCC, she found her post of General Secretary to be mainly administrative, closer to that of a high class PA than a Chief Executive. She understood that the fact she was young ('young enough to be their daughter'), left-wing and a lesbian (in an open relationship with another woman) now made her unacceptable[5]. Following Heather Mayall's departure there was great internal upheaval, with four posts made redundant and thus a whole tier of senior management removed and great staff unhappiness[6]. The focus of power seemed to move to Denman College, which was run by a man whose ideas were perceived to have a disproportionate influence on the Chairman and thus on WI decision making. There were also two very influential men on the Denman board. This was particularly ironic in the case of Denman College which has always been seen as an extremely important space for women. This whole upheaval was extensively reported in the press, with rather lurid headlines[7], comments from the former General Secretary Heather Mayall about how the WI is 'known as the jam factory because everyone there comes to a sticky end' and reassuring male comments from William Garnett, the federation's solicitor, about how 'there is a determination to cut their coat according to the cloth' but 'no question mark over its credibility as a very important organisation for women'.

Two years later the WI was again in the news, with a long article in the **Independent** on 'How the WI got in a jam over leadership. Battle broke out when the women's group with the tweedy image faced financial disaster'[8]. This detailed the resignation of the Chairman Elizabeth Southey 'on a point of principle', over a 'difference of opinion about the financial position of the organisation'. It seems that Mrs Southey felt the task of cost-cutting following the financial crisis two years earlier was not complete and more reductions were needed. This led to a split on the Executive Committee (what the article called 'a boardroom battle with a difference') and to Elizabeth Southey's resignation, with her place taken by Eileen Meadmore: 'The majority of the executive did not take the chairman's view. We think we're on a fairly firm financial base. We've got sound finances and can go forward.' Mrs Meadmore was keen to emphasis the priority she gave to increasing membership of the WI and to its importance as a pressure group. Certainly the WI is very financially dependent on its membership subscriptions (£945,795 in 1997 against £101,475 from investments) although in the same year it also earned £167,099 from its magazine **Home & Country** and £202,000 in profits from

trading activities.[9]

Three years on these problems seem to have largely resolved themselves. Some committees are still run from Denman College (now run by a woman) but the WI is resisting the temptation to do what many members (who resent the cost of a London headquarters) would like and move entirely to Denman. A new General Secretary is firmly in place but it is interesting that whereas the Guide Association has responded to somewhat similar circumstances with concerted efforts to improve the relationship between the Chief Guide and the Chief Executive and between staff and volunteers, the WI seems to see no necessity to do this, dismissing these events as unfortunate incidents of little importance. Although the WI is a highly complex organisation to run, with 33 staff in London, 11 at their unit in Denman College, three in Wales and six in regional centres, the present post holder, Jana Osborne, still thinks that 'General Secretary', rather than Director or Chief Executive is the appropriate title for the senior staff member: 'The title Chief Executive would be inappropriate because the WI is run by members, who make policy and decisions, including most staffing decisions.'[10]. Both General Secretary and Treasurer feel this works very well as long as it is clearly understood, so that staff are recruited on the clear understanding that they are there in a supportive role, to serve members and to give them the information that they need to make their policy decisions. In any public situation the 'limelight is on the member' and when Government asks for the WI's views it is emphatically that of the members in which it is interested. This allows little agency for staff and although Jana Osborne speaks of building 'good dynamic teams', between committee Chairmen and staff it is hard to see how true partnerships can develop between staff and Board, Chairman and General Secretary, when there is such an imbalance in the relationship. Jana Osborne speaks of how each new Chairman is accommodated within the 'basic structure', with every effort made to accommodate her special interests.

In many ways the WI is becoming an impressively modern organisation. It is embracing a cascading method to disseminate information on science funded by COPUS with great enthusiasm. It is making every effort to harness the potential of IT, including building up a national database which for the first time would allow it to track its members at national level. It has become a company limited by guarantee which has led to changes in its constitution and ways of working. It is far more aware of the need to outreach to its members and is trying to make itself attractive both to its older members and its new members who, while they still join mainly 'for friendship', need to be made aware of all the other opportunities – educational, policy making, craft etc - which the WI can offer. (As its current leaflet puts it 'new friends, good times, fresh start, new horizons' or, as its **WI –the Facts** sheet puts it more formally: 'The WI offers opportunities for all women, to enjoy friendship, to learn to widen their horizons and together to influence local, national and international affairs.') It has an impressive 'Vision' document. It is at first odd, then, that when it comes to matters of governance and management the WI appears so complacent and conservative, so little concerned with the sort of questions with which other comparable organisations are grappling with courage and imagination, so little inclined to learn from the problems in this area which it has already confronted – to have not even considered, for instance, the possibilities

of 'fast-tracking' or any sort of amalgamation with other organisations.

However, as still the largest women's organisation in Britain and one with very few competitors in rural areas, the WI occupies a unique position which means that perhaps it can afford to take this attitude in a way other women's organisations certainly could not. And certainly in its activities the WI does seem to be going through a considerable period of renewal. Recent reports in the press have been persistently upbeat. An article by Bea Campbell in the **Guardian** on December 3 1998 'pays tribute to that hotbed of radicalism, the Women's Institute'. It describes how the members of the North Yorkshire WI are vigorously supporting a campaign of direct action against the constructions of 229 pylons along the Vale of York and how (in an endorsement of all the evidence that very focussed campaigning groups attract members much more easily than the 'general interest' groups) it has 'acquired new members through its stand against the pylons'. As Sybil Kent argued , a campaign can be a palliative 'to unite the troops and provide a focus for group effort' (Kent, p.31). The production of the Alternative Calendar of near naked local WI members from Rylstone and District WI (also in North Yorkshire) in aid of Leukaemia research was reported as brave and feisty[11] and they have had a constant, positive press ever since and are following-up their success with a Christmas card and even a film; the vote at its 1999 AGM by 7,055 to 368 to call for a freeze on growing genetically modified crops was glowingly reported[12] and in 'Mothers ditch jam to tackle stickier issues' in the *Observer* of 13 June 1999 Richard Reeves discusses how the WI and Mothers' Union have become 'respectable radicals', lobbying the Government not just on GM crops but to take account of 'the special needs of women, particularly those who have been raped' in the Asylum Bill:

> Enter the gutsier, more outspoken WI and Mothers' Union – both of whom are losing members and are often seen by young women as irrelevant or even eccentric.

The WI certainly proved itself gutsiest of all in summer 2000 when its members gave the keynote speaker at their Annual Conference, Prime Minister Tony Blair, a very hard time - thus proving they are still a force to be reckoned with.

It will be extremely interesting to see whether a gutsier WI does actually attract younger women. Certainly an even more recent report on the WI's survey on rural deprivation (**The Changing Village**) showed that where 'Village life grinds to a halt as banks, shops and buses vanish'[13] (with schools and playgroups following fast behind) the WI can be almost the only example of civil society that remains. This makes it very powerful and puts it into a category all of its own.

To sum up: *The WI was founded in 1915 to voice the concerns of rural women. It is still the largest women's organisation in the country providing a unique space for rural women, although its membership is halved from its peak of 462,000 in 1956. Its governance is very hierarchical, with elected members working their up from local institute level (8000 local institutes) to federation level (70 county federations) to the National Executive Committee and various committees at national level. It has a central London headquarters with a General Secretary heading a staff of*

around 40, and another office at Denman College, the WI's adult education college founded in 1948, but is largely run by volunteers at all other levels. The WI has been a strong campaigner on behalf of rural women since it began, with rural housing a particular concern. Following some quite public organisational problems, it has recently had a much more positive press for brave campaigning against genetically modified crops and other issues. But, possibly because of its unique position, it has not felt the need to adapt its governance in the same way that other traditional women's organisations have done.

This case study thus seems to be an example where strong external contingency factors - concern about the countryside in the face of the collapse of many other aspects of civil life there - override, at least for the moment, the pressing need most comparable traditional organisations face to update their structure and governance.

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[1] Andrews M. (1997) *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: Women's Institutes as a Social Movement*, London, Lawrence & Wishart. This is an interesting book because it is almost the only one of the books written about the WI which is not written from inside, with no attempt at a critique.

[2] I am indebted to telephone interviews with Jana Osborne, General Secretary, and Beryl Brown, Treasurer, 12.3.99 and to contemporary literature produced by the WI for this and subsequent information about the situation in 1999.

[3] See Cornforth and Edwards, 1998, p,12-13 and Chapter 2, p.27-8 above

[4] Interviews with Suzanne May 10.4.95 and Heather Mayall 5.2.95.

[5] Interview with Heather Mayall 13.7.96 and telephone interview 20.11.98   We noted in Chapter 2 p.12 above Oerton's view that 'women's flatter organizations are marginalized by being positioned in complex relations to discourses of ... lesbianism'. Traditional organisations would seem to have a even more complex and problematic relationship to such a discourse.

[6] Interview with Emily Holzhausen 24.8.98

[7] 'WI in turmoil as four senior jobs are axed' *Daily Telegraph* 24.9.94; 'A man at the top shakes up the WI' *Sunday Express* 25.9.94 and 'WIs shed jobs as times get harder' in the *Guardian* 24.9.94

[8] Article by Louise Jury in Living section of the *Independent* 15 April 1996.

[9] From accounts in *Annual Report and Accounts* 1997.

[10] Telephone interview with Jana Osborne, General Secretary, 12.3.99

[11] Lesley Gillilan, From Pinnies to Pin-ups, *Guardian* 12.4.99

[12] For instance John Vidal, Power to the People, *Guardian* 7.6.99.

[13] Title of article in the *Guardian* 6.7.99. The report was also widely reported on radio and television.

The Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland

The Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland (henceforth to be known as SIGBI) was founded as a federation of clubs in 1934 as part of a worldwide movement (called Soroptimist International or SI) 'to maintain high ethical standards; to strive for human rights, in particular to advance the status of women; to develop a spirit of friendship and unity amongst Soroptimists of all countries; to promote a spirit of service to the community; to contribute to international understanding and universal friendship.'

SIGBI thus stands out from the other organisations by being international through and through (sharing the SI slogan of 'A Global Voice for Women'), and in fact it is even more international than its name implies. Given the need to distribute the 116 countries in which there are Soroptimist International Clubs between four federations (Americas, Europe, Great Britain and Ireland and South West Pacific) SIGBI (which broke away from the European Federation in 1934) encompasses a grand total of 29 countries including Anglophone countries from Africa and the Caribbean, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka as well the UK, Ireland, Jersey and the Isle of Man. All these are administered from its offices in Stockport, while Soroptimist International (SI) is administered from its offices in Cambridge. The actual number of members in the UK and Ireland is 13,825 in 336 clubs[1]. This is down from 14,500 in 1997.

Soroptimism had grown so quickly that in a sense the structure has had to run to keep up with it. The first Soroptimist Club (the name comes from the Latin words for 'sister/woman' and 'best') was formed in Oakland, California, in 1921; the first in London and in Paris in 1923. An international conference in Washington DC in 1928 decided to group clubs in North America and Europe into federations of the Americas and Europe:

> In 1934 the clubs in Great Britain and Ireland decided to form their own federation and withdrew from the federation of Europe. These three federations continued in existence up to 1977, gradually expanding into the continents of Africa, Asia, Australia and South America. In 1977, the International Board decided to create a fourth federation thereby fulfilling the wish of Soroptimists in Australia, Fiji and New Zealand for a separate voice at the International Board. The new federation – South West Pacific – was previously part of SIGBI and was inaugurated by the International President in March 1978. [2]

There is currently a strong feeling that there should be a similar federation for Africa, and this again would obviously affect the composition of SIGBI.

Meanwhile in 1952 a formal structure for the whole of SI, with a parallel officer group of President, Treasurer, Immediate past-President and President-elect (these officers do not have a vote – voting rights lie in a Board made up from three representatives from each federation) was established when the need for co-ordination between the federations and for official contacts with other similar organisations and with the United Nations and its various bodies became pressing. SI was granted Category I Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1984. It is extremely active and its work is much respected

at UN level. SIGBI also stands out from the other organisations as the only one to emphasise the concept of 'service.' Although its members do undoubtedly gain much from membership and speak with enthusiasm of the friendship, the contacts, the breadth of experience amongst other members,[3] all the literature emphasises what the members can do for others through the organisation, rather than what the organisation can do for them.

At the heart of this service are the six areas of the Programme which implements the objects of Soroptimism in six areas:

- Economic and Social Development
- Education
- Environment
- Health
- Human Rights/ Status of Women
- International Goodwill and Understanding

Broad areas to be worked on are decided each four years at the International Convention held in Helsinki in July 1999 (attended by 1800 participants from nearly 80 countries). These broad areas are then interpreted and implemented at federation, regional and club level (with Human Rights and the Status of Women a strong favourite and with human genetics and trafficking in women and girls key areas at this year's conference). Implementation takes place with the help of an elected Programme Action Committee (PAC) and with a co-ordinator on each programme area: with six areas and four federations this means that in some years a federation will elect two co-ordinators and sometimes one. There are also six programme advisers for each programme area, one for each federation, elected for their expertise in that area. The 'Programme-related statements', (in effect the Soroptimist 'policy bank') are also collected into a 'Where we stand: the Soroptimist position'. As a guide to 'Awareness, Advocacy and Action', it is intended to promote Soroptimist objectives at all levels of decision making.

In celebration of the December 10 anniversary of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, each International President also has the opportunity to nominate a project of her own choosing and invite Soroptimists to contribute towards it[4]. There are also quadrennial projects including the Senegal Project, mainly to provide clean water in six areas; an integrated development project in Peru; Working for Children in Bangladesh (in co-operation with Sightsavers); the SIAM Project (Aids mediation in Thailand) an anti-landmine appeal for Angola, an imaginative education project in India and the current project 'Women helping women' to build and develop an inclusive women's centre in the Solomon Islands. Soroptimists are extremely generous in their response to these appeals, some of which raise nearly half a million pounds, but they are just as mean as other women's organisations when it comes to increasing membership dues or raising a small levy to support the Soroptimist Club in Bayswater Road[5].

SIGBI is an association of **working** women – 'A world wide organisation for women in management and professions to strive for human rights and the

advancement of women through service projects at local, national and international level.' In some ways it is more elitist than most other women's organisations since it does not have an 'open' membership but rather tries to ensure by invitation that at club level (its grassroots) there is one representative from each profession. This used to be women at the top of their profession, which effectively excluded younger women, but recently the rules on this have eased up, and there is also more scope for diversity by allowing different women from different parts of the same profession. Things are also much more open since recruitment and retention of members, have, along with every other women's organisation, become more difficult. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the Soroptimists' similarity to Rotary means that it has been adversely affected by the fact that Rotary now admits women. Soroptimists have also made the membership question difficult for themselves by restricting full membership to women 'actively engaged in a management or professional capacity' – and they require their members to be **active** members, attending at least 50% of meetings. Given that so many organisations are looking to the 'young retiree' to replenish their numbers, they are obviously restricting themselves, but they have recently adopted the category of 'continuing member' for those who have previously been active members for more than three years, and are inclined to interpret 'actively engaged' more imaginatively, to include, for instance, volunteer work in a voluntary body.

The Soroptimist movement has a necessarily very complex, hierarchical structure – moving from club, to region, to federation, to Soroptimist International with a different layer of elected officers at each stage. This is, in effect, the 'administrative structure', with the programme supported by a parallel structure of co-ordinators and advisers (see above). While these structures may be difficult to operate at regional and federation level, particularly because of the incoherent and seemingly haphazard composition of countries in each federation, at international level, the fact that the four federations have equal status, whatever their size (and they vary from about three and a half thousand in the South-West Pacific Federation to nearer fifty thousand in the Americas) makes them administratively fairly straightforward. It means that this complex organisation with around 97,000 individual members, in 3,124 clubs, in 112 countries and four federations can be run from an office in Cambridge with only three staff, although the International President and others on the Board are necessarily quite 'hands-on' in the office, as well as doing all their representational work. This is an office which seems to work very well. **A History of Soroptimist International** talks of how 'the Executive Officer and her staff strengthen the programme and its relationship with the United Nations, non-Governmental organisations and other international bodies' (Haywood, 1995: p.103).

Janet Bilton has worked for SI for twenty years, working her way from executive assistant, to executive officer. She is very clear that the organisation (for which she has great admiration) belongs to the members and that hers is a support role. The success of her role is 100% dependent on the personality of the International President. She has an excellent relationship with the current President. SIGBI has a similar pattern of an Executive Officer and three administrative staff. The Americas, on the other hand, have gone for an Executive Director (housed, with

twenty staff, in an executive suite). Many members remain rather uneasy about such a 'corporate approach' in such a strongly volunteer organisation, and do not feel it has necessarily led to an enhanced level of service. When members were asked in a recent questionnaire distributed direct by SI (the Harris Report) whether they would pay increased dues in order to have a Chief Executive, there was a resounding 'no' (although given almost all women's organisations' feelings about increased subscriptions that is rather a loaded question!). As we saw above, Soroptimists are just as reluctant as any other women's organisations to increase membership dues, although extraordinarily generous in responding to their appeals[6]). There are others, however, who feel that Soroptimists will not really be able to respond adequately to current challenges without a chief executive who is paid to provide excellent leadership and management skills. When, or whether, this shift to a more managerial or partnership model of governance will actually happen is as yet uncertain.

Nonetheless, the Soroptimist movement today strikes one as strong, outward looking and very generous. Where there are specific problems, such as the difficulties in getting proper representation of clubs from Africa and the Caribbean in SIGBI (which has tended, as you would expect from its title, to be dominated by women from Great Britain and Ireland) there have been strong attempts to address them through constitutional changes (in spite of the financial implications of needing to subsidise the travel of representatives from these areas) although it seems unlikely (mainly on costs grounds) that the ideal of a new federation for Africa will be realised in the near future. But of course it also faces all the 'generic' problems faced by the organised women's movement as a whole, foremost being problems of recruitment and retention (for Soroptimists. retention is more of an issue, with a worrying number of members leaving after about five years) and the problem that 'young women of today want something a great deal more progressive than we can offer them at the present time' (Haywood, 1995: p.7). And however committed an organisation may be to change, it can be quite hard for a democratic, mass membership organisation to actually **achieve** it. At club level there can be a big divide between the conservative elements who are quite happy with things as they are and those who see the need for change, for succession planning, for ensuring the retention of members. An interesting example of the challenges of change came recently with a discussion over the famous Soroptimist emblem, adopted in 1928 (after a competition) which 'represents womanhood with her arms uplifted in a gesture of freedom and acceptance of the best and highest good. The oak leaves and the acorns represent the strength of our organisation and the leaves of the laurel typify victory and achievement'[7]. But it is a decidedly white woman and by the 1990s this began to seem inappropriate for a world wide movement. However, discussion revealed great devotion for the emblem (and the name), including from women from Africa, and India, as well as Europe, so for the moment she remains.

The immediate Past International President, Hilary Page, was very committed to change. Following the report of the Harris membership survey (which itself showed a desire for change) she set up a Moving Forward Together (MFT) team comprising representatives from all four federations and SI and asks for the input of

all: 'Soroptimist International belongs to us all and we must shape its future through international goodwill and understanding and friendship.'[8]. But although the work of the Soroptimists is undoubtedly extremely valuable and much needed, its strength in the future will depend as much on external contingency factors such as the climate in which it has to operate, and the value that is given to volunteering, as to the governance of its different constituent parts – and it is much more difficult to influence the first than the second. In the meantime it continues to be transformational to its members. Kate Fussell is a retired surgeon with strong involvement in numerous medical and women's organisations. She joined the Soroptimists to meet people when she moved to a new town. It was to become, with her work, one of the two most important influences in her life and her year as Federation President was 'the best year of my life'.

To sum up: *SIGBI, founded in 1934, is one of the four federations in Soroptimist International, a world wide organisation of classified service clubs for women, founded in 1921 with a strong emphasis on service, human rights, the status of women, international understanding and universal friendship. It has a complex administration structure - with local clubs, regional, federal and international structures, all with different layers of officers and committees. Parallel with this is its programme structure with six programme areas – economic and social development, education, environment and health, human rights and the status of women, international goodwill and understanding - administered by a programme action committee and programme co-ordinators and advisers. SIGBI has a strong international dimension, contributing generously to quadrennial projects and appeals and to SI's work at UN level. It is much less generous in contributing to the cost of its own club or development and is still run from a small office with only administrative staff with much of the 'hands on' work done by elected officers. The fact that it is suffering a significant drop in membership (down to 13,825 in the UK) has not yet precipitated significant changes in governance or management but it could well do so.*

This case study seems to demonstrate an organisation which needs to adapt its rather ponderous, outdated, bureaucratic structure and to encourage stronger leadership in its paid staff.

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[1] Information given by SIGBI office, 8.7.99.

[2] Soroptimist International leaflet *Your Questions Answered: A brief guide to International Soroptimism.* I am indebted to literature provided by both the SI and the SIGBI office for the information on the history and structure of the Soroptimist movement.

[3] Interview with Ann Walton, member of Ipswich Club 14.12.98 and with Gillian Matthews from Croydon and District Club on, 7.11.98.

[4] I am extremely grateful for the detailed information in this and subsequent paragraphs to long telephone interviews on 21.3.99 and 22.3.99 with three women who have between them held almost every position in Soroptimism. **Eve Craske** has been a member since 1974, she has been her club's

(London Mayfair) secretary and then its President (twice); she's been a regional President, a programme co-ordinator and a representative for Human Rights and the Status of Women. **Hilary Page** has been a member of her local club in Lewisham since 1972, becoming Club President, Regional President of London Chilterns, Federation President of SIGBI 1989-90, member of International Board1991-1995, Extension Co-ordinator internationally, and finally International World President 1997-99. **Kate Fussell** has been a member of her club in Wigan since 1971. Once she discovered she could attend any conference she has hardly missed one at regional, federation or international level. She was club President in 1976, Regional President (South Lancashine) in 1980, Programme Adviser on Health in 1979-83, President of SIGBI in 1986 (preceded by Vice- and President Elect and followed by Past President). I have also talked to Kate Fussell in depth about Soroptimism over a number of years and she was kind enough to read and comment on a draft of this section.

[5] Interview with Kate Fussell, 25.3.99.

[6] Telephone interview with Janet Bilton, Executive Officer of SI, 22.3.99.

[7] *The History of the Soroptimist International* p.7.

[8] *The International Soroptimist* March 1999, Volume 27, No 1: p.1.

Townswomen's Guilds

The Townswomen's Guilds (henceforth to be known as TG) is often seen as the sister organisation to the WI for women in urban areas. But its roots lie, like the Fawcett Society, in the suffragist movement and it was set up in 1928 by Margery Corbett Ashby, Eva Hubback and others to help women in the cities manage their new-found freedom. Two seminal books about the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds (Stott, 1978 and Merz, 1988) trace its origins from its close connections with the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), its struggles to form a new organisation, in the face of considerable hostility, under the feminist slogan 'After the Vote, the Education of Women' and its commitment from the start to the principle of 'a common meeting ground for women irrespective of creed and party, for their wider education, including social activities'. There were high hopes for this new organisation which it was anticipated 'would recruit women beyond the range of the older feminist societies, thereby capitalising on the obvious success of the WIs for the ultimate advantage of feminism' (Pugh, 1992: p.241) although 'it cannot be said that the townswomen's guilds achieved the objectives of their founders in the 1930s' (Smith, 1990: p.147).

This combination of high-mindedness and fun, however, proved extremely successful, with Guilds spreading rapidly, particularly after the war when there was a 'positive hunger for Guilds' (Stott, 1978: p.118) for women coming out of the Forces and the munitions factories. By its peak in the late '60s the total number of Guilds had risen to 2,700, with a total membership of around a quarter of a million women all over the UK. Indeed the TG is constantly quoted as luring members away from the Co-operative Women's Guild in the 40s and 50s (Gaffin and Thoms, 1983: p.155 and 188), and both TG's and the WI's rising membership were held up by Groombridge in the early '60s as an example to the declining Co-operative Women's Guild: 'These figures are not quoted for the sake of provocation but because they show that the social climate is not necessarily hostile to women's organisations with educational programmes and an interest in larger social questions' (Quoted in Gaffin & Thoms, 1983: p.195). The accounts of TG's history list considerable service to the nation through the 'devil's decade' of the 30s, through the war years and beyond. Although never lobbyists, TG resolutions have covered most of the issues of the day (including, in 1997 taking up the issue of full labelling of genetically modified food before it became an area of such urgent public concern) and they have played a crucial part in giving women the confidence and skills to take part in public life. Although not formally linked to an international body, they have a strong international interest, with at least two meetings a year on an international theme, one to celebrate International Women's Day (IWD). I spoke at the extremely well-attended IWD Luncheon and Seminar on 'International Links' in March 1999. This was marked by keen and enthusiastic interest although it was also obvious that in a room full of several hundred women the only women who were visibly of an ethnic minority were my co-speakers. Organisations like TG may be losing the fight for diversity across age groups but they have never really engaged in the challenge of ethnic diversity. In 1988 Merz recognised this:

There are still bridges to be built between the grassroots and those who participate at national level. And there are still issues to be tackled before the movement can genuinely say it fulfils its stated objective 'to advance the education of women, irrespective of race, creed or party' for the vast majority of Townswomen belong to a single culture and a single race. (Merz, 1988: p.68)

At the same time the standard of the crafts, music and drama TG encourages and its commitment to sports and creative leisure (with new pursuits like line dancing, tai chi and ceramic painting being added recently to old favourites like bowls and bridge and golf) is renowned. The problem is that as social conditions have changed and opportunities for women particularly in towns has expanded hugely (with not just a potential job but a leisure or adult education centre round almost every corner) this sort of 'way of life' organisation which combines good citizenship with friendship and fun no longer has the same appeal. Numbers have fallen dramatically to 80,000 in approximately 1,600 Guilds and 104 Federations today[1]. A 'recruitment campaign called Target 2000 was vigorously embarked upon in 1993, including 'outreach' with line dancing in shopping centres, to increase membership and form new Guilds, with a target of 2000 new members per year'[2]. This has certainly led to the starting up of some new guilds and to a slowing down in the overall decline in numbers but nevertheless, as with all comparable organisations, the trend is downwards and has fallen from around 90,000 to 80,000 since 1995 (and down from 120,000 when Merz wrote in 1988).

The TG has also, like virtually all its sister organisations, grown older. When one of its current Vice Chairmen, Shirley Toogood, joined as a young women nineteen years ago there were enough mothers with pre-school children for her local Guild in Bath to run a creche[3]. This would be very unusual today. My research in 1995 revealed that only about 5% of TG's members were under the age of 35 and that the difficulties in recruiting from this age group were almost insurmountable for all the external contingency reasons shared by other organisations – the multiple pressures young women face, great difficulties in combining motherhood with professional careers, motherhood itself becoming more demanding as mothers have to escort their children everywhere, numerous alternative opportunities available, a fear of going out at night. Approaches I made to the TG group in Blackheath, south-east London, revealed not just no woman under 35 to interview, but not even one under 50. (Grant, 1995: p.3-4). But the decision to target women in late middle-age, the 'young retirees', who can have a tremendous amount to contribute to an organisation, is not entirely unproblematic either. As men live longer, their wives are more inclined to do things with them as a couple rather than join a 'women only' organisation which offers space for single women and widows[4]. The current Chairman, Marjory Hall, who has been a member for 39 years, spoke passionately about how TG had 'been my university' but even for older women in particular there is now the strong competitor in the University of the Third Age which attracts retired couples[5], on top of the burgeoning opportunities for women in further and higher education, including the Open University.

Stott's book about TG, **Organization Woman,** is, as we have seen, very relevant to the traditional organised women's sector as a whole as well as being specific to TG. It is interesting about TG because although it is still considered the 'definitive

history' and is very much written from the inside, with great affection, it is by no means an uncritical or sycophantic account. For instance it analyses the tension between the need for rules and regulations and the way in which these can become almost an end in themselves and very off-putting for potential new and younger members; it examines the uneasy relationship between paid and unpaid officials and the phenomenon of 'organisation woman', the formidable full-time volunteer.

TG is a complex, many tiered, hierarchical, classically bureaucratic organisation from the individual Guilds and their members at the grassroots, with their own Executive Committee, who appoint a delegate to the regional Federation Council, who elect a Federation Executive Committee, who appoint a delegate to Central Council, who in turn elect the National Executive Committee (NEC). Within the NEC there is a division, headed by each of the two Vice-Chairmen, between Sports and Creative Leisure and Public Affairs. This division reflects the way many of its members experience TG. It is different things to different women. To some it is like a companionable local club offering a range of craft, sport and leisure activities, to others an opportunity to get involved in debate of public importance and to climb up the hierarchy to eventual positions of responsibility and power. Ideally TG would like all its members to be involved on both sides but it acknowledges great problems of communication, with many, many members having little idea of the breadth of the organisation they have joined (see remark by Merz above). It is a challenge both to 'cascade' information **down** to individual Guilds (with information often getting 'stuck' on different desks[6]). Conversely it can be very difficult to persuade local Guilds to hand on information **up** to HQ about membership numbers, since women join TG locally, and therefore all membership figures have to be somewhat provisional[7].

Organization Woman identifies how problematic the relationship between paid staff – particular the senior staff person – and the 'volunteer' members can be. The book is peppered with 'fallings out' between strong-minded Organising Secretaries and National Chairmen, part of Stott's 'old story, which seems to run right through big organisations, that voluntary workers are apt to be suspicious of those who get a salary for doing very similar work'(p.127). TG's current situation is interesting in that they have a strong staff team led by a woman, Pauline Wilkes, whose title, (as the **Annual Review 1997** revealed) changed during 1997 from National Secretary to Chief Executive/National Secretary (the CEO title to be used externally and the National Secretary internally, at least for the moment, 'as calling her CEO, would be more than members could cope with'[8]). Pauline Wilkes seems much respected and leads a very strong staff team of nine which, compared with the WI, is very small for the amount of work involved. Staff are very clear that their role is to support and promote the members – comparing their role to the civil service versus. the Government[9]

TG is an organisation with a strong awareness of the need for change. In her role as National Chairman Iris Shanahan at the National Council Meeting in 1997:

> reminded members of the need for progress in order to safeguard the movement for
> future generations. She stressed the importance of keeping open minds to new
> ideas while at the same time holding on to the tradition of the past, remembering

our roots in the Suffragist movement. These women were not afraid to speak out
for what they believed. They sought change and achieved it. Above all, she said,
flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing times were of great importance to the
future of the movement.[10]

In reality change is very hard to effect. TG, like most other mass membership
women's organisations, sees its governance substantially in 'political' terms - the
need to represent its members' interests. But even getting the membership to
approve the new purple and green logo, with its forward looking flags, was a major
achievement, Agreement for an increase in subscriptions (which have just gone up
from £10 to £11 annually) is always a struggle, although members will be
incredibly generous in giving to the causes their Guilds supports (as we have seen,
this is a familiar pattern). This is a cause for anxiety as TG is almost entirely
dependent on its affiliation fees for income, anticipating a deficit of £105.440 in the
year 2000[11]. Iris Shanahan did not even seriously contemplate a major change to
the constitution, having been advised by TG's solicitor that it would be extremely
expensive to attempt this, although twenty years[12] earlier Mary Stott was
commenting:

> Thinking about the future of the large-scale organizations ...one is bound to wonder
> whether the sort of hierarchical structure which the founders devised in the thirties
> is essential today. (p.219)

But Iris Shanahan was keen to develop guidelines to make the constitution work
better and Shirley Toogood in our conversation was very interested in the concept
of 'fast-tracking' adopted by other organisations as a way of encouraging both
younger women and those who join in retirement to take an active part in TG's
governance without having to spend about fifteen years working their way up the
hierarchy. At the same time TG 'beat the opposition' by going on the internet in
1997 and provides training for its members in information technology and a guide
to the internet.

But it seems the National Conference, at least, fulfils a very vital function. Mary
Stott in **Organization Woman** describes a TG member called Mrs Hall who,
unusually went on to become an employee and her delight at attending her first
National Conference:

> Her experience of being filled with enthusiasm by the first national conference she attended
> is ... remarkably like that of many young women who are astonished and delighted to find
> at their first conference of the Women's Liberation movement that they are among sisters.
> (p.146)

It is not hard to see why. The combination of an Albert Hall filled with enthusiastic
women, the display of the beautifully embroidered federation banners from all over
the country, the debate of urgent issues (in 1999 Genetic Reproductive
Technologies, BST and Organ Donation) engenders a strong sense of sisterhood. It
may be middle-aged or elderly sisterhood but it is none the less for that.

Twenty-one years after Mrs Hall, the Vice-Chairman Shirley Toogood describes her
experience in TG in equally transformational terms: 'tremendous opportunities, the

most exciting thing that ever happened to me.' But she equally saw the need for possibly really drastic change in the next ten years. In 1988 Sybil Kent had reported how the TG would not even consider a merger (Kent, 1988: p. 49); in 1999 Shirley Toogood spoke about amalgamation or other drastic remedies, like a large reduction in services, as a distinct possibility to safeguard TG's future. TG faces many challenges as it faces the new millennium.

To sum up: *TG was established in 1928 to help women in towns take advantage of women's suffrage. It has retained a strong educational role (led by its Public Affairs Department) but this is balanced by a strong emphasis on sports and creative leisure. TG is led by a Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen and an Executive Committee of twelve, supported in Birmingham by a team of nine staff led by a Chief Executive/National Secretary. At its peak in the late 1960s it had a membership of around 250,000 women in 2,700 local Guilds. However there are now too many alternative opportunities in the community for members and, in spite of concerted efforts to boost recruitment, this has now fallen to around 80,000 in 104 Federations and 1,600 Guilds, with most of these middle-aged or older. TG is almost entirely dependent on membership subscriptions and, recognising the necessity for change, is contemplating drastic measures for survival.*

This case study thus demonstrates an organisation which needs to update its structure and governance. But, perhaps even more urgently, as a generalist, life-style organisation, it faces serious contingency challenges to its purpose in the face of the changing role of women.

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[1] This has, however, to be an estimate since all members of TG join locally and not all Guilds co-operate very effectively in making sure headquarters has the details.(Interview with Shirley Toogood, Vice Chairman, 16.3.99)

[2] From *Townswomen: Leading Women Forward: Background Notes,* September 1998

[3] Interview with Shirley Toogood, Vice Chairman, 16.3.99

[4] Ibid

[5] Conversation with Shirley Toogood and Marjory Hall, National Chairman, 1.3.99

[6] Interview with Iris Shanahan, past National Chairman 1997-8, 19.1.99

[7] Interview with Shirley Toogood, 16.3.99

[8] Interview with Iris Shanahan, 19.1.99

[9] Telephone interview with Luke Bull, Head of PR, 25.11.98

[10] *Annual Report 1997:* p.5

[11] See booklet produced for the National Council Meeting, 9.6.99.

[12] Interview with Iris Shanahan.

Standing Conference of Women's Organisations

The Standing Conference of Women's Organisations (henceforth known as SCWO),
has its origins in a conference called in 1939 by the National Council of Social Services
to discuss the problems associated with evacuation. As it became clear that evacuation
was not the only problem for women and children generated by the war, the Women's
Group on Public Welfare (representing 46 national women's organisations and several
more with a large women's membership) was formed in 1940 as a means of mobilising
women nation-wide to deal with these problems. With this Group at the Centre, a
network of Standing Conference of Women's Organisations was set up all over the
country in 1942 to be the grassroots means for this to happen. This has been operating
ever since as a non-political, non-sectarian umbrella organisation for women's groups,
describing itself in a recent newsletter (Spring 1998) as a 'grassroots organisation made
up of conferences spread around the country. Members of local conferences are from
the branches of national women's organisations and family groups'.

For the first forty years of its existence SCWO, and its central body the Women's
Forum (the successor body to the Women's Group on Public Welfare), were operated
from the offices of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (the renamed
National Council for Social Service) who provided its office and secretariat. In 1981
they were told there were no more funds to run either body and they had to make
separate arrangements. The Women's Forum was closed down, but SCWO 'resolved
to continue'[1] and, cushioned by a small, non-recurring grant from the Home Office,
worked out a complex structure of governance at local, regional and national level
which would allow it to do so and which remains essentially in existence until today.
Local conferences elect seven regional committees who in turn elect regional
representatives to the National Council. SCWO sought and obtained charitable status
and, as an umbrella organisation, adopted the umbrella motif which features
prominently in its literature, letter-heads etc. Since then SCWO has existed on the
proverbial shoestring with practically no funding except for specific, usually local,
projects. It has been run almost entirely by volunteers, with its national office run by a
national secretary who is either paid a small honorarium or for a few hours' work each
week. Its current national secretary is supposedly paid 'for four hours on a Monday
afternoon, but actually works nearer 63 hours'[2].

Over the years SCWO has, given its resources, undertaken some amazing work. In
towns up and down the country (but not in London) it has been the only mechanism to
bring together all the local branches of national organisations and the local voluntary,
women's and family groups around the broad issue of the advancement of women. As
an early article describes SCWO's co-ordinating function:

> The object of Standing Conferences is to canalise effort, to avoid overlapping,
> to pool resources and to bridge gaps, to permit a bird's eye view of the whole field of voluntary
> service available in any particular locality, to combine where possible with the local authority

and the government departments for social service and community welfare; they permit of
concentration and intensification of effort in local emergencies, and give training in leadership
and civic responsibility[3].

The number of groups it has brought together in this way is impressive. In 1997-8 the
national list of its member organisations comes to 95. It has conducted surveys and
produced reports on violence against women, Caring, Sharing and Helping;
unemployment; homelessness and care of the elderly; stress in the eighties; a transport
survey and, most recently, a booklet of **Step Family Stories**. But the reports they
produced in 1995 and 1996 were particularly interesting because they were about
women's involvement in the women's voluntary sector - and about the progress and
future of SCWO itself.

In 1993 the then national chairman Joan Martin initiated what she called an
Assessment of the Association - both 'Looking at Ourselves' and 'As others See us'.
She and other Council members prepared and circulated three different questionnaires,
one to individual members (representing a local organisation), one to representatives of
existing SCWOs, one to associate members (whose local SCWO had disbanded). The
response to this was very encouraging and the analysis of the results produced very
interesting information about the women's voluntary sector in general and SCWO and
its members in particular.

For a start SCWO's members seem to be extremely loyal, with some going back to the
'40s and '50s, and many from the '60s, '70s and '80s. Of the 25 local conferences who
completed the questionnaire, twenty had started in the 1940s. From one perspective,
this gives the organisation great continuity but, from another, the report reveals great
difficulty in replacing this loyal but ageing membership. Overall there had been a loss
of fifty two member organisations against a gain of ten new members. Most local
conferences reported problems with recruitment, either having difficulty retaining their
present membership or in recruiting new members. A problem common to almost all
was finding officers.

Those who answered the questionnaire for associate members reported on three local
conferences - Plymouth, Wellingborough and Chester - which had disbanded in 1990,
1991 and 1992 respectively. The reasons for disbanding was common to all three -
lack of funds, declining membership, failure to recruit members (in spite of
considerable efforts in some cases), no one willing to take office. In each case the
closure was decided on with great regret, after all efforts had been made to prevent it.
These associate members do not see the situation improving:

> All organisations are having difficulty in maintaining members and finding officers. Generally
> there is no interest in this type of organisation. In one city the Women's Institute had been
> advertising for members on the local television channel ...One member ...commented on the
> work done in the conferences and the value of the projects undertaken. She feels sad that in
> common with other women's organisations, the lack of interest appears to be the average age of
> present members, changes in the social structure, and present day attitudes in society.[4]

In spite of this depressing account, overall this report gives a fascinating picture of the grassroots women's voluntary sector with some organisations (e.g. the Association of Wrens) of which I had not previously heard. It illustrates the range of SCWO activity, its involvement in community affairs, the number of bodies on which its members are represented, the range of its fund-raising activities. Its questionnaires invite constructive criticism and duly report the need for more democracy at regional level, for better communications at all levels, for SCWO to have more impact and not just 'muddle through' attempting too much.

In summing up the national chairman had to report that three more conferences had disbanded. Alongside the problems of lack of membership and unwillingness to take office was the associated, and perennial one of lack of money and the difficult of maintaining the national structure when local conferences are struggling to maintain their own branch and regional committee. There was 'an urgent need to find a regular source of income'. But the declining membership was common to all women's organisations (and it was decline of its member organisations which directly affected SCWO's decline) and the report on the whole had been very positive and it ended looking forward 'to meet the challenge of change in today's society'.

The Assessment of the Association gives two reasons for difficulties in increasing membership, summarised as:

- Young women today have very busy lives running the home, as well as holding a job, and they prefer to use any spare time in leisure pursuits, instead of attending meetings.

- Since women now take a more active part on equal terms with men in many situations they do not feel the need to fight for women's issues.

Interestingly, as this report was being compiled at national level, in 1995 the North East Region were concerned by the fact that 'all women's organisations are suffering from a reduced membership and in some areas ... have found it necessary to disband'. Their survey on **Leisure Time: Is your organisation meeting the needs of the Women of Today?** sought to find out some of the reasons for this. In particular they addressed their survey at women aged 25-50 - the age group they themselves found most difficult to attract. They found leisure activities affected by such considerations as employment, availability of transport, accessibility to town/city centre, marital status, number and age of children, responsibility for care of other dependants and time available in the morning, afternoon or evening. They asked what women expected to gain from their leisure time activities and in particular that they know about or would want from a women's organisation. This demonstrated that although very few of those interviewed actually belonged to a women's organisation, what such organisations had to offer **could** meet the expressed needs which women seek from their leisure activities. The report concludes:

Section 5 - General Comments and Observations

The survey indicates that:

1.0 Women's views and opinions on 'What can be gained from membership of a Women's Organisation' match and sometimes exceed what women feel is important if their leisure time needs are to be fulfilled.

2.0 Well-organised meetings with good leadership and at a venue with good facilities and a well-lit area are important factors. Ease of access to the venue is also a major consideration and this should be closely linked to the timing of the meetings to allow for travelling and family commitments to be fitted in.

3.0 Companionship is valued highly by all women. Members of organisations should avoid forming little cliques within its membership so that women coming alone feel welcome and part of the entire group. Need was expressed for involvement within the meeting, a wide range of topics and interesting issues relevant to its membership and providing opportunity for personal development.

4.0 Awareness of women's organisations is lower amongst women under 40 and it is this age range which has the greater number of evenings available and who would consider joining a women's group which meets in the evening.

5.0 This suggests that women's organisations should do more to promote themselves and provide information on their activities as the number of women who would consider joining a women's group is in excess of those who have taken up membership. Groups with a wide age range are acceptable to many women (63%) but well established groups should be prepared to adopt new and modern ideas and present themselves in a manner which appeals to younger women.
(**Leisure Time:** p.20)

This was certainly been borne out by my report on **The experience of women aged between 18-34 in women's organisations** which reaches very similar conclusions:

> The message for those women's organisations who want to involve younger women is clear. If they are to capture the imagination of the young woman of today they must meet her ideals and interests, not make unrealistic demands on her already pressured time and not make her feel guilty if she cannot attend all events. Instead they must offer her opportunities to develop her skills and expertise in ways that will be useful to her as well as to the organisation. This is a tall order which demands quite radical changes in the way things have been done.
> (Grant, 1995: p.20)

Sadly SCWO has not been as successful in implementing its findings as it was in analysing them. However, given the particular challenges it shares with all umbrella organisations and the problems, unlike so many comparatively well endowed women's organisations, of never having any investments or reserves, it is remarkable what it has achieved. In fact it has had some spectacular successes recently, particularly in its National Rolling Programme of Women's Health Days (funded by a specific Department of Health grant of £60,000), always in alliance with the local Health Authority and based on the **Health of the Nation** document. In Liverpool one of these

health days, on 'What every woman should know about cancer' in February 1999, was attended by women from all sections of the population, and was the catalyst for the re-formation of a closed conference.

SCWO was also, along with several other women's organisations, part of the Women's Health and Screening delegation which met regularly with the Minister of Health. SCWO's Health Days have been extremely well attended. However, their past Chairman, Mimi Johnson, is concerned by the gulf in attitudes that can separate established members from the differently focused (usually younger) women. She and her colleagues have had to repeatedly address this problem in order to attract the widest possible age range to the Health Days. They have done this with a degree of success, by involving non-members (usually professional younger women) along with long term SCWO members in the earliest planning stages of the Health Days - 6-9 months before the Day - and have achieved compromise between entrenched and more progressive attitudes by this approach. Attendances can be from 200-300; the age range of attendees is remarkable - but so is the camaraderie which develops between generations on the Day. It is not so much to do with age as with attitude towards the need for change in order to adjust to differing lifestyles and alternative ways of doing things[5].

Things seem to be changing in other respects also. With a dynamic, much younger and more entrepreneurial national secretary, SCWO could be poised to reach out to newer groups representing the new rather than the old women's movement - working-class women, women against domestic violence, black and ethnic minority women (as is already happening in Liverpool, with the help of some funding from the Eleanor Rathbone Trust and secretariat support from the Liverpool Voluntary Service Council). This national secretary, Jill Block, sees an opportunity for women's organisations with the Labour Government's 'third way' which did not exist under the last Government and she has already submitted a business plan and a funding application to the Women's Unit. She has already given SCWO's publicity material a considerable overhaul and, with the new Chairman, she is planning better communication and a more dynamic newsletter to the regions. At the same time they are contemplating revisiting the constitution, where at present the National Council can only be elected from Regional Councils, in order to make it more open[6]. This seems to indicate an unusual trend at least partly away from bureaucracy towards adhocracy (the move is usually in the opposite direction) although, like almost all the organisations we have examined, SCWO is a hybrid organisation.[7]

If SCWO does succeed in opening itself up in this way and in attracting a new membership, while retaining the loyalty of its existing older members (which could mean planning separate activities for the different groups) it will need to be very sensitive to both sides since feelings about change, (for instance even over such a small issue as modernised letter-heads) can run extremely high. If it can do this and at the same time manage to acquire some assured funding for its central administration to allow the employment of at least one designated member of staff (without which it will not realistically be able to effect real change), its effect on the women's voluntary

sector across the country could, given its infrastructure role, be considerable. Its latest newsletter **SCWO Active** certainly gives an air of great buoyancy announcing SCWO as a partner in BBC Webwise, giving news of active local conferences, and start-up packs for others, reporting on news from both their own National Council Meeting and the Women's National Commission. They urge the local Conferences to photocopy this two-sided A-4 sheet and distribute it to all member organisations before they meet – a simple but very effective way of snowballing information from the national level down to grassroots With such an interesting combination of bureaucracy and adhocracy, coupled with a dynamic leadership and better channels of communication, it really seems it might be possible to breathe new life into SCWO's structures and make them appropriate for the new millennium.

To sum up: *SCWO was established in 1942 as a vehicle for mobilising wartime women nation-wide. It has continued as an umbrella organisation with local conferences made up of local branches of national women's and other voluntary organisations. It has an elaborate hierarchical structure which leads from local conferences to seven regional committees with representatives from each of these serving, with Honorary officers, on the National Council. SCWO was run till 1981 from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and since then has been run on a shoestring with a very part-time National Secretary. SCWO shares all the problems of an aging membership with other organisations, including difficulty in filling officer posts at different levels. But there are recent indications that it is working, under a new leadership to streamline its governance, becoming more of an adhocracy and thus becoming more relevant to younger women by, for instance, running very successful Health Days funded by the Department of Health and introducing its members to the internet.*

This case study thus demonstrates that even the most traditional and bureaucratic of organisations can flirt effectively with adhocracy, encourage good leadership and make contingency factors work with it, rather than against it.

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1 I am indebted for information on SCWO's history to their Golden Jubilee Booklet 1942-92, and historical notes produced by Nottingham SCWO in 1995 and Cardiff SCWO in 1997, together with the constitution, briefing notes, organisational organagram etc produced by SCWO's central office.

2 Telephone interview with Jill Block, 4.1.99.

3 D. Warner The Know How: A Standing Conference and How it Works, undated paper, but thought to be 1950's.

4 Quotations from SCWO's 1994 -1995 Project Assessment of the Association (no page numbers). Other unattributed quotations are from the same document.

5 Interview with SCWO's past Chairman Mimi Johnson, 12.10.98 and several subsequent communications.with her.

6 Telephone interview with Jill Block, 4.1.99.

7 See Robbins (1990) description of 'adhocracy':
      a rapidly changing, adaptive, usually temporary system organized around problems to be solved
      excellent ... for responding to change, facilitating innovation, and co-ordinating diverse specilisms (p.354)

The Wider Picture and Summary of Chapter 4.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the organisations we have examined is their willingness and capacity to change in response to external and internal forces, with some, like the Guide Association, the Mothers' Union or the Standing Conference of Women's Organisations showing a remarkable capacity to do so. Other very long-established organisations are also showing considerable capacity to change. Arguably the oldest established women's organisation of all – the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) founded in 1855 (and part of a worldwide movement which encompasses national associations in over 90 countries) – has faced many of the problems we have examined in the case studies. Research carried out in 1995 (Grant,1995: p.11) showed that while they were major providers of social housing and youth and community services for young women, they were also finding it increasingly difficult to convert recipients of services into active members. Membership fell from 23,924 in 1977 to around 10,000 in 1995, with most of those over the age of 35, while most of their users are under the age of 25. For past President Joyce Scroxton, an exclusive emphasis on encouraging the participation of young women could make older members feel their efforts were negated. The challenge was to retain the organisation's 'institutional memory' and sense of history but not let it be constrained by them.

The YWCA was also an organisation with a complicated framework of volunteer management, via local, regional and national committees, within a complex legal structure, lacking in transparency. It has made very active efforts in the last few years to overhaul its structure, including involving young women at all levels of its governance, without losing the support of its older members. It has throughout had the strong support of its past and present Presidents, Jenny Cooper and Sheila Brain, who have both had a strong commitment to young women and a consensual way of working. Its Director Gill Tischler has placed great emphasis on staff training and development. She has a keen interest in the issue of governance in the context of strategic planning, and in making the YWCA's very complex structure more streamlined, and had in fact originally contacted me because she was interested in my research. She feels that the model of the non-working Chair/President who does the job more or less full-time is not sustainable. This position needs a woman who is confident enough in herself not to even attempt to be the Chief Executive, a classic example, as we shall see, of a managerial/ partnership approach.[1].

Some very progressive work was already taking place when the organisation was in effect overtaken by external events. An ageing housing stock which could not easily convert to offer young women the sort of accommodation which, with changing expectations, they now require, plus changes in housing finance, made it imperative for the YWCA to confront the need to move away from its primary purpose since it was set up, of being direct providers of social housing for young women. The financial imperatives were so strong that this decision, however painful, was unanimous. This means that the YWCA is now seeking to dispose of its housing stock to other appropriate landlords.

Alongside this momentous task of disengaging from its role as a social landlord, the YWCA in England and Wales has continued with a parallel and almost equally momentous revamping of its governance which has led to a completely different composition of the Board. Instead of the main criteria for being on the Board being to have worked your way up the YWCA hierarchy, it is suggested that recruitment 'should primarily be on the strength of appropriate skills ... (and)... a skills audit ... in a focused way, for example by advertisements, scanning CVs and interviewing candidates ...(and with) a standing recruitment committee.'[2]. The optimum size of the Board should be not less than 15; recruitment should be from individuals both inside and outside the YWCA, (with one third reserved for YWCA members); and, to increase understanding, suitable candidates should be encouraged to attend a number of Board meetings prior to appointment. This was approved at an Extraordinary General Meeting on April 29, 1999. By August 1999 they had been able to put together a Board 'team which balanced continuity with new blood and gave us a broad range of skills in the areas we wanted'[3] to take office at the AGM on September 8. All this is 'fast-tracking' with a vengeance, moving immeasurably further and faster than any other of the multi-layered traditional organisations in the case studies. The move away from social housing may also allow further simplification of the parallel governance structure of both an incorporated company and an unincorporated Association.[4] This is a major move towards the management/partnership approach where :

> Board members should be selected on the basis of their expertise and contacts so that they are in a position to add value to the organisation's decisions rather than just select, monitor and control management. (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998, p.12-13)

So the YWCA seems to be a very rare example of an organisation which has taken a hard look at the external environment, has listened to key informants, and taken hard and brave decisions to turn itself into a differently shaped organisation for a differently contoured world – decisions which relate to both purpose and appropriate governance and which encourage strong, but not competing, leadership, both from the Chair and the Chief Executive. The YWCA will in future focus on its range of community projects with young women. Their recent high profile 'Stop Violence Against Women' Campaign works in coalition with the more recent organisations which came out of the 1970s and later, such as the Campaign to End Rape, Justice for Women, Rights of Women, Women's Aid and Zero Tolerance (see Chapter 6), and calls very strongly for 'changes to policing and the law, more support for services for victims, and education aimed at preventing violence in the future'. In addition they have developed a powerful research project 'Promoting Equality and Social Justice for the Twenty-first Century: A Survey of the Needs and Aspirations of Girls and Young Women 13-25 in Britain.' They have also committed themselves to work on the anti-debt campaign Jubilee 2000.

In 1997 the YWCA conducted another important piece of research called 'Vital Statistics' on youth organisations and young women. This was carried out with GFS Platform for Women. This is the transformed version of another venerable organisation called the Girls Friendly Society started in 1875 by Mary Townsend 'with the encouragement of the Archbishop of Canterbury ...to rescue the most vulnerable from the social evils of the time'. This now grapples with the challenges

which young women and girls face today – broken homes, abuse from parents or partners, young single parenthood, isolation, lack of secure accommodation, limited life skills and illiteracy – with the focus of their work on protected housing and life and social skills support. Their recent relaunch with a new name and an entirely new image is another example of how women's organisations can reinvent themselves in a very dynamic way in response to changing external and internal conditions.

It is perhaps significant that both these organisations work with young women and girls and have a very focussed purpose whose need is very obvious. It seems, as we have already seen in the case studies, to be much more difficult to transform a more generalist organisation and ensure its relevance to the women of today. The Business and Professional Women (BPW) finds it difficult to attract younger women who are often overwhelmed by the twin responsibilities of running a family and a career (Grant, 1995). They are also faced with increasing competition from more specialist professional women's groups (Women in Management, City Women's Network, Women in Publishing, Women in Banking and Finance etc) which seem to be proliferating. The National Council of Women (NCW) founded in 1895 under the name the National Union of Women Workers, is another case in point. Its original aims were 'to end discrimination against women on the grounds of gender; to inform and interest women in participating in public life, in order to influence matters relating to women, and to improve conditions of life for all'. Over the years it has been involved with the recruitment of women police, with magistrates and jurors and with the fight for equal pay and equal opportunities[5]. The centenary history of the NCW (Glick, 1995) also details its work on such diverse issues as breast cancer, on pensions for war widows, equal retirement ages, discrimination against women in the tax field and family law.

The NCW's current Aims are:

- To improve the *quality of life* for all

- To secure the removal of discrimination against women and to encourage the *effective participation* of women in the life of the nation

- To act as a *co-ordinating* body to which societies with similar aims can affiliate.

- To affiliate to the International Council of Women, forming a link with the National Councils of Women throughout the world and to work for international understanding and peace.

These ambitious aims necessitate a complex bureaucratic structure which includes fourteen regional councils, with around 52 local branches. It also has 95 affiliated organisations which work with NCW at both local and national level and it in turn is affiliated to the International Council of Women (ICW), with national councils in 74 countries, and the European Council of Women. All affiliates and branches elect members to the Council and, by ballot, to the Committee of Management (COM), which forms part of that Council, and has 15-19 members, including a President,

four Vice Presidents, Treasurer members of the COM (who are elected for two years renewable) and some appointees such as the Editor of the magazine and the Chair of the ICW Committee GB who is elected without limit.

This is, however, much less complicated than pre-1988 after the then President, Eve Martin, had given an undertaking to be particularly involved with the reorganisation of NCW. 'I gave an undertaking that we should look at ourselves and so we did' (Glick, 1995: p.101). 'The structure of the organisation had become unwieldy,' with a COM of 74, four working parties, and twelve special committees. A representative working party was set up and after two years of consultation, and four draft new constitutions, the necessary resolutions passed at an EGM at Cardiff Conference in 1988 to amend the Articles of Association and resulted 'in a more compact and workable ... and streamlined Council' (Glick, 1995: p.101-2). The system of special committees and working parties was also reduced and streamlined although today they still cover committees on health/science and technology/arts/ consumerism/education/media/social and employment issues and permanent working parties on housing, environment, foreign affairs and transport. With this expertise they were able to respond to 15 consultative papers from October – December 1998, with another 13 awaiting a reply in January 1999[6].

The National Council of Women is in many ways an extremely impressive organisation, with a strong international dimension, which has tackled some of the organisational problems we have identified. For instance it has streamlined its governance and in spite of a structure which is still very complex and hierarchical, does allow 'fast-tracking' for women who are encouraged to make their way fast to the top. Daphne Glick had been 'head-hunted' herself in 1989 (by the then President Ros Preston) and 'fast-tracked' to the position of President within ten years. Ros Preston had also been responsible for bringing in a young woman called Tobe Aleksander who first helped NCW run workshops and organise their first big celebration on International Women's Day, (for which they were to become renowned) in 1990 on the theme 'Are we fit for the nineties?' She then became involved with the COM as its publicity adviser and in 1993, at the age of 32, ran successfully for the post of Vice-President.

Tobe Aleksander had, as a young woman, both given and learnt a great deal from NCW but she recognised that many of the older members found she challenged their way of doing things, felt she was in too much of a hurry and resented the fact she did not give total allegiance to NCW (see interview in Grant, 1995). And she is rare as a younger woman within NCW. Overall it shares with almost all generalist organisations the problem of both a falling and an ageing membership. By 1971 the total membership was approximately 7,000 (compared to approximately 30,000 at its peak) (Glick, 1995: p.85) and at the 1974 Conference the President opened with the fighting words:

> NCW, in common with many other organisations, was fighting for survival, not in the economic sense but in the face of widespread apathy, not to say cynicism. (Glick, 1995: p.89)

It was impossible to persuade the NCW to divulge its current membership, but one suspects it is a great deal lower than that. The membership, according to Glick, seems to divide between the 'high flyers' on the fast track, who are very professional and business like, and the 'old ladies' (metaphorically or literally so) who regard the organisation 'as their child' – 'a huge dead weight of women who have been there for thirty years'. They are not now seriously even trying to attract younger women (for all the same reasons as other organisations give) but are instead targeting the 'young retirees' (although Daphne Glick identified the new challenge of the 'earnest grandma' who is constantly standing by for grandchildren, and the need to accommodate the longer-living husbands, and wives who are correspondingly less free). And Daphne Glick, like representatives of other organisations, sees the need to develop in some way a 'two-tier' system to accommodate the needs of different categories of membership.

The role of President of NCW is extremely demanding since, with no senior staff and only 'two girls in the office' she has to undertake a very heavy weight of hands-on administrative work as well as her representative/leadership role and needs to spend about four days a week on the task. Till now NCW have rejected the idea of employing a professional director or encouraging any leadership role in paid staff but Daphne Glick feels this might need to be reconsidered in the next five years, which she sees as crucial both for NCW and for all other comparable women's organisations all of which (apart from the religious ones) need to 'look closely at ourselves'. NCW is part of a group of large organisations called 6/0 which includes the Women's Gas Federation, the British Federation of Women Graduates, the Business and Professional Women, the Townswomen's Guilds and NCW (they used to be the 7/0 until the WI withdrew). All these organisations identify the need to be able to offer young women hands-on service work (as the League of Jewish Women does) or work on single issues.

We saw how the YWCA has embarked on a remarkable process of change. It will be extremely interesting to see how the organisation is able to survive and manage these changes – and whether other organisations can embrace change as bravely. In the next chapter we will be examining an organisation – The Fawcett Society – which has already successfully negotiated the journey between traditional and modern and therefore acts as a very effective bridge between the traditional organisations discussed in this chapter and those that came out of the 'women's movement' examined in Chapter 6. The findings of the research will be analysed in full in Chapter 7.

To sum up the findings of Chapter 4: *This chapter reviews a part of the organised women's movement which still plays a very important, indeed transformational, part in the lives of many women and has an impact on the wider society. Both external pressures (including very importantly the changing pace of women's lives, with both pressure of work and family, combined with hugely expanding educational and social opportunities, making it very difficult for younger women to devote the same time to their organisations as previous generations) and internal problems (such as over-bureaucratic and hierarchical structures and a*

suspicion of professional management and leadership leading to conflict or suspicion between the board, staff and volunteers) have led to a large, and sometimes drastic drop in membership. This in turn brings great financial problems since most organisations are overwhelmingly dependent on subscriptions (although some, like the Guides and the Mothers' Union, have developed strong trading branches), and there is a universal reluctance to pay increased dues, even when members may be simultaneously contributing extremely generously to causes the organisation is promoting. There is a particular problem in attracting younger women and several organisations, notably the Townswomen's Guild and the National Council of Women, are no longer even seriously trying to do so, instead targeting the 'young retirees'.

In the light of these challenges many organisations are responding bravely and creatively, adapting their governance, re-visiting their mission statement to make sure it is still relevant to today's women, stripping out unnecessary bureaucracy, 'delayering' their hierarchies, allowing 'fast-tracking' in order to encourage new members, developing protocols for good relationships between staff and members as volunteers, working hard on the relationship between Chair and Chief Executive, improving communications, using the internet, working on their media profile, even considering amalgamations (although none as yet has done this). Failure to respond in such ways leads to obsolescence, as is happening with the once very vital Co-operative Women's Guild. The YWCA leads the way in willingness to change, with a total transformation both in its purpose (with a move out of social housing) and governance - moving from a traditional 'agency' model to a managerial/partnership model. The governance of most women's organisations is, however, hybrid and, as membership organisations, they also have a political/democratic dimension, representing the views and needs of their members.

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[1] Conversation with Gill Tischler on 9.11.98. I am indebted for information on the YWCA to various conversations with Gill Tischler, Joyce Scroxton (President 1984-1988) and with Linda Collins (London Administrator and Development Officer) and to YWCA literature 1996-8.

[2] See YWCA document on *Implementation of the Board Review*, 25 January 1999.

[3] Written communication from Gill Tishler 18.8.99.

[4] I am indebted for details of more recent developments to telephone conversations with Dorrie Gasser on 19.3.99 and to conversations and written communications with Gill Tishler on 30.3.99 and 1.4.99.

[5] See NCW leaflet 'One Voice with the Power of thousands'.

[6] I am indebted for this and subsequent unattributed information to an interview with Daphne Glick, President of the National Council of Women, 13.1.99.

CHAPTER 5:
THE FAWCETT SOCIETY:
A BRIDGE BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN[1]

Fawcett is the UK's leading campaign organisation working for equality between women and men with thousands of individual members and a growing network of local campaign groups. Fawcett has a key role in influencing policy makers. We work for changes in policies, structures, processes, cultures and practices which lead to improvements in women's lives.

Fawcett's current campaigns focus on participation in democracy, employment and pay, poverty in retirement and tax and benefit reform[2].

The example of a women's organisation which, in marked contrast to almost all other so-called 'traditional' women's organisations, has most dramatically re-invented itself in the last decade is the Fawcett Society which has not only had an august past but has a dynamic present and every chance of an exciting future. And yet seven years ago Fawcett was housed in a basement in Vauxhall, employing one and a half essentially administrative staff, highly respected but not sufficiently known, given the excellence of its work, and a devoted but small membership (400 and falling). There was little indication that it was about to undergo a considerable transformation into the dynamic, professional campaigning, organisation it is today with, it would seem, an increasingly younger membership[3] (2500 plus and growing), excellent premises, a very high profile and a very strong channel into government policy making.

In a sense Fawcett has been constantly re-inventing itself, in response to societal changes in the position of women and the corresponding demands made upon it. It has certainly repeatedly changed its name and, amidst all the different manifestations of suffragist activity in the nineteenth century, it is quite hard to trace the direct line from the London Society for Women's Suffrage, which in 1867 grew out of the small group of women who in 1866 collected more than 1500 signatures for John Stuart Mill to present to parliament with his Women's Suffrage Amendment to the Reform Bill (see Barrow, 1981: p.209; Rover, 1967: p.54-5 and Dingsdale, 1995)[4], and the Central Society for Women's Suffrage which emerged at the beginning of the new century, after a series of false hopes and political disappointments over the years. There were also prolonged disputes over different reactions to the Contagious Diseases Acts, against which Josephine Butler was to campaign so strongly, and frequent splits over the need to keep a 'non-party line'. Since then the name changes have been easier to follow. In 1907 it became the London Society for Women's Suffrage, which in 1919 transformed into the London Society for Women's Service (with a strong emphasis on women at work) and the London and National Society for Women's Service in 1926 (as the long fight for the full vote was finally won in 1928)[5]. By so doing, it showed a rare capacity to develop from being a substantially single-issue group devoted to achieving the vote (by constitutional means) to a broad-based organisation concerned with a broad range of equality issues for women, particularly women at work (Pugh, 1992 and

Smith, 1990 give plenty of examples of organisations which do not manage to make this transition). In 1953 it was finally renamed as the Fawcett Society, in honour of Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett who campaigned for women's suffrage for over 60 years. Millicent Fawcett was there at the beginning in the small group which went to ask J. S. Mill for help in 1866, was in the gallery of the House of Commons on May 20, 1867 when J. S. Mill introduced his women's suffrage Amendment to the Reform Bill and there again in the gallery of the House of Lords on May 21 and 22, 1928 to watch the passing of the Equal Franchise Act, giving women the vote on the same terms as men.

The Fawcett Society has also been through many changes of address. Probably its finest hour in property terms was from 1926 when the financial generosity of an executive member, Sarah Clegg, bought the freeholds of the properties adjoining its office in Marsham Street to establish the Women's Service House, comprising a meeting room, office, a hall with a stage, reading room, a much-needed employment bureau, bedrooms and a cafeteria and accommodation for the newly founded Women's Service Library. Miss Clegg was to die intestate in 1930 but the money needed to complete the project was eventually paid off by Millicent Fawcett's daughter Philippa and the Women's Service House was established as a kind of club, particularly appreciated by the newly formed Junior Council, funded by the Women's Service Trust (created by Miss Clegg). It may be, as Jenny Watson, Fawcett's current Chair suggests, that it is Fawcett's past as a club - and one based on identity - which helps to engender 'a feeling of immense loyalty and camaraderie amongst its members.'[6] Kathleen Halpin, an early member of the Junior Council and its Chairman from 1926, described the impetus behind its formation as being a reaction to the fact that, to her and her friends, everyone seemed 'like old ladies', younger people were not getting a say and everything seemed to be in the hands of the Executive Committee.[7] (Tout ça change. The involvement of younger women remains a key issue for all women's organisations. It is a challenge Fawcett seems to have come closest to meeting in the last decade or so, with a number of young women - such as Margaret Joachim who became chair in 1984 at the age of 35 - in key leadership positions).

During the war a combination of financial difficulties and the bombs meant the Women's Service House had to be abandoned, never to be reclaimed, although there have been valiant attempts to do so recently when in 1990 Westminster City Council (who acquired it in the 1940's via a compulsory purchase order) put the site containing the buildings on the market, and then threatened to turn the whole site into a temporary car park[8]. After temporary homes, including sharing premises and a Chair with the Equal Pay Campaign Committee in the '50's, in 1957 the trustees bought Fawcett House, 27 Wilfred Street, Victoria which proved a happy home for both Society and Library for twenty years. There was, however, never enough money to support both and, after protracted negotiations with various University libraries (partly motivated by a desire to keep the library intact) and long and painful separation proceedings, the Fawcett Library moved in 1977 to become part of the London Guildhall University (albeit a subterranean part). This was accompanied by protracted and extremely complex negotiations on the legal status of the Women's Service Trust (whose income derived mainly from the balance of

the sale of the Marsham Street property, plus, in due course, the proceeds of the sale of Fawcett House in Wilfred Street) which resulted finally in a legal victory in 1976 which declared the Trust **valid and charitable** (thus establishing for the first time the principle that equality between men and women can be a legitimate **charitable** aim)[9]. This period is referred to in Fawcett papers as 'Fawcett penury 1974-77' since the Trust's funds were frozen during the court case and 'members who lived through the period ... seem to have a fixed mental picture of the work of the Society being impeded in all directions by lack of money.'[10] Once these legal complexities were resolved and Fawcett House could be sold (for £95,000) the Fawcett Society was housed for five years in very unsatisfactory premises in Parnell House, 25 Wilton Road and in 1982 moved, like the Library, to a very much less than satisfactory basement, in their case at 46 Harleyford Road in Vauxhall. The area, as well as the premises, was, in spite of the proximity to Vauxhall Station (tube and train) and various bus routes, seen by many as a problem. Writing in 1985 to the Chair Margaret Joachim, a Fawcett member describes graphically how demotivating such unsuitable premises could be:

> I find it increasingly difficult to attend ... meetings as the journey to SE11 and the surrounding area so unpleasant and depressing and rather unsafe for foot-passengers.... I think Fawcett's effectiveness is being seriously undermined by our present location... I am currently only willing to make the unpleasant trek because of great belief in Fawcett's aims but motivation is diminishing.[11]

Since then both organisations have moved - or are moving - into the light. The expanding reputation of the Fawcett Library (which deserves a study of its own) led to its being awarded in May 1998 a £4.2 million Heritage Lottery Fund as half payment for the conversion of the Victorian Wash House alongside its present site into a state of the art national Women's Library. Although ties with the Fawcett Society remain strong, the final legal connection was cut when the Fawcett Society's AGM on 20 June, 1998 voted to transfer the ownership of the Women's Service Library (the original core collection of the Fawcett Library) from the Society to London Guildhall University. The Library is due to move up into this magnificent above-ground site during 2001.

Meanwhile the Society was to continue in its basement in Vauxhall (assailed by floods, burglaries, spider invasions and even bricks through the window) until 1995 when on October 24 Fawcett felt 'On top of the world!' as it moved to a much more accessible and auspicious address as the 'proud tenants of the fifth floor of 45 Beech Street in the Barbican. The clean spacious offices and views of gardens ... make a wonderful change. Fawcett is sharing with two other voluntary organisations, the Maternity Alliance and Parents at Work.'[12]

The move to Beech Street accelerated a process which had already begun for Fawcett, of transforming itself from an extremely worthy, well respected, but comparatively little-known body, with a very active and dedicated but rather small membership[13] of very high-minded, intellectual feminists. Given their numbers (and the fact that throughout this period they were never able to employ more than one and a half paid staff, at best[14]) it is astonishing what Fawcett was to achieve. These achievements deserve a book of their own but amongst those that stand out

are all the campaigning around the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts, the fight for equal taxation and the Women's Action Day spearheaded by Mary Stott on November 27, 1980 which involved 67 other women's organisations, and led to the drawing up of a Women's Agenda, and was experienced as a 'moving and exhilarating experience'[15].

The positive action conferences and awards run by the very active Education Committee also stand out, as does the truly excellent work carried out over many years by other committees, especially the Media Committee and the Public Affairs Committee with its long-standing shareholders' campaign, its work on women into public life, taxation, childcare, the non-contributory invalidity pension etc. To these must be added the renowned Fawcett Book Prize run from 1980 -1996, the close and vital involvement of Fawcett in the setting up the European Women's Lobby, from the initial Fourth Colloquium of European women's organisations which they co-sponsored at the Queen Elizabeth Conference Hall in November 1987 to the arduous chairing job undertaken so ably by Margaret Joachim throughout the initial consultation period of the Lobby, and the campaign to win equal rights for part-time workers spearheaded by Diana Rookledge in 1990[16].

Shirley Williams spoke recently of the Society as traditionally 'very respectable but hardly dynamic'. It can certainly be asked how such an august body managed to transform itself into the dynamic, high profile campaigning body it is today, seldom out of the news, with a direct line to government and its governance and membership totally transformed as more and more women, including many young women, join. Research undertaken in 1995 revealed how much young women valued their membership of Fawcett (Grant, 1995). This is perhaps most marked in contrast to many other traditional women's organisations most of which, as we have seen, are finding it very hard indeed to transform themselves into modern organisations relevant to contemporary young women. The spectacular changes Fawcett has undergone have been a continuum rather than a break with the past, and perhaps only what we might expect from an organisation which has always shown itself able to adapt well to change. Fawcett has always been very much an organisation of its time: while the substance of its campaigning remains much the same, in the nineties it has had at its disposal much more sophisticated techniques for presenting and disseminating its work and ideas which obviously contribute to its higher profile.

How did Fawcett manage to do this - to build on achievements of its past to adapt to changing circumstances in a way other traditional organisations have almost totally failed to do (and would give their eye teeth to be able to emulate)? The pattern in every other traditional women's organisation I have researched has been a depressing one of falling and ageing membership. It is significant that the remarks by Shirley Williams above were made at the goodbye party for Shelagh Diplock who had become Fawcett's first Director in 1992. Long before then Fawcett had (as the London and National Society for Women's Service) relied for decades on the unpaid service of Philippa Strachey as its Secretary, until her retirement in 1951. They subsequently employed General Secretaries, with administrative assistants

when these could be afforded[17]. Although the term 'General Secretary' **can** imply a position of responsibility (e.g. in Trade Unions, the Arts Council) in the world of women's organisations it and similar titles (e.g. 'Executive' or 'Organising Secretary') have tended to imply a predominantly administrative post, subservient to the Executive Committee and with little or no 'agency' role. The Fawcett Society was always punctilious as an employer, following best employment practice in terms of recruitment, contracts etc. but it is significant that Margaret Laird's expertise and talents were 'underused' as paid General Secretary in an overwhelmingly administrative job, and she could not fully contribute her skills to Fawcett until she became Chair (in 1993) and subsequently a trustee of the Fawcett Trust (in 1998)[18].

Even when such traditional organisations have appointed much needed managers or directors, they have often found it exceptionally difficult to allow them to actually direct or manage, in other words to move as an organisation from the traditional 'agency' model to a more managerial/ partnership one, and the failure to establish the appropriate balance of power and responsibility between paid staff and the elected Board, and, on occasion, between the Board and its officers, remains one of the major things which hold back the development of the organised women's movement. Kathleen Halpin, a member of Fawcett and other organisations for more than seventy years, defined the importance of getting the balance of power between the Chairman and Chief Executive as essential. These organisations are crying out for leadership but are frequently denied it because those who are paid to lead them are so often prevented from doing so by the unpaid 'volunteers' from the Board or the membership[19].

Fawcett is so exceptional because it not only decided it needed a director, recruited a person in Shelagh Diplock with the right skills and experience of campaigning and change management, wrote the word 'lead' into her letter of appointment - and then actually allowed her to lead. This is no mean achievement in an organisation which had been very member-led and with an extremely able and articulate membership, many of whom were used to playing a lead role in the running of the Society and its various authoritative committees. But change never comes from nowhere. Decisions about what sort of post this should be were taken long before the recruitment process itself and not without protracted debate about the need for such a post going back over years rather than months. Back in 1986 the Chair Margaret Joachim

wrote in a letter to the President elect Dorothy Wedderburn of the need to strengthen the capacity of the paid staff:

> The Society has just appointed two joint General Secretaries ... Previously we have had a single part-time employee, so we are hoping to improve our administrative efficiency considerably.[20]

But there was also a strong feeling of the need for change and a new sense of vision. Sandy Shulman had written to the Chair, Betty Scharf in 1984:

> (I) believe they (the changes in the constitution) will inject the Society with new vigour. If

the Fawcett is to flourish then I believe things have to change ... and, I have noticed, that recently things are changing for the better.[21]

In 1990 a strongly worded statement on **Visions and Strategies for a Post-Patriarchal Society** identified the cause for the 1990s:

- to develop and articulate a clear vision of a non-sexist post-patriarchal society in which women and men are fully equal partners, and the changed values, priorities and quality of life which will accompany it - and to work to make it happen.[22]

It was the uncompromising nature of this statement (coupled with the need to find a feminist 'home') which encouraged Annette Lawson, a recently returned academic from California, to join Fawcett. Lawson had none of the 'baggage' of the accumulated culture of the organisation, but brought her women's studies experience, to contribute to the process of change[23]. She was the Chair in 1992 when, partly triggered by the fact that the Society at this time had only one totally overburdened administrator, the feeling was very strong and widespread that Fawcett could no longer rely on paid administrative help alone. Part of the thinking behind the resulting decision to appoint a Director is contained in an unsigned paper circulated to the Executive with the job description:

...we looked at the titles used by other organisations - they were many and various and not always representative of what the person was doing. It is a fact that people are attracted by titles. It is also a fact that if we genuinely wish for a higher profile with the media and other organizations, that we need an unequivocal title - not too long, not too dull - 'Director' sounds high profile, and is not to be confused with 'Chair'. Others considered were real mouthfuls - General Secretary' is too tied up with TU associations; anything with 'admin' in it sounds too feeble for a spokesperson and it's hard to think of anything else.[24]

Certainly it seems to have been a power-sharing job that was envisioned, and although there have been many problems, and inevitably some jockeying for power, Shelagh Diplock, once appointed, was by-and-large allowed to use her considerable skills to the full and to develop, manage and fund-raise for a very modern campaigning organisation with a skilled professional staff (by 1998 this had grown to seven fulltime staff). She was also assisted in this by having the support of the Chair and Executive and managed to do this by bringing most of the membership with her. Again this was not easy or universal, as older members in particular have understandably felt extremely protective of Fawcett's past and traditions and have inevitably at times felt their own position to be undermined or made redundant by the professionalism of the staff, performing tasks which were previously undertaken by themselves as volunteers[25] (This again is a common cause of friction between paid staff and unpaid members or Board members in many women's organisations). Older members have also regretted the demise of the committees on Public Affairs, Media and Health which have been extremely effective bodies run by such renowned convenors as Dorothy Kent, Mary Stott, Diana Rookledge and Hilda Smith. The Education Committee, for years convened by Enid Hutchinson, has continued as an expert group meeting in each others' homes.

Part of this unease with the pace of change has been expressed in the controversy over what should constitute the Fawcett's colours. Traditionally the suffrage -

rather than the suffragette colours - were green, white and red (later defined as
'Give Women Rights') while the suffragette colours were the far more ubiquitous
green white and violet or purple ('Give Women Votes'). Fawcett has been
increasingly using the second set of colours on its publicity, to the distress of some
of its long-standing members who feel that there 'is an important point of principle
at stake. We are perpetuating the ethos of the suffragists in that we still operate
constitutionally and do not step outside the law as the suffragettes did. I think the
message is an important one and one which I would like to see put forward with the
greatest clarity'[26]. On the other hand another member argued very strongly that the
purple, white and green is now so widely recognised as the 'women's colours,
women's perspectives' (rather than narrowly suffragette), that Fawcett cannot
afford not to use them[27]. An Executive Committee decision to reach a compromise
of using the suffrage colours internally (and certainly at Shelagh Diplock's farewell
party the room was draped in green, white and red!) and the green, white and purple
externally was not very well received at the AGM on June 20, 1998. The President
Dorothy Wedderburn asked for a rethink and a period of 'listening attention' to
those who felt strongly on this issue. That thinking is yet fully to take place but it is
important for Fawcett's 'institutional memory' that it does.

In most ways, however, Fawcett, manages to achieve a remarkable balancing act
between pride in its past (and even younger members repeatedly express how proud
Fawcett's past makes them[28]; while the wreath laying on Millicent Fawcett's
memorial in Westminster Abbey remains an important part of its calendar) and an
ability to wear this pride lightly rather than reverently. In Shelagh Diplock's words,
it has managed to rise above 'the burden of history' so that it is no longer weighed
down by its past baggage[29]. Its past gives it depth and resonance but it also has a
strong sense of the future. Its current reputation as a highly effective, well informed
and brave[30] campaigning organisation in the field of equal pay, parliamentary
representation, pensions and poverty in retirement, childcare, carers etc explains
why its views are sought by members of parliament, government ministers, reviews
and commissions, and, constantly, the media.

Why has Fawcett succeeded where others have failed? First, I think because it had
a tradition of extremely high-minded integrity on the part of its members which
probably goes back to the days of John Stuart Mill and which, while not protecting
it from all internal dispute, does mean that members have usually been prepared to
put the good of the organisation above their own interests. Thus, while most
members have certainly had their own careers, often very distinguished ones, the
Society has been saved from the sort of divisive careerism which has caused so
many rifts in an organisation like the 300 Group. Sandy Shulman, in her Chair's
report to the AGM in 1988, conveys this quality which Fawcett demands, and gets,
from its Chairs, Executive and members:

> Each Chair brings her own individuality and expertise, and this characterises her time in
> office and hopefully enhances the Society's work and reputation and attracts membership. I
> have been asked to make some personal observations on this subject today: since no single
> Chair can be an expert in every area I think she must be someone who can find the best
> members for specific tasks within the Society and be able to inspire others into action
> wherever possible. I must add that besides being a responsibility it is a great privilege. No

> one who has served as Fawcett's chair can fail to be enriched by the experience. We walk in the footsteps of some exceptional women.[31]

Ten years later the current Chair, Jenny Watson, echoes these sentiments:

> (Millicent Fawcett's) legacy to me (and women like me) is surely not her name but her indomitable spirit, and it is this which should be our inspiration.... we do walk in the footsteps of some exceptional women. I can't repay them for the things they achieved, which have enabled me to make my life the way that it is. But I can do my utmost to ensure that I continue to try and follow those footsteps by steering us on the way to strong and effective campaigning and lobbying which will make a difference to all our lives.[32]

Linked with this inspirational leadership is a great generosity and openness to other organisations which is, again, too often **not** a characteristic of other 'traditional' organisations. Sandy Shulman and the Society's very active support for the fledgling National Alliance of Women's Organisations in the late '80s was a classic example of this.

Secondly, I think, Fawcett has been able to embrace change so effectively because it both recognised the need for change and was prepared to accept the consequences of this change, however painful. Again in Shelagh Diplock's words, it had the 'guts' to want to change and then went out proactively to raise the money for this change. It took on board the fact that all change involves loss as well as gain. It adapted to the fact that by becoming bigger, apparently younger and less elitist it would lose the particular character of being part of a club, an inner circle which many older members cherished. It was prepared to accept the fact that appointing a professional director - and thereafter a highly professional staff - did mean that the Executive, as it moved from a traditional to a partnership model of governance, had to learn to share power but that thereby the whole organisation became infinitely more powerful. However on a more mundane level it was able to do this because it had the money, in the form of the Fawcett Trust (the renamed Women's Service Trust), which it could draw on for crucial funding for its expansion of staff and activity - a luxury which very few underfunded women's organisations enjoy. There has been considerable debate, and some creative tension, between trustees and the Society about how this should happen but undoubtedly Fawcett found itself in the position after 1992 to have the will, the leadership and the money for change - which made it extremely powerful.

Seven years on, Fawcett can feel proud of what it has achieved. It has increased its membership more than fivefold. Its excellent publications reflect the range of its activities (see Garner, 1998, Stephenson, 1998 and the Women's Budget Group 1998), projects like the Eurobus carried its message and name all over the country during the European elections of 1994 (and even into **The Archers** on Radio 4) and its campaign to highlight the fact that only 27% of local councillors are women was pursued vigorously in the local council elections in 1999. It has encouraged the development of currently twenty active local groups (which are separate entities licensed to use the Fawcett name) and, most recently, an Activists Network, which it is promoting with a very 'in your face' youthful image, for individuals to get involved in campaigning. Although none of these probably quite replace, for older members, the special quality of involvement which the specialist committees

provided, they do provide opportunities for much more open involvement for a much wider range of members.

But there have been problems. 1998 in particular was a difficult year financially. A wonderful but very costly cartoon exhibition entitled **Fawcett Funny Girls - Cartooning for Equality** was mounted in Manchester, London and elsewhere in 1997-8. This was a splendid showcase for Fawcett and a venue for various celebratory events, including the ninetieth birthday party for Mary Stott, the renowned journalist, writer and campaigner who has for thirty years seen Fawcett as the channel for her campaigning efforts to 'ensure that women should walk on level ground, side by side with men'[33]. **Funny Girls** was great fun and a great public relations success- but overall it lost money Fawcett could ill afford to lose. This underlined a challenge Fawcett shares with virtually all other women's organisations - that of the great difficulty of fund-raising for core costs. In the same year Fawcett faced the challenge of a need to make three staff members redundant and a new Director, replacement for Shelagh Diplock, who was only in post for three months. However it was able to use this period to bring in outside help, to set up better administrative systems and to make strategic decisions about its staffing needs .

However Fawcett's problems also revealed its strengths. As an organisation it was to remain very cohesive during this crisis with no internal divisions and its reputation intact externally. An appeal for money during this crisis evoked an extraordinarily generous response, with more than £25,000 donated, revealing that this is one organisation which members are prepared to support with their money.

So as it prepares for 'Campaigning for Women into a New Millennium' (the strap line on its **Annual Report 1998-99**) Fawcett looks extremely buoyant. It has a new young Director Mary-Ann Stephenson (although not new to Fawcett since she has been its Campaigns Manager since 1996). She is determined that Fawcett becomes even more open and diverse, and, although she does not anticipate it ever becoming a. mass membership organisation, would like to see membership increase to around 7-10,000 which she thinks is probably achievable with a membership drive (this has not happened over the last two years and funding has now been applied for a membership development programme). But she sees this membership as being segmented, with different categories of supporter, activist, subscriber, to meet different needs. At the same time Fawcett needs to build up its capacity internally, using IT as effectively as possible so that, with a small staff, and probably increased use of short-term contracts for specific pieces of work, it can work as effectively as possible[34].

Fawcett has been extremely successful in recreating itself as a young, dynamic organisation (with both its Chair, its Director and all its current staff under forty). Ironically possibly part of this success is due to the fact that it has taken itself out of the exclusive 'women's organisation' box, seeing itself as much a campaigning as a women's organisation (and it does have a few male members). Mary-Ann Stephenson explains how Fawcett now acts as a bridge between the women's

organisations and other sectors like trade unions and democracy organisations (Charter 88, the Electoral Reform Society etc). She considers its governance very appropriate, with a clear understanding that the Executive (of 12) set the policy and the Director and staff are empowered to implement it within broad guidelines. Rules of governance means that no-one can stay in office too long (four years for officers, six years for committee members.) Work, however, needs to be done to encourage more people to stand for the Executive and to ensure greater ethnic diversity, possibly by co-option (it is already very diverse by age). The development of flexible expert groups, on subjects like pensions and employment, which can be called upon for input when it is needed, are proving very effective.

So it looks as if Fawcett has begun the new the millennium campaigning dynamically and effectively for women's equality 'as a much needed independent organisation that is prepared to speak out – to challenge and question the impact of new legislation on our lives.'[35] Kathleen Halpin, Fawcett's oldest member in every sense of the word, died in January 1999. But interviewed at 95, shortly before her death, she saw its past as good, its present as better and its future as potentially best[36]. Fawcett could not have a better tribute paid to it than that.

To sum up: *Fawcett's roots go back to 1866 and its early history is deeply interwoven with the suffragist movement. Once the full vote was won in 1928 it was able to broaden its work to include work on employment, sex discrimination, equal pay, education, the media etc. Its library, started in 1926, was to form the basis for the Fawcett Library (now to become the national Women's Library) and the Women's Service Trust, established soon after, has supported the Society financially ever since, now as the Fawcett Trust. Fawcett has thus had a financial cushion which most women's organisations do not enjoy, although in the last decade it has been increasingly diversifying its funding base with grants particularly from charitable trusts for specific pieces of policy work. It also has a membership which is unusually generous in giving money to the Society.*

Until 1992 the Fawcett Society had a small membership (400 and falling) and a highly respected but rather staid image. It was run from a small office with the help of one or two administrative staff. It had an executive of 12 and specialist committees in education, public affairs, health and media. However moves for change, which had been brewing for several years, came together in the decision to appoint for the first time a director who would actually be allowed to direct, thus moving the organisation from an 'agency' to a partnership model of governance. Since then Fawcett has expanded in every direction; it has moved into excellent premises; its membership has grown fivefold; its work on taxation, pensions, political representation and equal pay has been influential and high profile; it has built effective partnerships not just with women's organisations, but with democracy organisations, with women MPs, with the Women's Unit etc. With a young Chair and a young new Director it now has an image of a young, dynamic, campaigning organisation.

Fawcett has also demonstrated that it is able to overcome internal problems and

come through them stronger. It is now evolving more flexible structures, with the specialist committees, (with regular meetings), being replaced by expert groups which are only called on when needed. It is now working to involve more – and more diverse – members in its governance, in its local groups and in its Activist Network. Fawcett seems to have succeeded in making the very rare transition from traditional to very modern organisation and at the same time providing a bridge also between the world of the organised women's movement and that of wider campaigning organisations. It looks forward to campaigning strongly for women well into the new millennium.

This case study thus demonstrates that it is possible to update structure and governance, purpose and leadership simultaneously and that the effect can be transformational.

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[1] A shorter version of this chapter appeared as The Fawcett Society: An Old Organisation for the New Woman? In *Women: a cultural review Vol. 10*, No.1, Spring 1999.

[2] From Fawcett Society *Annual Report 1997-8*. I was indebted in writing this section not only to the Fawcett archives kept in their offices or in the Fawcett Library but to extensive interviews and conversations, often backed up by written communication, with long-standing members such as Mary Stott, Kathleen Halpin, Margaret Laird, Sandy Shulman, Dorothy Wedderburn, Diana Rookledge, Annette Lawson and Margaret Joachim. Their wisdom and generosity with their time has been enormously appreciated.

[3] Fawcett has never kept consistent statistics on the age profile of its members so any comment like has to be treated with caution as it is dependent on people's perceptions, with different people having different perceptions depending on their experience of the organisation. However a survey carried out in 1981 using a very small sample showed the percentage of women aged thirty and under had risen in two years from 6% to 25%.

[4] See also various updated editions of the Fawcett pamphlet *The Long March to Equality: A Short History of the Fawcett Society*.

[5] The key role which the Fawcett Society, in its previous manifestations, played in the struggle for women's suffrage from 1866-1928 is fully documented in Strachey, 1927 and Strachey, 1928.

[6] Jenny Watson, written communication, 10.10.98.

[7] Interview with Kathleen Halpin, 23.7.98.

[8] Project W, comprising the Fawcett Society and the newly formed National Alliance of Women's Organisations, co-ordinated a very strong campaign and eventually succeeded in ensuring Millicent Fawcett Hall acquired listed status, thus saving it from demolition. In granting this on 21 May, 1992 the National Heritage Minister Robert Key said: 'This is a very significant building in the political history of this century, and of the emancipation of women' (see The Fawcett Society *Annual Report*, 1991-92: p.7). Fortunately, it now (September 1999) seems certain that Fawcett will regain some access to and use of the building (bought by Westminster School) on a long-term basis.

[9] See the very useful explanatory chronology of the Women's Service Trust by Kathleen Halpin in the Fawcett *Annual Report 1976-77:* p.10-13

[10] Minutes of meeting on The Loan Training Fund and Legal Loan Training Fund, 4 March, 1981

[11] Letter from Lucie Heney, 15.1.1985

[12] From article by Caroline Hepple, (Autumn 1995) On top of the world! *Towards Equality: News from Fawcett.* Legally, however, these two organisations are licensed to use part of the premises, rather than sharing them with Fawcett.

[13] It is quite hard to find detailed statistics of Fawcett's membership year by year but there is a figure of 464 on 15.5.1990 (See Annual Report 1989/90), compared with 2570 on 27.8.1998.

[14] And sometimes they could not afford to employ anyone at all. In the Annual Report in May 1975 the Chairman Pamela Anderson writes how 'one of the most difficult (years) the Society has had to face 'led to the termination of the contract of our newly appointed Organising Secretary'

[15] See Newsletter January 1981 and the eight point *Women's Agenda: A Call for Action* published by the Fawcett Society and Women in Media 27.11.1980.

[16] Any list of Fawcett's achievements is bound to be selective. A full history needs to be written but in the meantime these are recorded in newsletters and annual reports, as well as the various committee reports and minutes.

[17] On 12.9.1965 the Fawcett employee Mrs Horton wrote to Miss Halpin: 'Please let the Executive Committee know how tremendously I appreciate their action in negotiating.... to provide me with additional salary. It has never occurred to me to seek an increment, knowing the limitations of the Society's income'.

[18] Interview with Dr. A.E.L. Davis, 26.7.98

[19] Interview with Kathleen Halpin, 23.7.98.

[20] Letter from Margaret Joachim, 1986

[21] Letter from Sandy Shulman to Betty Scharf, 31.5.1984.

[22] Fawcett Paper *Visions and Strategies for a Post-Patriarchal Society,* May 1990

[23] Interview with Annette Lawson, 27.7.98.

[24] Unsigned, undated executive paper, 1992.

[25] Interview with Dr. A.E.L. Davis, 26.7.98.

[26] Letter from Ann Walton to Shelagh Diplock, 6 2.998

[27] Paper on *Fawcett's Colours* by Barbara Lindsay to Fawcett Executive Committee, 26 5. 1998.

[28] Comments by participants in a workshop on *The Spirit of Fawcett* at the AGM, 20.6.1998.

[29] Interview with Shelagh Diplock, 20.8.97.

[30] In spite of being very much on 'the inner loop' with the new Labour Government, Fawcett was the first, and almost the only, women's organisation to express public doubts about Labour policies, particularly the 'New Deal for Lone mothers'. See 'The Honeymoon is over' *Towards Equality* Winter 1997/8: p.1.

[31] The Fawcett Society *Annual Report 1987-88:* p.7

[32] Jenny Watson, written communication, 10.10 1998

[33] Interview with Mary Stott, 20.10.98

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[34] Interview with Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director of Fawcett, 8.7.99.

[35] From Jenny Watson's 'Message from the Chair' in Fawcett's *Annual Report 1998-9*

[36] Interview with Kathleen Halpin, 12.10.98.

CHAPTER 6:
ENABLING SISTERHOOD: THE STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

Introduction

Feminism did not, of course, begin with the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s. This was its **second** wave and we have seen plenty of manifestations of earlier feminisms in the traditional organisations we have examined, even if for most this has become decidedly diluted over the years. But for the purposes of this enquiry the mushrooming of organisations (although that term is in itself inappropriate to many of the small consciousness-raising groups, which were hardly **organised** at all) which came out of second wave feminism are particularly relevant: not only were they intended to change the world and women's place in it, but they were intended to do so in a particular way which mirrored the ideals they were fighting for, replacing the structures of patriarchy with ways of organising that better reflected women's ideals.

So, while the traditional organisations we have examined were almost invariably highly hierarchical and bureaucratic - with many-tiered structures, categories of membership, strong leadership positions and innumerable rules and regulations - the groups which came out of the women's liberation movement were very different. Instead of being large, they tended to be very small, at least initially; fluid rather than rigid; flat rather than hierarchical; with leadership diffused rather than concentrated in a few positions. And although the women's movement certainly does not, or did not, have a monopoly on collective ways of working (see Lamb et al, 1979 for many examples of what they call 'libertarian projects' run on collective lines) it has been extremely closely associated with what has been called 'collectivist-democratic organisations' as opposed to 'rational-bureaucratic models' (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Ferguson, 1984). In fact, the women's movement tended to see hierarchy often as synonymous with patriarchy and thus to be avoided at all costs.

We have seen in Chapter 4 how the traditional mass-membership organisations are being forced to streamline their highly hierarchical structures in the face of changing needs, removing tiers and committees, cutting their boards drastically, giving opportunities for 'fast tracking'. Ironically, as they have become flatter, the flat organisations of the women's movement find themselves forced to build in more structure, to drop pay parity, to employ at least a co-ordinator if not a director, in response to similar pressures. We will be examining why - and how successfully - they are doing this; why collectivity has proved such a difficult ideal to sustain over time but one which is so hard to abandon; how much can be saved to carry into these re-structured organisations, and what we can learn from these case studies about what enables or disables women's organisations.

We will start by looking broadly and briefly at the range of organisations which came out of the women's movement in the 1970s and 80s; then in some depth at eight organisations of varying sizes, working in different areas, looking particularly at the effectiveness of their structure and governance and how they have managed to survive, when so many did not. We will be assessing what we can learn from their history about what makes an effective organisation particularly in Chapter 7. What strikes one in looking at these organisations is how much smaller they are both than the traditional mass membership organisations and the organisations which came out of the women's movement in the US. There is no UK equivalent to the National Organization of Women (NOW) in the US which has always, since its founding in 1966, developed a mass membership of women both in chapters around the country and as direct members (Tobias, 1997).

This chapter in no way attempts to give a comprehensive picture of the women's liberation movement and the groups which came out of it. As we saw in Chapter 2, this has been at least partly attempted in a range of books (Campbell and Coote,1987; Curno et al, 1982; Dahlerup, 1986; Deckard, 1979; Griffin, 1995; Holland, 1984; Lovenduski and Randall, 1993; Mitchell, 1986; Rowbotham, 1989; Williams, 1988) although a full account remains to be written. And, it should be noted that there was far from a total void in the formation of women's organisations between the more traditional organisations we looked at in Chapter 4 and the · explosion of groups in the 70s. Books like Smith (1990) and Pugh (1992) show strong activity by a whole range of other groups between the wars and beyond – groups like the Six Point Group, the Women's Freedom League, the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, the Women's Peace Crusade – although Pugh does suggest that the period 1945-1959 could be called 'the nadir of British Feminism'. But in the 1950s and early '60s, in what Mary Stott called 'a time of most uncomfortable transition for women', many 'self-help groups were launched by women at home'(Jerman, 1981: pp.6-7). One of the most notable of these was the National Housewives' Register (NHR) 'for housebound wives with liberal interests and a desire to remain individuals' which came into being after a heartfelt letter to Mary Stott's Women's Page of the **Guardian** from a young isolated mother in the suburbs - and grew, at its height, into 21,000 members in 1000 neighbourhood groups[1]. The first twenty years of NHR's growth and unique structure (or rather non-structure, as it did not even have a constitution till 1976) have been meticulously recorded in Jerman's book (1981).

One characteristic of the National Women's Register (it was to change its name in 1987) is its determination to this day to remain resolutely non-campaigning and non-political, in any sense of the word. This is one of the major differences with the groups of the 1970s. As a book like **Sweet Freedom** (Campbell and Coote, 1987) shows, the groups that emerged in such numbers from the early seventies emerged directly from a movement, the Women's Liberation Movement, and were imbued with a particular philosophy, feminism. This not only affected **what** they did, but also **how** they did it.

The start of 'second wave' feminism is variously attributed to the publication of Betty Friedan's **The Feminist Mystique,** (1963) the foundation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in US in 1966, and the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968 (at which bras were only reputedly burnt.). In the UK its early landmarks include the strike of women sewing machinists at Ford's Dagenham in 1968, and the trade union rally for the National Joint Action Campaign for Women's Equal Rights (NJACWER) in Trafalgar Square in 1969. Three key early texts were Sheila Rowbotham's **Women's Liberation and the New Politics** (Spokesman pamphlet, No.17, 1969), Anne Koedt's 'The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm' (in **Notes from the Second Year,** 1970) and Germaine Greer, **The Female Eunuch,** (Paladin, 1971). Its first major landmark was the first National Women's Liberation Conference held at Ruskin College Oxford in February 1970. This led to the setting up of the National Women's Co-ordinating Committee and the evolution of four basic demands:

- equal pay now
- equal education and job opportunities
- free contraception and abortion on demand
- free 24-hour nurseries

The Second Women's Liberation Conference was held at Skegness in 1971 and led to three further demands:

- financial and legal independence
- an end to all discrimination against lesbians
- a woman's right to define her own sexuality

and the final National Conference in 1978 additionally demanded:

- freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status
- an end to all laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women.

No women's group from the late 1960s, early 70s onwards could have failed to be influenced by the women's liberation movement (henceforth known as WLM) whose ideas were disseminated through workshops, conferences, marches, demonstrations and numerous publications of greater or less duration. Notable amongst the latter was **Spare Rib,** founded in July 1972 as 'the magazine which puts women's liberation on the news stands.' This was the longest running and most well established periodical of the WLM in Britain, effectively charting the history of the movement, until it was finally to close in 1993. But the WLM was probably most characterised by mushrooming conscious-raising groups[2]. The London Women's Liberation Workshop – 'a network of small groups with an information service' – claimed to be 'the first organisation of the women's movement'.[3] The account of the first nine years of one of their small groups, the Belsize Lane group, demonstrates the heady and life-changing excitement – the 'revelation' and 'exhilaration' of being part of such a movement. It describes the multiple

campaigns and activities developed around the established WLM demands above (including helping to set up a nursery), the fluidity of the movement and the way in which the group constantly changes and reinvents itself. The women involved in the group who, in true collective style, act as joint authors of this account, explain why they decide to exclude men from their meetings 'to establish our own leaderless groups and to meet each other over our common experience as women' – and why they keep the group small:

> groups small enough for us all to take part in discussion and decisions are the basic units of our movement We feel that the small group makes personal commitment a possibility and a necessity and that it provides understanding and solidarity. Each small group is autonomous, holding different positions and engaging in different types of activity. As a federation of a number of different groups, Women's Liberation Workshop is essentially heterogeneous, incorporating within it a wide range of opinions and plans for action.

> The magazine, SHREW, is produced by a different group each month. Thus, to a certain extent, it reflects the preoccupations of the group producing it. WLW meets monthly, the small groups weekly. We come together as groups and individuals to further our part in the struggle for social change and the transformation of society. (Spare Rib, Issue 69: p.45)

The article also discussed how the need to keep meetings to a manageable size meant reluctantly turning the Belsize Lane group from an open into a 'closed' group, and their habit of always going out to speak 'in twos to show that, though we were in common agreement, no one person could represent the movement' (p.42).

Such debates were to take place in groups all over the country. From them were to develop a collective ideal of organising which came directly from the philosophy of women's liberation. Marsha Rowe writes of how **Spare Rib** in fact moved from a hierarchy to a collective:

> We worked as a hierarchy initially because Rosie Boycott and I were the only ones with experience of magazines. This gradually broke down as everyone learned more and as ideas about collective organization from the women's movement filtered through to us. Rosie Boycott and I were criticised by the others for being so competitive with each other that we did not give anyone else a chance to talk or to discuss the content of the magazine democratically.

> By the end of 1973 the magazine was produced collectively. This meant that the office work was shared on a rota system, with each woman in turn taking responsibility for a day. Different aspects of the work were still particular responsibilities, but the editorial and design were discussed at collective meetings and everyone learned to do their own paste-up for articles, co-ordinating with the designer. We shared tasks like cleaning the office as well as the editorial work. We also tried to recognise individual skills and interests, and the collective gave women a chance to concentrate on work they found most rewarding. (Rowe, 1982: pp. 17-18)

The groups which came out of the WLM and actually solidified into organisations were extremely wide-ranging and often quite short-lived. They formed, inevitably, around the issues which were important to the movement. Around the issue of domestic violence, the maverick Erin Pizzey opened the first women's refuge at Chiswick with maximum publicity in 1972, and although this continues vigorously under the title 'Refuge', the main work for survivors of domestic violence is now

delivered via the members of Women's Aid Federation England (WAFE) which was formed from 35 groups in 1975 (see case study). Around the issue of rape, the first rape crisis centre was opened in 1976 (run as a collective, with two employees and many volunteers). By 1985 there were 45 centres (and more opening all the time) designed to provide a woman-centred framework of support. They were usually run as collectives substantially, and sometimes exclusively, with volunteer support. The Rape Crisis movement finally achieved their own Federation in 1996 (see case study). There were many, many groups formed around childcare. Two were the Camden Children's Community Centre formed in 1971 and the Kingsway Children's Centre in 1977. Many groups from all over the country came together in 1980 to form the National Child Care Campaign to campaign, lobby, research and give advice on setting up nurseries. Health and reproductive rights were also major arenas for organisation. The National Abortion Campaign was set up in 1975 (having come out of the Co-ordinating Committee in Defence of the 1967 Abortion Act) as a federated, non-hierarchical, feminist organisation committed to give radical mass support for a 'women's right to choose'. It was followed in 1983 by the Women's Reproductive Rights Information Centre (WRRIC) set up with money from the Greater London Council (GLC) and these two represent different ends of what has been a passionately contested political argument about the place of abortion as a single issue or situated within the wider field of reproductive rights (see Hohmeyer, 1995: pp.41-48). The 1970s and 80s were also the decades when campaigns to set up well women clinics were fought and won.

Another surprising group of organisations (of which there does not seem to be anything comparable in other countries) are those which developed around the issue of women in prison, often beginning as self help groups set up by women coming out of prison. Although obviously influenced by the WLM, they were not so directly associated with it and tended to be run by charismatic founders, which made them closer to Mintzberg's entrepreneurial configuration of organisations rather than a collective model. The first of these was the Clean Break Theatre Company set up in 1979 to provide a voice for ex-prisoners and make something positive of their experience. Its roots were in Durham Prison and in Asham Grange where a third of the women prisoners had been involved in a production of **Ephemera.** Women in Prison followed in 1981, started by Chris Tchiakovsky as a support and campaigning group for women prisoners; CAST (the Creative and Supportive Trust) in 1982, set up to provide support to women before and after release, and WISH (Women in Special Hospitals) started by Prue Stevenson in 1984 to support women in special hospitals and secure psychiatric units. Then in 1986 the Female Prisoners Welfare Project was started by Olga Heaven, with its accompanying Hibiscus Project which supports the women (mainly from Nigeria and Jamaica) caught acting as 'mules' (the subject of a Clean Break production at the Royal Court in 1996) by smuggling drugs into the UK. Working with a clientele which is often very 'near the edge', these organisations have faced particularly difficult internal problems, partly concerned with the founder syndrome which we examined in Chapter 2. But twenty years on from Clean Break's foundation they have proved themselves very resilient[4].

There have also been a hugely creative and diverse set of groups of women in all

sectors of the arts. Many of these were very transitory but others, like the Women's Playhouse Trust, the Women's Art Library or Women in Music, are already entering or well into their third decade. And even the more recent manifestation of women organising for peace focussed on the peace camps first set up around the US base at Greenham Common in 1981 proved surprisingly enduring (Blackwood, 1984; Young, 1990). Less enduring were the network of generic women's centres many of which have closed unless, like the Women's Resource Centre (WRC) (see case study), they have managed to find a more strategic or specific purpose. However this trend is certainly not universal: Greenwich Women's Centre was set up in 1997 with strong backing and funding from the Council. And there were five women's centres from all over the country represented at the WRC's conference on 'Building on our Strengths' in July 1999, arguing strongly that there was still very much a place for such centres and that they were hoping, at last, to set up a network to support them, a hope which by summer 2000, after a conference in Liverpool, was well on the way to realisation. Possibly more in tune with the 1990s are the professional women's groups which have proliferated since the '70s. At an evening on 'Women and Work' organised by Business and Professional Women in September 1991, there were 25 different professional women's organisations, although not all would identify themselves as feminist or part of the women's movement (see Tomlinson, 1987).

The capacity for a loosely formed group to transform itself into a properly constituted organisation, employing staff (a process which, as we shall see, is usually only achieved with great struggle and often considerable pain) obviously depends substantially on its access to funding, as well as other internal and external contingency factors. With none of the reserves which most organisations from first wave feminism brought with them, this usually means access to statutory funding, whether at national or, more frequently, local level. There has been very compelling research to demonstrate the imbalance in funding available for women's organisations, both traditionally and currently. (Bowman and Norton, 1986; Grant, 1987; Riordan, 1996, 1998a and 1998b and 1999; Klinker, 1998). Riordan argues:

> Women's organisations, through their participation in civil society, are a force for social change, bringing new priorities and perspectives to the political process and the organisation of society.... (but) ... they remain largely invisible to funders.
>
> (1998a: pp.182-3)

It is for this reason that the hugely increased funding made available to women's groups by the Women's Committee of the GLC (and some metropolitan councils) in the early 80s was so significant for the development of the **organised** women's movement (and its shift in many cases from a women's liberation movement into a women's voluntary sector). It is also why the GLC's demise in 1986 was considered to precipitate such a crisis for women's organisations (see Bowman and Norton, 1986). Some of the funding of women's organisations was picked up by the London Boroughs Grants Committee and continues till this day – but many groups did fold with the GLC, or shortly after, although this was often due to the fact that they had failed to use the GLC money as an opportunity to diversify and strengthen their funding base, rather than as their sole source of funding. The National Lottery is currently showing some awareness of the needs of women's

groups and it is funding the WRC's strategic capacity building project and an expansion of Rights of Women's legal work, but it is probably too early to say what overall effect the Lottery will have on the organised women's movement.

The WLM was far from a totally unified, homogenous movement. Political splits were to form quite quickly - notably between liberal, socialist, and radical feminists (see Calas and Smircich, 1996). Debate was also to rage around how far the groups should become institutionalised, accept money from statutory or other funders, deliver services as well as campaign. One of the most painful battles was that of the relationship between the WLM and black and ethnic minority women, who felt their needs were neglected by both anti-racist groups (usually dominated by men) and the feminist movement (usually dominated by white, middle-class women). This led to the development of autonomous groups to fight all aspects of the oppression black women face – race, sex and class discrimination. Amongst the first of many of its kind was the Brixton Black Women's Group in 1973. In 1978 OWAAD (Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent) was formed and held its first conference in 1979 attended by more than 300[5]. In 1980 its second conference was attended by more than 600; but sadly OWAAD was not able to sustain its ideal of Black (meaning Afro-Asian) unity beyond 1982, and there has been no unifying umbrella body for black women's groups since. However black and minority ethnic women's groups organisations remain very strong. I will be looking in depth at the East London Black Women's Organisation (ELBWO) but I could equally have chosen Akina Mama Wa Afrika, an extremely effective development organisation for African women which celebrated its 15th birthday in 2000, or Southall Black Sisters (SBS), a group of Asian women born out of the anti-racism struggle following the death of Blair Peach in 1979, and still on the frontline in the fight against fundamentalism, racism, domestic abuse and, together with a recent, small but very effective group Justice for Women, justice for women driven to kill their abusive husbands. SBS held on tenaciously to their collective structure and only finally relinquished it in October 1998 to move to a modified or 'democratic hierarchy', with joint co-ordinators, to give greater support and structure. Interestingly this move was not imposed by their funders (including the London Borough of Ealing) with whom they have always had very good relations, but came from within because they were afraid that they would no longer be able to attract women to devote the same amount of time and commitment to the collective as they had given over the years[6].

In addressing the eight case studies that follow I was concerned to cover essentially the same ground already covered in Chapter 4 i.e. questions about their governance, relationships between paid staff (if these exist) and committee members and between the Chair and the senior staff member, about financial viability and so on, but to make this as specific as possible to organisations which came out of the women's movement. So questions ranged around:

- whether their organisation was structured hierarchically or as a collective (or a modified/hybrid form of either)?
- the strengths and weaknesses of their chosen structure,

- how far it had been able to adapt to change and external contingency factors?

- how far it could cope effectively with conflict?

- how far it brought out the best in staff, committee members and volunteers?

- what sort of style of leadership the organisation allowed/ encouraged?

but also allowed space for interviewees to introduce their own concerns). As before (on the principle of triangulation) I interviewed at least two (and usually far more) women from each organisation chosen because they had different standpoints and interesting perspectives to share. The case studies were chosen through a process of network sampling, with a concern for balance in size, constituency, area of work and so on. Six are individual organisations (originating between the years 1975 and 1983, a period when the WLM was at its strongest). The other two are movements – the refuge movement and the rape crisis movement which originated in 1971 and 1976, respectively although the Rape Crisis Federation was established as recently as 1996. The eight organisations are as follows, in chronological order of first setting up:

Women's Refuge Movement	(1971)
Rights of Women	(1975)
Feminist Library	(1975)
Rape Crisis movement	(1976)
East London Black Women's Organisation	(1979)
300 Group	(1980)
Maternity Alliance	(1980)
Women's Resource Centre	(1983)

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[1] The National Women's Register's membership is now down to nearly 8000 members in 486 groups (communication with NWR office, 7.9.99)

[2] Jo Freeman describes consciousness-raising or 'rap' groups:

> The process is known as "consciousness-raising" and is very simple. Women come together in groups of five to fifteen and talk to one another about their personal problems, personal experiences, personal feelings and personal concerns. From this public sharing of experiences comes the realization that what was thought to be individual is in fact common; what was considered a personal problem had a social cause and probably a political solution. (from Freeman J., ed. (1975) *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, Palo Alto, Mayfield Publishing Company: pp.451-2).

[3] See Nine Years Together: A History of a Women's Liberation Group, (1978), *Spare Rib*, Issue 69, April 1978: pp.41-46.

[4] Interview with Jennifer McCabe and Olga Heaven, 11.6.97

[5] See Black Women together: Organization of Women of Afro-Caribbean and African Descent, *Spare Rib*, No. 61, August 1977 and Black Women Fighting Back, *Spare Rib*, No.95, June 1980

[6] Interview with Hannanah Siddiqui of Southall Black Sisters, 15.4.99 and see (1990) *Against the Grain: 1979-1989: A Celebration of Survival and Struggle*, London, Southall Black Sisters.

Women's Refuge Movement

The women's refuge movement lies right at the centre of second wave feminism. However its organisation and structure has already been quite extensively examined (particularly in Dobash & Dobash,1992) so this is in no way an attempt to give a full history or overview but rather to pick up on some of the organizational challenges it poses and look at one or two examples by way of illustration.

The field of domestic violence/ refuge provision has, of course, in England produced two very different responses. The very first, rather chaotic, refuge was started in Chiswick in 1971 by Erin Pizzey who was very much in the mould of charismatic, larger-than-life leaders, had rich and/ or influential friends including many local women in and around Chiswick, and attracted a great deal of publicity :

> Although the original group began as a feminist collective, under the influence of
> Pizzey it soon eschewed such ideas and practices in favour of those of a distinct and
> in many respects idiosyncratic type of therapeutic community.....Chiswick's
> organization, particularly the uncontrolled open-door policy with its excessive
> overcrowding, created an even greater sense of chaos and constant crisis than in
> other refuges.... Proposed solutions involved individual therapy, psychiatric
> intervention and long-term institutional care. This model of organization and
> regime did not embrace notions of social care. (Dobash & Dobash, 1992: p. 84-86)

Eric Pizzey was to evolve a philosophy which, as she explained in a 1977 documentary on Chiswick Women's Aid, distinguished between 'two very different types of women' 'innocent victims' and 'women who were the victims of *their own violent relationships*'. In fact she was to argue in 1998:

> Almost immediately, people working (in the refuge) with the women and children
> became aware that of the first 100 women coming into the refuge, 62 were as
> violent as the partners they had left. Not only did they admit their violence in the
> mutual abuse, but the women were abusive to their children.[1]

This view, that some women are complicit in their own abuse and even addicted to violence, runs directly contrary to the philosophy of what was to become the Women's Aid Federation England (WAFE), the collection of 35 refuges which originally came together in 1975 and currently supports around 150 refuges in England. (There are comparable co-ordinating bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and close links maintained between all four). It was to lead to a total split between Pizzey and the women's movement[2] and she has over the years referred to it with total contempt.[3]

Erin Pizzey was to leave Chiswick in 1981, the same year it changed its name to Chiswick Family Rescue (it was to change this again to Refuge in 1993). This would seem to be a classic case of the challenge of the founder director whose skills are essential in the entrepreneurial, formation stage of an organisation (see Chapter 2 for Mintzberg's model of the life cycle of an organisation and Riger's views on the 'founder's trap') but become increasingly inappropriate as the organisation grows. Refuge, while acknowledging her as their founder, now strongly disassociate themselves from Erin Pizzey's views on women's complicity in violence.

However in 1985 their new Director, Sandra Horley (who came to Chiswick in 1983 after five years of very 'hands on' works as a practitioner in refuges in the Midlands) had to fight a battle with some of the then Management Committee who felt that to totally abandon Erin Pizzey's views would be 'to float the organisation into the feminist camp'[4] Sandra Horley felt this was a question of human rights and justice and stood her ground on the principle of women's empowerment. Unusually, for a women's organisation, it was members of the Management Committee who resigned rather than the Director. Much the same was to happen in 1997 with a very public row over conflict of interest on the part of a committee member over false memory syndrome; again it was three members of the committee who resigned, including the Chair Lady Rayne. As a result of these incidents the Chief Executive was delegated to draw up an extensive induction pack which spells out the philosophical principles and policies of Refuge. This included job descriptions for Chair and Chief Executive and codes of conduct of how staff and trustees treat each other and includes such points as 'Council members, collectively or individually should not undermine the delegated authority of the Chief Executive in the eyes of the staff or other stakeholders' and 'To acknowledge that the Chief Executive has a responsibility to protect the reputation of the organisation and that it may be necessary for her to act immediately on her own initiative'[5]. - which is quite an unusual way to deal with the challenge of how to deal with critical as well as routine decisions and displays a partnership model of governance where the Chief Executive is very much a senior partner.

Such organisational backing gave Sandra Horley the authority to help Refuge to grow and develop into a very efficiently (and hierarchically) run, multi-facetted agency which not only runs refuges across London but also 'offers a nursery, counselling support, housing officers, resettlement and outreach work, lobbying on the issue of woman abuse and a national crisis line.'[6] Although it currently has a man as Chair, it describes itself as 'women centred, women led', had an income of about £1.5 million in 1998, has 400 bed spaces, 65 paid staff and up to a hundred volunteers. Its latest fact sheet describes it as:

> The UK's *largest single provider of refuge services and specialist support to abused women and children.* In one year alone Refuge will provide emergency safe accommodation to 1,200 women and children and will receive 20,000 calls from women across the UK via the 24 hour National Crisis Line.[7]

At the same time Refuge manages to retain something of the entrepreneurial 'glamour' of its early days with Sandra Horley as a very high profile Director who speaks and writes extensively and acts as an 'expert witness' in court, with royal patronage until her death in the person of Princess Diana (who involved herself very closely) and, as the **25th Birthday Review** makes clear, very high profile supporters and Board of Management, including Cherie Booth. There cannot be many other women's organisations who can boast three Ladies resigning from its Trustee Board as Refuge did in 1997 over false memory syndrome (Lady Rayne, Lady Parker and Lady Browne-Wilkinson). Its current board has a balance between more high profile and those with an appropriate 'skills mix'. Its model of governance is closest to a managerial perspective - a partnership model (Cornforth & Edwards, 1998), with the Chief Executive having the role of a senior partner and

the fact that Refuge has throughout had very strong (if very different), high profile leadership probably owes as much to the fact that it is not a membership organisation (which usually produces, at least partially - most models being hybrid - a very different democratic perspective, leading to a political model of governance) as to the fact that both its Directors have in very different ways been extremely skilled in managing their public relations and building the profile of the organisation.

Unfortunately, however, relations between Refuge and WAFE remain cool, partly because the ways of working of the refuges in WAFE, and WAFE, itself are very different, with the philosophy woven into the way of working:

> The style of work and relationships between women who live and work in refuges follows ideas about working with, rather than for, battered women and horizontal, rather than vertical, forms of organization including collective decision making and the involvement of women who have experienced abuse...Wider social change, particularly of the status of women and of the institutions responding to violence is very much on the agenda...From the outset, Women's Aid focused attention on the need for permanent housing as well as temporary refuge, and has actively campaigned for both. While refuge continues to be the priority and the political base of the movement, permanent housing is a crucial part of the movement's agenda of change and represents one of battered-women's most difficult practical problems. Legislation was passed early in the life of the movement. e.g. The Domestic Violence Act (1976) ... which allowed for temporary exclusion of the violent partner using a civil injunction with the possibility of attaching powers of arrest for subsequent violation.   (Dobash & Dobash: 1992 89-94)

WAFE has extensively tracked its own development. In *Building Bricks: A Women's Aid guide to running refuges and support services* (Turner,1996) it both explains its own development and gives very practical advice for new and existing refuges. It explains how WAFE does not (unlike Refuge) provide direct refuge provision but 'promotes the interests of women and children experiencing abuse, to monitor the law, social policy and practice on domestic violence, and to provide educational and practical resources to local refuge groups and to the general public' (p.11). It is particularly interesting on organisational development and on its commitment to 'collective working' which:

> has been a key element of the management of a Women's Aid project since the early 1970s . The term is defined in the WAFE Statement of Aims and Principles as referring to a participative and non-hierarchical way of working. In practice, people interpret the term in different ways ... this way of working derives from the women's movement of the early 1970s where it meant a commitment to certain values about how we work together. These values include:
>
> * valuing everyone's contribution
> * Participative and consensus decision making – having a right to be consulted and heard;
> * Sharing knowledge, skills and power.
>
> The most important insight from the early Women's Aid movement which has continued today is the valuing of women's personal experience, and an approach which means there is no 'them and us' .....

> There is still a commitment to maintaining these values today in Women's Aid, but
> in practice this is very hard to do without effective structures...
> (Turner, 1996 p.41-2)

Women's Aid commitment to collective working was strong but not doctrinaire. They fully accepted that a number of their member organisations now operate a hierarchical structure. But they argued that there are 'key elements of good management which apply equally to collectives as well as to hierarchical structures (and) should be incorporated into the management procedures. These are:

- defining clear roles, responsibilities and accountability
- clear boundaries between different roles
- consultation
- participation in decision making by all affected
- recognition of the potential of all
- recognition of the specific knowledge and skills of individuals
- good delegation and sharing of tasks. (Turner,1996: p. 42)

It is significant that, having till 1999 retained a form of collective structure (with a management committee and with differentiated roles but pay parity) WAFE underwent a substantial organisation review involving consultation (including a membership survey) with its membership of women's refuges to develop a structure to sustain it over the next ten years. Writing to WAFE members at the end of this process on 15 June 1999 the chair of the Women's Aid Council, Jan Frances, announced the decision:

> To set up an internal management structure consisting of a Director and
> Team Managers....
>
> The best aspects of collective working will be maintained in the new structure, including teamwork, equal opportunity and consultative structures within an ethos of inclusivity and participation At the same time, the organisation will benefit from a management structure that can deliver better accountability, fast and responsive decision-making, support for staff, evaluation of performance and proper co-ordination of all national service activities.
>
> In addition, the new structure will free up council to concentrate on the long term strategic issues and to provide more focused leadership to the organisation.[8]

If we look at just one of WAFE's members we see a similar pattern of challenge and adaptation.. In 1995 Southwark Women's Aid (SWA) ran five houses, with places for 28 adults and a disability and counselling project. They were a collective of twelve full-time workers with differentiated jobs but total pay parity. However as external pressures for accountability by funders grew, coupled with internal pressures to deliver an increasingly heavy workload and increased awareness of the new managerialism sweeping the voluntary sector, there was growing discontent with the concept of 'no manager' and an apparent lack of valuing in pay terms for those who had been there many years although SWA was in fact rare in having a very stable staff group, with one woman who had been there since the late '70s. In particular it was felt that a collective structure was no longer appropriate to meet the increased demands being made on refuges. These views echo almost exactly those identified by Iannello about the move away from consensual organisation arising

from 'major concerns over *efficiency'...* 'women began to want recognition ...were feeling used ... wanted leadership' (Chapter 2 p.18)

One of the long-standing staff members of SWA, Linda Graham[9], set the ball rolling by holding a series of brainstorming consultative meetings amongst a range of refuges in London who were contemplating change. Within SWA, money was raised for a consultancy, carried out in early 1996, to examine the most appropriate structure for SWA into the future. Workers felt quite threatened by this process and in need of support which the Management Committee (MC) did not have time to give them. This was indicative of long-standing problems with the MC who were experiencing very rapid turn-over and were never on the spot to make decisions – a change to a more hierarchical structure would relieve pressure on them and reduce the need to call emergency meetings. Linda Graham felt that she was, in effect, expected to take a lot of management responsibility but that her right to do this was then questioned. She believed that there were more disadvantages than advantages in being a collective, although many remain very attached to the collective ideal. For her, on one hand a collective can provide a 'comfort zone' in which no one need make a great effort. On the other hand over-commitment can cause burn-out and resentment.

SWA's consultancy suggested three alternative solutions:

- remain a collective but have a have a better structure/line of responsibility.
  Different people take responsibility for different areas of work – each directly responsible to the MC. This was rejected.
- Team work or sub-groups working on different subjects e.g. on policy making on admissions/ discharge. This was in fact current practice and should be incorporated into any new structure.
- Introducing a hierarchy, with an overall manager managing finance worker/ admin worker/ and maintenance worker and refuge co-ordinator (who manages the refuge workers and deputises for the manager as needed)

In the event the third option was chosen and SWA joined a lengthening list of refuges to move away from collectivity.

Another London based organisation, London Women Aid (LWA) (which did not actually provide refuge services but rather a confidential helpline which referred women to refuge accommodation and specialist support and advice agencies throughout London) made a different decision in 1998 when it suggested a revised structure based on two collectives – management committee and staff, It was a structure, however, that it was never able to put into practice as in April 1999 the LBGC, its principal funder, withdrew funding from LWA and the organisation, founded in 1980, closed down. It was thus external contingency factors (especially LBGC's increased preoccupation with quality assurance) which dealt the final blow to LWA.

However it was clearly LWA's acute internal problems which led to this decision. The LBGC moved to safeguard the service and undertook an extensive consultation as to how it might be alternatively provided. So the decision to withdrew support from LWA was an indictment of it **organisationally,** rather than of the need for the service. The **LBGC Revenue Grant Report** on London Women's Aid dated 27 January 1999 reports 'serious concerns about several key areas which impact on the quality of service provided by LWA'. Under **Management** it identifies extreme difficulty in finding and keeping Management Committee members, with the 1998 AGM inquorate and a constant air of crisis management. Under **Staff** it reveals no training, no formal supervision or appraisal and the only staff member with a contract and job description on long term sick leave. Under **Operational framework** it reveals that although LWA was making moves to become a Company Limited by Guarantee and set up complaints, disciplinary and equal opportunities policies 'in the meantime, the organisation remains without basic procedures and policies and lacks formal planning and review mechanisms.' It has also failed to implement LBG's Quality Assurance Measures. And under **Relationships** it describes persistently bad relationships with both key agencies and individual refuges, and no formal complaints or feedback system. These echo of some of these problems in the women's aid type organisation described in Cornforth and Edwards (1998).

LWA was never a member of WAFE, although it could certainly have profited from WAFE's training and advice on its management and governance. Ironically LWA had been awarded a large grant of £170,000 from the National Lottery in 1997 for an Information Officer and Development and Support Officer but had not had the structure or requisite stability to be able to take this up. Kim Smith, who had been LWA's Joint Coordinator from September 1993 – August 1996, points out how a large influx of money can be as destabilising to a vulnerable organisation (a description which applies to most Women's *Aids or refuges* because of the nature of the work) as no money[10]. She also identifies problems caused by lack of boundaries between the MC, paid staff and volunteers, and the difficulty in finding volunteer or user representatives with the necessary skills to make effective Management Committee members in a political model of governance which gave greater emphasis to democratic accountability.

In response to the shortcomings in LWA identified above, LBG drew up in May a **Brief for New London-Wide Domestic Violence Helpline, Referral and Support Service.** This not only sets up a detailed two phase programme for the development of the service (which will be 'women-only') but also states that 'it is expected that the new service provider will have a clear management structure and accountable management committee/ managing body', as well as being very responsive to service users and working within LBG's Quality Assurance Measures. The budget of £100,000 to provide this service 24 hours a day 365 days a year is felt by those in the field to be quite inadequate. Nevertheless there were four bids, including Refuge and WAFE, and in the end the LBGC decided to accept Refuge's bid 'on the basis that LBG had been funding them as a refuge for some years and had not received any complaints'[11]. However they were forced to reconsider because they received a 'number of letters from women's refuges protesting against this decision'

and in the end the grant was made 'conditional on Refuge engendering positive relations with other women's refuges'.

Compared with many organisations both Refuge (turnover £1.5 million and 65 staff) and Woman's Aid (turnover of about £0.5million and around seventeen staff) are well-funded and well-staffed but compared with the urgent need for refuge provision their funding (as that of most local refuges) is woefully inadequate and (in the words of a recent WAFE publication on funding) 'arbitrary and piecemeal'. This makes their achievement all the more impressive:

> The provision of refuge services is no longer a marginalised activity provided by local groups at the cost of constant campaigns and fights for recognition and resources. These services are now recognised and valued, even by those who cannot find the resources to support them. The management and operation of these groups has generally reached a level of efficiency and good practice which allows them to to be called 'professional' in a non-pejorative way. (Ball,1994:p.63)

It is very unfortunate that, for all sorts of historical reasons, these two lead players still perceive themselves to be in ideological competition, although Refuge is now an associate member of WAFE so there will hopefully be growing opportunities for dialogue. As Sandra Horley says, they really must 'sing from the same hymn sheet' and the conditions imposed by the LBGC should hasten this process. Certainly there is likely to be a far great convergence of structure and style between the two organisations as WAFE negotiates a more managerial and hierarchical structure for the future, while striving to retain all that was best about its collective past.

To sum up: *The women's refuge movement started in 1971 with the founding by Erin Pizzey of Chiswick Women's Aid. This helped to get the issue of domestic violence recognised and there are today around 150 refuges in England. Chiswick Women's Aid started as a collective, but after Pizzey's departure in 1981, it developed into a very managerial organisation, now called Refuge, running several refuges and a 24 hou crisis line and led by a high profile Director and spokeswoman, Sandra Horley. It has recently been awarded £100,000 per annum to run the Domestic Violence Helpline for London following the demise of London Women's Aid.*

Meanwhile in 1975 the Women's Aid Federation England, with, in due course, parallel federations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, was formed to support the growing number of refuges and there have been tensions between the two organisations ever since. WAFE has had a strong but not doctrinaire, commitment to collective working both in its own governance and in the advice it gives its members but, after a strategic development programme, is currently adapting its own internal management structure and governance away from collectivity

Although both organisations are comparatively large and well-resourced (Refuge with a turnover around £1.5million and 65 staff, WAFE £0.5 million and around 17

staff), compared with other organisations examined, this in no way meets the demand and there is an urgent need for far more refuge spaces.

All the organisations cited have had problems developing appropriate governance and structures and responding to various contingency factors both internally and externally, echoing the organisational dilemmas explored by Cornforth and Edwards. In Refuge's case, the challenge of a idiosyncratic founder director has obviously played a part. Both organisations have illustrated different responses to similar challenges but as WAFE in particular enters a new stage of development (its 'mature' stage?) the two organisations are reaching greater convergence around a more managerial and hierarchical structure, although WAFE is determined to retain the best working practices encouraged by collective working.

This case study demonstrates both the capacity to change structure and governance, adapting collective structures in the face of contingency forces. It also demonstrates the importance of developing both appropriate leadership roles and the capacity to deal with conflict.

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[1] Erin Pizzey (1988) Men are strong, men are bullies and men are violent. Men don't cry when their wives beat them up – this is the unreported face of domestic violence *The Observer*, 5 July 1998..

[2] See Chapter 7 of Pizzey, 1974, for a description of the women's aid movement in the early days, before the split with Chiswick.

[3] In 1986, for instance, she was to refer to them in an interview with Brian Deer in the *Sunday Times* in 17 August 1986 as 'that bunch of smelly lesbians' and her **Counterblast** programme on March 30 1999 accused feminists of 'looking for a cause, and funding, so they highjacked my issue' and again claimed that feminists have no grounds to assert that domestic violence is a problem primarily for women'

[4] See two telephone interviews with Sandra Horley 8.6.99 Further references to Sandra Horley are to the same interviews. Ironically subsequently Refuge has been considered to be not feminist enough and currently has a man as Chair.

[5] From Refuge's *Council of Management Terms of Reference*

[6] Lady Rayne, Chairwoman of the Council of Management in *The Refuge 25th Birthday Review* p.20.

[7] Refuge Fact sheet 1998.

[8] Letter from Jan Frances, Chair of Women's Aid Council to members 15 June 1999

[9] Interview with Linda Graham at Southwark Women's Aid 11.9.96.

[10] Interview with Kim Smith 29.4.99

[11] *The Source (Newsletter of WRC)* August 1999, p.3. Following quotations from the same article.

The Feminist Library

Most of the organisations we have examined here have changed or grown almost
beyond recognition. The Feminist Library (FL) has changed very little, apart from
its name and its expanding stock. In fact in some ways it could be said to have gone
backwards in staffing and financial terms. When it first opened its doors as the
Women's Research and Resources Centre (WRRC) in the Spring of 1975 it had just
£50, but it advertised for a paid worker and its first appointee, the writer Zoe
Fairbairns, was required, and somehow managed, to fundraise her own salary, as
well as to fund the newsletter, the stamps and so on. In its heyday in the 80s the
Feminist Library (it changed its name in 1983) was able, with the help of grants
from the Rowntree Trust, the Ford Foundation and particularly the Greater London
Council, to have five paid staff. When the GLC was abolished in 1986 its funding
was initially replaced by the London Boroughs Grants Scheme at a much lower
level (to cover two staff Members) but only up till 1988, and since then the Library
has been run entirely by volunteers[1]. Although it has received grants these have
tended to be on a small and specific scale - for instance recently for better computer
software and £2,500 from the Lottery for a new photocopier.

The change of name in 1983 reflected a considerable change of emphasis. WRRC
was originally started by women academics, including Diana Leonard and Leonore
Davidoff, who came out of organisations like the British Sociological Society
Women's Caucus and the Feminist History Group. Its first home in 1975 was a
small room near London University and:

> Initially the centre's purpose was to maintain a register of current research on
> women, provide a support and contact network for women engaged in research, and
> disseminate the results of research through seminars, publications and a quarterly
> newsletter. The group also published a directory of women's studies courses
> throughout the country in 1981. The final stated aim of the WRCC was the
> establishment of a library to collect the increasing quantities of printed material
> emanating from the women's liberation movement.
> (Collison & Follini, 1995: p.159)

It was this last aim which was to become increasingly prominent, with the
collection of books as well as journals and ephemera (all donated, or acquired in
exchange for the Library's **Newsletter).** This was partly because the need for a
collection of resource materials was becoming more urgent (and was not available
elsewhere). But it was also because the research function was being increasingly
taken over by the growth of women's studies courses and the establishment in 1989
of the Women's Studies Network, with which one of the WRRC's founders, Diana
Leonard, was, and has remained, very involved. This shows the Library to be both
very responsive to changing needs and external factors such as those above and
careful to stick to what it is particularly good at (I shall return to this point at the
end of this section). In 1977, for instance, it had already published several
pamphlets and was considering publishing a general feminist journal but felt that
the **Feminist Review** (started in 1977) 'swept the boards on that front' and 'In 1983
the magazine **Trouble and Strife** was begun by a group that had coalesced around

the centre' (Davidoff, 1996: p.5).

Concentrating on its library function, FL's collection was to grow dramatically from the fifty items with which it opened to, today, approximately 10,000 books, 1,500 journals, 1,200 articles, 9,000 pamphlets and miscellaneous ephemera on the women's movement both in the UK and abroad. This is all the more impressive when you realise that the Library has only ever had a budget for book acquisition in the mid 80s; otherwise virtually all its collection has come from donations. As the collection grew, it soon became clear that the traditional Dewey system of classification was quite unsuitable. Following a seminar led by Michele Roberts on a 'feminist classification system' the Library hired a librarian, Vivian Griffiths, to devise such a system. This included fourteen broad subject areas and, with refinements and amendments, this has been felt to work very effectively ever since.

As it grew, the Library was forced to move several times to acquire more space. In May 1977 it moved from North Gower Street to Clerkenwell Close, then in 1979 to very well-placed premises above the bookshop Sisterwrite in Islington and then in 1983, along with a Women's Place, into the GLC-funded building at Hungerford House. This was given at a peppercorn rent, and when the Library found itself threatened with a 'full market rent' following the demise of the GLC, a strong campaign led to the offer by Southwark of its present premises at 5 Westminster Bridge Road, into which the library moved in 1989, again on a peppercorn rent. Two years later, in 1991, Southwark, too, was threatening to move to market rents and it was again only a large and vocal campaign which persuaded its then Women's Committee to ensure the Library a grant to cover the rent.

So the Library has at least been able to feel reasonably secure in the premises which it has made very much its own and which house its growing collection. It has, however, had no other really substantial grants, and this has meant that it has been entirely volunteer-run since the London Boroughs Grant Scheme curtailed its grant in 1988. This has meant that its activities have in turn inevitably been somewhat reduced and the list of subscribers to its newsletter has fallen from 1,800 in April 1985 to around 300 today. However, unlike so many other GLC-funded women's organisations, it has survived and is now open one full and two half days a week to around fifty users a month, with around another fifty phone enquiries a month[2].

It has also, unusually, survived as a collective[3] (although, as Eve Setch argues), as a changed collective:

> ... not only in relation to the women involved and the numbers, but also in its construction. It began as a group of women who were interested in running the WRRC, which included then workers on an informal basis. By 1983 it had effectively become a workers' collective. In 1985 it was decided that there would be a three month probationary period and members should also be volunteers.
>
> By 1996 the qualifications for joining had been altered to three consecutive meetings. Likewise the responsibility of the collective has been in flux – who should it answer to? One solution was an advisory users group, set up in 1984.
>
> When the entire structure changed in 1986, so did the collective. It became the

> group which ran the library on a day to day basis, staffed by volunteers who also
> worked there and meeting fortnightly rather than monthly. But there were
> continuous features, for example the issue of responsibility was still open.
> A dilemma often faced has been that debates have tended to recur over and over
> again within this framework. With frequent changes in membership and precarious
> financial standing this was, and to some extent still is, inevitable. Whether this is a
> solvable problem, or even one that needs solving has yet to be worked out.
> (Setch, 1998: p.8)

In 1999, the collective had five members made up of present or past volunteers.
The two members I met felt strongly that collectivity was not only the right way to
organise politically, but was also both efficient and effective. The sort of problems
outlined above were dealt with through training days for new volunteers (although
not enough of those attending went on to become regular volunteers) and good
internal communication. They would certainly concur at least with the second half
of the statement of Collieson and Follini (themselves one time collective members):

> Dependence on volunteer labour is obviously unsatisfactory insofar as the provision
> of a service is concerned, but there are positive aspects in that many volunteers feel
> empowered by their involvement in running FL, and for several who were
> unemployed, volunteer work led to paid employment.
> (Collieson and Follini, 1995: p.161)

For the collective members I spoke to their involvement 'makes me feel
responsible, that I am doing something, not just being a housewife', 'gives me
skills, responsibility, contacts with other feminists.'[4]. They felt the collective
worked because everyone was so committed. They were in fact ambivalent about
the need for fundraising on a substantial scale. Funders, like charitable status
(which the Library acquired in the late 70s), are inclined to attach strings - like the
recent 'string' imposed by Southwark Council that the Library must allow access to
men, a highly contentious issue which has been argued repeatedly down the years.
Given a choice between being 'poor and pure', working as volunteers with principle
or becoming possibly paid professionals with proper funding, they felt inclined
towards the first.

So the Library seems to face different choices - it can possibly continue as it is
almost indefinitely as a rare, if not unique, form of pure, idealistic feminism.
Visiting the library is in some ways like a throw back to the 70s - warm, very
helpful, slightly chaotic, very idiosyncratic - like its unique feminist classification
system 'which takes women as the primary point of reference' (Collieson and
Follini, 1995: p.163). There are children there at half-term and an evening
discussion group every other Tuesday (on subjects such as Homophobia and
Women and Violence). As it is, the collective structure works extremely well,
empowering to all.

But while the Library is there for who those are determined to make their way there,
it is clearly not reaching all those who need or might appreciate it. Its 'donations
only' style of acquisition means it has inevitable gaps. It needs to become
computerised. For this it needs money, professional librarians etc. Its current
attempts at fund-raising - a Friends scheme, encouraging paying by direct debit,
charging for inserts in its mailings, raising money for a new photocopier, seem

aimed at continuing to operate at the current level. But Eve Setch, who has done research on the Library feels:

> If anything this research points out to me the importance of acknowledging the growth of the centre in order not to keep going round in circles, to try and push what women were doing in the past into the future (although this is a difficult task when funding is not secure).
> (Setch, 1998: p.8)

The contrast between the current situation of the Feminist Library and the Fawcett Library, as it plans the construction of its purpose-built National Library for Women (with a £4.2 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund - on a rather different scale from the £2,500 awarded to the Feminist Library from the Small Grants fund to replace its photocopier) could not be more pronounced. But the Library has always resisted offers to become part of a larger academic institution, unlike the Fawcett Library which chose to become part of the London Guildhall University in 1977 (see p.110 above):

> Despite the prospect of more secure accommodation, paid staff, more resources for collection development and greater prestige, the library's management collective has always been very reluctant to pursue this option, seeing it as only a last resort if FL were in danger of being dispersed. The collective is committed to the library as a feminist organization with an agenda that goes beyond the provision of a library and information service. It seems unlikely that FL could retain its particular structure and ethos if it were to become part of a much larger academic library.
>
> One principal objective of FL over the last decade has been to make it more accessible to women from traditionally marginalized groups: women of colour, Irish women, Jewish women, lesbians, older women, and women with disabilities. Merger with a larger institution would undoubtedly limit access both in principle and in practice and would likely result in the library's becoming inaccessible to many of its current users. (Collieson and Follini, 1995: p.162)

One of the tools the Library uses to make it more accessible, apart from giving copious details of its physical accessibility in all its literature, is keeping detailed monitoring statistics on ethnic origin, sexuality, ability and age so that different groups can be targeted. But it has a policy of never paying for advertisements (although it does arrange exchange of information with other organisations), just as it does not pay for books. Its funders, Southwark Council, are trying to make it reach targets, be more proactive, work on a development plan and possibly go out into schools.[5]

The received contemporary wisdom is that organisations have to grow or die, that they have to diversify and develop. But Zoe Fairbairns, who remains a close friend of the Library, makes a strong argument that its work – the way in which it has preserved the history of second wave feminism and made it available to whoever wishes to have access to it – is so important in itself that the Library should not be turned into something else[6]. It is also nearly unique in that not only is it **about** feminism, but it is also run in a nearly unique feminist way (it is significant that the Library chose to change its name **to the Feminist** Library in 1983 when many were becoming increasingly wary of the term). The ideal of collectivity, abandoned by so many, has been handed down, not without problems but still intact and currently

operates in a very 'pure' way. It is perhaps the reasons cited above which ensured that the Feminist Library retained this structure and has not developed down more managerial or hierarchical pathways as many other organisations have. Zoe Fairbairns (knowing from her own experience how hard it is run such a service) also has enormous admiration for the way the Library is run entirely by volunteers and for the great commitment this demonstrates. In a sense the Library was never sustainable (she would wonder every time she went in to the office whether there would be enough money to pay herself, the stamps etc) and yet, against the odds, it has been sustained. It was planning to mark its 25th birthday in 2000 with a big party. This will be a real cause for celebration. There are obvious challenges about updating the library and acquiring more space for the collection (at the moment there is no great incentive to catalogue the backlog of books because there is so little shelf space) and of ensuring that it takes its rightful place in the changed world of women's archives which will come into existence as the Fawcett Library becomes the national Women's Library[7] By the end of 2000 a relationship with the Women's Library was being established, with the later agreeing to provide a measure of mentoring for the FL[8]. Whatever happens, it must be hoped that the Feminist Library will be allowed to continue to contribute to holding onto a past which is extraordinarily important to women so that it is there into the future[9] – and not being ashamed to use the word feminism.

. **To sum up:** *The Feminist Library was founded in 1975 as the Women's Research and Resources Centre by a group of women academics, changing its name in 1983. Its purpose has been to collect the increasing quantities of donated material emanating from the women's liberation movement. It has had various homes and has since 1989 had premises donated by Southwark Council. Although it was, up till 1988, to receive funding (from the GLC etc) which allowed it to employ staff, it has since 1988 operated on a shoestring entirely on a volunteer basis. This means that although it has acquired a considerable collection (10,000 books, 1,500 journals etc.) it can only give limited access to them, although it is much valued by its users. While most organisation which came out of the WLM have grown and developed more hierarchical or managerial structures, the Feminist Library is one of the few organisations to operate still as a pure collective, currently of five members and it seems to be its size which allows it to do this. It is not yet clear how its future will be affected by the new Women's Library.*

This case study thus demonstrates that a collectively run organisation can survive into the 21st century but only, it would seem, on a very small scale.

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[1] I am indebted for these historical details to three articles in different editions of the *Feminist Library Newsletter,* by Fairbairns, 1995; Davidoff, 1996 and Setch, 1998; and to a telephone interview with Zoe Fairbairns, 24.2.99.

[2] See AGM report for 18.4.98

[3] See Revised Constitution of Feminist Library Information Resource Centre (FLIRC) approved by Collective meeting, 2.9.98. This allows both for the main collective 'open to all women subscribers who participate in the running of FLIRC ... and who attend collective meetings... Only the Collective can issue policy statements or make comments'. There is also a capacity to form 'sub-collectives'.

[4] Interview with collective members Roberta Wiseman and Rosa Guzzetta, 16.2.99

[5] See Collective Minutes for meeting on 17.2.99

[6] Telephone interview with Zoe Fairbairns, 24.2.99

[7] Interview with Roberta Wiseman, 23.2.99.

[8] Interview with Antonia Byatt, Director of the Women's Library, 10.11.2000-12-200

[9] Conversation with Diana Leonard about the lack of co-ordination between different archives of the women's movement, including those of the Women's Studies Network, and personal archives, 17.3.99.

Rights of Women
(Vindication of the Rights of Woman – Mary Wollstonecraft 1792)

Rights of Women (ROW) came directly out of the women's liberation movement, in response to its fifth demand 'for legal and financial independence.'[1] It was founded in 1975 as a 'feminist organization which informs women of their rights and promotes the interests of women in relation to the law.'[2] It was registered as an Industrial and Provident Society in April 1981 but was best known as a collective, challenging hierarchical and patriarchal models, in its structures as well as its campaigns.

It was to continue as a very effective collective for more than twenty years. Marguerite Russell, a lesbian feminist activist and barrister, conveys something of ROW'S early heady days:

> After a few meetings, we grew from a consciousness raising into an activist group. We managed to get premises and a small grant for a part-time worker and set up the legal advice line for women. There were Law Centres in existence by then, but they did not work on specifically women's issues or operate within a feminist perspective. This was a wonderful time, women had the energy to set up groups. Women's Aid was set up in 1974, ROW in 1975 and the first Rape Crisis Centre in 1976. (Griffin, 1995: p. 53)

ROW went on to be involved in campaigns like 'YBA wife' 'Don't Do It, Di' (a plea which went unheeded) and Rape in Marriage. Its feminism was wide-ranging – from liberal feminism, to global feminism, to lesbian feminism, and lesbian issues, particularly around parenting, have been a very important part of ROW's work since 1982 when the Lesbian Custody Project (LCP) was housed in the office.

Jill Radford describes how in the 80s ROW:

> struggled to transform itself from an autonomous and Women's Liberation group into a
> . voluntary sector feminist organization. This involved developing new structures of accountability as ROW began to employ paid workers. We established a voluntary policy group, with a sub-group to deal with managerial matters...' (Griffin, 1995:p.55)

These staff were to form a workers' collective (with, by 1999, five members, all but one part-time) with the management provided by a Management Committee/Policy Group elected from the membership of ROW (currently around 500). ROW was able to employ staff because at last it had some revenue funding, first from the Greater London Council, which in the first half of the 80s was to prove extremely generous to women's groups, and, once the GLC went, to the London Boroughs Grants Committee (LBGC) which is its principal funder to this day. Funding gave an enormous boost to ROW's work, assisting wide-ranging networking, outreach, more publications and more effective lobbying; however, accountability to funders also generates a lot of bureaucracy, the need for better systems, monitoring and evaluation and so on and, as we shall see, this was an area in which ROW was for a long time vulnerable.

By 1998 ROW's **Bulletin** (4-6 times a year, free to members), **Newsletter** and **Annual Review** reveals a great deal of on-going work on Family Law, Domestic Violence, the Best Interests Campaign, Sexual Violence, Rape, Lesbian parenting and employment. This is accompanied by impressive news of networking with individuals (including overseas visitors) and organisations and details 'In the news' of the extensive media coverage which Rights of Women receives. **The Annual Review 1997-98** reveals 1,614 calls to the Legal advice line which is open for fourteen hours over seven sessions and staffed predominantly by volunteer advisors. Amidst all these achievements, only one line – the plan to 'undertake an organisation and structural review' in 'The Year Ahead' gives a hint of possible internal problems.

At a planning day in August 1997 ROW staff and the Management/Policy Group had prepared a wish list of **Where we'd like Rights of Women to be in the year 2000.** This was a bold and ambitious vision which covered improving its service through more workers and volunteers (and using them better), undertaking research, extending the advice service and adding some case work, improving its publications, moving to new premises (with possibly an additional office in Scotland), securing a better funding base (and a fundraiser), developing better links with women's organisations both in the UK and overseas and becoming (or remaining?) the country's leading women's legal organisation. Above all it constantly reiterated the need for better and more flexible planning in the light of changing requirements, coherent discussion of policy options and appraisal of priorities, clear structures, policies and procedures, open monitoring and critical appraisal.

All this sounded very positive but in fact internally things were becoming difficult for ROW, with particular problems of a management deficit caused by a Management/Policy Group, many of whom preferred to contribute their legal expertise on policy matters rather than get involved with the intricacies of voluntary sector management. Thus the need for such a management review was becoming urgent. In the summer of 1998 the staff prepared a Briefing paper for this organisational review which identified the following difficulties:

- Power imbalances
- Lack of accountability
- Difficulty in decision making
- (Need to) further improve communication with the policy group

ROW's co-ordinator, Linda Diggin was more forthright about how urgent was the need for the review, which she initiated. She felt the collective structure was no longer working (and could not work in the current climate); she described how the Management Committee/Policy Group had hardly met recently (with six or seven meetings cancelled and the AGM not quorate first time round); about how relationships in ROW were inclined to be hostile; bullies in the office were not properly dealt with; and although the disciplinary/grievance procedures were in place, the Management Committee/Policy Group did not wish to get involved in dealing with them. This led to a 'culture of blame' and considerable discontent

amongst workers, several of whom had left.. These are all classic problems of participatory democracy, as identified in the literature (see Chapter 2 above). There was also considerable uncertainty because ROW's funding from the LGBC had been cut by ten per cent, and a stipulation had been made that it should form no more than 60% of ROW's overall funding[3]. This necessitated a strategic approach to funding for almost the first time in ROW's history, although Linda Diggin could see problems ahead trying to fundraise under the banners of either lesbianism or feminism.

ROW managed to raise £5000 from the Baring Foundation for this organisational review and consultants were briefed to carry it out, starting in Autumn 1998. The brief was wide ranging to cover not just the identified problem areas above but:

Structures:
- aims and objectives
- rules
- constitution
- policies and procedures
- planning – three and five year plans
- monitoring and evaluation

Current posts' job descriptions and scope of work
- posts seen as very fragmentary
- no clear decision making process for deciding what new areas of work to take on (e.g. immigration or employment policy work)

Part of the process consisted of interviews with all the staff and management members, with questionnaires via a mail shot to all the members and the volunteers. In February 1999 the consultants (Nors Jackson and Sarah Jackson) presented a **Draft Interim Report and Action Plan** which both identified the problems and came up with some preliminary recommendations. These were finalised in the full **Organisational Review: Report and Action Plan** in March 1999. This report remains confidential but ROW's chair from 1997-8, Catherine Rayner saw it as a very fair analysis, described how valuable she felt the process had been, how the organisation has been 'rallied' and how useful it has been to have someone else spelling out what needs to be said. She also made the point that you are likely to get better value from something you have paid for.

Catherine Rayner had been involved with ROW for about six years, joining the Policy Group as a woman lawyer who felt that the Law Centre movement left out feminism, and finding in ROW an organisation which uniquely offered legal work from a feminist perspective. She felt strongly that ROW still had a very definite purpose and must survive but she recognised, as the Review did, that things had to change. Above all, she recognised that the collective structure which ROW had had since it started was ready for change. As currently constituted, the collective structure had become controlling, did not encourage attention to routine governance or a sense of ownership. Catherine Rayner, however, pointed out that personalities can be very important in small organisations and that structures are only as good as

the people using them – so that in blaming a structure one may be missing the real target of the people operating it.

In accepting the need to change – in a number of areas such as where responsibility lies/accountability/vision/aims/where resources are placed/policies and procedures as well as the need to move to a more hierarchical structure, abandoning pay parity – Catherine Rayner acknowledged that when it worked well a collective structure could be 'incredibly rewarding and wonderful' but it can too often be abused. However she thought the blame lay as much with external agencies as with collectives themselves. Internally their expectations of each other may be too high, but externally they are very misunderstood, and are denied the funding and thus the time and stability to work out problems. This means that collective structures are often doomed to fail. In fact, of course, a collective structure does not equal 'no structure' but a different way of defining responsibility.

Catherine Rayner worried about exactly how the changes would be effected but she saw them as inevitable and 'doable'. However it would be necessary to fundraise and it would remain difficult to raise money for issues such as lesbian parenting or domestic violence. But ROW was too important, and has the support and good will of too many determined women to be allowed to fold. It would continue, even if it has to be run by volunteers.[4] The challenge of the next few months was to see that it can survive re-structured, re-funded and with all the mechanisms in place to resolve and avoid the sort of conflicts with which it had been afflicted.

The workers were empowered to come up with detailed plans. By May 1999 they had gone through the challenging process of producing a mission statement (a first for ROW) and aims and objectives and identifying their unique selling point, with very realistic expectations and an accurate assessment of the current funding situation. At the same time they felt very undermined by threats of more funding cuts from the LBGC and pressures by them to establish close links with Women Against Rape, a radical group which both supports survivors of rape and campaigns for changes in the law, with whom many members of ROW have strong ideological differences.[5] By August 1999 they had realised that the Management and Policy roles had to be separated and were advertising for Management Committee members (with organisational and staff management, financial and fundraising expertise), separately from policy group members, with expertise in the areas of law ROW works on. The main changes were agreed at the AGM in November 1999 – and by the end of the year they were advertising for a Director, with Ranjit Kaur appointed to the post in February 2000, arriving in time for the launch of their Domestic Violence Handbook at the House of Commons in March.

By December 2000 the changes seemed to have become part of the accepted fabric of ROW. The Director spoke of the separation between Management Committee and Policy Sub-Group as working well, with herself and the Management Committee working 'as a team'[6] - a clear example of a partnership model of governance. She explained how this new organisational stability has opened up new sources of funding - not just the renewed funding from LBCC but from the Lottery (£199,726 over three years to expand its current legal services), from the

Nuffield Foundation and from a new emphasis on earned income from publications, training courses, consultancies and speaking engagements. The Director's report from ROW's **Annual Report 2000** celebrates the organisation's 25th birthday but also recognises, in a clear understanding of external contingency factors, that it has not been easy to reach this point intact and indeed thriving:

> The changing economic and political climate has meant that organisations such as Rights of Women have had to critically examine and refocus their own structures and direction. This is an ongoing process. However, by working together in partnership with others, who share our aims and objectives, and through positive strategic planning, we can meet these challenges with confidence and emerge as an even more vibrant, inclusive, and pro-active women's sector organisation. (p.5)

This was echoed by the Chair's comments that ROW was at an exciting point of its history, 'having reflected, consolidated and developed'.

As recently as 1998 ROW appeared to be in decline, possibly even at the end of its life cycle. Its strong revival illustrates very clearly Mintzberg's thesis that 'Demise can be avoided through organisational renewal....through *dramatic turnaround*' (Mintzberg, 1989: p.294)

To sum up: *ROW was founded in 1975 as a feminist organisation in response to the fifth demand of the WLM 'for legal and financial independence'. Although registered as an Industrial and Provident Society, it was known for its collective structure as well as its campaigns. This structure was adapted in the 80s, when it received funding first from the GLC and then the LBGC which allowed it to employ staff, who formed a workers' collective with management provided by a Management Committee/Policy Group. By the mid 90s this structure was showing the need for overhaul, with problems of this Group showing more interest in policy than management, with resultant staff conflicts, power imbalance, lack of accountability etc. At the same time ROW has always been much respected for its campaigns on domestic and sexual violence, best interests, rape, lesbian parenting and employment and for its authoritative publications.*

An organisational review by outside consultants in 1998/9 suggested wide-ranging changes, including moves away from its collective structure. ROW accepted these recommendations and went on to implement them in full - separating out the Management Committee(MC) from the Policy Sub-Group and appointing a Director who is now able to work successfully as a team with the MC. This 'dramatic turnaround' has also had a very positive effect on ROW's potentially very serious funding crisis - with renewal of its grant from the LBGC, together with grants from the Lottery, the Nuffield Foundation and much emphasis given to earned income.

This case study thus demonstrates an organisation which has retained its purpose (which remains highly relevant) but which has adapted its collective structure in response to internal conflict and external contingency factors.

[1] I am indebted for the early history of ROW to Jill Radford's chapter on Rights of Women – Twenty Years of Feminist Activism in Griffin G, 1995.

[2] From the current *What is ROW?* Leaflet

[3] Interview with Linda Diggin, Co-ordinator with ROW, 3.3.99.

[4] Comments in this and the previous two paragraphs come from telephone interview with Catherine Rayner, Chair of ROW 1997-8, 12.4.99

[5] Telephone interview with Linda Diggin, 23.5.99.

[6] Telephone interview with Ranjit Kaur 4.12.00

The Rape Crisis Movement

We have seen in the introduction to this chapter how the rape crisis movement sprang from the heart of the women's *liberation* movement, with the first rape crisis centre (RCC) opening in London in 1976. This did actually manage to get funding from two trusts to employ two workers (Coote & Campbell,1987: p.42) but the rape crisis movement has depended very substantially indeed on volunteer work – and is identified very closely with collectivity.

This is hardly the place to attempt a history or analysis of the whole rape crisis movement, although this undoubtedly needs to be undertaken. What I will do instead is take brief snapshots of four different rape crisis centres over the years and the different challenges of governance they have faced - and end by looking at the development, governance and work of the Rape Crisis Federation which finally became operational in 1996 after years of careful preliminary work.

The **Tyneside Rape Crisis Centre** opened in July 1979 with funding for two workers, with a third added in January 1979. Writing in 1982, the members of the collective explain their overtly feminist ideology:

> Rape reflects and reinforces a power relationship: the power men as a sex have over women as a sex. (Curno et al, 1982: p. 171)

They reflect in some detail on their organisation structure and are very honest about both the strengths and the challenges they face:

> (The RCC) organises along feminist lines. We are non-hierarchical – that is we don't have an executive committee or elect officers, as these functions are shared amongst the members. Before we employed paid workers, the tasks arising out of business meetings were undertaken by member or members volunteering to carry them out. We also had a number of sub-groups meeting regularly who were responsible to the main group, reporting back on their work at general meetings. These sub-groups worked *on fund-raising, publicity, information gathering...and counselling...*
>
> We also tried to pay as much attention to the form and process of our meetings and interactions as we do to the content, trying all the time *to be aware of each others'* feelings, ensuring that all women are involved in decision making, and the tasks of the group. Often those more used to formal structure and hierarchical organisations will query whether feminist principles are compatible with getting things done – but we can say to them that we managed to set up a rape crisis service after only a few months of work. During these months, we taught ourselves the basic counselling skills that we thought we needed, we compiled the necessary legal, medical and other information, we acquired premises, funding, and a phone, and we established contact with social services, the police and other interested agencies. Our meetings were enjoyable even though we were working so hard. We got to know each other really well; this was partly due to the way we were working, and partly due to the closeness and warmth we felt as we practised our counselling skills together. (pp.176-7)

Ironically, the collective see the arrival of the much-needed paid workers as the start of their real problems:

> The meetings subtly changed: sub-groups tended to fold up, and energy seemed to evaporate......This is a serious problem for any organisation employing paid workers. The group is no longer working collectively towards a common goal ; a division develops between 'volunteers' and paid workers – a division with possible sources of resentment on both sides. (p.177)

They describe the tendency for more and more work to be left to the paid workers, with other women seeming to show little interest and warns that:

> Unless steps are taken to intervene in this process, the people who started the project....the collective, can feel left out as information and experience accumulates in the hands of the paid workers. (p.177)

The other side of this equation is that workers are inclined, or feel obliged, to work harder and harder, leading to a sort of 'overwork syndrome' common to many collectives:

> It is a real contradiction that often employees of socialist and/or feminist projects find that they're taken for granted, exploited in pursuit of the high aims of the project. (p. 118)

The collective describes different strategies to combat this tendency, such as a workers' support group, or (the preferred option) each worker being allocated a member of the collective in a one-to-one support relationship. They also describe the difficulty, shared by almost every other women's organisation, of negotiating these complex relationships in an external funding climate which works against any organisation 'run by women for women' so that:

> as long as we have to continue on an annually funded basis, fundraising will predominate over other aspects of the centre's running, both for the paid workers and the collective. (p.179)

They end with an affirmation of the importance *of consciousness-raising* to:

> Strengthen our identity as a consciously *feminist group*, dedicated to offering a service to our sisters and to challenging established ideas about rape and therefore, about women's role in society. (p.180)

Seventeen years later Tyneside RCC is still there to, as its leaflet explains, 'to offer a 'Sexual Assault Counselling and Information Service for Women, both on the telephone and face to face.' It has just produced a pack on 'flashbacks'.

London Rape Crisis Centre

We saw above how the London Rape Crisis Centre (LRCC), established in 1976 was the first of its kind and certainly the first centre to be funded. However the funding it was to receive was always the same 'year by year' funding described above which made it very vulnerable to the constant external questioning of a service provided by women, for women, with a philosophy of treating women as survivors, rather than as victims. Victim Support had been established in 1979 'to offer a comprehensive service of information and support to victims of crime

throughout Britain' and gradually began to expand into support for victims of rape. This much more mainstream provision put many rape crisis centres under increasing scrutiny for their policies on being strictly 'women only', on not working with the police, for ensuring strict confidentiality for the women who turned to them for help and for working from an overtly feminist philosophy, usually collectively.

For the LRCC matters came to a head in 1995 when the London Boroughs Grant Committee (LBGC) withdrew its annual (but standstill since 1986) grant of £67,000. At the time LRCC had a staffing level of 3.5 paid workers, 7 management committee members, 8 team members and 26 volunteer counsellors[1]. The main criticism made of the LRCC was that it relied on an ansaphone out of hours and at weekends but suspicion seems to have surrounded the refusal of the Centre to allow their phone calls to be monitored by the funder on grounds of professional codes of ethics and commitment to confidentially[2].

LRCC mounted a spirited defence of its funding from LBGC but at the same time encouraged replacement funding from covenants from 6000 individual women. LBGC were not persuaded to change their mind and after nearly twenty years as a funded organisation, the London Rape Crisis Centre became volunteer only. Although they have received some funding since, and are certainly still in existence, they operate at a much less ambitious level and are felt to be difficult to get in touch with[3].

Manchester Rape Crisis Centre (MRC)

MRC started in 1980, as a collective with a group of ten women who employed two of their number as a job share.[4] In their paper **Doing unto others: Changing Ways of Working in a Mixed Race Collective** Suryia Nayak and Sara Scott explain how in the 70s 'process was prioritised and any form of leadership was rejected'. Instead rape crisis centres tended to continue to 'draw on the alternative tradition...Informal, anti bureaucratic. Radical/egalitarian/ anti-hierarchical, anti-professional, and committed to consensus decision-making.' During the 80s things changed, with a kind of 'creeping respectability' in response both to internal problems and the availability of external funding from bodies like the GLC. Rape crisis centres tended to go in two directions – in a few cases expanding and becoming more professional, working with police and social services and becoming in effect a mainstream voluntary organisation. On the other hand, many remained small collectives, becoming increasingly insular and defensive. Feeling marginalised, they were often afflicted by funding cuts and acute internal problems, frequently involving battles between black and white women, as if, in a familiar pattern, the external and internal contingency factors fed on each other. and instead achieve a balance between 'preserving a radical feminist practice but also a desire to professionalise: improve the standard of work, set up systems, plan, grow and raise our profile in the city'. If that was one 'push' there was also the major push 'from Black women in the collective for the organisation to become less white'. The paper was intended to show the links between increasingly formal structures 'and the possibility of black and white women working together in a positive

alliance, which makes power visible, increases our accountability to each other as feminists and minimises the pain we inflict on each other.'

The collective are anxious to move away from the stereotypes of 'threat', 'survival' and 'backlash' and instead present 'a more positive story of critical reflection, reflection, growth and alliances across differences.' They work on the assumption that there are structures which can:

1. Help to make power more visible and thereby
2. Create an environment which can accommodate women with differential access to race and class based power and
3. Increase our accountability to each other across the differences between us.

As they move from being a predominantly white to a mixed race collective they concentrate on three examples of changes which are facilitating the process:

1. Monitoring and Evaluation
2. Training of volunteers
3. Support/ supervision.

All these, of course are processes that are critical to the running of any women's organisation. In the case of monitoring and evaluation, these changes have usually been imposed by external funders and seen very negatively 'as men in suits asking for information they had no right to'. MRC, however, decided to turn a negative into a positive:

> ...if counting women was going to be obligatory, we wanted to do it in a way that would 'make women count'. Time was spent developing a detailed m&e system that was tied into a planning cycle and became a specific item on the co-ordinator's job description.

So they decided to develop log sheets 'that count some things for funders and others for us.' It was asking questions about race which led to the development of a Black Women's Service and to a successful funding bid to resource it. An unforeseen consequence of the log sheets led to 'greater consistency of information given and alternatives explored with callers' – and to a greater sense of ownership of the work by members of the collective.

In the case of training, the group moved from a tendency for differences to be minimised and sameness emphasised to an emphasis on making 'power visible within the group. This was no easy option. It involved a highly structured process (including parallel space, different learning styles, global materials) and sought to 'avoid the "cosy" and problematise the taken-for-granted assumptions of similarity'. The result was one of the most joyful training course which 'reduced women's sense of vulnerability and enable(d) a degree of honesty and self-reflection that was quite astonishing.'

Finally the MRC see support/supervision as part of accountability. They recognise the need for 'getting the structures in place and not relying on chance or

personality'. And in their desire to tackle the challenges of white and black women working together they emphasise that:

> There must be formal, enabling structures...Assumptions of shared identity, friendship and sameness which sometimes provided an adequate basis for feminist groups in the 1970s are quite inadequate when we need to negotiate complex differences of power. For us this has meant taking on board some ways of working which appear to come from 'the other side' – that are far more bureaucratic, formal and structured. At the same time many of these emphasise self-reflection in a way that mirrors the kind of work we do with survivors of sexual violence. Although the early radical feminist practice of consciousness raising emphasised process and the relationship between means and ends, this became increasingly split in the 1980s between therapy on the one hand and activism on the other. Our work can be seen as an attempt to re-politicise the interpersonal interactions on which any feminist enterprise is inevitably based.

What they articulate are challenges which face most rape crisis centres, as well as other feminist organisations, especially those, as we saw in the literature, which are collectively run. What distinguishes the MRC is their degree of self-reflection in facing these challenges.

Scarborough Rape Crisis Centre

The previous three organisations were established in the 1970s or early 80s and came directly out of the women's liberation movement. But rape crisis centres do not all come directly from this era. The Rape Crisis Centre in Scarborough (SRCC) was set up in 1996 in response to a complete lack of provision in the area.[5] It is run at the moment entirely by unpaid staff, the two founders and nine volunteers, with four counsellors and five on their management committee (and with premises provided rent free). It offers non-directive counselling and by its second year was receiving 255 calls a year and offering 400 hours of counselling. Its users range from ages of 14 – 62, with 91% of survivors of rape knowing their abuser. The challenge they feel faces them is to find the information women need and to challenge the myths and stereotypes which surround rape, such as the totally misleading labelling for 'date' and 'stranger' rape.

SRRC lays great emphasis on training and hopes to raise money to provide more training. They have used the 'excellent' training provided by Cleveland Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre. Although the style of the women involved in SRRC is very far from the women's liberation movement of the 70s (with service users being referred to at times as 'ladies') the way in which they tackle the 'myths' about rape (she asked for it/ was dressed like a tart/ changed her mind etc), deal with disclosure and offer options, rather than advice, put them right at the heart of what is most empowering about the rape crisis movement.

The Rape Crisis Federation (RCF)

The RCF was launched in 1996 to bring together just such groups as these (only Scarborough is currently not a member). However its long gestation period goes

back to the beginning of the decade[6] (and indeed it had been discussed repeatedly over the years but the time was never felt to be right earlier), with a National Conference organised by the Nottingham Rape Crisis Centre in 1992 being a key stepping stone. The early thoughts on the subject had revolved around the need for the movement to learn from its previous experience, to build on the counselling experience that has built up since the early days, to act as a central collecting point, as container and disseminator of information, training materials and education packs[7].

At this 1992 conference, a National Federation workshop agreed a number of common things felt by everybody:

> The need for some form of organised national voice, the need for some body that could possibly negotiate with Central Government for funding...the need for some form of national campaigning voice to co-ordinate campaigns, national statistics, etc. This workshop was very positive, we recognised our differences and acknowledged that we all need to keep our autonomy. We felt this could be incorporated into the structure of any possible Federation whereby we would all be independent, autonomous organisations, abide by the philosophy of this organisation and benefit from the positive aspects of having a national voice.

Seven years later this has been substantially achieved. After the 1992 Conference direct moves were made towards setting up the Federation including setting up a National Federation Representative Group (with representatives from RCCs all over the country) and the management structure to employ a national federating worker, with funding made available by the Allen Lane Foundation.

Bringing together such a loose and diverse movement, often divided on fiercely held ideological beliefs such as whether or not to work with men and equally fiercely committed to their own autonomy, needed a high degree of skill and sensitivity. It is a great testimony to all concerned that by October 1996 the Federation was ready to launch officially and provide everyone who came to Manchester for the event with an opportunity 'to celebrate the beginning of something very exciting and essential to all Rape Crisis Groups and women living in Wales and England'.

In fact they had much to celebrate. By then they had already agreed the criteria for membership (far from an easy task) and had thirty member organisations sending delegates. Three years later their membership had risen to 50 (out of a possible 65). Their overtly feminist values as an organisation were already clear in 1996 although they have been refined and are now available in poster form:

Value Statement: the Rape Crisis Federation

- Recognises that sexual violence against women and girls is the result of a power imbalance between women and men in society
- Recognises that sexual violence is predominantly an act of male aggression and power

- Believes that women and girls have the right to live without sexual violence or the fear of sexual violence/abuse
- Recognises that women and girls have the right and essential ability to take central control of their lives
- Believes that women and girls have the right to information and support necessary to make their own decisions and choices
- Recognises that women's experiences of sexual oppression differs and is often compounded by other oppressions
- Believes that women have the right to the safety of women-only support
- Recognises the importance of working from a feminist perspective

These values have imbued all their work, from their excellent training materials on **Understanding Service Level Agreements, Making the Media Work for You and Effective Monitoring and Evaluation,** to their networks on Young Women Workers,' Lesbian/Bisexual and Black Women Workers (the last has been the most consistent and successful, echoing what was said above by Manchester Rape Crisis Centre). Their values have also, however, caused them problems in that they are currently being lobbied very hard by eight rape crisis centres, led by South Cumbria, about their 'women-only' policy which prevents a number of centres from joining. Nor do they work closely with the radical pressure group Women Against Rape. One of their most outstanding achievements is to raise the credibility and influence of the movement in government and official circles, so that they are now regularly consulted by the Home Office, for instance on the Sexual Offences Review[8], meet with the Women's Unit and have even established a working relationship with Victim Support[9]. Just as outstanding is the fact that in April 1998 their Newsletter was able to report the success of a bid to the National Lottery for £338,785 over three years. Although this was a considerable reduction from the £583,000 they had applied for (so that it meant that projects like a training summer school and management committee training had to wait) it has meant they have been able to employ another member of staff and consolidate their office in very good premises in Nottingham (thus avoiding endless tearing up and down the motorways by workers between 'split sites' in Nottingham and Manchester).

It is clear from reading the **Annual Report 1997-8** and the **Newsletters** that the RCF offers enormous support and wide-ranging information to its members (as Watford Rape Crisis expressed it in the **Annual Report:** 'The strength in being part of the federation is both comforting and empowering'). The RCF has been important in standardising procedures, advising on funding, supporting through management crises etc. But this does not, of course, cushion either the members or the RCF itself from all the complexities of continuing to run (in an estimated 80% of the membership) some sort of collective structure, although it is increasingly likely to be some form of 'modified collective'. In RCF's case they operate what they call a 'co-operative with a structure'. This means staff have distinct job descriptions and responsibilities, but the management responsibility is held by the Management Committee, or Directors' Group, (since they are a company limited by guarantee) who, apart from three co-options, are all elected, with mechanisms to ensure balanced regional and racial representation. Directors also have job descriptions (and 'agreements' to sign), as do the officer group of chair, vice-chair,

company secretary and treasurer and it is, at least on paper, with them that the ultimate responsibility lies although there is considerable ambivalence about the role of the Chair and whether the Board is still 'really' a collective. Each worker has a personnel supervisor in the Directors' group, with each of these forming a personnel sub-group. But with such geographically scattered Directors, most heavily involved in their own centres, it is difficult to convene this group (although the Chair, Denise Taylor, finds communication greatly helped by modern technology like telephone conferencing and email[10]), and with no clear cut strategies for conflict resolution, inadequate training and somewhat fudged lines of decision making (so that it is difficult to get even urgent but routine decisions made quickly), the mechanisms for dealing with presented challenges of personnel and accountability are not really adequate. Denise Taylor is very devoted to the collective ideal but ambivalent in that she refers to the importance of personalities within a collective and the 'need to have someone to lead it'!

However these are teething problems. With so much achieved through 'organic growth' so far there seems little doubt that RCF will solve its own challenges of governance once it has the time, space and money (since appropriate training is clearly key) to do so and that it will continue to offer representation and support to a movement which urgently needs both. Denise Taylor sees the Federation becoming closer in its links to Government, more establishment. This will inevitably be seen as loss by some but she sees it as inevitable since that is where the money lies ('we need each other'). And, given the establishment's perception of the rape crisis movement even within the last decade, that would be on one level an incredible achievement.

To sum up *The rape crisis movement also comes out of the heart of the women's liberation movement and originated with the founding of the London Rape Crisis Centre in 1976. There are now around 65 centres or lines all over the country which are run in the belief that sexual violence is predominantly a result of male power, and seek to empower women to take control of their own lives, treating them as survivors rather than victims. Their collective ways of working are strongly linked to this belief and the examples we looked at demonstrated both the strengths and weaknesses of participatory democracy described in the literature.*

Most RCCs have remained small, with inadequate funding and a strong dependence on volunteers. Most are still run as some sort of (usually modified) collective although they are struggling to adapt these structures to make themselves more accountable and diverse, to provide better supervision and training for staff and a better service. They have been much helped recently by the development of the Rape Crisis Federation established in 1996 to support and campaign on behalf of the movement. Divisions still exist, for instance over the question of 'women only', but on the whole the Federation has been very successful in bringing cohesion to a rather fragmented movement and in raising the profile of rape crisis. It has recently received a large Lottery grant.

This case study thus demonstrates a movement which has retained its strong purpose, even in the face of competition from Victim Support. At the same time it has managed to adapt its governance and develop some very creative hybrid structures attempting to marry the best of hierarchical and collective ways of working.

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[1] See Oldest Rape Crisis Centre in Europe Denied Funding! Appeal Launched today, *Sign of the Times: Bringing you news from the London Rape Crisis Centre*, April 1995, *p.1*

[2] See various leaflets produced by London Rape Crisis Centre.

[3] Interview with Irene Murray Training-Co-ordinator and Julie Barnard, Co-ordinator, of the Rape Crisis Federation, 19.4.99

[4] I am indebted to the information in this section to a workshop and conference paper *Doing unto others: Changing Ways of Working in a Mixed Race Collective by* Suria Nayak and Sara Scott, given at the Women's Studies Conference on *Past, Present and Future Feminisms* at the University of Glamorgan 7 July 1996. Other unattributed quotations in this section are to this paper.

[5] All the information about Scarborough Rape Crisis Centre comes from participation in a workshop run by 'Eileen' and 'Claire' of the Centre at the Women's Studies Network conference at Scarborough on July 18 1996.

[6] In the early 90s the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO), of which I was Director, played something of a midwife role, having been approached to do so by the Avon Sexual Abuse Centre. Sadly ASAC was, like several other rape crisis centres, forced to close over the last few years.

[7] Information and Conference 1992.otherwise unattributed quotes come from undated paper on *Background to the National Federation of Rape Crisis Centres* c.1994.

[8] This is definitely no mean achievement. I remember in late 80s/early 90s Home Office officials would almost raise their eyes to heaven when rape crisis was mentioned.

[9] All recent references, unless otherwise cited, are to the interview with Irene Murray and Julie Barnard in Nottingham on 19.4.99 or with Irene Murray on 30.4.97

[10] Telephone interview with Denise Taylor, current Chair, 17.5.99

East London Black Women's Organisation (ELBWO)

We have seen how the question of diversity in relation to race was to raise its head very early in second wave feminism, with writers like bell hooks arguing:

> White feminists did not challenge the racist-sexist tendency to use the word
> 'woman' to refer solely to white women, they supported it...They chose to deny the
> existence of black women and to exclude them from the women's movement.
> When I use the word 'exclude' I do not mean that they overtly discriminated
> against black women on the basis of race. There are other ways to exclude and
> alienate. Many black women felt excluded from the movement whenever they
> heard white women draw analogies between 'women' and 'blacks'...
> Unfortunately, despite all the rhetoric about sisterhood and bonding, white women
> were not sincerely committed to bonding with black woman and other groups of
> women to fight sexism. (hooks, 1982: pp.14 & 142)

This is, of course, written about the USA but it is substantially true of the situation in the 70s in the UK. bell hooks described how, finding their trust betrayed in white women's groups, 'some black women who were interested in women's liberation responded to the racism of white female participants by forming separate 'black feminist' groups' (hooks, 1982: p.150). In the UK a very significant conference was to happen in Brixton in March 1979, the first National Black Women's Conference:

> The conference marks an important stage in the development of an autonomous
> Black Women's Movement in Britain. It was a living witness to our conviction that
> if the voice of Black women in this country is to be heard we need to set up a
> separate and independent organisation of Black women in which we ourselves lead
> a struggle against the specific type of oppression that we face. For too long the fact
> that as Black women we suffer triple oppression has been ignored – by male
> dominated Black groups; by white dominated women's groups; and by middle-class
> dominated left groups.[1]

The organisers of this conference were the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) set up in February 1978, with the ultimate ambition to establish a national Black women's umbrella organisation made up of local groups and individuals who are active in anti-racist, feminist and community campaigns. Black women had played 'a positive and substantial role' in generalist Black organisations 'despite the fact that we were frequently overshadowed by the men' (Bryan et al, 1985: p.135). Now was the time for their own organisations.

OWAAD's second conference, in north London in March 1980, focussed on education, was a two-day event and attracted 600 women, double the number in 1979. As well as addressing the issues of black feminism and triple oppression, this conference discussed the issue of the urgent need to build . Black (i.e. 'Afro-Asian') unity which has been ignored far too long... We therefore committed ourselves to working in such a way that this unity would be forged, by taking up issues jointly and speaking out with a unified voice[2].

The third OWAAD Conference was held in Brixton in 1981, hosted by the Brixton Black Women's Group, one of the earliest black women's organisations, formed in 1973 because:

> We didn't want to become part of the white women's movement. We felt they had different priorities to us. At that time, for example, abortion was the number one issue and groups like Wages for Housework were making a lot of noise, too. These were hardly burning issues for us – in fact they seemed like middle-class preoccupations. To begin with, abortion wasn't something we had any problems getting as Black women – it was the very reverse for us! And as for wages for housework, we were more interested in getting paid for the work we were doing outside the house as night cleaners and in campaigning for more childcare facilities for Black women workers... Groups like the Brixton BWG were just one of the strands which, when woven together, helped to bind the political practice of the Black community as a whole. They were in many ways simply a continuation of the Black groups which had existed ever since our arrival after the war. Black women were just as committed to the task of fighting racism both locally and internationally, but brought the important new dimension of feminism into our struggle. (Bryan et al, 1985: p. 149-151)

The external influence of the anti-racism movement was thus very strong.

This third OWAAD conference concentrated on the possibility of unity between women of African and Asian descent. There were also calls for it to take on a stronger, more feminist agenda, with space, for instance, for lesbian women and calls not to work with men. But these proved very divisive issues (with Asian women, for instance, perceived as privileged and controlling [3]). OWAAD's united front proved impossible to sustain and it was to disband in 1983, having been unable to heal its deep divisions. But it was to have an influence far beyond its own five year lifetime and to encourage the formation of a whole range of other black women's organisations:

> Nevertheless, OWAAD had achieved much of what it had set out to do and turned us into a force to be reckoned with in our own right. It became a forum for us to discuss and articulate our demands. And it represented a period of intense growth and learning for all Black women in this country, the repercussions of which can still be felt today. (Bryan et al, 1985: p.177)

One of the organisations to emerge was the East London Black Women's Organisation (ELBWO), although they were to be subsequently expelled from OWAAD because they (ELBWO) were prepared to work with men, and indeed felt it essential to 'facilitate communication with Black men which was or could not be accommodated in OWAAD itself':

> Members of ELBWO met whilst attending this...conference in 1979 and came together like many other women among the hundreds there after a question of regional women's groups was raised. For the first time members saw Black women, waged or unwaged, eager, organised, talking of their experiences, their struggles, their losses and achievements, families, their womanhood and politics. There was an air of euphoria and hope....The women from the East End of London live and work in an environment with a long history of privation, migrants, established charities and maldistribution of resources. To compound this there is

> the added dimension of ignorance, ethnic chauvinism and violent racism at all
> levels... (and) ... over or under policing.[4]

Another interpretation of ELBWO's origins comes in its magazine *Grapevine:*

> ...ELBWO came into being in May 1979 in response to Black women in the
> Borough of Newham coming together to support one another and to highlight the
> lack of educational provision in the Borough for Black people[5]

Unlike organisations like Southall Black Sisters, it is very clear that it interprets the
word 'Black' in its title as 'women of Afrikan and Caribbean descent and their
families' (although its Centre is currently being used much more widely).

Issue No 6 of the magazine **GEN** (October-December 1985) lists nearly sixty
'Black Women's Groups and Organisations'. Fourteen years later there are very,
very few of these still in existence (although of course some others have taken their
place). Why is ELBWO (along with Southall Black Sisters) one of these very few?
Why has it managed not only to survive but to prosper, when so many have failed to
do so?

I have known and worked with ELBWO in one capacity or another for fifteen years
and, like many others, including their funders, felt great admiration and affection
for them. We have seen them grow out of their initial home in Plaistow, into a
beautifully 'purpose converted' Church Hall in Forest Gate (converted by the black
woman architect Elsie Owusu) – although they are now bursting out of these very
intensely used premises. One of their strengths seems to lie in the fact that,
although they are frequently called on to contribute to wider forums and on a
national stage, they are absolutely rooted in the needs of their users in East London.
These needs have changed in some respects, and one of ELBWO's hallmarks is not
to impose its own philosophy but to be flexible in response to need[6], but many
remain the same. In 1985 ELBWO is described as:

> a community resource centre. It provides counselling and support...information
> about cultural activities and runs courses. It also offers help to black women who
> want to start their own groups/ projects...(it)...has set up a Saturday school for the
> black community in East London.[7]

By 1999 this encompasses a much expanded Saturday school for children (now
called Sankofa), the Afterschool Club and Playscheme, the Summer Playscheme
(involving 300 children in all), numerous classes on black history, literacy, English
as a Second Language, and towards the City and Guilds teacher training certificate
7307 - and the constant all hours 'drop in' service. It lets out its building for
community use and its publication **Grapevine News** gives very targeted
information not just about its own activities but on such issues as debt, health and
legal advice. It works in partnership with other organisations and at the moment is
working on a Domestic Violence Project with London Borough of Newham Social
Service and Newham Asian Women's Project (another extremely effective local
women's organisation).[8]

So one of ELBWO's lies strengths is its responsiveness to local needs. But Ama Gueye, one of its three founders (with Hallim Thomas and Mabinte Cyrus) describes how much attention was given in the early days (when they had no money and met mainly in each others' houses) to thinking through their aims and objectives very carefully at a theoretical as well as a practical level and how they spent two years consulting and working on their constitution to be sure they got it right. Part of 'getting it right' was trying to avoid the development of 'personality cults' which, as we saw in the literature, has bedevilled many organisations, and involving as many as possible in the decision-making.

The meeting in each others' homes was rendered unnecessary in 1984 when ELBWO was one of the last groups to be taken on by the GLC before it was disbanded. This allowed the move to the premises in Barking Road, Plaistow, and for Ama Gueye and Joyce Grandison to be taken on as paid workers. When the GLC went they were taken on by the London Boroughs Grants Unit and managed to secure one of the last capital grants available for the conversion of the Church Hall in Clinton Road, Forest Gate into which they moved in 1988. By then they had secured joint funding from the LBGU and the London Borough of Newham but to this day have never felt secure in their funding and are now, like most women's organisations, being pressed to generate more of their own income and feel in competition with a number of strong Asian women's groups in the area.

ELBWO is a great provider of education, both to school age children and to adults. Its Saturday school (the cornerstone of its work) started in 1980, long before they had premises, and continues to this day. But it is also a great inspirer to higher education. Glenda Popeau, its current Manager, explains how woman after woman has joined as a user, usually with young children, has become a volunteer, or a Management Committee member, has taken classes and, with the confidence that all this gives her, has gone back to higher education to take a diploma, a degree or a further degree. This means that ELBWO has a very impressive well qualified pool of women to draw on – at a recent Education seminar there were five school heads or deputy heads who came to speak from ELBWO's own membership – and it makes it easier for them than for most to replenish their Management Committee, which has been extremely effective over the last three years, bringing a great breadth of expertise.[9] Unlike many other organisations (for instance the 300 Group) ELBWO manages to retains its high-fliers (as Glenda Popeau puts it 'no one ever gets lost to the organisation') and it is the way in which it manages to encourage and enable growth and personal development, together with a desire to give back to the organisation, amongst staff and everyone else which is one of its most attractive and impressive qualities.

Some women who join as users or volunteers also go on to become members of the Board or staff members, as Ama Gueye did in 1984 or as Glenda Popeau did in 1990 when she became the Research and Development worker. At that time ELBWO was still run as a collective, as it had been from the beginning, but it was to change in 1997 when Glenda Popeau became its Manager. Although the push for this change came from outside, with funders questioning the effectiveness of the collective structure, the internal consultation exercise was unanimous for change. It

was felt that what had been appropriate for a very small organisation with only two workers was no longer appropriate for an increasingly more complex staff team with, in 1998, seven permanent staff members and at least eight sessional play workers or tutors. ELBWO has been rare, alongside all its other strengths, at being able to negotiate this transition from a collective to a more hierarchical structure with, seemingly, far fewer problems and with the shared understanding that a collective only works if you have equal strengths and abilities and that problems arise as you grow and diversify. Ama Gueye agrees that ELBWO has become too sophisticated an organisation for a collective structure to be any longer appropriate in the modern world but she regrets the loss of the way in which a flat structure encouraged all to develop skills, the strong sense of co-operation or helping each other and the way there were none of the feelings of resentment between volunteers and paid staff which seem to be endemic to the organised women's movement, if not the voluntary sector as a whole.

But as Ama Gueye looks into the futures she feels on the whole optimistic about ELBWO. She is pleased at how ELBWO attracts and engages the enthusiasm of young women (something most women's organisations find extraordinarily difficult) – so that those who started as toddlers twenty years ago are now coming back as playscheme workers etc. Simone Foli started with ELBWO as a French tutor in 1990[10], took on various other roles, including co-ordinating the Saturday school and has worked on its Domestic Violence Project for the last two years. She speaks very highly of the organisation and the way in which in some ways the Management Committee, while being very professional, continues to act like a collective so that in her project she both has a lot of scope and freedom to use her initiative and a lot of support. It would seem to have achieved the best sort of example of a partnership model of governance operating in a highly participatory/democratic way.

ELBWO's success as a service delivery organisation, giving access, plugging gaps, building confidence, is beyond dispute, its capacity limited only by the familiar lack of resources and a very, very overused and noisy building which allows little privacy. But Ama Gueye, co-opted back onto the Management Committee after nearly a decade living overseas, would like to see ELBWO with an analytic and political dimension beyond its role as a quasi-outpost of the social services that could encompass both the Stephen Lawrence aftermath and the need to reclaim a 'space for women' (which is why she is against current attempts to change its name to something like the East London Black Women's Family Centre). Bryan et al describe this aspect of the black women's movement in the early 80s:

> Organising as Black women did not develop simply from working and campaigning at a practical level. Our confidence grew out of our sustained effort and collective willingness to grapple with definitions, to assess and re-assess our priorities and constantly to seek out ways of ensuring that our politics represented the aspirations of our people. (Bryan et al, 1985: p.172)

It is not clear whether it is in fact possible to recreate the 'consciousness raising' ethos of the early 80s into the more pragmatic ethos of the new millennium, but if any group can achieve this it will undoubtedly be ELBWO. As an academic as well

as an activist, Ama Gueye will be a good position to both lead and write up this process. ELBWO is delaying its twentieth anniversary celebrations to the year 2000 but should then have much to celebrate.

To sum up: *ELBWO came together in 1979 out of the excitement generated by the first conference of the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD). Although OWAAD disbanded in 1983 ELBWO, with its firm base in the local Afro-Caribbean community of Newham, has expanded and diversified its work. Having started in members' homes, it acquired its first premises in 1984 and in 1988 moved to a very imaginatively converted Church hall which has been its centre ever since. It has always given a strong emphasis to education, both to Saturday schools and holiday play schemes for children, but it has also always been a great inspirer to higher education amongst its members. ELBWO used to be run as a collective but in 1997 was able, in marked contrast to many organisations, to make a smooth transition to the employment of a manager to lead the team of seven permanent and at least eight sessional staff and develop a successful partnership model of governance. It is able to attract young women and retain the loyalty of its members over many years. Although it receives core funding from LBGC and Newham, it is very overstretched financially. While rooted in its local community, ELBWO contributes to many wider forums and partnerships and has a strong intellectual interest in developing an analytic and political dimension to its role.*

This case study thus demonstrates a highly adaptive organisation which, while remaining true to its values and purpose, has been able to exploit external contingency factors to its own advantage. It has encouraged inspired leadership and was able to move unusually easily from a collective to a hierarchical structure.

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[1] From (1979) Black Women Together: The need for a united and autonomous National Black Women's Organisation, *Spare Rib*, No.87 October 1979, p.42

2 From (1980) Black Women Fighting Back, Spare Rib, No.95, June 1980: p.49.

[3] From telephone interview with Ama Gueye, one of ELBWO's founders, 16.5.99. Most of the unattributed references that follow come from this interview.

[4] From paper on The Black Women's Movement given by ELBWO in November 84 in (1985) GEN, No. 5, 1985, London, Women's Educational Group: p.61-62.

[5] From ELBWO's Grapevine, September 1989

[6] Interview with Glenda Popeau, Manager of ELBWO. 30.4.99.

[7] (1985) GEN No.5: p.63

[8] As its literature explains: 'Newham Asian Women's Project is a unique community organisation that was set up in 1987 to provide advice and support for Asian women and children experiencing domestic violence. Since then our work has developed and expanded, and we now offer a wide range of support services to local women. We run a resource centre, a refuge and a second stage hostel; we also organise courses, events, support groups and activities'. (From fund-raising leaflet c.1999). At the Women's Resource Conference on Building on our Strengths on 1.7.99 NAWP explained how they managed to survive and prosper partly through building very strategic partnerships.

[9] Interview with Glenda Popeau, 30.4.99

[10] Interview with Simone Foli, Domestic Violence worker, 30.4.99

The 300 Group

The 300 Group is hard to characterise as an organisation because, although it was undoubtedly influenced by the women's movement and is passionate in its commitment to equality of opportunity for men and women in politics and public life, it has not been so successful in ensuring that its own structure and way of organising reflects this. Far from working as any sort of collective, it has tended to be led (usually in an unpaid capacity) by strong, charismatic women in a rather ad hoc, entrepreneurial way, thus coming closest to Robbins' configuration of 'adhocracy' (see page 8 above).

The 300 Group was started in 1980 (both literally round the kitchen table and with a packed meeting in the Grand Committee Room at the House of Commons)[1] by Lesley Abdela, who had fought the 1979 General election as a Liberal Democrat. At that election 206 women stood but only 23 were elected, making a percentage of 2.9%, actually down from the previous 4.3%. Lesley Abdela had not been active in the women's movement till then (being an advertising executive and a parliamentary researcher) but this experience (together with the misogyny of most male politicians)[2] was such a dramatic consciousness-raising experience that she determined to establish a group that would 'work towards a minimum of 300 members of Parliament, to encourage women to seek and hold public office and participate in public decision-making at all levels.'

The 300 Group, especially initially, was run with great entrepreneurial style and panache and attracted a great deal of publicity. Its first four annual conferences were held on specially chartered ferries crossing the North Sea and I attended a memorable dinner in 1989 in honour of Nancy Astor addressed by Elizabeth Dole. One of the things it did particularly well was to hold parliamentary-type debates for school girls in the House of Commons. It set up a speakers' service, runs training courses and programmes (and currently a political 'school' over a fifteen/eighteen month cycle which 'will provide a supportive practical environment where women can learn about political life and acquire skills to help them climb up their party ladders to success'[3]). It also gives media awards, played midwife to the Women in Public Life (WIPL) Campaign set up by Dr. Lily Segerman-Peck in 1986, and retains a register of interest in public appointments. Right from the start it provided a very effective network for anyone aspiring to public or parliamentary life. A founding member, Mimi Johnson, describes how both frightening and exhilarating it was to come down from Sheffield and participate in events in London and how, although she never stood for political office, this experience was to give her the confidence to go on into many areas of public life. She was also to run a very vigorous local 300 Group in Sheffield[4].

Although initially all this activity kept going on the impetus of its 'imaginative creation' and a small 'Board of Guardians' (together with an essential small annual grant till 1987 from the Rowntree Trust, and free premises in 9 Poland Street) by Summer 1985 it was clear there was a need to formalise the Group's structure. The

first Chair of the newly formed National Executive Committee described the process:

> The last year has been spent formalising our structure, identifying our objectives and moving forward on a more professional footing... Internal re-structuring is not news-worthy but it is essential if a fast-expanding enterprise is to be taken seriously... A Constitutional Working Party was set up... We met for many long, complicated meetings and spent many hours endeavouring to ensure that all the matters raised by members not able to attend our meetings were fully considered. We wanted to be certain that the Group's day-to-day running was in the hands of people elected democratically by all the members: that the regional members were fully represented; that the Executive Committee was politically balanced and that the final document was sufficiently flexible for our needs.
>
> We finally arrived at a consensus.... the draft (constitution) was prepared, discussed with Guardians, amended and finally passed by a full meeting of members ....The structure of the Group is very straight-forward ...The Board of Guardians continue to keep an important watching brief on all policy matters and on the general direction the Group is taking. They must also liase regularly with the National Executive which is responsible for the administrative decision-making of the Group and meets six weekly to discuss all the various activities with which we are now involved....sub-committees have been set up to deal with Fund Raising; Press & Publicity; Training and Future Events ...(and) an Editorial team created to manage the publication of this News.[5]

One of that group closely involved in drafting the original constitution (along with lawyers William Goodhart and Anthony Leicester) was the academic Lisanne Radice who was also on the Board of Guardians. She describes how the constitution was very carefully designed to provide party balance (with patrons from all parties) and to avoid take-over by any sort of extreme tendency, left or right. They all – including Lynda Chalker, Doreen Miller, Elizabeth Vallance – worked very effectively cross-party and at that stage it was marked that members would be more inclined to criticise their own parties than each other's[6]. These structures, however, were to disappear in 1995 when the 300 Group became a company limited by guarantee, with Memorandum and Articles of Association and Directors rather than an Executive Committee[7]. Publications have always been important to the 300 Group. Over the years these have included the **News**, augmented by the newsletter **Dispatches** and more frequent monthly **Briefings** from 1987- and sporadic publications from local groups. The current publication is **Dispatches.**

With the mechanisms in place in 1985, the 300 Group went on to elect a politically and professionally (although not ethnically) diverse National Executive Committee (NEC) of 12 and to elect Sue Stapely as its first Chair. It then went on in 1988 to set up its own Trust, the 300 Group Educational Trust, which acted as its charitable arm (and thus able in principle to access additional sources of money) 'to advance education about the position of women in society and, in particular, about the ways in which women may take better advantage of the opportunities available to them'. It was greatly helped into existence by a past NEC member, Margaret Hyde, and chaired by the Conservative peer Baroness Platt of Writtle[8]. However the relationship between the 300 Group and the Trust was to be very uneasy, with the legal position never satisfactorily resolved, and in 1992 the Trust was to separate from the 300 Group, change its name by deed poll, and now operates under the title of the Menerva Educational Trust, with its own Board of Trustees. This has

managed, with some difficulty, to raise money for a series of innovative educational projects, starting with Trigger Packs for Teachers on **Girls in a Changing World** (part funded by Yorkshire Television).

Lesley Abdela was to leave the 300 Group after ten years (she now continues the work in Eastern Europe for Project Parity as well as many other wide-ranging projects) but it continued to be run by 'large' and committed personalities like Doreen Miller (now a working Conservative peer)[9]. This made for a high profile but could mean that it was very difficult to draw the line between the Board and the staff, with Doreen Miller acting for a period as Honorary Executive Director. It also made for great fluidity, with many women joining as volunteers or intern students, becoming members, being co-opted onto the Board (and thus 'gaining a *taster* in managing an organisation'[10]). But, even when the 300 Group has had money to employ staff it has not been a good employer[11], adopting the worst sort of outmoded traditional 'agency' model - 'to monitor and, if necessary control the behaviour of managers' (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998: p.12), even being accused of being more inclined to bully than show appreciation of staff[12] and perceived as a 'complete disaster' in the relationship between its campaigning and educational branches.[13]

In some ways it would seem that the 300 Group set itself an impossible task and it is hardly surprising that a cross-party organisation dedicated to helping women realise what in the end must be personal ambitions to acquire political power does not always foster sisterhood or provide a particularly harmonious or supportive environment in which to work. It is marked, for instance, that it never developed the sort of 'pooled fares' or travel fund to help members from the regions to attend and seemed to value women with personal political ambition rather than those who wished to offer support to the cause of more women in Parliament[14]. However, at its best, it did manage to give this support, as one women interviewed as part of a study of the 300 Group in 1986 revealed:

> I have no sisters or women cousins and the 300 Group has been like a family . to me. Those of my political Party come and help me at elections and it's like working with a group of close friends.[15].

The researcher summed up her image of the 300 Group revealed by the survey:

> My image of the women in the Group is now quite clear: politically interested, with very diverse political views, active or wanting to support other women activists, energetically organising a responsible job, a family and a home, wishing they had more time, more money, more confidence but, above all, certain that there should be more women in politics. Is that you? If so you might like to heed the advice of a fellow member: '(a woman) has to be fierce about what she believes in – take yourself seriously – to be convinced that what your Party believes in is right, at least in public.' At the same time it is to be hoped that you, no, we, can retain our warmth, our friendliness – and our support for other women. (Ibid. p.9)

In fact it is surprising that the group has managed to work cross-party as well as it has. The Chair Andrea Whalley, spelt this out in 1989:

In spite of coming from very different and sometimes diametrically opposed philosophical and political viewpoints, as members of the 300 Group we all work together to further our aims.[16]

This survey in 1986 also shows how much more successful the 300 Group has been than most groups in attracting younger women, with nearly as many members below the age of 40 (48.7%) as above it (51.3%). They also attempt to reach very young women through events in or for schools and in the Universities.

The 300 Group would also seem to have been a phenomenal success in its primary purpose, with numbers of women MPs increased in the 1997 election to 120, 18.4% of the overall numbers in the Commons. This may not be 300, or yet anything approaching parity, but it is a huge step up from the 2.9% in 1979. And of course in the Labour Party the number of women MPs at 102 is quite considerable (about 25 %), with about 27 in Government. It would thus seem to be an example of an organisation falling victim to its own success: it has certainly not achieved 300 women in Parliament but enough progress has been achieved for the issue to seem less urgent. However it is argued that this had little to do with the work of the 300 Group and everything to do with the introduction of women only short-lists before the last election (of which the 300 Group never approved and which has now, been declared illegal), augmented by the development of the Labour Women's Network and Emily's List, started by Barbara Follett to provide support and money for Labour women wishing to stand. For the Liberal Democrats something of the same function is fulfilled by the Nancy Seaar Memorial Fund. This means that only the Conservatives – or those that want to go into political life but do not know what party they want to join - still need the 300 Group in the same way.

Lisanne Radice has also argued that the very substantial number of women who stood for and were elected to the Scottish Assembly in May 1999 has a great deal to do with the fact that it promises to be a much more family friendly place to work – with a crèche, and 'normal' hours of 9 – 5.[17] But she also argues that the 300 Group's main achievement has been to effect a sea change in attitudes towards women standing for Parliament or public life. In the seventies she was thought mad for having strong views about the need for more women in political and public life: as we approached 2000 such views are totally unexceptionable and mainstream.

Is there, then, still a place for the 300 Group as we approach the millennium? By 1998 the Board had become very depleted, the last paid member of staff had left in 1996 (when funding ran out from the Barrow Cadbury Trust) and not much had been heard of the 300 Group for two or three years, except for worrying rumours of internal dissent and clashes of personality[18] (although, for Mimi Johnson, it has remained throughout 'a wonderful source of information and some impressive events' which illustrates my thesis that the same organisation can be experienced in very different ways). And organisations can prove very resilient. An appeal in Summer 1998 resulted in a Board of eight 'larger ... than for the past few years. This, coupled with the support of those who volunteered to help with events, means we can run a full programme this year'[19]. Ann Swain, was elected as Chair, and with her long involvement in the organised women's movement (e.g. Business and Professional Women (BPW) and Women's National Commission) and public life

must be considered a very safe pair of hands. She feels there is still a place for the 300 Group. Whatever progress has been made, the parties are definitely not yet 'sorted' – the Conservatives in particular are a long way from 'electing on merit'. She felt the problems of internal strife which the 300 Group has endured were partly due to the lack of a local group structure like the club structure of BPW (there are some local 300 Group but they tend to be rather ad hoc and dependent on individuals so tend to rise and fall); and partly because some of the Chairs have been very dominant, very much with their own political agenda. .

Another problem is that when women do achieve a high level appointment (with the help of the 300 Group) they do not find the time to give back the same sort of help themselves. Ann Swain is trying to help such women remain in touch with the Group; to emphasise the awareness of PR and the importance of working with all three parties, and with building up local groups, particularly in the universities. She also sees it as extremely important to organise regional training events so that all the opportunities are not in London[20]. The need for this is very much echoed by Mimi Johnson, who points out that whatever the situation of women in public life may be in London 'for women in the regions it hasn't even begun'.

But the 300 Group still seems to be in, or close to, the decline stage of Mintzberg's life cycle of organisations at the moment and it is uncertain whether the 'gradual revitlization' we are seeing at the moment or some 'dramatic turnaround' (Mintzberg, 1989, p.294) can save it from demise. If the latter is to happen it is likely to be a result of the growing realisation that nothing much has really changed and that, without the positive action of 'women only' short lists, the dramatic rise in women elected at the 1997 election may be catastrophically reversed at the next election, probably in 2001. Whatever happens to the 300 Group it will have played a key part in promoting women into politics and acting as an inspiration to similar groups round the world. But many women see its continued existence as very important. Its disappearance would be, for Mimi Johnson, a bereavement.

To sum up: *The 300 Group was founded in 1980 by Lesley Abdela with the mission to get more women into Parliament and public life. From its entrepreneurial beginning it was determined to be resolutely cross-party and to maintain this in its governance, evolving a complex constitution with structures including a Board of Guardians, a National Executive Committee and various committees. In 1988 it set up its Education Trust which, after some internal disputes, went independent as the Menerva Trust in 1992. Not surprisingly for an organisation of women seeking political power, the 300 Group has had a number of internal power struggles and has found it difficult to differentiate between governance and management. But many women have profited from its excellent training courses and publications and it has been extremely influential in raising the issues publicly. Although there has been discussion about whether the 300 Group still has a role now that there are so many more women in Parliament (a contingency factor which it helped to bring about), it is currently, after a very quiet period, experiencing something of a revival and this would well be accelerated by*

the realisation that the number of women MPs is likely to go down quite dramatically at the next election.

This case study thus demonstrates an unusual organisation which can perhaps best be described as an adhocracy which has been very effective in promoting its purpose but less so in dealing with conflict, encouraging appropriate styles of leadership or providing the basis for a more mature organisational structure.

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[1] Interview with Lesley Abdela, 26.3.99.

[2] Lesley Abdela was to explore this at more length in a chapter on 'The Yahoos – a woman in a man's preserve' in Abdela, 1989

[3] This, and all other unattributed information, comes from the 300 Group's current literature.

[4] Telephone interview with Mimi Johnson, founder member, member of NEC in 1985 and then Vice-Chairman, Secretary of 300 Group Educational Trust and then of the Menerva Trust 20.5.99.

[5] Sue Stapely, View from the Chair, *300 Group News* Edition No 12 Summer 1985

[6] Telephone Interview with Lisanne Radice, 17.5.99

[7] Telephone interview with Ann Swain 18.3.99

[8] *300 Group News* No.14 Spring 1987

[9] Lisanne Radice, 17.5.99

[10] Telephone interview with Caroline Clipson, 23.6.95

[11] Although the administrator Gilly Forryan gives a rather enthusiastic 'View from the Office', characterising life as 'interesting' and 'exciting'.

[12] See focus group discussion on, 13.7.96

[13] Interview with Lindsay Driscoll, 15.4.97

[14] Interview with Mimi Johnson, 20.5.99

[15] Eileen Wormald, the 300 Group: Who are we?, *300 Group News* No.13 Autumn 1986

[16] *300 Group News*, No.17 1989-90: p.3.

[17] Telephone interview with Lisanne Radice, 17.5.99

[18] Telephone interview with Catherine Mulgan, organiser of school talks from 1991 and Board member 1994-5, 18.5.99

[19] *Dispatches: The Newsletter of the 300 Group*, January 1999: p.7.

[20] Telephone interview with Ann Swain, 1.3.99

Maternity Alliance

The Maternity Alliance (henceforth known as MA) is particularly interesting because although it clearly came **out** of the women's movement, the whole concern to give women back control over their bodies, and the process of giving birth, it was not overtly a women's movement organisation. From its inception in 1980, it has been concerned with the well-being of fathers, as well as mothers and babies. In fact none of its founding organisations – the Spastics Society, the National Council for One Parent Families, the Child Poverty Action Group and Save the Children (who obviously brought in very different perspectives and concerns) – could be called openly feminist and the organisation has never been an overt contributor to the on-going feminist debate[1]. Instead it declared in its first **Annual Report** its aim to act as 'a non partisan forum for all those with an interest in pregnancy and the first year of life.'[2] And, having been founded 'in response to concern about inequalities in the treatment of and support for pregnant women and new parents on low incomes' it has retained a strong emphasis on improving the material conditions and income of new parents, lobbying for maternity pay and payments, better maternity leave, parental and paternity leave and child-friendly working hours[3]. So it fulfils at least four out of the five qualifications for being considered a feminist organisation identified by Martin - feminist ideology, values, goals, outcomes - with its 'founding circumstances' at least partially identifiable as feminist (Martin, 1990: p.189) and thus deserves its place in this study.

From its inception the MA was unusually successful in fund-raising and by the time of its first **Annual Report** in 1982 it had four members of staff, led by a co-ordinator. The fact that this term, rather than Director, was chosen shows, along with the choice of pay parity for all posts, a commitment to non-hierarchical and empowering ways of working which place them within the participatory/democratic organisational model and which exist, although in different manifestations, to this day. And the MA certainly **feels** like a feminist organisation and, although they were surprised to be asked whether they think of themselves in these terms, they present a very feminist face to the world. Although it started its life with a male treasurer it now has an all female Management Committee (although some male advisors) – and, apart from a brief maternity leave replacement, has always had an all female staff. As its current Chair says: 'it is run by women, in a style that is very women-centred' and she and the Director 'treat each other as women, with great respect'[4].

MA has been enormously successful in its twenty years existence. It has put the issue of maternity and parents' needs on the agenda like never before. It has strongly influenced progressive legislation in its field. It has published a regular bulletin, numerous pamphlets and briefing papers and several books, including recently the very moving **Mother Courage: Letters from Mothers in Poverty at the End of the Century** (Gowdridge et al, 1997). It has worked effectively both with Governments with whom it did not see eye to eye and, more recently, with a Government where many of its old friends and supporters are now in prominent positions (the current Minister for Health in the Lords, Baroness Hayman, was its

first Vice-Chair Helene Hayman). The Budget in March 1999 contained several points – including the increase in the Maternity Grant from £100 to £200 – for which the MA had lobbied and the Fairness at Work legislation also drew strongly on MA's work. Meanwhile MA's membership has risen so that it now has 72 national organisations as full membership organisations, with more than another seven hundred local groups and individuals as advisor or associate members. Of these 329 are very actively involved in working groups on disability, minority ethnic community, legal or trade unions and it now houses the Disability, Pregnancy and Parenthood International (DPPI). MA is particularly good at working across sectors, contributing to a number of forums, and its Chair suggests that the fact it is an umbrella group means that it generates less potentially divisive emotion (although of course umbrella groups can certainly have their own problems).

So the MA has undoubtedly been extremely successful in empowering and involving its members, as well as 'empowering women through the provision of accurate and accessible information about their maternity rights'[5]. For the purpose of this thesis, I am also extremely interested in how far it has succeeded in empowering the women it employs (who have now risen to twelve, four full-time, eight part-time) and those who serve on its Management Committee, (MC) and whether it really has managed to blend the **how** and the **what,** so that, as happens in so many different feminist organisations, the great support it gives externally is not at the expense of an enormous expenditure of time and stress internally.

It would seem that it has very substantially successful in doing this. Everyone involved with the MA seems to speak of it with great affection. Claire Crocker of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation is quoted in the **1994/5 Annual Report** as saying: 'The Maternity Alliance is a boost to the spirit as well as doing extraordinary good work' and most staff seem to feel the same and remain as long as possible. But this did not happen by chance. There are structures in place which both reduce the possibility of conflict and allow for its resolution if it occurs. For instance, extremely effective use of its Finance and General Purposes Committee **and** the fact it is unionised, defuse much of the stress in staff/'management' relations (This is the perception shared both by the Director and the shop steward[6]). It is a very family friendly organisation to work in, with exceptionally good working conditions, and has resolutely fought the 'long hours' culture which characterises many women's organisations. The Director reports how when she arrived in 1986 the assumption was that she would be available to work all hours: now the assumption is that both she and everyone else have other lives to go to, work a 35 hour week and leave the office by 5.30pm. She would also be the first to admit that organising a staff team where two-thirds work part-time is very challenging, but it is a challenge to which the organisation has fully risen.

However the internal organisation of the MA has not been without problems. One of the greatest challenges came from the principle of pay parity with which it started – so although there were clearly defined roles of co-ordinator, administrator, secretary etc all were paid on the same scale, with salaries only differentiated by length of service. Although this made for equality in theory, in practice it meant that the ideology of the organisation was being reflected in the pay rather than the

working structure and the equal pay in fact masked a hierarchy. It was also acting as a form of 'golden handcuffs' which prevented many from moving on since they would not be paid the same elsewhere. What was needed was to pay what the job was worth and the organisation brought in the Greater London Employers Association to evaluate their jobs[7].

Christine Gowdridge questions still more of the traditional shibboleths of feminist organising; for instance, whether operating a collective where everyone works all hours (i.e. works as men have traditionally worked) is in fact an exemplary way of being democratic, 'Workaholics are the worst enemies of women's equality'. Similarly, if you have people with degrees doing the typing, then those without degrees are effectively debarred from working with you - 'to be self-servicing is anti-working-class women'. What she wanted was to make the Maternity Alliance open to working-class women, women without degrees and women with children. The aim should be to employ 'real' women, not zealots, and the structure of recruitment and induction should encourage this. What was needed was to break the stereotype that you are only 'committed' if you work all hours.

So, in 1993 the MA moved away from pay parity, not without considerable pain and with the loss of some members of staff. It also changed the name of its senior staff post from Co-ordinator to Director. On paper it would seem, therefore to be moving away from the 'collectivist-democratic' model and closer to Rothschild-Whitt's (1979) 'rational bureaucratic model'. But in reality the new structures and accompanying working practices (structures alone are **never** enough) have allowed far more democratic, and far more transparent, participation to develop. Now there is a **visible** planning system with progress on project management up on the wall for all to see – unlike the old days where access to knowledge depended far more on whom you knew on the management committee. The result of all of this is a really loyal staff, with great 'give and take', who do not exploit the exemplary working conditions but who are complete human beings with balanced lives.

To make the new structure work with an expanding staff of around thirteen, it was essential to inaugurate a functional system of supervision and induction. However it soon became clear that it was extremely difficult for the Director to give an adequate level of supervision and appraisal to all staff and that essentially more 'management' was needed. By 1999 it had embarked on structural changes which will result in two teams – the Resource and Information team and the Services team. These teams will be **led** - i.e. will have team leaders - but the word 'manager' will be avoided not because the Director thinks management is a bad thing (on the contrary she points out that the MA could hardly succeed in changing the world for women if it was not well managed) but out of sensitivity to the MA's commitment to self-management and autonomy and to retaining a degree of fluidity within imposed structures. The Director also sustains the MA culture of always giving credit to staff and making sure all have a share in attending events outside the office. At the same time it has embarked on the Investors in People process which it is finding very useful[8].

MA has also managed to develop an exceptionally constructive relationship

between staff and management committee and between Director and Chair. The current Chair is Roma Iskander, who follows in the steps of such prominent feminists as Tess Woodcraft and Angela Phillips. She speaks in extremely positive terms of the way in which the MA gives an excellent model of managing change (including the move to new and much larger officers in 1995 with all the adjustments in working practices and communication that involved). At the same time it manages to consistently develop the skills of its employees and bring out the best in all players in the organisation - the staff, the various Working Groups and the MC (many of whom are co-opted very strategically for an area of expertise which is needed by MA at any particular time). The relationship between the Chair and the Director is also 'managed' extremely well so that the boundaries between the two roles are well understood: this is helped by the fact that they have a similar management style and like and respect each other.

MA is an extremely impressive organisation which does seem to have married the capacity to make a difference in the world with the evolution of a structure and ways of working which, through constant re-negotiation, foster mutual respect and work for its staff and MC as well as its public. It is also a very attractive and even inspiring organisation, much given to celebrations – and which indeed has much to celebrate. The words and phrases which came up again and again were 'pleasure', 'enjoyment' and 'meetings full of laughter'. These are sadly not phrases that exactly reverberate through the sector as a whole.

To sum up: *The Maternity Alliance was founded in 1980 to make life better for pregnant women, new parents and their children and has been doing it very successfully ever since. It has grown to a membership of 72 national organisations, seven hundred local groups and several hundred individuals working with it on working groups on disability, ethnic minority communities, legal or trade unions. It has strong partnerships with a range of forums and has been very effective in influencing progressive Government policy in its field. It has always been very effective in raising money and now employs around thirteen paid staff.*

The MA has succeeded in adapting its own governance and management to its expanding role, using its Finance and General Purposes Committee very effectively to reduce the likelihood of conflict. Its Director has worked hard to reduce the 'long hours' culture and develop very 'family-friendly' employment policies. She has negotiated a move away from pay parity, but although on paper the MA looks like a hierarchy, in fact it has developed a very democratic, team-led and transparent way of working which makes it much admired and a model which, although it is not overtly a women's organisation, the organised women's movement has a lot to learn from.

This case study thus illustrates how diverse and complex are the possible variations on the continuum between bureaucratic or hierarchical models at one end and collective or participatory democratic models at the other end. It shows how effective a truly adaptive organisation, which has fully faced the challenge of conflict, leadership and diversity, can be.

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[1] Interview with Christine Gowdridge, 18.2.99.

[2] *Annual Report*, 1981-2: p.2

[3] See *Manifesto for Maternity*, Maternity Alliance 1998.

[4] Telephone interview with Roma Iskander, current Chair of Maternity Alliance, 11.3.99. Subsequent references come from this interview.

[5] From Roma Iskander's Chair's introduction to the 1994-5 *Annual Report*

[6] Meeting with Sophie Robinson, MA's Information Officer and shop steward, 18.2.99

[7] See interview with Christine Gowdridge, 15.8.96 for the ideas and quotations in this and the following paragraph.

[8] See interview with Christine Gowdridge, 18.2.99

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC)

This organisation came directly out of the women's movement although, in its initial emphasis on education, a particular branch of it. It ran for years as a feminist collective largely supporting individual women, but has recently recreated itself as a very focussed, strategic support mechanism for women's groups in London.

The origins of the WRC in the Women's Education Group are described by the Editorial Collective in the first edition of its magazine **GEN** in Autumn 1983:

> The Women's Education Group was set up at the Institute of Education in 1980. Sexism in Education was not being addressed within the Institute or schools and a group was needed to support the work of feminist teachers so that information about anti-sexist practice could be shared, and to provide a forum for debate.
>
> WedG celebrated its first anniversary with a conference held at the Institute of Education: 'Equal Opportunities Across the Curriculum'. The conference, which was attended by people from outside London, made us appreciate the importance of contact with women from around Britain and the need for a support/information network.
>
> From discussions it was felt that this need could be met by providing a resource centre and producing an anti-sexist educational magazine and newsletter. Open meetings were held throughout 1982 to discuss how best to achieve these goals. We decided to apply to several funding bodies to support these projects. Finally, in January 1983 the GLC Women's Committee and the Inner London Education Authority approved joint funding. We recognise how 'privileged' we are: while the resource centre and GEN have received funding other feminist activities have been cut.
>
> Once workers had been appointed meetings were held to set up an Editorial Collective for the magazine and newsletter....Our central aim is to produce a magazine which focuses on the experience of girls and women within a feminist framework...One of our primary aims at present is racism and how as white women we perpetuate and deal with it.

As well as producing both the magazine **GEN** and its newsletter, during its first year the Resource Centre co-ordinated an exhibition on **Challenging Sexism in Education,** held a WedG Women's Festival and organised a residential weekend to give the Collective space to 'examine our own racism', something about which, as an all-white collective, they were becoming increasingly concerned. They also 'spent many hours discussing its own policies and developing working methods.' They came to the conclusion that the Centre, intended to support women to develop anti-sexism initiatives in education, should become a women-only space, although that immediately put their grant from ILEA under threat and meant that, in words which echo in different manifestations down the organised women's movement 'at present, we are working from week to week, with interim funding up until the end of June (possibly)'[1].

WRC was initially housed in the ILEA Drama and Tape Centre in Princeton Street in Camden and even when ILEA disbanded it stayed on in what became the

Holborn Centre. But its emphasis was changing. A press release in 1988, warning of possible closure if the London Boroughs Grants Unit (who had taken over their funding from the GLC) was to withdraw funding, lists amongst its activities a self defence project, a refugee women and children's project, a project on positive images of black women, and a resource room with information on health, literature and welfare rights as well as equal opportunities in education. It was also offering space for women's groups and free use of reprographic facilities. Even the magazine **GEN** had by this time lost its educational emphasis becoming a 'quarterly magazine dedicated to the principles of equal opportunities and the positive portrayal of women'.

By 1989 the Centre is still very much in existence although virtually all mention of education has been dropped as a result of the Women in Education Group losing its funding in 1988. The **1990 Annual Report** reflects the priorities of its new funder, the London Boroughs Grant Scheme and describes the WRC thus:

> WRC is a women's meeting place and drop-in centre for advice and information in Central London ..(housing) ... a collection of books, magazines, pamphlets and videos and reproduction materials which women's groups can use in the meeting room. Three workers give advice, information and support to women who drop in, write or phone.

The early worries about an all white collective have clearly been addressed as the report continues:

> We aim to provide a service for women of all ages, all racial backgrounds, women with disabilities and we especially aim our service at women who have been marginalised and who for this reason may have been at a disadvantage in their education and career opportunities and as a result in their access to employment. The workers have themselves been deliberately appointed to reflect and serve a cross section of London women in terms of racial descent, physical ability, age etc and this policy is in turn reflected in the Centre's activities and by advertising our services in relevant agencies and publications.

The report lists various women's groups the Centre has housed or supported but there is a strong emphasis on supporting individual women, and on the specialist expertise the Centre can offer in particular in graphic design and layout.

By the **1991 Annual Report**, activities during the year include courses on sign language, massage and lesbian co-counselling, and the Centre facilitated support groups on women with disabilities, single parents, and homeless women and a workshop on the recovery of sexuality from colonisation and patriarchy.

The cutting of the links with education is made clear in the Aims and Objectives which emphasise generic self-help and self development for all women. During this year the Centre became a company limited by guarantee and the Workers Report gives an interesting insight into how the Collective actually works, with all three workers taking on a 'generic' workload:

> The three workers (1 full-time, 2 job-share) ... work collectively. We are all Equal Opportunities appointments.... We have a regular workers' meeting where we

> share out the tasks, plan our workload and organise our courses. Any problems are discussed in the meeting. Once a month we have a Collective meeting which we prepare for by putting together information and figures which the collective will need to reach their decision. Workers are allocated individual tasks by the collective which are then acted upon. Once a year we are monitored by our Grants office. We rotate the administrative tasks and each worker is equipped to deal with all the enquiries as well as running the resource centre.

The **1992 Annual Report** gives an additional interesting insight into the governance of the WRC and how it is adapting its collective structure to the demands of Company House.

> The WRC Collective acts as the Management Committee to which workers are responsible. The Collective meets regularly with workers to discuss all WRC business and is the main decision-making body ... In addition, in compliance with our status as a limited liability company, WRC also has a Board of Directors which are named members of the collective with specific responsibilities to the Registrar of Companies and the Companies Act.

This was a very eventful year for the Centre. In November 1991 it had a 'fresh start' after 'a period of isolation and crisis' when it finally moved, after eight years, from its premises in Princeton Street to the Saga Centre in Kensal Road, North Kensington. Although both the Report and the new leaflet emphasise the continuing 'drop-in' facilities for local women, there are indications of a much more strategic approach to working with women's groups. The major manifestation of this new approach was the London Women's Forum held at the London Women's Centre on 18 September 1992. This was 'born out of our own need to find out which women's organisations are still active in London, especially since cuts in funding over the past few years have really decimated the women's voluntary sector'. After extensive consultation and networking arising out of a desire 'to bring women's groups across London together and to work out collective strategies for the women's voluntary sector'. 143 women representing 92 organisations met for an intensive day which started with two speakers – Dee Springer of the London Voluntary Service Council talking about the effect which the GLC had on building the Women's voluntary sector in London and Razia Aziz from Rights of Women on 'A Few Thoughts on Difference and Unity'. This gave an extremely gloomy picture of the state of the women's movement, describing 'Why it all fell apart', analysing the effects of 'difference invested with power' and ending with 'The Conditions of Regeneration' and 'Suggestions of Ways Forward', such as 'collective healing and mass political action'. The meeting then divided into eight policy groups on:

- The Role of Women's Groups in the 1990s
- Health
- Violence Against Women
- Legal rights and benefits
- Employment
- Education & Training
- Arts and Culture

- Black women (with an informal meeting at lunch to establish a Black women's network)

These groups each suggested strategies within their area and the open plenary at the end both discussed these, identified the need for a central co-ordinating body for women and called unanimously for an interim London-wide network[2].

WRC's stay in Kensal Road was short-lived, with the move precipitated largely by a spate of burglaries. By the **1993 Annual Report** it is back in Holborn at the London Women's Centre. Moves towards changing the role of the Centre – initiated by the London Women's Forum – are going ahead: 'Decisions were made at this point to discontinue running courses and workshops and to completely separate from the educational orientation that had featured strongly in the past.' Instead the WRC concentrated on outreach and on setting up the W.I.R.E. (Women's Information and Referral Exchange) telephone line, linked to a computer directory of nearly 2000 organisations which was launched at an Open Day in September 1993 attended by 64 women representing 42 London women's organisations.

The WIRE line features at the top of the list of WRC's activities in the **1994 Annual Report** (with calls broken down under the top ten issues), with the Resource Library second and a co-ordinating role identified, including the 'facilitation of a forum for workers in the London women's voluntary sector' (this was to become the Women's Action Network London). Internally the Centre devoted a lot of time to producing a complex Procedures Manual (intended as a blueprint not only for themselves but for other women's groups in developing their own procedures system). In January 1995 the WRC held its first Annual Review, identifying the need to become a co-ordinating umbrella organisation and to obtain the funding to do so. By the **1995-6 Annual Report** WRC has addressed the problem of the difficulty in finding Management Committee members by advertising in the press, with an overwhelming response and a subsequent Open Day. The WRC this year is still concerned with its helpline and is still offering a drop-in facility (but only for two two-hour sessions a week) but otherwise its work continues to become more strategic and more concerned with organisational development. It had conducted a major consultative survey of women's groups in April 1995 to find out exactly what sort of information and support services are needed. This referred back to the **LGBU Women's Sectoral Review** carried out in 1993, which 'in view of the absence of an umbrella organisation'[3] set up the Women's Sector Working Party to be serviced by LGBU. It also referred to the research (commissioned by LGBU but carried out by CAG consultants) earlier in the year into 'roles and functions of co-ordinating organisations which operate London-wide, sector-wide or borough-wide'.

The Future of the Women's Voluntary Sector in London, which 'writes up' this survey, identifies various problems facing the sector – no unified voice and therefore lack of political influence; lack of communication between groups to share information and expertise; isolation; lack of unity and support; no unified strategy to fight for funding, low media profile etc. In the light of this need WRC

'aims to combat these identified problems by providing co-ordinating and support services to fill the gaps felt by women's groups'(p.6). And they certainly identify a need, in a near crisis for the sector which has seen the number of borough-based women's centres dwindling from 18 in 1985 to 11 in 1994, with many other groups losing their funding also. They also identify a growing need for organisational support:

> Contract culture, the now standard use of Quality Assurance Measures and the increase in importance of internal markets and performance indicators means that there is an urgent need for greater professionalism amongst women's groups. The shift from old-style collective working practices to more hierarchical divisions of labour is a central part of many organisations' restructuring.

> All these changes mean that there is a need for more highly-skilled management committees and boards. However, the sense of vulnerability in the sector, coupled with difficulties over procedures and decision-making processes, mean that it is difficult to attract and retain the level of professionalism and skills needed at board level. Often, staff teams themselves are struggling to provide the guidance and advisory input which should really be coming from directors and trustees. It is important that this issue is addressed sooner rather than later to prevent the present situation from developing into a full-scale sector crisis. Organisational support must be a central part of any attempt to co-ordinate the women's sector. (p.6)

Building on these surveys and their identification of the need for infrastructure support, in 1997 the Centre carried out a market research project to explore **The Future of the Women's Resource Centre Membership Scheme.** Using a core questionnaire to both members and potential members, with opportunities for individual comments, it identified the most pressing organisational issues facing women's groups in London (funding, UK government legislation, equal opportunities, organisational development, European legislation and Management issues) and underlined both the need for and the dilemma of networking events since 'grassroots and community groups rarely have workers who can spare time away from their direct service activities or organisational duties to 'network' or communicate with other groups unless this activity is going to have a clear and obvious benefit for their work.'[4] It then suggested a membership structure (of both individuals and organisations) which reflected as closely as possible the wishes expressed.

Although WRC was doing some valuable work, by 1996 it was itself experiencing just the sort of severe internal problems (both within the staff group, within the Management Committee and between the two) as it was identifying in the sector as a whole. The organisation was seen as very inward-looking with the elaborate Procedures Manual not really helping to provide the sort of conflict resolution which they so urgently needed. The situation changed during 1996/7 as all the original MC left, with the newly constituted Management Committee now made up of young professional employees in the wider voluntary sector, recruited through an advertisement in the **Guardian** and anxious to gain the skills and experience which they were not necessarily getting in their paid jobs. This led to a clash of values with the staff who, with their roots in the women's movement in the 70s, wished to hold on to both their history and their collective structure, while the MC wished to change to a hierarchy, look forwards, not backwards, and turn the WRC into a very

modern and professional organisation. The MC were not against the collective as an ideal, but felt it no longer worked in practice. They saw their role as becoming far more managerial, more structured and rule-bound. This led to conflict between the staff and the MC and in the end all the staff resigned[5].

This could very easily have been the point at which WRC folded. Its funding from LBGU had been virtually suspended and it had no staff. It was no longer even servicing the Women's Action Network London (WANL) which had come together after previous consultations. However its new MC felt there was a need for the sort of organisation a re-vitalised WRC could be, and went to the LBGU to ask for a stay of execution to give it time to turn the organisation round. They were given in effect six months and recruited a consultant director to help them do this (and here I have to declare an interest since I was the consultant employed and worked with WRC from September 1997 to April 1998, on average three days a week, thus becoming a classic participant observer) and a temporary Resources Officer. It was clear that although the helpline fulfilled a useful function, it was by no means enough to justify WRC's existence and to do this WRC had to develop the infrastructure role which had been so strongly identified in all the previous consultations and surveys. In doing this I started with three consideration: 1) is this service needed? 2) would it be duplicating the work of any other agency? and 3) can WRC do it well? My interviews with key figures in the sector in London (and particularly with other infrastructure bodies like the London Voluntary Service Council – LVSC – and the Federation of Independent Advice Centres – FIAC) convinced me that there was a need for the sort of role WRC was proposing and that, with the right staff and a very focussed approach, it was a role it could carry out very well. There was a process of negotiation with these bodies to find what they did well, so that a revitalised WRC would complement their work rather than be in competition with them.

Since then things have moved very quickly. In December 1997 WRC launched and began to promote its membership scheme, with full membership for women's groups in London, associate membership for other groups and a category of supporters (rather than membership) for individual supporters. In January 1998 it launched its revamped newsletter **The Source** as exactly that, a useful source for networking and information to its members - and in the same month its funding from the LBGU was reconfirmed. In February it heard it had been awarded a grant from the Opportunities for Volunteering Scheme (which allowed it both to improve its helpline service, employ another staff member and offer a really high quality volunteering opportunity for, particularly, unemployed women). In April (at a time when the LBGU appeared to be de-prioritising the funding of women's groups) it held a well attended seminar at Charity Fair asking the question 'Are Women Getting Their Fair Share of the Resources?' with a range of speakers from funders, funded groups and infrastructure bodies. One of the speakers was Siobhan Riordan, renowned for her research on the funding of women's organisations at the Centre for Institutional Studies (CIS) at the University of East London. This led to a joint application to the National Lottery (also represented at the Charity Fair seminar) from the WRC and CIS for a three year action research project which would both

collect evidence on the issues which affect the capacity of women's organisations and work directly on strengthening that capacity.

April 1998 was also the month WRC recruited its first Director, Kim Smith, who had extensive voluntary sector experience and subsequently two more permanent members of staff - a resource and volunteer co-ordinator and a policy and outreach officer. Its infrastructure role was to continue with a seminar in January 1999 on 'Towards London Government: What's the Future for Women?' and in April on how women's groups could apply effectively to the National Lottery. But much of this year was to be spent on improving its own internal management structures (what Kim Smith calls 'establishing an infrastructure to grow and change'[6]) During the year WRC developed a revised Policies and Procedures Manual (covering ethos and purpose, services and activities, employment, operational policies and procedures and the management committee) intended for very active use by the MC and others. The WRC also made strong attempts to widen its pool of potential MC members illustrating, as the 1995 report had emphasised, that this is not easy and an area which has to be worked at. In Kim Smith's words 'MC members need to be grown' and she has not only gone out to actively seek appropriate women but has developed a programme of induction for new members that includes individual copies of the revised version of **Just About Managing**. (Adirondack, 1998) and a whole day for the MC on developing a vision for the new WRC with Sandy Adirondack in November 1999. Considerable emphasis was also given to strengthening the WRC's capacity in information technology, largely through membership of a project called Women Connect, both internally (with email and a web site) and in the advice and support it can now offer to other women's groups.

Sarah Lord, who joined WRC as its temporary Resources Officer in August 1997 and was, until recently, its permanent Policy and Outreach Officer, describes living through the process of change as a very exciting period (although she also feels that the internal restructuring was mainly unproblematic because the long-serving staff left before the process so that there was no resistance to change):

> All the work done laid the foundations for a future, the networking and outreach, the policy development and the event organisation. We have travelled so far that it is difficult to remember the month of August 97, the phone was ringing once a day. Seeing the development of WRC has given me a rare insight into positive changes that can be implemented and how internal organisational structure and objectives can be managed. The result is a forward and outward-looking organisation with the women's voluntary sector at its core.[7]

In April 1999 WRC heard that it had been awarded £172,226 over three years from the National Lottery to develop its research and capacity building project for women's organisations with the CIS. This gives it an enormous opportunity to build its developing infrastructure role really effectively and to illustrate that it is possible for an organisation to totally recreate both its purpose and its structure in response to changing needs. It also allows the possibility of carrying some very exciting research, linking theory with practice:

> The findings from (the project) will inform much of our work over the next 3 years as we want to be responsive to organisations' needs. I am particularly interested in

'bridging the gap' between academia, advocates and activists and feel this work will help to substantiate the issues. I would like to partake in the research in a personal capacity, perhaps by basing my own experiences within the academic field at some point in the future. It is also possible that we will face some difficulty in our objectives particularly from women's groups who have felt marginalised in the past. However, I am keen to develop new relationships with a view to overcoming the problems and including both diverse and different opinions in our project.[8]

The capacity-building project was launched on July 1 1999 at a conference entitled **Building on our Strengths: Securing a Future for the Women's Voluntary Sector** attended by women's groups from all over London and beyond. It was addressed by both funders and researchers on the women's voluntary sector, particularly its funding, and was very focussed and pragmatic at identifying its needs – a comprehensive database of the sector, funders who understood the needs of the sector, development of networks and partnerships, a real understanding of effective leadership, skilled help in dealing with organisational change and conflict and so on. It effectively began to set the capacity building agenda for the WRC over the next three years. By its Annual Conference in September 1999 it was able to confirm the appointment of eight carefully 'grown' new members of its management committee to guide it through this agenda. By 2000 this had grown to ten, very diverse women elected at an Annual conference which highlighted the role of black women's groups in Europe. As a membership organisation its current model governance straddles the political/democratic and managerial/partnership models.

The WRC has certainly come a long way in three years and clearly has a lot further to go although it would be a pity if it entirely lost its rather fractured 'institutional memory'[9]. It has a lot to tell us about how organisations can successfully negotiate change and learn to turn external contingency factors to their advantage and is in a powerful and strategic position to help others do the same.

To sum up: *The WRC came out of the women's movement in 1983, with its origins in the Institute of Education's Women's Education Group. It has moved from its initial educational bias, via a drop-in centre and library, to an advice line (which they still run) to the strategic and capacity-building umbrella organisation for women's groups in London that it is today. In the course of this change it has moved, with considerable pain and conflict, from an old style collective to a streamlined staff team led by a Director with a model of governance which is now a hybrid between political/democratic and managerial/ partnership. It is responding to problems in finding trustees by developing and growing its own and working hard on developing its own structures and procedures. It has just received a large Lottery grant to run a three year research and capacity building project in partnership with the Centre for Institutional Studies at the University of East London, while providing a dynamic support and representation role for the women's voluntary sector in London.*

This case study thus illustrates how a collective can reinvent itself as a dynamic, diverse hierarchy and an organisation near decline can use contingency factors to help it effect a 'dramatic turnaround'.

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[1] Editorial in GEN, Issue 2, 1984: p.2

[2] Women's Resource Centre (1992) *Report of London Women's Forum*, 18.9.92

[3] Women's Resource Centre (1995) *The Future of the Women's Voluntary Sector in London: Equality, Values and Co-ordination.*p.7 Subsequent quotations are from the same document.

[4] Field, N. and Bond, S. (1997) *The Future of the Women's Resource Centre Membership Scheme*, London, Women's Resource Centre

[5] See interviews with Sarah Bond, MC member 1996-9, 24.2.99 and Julie Christie, Co-ordinator of the Women's Design Centre and long-time member of WRC, 16.6.98

[6] Interview with Kim Smith, Director of WRC, 29.4.99.

[7] Written communication from Sarah Lord, 18.5.99

[8] Ibid.

[9] There is a pointed symbolism that, in the same month it received its Lottery grant, the WRC was advertising for people to take away copies of its archived collection of the Women's Liberation Newsletter and other periodicals which had formed the backbone of its now very depleted library. It is an ambivalent symbolism, however, as the WRC has recently received a grant to re-establish a library of support materials for the women's voluntary sector.

Conclusion

In Chapter 4 we tracked a sector, that of traditional women's organisations, which had an extremely important past but an uncertain future. Some of the organisations we examined were facing up to this future with great courage and a willingness to change but the whole sector was facing a massive drop in membership, particularly of young women. In Chapter 5 we examined the Fawcett Society, which has effectively bridged the gap between traditional and modern and become a very streamlined and effective campaigning organisation, attracting a growing membership and with a youthful and dynamic image. In this chapter we have looked at a range of organisations or movements which came out of, or were strongly influenced by, the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. Several of these have moved from being very loosely structured consciousness-raising groups (hardly inviting the name 'organisation' at all) to sophisticated organisations employing staff and delivering complex services to conform with rigorous quality assurance measures. To have made that transition from informality to formality in a climate which, as Riordan (1996, 1998a and b and 1999) shows, has never been encouraging to women's endeavours; and where their organisations have always been starved of money and forced to exist on the margins of viability, with shabby offices, and out of date equipment (Riordan, 1999), is in itself an achievement. (Many organisations never made such a leap at all or, if they did, could not sustain it once the GLC and Metropolitan counties, with their comparatively generous funding for women's organisations, were abolished in 1986). And to do this in a way which attempts to retain in their reconfigured governance not necessarily collectivity itself (except in the case of the Feminist Library) but their deep commitment to democratic, participatory ways of working, is a real achievement.

Although these case studies were chosen to give a wide cross-section of organisations they cannot, of course, be representative of the sector as a whole which is very wide-ranging and diverse. The WRC conference on capacity building on 1 July 1999 was attended by a full range of organisations from health, the arts and design, Women's Aid, refugee and ethnic minority groups, women's centres, young women, older women, new technology, non-traditional work. It also had a woman from a group called Sistervision who reminded us that there was still a strong part of the women's movement on the edge of the millennium which – like the Spiral Women's camps she helps to run – are informally structured and non-hierarchical, striving for the feminist ideals of inclusiveness and full participation (see Auckland, 1999). Likewise, although the last women may have left Greenham Common, women's involvement in peace camps and other anti-arms activity remains very strong, with the launch of the Women's Network of the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) taking place on September 25 1999[1].

For our case studies, working out ways to adapt this commitment to participatory ways of working in an era of 'mainstreaming' but little money to support women's organisations has led, as we saw in the case of the Maternity Alliance and ELBWO, to the development of some extremely creative structures and working practices

which attempt to support and affirm everyone involved – users or clients, staff, volunteers, management committee, and members.

This chapter also shows that organisations can be very resilient. The WRC was almost at the point of closure three years ago but is now a major player in encouraging capacity building for the women's voluntary sector in London. The Feminist Library has managed to survive as a pure collective in spite of virtually no funding at all since 1988. Rights of Women has emerged from the challenge of restructuring much strong and better equipped to face the 21st century. The Rape Crisis Federation has managed to bridge various groupings in what had been a very divided movement. And each of these has managed to put on the public agenda issues of women's rights or concerns which were previously invisible so that, for instance, survivors of domestic abuse no longer need 'scream quietly' (Pizzey,1974) – and several of them have managed to contribute to much needed changes in legislation. We will examine what we can learn from these examples in more depth in the next and final chapter.

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[1] See *Newsletter* of the National Women's Network, July/August 1999 and Fay Weldon's article 'Mothers' Day' in *Sunday Times* 12 September 1999.

CHAPTER 7:
THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

In Chapter 2 I examined a wide range of literatures which related to the organised women's movement under a number of broad headings (Appropriate organisational structure and governance/ Management, leadership and the use of power/ Organisational ability to change and develop in response to external and internal contingency factors) with four sub-headings under each of the first two headings (see p. 5 above). I then used these categories or headings as extremely useful lenses to illuminate the seventeen case studies of individual women's organisations.

These seventeen cases studies are representative of a large and vibrant but very under-mapped sector. Although there is no comprehensive data base on the women's voluntary sector, research being carried out at the Centre for Institutional Studies has identified around 800 groups and a speaker from CIS[1] at a recent conference revealed just how complicated it is to create the route maps through what has been such a fluid, under-funded and under-documented sector. This is endorsed by almost all Riordan's work (see Riordan, 1996, 1998a and b, 1999).

This research has in itself attempted to create a route-map through an under-researched sector, using case studies to look in some depth at the governance, structure and working practices of a range of organisations. These have come from different points along the broad spectrum which makes up the organised women's movement - from the traditional mass membership, hierarchical organisation at one end to the small, collectively run, overtly feminist group at the other. Although different ends of the sector obviously face different challenges, one of the perhaps surprising research findings is how much these organisations have in common and how their concerns, if not always their solutions, are very similar – and growing more similar so that boundaries between traditional and modern, between first and second wave feminism, between those that are hierarchically and collectively structured are becoming increasingly blurred and organisations are becoming increasingly hybrid. This is not only in the obvious case of the Fawcett Society, which has been chosen as a bridge between the two extremes for that very reason, but also in the YWCA which has made quite remarkable efforts to update its purpose, governance and partnerships. From the other direction, formerly collectively run groups are becoming increasingly hybrid, if not hierarchical. It is encouraging to find that old doctrinaire battles about whether you are 'feminist enough' (Bewley, 1996: p.169), or what sort of feminist you are, which discouraged many women from using the title at all, are becoming less and less important.

In analysing both the case studies, my wider experience as a participant observer in the organised women's movement over sixteen years and the focus group which came together in summer 1996, I have used a form of 'discovered, grounded theory' which:

> will tend to combine mostly concepts and hypotheses that have emerged from the data with
> some existing ones that are clearly useful...(with) most emphasis on the emergent concepts
> – those coming from the data. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: p.46)

or where 'data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: p.23). The eight main paired categories under which to present my analysis emerged, therefore, substantially from the literature, (reviewed in Chapter 2) and echo many of the headings used there and it must be very clear from the constant references which follow here (as in the case studies) just how essential the literature has been.

But these paired categories also emerge from an analysis of the case studies and particularly of the open-ended interviews. In the process of this analysis, I found it was necessary first to 'unpack' the main headings and sub-headings, through which I had reviewed the literature some of which (like 'Gender and Organisation') were very broad and then 're-pack' and extend them in ways which more exactly reflected the reality and variety of organisational life revealed by the research. To take one or two examples. Given the complexities, fluidity and hybrid nature of the structure and governance of women's organisations revealed by the research, it seemed more appropriate to look at this under one heading rather than having a separate heading for 'participatory democracy' as in the literature analysis. On the other hand, although the importance of the size of an organisation was noted briefly under the heading on contingency factors in Chapter 2, the research revealed it as such a significant factor that it demanded a category of its own.

These eight paired categories are certainly not perfect or fully inclusive, but because they are all interlinked and the boundaries between them very permeable, it does mean most other key concepts – alliances, diversity, difference, management, volunteering and so on - can be accommodated under one or other of the headings. This chapter should not be read in a linear way but as each category reflecting on all the others. These categories are:

- Structure and governance

- Power and leadership

- Conflict and conciliation

- Size and membership

- Purpose and partnerships

- Income and accountability

- Context and contingency

- Transformation and change

This thesis ends with a conclusion which incorporates a series of very grounded recommendations (set out in Appendix II) for the better governance and management of women's organisations, which have come directly from the

organisations and other participants themselves, and plans for wide dissemination of the research findings through the organised women's movement.

Structure and governance

It is probably in structure and governance that organisations at both ends of the spectrum started the furthest apart. The traditional organisations we have looked at were all, at least in the beginning, highly bureaucratic and hierarchical; they fit very closely into Rothschild-Whitt's 'rational-bureaucratic model' (1979) where 'authority resides in individuals by virtue of incumbency in office and/or hierarchical organization by office'. All these organisations have many tiers of governance (each with their own committees and officer groups), usually from the local, to the regional, to the national and, in the case of four of them (Soroptimists, BFWG, Mothers Union and Guide Association) international affiliations as well. To work your way up the hierarchy usually means holding office at every level and to work from the local grassroots level to the national level usually takes around 15 years in most organisations (16 in the case of the Soroptimists). There is an irony in these organisations, however, because while they are highly bureaucratic, they are also highly democratic, participative and member-led, and it is the mechanisms of operating the democratic system – sending resolutions and information down to the grassroots and back again, allowing representation at every level – which makes their bureaucracies so cumbersome.

It can be argued that these bureaucratic structures are appropriate for mass membership organisations since they allow maximum participation at all levels: the problem has been that organisations like the Co-operative Women's Guilds, the BFWG or the Standing Conference of Women's Organisations, in particular, are continuing to operate them with a dwindling membership, where there are just not enough people to fill the posts at every level. As a result, there is little turn-over in posts (women may stay for years in one position so that it becomes in effect 'their' branch) or where the same people get endlessly 're-cycled' round the positions or committees. Another result is that women cannot be found to take on positions, e.g. treasurer, at the local level and the branch closes; this is what appears to be happening in BFWG. In cases such as these (as Stott vividly describes) the structure begins to become empty and self-serving, form without content, so that 'the bureaucrats come to see adherence to the rules as itself the goal' (Ferguson, 1984: p.9). The classic example is the Co-operative Women's Guild where once vibrant local branches have dwindled to Wednesday clubs for older ladies with little or no campaigning content. Obviously CWG's decline has much to do with loss of purpose and with external contingency events like World War II (which made its peace campaign highly problematic) and the decline in the wider Co-operative movement. But the way in which its structure allowed it to develop into an autocratic organisation with a two-tier system of 'leaders and led', where the leaders are a weight upon the branches and the branches are rooted in the '30s, has made renewal impossible, although many have tried.

Other traditional organisations are showing themselves much readier to change,

to update their structures, strip out layers of bureaucracy. The Mothers' Union has made quite spectacular moves towards 'more streamlined, less expensive structures', in particular reducing its Central Council from a possible 561 to 22 trustees, cutting down from nine large sub-committees to four committees corresponding to staff departments (surprisingly close to the 'leaner, fitter model' beloved of much contemporary management theory). The Guide Association speaks of 'bureaucracy disintegrated', of how it has reduced 38 committees down to nine, of how there may be fewer positions for people to hold but more opportunities to participate. The National Council of Women went through a thorough streamlining process in 1988 and, unlike most organisations, allows a process of 'head hunting' and 'fast-tracking' up the hierarchy - but is still very bureaucratic for its size. The Soroptimists are perhaps the most hierarchical of all, although they are at the same time a very generous and outward looking organisation. The recent revamp of the constitution of the Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. (SIGBI) should be very successful in ensuring justice and representation from clubs in Africa and Asia, but by introducing a Board above the National Executive Council it in effect inserted yet another layer of hierarchy. It is the YWCA which has made the most spectacular changes in its governance (as in its purpose) – voting in April 1999 for the fastest tracking of all, i.e. appointment, rather than election, to most of the places on a new Board of only 15. It thus illustrates, a very strong example of the partnership model of governance (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998)

On the other hand the feminist groups which came out of the WLM in the 1970s started as loose collectives - which was an entirely appropriate 'structure' for this 'consciousness-raising' phase of their development - but as they have grown and adapted, become funded and formalised and taken on staff, collectivity has become less and less appropriate and more difficult to manage. Defining exactly what a collective is has never been easy as there have been so many variations – workers' collectives, collectives where workers, volunteers and committee form part of one group, collectives where both the Board and the staff operate as separate collectives – or where only one or other does. Rothschild-Whitt attempted to define the characteristics of what she called 'fully collectivised democracy' while arguing that the pure and complete form is never achieved. In practice, organisations are, as Mintzberg and Bordt also reminded us, 'hybrid'. The only one of the case studies which has remained a 'pure' collective is the Feminist Library which has remained small, virtually unfunded and run entirely by volunteers – the classic 'poor and pure' syndrome. The others have grappled with all the problems identified in the literature (see Iannello, 1992; Freeman, 1984; Ferguson, 1984; Brown, 1992; Bordt, 1997) – 'structurelessness', staff resentment at feeling unappreciated, abuses of power (it did not take long to realise power could be abused in a collective) and failures to deal with conflict, where decisions at both routine and critical levels should be made and so on. As we have seen, they have dealt with this in a great variety of ways – modified collectives, participatory hierarchies, increased accountability; all sorts of imaginative alternatives (I find Bordt's categorisation of hybrid women's organisations in New York into 'professional organisations' and 'pragmatic collectives' useful but not quite broad enough to cover the full structural complexity of organisations in the UK) . What these hybrid organisations have

retained is what Parkin and Hearn (see Chapter 2 page 15) called an explicit sexual ideology, however much this may have been modified.

Rape Crisis centres demonstrate both the 'purity' of the original collective structure, paying:

> as much attention to the form and process of our meetings and interactions as we do to the content, trying all the time to be aware of each others' feelings, ensuring that all women are involved in decision making and the tasks of the group. (Curno et al, 1982: p.176)

and the difficulties that come as it evolves into something else, e.g. becomes an employer and develops the over-work syndrome (although there was a contrary problem with collectives identified by Linda Graham of Southwark Women's Aid of establishing a 'comfort zone' where no one works very hard at all). The Manchester Rape Crisis Centre illustrates that you **can** be both radical and reformist, retain your collective structure and modernise your organisation 'preserving a radical feminist practice but also a desire to professionalise', even using the quality assurance measures demanded by your funder to your own advantage - but that it is very hard and demanding to do so (see p.148-150 above). I am constantly reminded of Iannello's phrase that, unlike organisational theory which take hierarchies as the way things are, feminist theory, and the structures which feminist organisations have evolved:

> begin from the world as it ought to be, one in which gender hierarchies have been eliminated; thus it assumes the possibility for fundamental social change' (1992:p.xi)

We see in these organisations the process of grappling with change often, as in the case of WRC and ROW, through considerable conflict and pain, illustrating 'how non-hierarchical forms of co-operation have to be constantly negotiated and struggled for' (Brown, 1992 p.4), working to adapt existing structures to their own needs and ending up with 'hybrid' organisations which cannot easily be categorised or labelled. In the case of the Maternity Alliance and the East London Black Women's Organisation, what has emerged after twenty years of adaptation are organisations basically hierarchical in structure, but women-centred, universally admired for a highly participative and supportive governance and management which seem to brings out the best in all concerned. Many organisations, of course, grapple with change - it is the gendered nature of this change which is unique to women's organisations.

One of the key issues in governance throughout the voluntary sector is the relationship between the Board and the staff, and the roles of the Chair (or Chairman as she is still called in most traditional women's organisations, when not President, or Chief Guide or whatever) and the Chief Executive (or 'Director' or again, as she is often called, in a show of revealing indecisiveness, 'General Secretary' or 'Organising' or 'Executive Secretary' or even 'co-ordinator'). We will be looking in more depth at the dynamics of these leadership roles in the next section but there do seem to be particular characteristics of the governance of traditional women's organisations which make them inherently problematic. For instance, because it takes at least fifteen years to work your way up the hierarchy,

holding positions at every stage, it means that the Chairs of these organisations will certainly be in middle age and possibly late middle age. The same applies to most members of the Board. Because these women may not be in full-time employment, indeed may never have been in full-time employment (although this situation is changing), they may be able to treat this honorary position like a full-time post. This obviously has considerable repercussions on the other part of the equation, the senior staff person. Either it means that it is an excuse not to employ anyone with any 'agency' or responsibility (as BFWG put it 'we should be clever enough to run it ourselves' and NCW makes do with 'two girls in the office') or it tends to downgrade the post of this senior job or, even if the title and job description acknowledges a post of managerial responsibility, to make it difficult to draw the boundaries between these two posts. The relationship between them, and between trustees and staff, is probably the most written about issue in voluntary sector literature (e.g. Dowsett and Harris, 1996; Cornforth and Edwards, 1998 and copious material produced by the Trustee Board Development Programme of NCVO and by the Association of Chief Executives of National Voluntary Organisations); but the full-time non-working Chair or President (Stott's 'Organization Woman') is found almost nowhere else apart from the women's voluntary sector and as Gill Tischler, the Director of the YWCA said, is not sustainable.

One of the other obvious problems of a Board occupied almost entirely by older women is that it does not help an organisation's attempt to make itself more attractive to young women. We have seen how the YWCA has radically transformed both its purpose and its governance. A strong part of the impetus for this was to be able to open the organisation up to younger women and those coming from outside with new ideas. For a very traditional organisation with layers upon layers of bureaucracy this is an astonishing change. The Fawcett Society's new governance and image make it increasingly successful in attracting young women onto its Board as well as joining as members.

Another challenge of governance which women's organisations face is difficulty in finding enough women to be trustees or management committee members. Southwark Women's Aid, ROW and the WRC all experienced great difficulty in finding people to sit on their Boards. This does not apply so much to the traditional organisations where these positions – at national level - tend to carry a lot of prestige and thus be very prized. But it certainly does apply further down the hierarchy where falling membership can make it very difficult to fill posts, with that of treasurer being particularly hard to fill. Tesse Akpeki's work at NCVO on women's involvement on Boards (Akpeki 1997 a and b) is very helpful about why women are reluctant to get involved, although this is not specific to the women's voluntary sector, and her work on involving ethnic minority women is particularly relevant to organisations wishing to build diversity into their governance. The emphasis in the trustee literature now is on spending careful time on recruiting, growing and developing your own Board and the WRC are doing exactly this with their new Board, hand-picking members for skills and diversity and planning a meticulous induction programme.

To sum up: *the organisations we have looked at come from all parts of the organisational continuum from the 'rational bureaucratic' to the 'fully collectivised democracy'. However they have tended over time to move closer together, with the hierarchical organisations stripping out layers of bureaucracy and the flatter organisations building in more structure. The resultant organisations are thus more 'hybrid', with structures and governance which are becoming more adaptive, and, in several cases, extremely innovative.*

Power and leadership

It is impossible to talk about Governance without talking about leadership– 'an issue which is inextricably linked to leadership' (Billis & Harris, 1996: p. 11)

It is ironic that the word 'power' has been swathed in ambiguity in the women's movement (with the word 'illiteracy' used by Riordan perhaps its most compelling description) while the word 'empowerment' has become one of the positive key words of the movement.

While even a mainstream organisational theorist like Hales (see Chapter 2 p.29) identified some uses of power as problematic, the traditional women's organisations did not have a problem with power in the sense that they never denied that it was an issue. The literature is full of accounts of very powerful and almost legendary women – Margaret Llewelyn Davies and Kathleen Kempton at the Co-operative Women's Guild, Dame Millicent Fawcett and Phillipa Strachey at Fawcett, Dame Margery Corbett Ashby at TG, Lady Denman at the WI. Stott describes very graphically the possibilities for abuse of power in this sort of very hierarchical organisation, and particularly the capacity for 'falling out' between National Chairmen and the senior staff person. Some of the legendary figures above were in paid, or at least in staff positions (if unpaid), but overwhelmingly the power in these organisations now lies with the elected Chair. It has this in common with most of the voluntary sector, where ultimate power and responsibility has to lie with the Board. The problem lies in the frequent reluctance of the Chair and Board of women's organisations to delegate the operational and managerial tasks (which are considerable in complicated, multi-layered organisations with, in the case of the GA, up to 168 staff) to a suitably qualified manager or, even if they do appoint such a person to the job, to allow her to do the job properly and to affirm her in doing it. This again, if not unique, is certainly much more marked in the women's than any other part of the voluntary sector. Stott's 'organization woman' certainly seems to be alive and well and living mainly in the traditional women's organisations.

So we have seen how organisations like BFWG, the National Council of Women and the Soroptimists *still have no Director at all, how TG is moving towards allowing their manager to be called Chief Executive externally but ensuring she is still called National Secretary internally since having a CEO at this stage 'would be more than members could cope with' (see page 102 above) and how the NFWI 'let go' an extremely respected and high profile General Secretary, employing one now who believes that, in spite of managing a complex organisation with 33 staff, 'the*

title Chief Executive would be inappropriate because the WI is run by members, who make policy and decisions, including staffing decisions' (see page 91 above). And we saw what an uneasy relationship there was between Chair and General Secretaries in a whole range of traditional women's organisations (see page 55 above).

Stott traces the origins of this unease to the wider relationship between volunteers and paid staff 'the old story, which seems to run through big organizations that voluntary organizations are apt to be suspicious of those who get a salary for doing very similar work' (Stott, 1978 p.127). One would think that this might be exaggerated in organisations like the TG and NFWI where there are still women in elected leadership positions who may not have been in paid employment for years, if ever. And yet, ironically, it is the organizations made up entirely of professional women – BFWG, NCW, the Soroptimists – which are most reluctant to 'lose control' to a paid professional colleague. Volunteers can, of course, come in two main guises (although the distinction between these can be blurred): those, like honorary officers and board members, who form part of an organisation's governance and those who volunteer to take on tasks and are thus closer to a staff role. We have seen how organisations can be very challenged by this relationship with volunteers but also how bodies as distinct as the Guides and ELBWO are working to bring out the very best in those who volunteer for them.

Given the fact that Gill Tishler, the Chief Executive of the YWCA, argues that the model of the non-working Chair/President who does the job more or less full-time is not sustainable, although many are actually still doing this, it is encouraging that more constructive models of partnerships and leadership are being developed within the sector. Tischler perhaps pointed to a solution when she suggested that the position needs a woman who is confident enough in herself not to even attempt to be Chief Executive. It is interesting that the Chief Guide, after a very unfortunate experience with the previous Chief Executive, now stresses an enabling model of leadership rather than the model of 'command type' heroic leadership as in the Scouts. This includes developing a shared sense of purpose and trust with the present Chief Executive, Terry Ryall, based on a shared belief in the mission of Guiding, but a firm understanding that the organisation needs professional staff of calibre, and that the Chief Executive needs to be empowered so that she can empower her staff, who will in turn support the 70,000 volunteer adult leaders. From the other side, Terry Ryall sees the relationship as one based on mutual respect between two competent individuals who have distinct roles but no need to feel competitive, although their relationship needs to be 'managed' very professionally.

We have another example of a very carefully managed and negotiated relationship between Chief Executive and, in this case, World Wide President, in the Mothers' Union. Again the Chief Executive, Angela Ridler, had been appointed under the rather ambiguous title of 'Central Secretary (Chief Executive)' and only confirmed in the second once the constitution was revised. She has worked with two Presidents and in each case managed to develop a warm partnership, based both on a shared Christian belief, but also on a strong commitment to consensual

management and empowerment of all MU's stakeholders, whether staff, Board or ordinary members. It is significant that Angela Ridler, like the Chief Guide, acknowledged the likelihood of there being some tension in this relationship, but both argued that it can be *creative* tension. Ridler also argued that while it is important to have a clear understanding of the different roles of Chair and Chief Executive it is also important that the 'membrane (between them) must be permeable'. Both these relationships clearly demonstrate creative leadership on both sides.

The traditional women's organisations may have had difficulty in negotiating power and leadership but at least they have always appreciated their importance. The organisations which came out of the WLM in the 70s have had a real problem with these concepts because for a long time they tried to pretend they had no relevance to them. But as Bewley has pointed out, pretending something does not exist, does not simply make it disappear:

> What I needed was some clear writing, from an organizational perspective, about the abuses and muddles around power between women and it was specifically the debate I could not find ... part of my motivation to write comes from anger and frustration at the way in which power is sometimes abused and denied in feminist organisations. (Bewley, 1996: p.161).

We saw in Chapter 2 how Rothschild-Whitt presented a highly idealised (and later disputed) 'feminine model of organization' (see p.9-10). Ferguson also suggests that power is abused less easily in democratic, feminist organisations:

> But if no individual or subgroup within the collective possesses the permanent institutionalized power to enforce particular definitions of the group and its members,. then the group is more open to processes of redefinition that can allow and encourage change. (p.197)

but this is not born out by the evidence of the case studies, of the 'culture of blame', that developed at ROW, of the internal problems which nearly led to the WRC's demise, of the power conflicts that developed in the 300 Group in spite of so much effort to develop a constitution which would not allow take over by any group.

The trouble is not that power does not exist, or is not abused in women's movement organisations, but that it is treated as invisible – and for this very reason its abuse becomes more likely, a self-fulfilling prophecy. The study of a women's network in Hungary charts a very familiar pattern:

> The issue of leadership in the Feminist Network was initially believed not to exist. This too was part of an emotional commitment to equality and non-hierarchical functioning....However, once the organization began to experience rivalry, jealousy, and mistrust among its members, this informal method of communication compounded negative tendencies. (Beres and Wilson, 1997: p.175)

There is a whole literature developing about appropriate models of power and leadership for women. Much of this is found under the wider Women in Management label, (for instance, Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995; Bell and Nkomo, 1992; Colgan and Ledwith, 1996; Kline, 1993; Marshall, 1984 and 1995; Nicholson,

1996; Page, 1998; Wilson, 1995 and in periodicals like the **Women in Management Review** and **Gender, Work and Organization**). Many of these are posited on Gilligan's (1982) basic assumption that women have an alternative moral orientation based on an ethic of care. Much of this literature revolves around the reformist or radical divide – i.e. whether women should adapt their values and management style to the dominant male values or insist on the importance of feminine values.

Women's own organisations in theory give an unequalled opportunity to translate these values into practice. There is a small but developing literature on power and leadership in feminist organizations. (e.g. Auckland, 1999; Bewley, 1996; Brown, 1992; Grant, 1999; Riordan 1996 and 1999, Wolf, 1993) which suggests that some of the problems with power arise from an assumption of sameness, that all women will behave the same just because they are women, whereas the women's movement has of course been characterised by diversity – in race, class, sexuality, disability and in numerous other ways. An ability to acknowledge and value difference becomes almost the first prerequisite to being able to develop an empowering model of leadership, as is illustrated in the example of the Maternity Alliance, which has taken on board the complexities of working not only across gender divides (they are concerned with fathers as well as mothers) but also those of race, class and disability.

Gould argues how the expectation was that women would not reproduce

> leadership equated with patriarchal authority ... In organizations created by women, this tyrannical leadership would be replaced by sisterhood, mutual support and the co-operative networks of friendship. (Gould, 1979: p.240)

and Riordan argues that part of women's 'power illiteracy' is because expectations of their use of it are so high:

> Women have the ability to abuse power just as much as men. I believe that 'the legacy of sisterhood' has created an unrealistic and unnatural expectation of women and their organizations ... (power-sharing) has become an expectation that because of their sex, women will automatically share power and decision-making... this is not always the case. And when women don't live up to this expectation strong feelings of betrayal, anger and resentment ensure. (Riordan, 1996: pp. 55-56)

What is clear is that each organisation – and each woman in a leadership position – has to work out her own model for using power effectively. There are useful models in the literature to guide her – for instance, the concept of 'power with' rather than 'power over', the model of 'compassionate leadership' - 'a leadership which facilitates, guides, enables members of an organization to strive towards an identified goal' (Page, 1998: p.8) – developed by women managers in refugee organisations. However there is no prescriptive blueprint for leaders of women's voluntary organizations. We have seen power abused in different ways in both traditional and women's movement organisations. We have seen how it is often difficult for an organisation to deal with what Riger calls the 'founder's trap' and, once a charismatic founder leaves (or, in some cases, will not leave) develop a more appropriate style of leadership for the next stage of its life-cycle (see Hudson,

1995: p.260). We have seen, for instance, how inappropriate Erin Pizzey's style of leadership was to a period of consolidation, and how difficult the 300 Group found it after Lesley Abdela left to develop a style of leadership and way of working that was not so strongly dependent on personality. There are many other examples in the women's movements of charismatic founders – Pauline Barrie at the Women's Art Library, Bernadette Vallely of the Women's Environmental Network – who can make it difficult for the organisation to move on into its adult stage of a strategically managed, well governed and led organisation, with all the appropriate systems and clear accountability. On the other hand Georgina Ashworth, founder Director of Change, the highly effective international research unit on women, has been able to stand back and allow others to help to formalise and develop an organisation she has run almost single handed for twenty years[2].

If we have seen power abused in different ways, we have also seen it very well used, again in very different ways. The models of leadership which we have seen have been very varied. We have seen the model of the Director of Refuge, Sandra Horley, who is clearly the most powerful person in the organisation and has survived two major disputes with the Board to lead the organisation with skill and high profile passion. We have seen the extremely effective leadership partnership of the Chair and Director at the Fawcett Society where the Director is given a lot of support and affirmation in her role of implementing the Executive Committee's decisions. We have seen the 'power-sharing' models of the Mothers' Union and the Guide Association where very carefully negotiated relationships, based on mutual respect, have developed between the elected and the appointed leaders. We have seen in SCWO how the arrival of a dynamic, entrepreneurial, younger National Secretary (partly paid, mostly volunteer) prepared to take a leadership role has galvanised what had become quite a moribund organisation, moving it from a classic bureaucracy to something close to Robbins' definition of an adhocracy (see Chapter 2 p.8 above) and opened up all sort of possibilities for its future – and, significantly that she has been **allowed** to do this. One of the most depressing features of many sections of the women's movement has been the fact that so often examples of good, high profile, leadership evoke not pride but envy. Thus instead of being greeted with affirmation and support, a woman in a leadership role may, even from her own organisation, be the targets of remarks like 'Who does she think she is?'(and, in a phrase reported by the participants of a recent conference 'What does she think she is wearing?'). In contrast we have seen how a form of 'distributed leadership' really has been achieved in the collective in the Feminist Library (almost certainly because it has remained very small) and how the Manchester Rape Crisis Centre struggled to 'make power visible', negotiating complex differences of power as they worked towards their goal of becoming a mixed race collective. And we have seen in the Maternity Alliance and ELBWO two models of leadership which are very different but each in their way transformational. In the case of the Maternity Alliance this has been achieved by challenging many of the traditional shibboleths of the women's movement – not working with men, being self-servicing, demanding long hours and almost total commitment - and yet achieving an organisation which is extremely affirming to all the women involved whether new mothers, or staff, Chair or committee members, or all those who sit on its various working groups.

Eagly and Johnson, in their large study of research comparing the leadership styles of men and women - **Gender and Leadership Style: A Meta-Analysis –** concluded that:

> Consistent with stereotypic expectations about a different aspect of leadership style, the tendency to lead democratically or autocratically; women tended to adopt a more democratic or participative style and a less autocratic or directive style than did men. This sex difference appeared in all three classes of leadership studies, including those conducted in organizations. (Eagly and Johnson, 1990: p.233)

But a democratic or participative style does not, on its own, ensure good leadership. We have seen some examples in the case studies of just how complex are the skills which successful leaders in women's organisations need to exercise. There is an increased understanding of the need for good leadership. Sen and Crown wrote of the need in the international women's movement 'to devise innovative ways of sharing responsibilities, develop structures which keep leaders accountable and responsive to the voices and needs of the membership at all levels' (1988: p.93). The London based African women's organisation, Akina Mama Wa Afrika, has responded to this need by developing the African Woman's Leadership Institute with in-depth programmes on leadership skills, strategic planning, project management, managing change, conflict resolution, influencing policy and advocacy. In this country too there is increased interest in the issue of women and leadership, with courses put on by the Centre for Institutional Studies at the University of East London – and an increased need for such courses.

To sum up: *the women's movement has had an ambivalent relationship with power and leadership. In traditional organisations these concepts were recognised as important – with models of very powerful women – but sometimes abused. In feminist organisations built on a participatory-democratic model, power and leadership were often rendered invisible, leading to power illiteracy. There is now a growing understanding that power exists in all organisations and can be both used or abused – and there are models of good and even transformational leadership developing in all parts of the organised women's movement.*

Conflict and conciliation

We have seen how the issue of power and leadership in the organised women's movement has been almost inextricably linked with the issue of conflict and, as organisations stop pretending conflict does not exist and become better at dealing with it, with that of conciliation.

Riordan shows the link between this problem of power and the 'myth of sisterhood', the idea that women are not only all the same but inherently nicer than men. In reality:

> ...sisters are not always nice to each other; their positions and status are not always equal; and their relationships are not always supportive. (Riordan, 1999: p.34)

and even solidarity between women sharing the 'triple oppression' of gender, race and class can , as we saw with the development of OWAAD, break down into painful divisions, echoing Alexander's ambivalent experience:

> Whilst Black women have been my greatest source of encouragement, inspiration and joy, they have also been my greatest source of hurt, frustration and disappointment. (Alexander, undated)

Phillips too, explained both the intensity of sisterhood, the 'atmosphere of intimate engagement' but how its 'strength is also its weakness', how its 'desire for homogeneity, ... also implies an intolerance of difference' – and how, when sisters 'fall out we do it with a vengeance.' Her chapter on *When Sisters Fall Out* tracks all the ideological divisions between women in the 70s which led to such a falling out. (Phillips, 1987)

Riger argues that many of the conflicts that develop in women's organisations are:

> Organisational growing pains, not personal deficits, generate many of the tensions in feminist organisations... Recognition that tensions can stem from systemic factors rather than members' lack of commitment to feminism reduces the guilt and blame that confound the already difficult process of conflict management. Moving from individualistic to organisational explanations permits consideration of solutions other than simply ousting people from the organization. (Riger, 1994: p.296)

She suggests that the need to 'develop an "etiquette of conflicts" which permits differences to be negotiated between women is a formidable task facing women's organisations' (p.295).

We have seen too many examples, in the case studies and more widely, of conflicts in women's organisations that are deeply personalised and seemingly impossible to resolve. Complex grievance and disciplinary procedures, as existed in ROW or WRC or currently in the Rape Crisis Federation, do not necessarily help and may not even be evoked by Management Committees frightened of confronting conflict. It is demonstrably not enough to have the structures unless one is prepared to use them. Those organisations that are more successful are those which confront the **causes** of conflict and set up mechanisms –'organisational explanations...(and) solutions' - to deal with them before they happen. The Maternity Alliance, for instance, has structures in place (including trade unions and a very effective Finance and General Purposes Committee) which both reduce the possibility of conflict and allow for its resolution as it occurs. The organisation which has come closest to setting up an 'etiquette of conflicts' or rather an 'etiquette of conciliation' is the Guide Association whose new 'Partnership Protocols' recognise the potential for a breakdown of relationship between staff and volunteers and set out very detailed standards of good practice for both sides to follow. Equally, however, it is realistic in recognising that 'in agreeing these protocols as the foundations for effective partnerships, it is not a panacea for the resolution of all

problems between individuals'(see p.84 above). Cockburn's work (1998) also shows there are no easy answers - but that the recognition of differences as well as commonalities, the shared experience of how to handle disagreements, to build multiple bridges, to 'hold together' in the face of ethnic and every other sort of division, do offer some hope of conciliation.

The 'Building Blocks' which WAFE suggests to its members would also go a long way towards avoiding the sort of conflict and division which has sadly affected the women's refuge movement both within organisations, (see example of Southwark Women's Aid p.141-142) and between different parts of the refuge movement, as in the as yet unresolved divisions between WAFE and Refuge. The Rape Crisis Federation was in its very formation an example of working through conflict to conciliation, although a conciliation which has to be constantly re-negotiated, as the recent approach by eight RCCs objecting to RCF's continuing 'women only' policy testifies.

To sum up: *the organised women's movement is developing a much more realistic and less personalised approach to organisational conflict which allow it to develop innovative institutional methods of conflict resolution and conciliation which avoid tearing individuals or organisations apart. Cockburn's research on three women's organisations in areas of conflict give some very relevant insights on how to handle conflict and conciliation.*

Size and membership

As we saw in Chapter 6, size of membership is not, of course, the only or even the most accurate index of an organisation's success (you **can** be small and beautiful like the Feminist Library, and in the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement groups tended to become deliberately 'closed' rather than open in order **not** to grow[3]) but it is certainly the one which is most cited in relation to an organisation's health. All the traditional organisations in the case studies are membership organisations – although SCWO has a membership of organisations rather than individuals – and several counted, and in the case of NFWI, TG, MU and GA still count, as mass membership organisations. Criteria for membership can be a point of some contention. The Mothers' Union decision to exclude women who had been divorced, or were married to men who had been divorced, proved extremely divisive, but it is marked that it is organisations which, while remaining resolutely 'women centred', encourage open and acknowledged partnership with men (rather than a secret 'shadow hierarchy' of men) which seem to be the most successful – for instance Fawcett, ELBWO and the Maternity Alliance.

All the membership organisations, with the exception of the Fawcett Society, are affected by falling membership – the challenge of 'downsizing' - some, like the Co-operative Women's Guild, (with a fall from more than 87,000 in 1939 to 3300 in 1999) disastrously so. The reasons for this decline have been well rehearsed: women's changing lives, too many competing activities, a general decline in volunteering, a rapidly changing external environment. In particular, as my own

earlier research showed (Grant, 1995), there have been particular problems in attracting young women into women's organisations and we have seen in the case studies how many organisations have virtually given up trying, concentrating instead on the young retirees (although even then there can be a problem, identified by NCW, as husbands live longer and there are more activities couples can do together). One of the case studies, SCWO, was sufficiently concerned, as we saw, to carry out a survey asking **Is your organisation meeting the needs of the Women of Today?** The sort of solutions they suggest – well organised meetings, interesting topics, companionship, better promotion – are clearly important but frankly seem cosmetic. All organisations but one are, in spite of considerable efforts to increase membership, at best only managing to slow the rate of decline. But there are signs of a change. The NFWI may not appear very dynamic at headquarters (although its Annual Conference in Summer 2000 was, through the hostile reception by the rank and file, to give the Prime Minister some pause for thought!) but there have been recent reports of considerable dynamism at the grassroots, taking direct action against electricity pylons, campaigning against genetically modified food or taking off their clothes to raise thousands and thousands of pounds for Leukaemia Research (see page 93 above). And the Fawcett Society, against all the trends, has managed to increase its membership more than fivefold, attracting more and more younger women, partly through its very targeted Activists' Network. Its Director is confident, that, with a properly planned membership drive, it can more than treble its present 2000 plus members - although it does not aspire to become a mass membership organisation, thus challenging the business view that you must 'expand or die.' But Fawcett is not concerned only about numbers but anticipates a 'segmented' membership, with different categories of members receiving different benefits. It looks as if the successful organisation of the future will need to be more sophisticated both about attracting new members and meeting the needs of different kinds of members. BFWG is a also considering a more segmented membership to take advantage of its international and European contacts (see page 77 above).

How has Fawcett achieved what others find impossible? We have examined several of the reasons – its governance, its leadership, its image. But Kelly and Breinlinger in their exploration of women's participation in collective action and in women's groups concluded that:

> Involvement in women's groups is not an expression of political disaffection for these women, but a commitment to do something positive to help bring about social change and depends on a feeling that such change is a real possibility.
> (Kelly and Breinlinger, 1995: p. 53)

It is this commitment to do something positive and the confidence that you can make a difference which make women want to join Fawcett's active campaigning for equality, which made them join the Movement for the Ordination of Women, or the Women's Environmental Network, which keeps them loyal to Rights of Women. And it seems to be the tremendous commitment it inspires which enables ELBWO to keep the girls who took part in its nurseries or Saturday schools or holiday play schemes 'in the fold' so that they come back as play leaders or tutors or volunteers. The Guide Association, on the other hand (in spite of all its

impressive work on its governance, its mission and its image) still finds it hard to persuade the girls and young women who have been Brownies and Guides to stay on as adult leaders.

Most of the traditional organisations we have examined have at least attempted to diversify by age. Apart from the Guides, and very recently SCWO in Liverpool, they show very little ethnic diversity at all even if they may, like the MU, BFWG, or the Soroptimists have very strong international links. It is a challenge which Fawcett takes very seriously. And whereas it may be unrealistic to expect black women to wish to **join** the WI or the TG, all such organisations would do well to open a dialogue with ethnic minority women's groups with a view to developing mutually beneficial partnerships with them, as the WI started to do with its work with groups like Southall Black Sisters over the law on provocation.

If membership is one of the main ways of measuring the size of an organisation, we can also use number of staff, number of volunteers and size of budget. An organisation like the Guide Association counts as large on all counts: 700,000 members, 168 staff and an income of £7 million (with the NFWI and MU not far behind). At the other end of the scale the Feminist Library is tiny on any measure – no paid staff, only 300 subscribers, and a very small income. Between these two extremes there is considerable variety. SCWO gathers many organisations under its umbrella and has recently run some very ambitious health days but it is run on the absolutely proverbial shoestring, with tiny core costs and a very part-time National Secretary. A small paid staff is the norm – although an organisation like Refuge has a turnover of £1.5 million and 65 staff. We shall be looking later at how membership is inextricably linked with income in most organisations.

To sum up: *While, to the women's liberation movement, small was considered beautiful and groups tended to become 'closed' if they became too large, most traditional women's organisations are now very concerned at rapidly falling membership numbers. Questions of membership revolve around questions of diversity, especially over age, and persuading young women to join/remain is a key issue. There is also concern about lack of ethnic diversity and an ageing membership and moves towards a more 'segmented' approach to membership.*

Purpose and partnerships

We saw under the section on membership how the single most important factor in attracting and retaining the membership of women's organisations is whether women feel that a group's mission or purpose is important and relevant and its aims and objectives are sufficiently realistic and focussed to be able to achieve this mission. This is why the campaigning or advocacy organisations find it easier to attract members (as long as they are effective) than the more generalist 'way of life' or multi-purpose organisations (however well run) 'which gave women a really empowering voice towards the beginning of the century but have now essentially

lost their function' (see interview on page 71 above). My earlier research showed how this is even more true of younger women (Grant, 1995).

The Co-operative Women's Guild may have made little effort to update either its purpose or its governance but other traditional organisations have tried hard to make their mission more relevant. One of the more outstanding examples is that of the BFWG who made the momentous decision to give up Crosby Hall, which had brought them great prestige, and put the money into grants for the living expenses of post-graduate women students. This brave move alone, however, has not halted the decline in membership and its Past President talks about more drastic measures of possibly a two-tier membership, with an activist branch taking advantage of all BFWG's contacts at the UN and in Europe. She anticipates the need for an even more drastic decline in membership before the organisation is ready to accept this degree of change. Both the Guide Association and the Mothers' Union were galvanised by substantial falls in membership to re-visit their purpose or mission, with the Guides in 1992 both changing their name and producing a Vision Statement which for the first time identified them uncompromisingly as a **women's** as well as a youth organisation. The Mothers' Union had gone through a considerable process of soul-searching in 1973, around the decisions to admit women involved with divorce, and emerged as a much stronger and braver organisation. And we have seen how the YWCA has recently almost totally rethought its purpose as well as its governance while the Fawcett Society, while remaining within the same broad parameters of campaigning for equality between men and women, has become far more focussed.

The women's movement organisations were all born with a purpose since they emerged in response to women's urgent needs – rape, domestic abuse, legal rights, racism and so on. However the partnerships which formed around these issues were often transient and fraught with conflict grounded in genuine, but no less divisive political differences. The conflicts around the National Abortion Campaign and its position in the pro-choice movement (see Griffin, 1995: pp. 41-48) are a case in point. However, even organisations with a more settled purpose can be threatened by external events and competition. With the new national Women's Library and with individual political parties doing more to encourage women to get involved politically, there must be a question mark over the future of the Feminist Library or the 300 Group (and the spectacularly successful Movement for the Ordination of Women demonstrated that to close down because you have achieved your objective is emphatically **not** a sign of failure) - although the fact that there are likely to be considerably fewer women elected at the next election might revive the 300 Groups fortunes. The WRC has revealed itself as an extraordinarily adaptive organisation which has evolved its purpose in response to changing needs.

An ability to find and work with appropriate and diverse partners on different projects is increasingly important to the organised women's movement and a much more pragmatic, less doctrinaire approach is developing. One explanation for the CWG's decline is that it became so insular that it was not even interested in working with progressive women **within** the co-operative movement, let alone further afield. At the seminar run by the WRC in July 1999 on 'Building on our

Strengths' great emphasis was laid on the importance, of building partnerships, developing networks, making allies rather than perceiving enemies. All the traditional organisations have tried to extend their networks. Even the NFWI joined in the early 90s an unlikely Alliance of Women's Organisations with groups like Justice for Women and Southall Black Sisters to campaign for changes in the law of provocation. Part of the YWCA's change of focus after moving out of social housing is its participation in the 'Stop Violence Against Women' Campaign with groups like the Campaign to End Rape, Justice for Women, Rights of Women, Women's Aid and Zero Tolerance. Part of the Maternity Alliance's strength lies in its very extensive networks and the Fawcett Society has been strengthened too by its partnerships not just with the women's movement but with wider political and human rights groups like the Electoral Reform Society, the Hansard Society and Charter 88. And both WAFE, the Rape Crisis Federation, and the WRC illustrate how much women's groups need strong and effective networks to give them the information, advice, support and advocacy that they need, while the revitalised ROW also emphasises the importance of partnerships. The Newham Asian Women's Project attributes its ability to survive and prosper partly to building strategic partnerships (see endnote 8 on p.172)

The building and maintaining of alliances ('alliance politics') pose particular challenges, (as the history of NAWO shows). A study from the US (Albercht & Brewer, 1990) provides a useful contribution to the study of multicultural alliances amongst women, addressing critical questions about women's leadership, power and grassroots organising and asking: 'How can we build strong alliances that take into account our differences but do not necessarily erase them?' (Bookman, 1994: p. 549). We have seen how the Maternity Alliance gives an example of very effective alliance building across a range of sectors and Page's work on networks, alliances and coalitions (Page, 1997) around the Beijing Conference includes a very useful list of 'Ingredients for Effective NGO Coalition and Alliance Building', of which the last item reads:

> Willingness to work as a diverse group of individuals, accountable to separate
> organisations, establishing and working to common goals. (Page, 1997: p.37)

To sum up: *Women's organisations of all kinds are revealing themselves as increasingly prepared to adapt their purpose or mission in response to changing needs and falling membership and to be willing and pragmatic enough to seek new and even unlikely partners for their work. The building of alliances, particularly multicultural alliances, provides particular challenges.*

Income and accountability

Regular income is crucial to any organisation. As Riordan (1996, 1998a and b, 1999) has cogently demonstrated, the women's voluntary sector is characterised by chronic under-funding. The reasons for this vary – the traditional organisations rely overwhelmingly on membership subscriptions (although some have, also been very successful in raising money for specific projects – for instance SCWO from the Department of Health for their Health Days and NFWI for a range of projects).

and those women's movement groups which have formalised into voluntary sector organisations rely on outside funders, such as local authorities, London Boroughs Grant Unit, Trusts, European funding or the Lottery etc. Both these sources raise questions of accountability.

We have seen that, whereas a few of the traditional organisations (e.g. MU, NFWI, GA) have developed profitable trading companies and some have sizeable investments, most are overwhelmingly dependent on their income from their membership subscriptions. A fall in membership thus has very serious financial repercussions, made worse by the fact it is extremely difficult to persuade members of almost any organisation to pay increased subscriptions. We have seen a consistent pattern where members may be extraordinarily generous in the money they contribute to the causes their organisation supports but just as extraordinarily mean about the amount of they are willing to contribute to the running and development of the organisation itself. An extreme example are the Soroptimists – a group made up of professional or managerial working women and hence not poor - who will raise half a million pounds for one of their quadrennial appeals but are very reluctant indeed to contribute to the upkeep of the Soroptimist Club in London or to increase their dues to help pay for a Chief Executive. The only organisation which has broken out of this mould is the Fawcett Society where a sizeable proportion of the membership have chosen (or been persuaded) to contribute considerably more than the minimum subscription by standing order payments. Last year Fawcett's members responded to a financial crisis by donating more than £25,000 in the space of a few weeks.

How, again, did Fawcett succeed where others have failed – and where does this reluctance to spend money on organisations which women profess to be devoted to and proud of come from? It is certainly very different in the US where I found women extremely generous in giving to their own causes and other groups of which they may not even be members (Grant, 1988) – by payroll giving, covenanting, different sorts of pledges. A recent report from the Women's Funding Network ('a partnership of women's funds, donors and allies') examines 'Why Women Give and Don't Give to Women's Funds'[4]. There has been no research at all in this country about why women here are so grudging about a small annual subscription of around £11-14 to their own organisation, while many women in the US will enthusiastically give more than that every month to a range of women's causes. We have seen that it cannot simply be explained by lack of disposable income. The nearest I came to an explanation was from Sacha Choudri at the Mothers' Union who suggested that 'as women we are not taught to spend money on ourselves'. Riordan, in her research on the funding of women's organisations quite understandably concentrates on 'public investment in women's organisations' but I would also recommend action research to promote women's investment of money as well as time in their own organisations – and others which are committed to social justice and the full participation of women and girls. It is probably unrealistic to envisage a national network of Women's Funds[5] although Akina Mama Wa Akrika has again led the way here with sponsorship of the African Women's Development Fund (inspired by other international funds for women such as MamaCash and the Global Fund for Women) launched at the Beijing + 5

Conference in New York in June 2000. But it is surely time to begin to establish a tradition of women investing in women and to build on examples of success like Fawcett or the Museum of Women's Art, which is largely supported by individuals through events, art auctions and so on.

For the traditional women's organisations accountability is mainly to their members – and of course to the Charities Commission and/or Companies House. In the case of most of the groups which came out of the women's movement and then 'formalised' into voluntary sector organisations, received funding and employed staff, it is the funders to whom they appear to be held most accountable. Crucial amongst these funders in the early 80s - and catalytic in the development of the organised women's movement- were the women's committee of the GLC and other metropolitan counties. Although organisations like the London Boroughs Grant Committee and the Bridge House Estates Trust were to pick up some of the GLC's funding commitments, women's organisations have never had such sympathetic and generous funders since. Sara Llewellyn of the Bridge House Estates Trust, a former activist on many fronts in the women's movement, explains that 'collective structures are extremely difficult for funding regimes to engage with – groups need to make it very clear who is responsible for what'[6]. We have seen in the case studies some painful transitions and how many groups have reconsidered their collective structure in the face of funder pressure. There are occasions when the clash of cultures is so strong that funding is withdrawn, as with London Women's Aid and the London Rape Crisis Centre. But we have also seen organisations which are just as radical in structure, such as Southall Black Sisters, develop extremely warm relationships with their funders (in SBS's case mainly Ealing Council) while the Manchester Rape Crisis Centre has come to see the accountability required by their funders as an **opportunity** to improve their own practice, rather than as a threat. And support organisations like WAFE or the Rape Crisis Federation now advise their members not only on sources of funding but on monitoring and evaluation, on dealing with service level agreements, on assuring 'your funders or potential funders that the service you are offering is one of QUALITY'[7].

Meeting the requirements of the new funding regime, the 'contract culture', is one of the major challenges for the women's voluntary sector (already the most underfunded part of the voluntary sector as a whole) although ironically some of the traditional organisations see **falling** income as a powerful catalyst for change. Nor is it just their structures which makes these organisations difficult to fund; it is often also the issues on which they are working. Domestic abuse may have become almost mainstream in funding terms, although still nowhere near adequately funded, but lesbian parenting is certainly not and ROW was until recently very gloomy about the chance of getting much of its work funded (the fact that the Lottery have come in as a major funder of ROW's legal work illustrates the importance of this comparatively new funding stream). More generally, in an era of 'mainstreaming', where the 'dominant discourse' and 'needs interpretations' may be in opposition to women specific services, such services come under increasing threat (see Klinker, 1998). It is in contrast to such challenges as these present that organisations such as ROW are becoming much more concerned and pragmatic about the income they

can **earn** and about pricing their expertise in a way which can make a significant contribution to their organisation's income.

To sum up: *the organised women's movement is - both historically and currently - chronically under-funded. For the traditional organisations this is largely due to falling membership and a great reluctance by members to pay increased subscriptions - and research needs to be undertaken to encourage women in the UK to invest in their own organisations as women do in the US. Those organisations which are part of the women's voluntary sector have become the most underfunded part of the whole sector, with 'women specific projects' under particular threat in a time of 'mainstreaming'. But women's organisations are beginning to see new funding regimes as an opportunity rather than a threat and to make their accountability to their funders work for them rather than against them - as well as recognising the need to generate far more of their own income.*

Context and contingency

We have looked at a number of individual women's organisations, building up detailed case studies through data collection and in depth interviews. We have noted how their structure, governance, management, quality of leadership, effectiveness, ability to respond to change etc have been affected by internal contingency factors like size, income, age, where the organisation is in its life-cycle, the tasks it performs or its ideology.

But organisations exist, as Burrell and Morgan point out, 'within the context of a wider environment' (1979:p.167), an environment which, as we have noted constantly, they both affect and are affected by - and they may be affected by the same contingency factor in different ways. For instance, the Co-operative Women's Guild may owe much of its decline to loss of purpose or an over-bureaucratic structure but it was also affected by the general decline of the Co-operative movement which tended to take the Guild down with it and the fact that the mood of the country around World War II was not supportive to its peace campaign. The TG and NFWI, however, more in tune with the spirit of the times, experienced a surge of membership after the war while SCWO was set up expressly to deal with problems generated by the War. Similarly the British Federation of University Women was born out of a period when the few women at university urgently needed support. In a time of mass higher education for women this support becomes virtually redundant and a viable future for the renamed British Federation of Graduate Women will require a radical re-focussing of purpose. Similarly the Mothers' Union has had an important effect in the promotion of marriage and the bringing up of children within the Church of England but has itself been forced to radically re-assess its membership criteria and its activities in the light of a burgeoning divorce rate and the fact that 40% of children are now born outside of any sort of marriage vows, let alone Christian ones. The NFWI, on the other hand, has been the beneficiary of a recent renewed interest in and concern for the future of the countryside. The very decline of rural areas has boosted the importance of the

WI as often the only example of civil society in a village with no Church, pub, school, shop, doctor and perhaps two buses a week.

It is also interesting that the development of concepts of women in management dear to the heart of the women's movement, - replacing the 'command-and control' leadership style with one based on a more participatory, transformational type - have affected wider managerial views on how both men and women should manage. And this wider managerialism has now, in turn, as we have seen, permeated right through the organised women's movement. On the other hand, views on collective ways of working as such have not been viewed with much enthusiasm externally and we have seen how several organisations remarked that disapproval from funders and other external bodies adversely affected their capacity to make this most demanding of systems work.

All the organisations we have examined came out of significant social movements - first and second wave feminism - which have had profound effects on women's lives in this country. The effect is often circular. The very changes which these organisations helped effect can rebound against them. To take one obvious example, amongst many. In the early part of the twentieth century opportunities for young women - as for any women- were very limited so that the importance of opportunities offered by organisations like the YWCA were beyond dispute. At the beginning of a new century the opportunities for young women have been transformed beyond all recognition (substantially because of the influence of first and second wave feminism). In this new climate it will only be those organisations which recognise the significance of these societal changes and find an appropriate niche for themselves within them who will survive.

To sum up: *Women's organisations are affected both by internal - size, age, income, task and ideology - and external contingency factors. To be able to survive in the 21ˢᵗ century organisations need to be aware of these wider societal forces and have strategies for responding to them appropriately. This was amply illustrated by the example of organisations like the Fawcett Society, the YWCA, the Women's Resource Centre, the Maternity Alliance and East London Black Women's Organisation which have all managed to do this very effectively.*

Transformation and change

At first this seems a strange title when we have seen how intensely conservative some of the traditional women's organisations have shown themselves to be, clinging on to old structures, ways of doing things and even their symbols. The Soroptimists, TG and SCWO have all hung onto clearly outdated symbols and logos. Even the Fawcett Society still generates a great deal of emotion around which are or are not its genuine colours (see page 123 above). However the organised women's movement has as a whole, as we have seen, shown itself surprisingly open to change pushed, to a large extent, by the imperative of falling membership and the corresponding fall in income. It is significant that the only

organisation which shows no sign of responding to change is the Co-operative Women's Guild, which has been shielded from the full realities of its falling membership by the fact that local Co-operative Societies underwrite the expenses of its meetings.

Elsewhere, as we saw in Chapter 4, we have traditional organisations which have either already undergone significant change (GA, MU) or, in the case of the YWCA, astonishing change. In the case of SCWO we see a very traditional organisation undergoing a renaissance largely through the agency of a new National Secretary. There are other organisations which anticipate drastic change (employing a Director, two-tier membership, even amalgamation) if their membership falls further (TG, BFWG). The Fawcett Society has become a model of change management where, while it retains its original mission of fighting for equality between men and women, its governance, management, ways of working, membership size and profile have all changed dramatically. Organisational change agents can come from various directions, both collective and individual – an inspirational Chair, a brave Board, a Director with appropriate skills, an active staff group, an effective committee, a grassroots resolution or the right external consultant. One of the absolute prerequisites for successful change seems to be good, transparent communication throughout the organisation (both up and down) and we have seen how many groups have enthusiastically embraced the new opportunities offered by the new technology - the internet, email etc.

What Colgan and Ledwith (1996) have to say about women as change agents 'movers and shakers' in mainstream organisations is also helpful in understanding the circumstances in which change can happen in women's own organisations.. They identify three conditions – external conditions which make change possible or necessary (i.e. the contingency factors which we have noted above and indeed throughout this thesis), a responsiveness within the organisation to accept the significance of these changes, and women's activism 'as employees and as users and customers of an organisation and as citizens within the society where it is located' (p.279) – and of course, in this case, as members and management committee members as well. Colgan and Ledwith also quote Kirton's (1991) view of a change agent as a 'competent individual who has enough skills to be successful in a particular environment', so it needs to be the right person (s) in the right place at the right time.

Of the groups which came out of the women's movement, almost all have gone through processes of enormous change and the WRC has recreated itself several times over, moving in the last three years from near collapse to an extremely strategic position supporting the women's voluntary sector in London. The Rape Crisis movement has also shown itself very responsive to changing needs, particularly through the launch in 1996 of the Rape Crisis Federation. Riordan (1999: p.32) speaks of the 'imagination, innovation and sheer dedication' which women's organisations display in the face of continued lack of appropriate public investment. The Maternity Alliance and ELBWO show how really effective organisations can expand and grow even within this climate. And an organisation

like the Feminist Library also shows itself very adaptive to changing circumstances, with a determination to survive even without funding.

Finally I want to argue that the organised women's movement, and in a small way this research project on it, has shown itself to be transformational in four ways.

- Firstly, it has clearly transformed the lives of women and society quite dramatically. Whether women today choose to call themselves feminists or not there is hardly a portion of their lives which has not been changed and enhanced by the first or second wave of feminism – from their right to vote, enjoyment of reproductive rights, to the way they give birth, to their educational opportunities, to the right to live free from the fear of violence, to receive equal pay, hold public appointments, be ordained or become managing directors. Nor is this struggle simply historical. We have seen in organisation after organisation how missions are updated in response to changing but still urgent needs. The picture this reveals is a changed but still vibrant organised women's movement with an important role to play in the 21st century.

- Secondly, we have seen how it has been transformational in the lives of individual women. These are not only the obvious examples of women who discovered 'sisterhood' and consciousness-raising in the 70s, joined women's groups and developed different, collective, participatory ways of organising which have transformed the ways we think about leadership and organisational theory and have permeated mainstream management and organisational thinking. It is also true of women years ago who joined the traditional, hierarchical women's organisations but found such pleasure in spending time working or learning, acquiring new skills or just enjoying themselves in the company of other women that doors were opened, their lives were immeasurably enhanced, transformed in a way in which there seems little comparable in men's lives (How many men could say the same about Rotary or the Rugby Club?)

- Thirdly, it has been a transformational subject to research and has in particular changed my thinking about traditional women's organisations dramatically. I started with the hypothesis that the organised women's movement was transformational as a whole, but that much of the traditional end of it was old fashioned, out of touch and probably beyond transforming itself. I end this research with great admiration and respect for this end of the sector for the remarkable effect it has had on women's lives and a great hope that it can overcome the internal problems which are holding it back, and adapt appropriately to external societal changes. I also started this research believing that structure and governance were the most important factors that enable or disable an organisation. I end it still convinced of their importance but realising, through 'grounded theory', through listening carefully to my interviewees, that ways of working and all the other categories we have identified are also of key importance.

- Lastly, it has also been a transforming research experience because it has evoked such a positive response from a number of women who had never been asked to reflect on their experience in this way before. They started as interviewees but, because of their interest and commitment, in effect became partners in the research process. The process of participating in the research helped them to reflect on their own practice and has encouraged several to write their experiences up themselves, thus fulfilling the fourth aim I set myself at the start, of 'beginning to redress the research deficit on women's organisations and stimulating further relevant research'.

To sum up: *Although there is a strong tendency for organisations to hang on to the symbols of their past, the organised women's movement (both traditional and second wave feminist) has shown itself extremely open to change, even quite dramatic change. The research as a whole has been transformational because it reveals a movement which has both changed, and continues to change, the world and the individual women involved in it. It has also transformed my thinking as the researcher and stimulated further research and enquiry amongst the interviewees.*

Conclusion and Recommendations

We have looked at an organised women's movement which, taken as a whole, is diverse in every respect although this may be far from the case within individual organisations. The quality of its work and the transforming effect which it has both on its members and on society has not been matched with appropriate funding from public sources and it is even difficult to raise money from its own members – one of the manifestations of the organisational 'feminisation of poverty'.

The organised women's movement shares many of the challenges of finance, structure, governance and accountability with the voluntary sector as a whole but it experiences some of these challenges, especially those around structure, power, leadership, income and conflict, particularly acutely. This makes the creative solutions which are being explored or created even more impressive.

Although the movement as a whole is showing itself very open to change, there must be doubt over whether, in a time of falling membership, all organisations can survive in their present form. Although the Feminist Library would seem a candidate for closure, by learning to operate on such a small budget it could secure its survival while top heavy hierarchies like the Co-operative Women's Guild are far more vulnerable. If others are to survive they will need to think in terms of amalgamations and other ways to make themselves more relevant to modern women.

The organised women's movement faces the challenge of how far it should remain 'women only' or be 'women centred' but prepared to work in partnership with men. It is marked from the case studies that the three organisations which are most affirming to women – the Fawcett Society, the Maternity Alliance and ELBWO –

are those which work in partnership with men or with generalist organisations beyond the women's sector. However the recent highly publicised appointment (July 1999) of a man as Chief Executive to the Mothers' Union can hardly be seen as progress and is particularly disappointing when such a model of good, affirming leadership had been established between the former Chief Executive and the World Wide President.

In Chapter 1 I outlined the aims of this thesis as follows:

- To develop a methodology for the analysis of the governance of women's organisations

- By drawing on both archival and contemporary material, make an original contribution to the understanding and knowledge of the organised women's movement, the challenges which it faces and its ability to adapt its governance in the face of rapid change.

- Draw on the case studies, other examples examined and other expertise within the sector, to draw up guidelines for the good governance of organisations as a contribution to the development of good practice in the organised women's movement.

- Begin to redress the research deficit on women organising and stimulate further relevant research both within the sector and within the academy

I hope I have already demonstrated the achievement of the first two. Although there were no doubt other approaches which would have yielded useful results, the combination of case studies, in-depth semi-structured interviews and a range of material gathered as a participant observer in the women's movement over years - together with an awareness of underlying contingency factors - seems to have produced material which the sector is already finding very valuable, possibly because this sort of empirical research is so rare. Although, as we have seen, this thesis is firmly rooted in the literature, it was never intended to be wholly an academic exercise. It was always intended to be action-orientated, a way of capturing the expertise in women's organisations and making it available to the sector as a whole and the fact that it has inspired a number of others to write about their own organisations I hope makes up for any deficiencies in itself.

In response, to my third aim above, over the last three years I have used not only my reading of the literature, the case studies and interviews, the focus group in 1996 and my wider experience as a participant observer in the women's movement but I have also very specifically taken the opportunity offered by participation in seminars, conferences and workshops to discuss and develop **Criteria for Measuring the Success/Effectiveness of a Women's Organisation.** They are attached as **Appendix I** and over the years literally hundreds of women have contributed to the debate around them.

In order to fulfil these criteria, the research indicates that a number of actions (which are certainly not to be seen as comprehensive) are recommended, either on behalf of individual organisations or infrastructure bodies. These **Recommendations for achieving success/ effectiveness in Women's Organisations** are given in **Appendix II**. Many, indeed most, of the individual points in both the Criteria and the Recommendations could be called generic and are not in themselves specific to women's organisations although taken as a whole. as a package, I would argue they are uniquely geared to the organised women's movement, coming, as they do, so directly from it. The space that this movement occupies intersects at many points with the wider voluntary sector and the world of organisations generally. What makes the organisations within it unique is that they occupy a 'gendered' space which, as we have seen, brings both its own challenges and its own rewards.

The process of disseminating the research findings and these recommendations has already begun and is generating considerable interest. So far this has been in a rather 'ad hoc' way but a much more systematic approach is planned through publication(s), speaking at conferences, running workshops and seminars under the aegis of organisations like NCVO, ACENVO and the WRC, through appropriate university departments and through targeted consultancies. I do not see this, however, as a solitary activity. I hope to continue to work with my research partners and to add to these all those who have been stimulated to write or do research on their organisations as a result of taking part in this project. The fourth aim of this research was to begin to redress the research deficit on women organising and stimulate further research both within the sector and the academy. This has already begun and I will be doing all I can to ensure it continues not least by using a language which is accessible to practitioners and activists as well as to feminist academics (see Duelli Klein, 1983; Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994). I hope this thesis shows how much we have to learn from a movement which deserves not only far more resources but far more research attention than it has so far received.

[1] Andri Soteri, speaking at the Women's Resource Centre conference on *Building our Strengths*, 1.7.99.

[2] Conversation with Sarah Robinson, 30.7.99 and Georgina Ashworth 4.7.00

[3] See page 132-133 above for the example of the development of the Belsize Lane Group.

[4] J. Bourge Hathaway, (1998) Awareness, Priorities, Resources and Results: Why Women Give and Don't Give to Women's Funds, *Summary Report of the Women's Funding Network Donor Research and Marketing Project*, Saint Paul

[5] An attempt to set up a women's funding coalition in the UK in the late 80s, modelled on Women's Way in Philadelphia, proved premature

[6] Sara Llewellyn was speaking on 'How can women's organisations engage in the funding process' at the WRC Conference on *Building on Our Strengths* on July I 1999.

[7] See *Rape Crisis Federation Newsletter*, Summer/Autumn 1998.

APPENDIX I

CRITERIA FOR MEASURING THE
SUCCESS AND EFFECTIVENESS
OF A WOMEN'S ORGANISATION

1. Does it have a mission, aims and objectives, which all women as stakeholders perceive as relevant and important?

2. Does it fulfil its original or revised mission, do what it was set up to do, make a real difference in the external world?

3. (If it is a membership organisation) does it (within its constituency) have a growing, diverse and involved membership to which it is democratically accountable?

4. Do its governance and structures enable and empower it, bringing out the best in the Board, staff, volunteers, members, users and other stakeholders, encouraging models of good leadership and providing the mechanisms to deal with conflict and prevent the abuse of power?

5. Does it have a flexible and adaptive organisational structure and an evolving vision to allow it to respond to rapidly changing needs and challenges and to undertake a change agency role?

6. Does it encourage user feedback, and appropriate monitoring and evaluation and is it fully accountable to all its stakeholders?

7. Does it encourage inter-agency work and develop partnerships with a range of other appropriate organisations?

8. Is it sufficiently financially stable to be able to reliably plan for its future activities in a context of strategic planning?

APPENDIX II

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RESEARCH FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS/ EFFECTIVENESS IN WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

1. Define clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities (with clear job descriptions and person specifications) between the Board/ trustees and staff, especially between the Chair and Chief Executive **but** also allow for permeability between the two. Recognise the distinction between governance and management (while allowing for permeability) and encourage a relationship of mutual respect between Board and staff and members with appropriate protocols to safeguard this.

2. Recognise that the relationship between Chair and Chief Executive is often difficult and one which needs to be carefully 'managed' and worked for. The two post holders do not need to like each other but they do need to **respect** each other and share a belief in the core values of the organisation.

3. Give priority, and devote resources, to finding - and 'growing' - your Board members and to developing their skills and confidence to the full (through detailed induction, training and so on) once found.

4. Ensure that your constitution, structure and governance is appropriate to this stage of your organisation's development, is **enabling** rather than **disabling** and will allow your organisation to grow in the context of your strategic planning. Do not be afraid to make brave and even drastic changes if these are necessary to ensure the future of your organisation.

5. Support and affirm good and appropriate leadership and expertise wherever it occurs in the organisation. Do not be afraid of the concept of management (even flat organisations need to be well managed). Encourage a management style which is transparent, appropriate to your organisation and draws on the best thinking on women and management. Encourage an affirming culture which recognises what is good (work on the principle of 'public praise, private criticism'), brings out the best in all (including volunteers), celebrates success and uses talent appropriately.

6. Develop a family-friendly workplace which encourages the involvement of women with caring responsibilities and discourages the 'all-hours syndrome'. Encourage diversity of all kinds, including ethnic diversity. Recognise and value difference.

7. Open a dialogue over whether black women are ever likely to want to **join** generic and overwhelmingly white women's organisations and what such organisations would need to do to make this happen. Most importantly, develop

appropriate and mutually beneficial **partnerships** between ethnic minority women's groups and more generic women's organisations.

8. Recognise that conflict of interest and abuse of power can occur in any organisation, and have the mechanisms in place to deal with them wherever they occur and well before they happen – and do not be afraid to use these mechanisms immediately if things go wrong. Always stand up to a disruptive individual or group. Never let a situation fester by pretending it is not happening.

9. If you want to attract younger women to your organisation, make it as attractive as possible to them by:

   - Ensuring your mission engages the enthusiasm and commitment of young women

   - Recognising young women are very busy and so not making unrealistic demands on their time

   - Opening up your governance, breaking down bureaucracy, allowing head hunting and 'fast tracking' so that younger women (or women who join as young retirees) have a chance of acquiring leadership positions without having to wait fifteen years to get there

   - Providing very focussed campaigning or other roles which allow young women to develop skills, experience and possibly qualifications which they can see as relevant and important

   - Ensuring that your organisation projects an image which is as diverse as possible and shows young women actively involved at all levels

10. Make the conditions imposed by funders work in your favour rather than against you and give a high priority to monitoring and evaluating your work and ensuring quality at all stages. Ensure the highest standards of financial management.

11. Expand and diversify your funding base, explore ways of increasing earned income and work on encouraging a climate whereby your members can be persuaded to support their organisation far more generously financially.

12. **Infrastructure and other comparable organisations should:**

   - Build up a comprehensive database which maps the sector as a whole

   - Advocate strongly on behalf of the sector to funders and to central and local government.

   - Identify and initiate appropriate research.

   - Provide a range of training, master classes, seminars, mini consultancies, mediation etc which are responsive to the developing needs of the sector and assist in capacity building.

APPENDIX III

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE TEXT

ACENVO	Association of Chief Executives of National Voluntary Organisations
ACF	Association of Charitable Foundations
BFUW	British Federation of University Women
BFWG	British Federation of Women Graduates
BPW	Business and Professional Women
BST	Bovine somatotrophin (as additive in cattle feed)
CAAT	Campaign Against Arms Trade
CAF	Charities Aid Foundation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIS	Centre for Institutional Studies (University of East London)
CWG	Co-operative Women's Guild
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DSC	Directory of Social Change
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council (UN)
ELBWO	East London Black Women's Organisation
FIAC	Federation of Independent Advice Centres
FL	Feminist Library
FLIRC	Feminist Library and Information Resource Centre
GA	Guide Association
GFS	Girls Friendly Society
GLC	Greater London Council
ICOM	Industrial Common Ownership Movement
IFUW	International Federation of University Women
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
IWD	International Women's Day
LBGS/U/C	London Boroughs Grants Scheme/Unit/Committee
LCP	Lesbian Custody Project (at Rights of Women)
LRCC	London Rape Crisis Centre
LVSC	London Voluntary Service Council
LWA	London Women's Aid
MA	Maternity Alliance
MC	Management Committee
MOW	Movement for the Ordination of Women

MRC	Manchester Rape Crisis Centre
MU	Mothers' Union
NADFAS	National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies
NAWO	National Alliance of Women's Organisations
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
NCW	National Council of Women
NFWI	National Federation of Women's Institutes
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NUSEC	National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OWAAD	Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent
PiN	Public Interest and Non-Profit Management Research Unit (Open University)
RCC	Rape Crisis Centres
RCF	Rape Crisis Federation
ROW	Rights of Women
SBS	Southall Black Sisters
SCWO	Standing Conference of Women's Organisations
SI	Soroptimist International
Sia	National Development Agency for the Black Voluntary Sector
SIGBI	Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland
SRCC	Scarborough Rape Crisis Centre
SWA	Southwark Women's Aid
TG	Townswomen's Guilds
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UWE	University Women of Europe
WAFE	Women's Aid Federation England
WIPL	Women into Public Life Campaign
WIRE	Women's Information and Referral Service
WLM	Women's Liberation Movement
WRC	Women's Resource Centre
WRRC	Women's Research and Resource Centre
WRRIC	Women's Reproductive Rights Information Centre
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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