Women's Organising for Change:
An Ethnography of a Feminist Health Group in Winnipeg

BY

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A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University

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ABSTRACT

Despite the large amount of feminist activism around issues of women's health, there are limited studies of these women's groups or their processes, particularly in Canada. The object of this research is to provide a case study of a feminist health group in Winnipeg, Women's Health Interaction Manitoba, which has been active since 1984. This research allows a glimpse into the relatively understudied realm of feminist organising, advocacy and activism, as well as attempting to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding feminist praxis and theory.

For this ethnographic research, eleven interviews and one focus group discussion were facilitated. Archival materials held by the group members were also analysed. As well, a literature review on women's movement studies, feminist modes of organising, feminist health activism, the barriers and facilitators to political activity and women's political culture in Canada was compiled.

Findings of this research point out that WHIM has several elements typical of Canadian women's groups, such as; a more collective-oriented organisational style, a check-in round to begin meetings, lack of formal leadership positions such as president and secretary, consensus-based decision making on major issues, and the feature of a volunteer labour base. Another feature is a flexible and fluid system of membership where women can leave the group and return. WHIM stands out from other groups for their longevity, their shifting amorphous structure that adapts to change, their mix of local and national projects, and for their perseverance despite lack of funding and limited volunteer time. Twenty-six related themes were explored during this study, such as women's political culture, group leadership, feminist process and effecting political action and social change.

This researcher asserts that WHIM has been and continues to be successful in inspiring and sustaining political action and social change, though supporting and nurturing its membership and developing both small and large scale feminist activist initiatives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Study

As a graduate student entering the Department of Anthropology, I did not already have a thesis project idea. My interests in women's issues, women's health, the influences of gender, and feminism naturally guided my search for a project. Soon after my arrival, it was suggested to me to contact a woman who had a Ph.D. in anthropology and was currently employed in the community in the field of women's health. This woman invited me to attend meetings of a women's health group with which she was involved. This began my association with Women's Health Interaction Manitoba (WHIM), the group under study.

I joined the group out of my own personal interests and I assumed it would be unrelated to my degree program at university. The idea of doing academic research with this group formed later. WHIM was developing a popular theatre action research project that would include a facilitated discussion with the audience after each performance. They were planning a role for a researcher, who would document the discussions and analyse the results. The first plan for my thesis research had developed as an evaluation research project about the value of popular theatre and a set of findings about the effects of health reform on Manitoban women. An application to the University of Manitoba Arts Endowment Fund was made to support my planned researcher role, which regrettably was unsuccessful. Unfortunately, two other proposals submitted by WHIM to different potential funders regarding the project as a whole were also unsuccessful. A small $6,000 grant was received, but this was inadequate to fund all project costs.

This lack-of funding put both mine and WHIM's plans on hold. It appeared that the project might have trouble getting off the ground. My thinking shifted towards a study of this women's group and the problems faced in organising for political action and social

change. The idea shifted from researching part of their project to researching the WHIM group itself. Discussions were held with the women of WHIM to establish consent and support for this research with them. During one of the set meetings, a motion was made to have the group's consent to participate be reflected in the minutes. Further consent has been negotiated with each woman individually.

The Research Consultants

The population under study is an educated one, with all consultants possessing some post-secondary education. Many have undergraduate degrees, a few have master's degrees and one has a Ph.D. The women are all capable, literate and possess a high level of comprehension of my research plans.

WHIM has a diversity of women involved who have varied life experiences, identities and perspectives. The following are a few of the multiple identities of the women in WHIM; white, black, disabled, immigrant, lesbian, heterosexual, single, partnered, married, separated, mothers, non-mothers, agnostic, atheist, Jewish, Christian, Bahai, semi-retired, employed, student, professional, of young years and of more advanced years. Eight of the eleven women interviewed are mothers, with the youngest child barely in school and the oldest one in their mid-thirties. The majority of the women are white, heterosexual, able-bodied, and professionally employed.

WHIM is an informal organisation of ten to twelve women and is not incorporated. Yet, they have undertaken major projects in the past, such as, overseeing the tour of a play about women and pharmaceuticals, *Side Effects*, throughout Manitoba. WHIM produced three newsletters, called the *Health Information Update*, as an educational tool about women's health issues. With funding from the Secretary of State Women's Program, WHIM held numerous public sessions over the years. Topics ranged from native women's health concerns, basic gynecological care, the Dalkon Shield Intra-Uterine Device, Depo-

Provera, and women and addictions. The group organised events for an International Day

of Action on Women's Health and sent delegates to several conferences. WHIM also acted

as the facilitating group of a Health Canada funded nation-wide consultation with women's

health groups to form the Canadian Women's Health Network. WHIM is one group in a

myriad of feminist groups in Canada that work for the improved attention to and care for

women's health issues.

Statement of the Problem

The latest wave of the feminist movement, which began in the 1960s, has sparked

the offshoot of a specific *women's health movement*. This movement fuelled research into

the gendered nature of the field of medicine, how understudied women have been by

medical research and the lack of attention to women's specific health needs in the formal

health care structures. This recognition has focused increased attention onto the field of

women's health and well being. The gains for women from this movement, thus far, have

largely resulted from the activist lobbying efforts and public awareness educational

campaigns mounted by feminist health groups (Norsigian, 1992). The work of these groups

put political pressure on governments and health professionals to better address women's

health concerns and needs. As Roach Pierson relates,

> Exemplifying the self-help organizational ingenuity and dedication of second
> wave feminists, rape crisis centres sprang up in urban centres across Canada
> in the 1970s. ... Shelters for battered women and their children provide
> another major example of women organizing to help women. So that we
> could feel confident and able to defend ourselves on the streets and in our
> homes, Canadian women invented Wen-Do, the art of women's self-defence
> fashioned from the moves of Asian martial arts. (1993: 116).

Among the numerous other examples of the impact of women's activism is the founding in

1979 of the feminist journal *Healthsharing*, "to counter the under-representation of

women's health issues in mainstream medical journals and to provide a forum for sharing

information crucial to women's health" (Roach Pierson, 1993: 117). In 1992, the Breast

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Cancer Action-Write Now campaign organised by women with breast cancer and survivors ensured that the governmental Sub-Committee's Report recommended that more of the Canadian research dollar be allocated to breast cancer research (Roach Pierson, 1993). Canadian women on the whole have benefited greatly by the concerted efforts of feminist and women-focused activist efforts. This activism continues because, in spite of advances, women still remain in a disadvantaged position in relation to the medical system (Salk et al., 1992: 653).

Despite the large amount of feminist activism around issues of women's health, there are limited studies of these women's groups or their processes, particularly in Canada. The object of this research is to provide a case study of a feminist health group in Winnipeg, which has been active since 1984. This research will allow a glimpse into the relatively understudied realm of feminist organising, advocacy and activism. It is hoped that this information may contribute to the body of knowledge regarding feminist praxis and theory. This study will provide information important to an understanding of the workings of the Canadian women's movement at a grass roots level. As well, the findings may make a contribution to an important, but presently underdeveloped, body of literature about activism and women's health for feminist and women's studies.

Research Questions

This research will attempt to provide answers to the following questions, among many others: Why does WHIM exist? What is the group's history? What is the structure and membership like? What is it like to participate in WHIM's meetings and activities? What is WHIM's role in women's health activism? Do the women feel their work does achieve the political action and social change they desire? If WHIM and other similar groups ceased to exist, what do the women involved think would happen for women's health? Why are these women politically committed to this cause enough to expend

volunteer hours on projects without any remuneration? In short, through my research, I will attempt to gain an understanding about the inner workings and mandate of this feminist health group. A complete account of questions posed appears in Appendix 1: Interview Guide.

Organisation of the Study

This first chapter has provided the background to this study and an introduction to the research consultants. Chapter Two contains a review of the relevant literature which provides a framework for the later analysis of Women's Health Interaction Manitoba. The review covers topics such as the Canadian women's movement, feminist ideals, women's political culture, and the barriers and facilitators to women's political activity. Profiles of similar groups are also included. Chapter Three discusses the details of the different research methodologies used in this study, as well as offering the reaction of the women interviewed to this research process. Chapter Four offers an historical overview of the group since its inception in 1984. Discussions of the role of WHIM within the women's health movement and opinions about their current project also appear in Chapter Four. The bulk of the analysis of the interview and focus group data, provided by the women involved in WHIM, is in Chapter Five. The final summary and conclusions constitute Chapter Six.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

There is an absence of literature on the inner dynamics of women's health groups in Canada. These groups very rarely write up and publish on the tactics that have worked for them, such as organisational structure or lobbying strategies. Likewise, there is little written about what was unsuccessful and why. The popular beliefs regarding the possible reasons behind this are; that women's groups are overburdened, run on volunteer hours, and without funding. We know very little about what goes on in these groups and the work being done by them. In 1986, Barnsley, Ellis, and Jacobson wrote about how the ongoing work of women's groups often goes unrecognised and unrewarded, which they liken to much of women's work in the home. Feminist work has a clear practice orientation and a focus on learning from other women and their experiences, which are typically not recorded through writing. It would seem to be a case of 'learning by doing' and therefore the knowledge is embedded in this practice. The aim of this research is to shed some light on these inner dynamics and politics of women's organising through the case study of Women's Health Interaction Manitoba (WHIM).

WHIM, as a case study, will provide one example of a group active in the Canadian women's movement. A perusal of the related literature on women's political activism in Canada provides the background for an examination of WHIM. The workings of WHIM are within a larger context shared, to some extent, by all women organising for change. A discussion of this context follows and provides an overview of the Canadian women's movement in the second wave, outlines the women's health movement as a particular branch, details the characteristics of women's political culture, examines certain challenges to feminist organising and finally offers profiles of other women's groups for later comparison to WHIM.

Locating sources for this literature review was challenging. There is not an abundance of material on how women function politically within the context of the Canadian women's movement, or even as actors with the Canadian state. As Maroney and Luxton related after editing a 1987 collection on feminism and political economy

> As we reviewed the literature, we were struck by how little work on women was actually available. For the most part, research on the political economy of women was begun in the 1970s, often for graduate degrees. Because there was neither an established body of empirical work nor clearly delineated conceptual frameworks, each person had in a sense to start anew. The combination of sexist hiring practices and the underfunding of universities and research has meant that most of these researchers were at best tenuously employed in academia. And so the articles in this book were produced during time away from a triple day of paid work, domestic labour, and feminist politics (ix).

Even though more than a decade has passed, not much more material has come to light. This is despite an open call for the need of this material, which remains intertwined in feminist practice and is not necessarily incorporated into Canadian feminist theory. As Carty outlined

> ... the feminists who are in the trenches, have little time to reflect on the daily obstacles and hardships they face. The demands of their work compel them to keep going. Yet, those who have the privilege of time for reflection - academic feminists - leave us hopeless because there is no vision of the future in their work. The criticism here is not of ideas per se, but of ideas for the sake of ideas without relevance or roots . This lack of linkages between the theory and lived experience of women is very evident in much of Canadian feminist theory (1993: 17).

As Egan had earlier proclaimed, "Theoretical work in an academic context is readily available in books and journals. What is not available is the history of the practice of socialist feminist groups and organizations." (1987: 109). While my interest is not limited to socialist feminist groups, Egan's point is clear - that accounts of the history of the practice of women's groups are missing and are needed to inform existing and future theoretical feminist work. Even almost a decade later, Rankin lamented, "documentation and analysis of feminist activism and the history of contemporary women's movements in

Canada remains thin, particularly in a comparative format..." (1996: 15). This thesis

research will document the history of the practice of one women's group and will add to this

needed body of literature.

The terms feminist movement and women's movement and feminist activity and

women-centred activity are going to be used interchangeably throughout this review. As

Morrow outlines

> Women-centered activity refers to women who are working autonomously in
> their communities but who may or may not self-define as feminist. The
> reasons for which women may choose not to identify as feminists varies and
> may include fundamental disagreements with the aims and goals of
> feminism, or a fear of backlash from their communities or governments for
> identifying with feminism. Although some women who are working
> autonomously from men do not see themselves allied to the feminist
> movement, recognizing their work as part of the broader trend in women's
> activism is important (1997: 39).

I am not concerned about whether women have accepted or rejected the feminist labels, but

rather that they are actively working for change to improve women's lives.

Overview of the Canadian Women's Movement

As a social and political movement, feminism is considered to have occurred in

noticeable waves of activity. The first wave is exemplified by the suffragists' struggle to

obtain the vote for women and dates roughly between 1880 and 1920 (Morrow, 1997). The

second high point of political activity is dated from the late 1960s and early 1970s and has

continued until the present. [These categories are useful, but should not be understood as

the only levels of activity. Women's activism occurred between these two high points and

the second wave label is used here with an understanding of this limitation.] Specifically

for Canadian women, the resurgence of the feminist movement was linked to student

activism and other left political affiliations, such as the struggle for Aboriginal self-

determination and Quebec's nationalist movements (Morrow, 1997).

Feminism is a difficult movement to define, as Molgat relates, "Feminism is the most challenging and transformative social movement of the late twentieth century and yet it has as many definitions as it does adherents. It is both a women's profoundly personal commitment to herself, and an intense commitment to the collective well-being" (1993: 9). For the purposes of this literature review, I am going to discuss feminism in an overall, general way. I will not be discussing the various branches and brands of feminism, such as socialist, Marxist, liberal, radical and so forth. The specifics are not as important for this research. What is important are the cumulative effects of the movement in all of its diverse forms. How the women interviewed for this study define feminism is included in Chapter Five.

Despite the variety of women's feminisms, collective organising around shared beliefs does happen and provides the basis for activism and feminist service provision. The beginning of the second wave of feminism was marked by the forming of consciousness raising groups around any issue of concern to women. The organisers of these groups wanted to encourage the realisation of women's shared experiences in order to form an analysis of a common base of oppression. The call for sisterhood was to be the basis of further mobilisation around improving the lives of women. It was in the consciousness raising groups of the 1960s and 70s

> that women began to make startling connections between "the personal and the political" realizing that what had seemed like individual problems were, in fact, problems shared by many. Women began to grasp the historical dimension of their oppression and the depth of their gender conditioning. This consciousness gave women the strength to act together, helped to spawn a grassroots women's movement and feminist services that have had a profound impact on Western Society (Amethyst, 1995: 17).

The sharing of stories in groups, in combination with collective action, were viewed in feminist circles as necessary preconditions for women to take control over their lives and effect positive change.

The agenda for the new movement was based on the belief that the personal is political and that the power relationship between men and women is a political issue. This rationale put issues such as reproductive freedom, rape and wife and child abuse on the public agenda (Burt, 1986). A number of feminist groups and service provision organisations grew out of the second wave. There was also a proliferation of feminist presses, publications, women's studies programs, women's networks and events, plus a body of academic theory.

The feminist movement in Canada grew rapidly and has had several effects on women and public policy. Indeed, the Canadian women's movement has generated a set of political demands with the potential to lead to a restructuring of the lives of both men and women. As Morrow assessed

> The multiplicity of sites of women's activism is testimony to the fact that from the outset, the Feminist Movement in Canada was broad and consisted of many different points of access for women. The broadening of the feminist movement and its impact as one of the most widespread, varied and significant social movements has been noted often: Adamson et al., 1988; Miles &Finn, 1989; Gabriel & Scott, 1993. One result has been greater demands for feminists to recognize the ways in which women experience oppression differently, and the ways in which women may oppress each other (Adamson et al., 1988; Wall, 1982; Carty, 1993) (1997: 39).

This call for feminists to become more aware of the differences in women's oppression is a challenge to the ideology of sisterhood, which prevailed at the beginning of the second wave.

A factor unique to the Canadian women's movement is the vastness of the country and the challenge this poses to pan-Canadian feminist organising. Canada has a regional character and these "subnational states with specific histories and distinct political, economic and social profiles present challenges to women's movements" (Rankin, 1996: 2). This has also precluded, in Rankin's opinion, an acceptable analysis of the "movement politics" of Canadian women. After her doctoral research she concluded;

> Most generally, I demonstrate the pressing need to excavate more empirical data on women's movements at the local and subnational levels to develop analytic tools that incorporate the specificities of the contexts encountered by women in Canada. The dearth of research on contemporary feminist practice, particularly outside of Ontario and Quebec, impedes comparative analysis and perpetuates incorrect assumptions that feminist organising is not significantly affected by context, thus allowing the myth of a homogeneous "English Canadian" feminism to persist. (Rankin, 1996: 355).

This study of Winnipeg feminist health activists will respond to this dearth of research, albeit on a modest scale. Rankin went on to write that her research results lead her to believe that

> Only through further documentation and comparison of the course of women's movements and their successes and failures across place and time will feminism meet the challenge of creating new political spaces for women everywhere. (1996: 357).

This research provides a case study which could later be used in a comparison and could perhaps, in some measure, contribute to the creation of new political spaces for women in Canada.

Diversity and Difference in Second Wave Feminism

Perhaps the biggest challenge to the women's movement is how to form coalitions of women that will recognise and account for their diverse backgrounds and perspectives. As the Amethyst collective discovered, "Differing amounts of power and privilege create inequalities between women based on race, class, language, culture, religion, ethnicity, physical ability, age, and sexual orientation." (1995: 9). The struggle for Amethyst, and all other women's groups, is how to mediate these inequalities and still join with women in a meaningful way.

In the 1970s especially, as previously mentioned, women's organisations had adopted the "ideology of sisterhood", which is the belief that women share a common bond, a common oppression, and a common struggle for empowerment (Morgan, 1988). Molgat recounts that

> The women's movement in Canada was for much of its early years, a largely able-bodied, white, university-educated movement. ... What distinguishes this period [the beginning] is that there was little constituency-specific organizing. Intent on the commonality of women's experience and focused on consensus and agreement, the earlier organizers tended to gloss over difference. Gender was the pole around which the majority of women organized - questions of race, disability, class, and sexual orientation were raised only infrequently and tentatively (1993: 12).

Later challenges by women of colour and lesbians forced the largely white, heterosexual and middle class movement to acknowledge their privilege. Racial, sexual and class identities challenge assumptions about the nature of sisterhood. After examining the current state of several women's groups in Canada, Morrow (1997) assessed that "Presently, many long standing feminist groups and organisations are re-examining their structures and membership and are attempting through anti-racist policies to reflect and include a wider range of women and issues in their work." (36).

The Canadian women's movement has been considered to be more diverse than its American counterpart to the south. Although, the linguistic and cultural differences have precluded the full participation of Francophone women from Quebec (Molgat, 1993). Part of the reason behind this greater diversity could be due to the immigration of many different groups of women to Canada, with some having been actively involved in feminist and anti-imperialist struggles in their own countries (Morrow, 1997). This influence is shaping the character of the Canadian feminist movement and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of women's oppression. As summarised by Morrow

> Although certain parts of the feminist movement have been widely criticized for replicating exclusionary political forms - racism, heterosexism, ableism, anti-Semitism and classism (Green, 1983; Bannerji, Brand, Gupta, Khosla, & Silvera, 1983; Carty, 1993; Rubin & Gershbain, 1994; DAWN, 1986) - it is also true that feminists in the Canadian Women's Movement have often been willing to engage in dialogue across the differences which arose from the many sites of activism and between committed women (Vickers, 1992; Hamilton & Barret, 1986; Prentice, 1988). This is evidenced by the formal presence of coalitions and umbrella organizations as well as by the characteristically open debates of the movement (1997: 37).

An urgent need for feminists is to understand the interaction of gender with other forms of inequality and to realise that gender-based oppression may not be primary for many women. The experience and perceptions around gender depend on its context (Corman, 1997), and women come to the movement with perspectives formed out of their personal background and multiple identities.

The acknowledgement of several axes of simultaneous oppression is known as the trend towards the politics of identity where people identify their particular background, for example 'Muslim black middle-class woman'. This trend towards identity politics manifests in the founding of "ethnospecific organizations", meaning organisations which address the concerns of an ethnically specific group of women (Morrow, 1997: 36). Examples of this are the formation of the Congress of Black Women in 1980, and the Inuit Women's Association (Pauktuuit) in 1984. Molgat, an advocate for the formation of these specific organisations, declares "Constituency-specific organizing permitted women to speak from the whole of their lives without trying to divide the indivisible: women did not have to choose which of their oppressions to privilege." (1993: 16).

While many feminists view the rise in identity politics as a positive development other feminists are leery of it fearing that feminism's capacity to appreciate and value difference within one movement will be ignored. Based on the politics around organising International Women's Day events, Corman grew critical of identity politics and claimed that "... the two fold premises of identity politics, that only people who experience oppression can understand it and usefully mobilize against it, fragment opposition." (Corman, 1997: 9). Corman came to believe that the politics of identity hid interconnections between women and hinted at a hierarchy of competitive oppressions. Briskin believes diversity issues are useful for analysis, yet she simultaneously views the divisions based on

axes of identity as problematic because this "reifies the categories, implying a rigid

separation between them and also suggests a clear institutional base and a practice easily

differentiated" (1992: 269). As recounted by Rankin,

> Briskin explains that despite the importance of the 'discovery' of difference,
> such a concentration often merges problematically with an over-emphasis on
> experience causing an anti-theory emphasis on personal experience that can
> individualize difference to such a degree that deep-rooted processes by which
> experiences are socially constructed are concealed (1989: 25) (1996: 76).

The shift to a difference-based discourse potentially has significant consequences for

feminist practice in Canada.

As outlined here, the current challenge for feminists is how to incorporate identity

politics into existing structures placing a primacy on gender. Both commonalties and

differences among women have to be identified and used in feminist analyses of women's

condition. A glorification of sisterhood sets up a false and homogenising base for feminists,

while a completely defragmented category of "woman" into sets of separate unrelated

oppressions masks the underlying gender connection. The relevancy of feminism for future

generations of women depends on how well a balance is achieved between these two poles,

allowing for the maximum amount of women, in all their diversity, to connect to the

movement.

Backlash to Feminism

Opposition to the efforts of the women's movement are described as backlash, which

also affects the character of feminist organising in Canada. As Morrow defines,

> The term "backlash" has been used to describe the wide variety of negative
> controlling responses to ideas and practices that challenge the *status quo*
> and, in particular, to describe certain historical periods where resistance to
> feminism has been highest. However, the use of the term has also been
> criticized as imprecise because it suggests an almost "knee jerk" reaction
> against feminism rather than the well thought out and organized resistance
> that it often is (1997: 121).

The Amethyst collective recounts that in the late 1970s their official documents avoided being explicitly feminist in order not to jeopardise funding or alienate potential clients (Amethyst, 1995). Then they removed all use of the word feminism from their centre during the mid 1980s. It was only in the mid 1990s that Amethyst came "out" again about their feminist philosophies.

The Canadian government has perpetuated and caused backlash against the feminist movement. The official government stance is that it should not favour any "special interests" in the name of equal treatment for all Canadians, which is a justification for reinforcing already entrenched forms of power. Morrow cites the analysis of Leni Uteinen, who describes how historically "any legal concession that is given to women is often followed by a corresponding concession for men, that then serves to undermine the original intent of the change for women":

> In the late 1980s and early 1990s along with legislation to assist battered women, came offerings to the father's rights groups: child support reform was accompanied by regulations for access by non-custodial parents, including batterers. Enhanced funding for shelters was followed by government funding for batterers' programs. Mandatory mediation was forced on women under the pretence that men and women have equal bargaining power. Women had the right to apply for Criminal compensation, so male partners were given the right to know about the application... (1995: 185). In (Morrow, 1997: 123).

By adopting a neutral stance governments can play both sides of the fence - appearing progressive on women's rights, yet still keeping the support of men who oppose increased rights and status for women. The neutrality is a convenient stance which ignores the historical imbalance of power and influence between women and men and does little to redress it.

Along with the government, the media is another partner in backlash and their portrayal of feminists has influenced women's abilities to speak out. The media shape public perception. Typically reporters will focus on internal discord rather than on the

constructive projects of feminism, which contributes to the notion that the movement is fragmented and disorganised (Morrow, 1997). In general, women's achievements, events and issues receive far less coverage.

Another form of backlash against the women's movement is the formation of anti-feminist groups which advocate a return to the traditional gender roles largely limiting women to the domestic sphere of activity. Alberta was the first province to spawn an organised multi-issue, anti-feminist group, who is known as the Alberta Federation of Women United for Families (AFWUF), in 1982 (CRIAW, 1987: 13). The largest group is known as R.E.A.L. Women of Canada, which stands for Realistic, Equal, Active for Life. R.E.A.L. Women are an anti-abortion group, who advocate that women should place more emphasis on their role as mothers (CRIAW, 1987). Their demand for equal time in the media and before governments, despite its relatively small membership, has angered many feminists (Molgat, 1993).

I do not include these traditionalist groups in my category of women's/ feminist groups because they do not work towards achieving an increased participation of women in all private and public spheres of life, nor do these groups work towards any improvement in the general status of women in terms of increased rights and freedoms. In addition, in the case of R.E.A.L. Women many of its members are actually men as evidenced by the majority male delegation sent to a World Conference on Population and Development in March, 1999 (Nolen, Globe and Mail).

Backlash is an ongoing concern for feminists in the Canadian women's movement and places feminists in a defensive position. It is counterproductive since energy is expended on preserving past gains rather than moving forward for new demands. Overcoming backlash and promoting an acceptance of feminist goals is still on the agenda for the next century.

Despite the backlash and other barriers to organising, the women's movement has made significant gains on more public access and rights for women. Burt contends that Canadian policy-makers have become increasingly sympathetic to the feminist claim that women should have equal access with men to the competitive spheres of politics and work (Burt, 1990). Yet, they have constantly resisted demands for

> a fundamental restructuring of relations among both women and men to reflect the feminist values of participation, nurturing, caring, and peace. To a somewhat lesser degree they have resisted as well attempts by feminists to redefine gender roles within the family. This pattern is similar to that found in other Western, industrialized countries, and in the case of Canada at least reflects the growing emphasis on individual rights... (Burt, 1990: 192).

Morrow also puts forth liberal individualism as a current problem hindering the feminist movement in Canada. Liberal individualism privileges the rights of individuals over the rights of the collective and "is a problem for feminism because it undercuts a political understanding of oppression and leaves women with liberal guilt rather than with an analysis of social power and the importance of collective strategies. Liberal guilt tends to immobilise activists and to obscure deeper social causes of inequities." (Morrow, 1997: 128). Obviously, there are numerous challenges to feminist organising in Canada. However, the work goes on and women continue to attempt to overcome these barriers.

The Classification of Women's Groups

Women's groups within the Canadian women's movement have been varied in their structure, processes, and influence. A large selection of types of groups exist, which can mean that a classification of women's groups is not a simple task. Some are small scale, informal and at a community level, while others are formally structured, large, and attempt provincial or national influence. Plus, there are several hybrid types of these. Burt, a political scientist, places women's groups in the category of public interest organisations

who want greater sharing and co-operation between the current power structure and themselves. Burt asserts that

> they stress the process of democratic discussion and decision making, they try to educate their membership and promote discussion about issues, and they generally call for more participatory democracy in Canada. They believe that the government should listen to women and provide more information to the public in general. The leadership of most groups is convinced that women have a different approach to problem solving than men (1986: 136).

Burt found that a division exists among groups on the way to present views to government, which allows a classification to be drawn around the question of equal opportunity versus fundamental role change. Equal opportunity groups are more traditional and reactive. They undertake political action primarily in response to government requests for information, typically providing written submissions. The other groups seeking role changes endorse political action as the means to bring about these changes. They have a broader definition of what is political and often take their demands to government via demonstrations or letter campaigns (Burt, 1986). As Briskin illuminates,

> All feminist practice struggles with two poles of attraction - disengagement and mainstreaming. Disengagement which operates from a critique of the system and a standpoint outside of it, and from a desire, therefore, to create alternative structures and ideologies, can provide a vision of social transformation. Mainstreaming operates from a desire to reach out to the majority of the population with popular and practical feminist solutions to particular issues, and therefore relates directly to, and interacts with, major social institutions, such as the family, the work place, the educational system and the state (1992: 272).

These two avenues of social change provide a useful way to begin a classification of women's groups.

The authors of a 1987 study of women's political activity in Canada echoed Burt's typology and Briskin's assessment, writing that they could divide groups into types by whether they advocated integration versus transformation of political structures (CRIAW). An example of a group working for role equality, or integration, is the National Council of

Women, founded in 1893, who work in general to protect the rights of women within the family (Burt, 1986: 139). An example of a group working for role change, or transformation, is the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). NAC works for self-determination for women in political, social and economic roles and supports affirmative action. Role changes have been advocated by socialist, lesbian, and radical feminist women, but Burt concluded "these groups have not been very visible in national politics, as they tend to form small self-contained units throughout the country." (1986: 141).

While women's groups may be divided on whether the best approach is to integrate or to attempt to transform the system, there are similarities they share. For example, women's groups rarely have explicit links with a political party, and their membership usually cuts across party lines. All women's groups are working in some way for the feminist goal of improving the status of Canadian women (Burt, 1986). Women's groups are formed around numerous issues, but they can all be thought of as complementary, in a sense, because "Women's groups are different from most other interest groups in that they regularly combine their special interests in, for example, women and sport or women and business with general concerns about the status of women." (Burt, 1986: 138).

In a 1990 article, Burt expanded on her classification of women's groups and stated that three major categories could be seen, based on a 1984 survey. She asserts that

> The largest category consists of service providers - groups that make counselling, referral, educational, or shelter services available to women. Equal rights groups are almost as numerous. They seek to break down the barriers to equal opportunities in employment and politics. Finally, there are still some groups committed to social feminist goals. Since the 1984 study, a fourth category of groups, those seeking to maintain the traditional division of responsibilities between women and men, has gained significance as well. (1990: 194).

These new categories can still be applied using the earlier question of whether groups are integrationist equal opportunity groups or transformationist role change groups. Social feminist and anti-feminist groups, categories three and four above, are obviously not advocating role change. Social feminists "wanted to transfer the values prevalent in the private world of the family to the public world of politics and labour, and worked to obtain franchise rights for women" (Burt, 1990: 191). However, service providers and equal rights groups could potentially be either integrationist or transformationist, depending on whether they advocate working within the system or outside of it to effect change. Clearly a typology of women's groups is cumbersome and perhaps implies more self-definition than the groups themselves operate under.

I attempted to use Burt's classifications of women's groups to categorise WHIM, the group under study for this thesis. I already know WHIM is not a direct service provider, although they may provide educational service in an indirect way, and that they do not support social feminist goals or the return to traditional roles. It would appear that while they can be harshly critical of the system, they do work within it for change. As explained by Price, who attempted to evaluate institutional change within the Vancouver police as a result of feminist lobby efforts, this appears to be a common situation for women's groups,

> In our most optimistic moments we might believe we can achieve "fairness"
> for women through adjustments in the system. In our bleaker moments we
> despair that nothing short of armed insurrection will bring about the
> liberation of women. In general, though, we steer a middle course: while
> recognising the need for a fundamental restructuring of society, we
> nonetheless struggle for small changes which will allow more women to
> survive better in the world as it is (1988: 7).

Issues Sparking the Women's Health Movement

The women's health movement gained momentum in the political climate of the 1960s in Canada and the United States. Women were beginning to see the vulnerability of working in isolation, and conversely the power of group action. Health has long been a

major concern for women, because the burden of good family health is placed on them. Indeed, the traditional role for women is one of caring for others, certainly for their children and often for their partner and ageing parents. This role makes women the majority of health care consumers. Also, they are the majority of lower tier health care workers. Despite this, women began to realise that they only had limited power to affect the system and wanted more voice.

Political organisation around issues of women's health is the result of several commonly held beliefs by many women about their encounters with the health care system. Many women were beginning to feel that doctors had taken over knowledge from lay people and had mystified causes of symptoms and effective home remedies, which could prevent a trip to the doctor's office. Women began wondering why an expensive aloe-derived cream is prescribed in place of using aloe leaves for a skin irritation (Salk et al. 1992). To reclaim the birth process, nurse and midwife operated birthing centres opened up. A major focus of the women's health movement is the demystification of exclusive medical terminology and knowledge. Advocates assert to women the commonly heard mantra 'We are the best experts on ourselves!' They urge less dependence on 'experts'. Salk summed up this medicalization of women's life stages, and the dependence it fosters on doctors, by stating, "Medicine has stepped up its treatment of menopause and ageing as diseases. In a sense, the medical world defines women as inherently defective throughout life, in that we "require" a physician's care for all our normal female functions" (Salk et al., 1992: 657).

In general, women active in this movement had come to believe that medical personnel did not listen to them or believe them, withheld knowledge about side effects and alternative treatments, treated them without their consent, used them as teaching material, treated them poorly because of their race, sexual preference, age, or disability, offered them tranquilizers or moral lectures instead of useful help from community

services, administered unnecessary and extreme treatments, prescribed drugs which hooked them and changed their lives, removed organs which were in no way diseased and abused them sexually (Salk et al. 1992: 652). As well, women are treated according to the recommendations in studies which were only researched using men.

There was also an awareness that the large majority of physicians came from upper middle to upper classes and were largely white and male. The problems women already have in encounters with this medical system are sharply amplified when a woman is from a racial minority, an immigrant, and/or poor. These characteristics are barriers from access to care and quality of care. Minority and disabled women were more often subjected to sterilization abuse than white women. Black women are more often exploited for teaching materials, which anthropologist Emily Martin discovered when she examined photographs and text in medical education books (1992).

Feminist Health Care Values

Knowledge gives an individual the ability to make more informed choices and thus some control over their health care provision. Ehrenreich and English describe the ideals of feminist health activists by declaring,

> This is the vision implicit in feminism - a society that is organized around human needs: a society in which healing is not a commodity distributed according to the dictates of profit but is integral to the network of community life... in which wisdom about daily life is not hoarded by "experts" or doled out as a commodity but is drawn from the experience of all people and freely shared among them (1978: 324 in Salk et al. 1992: 693).

The issues mentioned previously, and undoubtedly many more, dictate the need for consumer watchdogs and pressure groups to affect the establishment. Women's Health Interaction Manitoba is one of these groups.

Feminist health activists work on establishing accessible well-woman care, ranging from gynecological exams and care, nutritional information (especially when pregnant or

nursing), fertility awareness, birth control, safe abortions and other services of emotional

and social support. To achieve this end, community feminist health centres are established

and mostly staffed on shoe-string budgets and volunteer hours. An example here in

Winnipeg is the Women's Health Clinic on Graham Avenue, which shelters WHIM, the

group under study. Other well known feminist health organisations in Canada are Women

Healthsharing in Toronto and the Vancouver Women's Health Collective.

Organisational Strategies for Women's Health Groups

In the early to mid 1970s two organisational strategies emerged within the women's

health movement, one being self-help groups and the other political action organisations.

The immediate purpose of the self-help group is for "women to learn about themselves

through mutual discussion and sharing information, including personal experiences."

(Zimmerman, 1987: 455). [Although Zimmerman is writing about the American women's

health movement, her discussion has relevance for the Canadian context.] Groups were

usually small with half to a dozen women and while many stayed together for a short time,

often eight to ten weeks, others were longer lasting. Some self-help groups were devoted to

a particular subject, for example breast examination or fertility detection. The procedure in

a self-help group is to talk, ask questions and exchange information. Non-hierarchical

organisational structure and equal participation puts women in a position of active

involvement, rather than passive and dependent roles. Compared to women's other

encounters with the medical system, self-help is non-threatening and places women in a

position of control. Self-help groups focused on non-interventionist, natural healing

techniques. Some self-help groups even did revisionary work on the medical research about

women. The bottom line about self-help groups is that they raise "the issue of who controls

women's bodies and their lives" (Zimmerman, 1987: 459). A well-known example is the

illegal abortion collective known simply as " Jane" which operated in Chicago (Zimmerman, 1987).

Despite the usefulness and radicalising achievements of self help groups, by the early 1980s popularity had declined. Zimmerman identified that the main factor was that self-help was co-opted by organised medicine "through endorsing health education, prevention, and an increase in an individual's sense of personal responsibility" for health (1987:459). As well, self help is tedious, time consuming, and requires a high degree of personal commitment. This makes it a cumbersome approach for women with urgent health needs and heavy time demands, making it more appealing to middle-class rather than poor or working class women. Yet, women's health centres based on self-help concepts are an alternative for much mainstream care, and have remained popular with their clients (Zimmerman, 1987).

The second style of women's health groups are known as political action organisations, which "have been mainly concerned with effecting political legal and institutional changes through activities such as public information campaigns and mobilizations" (Zimmerman, 1987: 460). An American example is the National Women's Health Network, located in Washington, DC where it monitors Congress. Founded in 1975, the network functions primarily as an information clearinghouse and a consumer advocacy and lobbying group who use demonstrations to pressure government. There is a Canadian Women's Health Network which plans to perform these same functions, and many more, for Canadian women, although it is still in its beginning stages.

Zimmerman noted that in the U.S. these groups rely on support from private donations and on volunteer help and that "those that have survived have done so against significant odds and under constant financial pressure, as in the case of self help, feminist commitment has been a key ingredient in the persistence of these organizations."

(Zimmerman, 1987: 460). The same crisis mode of operating is shared by Canadian women's health political action organisations. The lack of funding and lack of wide societal support hinder efforts to mobilise political action. WHIM, as a feminist health group specifically, shares the aims and values espoused here. The belief in the need for feminist health alternatives forms the content of much of their discussion and activism.

Women's Political Culture

Whether a women's group is organising around health or equal gender representation in the courts, they share a common political culture of opposition to the status quo. In Canada, women are less politically active than men in the traditional political arena of provincial and national level electoral, partisan politics. One hypothesis behind this suggests that there are barriers to women's political participation and also that women appear to operate politically in a fundamentally different way from their male counterparts. This concept of a specific women's political culture was investigated in the Canadian context by researchers hired with the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW), through in-depth interviews with the membership of nine women's groups. The fieldwork was conducted in February and March of 1986 in rural Nova Scotia, the city of Halifax, the province of Quebec, rural Ontario, northern Alberta and the city of Edmonton. Of the nine groups, three were Francophone (two Acadian) and six were Anglophone, with two fully rural groups included. The nine groups spanned the spectrum from the most traditionally political, a women's party wing in Alberta, to the least traditionally political, a feminist newspaper collective in Halifax. The authors of the study claim that their findings "reveal what non-elite women conceive to be political activity and describe the barriers to and opportunities for involvement in political life for ordinary women" (CRIAW, 1987: 1).

The study by CRIAW cited here was commissioned by UNESCO to explore

Canadian women's political experiences. The main questions were; What does political

participation entail for the vast majority of ordinary women? What do women understand

by "political" and what activities do they consider to constitute political participation?

What motivates them to become involved politically? How do they perceive the barriers

between the modes of political activity they do undertake and the elite level of formal

political structures where they are largely underrepresented? (CRIAW, 1987). The

rationale for such a study stemmed from a recognition that women's politics were

understudied, as explained by Vickers, the editor

> To summarize, the image of politics represented to us traditionally reflects
> the realm of formal "big P" politics and its highly formalized institutions.
> This image is reinforced by the mass media, by political science and by male-
> centred history. Other less formal, community-based modes of "doing
> politics" are rarely mirrored back to us and we have very little information
> about the nature of political activity within women's groups or within the
> women's movement (1988: 10).

This lack of knowledge about women's movements has not improved much since Vickers

wrote in 1988, as shown by Rankin's assessment in 1996,

> Although women-centred analyses of government downsizing, constitutional
> reform, foreign policy and environmental issues effectively have begun to
> inject feminist perspectives into virtually all major policy debates on the
> Canadian political agenda, women's movements largely remain marginalized
> from mainstream politics (1).

Rankin also pointed to an academic bias which has contributed to a lack of study of

women's politics, and described how "Political science prioritises research that investigates

relationships between states or between citizens and their states at the highest level, a

disciplinary bias which long excluded women and their politics from serious study." (1996:

355).

An assessment of the level of women's political participation as high or low depends

entirely on the definition of political. Women are not as political as men in the sense of

action undertaken within state structures and formal political institutions, the definition

which informs most of the research. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman argues that such

traditional (male stream) methodologies and foci in research may hide a vast range of

political structures and current modes of women's political participation (CRIAW, 1987).

She asserts that women undertook political action long before they were able to vote or hold

office, in the form of action directed to "getting things done" in their communities. This

community action is just as political as casting a vote for a federal party and as the CRIAW

researchers discovered,

> Most of the women we interviewed do not see their activities in this realm as
> a substitute but as another, equally important, arena of political action.
> These women often use a woman-centred yard stick and find men's
> commitment to the politics of getting things done inadequate by women's
> norms (Vickers, 1988: 10).

It is important not to lapse into the belief that only an engagement with formalised political

structures and processes are in fact forms of political participation.

The CRIAW researchers found that

> ... women's political culture is muted; that is, women's community-based
> political activities are over-shadowed and constrained by the activities of the
> predominantly male state-political elite. When women's political culture is
> fully closeted, women do not tend to engage in activities which could be
> recognized as political, nor do they engage in what the women themselves
> consider to be important community work (CRIAW, 1987: 4).

The result of this mutedness is that the ongoing work of women in their communities is

defined as non-political. This allows women's efforts to be undervalued and their successes

to go unrecognised. It allows for the belief that women are not active in their communities.

Women are surprisingly active in their communities, especially when considering that

"[t]he sexual division of labour and workforce discrimination leave women short on the

resources of time, money and energy for political participation" (Vickers, 1988: 54). Kome

asserts that women seem to have "organizing in their blood" and that women are

continuously "organizing around school closings, safe tap water, neighbourhood redevelopment, and any other issue that affects their families and communities" (Kome, 1983: 1).

Women are politically active in a broad sense, most often at the community level and in a style different from that of men. As Vickers summarised "Instead of something distant and professionalized - a spectator sport - women's politics of getting things done is intense, requires personal involvement and is usually close to home" (1988: 10). An examination of women's specific political culture shows that it "would appear to be primarily goal-oriented in character, building on women's participation in intermittent activity, informed by a broad understanding of the political and capable of powerful outbursts of activity directed toward concrete goals." (CRIAW, 1987: 6). The study by CRAIW offers us two important premises to employ in an understanding of women's political activity; one is that women are often differently motivated in their political participation, and the other is that women's participation appears to decline as groups become more formally structured. One can see a contrast between the norms of "getting ahead" present in the male-dominated formal political culture and the norms of "getting things done" of women's informal political culture (Vickers, 1988: 12). The decline of women's involvement as groups adopt more formal structures is a contrast to the general Canadian political culture "which puts a premium on formal, institutionalized political processes, predictable and regulated levels and types of participation and both bureaucratic and hierarchical structures." (CRIAW, 1987: 6).

Another definition of women's political culture in Canada is offered by Christiansen-Ruffman, who declares

> Women's political culture may be defined as a set of orientations, morals, values, and beliefs about the nature of a just and caring society, one that meets human needs. Women's political culture helps identify socially

valuable goods and services, and strategies for maximizing women's goals. It
has a material base, not a biological or essentialist one. This materialist base
is rooted in the social organization of women's experience, which involves the
nurturing of children, caring for people, and ensuring distributive justice.
The institutional form it has taken has usually been relatively informal,
interpersonal, small-scale, and communal (1995: 387).

The CRIAW study maintains that the concept of a women's political culture is useful "for

understanding the operational procedures and norms which have characterised woman

centred political participation" (1987: 7). Their research led CRIAW to conclude that "there

may be a serious lack of fit between their (women's culture) norms and skills and those

required by the dominant political culture." (1987: 6). Kome (1983) shared CRIAW's

analysis and her work agreed that women function politically in a different way than men.

Kome offered a theory on why this difference in political culture exists and described how

men's organisations have evolved along the lines of the military and the corporation. This

history means that they are accustomed to being hierarchical, with one boss at the top of a

clear chain of command. Kome posits that women's organisations have evolved, to a great

extent, from family roles and from egalitarian groups like volunteer societies, church and

professional clubs. This has resulted in women tending to be "team players" who make

sure the work gets done and don't care who gets the credit. Also, women are more likely

than men to worry about hurting someone else's feelings. In Kome's view, "this concern for

the process as well as the goal, or product, can be a handicap for women when working in a

group with men - or it can be women's greatest organizing strength when working with

other women." (1983: 25).

Stemming from the consciousness raising groups used early in the second wave,

there exists a belief in the value of working as a group. Besides there being strength in

numbers, there is also a built-in support system for the members. Amethyst Women's

Addiction Centre asserts that there is "a power that comes through sharing stories in

groups." (1995: 17). Jill Vickers who served as editor to a later version of CRIAW's 1987

results declared that "Perhaps the strongest message to emerge from these accounts is the

strength women found by pooling their energies and resources with other women in

groups." (1988: 2). The CRIAW study mentions this sense of power experienced by

Amethyst as well, and describes

> effective political action by women without access to elective office has
> generally been the result of a group action in which women formed bonds
> among themselves to achieve collective strength and power. Power in this
> sense is not understood as a "thing" to be owned, but as a process of human
> beings interacting together (1987: 7).

This concept of power is in contrast to attitudes about male power, which is considered to be

more individualistic in nature (Vickers, 1988: 12). With women's focus on the process used

to mobilise, as well as the product, it allows for a component of empowerment for each

individual woman as an additional by-product of group action.

> Kome discussed how many women fear that they will become masculinized if they

enter the mainstream political arena but she counters

> Women do not have to become counterfeit men in order to be politically
> potent. Women have a potency of their own. But women are still hampered
> by some of the male political stereotypes of women. Some men still believe
> that women can't keep secrets, or work together without catfights, or stand
> up and speak out in public affairs. Women must be aware that these
> stereotypes still exist, and that some people will play to these perceived
> weaknesses (1983: 24).

Women encountering the traditional political machinery are at a disadvantage because of

these stereotypes and the different norms they prefer to use to effect political action.

Women appear to meet a cross-roads where they seem to have to choose whether they will

adopt the male pattern of political interaction, or join with other women in attempting to

change male political culture and create a space for women's different style of interaction.

CRIAW discovered that the macro-historical perspective on women's involvement in

political life traditionally assumes that the goal is integration of women into the

mainstream of democratic politics (1987: 40). They allege that this assumption ignores a major number of differences between men's and women's political culture, and is a false assumption about women's political groups. What Rankin felt was needed to correct these false assumptions was a women-centred model, and she advocates,

> A women-centred model for comparative women's movement research may take as its starting point Birte Siim's rejection of politics as defined narrowly as 'power from above' (1988: 176). Siim argues that "analyses of women's relations to ... power from below, focusing either on women's activities in social movements or on women's political interests and values, would no doubt give a more positive picture of women's relation to politics" (176). If we accept Siim's claim that women's political lives "from below" must be theorised as part of the spectrum of women's political involvements and not necessarily as a precursor to women's inevitable participation or integration into conventional politics, we can launch the task of understanding women's movements "on their own ground". This will allow feminist political scientists to liberate our theoretical models from the modernization-inspired "logic of linearity, development and progress" (Mohanty, 1992: 87) that characterises many of our existing approaches to women's political lives and instead acknowledge and analyse more effectively the temporality and spatiality of women's struggles for equality (1996: 52).

When women are dissatisfied with the "male stream" design for political living, they will create a "female design for political living" (CRIAW, 1987: 40). The machinery of a female design of political living requires certain conditions, most notably a flexibility based on "terrific communications systems, a lot of tact, and a sense of shared leadership. Shared leadership is particularly suited for women's political action, where committee work is very likely to be a third job for each individual on top of employment and caring for her family." (Kome, 1983: 25). As the CRIAW researchers reported

> We found women who would measure low in most cases on traditional political participation scales able to participate intensely to get things done in organizations flexible enough to take their life circumstance into account. The more structured formal and distant the organization, the higher the cost for women to participate as actively as they would wish. Even women generally considered "unavailable" for political participation were able to be productively involved in flexibly organized groups (Vickers, 1988: 54).

Structure and Process

The questions around structure and process have been integral to women's personal and political philosophies, and the subject of much discussion within women's groups (Holmes and Riggs, 1984a). Women who have felt alienated from the mainstream political process want to develop an alternative process which will be sensitive to the needs of women. They consciously struggle with the challenge of organising themselves in non-traditional ways. Women's groups want to replace the feelings of alienation with ones of connection to an accessible alternative structure for women to employ to voice their concerns.

At times the creation of alternative structures and processes causes splits to occur in the group. It can be frustrating for intensely goal-oriented women to have to focus on how to get things done rather than just doing it. Holmes and Riggs assess that

> it is not necessarily a negative development when a group divides. As women, each of us have different physical, emotional, social and intellectual needs and abilities. We don't all work well under the same conditions. ... Moving in and out of different groups and forming new groups is a natural evolution that expands the women's movement and provides a wide variety of women's services. ... Experiencing divisions with a group can lead to positive development for the group itself. Several groups found that splitting made them more conscious of their real goals and philosophies. It forced them to clarify the basic premises underlying the group and to state them more openly and concretely (1984b: 20).

Egan (1987) restated this point when describing the Toronto International Women's Day Committee and their period of reflexivity, which provided them with a clearer basis of unity but a "significantly reduced" membership (1987: 112). CRIAW also found that women's groups will splinter or form satellites with group boundaries constantly changing as one group merges into another or subdivides. As well, they noted that individuals flow in and out of the group's core as interest and time wax and wane. They spoke about how such

groups are difficult to capture in research which focuses on more structured political organisations. Still, they concluded

> there is ample evidence that much of women's political involvement in Canada occurs in groups of this type. Such groups, moreover, may be short-lived. Often groups may be disbanded because their central task is achieved or abandoned as unachievable. Some groups mutate into new forms as new goals are set and new participants recruited. The latent network of group connections and skills, however, remains to be tapped when events require mobilization afresh ... (CRIAW, 1987: 41).

These latent connections are also a way to refresh the movement and counter burnout of very active women, as well.

Collectivism and Consensus

An emphasis on consensus-based decision making is common to most women's groups. Ideally, all women would completely agree and decisions would be made unanimously. This is in contrast to the majority rules type of decision-making which most of us are so used to, where a vote is taken and those dissenting from the majority are · overruled. Women's groups want to "reject the use of majority rule because of the risk of alienating women in minority positions by overruling them with a vote before we have clearly explored all approaches to a problem." (Holmes and Riggs, 1984a: 9). This emphasis on consensus is based on the premise that the opinions of all members are equally valid and valuable.

The most common alternative structure among women's groups is the collective. The day to day functioning of a collective depends on the type of activity and the individuals involved. This structure is flexible and can exist in varied forms, however there are common elements in collectives. A collective is usually task-oriented with women joining together to do a certain task or series of tasks. On an interpersonal level, "each woman is responsible for speaking up and letting her opinion be known. Each woman is responsible for encouraging everyone else and taking each one seriously." (Holmes and

Riggs, 1984a: 10). Collectives are so popular for feminist groups because they are based on a set of compatible values. Holmes and Riggs recount that by choosing "a collective structure we empower ourselves, taking responsibility on our own shoulders." (1984b: 18). Collectives appeal to feminists because the dominant institutions in society which have disempowered women in many instances are hierarchical, such as families, schools, government and work places. A collective attempts to eliminate the structural imbalances of power by ensuring that there are no authority figures and no formal lines of accountability. This means that responsibility, credit and blame are all shared equally among the members. Members have a vested interest in working for the common good. Holmes and Riggs discuss the compatibility of feminism and collectivism, saying

> Both attempt to recognize informal power - the personal power that comes
> from having more information, being able to communicate articulately, being
> sexually attractive, coming from a privileged background, etc. Feminism, as a
> movement, is humanitarian and so is collectivism. Both make a basic
> commitment to thoughtful, honest and clear communication, which facilitates
> new approaches toward resolution of conflict (1984b: 17).

However, there are no set patterns for dealing with conflict or for problem-solving. This lack of established conflict resolution methods poses a creative challenge for every group that establishes a collective. Handling conflict in a collective is a potential problem for women's groups, which forces certain groups to abandon collectives and adopt hierarchical structures. The most common rationale given for the move away from collective structure was that collectives are inefficient and cannot effectively resolve conflicts that arise.

Conflict usually happens around decision-making, which can be cumbersome and time-consuming within a collective structure. Out of the ten groups studied by Holmes and Riggs, some groups opted to have one person make final decisions and resolve disputes the groups could not handle. Others decided to vote on issues and abide by the majority decision. Both an appointment of a decision maker and a vote system are traditional and

"run the risk of alienating those holding minority opinions, which can create resentment and subsequent lack of cooperation." (Holmes and Riggs, 1984b: 18). Several of the groups reported that they hold discussions until they reach consensus, or at least a decision or compromise that everyone can live with. However, the groups complained that while the decisions reached tended to be more satisfactory to all members, it was very time consuming. Holmes and Riggs discovered that this consensus approach to decision-making is only adopted by groups that place a very high value on process, meaning "they believe *how* decisions are made is critical to the functioning of the group. It is unsuited to groups that are very task oriented and value expediency above all else." (1984b: 19). While these groups using consensus reported that it was at times difficult, they felt that it did not interfere with their ability to function effectively and to achieve the goals of their organisation (Holmes and Riggs, 1984b).

Collectively structured groups often run into problems when dealing with hierarchically arranged groups. Collectives are unusual in society and are pressured by outside influences to conform, which can cause conflict within the group. To receive funding, collectives are often required to establish a board of directors or appoint a single contact person or spokeswoman, which undermines the collective process. Collectives have tried to counteract this forced shifting of power by using "information-sharing and rotation of imposed formal positions in order to minimize outsiders' efforts to have us adopt more hierarchical forms of structure and practice" (Holmes and Riggs, 1984b: 18). A by-product of this rotation of functions is that over time, knowledge and skills become equalized throughout the group." (Holmes and Riggs, 1984b: 19).

A major concern within collectives is how to keep power equal among all members. Members of a collective are in theory always equal, which can be seen in a formal sense by no one having a position of higher rank than the others. However, according to Holmes and

Riggs, women have different degrees of personal (or informal) power, because of class position, more information, better communication skills or a forceful presence (1984b). This power imbalance occurs when a woman develops knowledge and skills beyond those of most of the members of the group, which could potentially create difficulties in maintaining equality in decision making. Holmes and Riggs report

> Unrecognized personal power can be oppressive in a group. If unchecked, it can silence other members, cause resentment and undermine the collective spirit of equal participation. ... The particularly powerful woman must recognize her disproportionate power in the group, must be more conscious of listening to others and treating them with respect (1984b: 19).

The imbalance of power could be dangerous to collectivists ideals if especially knowledgeable women were to use their position to force decisions or impose their will on the group.

Structure

There is no one collective structure, freeing each group to adapt the model for their own needs. Women's Action for Peace (WAP), based in Ottawa, developed a collective structure they call the tapestry (Holmes and Riggs, 1984a). In the centre is a co-ordinating committee called the loom, which rotates every 3 or 4 months. Around the loom are thread groups which deal with specific issues. Since the thread groups act as affinity groups, no one has to go to the centre for guidance. Each thread group makes their own decisions by consensus. As well, each thread group and the loom make a concerted effort to equalize power (Holmes and Riggs, 1984a).

The issue of how to structure the group is faced by every women's group and the choices appear endless. The range of group styles can be thought of as forming a continuum from the least structured group, a small sized collective to the most highly structured group, a pan-Canadian group with head offices, provincial chapters and a large membership like the DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN). The CRIAW researchers (1987)

attempted to assess whether less or more structure was better for women's groups to be effective. They discovered that the more structured groups, such as the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee and the Alberta NDP Women's Section, mobilised women more consistently over time. The credit for this was given to the fact that they maintain a profile or identity to which both political elites and unmobilised women could relate. Yet, it was discovered that "they also appeared to experience more difficulties with funding, including the problems relating to state or party funding which posed restrictions on their autonomy and shaped their activities." (CRIAW, 1987: 41). In comparison to less structured task-oriented collectivist groups, CRIAW researchers concluded that

> Since more energy has to be devoted simply to maintaining the organization itself (applying for funds, membership drives, organizing meeting schedules, etc.), more individual members reported having to "drop out" or "let the side down" when faced with major constraints of time and energy. Nor were these more structured groups necessarily more successful in achieving their political goals or maintaining members' involvement and commitment. ... In summary, it appears that both task-oriented, relatively unstructured groups and more structured organizations surviving over time can successfully mobilize women for political activity. The latter require the expenditure of time and energy for tasks of organizational maintenance, resources which many ordinary women cannot always spare (1987: 43).

It would appear that the debate is still open as to whether structure facilitates or impedes women's political participation.

Barriers to Women's Involvement in Political Activity

The lack of female representation in the elite-level political institutions in Canada requires explanation. The CRIAW researchers (1987) undertook an analysis of this discrepancy and concluded that structural barriers bias the political opportunity system towards male participants. The Canadian context with its three levels of government is a formidable challenge because of the maze of jurisdictions and also the great distances among population centres (CRIAW, 1987). A structural barrier impeding women's participation is the fact that "many women are vulnerable, because they are more likely to

be lower-status employees, tenants, etc., than men, must not be ignored as a rational basis for refusing partisan involvement." (CRIAW, 1987: 54). Distance is a barrier, combined with lack of money to travel or pay for child care services. Combine this with lack of time and a potential risk to jobs, it is perhaps not surprising women do not participate. CRIAW also reported that "psychological or motivational barriers within women's minds have been shown to reflect the impact of early socialization and assigned gender roles" (CRIAW, 1987: 2), which they cite as crucial impediments to higher level representation in elite-level political bodies. Women simply cannot connect to the formal political structure and use it as effectively to express their views. To hear women's voices, allowances must be made for the difference in their political culture and ways of self-expression.

CRIAW (1987) has established that increased structural formality in group rules for membership, interaction, and goals will result in increased constraints on women's political participation in many instances. Bearing this insight in mind, it is not surprising that women choose alternative ways of operating politically. As Kome noted "Most women have so many responsibilities in their daily lives that they do not go out looking for ways to become involved in the political process" (1983: 5). Women need political structures which take into account their life demands, including work in the paid labour force, the bulk of unpaid work in the home, the majority of child care responsibilities and additional volunteer work.

Within the groups in the CRIAW study, members of the less structured groups emphasised that they could always adjust their level of involvement over time to "fit" with their other life demands. The CRIAW researchers reported that "[o]verwhelmingly, our respondents report that time demands are the biggest barrier to greater participation, except in loosely structured groups, based on the premise that "you do what you can, when you can." (1987: 8). Women cited lack of time as the problem which constrained their

involvement to levels lower than they wished. Lack of time is a huge problem because "[c]learly, the traditional division of labour has altered little with women's movement into the public realms of work and politics. Women have taken on more jobs, giving them less disposable time, while men's performance of child care and work traditionally done by women had increased only slightly" (CRIAW, 1987: 58). Women also mentioned that they didn't have any secretaries to cover for them or to pick up any slack. There isn't any support network for women involved in political activity.

Facilitators For Participation

It is obvious that barriers to women's participation exist, but facilitators for participation can work to counter those. Respondents in the 1987 CRIAW study reported that the support and enthusiasm of other women in their group encouraged their involvement. The energy of the group was valuable to the women and convinced them to continue. As well, some respondents reported that the willingness of spouses, relatives and friends to share child care and home duties was essential to enabling their activity. When women organise their groups in a manner which takes into account the realities of women's lives in ways that male-designed and more formally structured groups and institutions do not, women's participation is facilitated. Feminist practice attempts to use flexible structuring in groups, as a recognition of the heavy work and family commitments. Most groups attempt to provide funds for child care and travel expenses whenever possible. Also, all-women or women-predominant groups are perceived to support women's active involvement (1987).

After analysing the barriers and facilitators of women's' political involvement, the CRIAW researchers concluded

> Even women generally considered "unavailable" for political participation
> were able to be productively involved in flexibly organized groups. The
> sexual division of labour and workforce discrimination, however, leave

women short on the resources of time, money and energy for political participation. Most of the groups profiled recognize this and devise a "female design for political living" with flexible structures, day care and travel support and a sense of support and empowerment. Some women were able to participate more because men were not present to "hog the show" or "to leave things to." The division of labour by sex which characterizes most mixed-sex political groups – with men making decisions and women providing support – was not duplicated in most groups. Our respondents reported involvement in decision-making and a sharing of support work in most cases. This sense of "counting" and of being both responsible and respected is the intangible, but crucial, facilitator for participation in these groups." (CRIAW, 1987: 66).

Funding

Lack of funding is the problem common to most women's groups, and deserves

special attention. In the beginning of the second wave, the movement was largely

volunteer and nearly unfunded. After the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of

Women, several government agencies devoted to women's concerns were initiated,

beginning in 1973. One of these agencies, the Women's Program of the Secretary of State,

became responsible for funding women's groups. After this period, the Canadian women's

movement became characterised by a heavy reliance on government funding. A rationale

in favour of state funding is that women pay taxes and so women's groups should get

money out of the government coffers. The counter argument is that it is difficult to

challenge the system when you depend on its money for survival. There are advantages

and disadvantages to accepting government funding. The drawback is that groups are

subject to government guidelines and budget cuts, and this has sometimes restricted their

flexibility and freedom to lobby. In structural terms, budget cuts have meant that most

women's groups do not employ a lobbyist and are staffed by volunteers (Burt, 1986). The

advantages are that groups do not have to attempt community fundraising efforts which

require a lot of time and energy to organise with unpredictable results.

The Women's Program provided both core and project funding [until 1998] for

groups which served to "promote increased understanding of, and action on, women's issues

among women and the general public in the form of advocacy and information exchange" (Canada. Secretary of State, 1982: 1 in Burt, 1990: 198). Changes to the funding guidelines occurred in 1998, with a move away from program funding [a form of core funding] towards strictly project funding. This shift prompted outcry that it would jeopardise the ongoing viability of many women's organisations (Huang, 1998). Core funding is used by women's centres to cover rent, administration and general upkeep. A coalition of Canadian women's groups initiated the Fair Share Campaign, lobbying for two dollars more for every woman and girl, translating into about $30 million a year. They used a toonie postcard mail-in campaign with the slogan 'Aren't women worth more than a cup of coffee'. In another protest, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) refused to apply under the new guidelines. Their funding was removed and they closed their doors until they got late project funding to study the impact government funding has on women's political movements in Canada. Other groups supported NAC, but were forced out of necessity to apply under the new guidelines. NAC believes the federal government should be responsible for its stated commitment to the equality of women and expresses outrage that since 1989 the Women's Program budget was cut by five million dollars. Also, no new organisations have received funding because of these "budget constraints" (Huang: 1998).

Schreader, who undertook a study of the Women's Program, came to believe that its existence represents a compromise to women for their demands for social recognition and equality (1990). The concretization of women's demands within the state structure, while not altogether a positive event, does signal a victory for women and an acknowledgement for the activist efforts. Schreader cautions though that "Representation of women's issues through the bureaucratic and ideological processes of the state serves to mediate and ultimately redefine these issues into a form which does not pose a threat to the hegemony of liberal ideology." (1990: 196). In other words, what the state hopes to do is circumvent

any actual restructuring of the state apparatus. Within the Women's Program an example of this process is the

> Government demand for increasingly complex methods of bookeeping and reporting, with flowcharts, priority charts and excessive credibility criteria, far exceed the capability of most volunteer, community-based groups. Further, the government requirement that groups undertake quantitative evaluations of their performance places an emphasis on statistics as a measure of success or failure. Consequently, quality of work and the value women place on their own growth and development are not perceived to be relevant measures of success. (Schreader, 1990: 190)

Even when giving support, on the surface, to women's groups, the state is attempting to divert their energies and prevent successful mobilisation against the dominant state interests. In her Vancouver study, Price came to the conclusion,

> Because of its need to maintain the appearance of universal representation the state (and its institutions) cannot simply ignore feminists' demands for change. For the state the challenge is to respond to those demands while containing and constraining them such that they do not pose significant threat to the dominant interests. The techniques by which this is accomplished are familiar to many of us: stalling ("we'll need to study the matter"); jurisdictional buck-passing ("it's not in our mandate, it's the responsibility of some other department/ministry/level of government"); blaming ("if more women would report sexual assaults we could do something about changing our procedures") (1988; 50).

The funding situation certainly looks grim. Even if you can get elusive government money, there is still the question of government control. As Burt reports, "The government directs money to be spent in specific activity areas, requires its approval for budget transfers, and according to some groups, discourages service providers from taking public stands on issues related to women" (Saskatchewan Action Committee, 1983 in Burt, 1990: 199). Morrow discovered the same sentiment from the women profiled in her study of feminist anti-violence activism and recounts

> many women indicated that lack of funding or limitations on what their funding could be used for created serious problems in their work, particularly in the ways it restricted their political activism and coalition work. A number of women felt that governments intentionally under-fund organizations or

foster competition between groups in order to prevent real social changes (1997: 132).

Morrow discussed how decreased funding combined with increased need is used to set up this competition and is "a feature of the social dynamics of a backlash setting" (1997: 135). Morrow pronounces that this impacts negatively on the ability of women to build coalitions amongst their organisations. This problem of competition is compounded by a racist funding policy. This policy causes women working in organisations that specifically serve the needs of First Nations women, women of colour and immigrant women to be in a constant crisis mode (Morrow, 1997). Government funding bodies have historically favoured certain types of organisations, for example shelters, over others, such as services for immigrant women, and this "favouritism" can lead to resentment and competition between groups (Morrow, 1997).

In the case of the Amethyst addictions service, they struggled with the question of how explicitly feminist to be in relation to the public, and especially to funders (1995). They chose to hide it for a while but currently use the adjective 'feminist' in their mission statement and funding requests. Still, Amethyst describes "[w]hether or not they [government and other funders] actively dictate policies, programs, or structure, they often have an indirect influence over them. At Amethyst, obtaining sufficient funds while maintaining a feminist perspective was, and continues to be, a constant balancing act" (1995: 51). Morrow found that the dilemma that has always existed for feminist service organisations is one of "finding ways to financially support their work without watering down their political purpose" (1997: 138). After examining the functioning of the Women's Program, Schreader asserted,

> One is led to ask whether or not it would be in the interests of feminist
> organizations to reject state funding and build an alternative funding base.
> This is a complicated question with no clear answer, but the writer can
> suggest a way to think about it. First of all, state funding should be

recognized as a legitimate gain for women, and evidence of the impact of struggle. As we have seen, funding carries a risk of co-optation, but it has also permitted feminists to engage in numerous political activities and to deliver badly - needed services to women in crisis. The essence of co-optation is one of progressive groups being induced to buy into a state defined agenda with the illusion of having secured power. On the contrary, real power lies in our political clarity and ability to challenge the political positions of the state (1990: 197).

Internal Conflicts

As previously discussed, internal conflict can be an issue in feminist organising. Collectives do not have hard and fast agreed upon rules for handling conflict and many feminist groups are organised in collective styles. Also, in more traditionally structured groups conflict can be an issue and women who dissent from the majority rule are overruled and ignored, causing tensions. As well, women hold varied opinions on what modes of operating are feminist and what the priorities for the women's movement should be. The divisions around identity politics plays a big part too. Corman came to realise how "the varied life experiences and different aspirations that activists bring to their organizations often results in conflict" (1997: 1).

Through her involvement with an International Women's Day committee, Corman discovered even a success in involving women from diverse religions and political orientations generated problems. She relates that "the goals of some women were antagonistic and women brought different stakes to the table. ... Dissension arose over profiling lesbian lifestyles, men at the event, addressing difference and feminist process." (1997: 3). In the IWD case, women left the table and consensus could not be reached. The result was a loss in representation among members of the organising committee for an event with diversity as a goal.

Holmes and Riggs posed questions about conflict to the ten women's groups in their study; "What are the common sources of conflict for feminist organizations? What methods

have we devised for dealing with them?" (1984b: 17). The common sources of conflict were around what structure to organise within and how to operate in an explicitly feminist way with attention to values of support, skill development and listening to the voices of the individual women. Holmes and Riggs summarise

> Much of the conflict and change that arises around us is a result of our being politically conscious people revolting against a patriarchal, capitalist and all-round oppressive world. When we step into a women-centered organization, we expect life to get easier. Well, often it doesn't. In fact, this is where the real work begins. We are no longer just reacting, we are starting to build new structures and processes that are important to us as feminists (1984b: 17).

Yet, despite the time and energy spent to develop alternative feminist structures and processes, with all of the conflict resolution that must entail, activists in their study considered it essential in order for women to become a political force.

Holmes and Riggs discuss several techniques for resolving conflict within feminist organisations. They are constructive criticism, employing a consensus decision making model, using a facilitator and checking in and out during meetings. Constructive criticism "is based on the premise that criticism is a form of education that can be done in a gentle, non-abusive manner and towards a goal of positive change." (Holmes and Riggs, 1984b: 20). Consensus is used primarily to ensure that every woman will have a voice in every decision. Though time consuming Holmes and Riggs still advocate it as the only way to ensure that no woman's views are silenced. A facilitator is often used when communication has broken down within a group. Holmes and Riggs discovered that in many groups one person acts as an informal facilitator, but encourage inviting a formal facilitator if agreement cannot be reached. Checking in and out is considered to be a concrete attempt to acknowledge that the personal affects the political. As Holmes and Riggs relate,

> A check-in at the beginning of the meeting provides each women with an opportunity to state how she is feeling and to get some support for her as an individual. It also helps other members of the group know how to relate to

that woman for the meeting. Checking out is a chance to evaluate the meeting at personal level. It is also a time to discuss any problems that may have arisen from the meeting but weren't dealt with adequately (1984b: 22).

Inner conflict can be addressed by taking the effort to employ these tactics.

Evaluating Women's Groups

As already discussed, women's groups do not operate in a standard way using the same conventions as other political groups. Women's groups are different and so compare poorly when evaluated by models that do not take these differences into account. Evaluation models for formal, traditional, male-stream political organisations cannot be employed successfully on women's groups. In short, the conventional yardstick will not do. It is not appropriate to measure what men do in the formal political arena of the state as the norm and measure women against that norm. Women face barriers in accessing the formal political arena in the first place and they have different responsibilities from men, namely child care and family maintenance. The result is that "the costs of participating in formal distant political institutions are too high, in terms of time, money and energy, for all but a few women to bear." (Vickers, 1988: 2).

Appropriate models for studying women's political groups have been slow in developing because "... the study of women's movements has been inhibited at a fundamental level by the legacy of western political theory's dismissal of women's politics as apolitical" (Rankin, 1996: 51). Women's politics remain poorly evaluated and need to be examined using fundamentally different criteria. The models would have to allow that, for example, intermittent activity is a strength, not a weakness. Constant productivity is not a goal of women's groups and it would not allow the flexibility so important for women to be able to participate.

An important issue remains how to measure success, even with an evaluation model sensitive to the context of women's political organising. The work of women's groups is to

effect political action and social change - hard effects to measure. At the conclusion of her

study, Price questioned

> How can we know when we have succeeded in our work of institutional
> change? Given the nature of the work, the short answer is we can't. Because
> the work is ongoing and because often results are indirect, determination s of
> success and failure are neither appropriate nor feasible. This does not mean
> that evaluation is not possible or useful. The point is that in this work the
> measurement is not absolute. It is not a question of clear cut success or
> failure but rather of standards and degrees of success. Certainly, if a group
> sets out to get a particular policy changed by a certain point in time it can
> measure whether or not that is achieved but in general, in the area of
> institutional change we don't categorically win or lose (1988: 40).

This study of WHIM is not an attempt to measure success and failure in the vein of

evaluation research because of these limitations. Still, these points about how to

successfully evaluate women's groups inform my subsequent analysis.

GROUP PROFILES

The following profiles of women's groups will be used to compare with Women's

Health Interaction Manitoba (WHIM). Combined with the aforementioned insights about

the context of the Canadian women's movement, current issues for feminist organising,

women's political modes of operation, and the structures and processes for women's groups,

these profiles will serve as the context for an analysis of WHIM.

Of the nine groups studied by CRIAW for the UNESCO commissioned report on

women's political participation in Canada, three of them are particularly useful as possible

case-studies for comparison to WHIM; they are (1) Women of the North, (2) MUMS:

Mothers United for Metro Shelter, and (3) Pandora. Women of the North is based in Fort

McMurray, Alberta so differs from WHIM by being rural/northern based. However, the

small membership of nine women and several aspects of their style of operation are similar

to WHIM (which currently has nine regular members, and five latent members). MUMS:

Mothers United for Metro Shelter is similar to WHIM by its small membership of between

twelve and twenty women and some of their lobbying tactics. They are also an urban based group (Halifax) like WHIM. MUMS differs from WHIM due to their mixed-sex membership, although they are women-led, and their high public profile in their community. Pandora is a newspaper publishing group with deadlines and regular subscribers, which has a very different type of output than WHIM. However, they also have a small membership of between 10 to 20 women and are a women-only, urban-based group.

Women of the North (WOTN)

Women of the North operates as a collective with no formal leadership. Membership is open to any woman who attends a meeting and decides she wants to be a member, which is exactly like WHIM. While they have no constitution, their purposes "are loosely described as education of women and the general public, and activism and activities in the community towards improving the status of women" (CRIAW, 1987: 22). They use the consensus model for decision making, like WHIM. While there is no formal leadership, informal leadership in the collective is assumed by those women who have skills and expertise in given areas. The meetings are held at a home of a member and are advertised publicly. They have remained independent of government funding. The women reported that the independence of government funding leaves them entirely free to engage in any activity they want, but acknowledge that lack of funds also limits activity. The group manage to carry out their activities by keeping costs low and charging small admissions to public events. No membership fees are charged, so as not to bar the participation of any interested women because of cost. At the time of the research by CRIAW, the major issue had been lack of access to therapeutic abortions. Even though 55% of the population polled in an independent survey supported it, no Therapeutic Abortion Committee (TAC) had been established. After public pressure by WOTN and others, one was established in 1987.

Their other main activity was the development of a Women's Resource Centre "to alleviate women's isolation and to educate women on women's issues." (CRIAW, 1987: 23).

Several factors were cited by WOTN members as important for them to participate in the group. The women emphasised the importance of structures permitting flexible levels of participation (CRIAW, 1987). Only one woman expressed that her involvement would be facilitated if the group were more organised with a clear-cut "do-able" agenda. The other factors enticing the women to continue to participate were the support of the group, the freedom to disagree with a decision, the energy and commitment of the other women, and the lack of pressure for time commitments.

Mothers United for Metro Shelter (MUMS)

The MUMS group was formed over the lack of affordable housing for women and their families in Halifax, holding their first protest in November of 1984. They define themselves as a "group of concerned women working against discrimination, physical and mental abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, inadequate housing, social injustice and government apathy towards the concerns of low-income families." (CRIAW, 1987: 29). They have between twelve and twenty active members, although the group of active members has a high turnover rate. Most are low-income single parents, and the group serves as a support system. Women in MUMS explained that "many meetings are spent talking to one another about the problems in their individual lives" (CRIAW, 1987: 31). Many women recounted that they were battered and so the MUMS also act as a support system for battered women who are having trouble finding places to live after leaving husbands. The MUMS meet every second Sunday and try to provide child care and transportation when they can. There is no formal president or leader and many of the women prefer it that way.

The MUMS have kept up a steady pace of activities including a mock eviction of the residents of Province House (the elected members of the Nova Scotia government), two Tent Cities where MUMS risked being arrested for occupying government-owned land, and a march where they dressed as houses bearing slogans on International Women's Day. MUMS have also distributed a booklet describing their experiences with housing to government members. In addition, they speak regularly at many events. In the past they have received national news coverage for their efforts.

Many of the members of MUMS are surprised the group has lasted as long as it has, "because the women are mostly poor, have family problems and are busy just trying to survive, let alone run a successful organization" (CRIAW, 1987: 32). They continue to always look for new members to keep their group going. Individuals mentioned being worn-out by the hectic pace but say will never leave the group. MUMS reported that "The support they receive from one another makes their meetings enjoyable and a boost to their spirits." (CRIAW, 1987: 32). The women value the interpersonal support which they receive from the group. They want to outreach to all Nova Scotian women eventually. The MUMS also focus on reaching women of all income brackets, especially those women who they feel are "only a divorce away from poverty" (CRIAW, 1987: 31).

Pandora

Pandora is a newspaper with the aim to provide an alternative to the mainstream media (CRIAW, 1987). Pandora recognises that it is a political group, as one woman explained "Putting out a women's newspaper is a political act, maintaining it as women only is a political act, and we do that very deliberately. Being women-positive is political; being lesbian-positive is political, and we are very clear on those." (CRIAW, 1987: 35). Pandora operates as a hybrid of a hierarchy and a collective, employing features of each. They explain that the emphasis on their product, the newspaper with its production

deadline, has to take precedence over the group's process at times. Pandora recounted, though, that they consciously attempt to break down the hierarchy and there is not any of the typical abuse of power, in their opinions. The women of Pandora described decision-making as "very democratic", "participatory", "collective" and "cooperative", with most decisions made by consensus (CRIAW, 1987: 35).

Pandora chose not to allow men's involvement, as the women feared that men would take over the interesting tasks in a mixed-sex situation, leaving women with the support work. Pandora women emphasised that working in a women-only environment was both valuable to them personally and essential to the group's working dynamics. At a group level, political policies governing practice included "involving people from different backgrounds", being "inclusive of women's different ideologies" and practising "non-hierarchic, consensus-oriented process." (CRIAW, 1987: 36). The group wants to try to fund child care and transportation and also car pool. The women want to change social attitudes about women and their mission with each issue of Pandora is to "contribute to the struggles to create and legitimise women's voices and women's political culture, to expose and mobilise against women's oppression and to begin articulating feminist visions of a transformed world" (CRIAW, 1987: 36).

Amethyst Women's Addiction Centre

Amethyst makes an interesting profile, providing a rare case in the literature on women's groups. The women who are part of the centre wrote and edited their story themselves, with the help of outside people they hired. While women involved over the history of the centre were researched and interviewed, it was at the behest of the current Amethyst women themselves. Amethyst wanted to offer their story, and played a heavy role in the production of their book. As they stated, "We also want to share with the larger women's movement the story of Amethyst's struggles, which raises issues common to many

feminist organisations. As special programs for women gain credibility, Amethyst's experience may be useful to mainstream addictions services needing to strengthen their services to women clients" (1995: ii).

Amethyst opened in 1979 in Ottawa to attempt to respond to the 1970s research which showed substance use was experienced very differently for women than men (Amethyst, 1995). Amethyst focuses on the social and economic context of women's lives, and claims there exist direct links between the unequal position of women in society, the forms of violence against women and their substance use. As Amethyst explains, "we presented a social model and a feminist model and a political model that said women were oppressed and one of the ways they dealt with that was by drinking" (1995: 3). Amethyst employs a feminist approach to reject models which perpetuate women's powerlessness by "pathologizing" or "psychiatrizing" them, that is treating women as if they have deficiencies which must be fixed. For Amethyst a "feminist analysis is one that clearly identifies the central problem as a world that devalues women." (1995: 16).

Amethyst is staffed exclusively by women, and have only women volunteers as well. They have established a satellite service in Kanata, but still have not been able to successfully outreach to rural women. Part of the problem behind this is less anonymity can be provided for women in smaller communities making women reluctant to seek out their service, combined with not having enough funding to provide it. Amethyst has been more successful at providing service and counselling for Francophone women. They report having a mix of classes represented, and described groups containing a prostitute and a doctor's wife. Amethyst has long struggled with the best ways to be inclusive and accessible. They have established a separate group for lesbians. Also they have attempted and will continue to attempt more outreach to women with disabilities, immigrant women and women of diverse cultural backgrounds, as few use Amethyst at present. After trying

to employ native counsellors to run groups for native women only, they discovered that native women need different structures than the ones Amethyst had in place in order to heal. After recognising these different healing approaches, Amethyst made the decision to offer as much support in terms of resources as possible to native-run women's addictions services already in operation. Amethyst has had long struggles over how to structure themselves. They report that the centre has functioned as a participatory hierarchy, a staff collective, a more traditional hierarchical management structure, and currently as a modified staff collective with a board of directors. Debate continues as to what structure will effectively carry out the group's long-term goals and short-term objectives. Amethyst described the basic ingredients of a feminist approach as collective organisation, shared leadership and power, rotating of administrative tasks, agreement by consensus, room for personal concerns and wage parity of staff.

Many of the Amethyst women "found that hierarchical structuring fostered competition, isolation and stagnation, as well as restricting opportunities for personal growth and skill development." (Amethyst, 1995: 61). Yet, many women "were more wary about a collective approach, their reasons ranging from discomfort and lack of familiarity with the model, to serious doubts about its efficiency and workability." (Amethyst, 1995: 64). Over the years, Amethyst developed what they refer to as an 'alternative feminist model', which is a blend of the feminist organisational approach and elements of traditional organisational structure. Currently, the staff operate collectively, with wage parity except for the administrative assistant who preferred to have a lower wage instead of added responsibility. They do have a board of directors but it is operated in a participatory management style. Despite the positive reports from the women about the new structure, questions about accountability and power remain central. And there remains conflict over how to realise and maintain shared power and decision making. Most staff agree that

shared decision making is more time-consuming and adds to an already demanding workload, but the consultation feels good (Amethyst, 1995).

Amethyst, despite the long-term struggles about which structure, process, and feminist vision to employ, described a feeling of hope about their centre and its achievements over the years and its service to women. Their spirits do not seem crushed by the current challenges they identified, which were the economic climate, the backlash against women, the struggle of how to be inclusive, the efforts to keep roots in feminist philosophy and "the growing demand by funders for conventionally defined efficiency, evaluation and accountability." (Amethyst, 1995: 85). As they anticipate continuing and hopefully even expanding their services to women, they assert

> The importance of Amethyst as a concept, as a model, is that it is a reflection of what we want women's lives to be - sisters helping sisters, being in control of our lives, decision making for ourselves based on self-esteem and power, validation of ourselves as women through the power of sharing our stories in groups - women being the experts in their own lives with its inevitable problems and dilemmas (Amethyst, 1995: 89).

Chapter Three: Methodologies and Research Position

Issue of Insider Status

An issue that needs to be addressed for this research, is that I became a member of WHIM and then later decided to research this group. I am a member of this group as well as a researcher of it, which has the potential to affect on my analysis and findings. Concerned about this dual role and insider status, I wanted to explore how it may have played out in past research with other women's groups. Pennell (1987) discusses the issue of close identification with a research site in an article about a battered women's shelter, where she had previously been an active member in her ongoing commitment to the battered women's movement. In a vein of research encouraged by "hermeneutic philosophers and social scientists, left critical thinkers and feminist researchers", Pennell denounced the stance of distance and objectivity of traditional research (1987: 116). She adopted a feminist research stance which advocated that self-identification with those being researched provides crucial insights.

Pennell, influenced by Mies's (1983) notion of *conscious partiality*, agreed that "understanding emerges through the tension between affinity and distance" (1987: 116). The affinity came through recognising commonalties in ideas and feelings and the sharing of experiences between the researcher and those under study. The distance is maintained by a process of re-viewing the familiar as things unknown. This *consciousness* works to reduce distortions of perception by forcing the researcher to challenge previously held beliefs and by promoting a fresh awareness. These concepts formed Pennell's theoretical framework for her research, in a posture she labelled as "simultaneous identification and objectification" (1987: 116).

Corman (1997) echoes the stance taken by Pennell in discussing the organising of an International Women's Day Committee. Corman had been a member of this group for several years and concluded that the "intimate familiarity" was an advantage, but conceded that "Being fair to all concerned and being critical of our actions is complicated from an insider perspective." (1997: 1). I have adopted Pennell's research posture in my study of WHIM, bearing Corman's cautions in mind.

I agree with Pennell that self-identification with those being researched can provide crucial insights. The shared experiences inform all of my analyses of WHIM. Several of the women related during their interview, that they felt less wary of my research because they already knew me. They did not mistrust my motives and this familiarity helped them to respond more openly to my questions. They were comfortable and willing respondents. I surmise that because the WHIM members witnessed the evolution of my research plans over time, they felt more comfortable with participating than they may have felt otherwise. For illustration, these woman stated

> It's easy to speak to you as a member of the group. That question [about the effect of shared gender], if you were to reframe it and say, "How would it be if you were a researcher who just came in to do this research and hadn't participated?" To me, that's a more interesting question and again I would have been less open.

> I know you from WHIM. Now, granted our knowledge of each other is limited but just having gotten to know you the way I have, yes, there's a built in trust there.

> I wasn't aware until recently, or maybe I heard but didn't pay attention, that you would be making us a focus of your study. I thought, "Oh, great if you can do it." I don't think it has unduly influenced the group. You've made a strong contribution and it has been wonderful to have new energy from away. The fact you're coming from outside the province and have jumped in and brought a new perspective has been great. I see it as a total win situation. I don't see it at all problematic.

> It would have been different if you had come in with the idea that you were going to be doing this and you weren't a member. You were a member of the group first.

And it grew out of that, which I do like.
I guess I feel more comfortable with that too. Although knowing you, I don't
know if I would have felt uncomfortable doing this. The way that I know you
is as a member of the group, not as someone who is doing research on the
group.

Establishing "rapport" has long been discussed in anthropological writings as

important to successful research. A belief exists that the greater the level of closeness and

rapport between the anthropologist and the people he or she is working with, the more full

a consultant's account will be. In this particular case, I believe my pre-existing rapport

with WHIM did enable more successful research. The conscious partiality enables me to

critically revisit the group's activities despite my participation in some of their activities.

Ethnography

I have explored the "culture" of this feminist health group through ethnographic

research, relying on participant-observation and interviewing. Culture appears in

quotation marks to denote that it can be hard to define. As Kathleen Shannon remarked "I

had been talking about women's culture for some time before I started musing about how I

would define the term. "Culture" is a slippery word. It slithers." (1990: 16). Another term

that slithers is ethnography itself. Ethnography has been the foundation of sociocultural

anthropology, yet remains difficult to define. As living research, ethnography has been

defined as "the systematic attempt to discover the knowledge a group of people have

learned and are using to organize their behaviour" (Spradley and McCurdy, 1981: 9).

Bernard contends that as a noun ethnography means "a description of a culture, or a piece

of culture" and as a verb, as in *doing ethnography*, it refers to "the collection of data that

describe a culture" (1994: 16). I joined WHIM in October of 1996 and my description of

them is partly based upon my personal experiences of spending time with the group, which

allowed me to gather information used to discuss the group in this thesis.

Feminist Ethnography

Anthropology is extremely diverse and borrows topics of study, theories and methods from several other disciplines. Within such a varied scope, there is much separating into subdisciplines. There is also dissent among anthropology's practitioners as to what anthropology really is and how best to do it. As a result of this history and context, I assert that it is necessary to situate the vein of anthropology which provides the framework for my thesis research.

This ethnographic research is attempting to be a specifically feminist ethnography, which is a broad and varied category in itself. The label of feminist ethnography is a recent development within ethnographic methods, although ethnographies expressing feminist concerns had been written previously (see *The Alternative Tradition of Women's Writing in Sociocultural Anthropology, MASA Journal* by Duggan, 1998, for elaboration). The development is so recent within feminist anthropology that little consensus has been reached as to the objectives of such an enterprise and what form a specifically feminist ethnography should take. Such debate is to be expected, as feminist ethnography is a reshaping of the most traditional of anthropological methods.

Ethnography is a fuzzy and often hard to describe method whose noun simultaneously refers to the activity of anthropological research and the written results. Very briefly, traditional ethnographic research has typically involved travelling to, and living in, a new location with people who have a different way of life from that of the ethnographer. Ethnographers stay with these people, who are usually complete strangers, for at least a year and often for several. The purpose of this immersion into another "culture" is to carry out research which will be more informed than mere detached observation. This will possibly allow anthropologists to get closer to the "truth" about the people. The anthropologist has to negotiate entry into areas of life experience of the people

and then incorporate her or himself by participating in this culture's daily life. Ruth Behar captured the ambiguous nature of the finished product by describing an ethnography as "a strange cross between the realist novel, the travel account, the memoir, and the scientific report" (1995: 3).

The Value of Ethnography

Ethnography has received critical attention partly because of its exploitative (and some would say inherently violent) nature characterised by its "dependence on the words of (frequently less privileged) others for its existence and yet offer[ing] none of the benefits of authorship to those others who participate with the anthropologists in the writing of culture" (Behar, 1995: 4). Traditionally, anthropology has studied remote, rural, poor and illiterate peoples of different "racial" backgrounds. Naturally, there are power relations inherent in any attempted representation of this Other. It is imperative that feminist ethnographers attempt to deal with the power differentials between the women and men who write feminist ethnography, and the women and men who are written about. The inequalities stemming from conditions of global capitalism create more privileged locations for some and less privileged locations for others. This brings us to the question of "who has the right to write culture for whom?" (Behar 1995: 7).

Stacey cites many positive elements of an ethnography: the focus on the experiential, knowledge as contextual and interpersonal, attentiveness to the concrete realm of everyday reality and human agency, drawing on resources of empathy, connection, and concern because the ethnographer is the research "instrument", and the appearance of providing greater respect and power to subjects (1988: 22). Then after two and a half years doing ethnography, Stacey recognised difficulties with the ethnographic method. She began wondering whether the appearance of greater respect and equality between researcher and subject was a mask for a deeper, more dangerous form of exploitation (1988:

23). As the result of ethnography's dependence on human relationship, engagement and attachment, it places subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal. Stacey points out that fieldwork represents an intrusion and change into a system of relationships, where the researcher is far freer to leave. While Stacey acknowledges that the ethnographic method often places the researcher and his/her informants in a collaborative, reciprocal search for understanding, she counters that in the end the research product is ultimately that of the researcher. Stacey concludes that "the greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater the danger [to informants]" (1988: 24).

Yet, despite the problems with this style of research, many think there are still benefits and good reasons for doing ethnography. Bell summarises and endorses that

> Ethnography at its best opens a discursive space in which the silenced may speak. It empowers and validates everyday experience. It brings to the threshold of consciousness the routines, rhythms and rituals of everyday life, allows us to savour the ordinary, map the mundane, identify salient symbols, and to seek the strategies of persistence and resistance. In this conceptualization, good ethnography is a subversive activity: it is not balanced, bland or detached. ... The preparedness to acknowledge the situated knower, the contextual nature of knowledge, the relational basis of fieldwork, renders the ethnography vulnerable. I see these as strengths ... (1993: 298).

Bell, and others (Abu-Lughod 1988, Visweswaren 1988, Gordon 1988), believe that feminists should not abandon ethnography and that it can be put to good use if employed with an awareness of the issues.

The Question of Objectivity

Feminist ethnographers place more consideration on the influence gender has on fieldwork and also admit that the objective stance is uncomfortable. Abu-Lughod (1998) views the critique of objectivity as being one of the critical junctures of anthropology and feminism, which made the development of a feminist ethnography both more possible and more desirable. She defined objectivity as "that attitude which might be invoked to declare

the impossibility of putting 'feminist' and 'ethnography' together" (1988: 8). Indeed, if objectivity is the ideal of anthropological research and writing, then to argue for a more subjective approach is to argue for a flawed project. Clifford Geertz and his school of interpretive anthropology, however, had generated explicit questions about the claims of objectivity and declared that anthropology is not an experimental science in search of law (Abu-Lughod, 1988). This interpretive 'science' in search of meaning laid the groundwork for the reflexive attention to the process of fieldwork and the literary attention to the production of written representations. In regard to ethnography being a scientific method Abu-Lughod sums up, and I agree, that

> If, as anthropologists, we know what we know through emotionally complicated and communicatively ambiguous social encounters in the field, then certainly objectivity is out of the question and anthropology is not to be likened to science (1988: 10).

This critique of objectivity within anthropology paralleled the critique offered by feminism.

This thesis research is a rejection of positivistic objectivity and operates from the interpretive tradition within anthropology.

The Question of Difference

Abu-Lughod saw another crisis, besides that of objectivity, which feminism and anthropology share and which a feminist ethnography must address. She points out the crisis over *difference*. Anthropology and feminism share this issue because both are based on a fundamental and political system of difference upon which the unequal world has depended throughout history, that of *race* and *gender* (1988: 24). Issues of *class* intersect both race and gender as well. Both race and gender have their roots in a self/other distinction. Within the feminist movement it was lesbians, women of colour, and Third World women saying that white, middle class, heterosexual feminists could not speak for them and their realities. Abu-Lughod asserts that "the most pressing issue for discussion

in feminist circles now is how to develop a politics of solidarity, coalition, or affinity built on the recognition of difference" (1988: 24). Within anthropology, it was the voices of the Others which had been constructed through anthropological discourse.

In terms of the self/other base, anthropology is rooted in exploration and colonization and Abu-Lughod has classified it as the discourse of the self. Anthropology defines itself as the study of the other, which means that the notion of selfhood was assumed and unproblematic. It has long been asserted that women are the other to the male self. For this reason feminists understand that binary self/other distinctions are about *power*, and are in the position to offer important critiques of such hierarchies. Abu-Lughod declares that feminists have to face that womanhood is only a partial identity and is mediated by issues of race, class, sexual orientation, and education. Indeed, she declares, "By working with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partially the self, we might be moving beyond the impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide" (1988:25). Visweswaren also noted that the goals of ethnography are changing to reflect a respect for difference, with an allowance for incomprehensibility instead of attempting total understanding and representation (1988: 30). Both this shared crisis over difference and parallel critiques of objectivity created the critical juncture where Abu-Lughod places the emergence of a feminist ethnography.

Feminist Research Within Anthropology

The notion of *feminist research* has been hotly contested in academic circles and there exists no uniform set of principles, with many asserting that there should not be one (Stacey 1988: 21). Regardless, there is a prevailing sense of what characterises feminist research. It is most commonly viewed as research on, by, and especially *for* women. Feminists express distrust of the dualisms, abstractions, and detachment of positivism,

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especially the dualism of objective/subjective. Many, but not all, feminists celebrate experientially-based knowledge that draws upon perceived traditional feminine capacities of intuition, empathy and relationship. Feminists view as unnecessary the disciplinary boundaries around knowledge and generally perform research that is inter-disciplinary in nature. Feminists decry and critique the hierarchical, exploitative relations of conventional research and urge instead working towards "an egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her 'subjects'" (Stacey, 1988: 22). The important question to keep in mind now is, 'what difference could feminism make to the doing of ethnographic research and writing'?

In this research I have attempted to employ a feminist process within ethnography. Research ideas were discussed and developed with WHIM's input. All information on the project was openly shared verbally and additionally provided in writing in the form of an information folder. I always allowed for time for questions to be asked of me in each interview. I attempted to express my appreciation of the women's time and insight and reciprocate in several ways, for example the small gifts after each interview and the focus group. I wanted my research conduct to be respectful of the group and to be non-exploitative.

Guidelines of Feminist Ethnography

Among feminist anthropologists there are many differing visions of what constitutes a feminist ethnography. It is safe to say that for some people this thesis would not qualify, while for others it could very well be the embodiment of their ideas about what a feminist ethnography should be. The following brief discussion will explore several of the conflicting viewpoints.

Visweswaren writes that for her the most important characteristic of feminist ethnography is the yet unexpressed potential for "locate[ing] the self in the experience of

oppression in order to liberate it" (1988: 29). This prescribes feminist practice as the more important outcome of feminist ethnography, rather than the creation of a body of theory. She implies an inherently political nature to feminist ethnography. She suggests a focus on women's relationships to other women, instead of focusing on women's relationships to men. This prescription will be a feature of this thesis research.

A very interesting contribution to the debate comes from Visweswaren's position that feminist ethnographers must stop framing studies of women in anthropological models (1988: 37). She advocates listening to feminist theory outside of the discipline, that takes the *problematic of voicing* as the starting point. Her view is that we can learn from women's speech and also their silences. This is another of her feminist critiques of the assumptions of postmodernist experimental ethnography, that assumes voices (most likely male) ready to engage in conversations (1988: 39). Visweswaren argues instead, "feminist anthropology cannot assume the willingness of women to talk, and that one avenue open is to investigate when and why women do talk, to assess what strictures are placed on their speech, what avenues of creativity they have appropriated, and what degrees of freedom they possess" (1988: 37). A feminist ethnography then must confront the problems of coming to voice.

The focus in Gordon's vision should be on the centrality of power relations. Her recommendation is to develop "a history of feminist problematics" as they are played out in feminist anthropology and ethnography. She argues that this treatment of feminist questions as *problematics*, historically produced in specific struggles, opens up new possibilities of international relations. Although Gordon does not elaborate any further on this, I read that she is referring to international relations which would take into account the histories of colonialism and strive to not re-colonize through any engagements in exploitative research. Gordon also advocates an examination of how feminist questions and

research agendas tie in with macro and global relations, (1988: 19) and is interested in the problem of constructing a subjectivity able to address the social, cultural, and political conditions of multinational capitalism (1988: 12). If I were pressed to label her approach to ethnography, I would refer to it as a *feminist historical political economy*.

In a 1993 article that cites the article by Visweswaren, Gordon also discusses the problematic of voicing. Gordon acknowledges that the image of 'giving voice' to the disempowered suggests a troubling 'matronization' (438). She urges a focus on equalising power rather than giving voice. She sees this as being possible by centering ethnographic research within community agendas and considering how resources and power get redistributed. She counters critics who claim that any attempts to "empower" are patronising and states "[w]e need to understand social processes in a way that doesn't flatten all research between relatively privileged women and disenfranchised women into images of well-intentioned but naïve ethnographers blindly reproducing power inequities " (1993: 436).

Wheatley brings up questions around gearing texts to engage particular audiences. A relevant issue here is the use of language. Feminism calls for forms of writing that are available to readers who might not be trained in the translation of the jargons of specialised scholars. Wheatley suggests that feminist writers of ethnography consider how they can be accountable to the different audiences or readerships of their work (1994: 409). This consideration was also on the mind of Abu-Lughod (1988) as well, who noted that postmodernist experimental ethnographers were elitist as they drew from philosophy and literary studies rather than from ordinary experience. Plus, the experimental ethnographers did not reject the rhetoric of social science but created a jargon packed discourse which is more exclusive than ordinary anthropology (Abu-Lughod, 1988). The fact that ethnography is writing in a language understood by only select members of

academia, limits the extent to which it could be considered feminist, dialogical, or collaborative (Wheatley, 1994: 522). Whether the audience of ethnography is indeed so select is debatable, but the point to be taken from her statement is that a feminist style of ethnography cannot be selective in its readership.

Abu-Lughod offers a specific vision of feminist ethnography and declares its contribution to the current crisis in feminism will be expressed through,

> ethnographies that try to bring to life what it means to be a woman in other places and under different conditions, ethnographies that explore what work, marriage, motherhood, sexuality, education, poetry, television, poverty, or illness mean to other women, can offer feminists a way of replacing their presumptions of a female experience with a grounded sense of our commonalities and differences (1988: 27).

This type of ethnography has potential to help forge a viable international women's movement based on such sharing.

Another anthropologist, in 1994, wrote an article which called into question the entire purpose of this debate over feminist ethnography and suggested that focus should be placed instead on the myriad of other methods available to anthropologists. Enslin does not concern herself with the policing of the "boundaries of ethnography, anthropology or feminism in order to determine which texts might fit into a privileged slot called *feminist ethnography*" (1994: 537). She looks beyond ethnography as her primary practice and does not bother with attempting the salvation of ethnography through feminism. Enslin wishes the focus would shift from the concentration on texts to a revision of action. [Enslin appears either not to notice or care about the political nature of the proposed feminist ethnography and the goal of praxis and social action expressed by several authors; Gordon, 1993; Cole, Sally and Lynn Phillips, 1995; Abu-Lughod, 1988.] Enslin considers a more critical task to be "democratizing the social relations of research" first suggested by Salazar in 1991 (1994: 544). She is worried that while ethnographic attempts to capture women's

voices have become valourized in academia (she cites Abu-Lughod's work from 1986 with Bedouin women), firsthand writings by women of colour continue to be marginalized in mainstream women's studies in the United States (1994: 544).

Her opposition to the debate is crystallized into a powerful passage:

> My vision of a feminist ethnography grows out of my conviction that feminism should be more than ornamentation for academia. If feminism is to transform anthropology, it must be critical. It must be more than an adjective pointing to ethnography "by, for, and about women", especially when the woman it is by is a Euro-American academic, the women it is for are also Euro-American academics, and the women it is about are Third World. Such an endeavor neither transforms anthropology nor lives up to the critical possibilities of feminism. It does not create a "dialogue" among women it is by, for, and about. It contains feminism safely within academic institutions and texts rather than connecting it with women's struggles in the streets, farms, factories, forests, kitchens, bedrooms, hospitals, and prisons around the world (1994: 559).

Concerning the possibility of a feminist ethnography, Enslin asserts that being 'by, about and for' are necessary, but yet insufficient conditions. She also mentions that a feminist ethnography would have to be *something that is beyond writing*. It would need to reflect a collective process of building theory through struggles for change (1994). As an example for feminist ethnographers to look to, Enslin suggests the 1987 work *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women*, a book from the feminist action theatre group Sistren. Under the mediation of a director, Honor Ford-Smith, the women collectively recorded, transcribed and edited the life stories of the Sistren women.

The Sistren women had several opportunities to edit their life stories before print. The collective then did a final edit, decided on a title, authorship credits, and the use of the money from the publication. Honor Ford-Smith, though, is not a member of the group in the same sense as the other women and does not have the same disadvantaged background, which still means that there is a power difference. Enslin defines *Lionheart Gal* as collaborative, polyphonic and reflective of an ongoing dialogue even though that is

not included as part of the text. Enslin takes her prescription for a feminist ethnography from the words of Ford-Smith and suggests it should be tales created through a collective process "accomplished within a community bound by a particular historical purpose" (1994: 560).

Political Purposes

As previously outlined, there lacks consensus on what feminist ethnography is and what doing feminist ethnography means. In my view, what all of the authors have really been debating is the extent to which a feminist ethnography is possible, but more importantly the extent to which it could be *political*. Anthropology has been uneasy about declaring its politics and has attempted to deny any it has by couching itself as objective science, thus above any such biases, and also by adopting an oft-broken policy of not interfering with local affairs. Feminist ethnographers, in varying degrees of intensity, are advocating a politicised anthropology which will somehow better the conditions for women under patriarchy. The ethnography may be a participatory style of research and can serve an already existing "community" agenda. Efforts will be made to resolve the power differences and inequities between the researcher and researched, inasmuch as this is truly possible. This politicised anthropology expressed through feminist ethnography, both as living research and as written genre, will be a rejection of any strong cultural relativist position by attempting to study women for the specific purpose of transforming certain conditions of their lives. This transformation may be through shared action, but also through the providing of analysis and theory to guide later action by the "community" alone. Underscoring all of this debate is the assumption that any ethnography labelled as feminist will have a political purpose.

The political purpose of my work is modest in scope, but I hope that my study will be of benefit to WHIM and help in illuminating the successes and failures of their group

process, validate their strengths as a group and possibly even to help shape or inform future work. This study may also provide a useful or enlightening example for other similar groups.

Participant Observation

The core of any type of ethnography is participant observation, which can provide rich, enlightening data. I feel participant observation is the best way to understand a small group's dynamic. Participant observation involves immersion into a specific context and can provide more of an "insider's view" than can all other styles of research, where most often the divide between researcher and researched is maintained with little mutual engagement. Participant observation entails interaction with those the anthropologist is working with and using the self as a research instrument. It is the faculties of the researcher that will filter the new information and decipher meaning.

Participant observation, as the name suggests, involves both participating and observing in the research field. However, the ordering might be wrong as it is observation which is the key and primary method, and thus it should more aptly be referred to as observant participation. The researcher may at times stop actively participating, outside of his/her presence, but never needs to stop observing. This observation is attempted in unobtrusive ways in natural situations and seeks to achieve knowledge from the point of view of people under investigation (Spradley and McCurdy, 1981: 15). Crane and Angrosino relate that

> it is perhaps unfair to label it [participant observation] as a "technique" for field research, since such a term implies that there is one thing (or one set of related things) that a person does in order to do participant observation. ... [It] is more a state of mind, a framework for living in the field, than it is a specific program of action (1992: 64).

Bernard goes farther in defining it and describes that for him

Participant observation involves establishing rapport in a new community; learning to act so that people go about their business as usual when you show up; and removing yourself every day from cultural immersion so you can intellectualize what you've learned, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly (1994: 137).

Bernard's steps are goals which will be aspired to in conducting this research.

To date, my participant observation has involved attending numerous meetings of WHIM, approximately twenty-one full-group meetings since October of 1996. In addition, I was involved in at least eight subcommittee meetings. Often these included a supper meal and there was an informal atmosphere to the start of the meetings. WHIM appears to have a strong social element for the women involved. Many meetings began with a "sharing circle" style discussion with each member giving a brief update on her life, called a check-in. There was a lot of support and encouragement provided among the members for their varied activities. It is the sort of group where people share thoughts, feelings, and describe events in their lives.

The more "business-like" parts of the meetings dealt with the work to be done by the group. Discussions encouraged everyone to voice their views. Women who tended to be more silent were often asked directly for input to ensure that they had an opportunity to contribute. With everyone having a "say" it is easier to observe each member's style of communication and their individual perspectives. Although it also means that decisions are not reached quickly in this group. This background, achieved through having participated in the group process, informed my research as I conducted interviews with the individuals and compiled the history of the group.

My participant observation has also involved being on subcommittees in order to work with more focus on investigating and planning project ideas and developing funding proposals. Working in even smaller groups was more intimate and illuminated more of the inner workings of organising and decision making. I am fully involved in all committees of

WHIM and feel that my observations cover all aspects of WHIM's current work. This research is comprehensive and not skewed to particular sorts of activities over others.

Initially, the meetings dealt mainly with acting as an advisory group for the fledgling Canadian Women's Health Network, particularly on matters of organisational structure and sliding scale membership fees. In September of 1996, a new project idea had been decided upon, a popular theatre piece about the potential effects of the health reform (regionalization) process on Manitoban women. This play idea was a 'coming-full-circle' for the group, as they originated as a tour group for a play on women and pharmaceuticals. There was a lot of excitement about the idea, and my experience with WHIM has centred mostly on this popular theatre project.

Lately, most of the meetings have dealt with funding; searching out potential sources and then preparing grant applications to support this play. The momentum has stalled with only one funding request ($6,000) being granted. However, at a May 30th, 1998 morning meeting, the idea was still confirmed as the best medium for presenting the information on the effects of health reform on women and new directions were decided upon. As a result of the funding sources applied to, restrictions of the funders had been taken into consideration and the original concepts had been modified. The focus shifted back to exploring a collaboration with the Nelly McClung Theatre troupe, a community-based group of semi-professional performers skilled in activism theatre. A more complete description of the group's project and current activities is provided in Chapter Four: Profile of Women's Health Interaction Manitoba.

I chose participant observation over survey methods because of the engagement involved and the ideas of working *with*, rather than working *on*, a group. I am not doing this research for the purpose of making inferences and generalising on the basis of my data to a larger population with statistical validity. The smaller-scale, but more intimate style,

of ethnographic research serves my ends better and allows more depth. I will not be able to assert that a certain percentage of feminist health groups or general women's groups operate in the way WHIM does, but I will be able to show through one case what the possibilities and limitations may be for groups of this kind.

Ethnography In This Case

There are no identical ethnographies produced by anthropologists because of the variety of approaches, research foci and styles of 'writing up'. This is a variable method and is extremely flexible and adaptable. This research is not ethnography in its historical ideal because my involvement is sporadic (based on meeting times) and only focuses on one aspect of the women's lives, thus precluding holism, although it is comprehensive on all of WHIM's current activities. I will still refer to it as an ethnography because of the long term engagement (since October of 1996) and the amount of collaboration on a continuing basis with the group to help meet their various project goals. It is ethnographic in that it involved a process of negotiation to find a role in the group, learning the ways of the group, and the working together to accomplish ends on a regular ongoing basis. It is holistic in the sense that it will cover the entirety of WHIM's members and study their collective history.

As Gordon suggested, a feminist ethnographer should be centred in the community's agenda and be striving for common goals. I have developed this type of relationship with WHIM. I have collaborated on all of their projects since I joined the group, often taking on an extra share in some of the work. I was also paid an honorarium for my role in helping to prepare a research proposal for the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence.

The observational framework to be employed in this research has focused on the regular meetings of WHIM and on activities related to projects they are involved in. The personal lives of the members outside of this group were not researched in any depth.

Semi-structured, Open-ended Interviews

To supplement participant observation, I have conducted interviews with each individual WHIM member. The interviews were semi-structured in nature. I used a uniform list of questions for everyone, but probed in a different manner depending upon the responses of each informant. My aim was not to have each respondent respond to as identical a set of stimuli as possible (Bernard, 1994), therefore I did not limit myself to structured interviewing. Also, because I performed all of the interviewing myself, a detailed interview schedule with instructions was not required. I did, however, use an interview guide, which is a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order (Bernard, 1994). Building and following a guide allows for reliable, comparative qualitative data. Plus, it demonstrates that the interviewer is prepared and capable, but not attempting to exercise excessive control over the informant's responses (Bernard, 1994). Oakley (1981) has raised issues about whether interviews should be used by feminist researchers because of the unbalanced exchange of information which implies an exploitation. No matter how sensitive a feminist interviewer is to the woman she interviews, they are still never on equal terms in the setting. The researcher is in the position to potentially exercise the control over the encounter. For lack of a different method, I still performed interviews. There was less potential for exploitation by merit of the WHIM members being an educated and relatively privileged group. As well, my research aimed at giving back to WHIM as much as possible throughout the research process.

I phoned each WHIM member to ask for an interview and then followed up with a package containing the letter of intent, synopsis of proposal and consent form. In our world of voice mail, it often took several attempts to contact the women. For the most part, I delivered the information packages or sent them through the mail. The women had an

opportunity to review this material before we met. (The material was already familiar because I had previously given a presentation of my research plans to the group during one of our meetings.) The location of the interview and the timing were as they chose. The interviews ranged in length from thirty-five minutes to an hour and a half. There are several reasons behind the differences in times among the women. One factor is how well the woman had read and thought about the questions in advance. Another factor was that the length of involvement with WHIM varied, leaving certain women better able to discuss some questions. Relatively recent group members had less history to share. Also, certain women have more talkative personalities just in general. The average length of the interviews was between fifty minutes and one hour. As an expression of thanks, each woman was given a candle holder with a candle.

The interviews were recorded on tape. The transcripts of these exchanges constituted the raw data for analysis.

In total, I approached fifteen women about being interviewed for this project. One approach was made by electronic mail because the woman had relocated to Vancouver for two years. Other WHIM members urged that she would have a valuable insight to add to this research, but unfortunately she did not respond in writing to the interview questions. Along with her lack of response, I also chose not to pursue the possibility of a telephone interview because of the cost of long distance telephone charges and my lack of suitable recording equipment. One woman expressed a desire to see the information package because she was not aware of the research plan, as she had been unable to attend the meetings since early 1996. I mailed her the information about the project and gave her time to contact me. I then attempted to reach her and after repeated unreturned voice mail messages, I concluded she was not interested in the project. One more woman never returned several calls and I concluded that she would not be interested in being

interviewed. Another woman declined to be interviewed for personal reasons, but

expressed support for my research. The remaining eleven women were interviewed and

their responses form the basis for my analysis.

Scheduling interview times for these women was a challenge due to their busy

schedules. The majority were carried out during November and December of 1998. The

few remaining interviews were carried out early in 1999. Two were conducted in my

apartment. One was conducted at a work place and the rest in the homes of the

consultants. Providing the questions ahead of time facilitated a smooth interview process,

by having the women already thinking about the issues raised by the questions. This also

made me feel more comfortable asking the questions because I knew I was not catching

anyone unaware or putting them on the spot. The interviews always contained both

serious discussion and laughter.

Focus Group Discussion

I held a focus group style of meeting at the beginning of this research, before any of

the interviews took place. While similar to a group interview, a focus group differs "because

reliance is on interaction within the group, not just the alternation between the

researcher's questions and the research participant's responses" (Morgan, D., 1988: 9). The

premise is that it is useful and enlightening to observe interaction on a topic among group

members, as well as examine the content of their responses. A feature which makes them

relevant for feminist research styles is that "focus groups offer a stronger mechanism for

placing the control over this interaction in the hands of the participants rather than the

researcher." (Morgan, D., 1988: 18). Morgan describes the role of the moderator as one to

balance between being able to cut off unproductive discussion without imposing the

moderator's own sense of what is interesting or important, which I attempted to be

conscious of in conducting the focus group.

The questions to be covered were distributed by fax or personal delivery well in advance of the meeting. It was scheduled as one of the regular supper meetings of the group, with a brief project update before the focus group began. I took care of ordering and bringing the food from DeLuca's, the favourite take-out place of the group. Everyone chipped in to pay for the dinner as was the usual custom. I arranged child care and provided snacks and juice for the young daughter who came to the meeting. The young girl and the baby-sitter played together in an adjoining office space.

After sharing supper, I explained the group rules for the discussion. These consisted of trying to have only one woman talking at a time, no interrupting and no side conversations with their neighbours. For the most part, the no interrupting rule was followed. The tone of the interaction was light, with lots of murmurs of agreement and laughter. Each woman contributed to the discussion. A few women said more merely by virtue of being longer term members of the group and so were better able to speak to certain questions. No one dominated the discussion. The responses were very informative and it was nice to have the entire group provide backup and clarification or verification for each other.

I employed a suggestion of D. Morgan's (1988) to have every woman give a final summary statement at the end on either her feelings about the focus group or an offering of more information not covered earlier. It was an opportunity to ensure that every woman has a chance to say what she feels is important.

As a show of appreciation for their participation and as a way of providing dessert, I gave out gift bags of sweets to each woman. This was met with surprise and thanks from the women.

I found that the focus group yielded a lot of information in a format that was enjoyable for all participants. It served as a kind of "party" or celebration of the group,

what they had done together and who they were now. The women responded that it was

nice to have a chance to reflect on their philosophy and recap their successes and failures

over the years.

> Tonight has been an interesting process in terms of hearing. I don't think
> we've ever really put out what we all think WHIM is, or what we get out of it,
> or how we see its role, or what we believe, in such a concise way. That's been
> a really neat experience for me to be part of that. I'm glad I was able to make
> it to the group.

> I have to focus my [final] comments on tonight, because I have found this
> really powerful. I remember years ago reading a book by this Amethyst
> group, a women's only addiction service in Ottawa. They put out their
> process as a feminist organisation, and history as an addiction service, sort of
> two things together. As soon as I came across that book I took it where ever I
> went. I showed it to every group of women who I came across. I always
> thought "This is what's missing, a documentation of our process." We tend to
> be always looking and doing and never reflecting. I'm going through a period
> of reflection right now, so I'm finding this was really good, positive and
> encouraging to do this and I thank you Jen.

> As I sat here, it really felt like something we needed to do. When I read your
> questions I thought they were excellent, and it turned out they were. It
> proves the value of having women of different ages and experiences and new
> women come in and add to the group. It's been great. Tonight was very
> meaningful, so thank you.

> It has come at a good time for us which is really neat, that think thing. It
> was really useful in terms of me as a relatively new member.

> I always cherish times where we can just talk. The outcome or the goal is to
> do what we do, which is to share and to brainstorm, gain ideas, and that's
> wonderful.

Many of the women highlighted the focus group experience in our later interview,

for example

> The research you've been doing has been interesting and especially the focus
> group. It really allowed us to reflect positively on a lot of our process. One of
> the things that I've been involved with through the years is looking at
> feminist organisations, how they form, the stages they go through, their life
> and how we never document it. There's been so few organisations that I
> know of that have documented their process. I think we can always share
> our learning with other groups and with each other. Take stock and reflect
> how far we've come as people, as individuals within the group and the group
> itself. [The focus group] gave us an opportunity to reaffirm our usefulness,

our participation, ourselves, where we've come from, and in terms of a group the kinds of activities we've been engaged in. We tend to lose sight of that and just do, do, do, do. So, I found it very beneficial.

That one session that you set up and facilitated and treated us so well, little gifts and so on, was important. People appreciated that. That was a volunteer appreciation back to us. If I had to choose and say what was a nice moment, or a moment that I will remember, it was that meeting and it was you doing things for us. I don't think I articulated that as much before. We all said thank you and we appreciate it, but I think it really had a significance and a gesture that you acknowledged us. That we welcomed you in some way and that you were part of the group, but we were giving you something like our history and you valued that. It was a really fine moment you helped facilitate and that's what understanding something about the nuances of groups can bring. I don't think we could have done it for ourselves. It's really valuable. If nothing else we necessarily see out of your project, that evening gave us back something very nice and very important.

Archival Methods

Archival methods have been employed with the materials pertaining to the group over the years and which have been kept by various group members. I have searched through two boxes of old meeting minutes, notes, resource materials and flyers pertaining to WHIM. I organised these materials chronologically and used some of the information gleaned from them to inform the focus group questions. There are gaps over time due in part to the dormant/revived cycle of the group and lack of consistent record keeping. It is impossible to form any comprehensive account of the group's history from these materials, but they do provide insight. Very few materials were available for the period 1990-1996, in particular. I sent out the draft of the historical sketch to two long-term members. After they read it, I was provided with verification on the contents, as well some suggested additions. This archival research resulted in the historical background used to profile WHIM in Chapter Four.

Life-History Methods

In a sense this research is a life-history project, only it is the life-history of a group, not an individual. This life-history project will have explored how WHIM has changed over

time, stayed together, and created something interesting. Hopefully, the good work they have done will be celebrated and a reason for reflection was created by this project. The history of a women's group has the potential to be very interesting and results in a record of women's work, which all too often has gone unrecorded throughout history. This research has attempted to recover the history of WHIM and share the stories of its members.

Analysis

Content analysis was performed on the interview transcripts. Content analysis is the process of identifying, coding and grouping the primary patterns in the data into categories (Patton, 1990). The transcripts were formatted to allow space in the left margins for the assignment of codes. The coding process attributes labels to the various points and themes which were provided by the consultants during the interviews. Later, these codes were organised into groupings based upon their similarities and differences. By forming these groups of related codes into more substantive codes, the number of separate codes could be condensed to a manageable size. Still, I found that a large amount of interesting issues were raised during the focus group and the interviews, which made the refining of code groupings very difficult. I have wanted to include many more themes than I have been able to within this thesis. While some degree of simplification must occur during the process of developing themes, efforts were made to ensure that the integrity of the data is maintained. The detailed analysis, coding and comparison of the responses provided by WHIM members is the basis of my discussion of this group, along with my own personal observations from being involved with them.

Writing Strategies

The voices of the women interviewed will be present throughout this text. It is common for researchers to assign a pseudonym to each person interviewed and present his or her views in a profile. I have chosen not to profile my consultants that way. I have

decided to scramble all of the quotations in the interest of maintaining confidentiality of the women among their group members. For instance, one isolated quote could sound like the view of five or six of the women, but combine that with several other quotes in a recognisable profile and it becomes much easier to tell who is speaking. Despite my efforts to delete easily identifiable information and mix up the responses, women may still be able to recognise the opinions of their colleagues. This was a risk to their confidentiality that was explained to them before each interview.

Effects of the Ethnographer's Gender

Ethnographers do fieldwork by establishing relationships with other people in order to integrate into another culture for the purpose of carrying out their research. Ethnographers do this as persons of a particular age, belief, class, ethnicity and so on. They also do this as women or men, which means that the fields of ethnography are gendered, although this has not always been adequately acknowledged. Roger Keesing (1984) provided an account of the difficulties in eliciting information from female informants because he was a male. Feminist anthropologists have provided accounts of how sharing gender helped to gain data from women (Leela Dube, 1975). It is safe to say that despite differences, women recognise a female ethnographer as a woman and that certain things are in common. Abu-Lughod challenges us to

> imagine the woman fieldworker who does not deny that she is a woman and
> is attentive to gender in her own treatment, her own actions, and in the
> interactions of people in the community she is writing about. In coming to
> understand their situation, she is also coming to understand her own through
> a process of specifying the similarities and the differences (1988: 26).

This refers again to using the self as a research tool. I assert that my research was aided greatly by my gender, my knowledge of feminism and views and goals shared with this group.

Several women expressed that they would not have consented to be interviewed by a man, or would not have responded to the questions in the same way.

> I don't know. It depends on the male, you know, it really does. It's important that it's a feminist and if that man could project himself as a feminist sort of man then it would be fine. If it was a man who wasn't feminist, and didn't want to be, then it would be impossible.

> I would have been much less open in talking than to you. I would have been a little bit more uncomfortable. The difference would be that a male wouldn't have been participating. A limitation for me is that it's much easier for me to be very open with women. That's one of the challenges in my life, that somebody who is different from me in terms of gender and some basic life experiences, it's harder for me to connect. If you had come in as a woman who was very different from me, maybe an eighty year old, or different racial background, or obvious different religious differences, I would have felt less comfort too. I'm most able to connect to you because I see there's some difference in age and region where you are from, but there are some similarities that I can say something and you will understand what I'm saying. There's not a lot of translation, I feel.

> I don't think we would have actually felt comfortable. It would have to have been a very unusual person to have found his way in. Comfort level is understanding. I don't think he would have joined the group first, it just wouldn't have worked.

Reaction to Being Researched

I believe the methods used to study the group, and the research posture I adopted were successful in gathering information about WHIM. I base part of this assessment on the favourable reaction of the group to the research process.

In response to being questioned on feelings about being studied for thesis research in anthropology, women replied

> It's been really good in terms of respect about negotiating what you need to do for your own research, but in a way that's respectful from the group's perspective about what's feasible and what can happen. For me, it's really important to see because then it makes the research community based. It's not just academic.

> Good. It's hard being asked open ended questions. I have to say once you start doing work with groups, you only think of the group first. You need to bounce off somebody else and we were laughing, "Oh, my gosh, I have to make these individual decisions. Can I talk to a few people first?"

You asked a lot of good questions from a different perspective from what a lot of the people were doing. You forced the group at some level to reflect on itself.

It's been fun. It's good to think that one's ideas are worth something. It's been validating. I'm really glad you decided to choose this group. As I said, you've given us an opportunity to take that time to reflect. It's been really good. I know everyone is excited about this, what you're doing, and are really happy for you.

I like being involved in research. I do everything I can to help people do it, because it's so important. I love that this is feminist research. It's actually saying that there's value and importance and wisdom in what some person thinks and says. It's qualitative research so that's great.

It's a good thing. Anthropology is very interesting and fascinating. It's useful to sit back and turn the focus on ourselves as a whole. I'm going to be very curious to see what conclusions you come to. It will be a point of discussion for the group and will it change anything? Maybe not, because is it even supposed to? But maybe so.

It's better to study a group than can actually speak for itself and say to you, "No, I don't want to be interviewed." It has significance in terms of what is the nature of social movements and the women's movement and health movement in Canada and how do very informal groups participate in that process and help women heal, draw strength from it. It's a valid question and not one that is so readily asked.

The willingness of the women to share their thoughts made the interviews go smoothly and produced a lot of information. The bulk of their responses will be presented in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Profile of Women's Health Interaction Manitoba

The Origins

Women's Health Interaction Manitoba emerged out of a previous women's group known as the Manitoba *Side Effects* Tour Committee. *Side Effects* was a play about women and pharmaceuticals based on the true stories of women in Canada and Bangladesh. The purpose of the original group, established in November of 1984, was to organise the touring of this play throughout Manitoba. Among other agencies, this committee consisted of representatives from the Manitoba Council for International Co-operation (MCIC), the Alcoholism Foundation of Manitoba (AFM), The Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women (MACSW), the Women's Health Clinic, and also individual volunteers.

The Committee organised all Manitoba stops of this nationally touring play produced by the Great Canadian Theatre Company of Ottawa. In fact, Manitoba ended up hosting the most performances of any province due to the Committee's hard work. Together, the members fundraised, contacted potential host communities, arranged pre-tour planning meetings to allow women from different communities to meet, handled publicity and organised workshops for after the play at which the women and men in the audience shared ideas, concerns, resources and information on health issues. The Committee oversaw the tour through Brandon, Dauphin, Portage la Prairie, Gimli, the Pas, and Winnipeg during May and June of 1985. According to the women who were involved, it was a resounding success. The publicity was excellent and it was a highly professional production. There were large audiences and some performances even sold out.

Audience evaluation forms collected after the performances pointed to the need for follow-up work on the important issues surrounding pharmaceutical use by women. In November of 1985 about fifty women attended a public meeting in Winnipeg, which

fostered discussion ranging from the use of theatre as a health education tool to the value of self-help groups for women. Many of the women present shared their experiences and then discussed strategies for collective action, forming the basis for a network. On December 10th, 1985 a second meeting encouraged the formation of a provincial group to address women's health concerns. A mission statement and goals were developed and in March of 1986 the organisation was named Women's Health Interaction Manitoba. This was a take on the name of their "sister" group in Ottawa, Women's Health Interaction, who formed in order to initiate the script development and performances of *Side Effects*. On September 17th, 1986 the original members ratified the mission statement.

There were nine original objectives of Women's Health Interaction Manitoba. Those were

1) To be a resource for information on any/all aspects of health care

2) To link with other provincial, national, and international networks

3) To promote a health care system which is informed, responsible and respectful of women's needs

4) To demystify medical knowledge by increasing women's self knowledge

5) To change the dependent doctor-patient relationship, so that health care personnel become more like health facilitators

6) To lobby and advocate on issues affecting women's health

7) To empower women to participate actively in their care, and to expect to be consulted and informed

8) To educate individual women and providers of health care about issues pertaining to women's health

9) To promote continuance of a health care system that is universal and accessible, and to ensure that provision of health care services be dependent upon need rather than profit.

WHIM operates from the premises that good health care entails health maintenance, as well as dealing with sickness, and that the social context in which women live affects their health in important ways.

The original structure consisted of a Steering Committee, comprised of seven women, and a co-ordinator who divided the various tasks. The Steering Committee members represented a coalition of agencies working in the field of women's rights or health, and were; the Women's Health Clinic, the Consulting Committee on the Status of Women with Disabilities, the Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Klinic, the Children's Home of Winnipeg, and the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation. WHIM held regular monthly meetings, with an average of twenty women attending, initially. There were formal positions of co-ordinator and treasurer. As well, there was a schedule for rotating who would take the minutes, act as meeting chair and set the agenda.

Financial support was given by the Secretary of State Women's Program at that time, as well as by the Manitoba Jobs Fund to support the co-ordinator position. A number of participating organisations, like Klinic and Women's Health Clinic, provided ongoing "inkind" help. As the women of WHIM discussed during the focus group

> We still rely on the [Women's Health] Clinic as a base. We should lay that out. Having some organisational space has been key, to just minimal maintenance.

> It's been that continuity for us, and that is a point we should recognise. I've taken it so much for granted. I mean without Women's Health Clinic's commitment, morally as well as resource wise. I know in my mind and heart that if something hot came up, and that we only had so much energy, we could turn to them.

>Another important function, I think, is that the Clinic shelters money for us. That anonymous donor's money we could not have taken into our own treasury. We could not have had it if it hadn't been for the Women's Health Clinic.

>The interesting part is we all forgot to some degree the Clinic's heavy duty involvement, not because we don't acknowledge who is helping out, but because it's not over bearing, or overpowering, or directive. Now how many models of that do you see out there? Not controlling or ego-based at all, that's pretty astounding.

While the Women's Health Clinic shelters certain working groups, like Women and Health Reform, this sheltering of WHIM has been a more unique model.

The initial work of WHIM was the organisation of public education meetings on topics such as Depo-Provera, the Dalkon Shield intra-uterine device, health issues affecting native and disabled women, single parenting and mental health and critical issues in workplace health and safety. The group organised a session on the generic drug issue, which led to a May, 1987 presentation of a brief to the Special Committee of the Senate on the subject matter of Bill C-22, regarding the Drug Patent Act. WHIM viewed their efforts as contributing to increased awareness among women on health issues and to facilitating contacts among women for mutual support. In addition, WHIM also spent time compiling resource materials and keeping in touch with other women's health networks in Canada, and beyond, for information sharing. A gratifying experience for WHIM was being consulted by the government during the process to establish a Manitoba Women's Health Directorate.

During the group's first couple of years, they had sponsored a three-month research study on Depo-Provera in Manitoba. The study team of Sari Tudiver, Pat Kaufert and Laurienne Ring, along with a hired researcher/writer Cathy Hellston, attempted to interview 25-30 women who had been given the drug for an unapproved use, such as contraception. No detailed studies had been done before on Depo-Provera users in

Manitoba or in the other provinces. WHIM felt that the federal government was moving ahead too quickly to approve the drug without adequate research on the potentially harmful effects on women. The resulting brief on Depo-Provera was presented at Health and Welfare Canada's Special Meetings on Fertility Control held in Winnipeg in September of 1986. WHIM was also one of the organisations within the Manitoba Coalition on Depo-Provera.

Despite the limited resources and the reliance upon volunteer time, WHIM attempted to develop a means for regular communication among women throughout all areas of the province. To this end, they produced three issues of a newsletter called the *Health Information Update*, in 1987, 1988, and 1990. The *Health Information Update* worked to provide a forum for discussion on critical issues in women's health from a woman-centred perspective. It was an alternative source of health information for women, as the information in the *Update* was not normally found in the mainstream press. The objective of producing this newsletter was to empower women, through providing an education about health issues and a knowledge of available resources within the province. WHIM believed sharing a commonality of experience could help to break a sense of isolation, for rural and northern women in particular. Also, WHIM hoped to encourage women to become more involved in a variety of health and consumer organisations in order to advocate for health services which are sensitive to women's needs. On average it took five months to produce and usually 2000 copies were printed and distributed. The *Updates* included poetry, personal stories, feature articles and action updates from various Manitoban women's groups.

WHIM was represented at several other events occurring during this time. Members of the group attended and presented resolutions at the Manitoba Women's Agenda Conferences in every year from 1986 to 1989. The group participated in a Health

and Welfare national consultation on Women and Addictions and in a regional follow-up with women in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The group were also involved with the National Workshop on Women and Tobacco in Ottawa in March of 1988. In that same year, WHIM participated in the Northwestern Ontario Women's Health Information Network conference in Thunder Bay. As well, the group held events for the International Day of Action on Women's Health. The panel style discussions were part of an all-day forum to discuss reproductive health issues. During this period, WHIM also sponsored talks in Flin Flon and Dauphin.

Over 1989 and 1990, WHIM sponsored three public workshops on New Reproductive Technologies, two in Winnipeg and one in Portage la Prairie. The group was represented within the Manitoba Working Group on New Reproductive Technologies, currently sheltered by the Women's Health Clinic. WHIM also represented the Canadian Women's Health Network Project on an advisory committee for "Taking Control: An Action Handbook on Women and Tobacco", produced by the Canadian Council on Smoking and Health.

WHIM members recounted their efforts this way

I'd say *Side Effects* and the drug issues were really very key and very important. Pharmaceuticals and inappropriate use of drugs. Actually developing the play to that, doing popular theatre, working in that way and having a mass appeal, because *Side Effects* did, we saw the potential for actually reaching very broad audiences. We took on some issues. WHIM did a brief on Depo-Provera in the 80s to the government. Doing those newsletters we tried to at least be a bit of a voice for what was going on in different sectors in the province in women's health, and we canvassed women in Flin Flon and Thompson. We tried to be inclusive of Aboriginal women's issues. We tried to keep that going. I guess we'll see whether there's some role here for voices about health reform. I think there's potential there.

We had put on workshops for women on different current topics. There was the *Health Update*. We did the national consultation. I wasn't around for *Side Effects*. That was before my time. After the consultation, we tried to bring women together through Manitoba, as a follow up, to get networking going and get information out about what was going on. I don't know how

successful we were. There were women who knew about it who wouldn't have otherwise, I guess.

Putting together those *Health Information Updates*, with all the networking. I can only speak for me, like I talked to people from all over Manitoba. In that process said what other women were doing and what we were doing to get women writing about their experiences and resources, so that it would help them to make health choices. *Updates* went back out to all these communities and it not only had women's experiences in it but also resources-information about what was going on in women's health and also resources that were available to women in the world.

It is obvious that WHIM has played a role in provincial networking. I learned more about the roles WHIM has played over the years through the focus group discussion. I asked the group about what role they saw WHIM playing within the women's health movement in Canada. The women described

I see it as an avenue to constantly be raising consciousness of some of the health actions that are going on in the province. To raise the ethical dilemmas, to challenge alternatives, to just make sure those questions are always asked and to do it in such a way that allows grassroots women to express their voices in their unique way. Not just the typical lobbying report approach, but actually looking at women's lives and using their lives as their expression of those kinds of questions. It's grounded in reality first of all and in women's every day lives.

I think we've played different roles at different times. Sometimes we've been more active as part of the women's health movement, like when we actually organised the consultation for the Canadian Women's Health Network launch. That seemed to really be a major initiative and did move things forward at a national level. At other times it has been more touching base on issues with a group of women who I guess I'd like to keep in touch with. I see us as part of a women's health movement and this is our local little group. Sometimes we reach out more and sometimes we just sit around and laugh. Hopefully not cry too often.

I also see the role of WHIM as a sanctuary. A refuge for coming to be supported in whatever work we are all doing in our paid, unpaid and personal lives, with a certain sense of openness to challenge each other. The bottom line is we know we all support the principles of equality and anti-discrimination. As a result then, we can have deeper discussions with a certain permission to be vulnerable when we're asking hard questions and we don't always have answers. For me, it's been like a lifeline to encourage me to keep doing what work I'm undertaking. It's not always the big, big, big picture as much as, yes, it is kind of a womb kind of thing.

I then explored what WHIM felt the conditions for women's health would be like if

feminist health groups did not exist. They related

> Just like it is for most women today. Most women don't have the connections
> to the kind of health care, for example, that Women's Health Clinic provides.

> I find it hard to think some women wouldn't feel a void. That there wouldn't
> be some way that women would start coming together. I don't know if this is
> my own faith, but I really think so, whether it was around a kitchen table, a
> church group meeting, or in a classroom. If groups like us didn't exist,
> somehow it would still come together just because there would be a need. I
> don't know if they would necessarily call themselves feminists or would say,
> "Let's start a feminist women's health group", but it would be coming
> together because that's the way women are. That's what we do. We support
> each other, seek out common experiences to validate our own and we try and
> look at how we can improve the situation. A lot of us have energy still that
> we don't just sit back and let it happen.

The Relationship with the Canadian Women's Health Network (CWHN)

From 1990 through to 1993, the bulk of WHIM's activities centred around planning

for a nation-wide consultation of women's health groups to further the development of a

Canadian Women's Health Network.

A need was seen by Canadian women's health advocates for a national body to

address the health concerns of all Canadian women. Women's health groups, and even

coalitions and networks, existed within the different regions of the country and among the

many different constituencies of women, but a national body to link the efforts of these

groups did not exist. The need for such a pan-Canadian organisation has long been a cause

dear to the hearts of most of the women involved with WHIM. WHIM has continually been

involved in the planning and mobilisation of this Canadian Women's Health Network, and

continues to be linked to the Network today.

It was in 1982-83 that a group of women from different parts of Canada formed a

"Committee for a Canadian Women's Health Network". Lack of resources and further

chances for networking saw the momentum diminish. However, the momentum resulting

from the *Side Effects* tour led again to the recommendation for establishing a Canada-wide women's health network to share information and develop useful strategies for change. Later, in May of 1986, a Health and Welfare Conference on Women and Addictions provided a space for an informal meeting of women from various provinces. The women decided to draft funding proposals towards developing a network. Their proposal was successful, and in fall of 1986 Secretary of State approved funding for two cross-Canada Co-ordinating Committee meetings to plan the process for getting a network established.

The first of the Co-ordinating Committee Meetings was held in Toronto in February of 1987 and the second meeting in June in Montreal. The June meeting especially demonstrated the efforts made to have the groups involved be representative of different constituencies of women, based on geographic location, language, culture and physical ability. Among many others, the groups represented at the first meeting were; Labrador Native Women's Association, Health Committee of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, Women's Educational Network (Nova Scotia), Federation Nationale des Femmes Canadianes Francaises, DisAbled Women's Network, Indian and Inuit Nurses Association, Women's Health Interaction of Ottawa, Women's Health Interaction Manitoba, Northwestern Ontario Women's Health Information Project, National Immigrant and Visible Minority Women's Organization, and Women's Healthsharing (the publishers of *Healthsharing* magazine). Approximately twenty different groups were represented and participated in preparing a draft preamble and a set of principles.

Women's Health Interaction of Ottawa co-ordinated a proposal for submission to Health and Welfare Canada in February of 1987. Co-sponsors included WHI and INTER PARES in Ottawa and WHIM in Manitoba. The three original goals for the Network were; (1) to improve communication and sharing of resources on women's health issues

nationally, (2) facilitate educational outreach and (3) co-ordinate campaigns and other actions on issues of immediate concern to women's health.

Additional funding was requested for a three year project to further develop the structure of a sustainable network. Despite much positive feedback this proposal was turned down in the summer of 1987. After a meeting in Ottawa to discuss the criticisms, a decision was made to revise and further develop the proposal and resubmit it. The proposal was rewritten in Winnipeg, co-ordinated by WHIM who hired Laura Donnatelli as writer. It was resubmitted in mid-February 1988.

WHIM, Women's Health Interaction in Ottawa and INTER PARES received a $344,000 grant in August of 1989 from Health and Welfare to develop a Canadian Women's Health Network (CWHN). One woman described her reaction

> It was mind boggling that we got the government to actually finance the Canadian Women's Health Network. Sometimes I pinch myself and think "they actually gave you money to organise!" The big downfall was they may have funded that, but the government also was slashing funding for those different women's groups. Over those two or three years that it took to get that final weekend, a lot of those women's groups, I can't remember what that tally was, had shut their doors.

The funding delay of three years from the date of the original proposal resulted in a loss of momentum for the CWHN. Compounding this, serious cutbacks to funding affected many women's groups across Canada during this period. In the spring of 1990, WHIM, WHI in Ottawa, and INTER PARES conducted a survey of the original groups to see if there was still interest and energy in continuing with the CWHN. In May and June of 1990 a survey in French and English was mailed to 26 groups across Canada with follow-up phone interviews. The response from eighteen groups was overwhelmingly in favour of continuing with plans for the Network. In addition, respondents suggested that *Healthsharing* magazine be more directly involved, particularly to provide expertise around the regional newsletter aspect of the proposal. WHIM, WHI and INTERPARES also evaluated their

own energy levels and found that they could no longer anchor such a project. At a meeting

of the three groups in Ottawa in June 1990, it was decided to transfer the project to

Healthsharing in Toronto. WHIM remained involved in the CWHN project, but in a more

limited capacity. Specifically, they offered to co-sponsor the national consultation on the

CWHN with Women's Health Clinic in Winnipeg, in May of 1993, and to assume the role of

local organising committee.

In June of 1992 Sari Tudiver was hired as Consultation Co-ordinator. The WHIM

group and other interested individuals acted as the Winnipeg Consultation Organizing

Committee. One of the women describes the process

> When we were the planning committee for the consultation in 1993 that was
> a really heavy energy time. It required constant meetings, organisation,
> commitment and strategizing.
> **So, was it a good process for the group to go through?**
> Yes, well, you don't always pick them, but the group felt committed to that
> process of building the CWHN and saw they could really take an active role
> in how that would happen. The process that we ended up engaging in was
> very detailed. It wasn't just "let's organise a conference", it was "how can we
> be so inclusive that no one would ever criticise who we didn't invite or who
> we did?" I'm not sure that we achieved that, but we had a very detailed grid
> of all possible types of groups, backgrounds and diversity. It was a muddle.
> Some of the flack we got was from a few of the larger hospitals who actually
> wanted to come, but this was more community-based. When we said we only
> had 70 spots and pick groups who wouldn't ordinarily get a chance to come to
> something like this, people understood. We only had a certain amount of
> money. We also dealt with Quebec. We wanted to have about 20 - 25%
> Francophone women because that's the population of Canada. We ended up
> having real Canadian geographic representation. We used all kinds of grids
> over grids over grids to try and justify. Is that a fair process? We had
> criteria. There were women from every province and there was a lot of
> attention paid to issues of disability and to making sure that the conference
> was accessible. We spent a lot of time consulting with disability groups to
> make sure that would happen. We learned a lot in the process too of how to
> ensure a meeting that was sensitive to these issues.

In the end of this selection process, women representing more than 70 organisations

involved in various aspects of women's health met May 21-24, 1993.

The agenda was a mix of plenary and small group sessions. Within the groups a mission statement was drafted, common values and principles were outlined, models of information exchange were debated, membership issues were discussed, plans for action decided upon and possible sources for funding examined. In addition to the intense hard work, the Consultation Report states that "The women also renewed old friendships and made new ones. There were energizing exercises, activities to help women get to know each other and have fun, and some wonderful songs" (WCOC, 1994: 3).

The Winnipeg Consultation Organizing Committee was comprised primarily of the women in WHIM, and the report describes that "The decision to organize the Consultation was taken by the group after a "quiet" year of mutual support, discussions, and no major projects. We welcomed the renewed focus to our work and the opportunity to contribute to, and learn from, a larger process (WCOC, 1994: 21). WHIM members played crucial roles as organisers and facilitators at the consultation and in the follow-up. Organising a Canada-wide consultation reflective of the feminist goals of representing diversity and encouraging women's voices is an ambitious task. WHIM and the additional women who helped with the planning rose to the challenge, but describe the sometimes difficult process.

> The strengths of the committee were tested over the ten months of intense planning and particularly in the last months leading up to the event when we had frequent meetings. Through it all, we were able to air opinions and suggestions, maintain an atmosphere of respect towards each other to listen and be heard, work to consensus, keep our sense of humour and emerge solid friends. After a break, we remain enthusiastic and committed to building the network. We have also begun to recruit "new blood." (WCOC, 1994: 21).

After the consultation, the Winnipeg Committee was involved in preparing the English language draft of the Consultation report and other local follow-up activities. The consultation participants returned home and many held meetings to talk about the network and attempted to involve others from their region.

After the follow-up activities were over, WHIM members reported being burned-out and very tired. The group took close to two years off, with the exception of some brief contacts, from volunteer organising and refocused on their paid jobs, families and additional commitments. The energy of the group had waned and a much needed rest period was taken. This ebb and flow of energy is not an uncommon occurrence for women's groups and all WHIM members agreed it was good process for the group.

In October of 1996, WHIM clarified their goals and purpose. According to the minutes of that meeting, WHIM saw their role towards the CWHN to be serving as a "focus group to discuss, develop ideas, concepts related to the CWHN (e.g. membership, structure), [and] to provide expertise in particular areas (e.g. newsletter, hiring committee)". At a later meeting it was echoed that WHIM serves as a "sounding board, think tank on issues of importance to the evolving CWHN network." WHIM helped formulate ideas compiled into "A Discussion Paper on Membership and Structure of The Canadian Women's Health Network". WHIM's activity as an informal advisory committee to the CWHN Steering Committee appears to have stopped currently. A clarification of the continuing role of WHIM for the CWHN is needed, and is an issue up for future discussion by the group.

To update on the development of the Canadian Women's Health Network, the structure is set up and office space secured in the Women's Health Clinic building here in Winnipeg. Newsletters have been produced and a database of information relevant to women's health and activism has been developed. Membership is large and growing all the time. The Network is showing signs of success, due to the dedication of women's health activists across the country.

Theatre Project on Women and Health Reform

During a meeting held on October 5th, 1996, WHIM discussed the impending process of health reform. Much of the information came from the Women and Health Reform

Working Group sheltered by the Women's Health Clinic. The WHIM group decided that

health reform was a critical set of changes happening to health care in Manitoba. The

group decided that lots of education and action was needed to demonstrate the potentially

negative impacts for women within this process. As described in the minutes of that

meeting, "A theatre project on women and health reform was suggested (by XXXXXXX!).

Everyone instantly became animated and energized." Since my arrival into the group, the

main project WHIM has been working on has been this series of vignettes about the

potential impact of the health reform, or regionalization, process upon women in Manitoba.

WHIM proposes to educate and mobilise women for involvement in the process of

health care regionalization through the use of theatre and workshops to help identify and

document women's health concerns. WHIM is planning the presentation of five or six short

vignettes on issues pertaining to women's health concerns and health reform, and then a

follow-up facilitated discussion. Regionalization is the strategy to pool 'regional' resources

under the control of regional health authorities, largely as a cost-cutting measure (Boscoe

and Tudiver, 1996). WHIM wanted to contribute to a discussion on the impact from this

public policy on women and thus to help to fill a deficit in the government sponsored

research. The provincial government has not adequately examined the variable of gender

in relation to health and has not implemented measures to ensure women's perspectives or

participation (Boscoe and Tudiver 1996). WHIM asserts that cut-backs and downsizing

have, and will continue to, disproportionately and dramatically affect Manitoban women.

Their rationale is that

> women are the major recipients of health services, and often act as the
> primary decision makers for their children and aging parents. Women
> represent 80% of all health care workers, and therefore have been
> experiencing a disproportionate share of job loss in the health sector. And as
> family members are shunted away from institutions and back to homes,
> women, with limited assistance from home care and respite services, have
> had to shoulder a greater portion of their care (WHIM, 1997: 1).

WHIM's project design is based upon the action research model, which has the specific goal of political action or social change. WHIM plans to record and compile the information coming out of the facilitated discussion for later distribution to policy makers.

The enthusiasm for the idea of a theatre project harkens back to the beginning days of the group and the play *Side Effects*. To do another play represented coming full circle for WHIM. The memories of the success of *Side Effects* was a key motivational factor for the original members of WHIM. This health reform project even became known informally as Side Effects II. There was a flurry of activity over the next year until November 21st, 1997. This date marked the submission of a funding proposal to the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE). The proposal for the Centre had to emphasise the research capacity of the facilitated discussions after each performance. The thinking around this project was contorted away from the popular education/awareness raising goals, towards a research orientation. The application did not receive funding. While disappointment was expressed at the lack of funding, and frustration over the loss of that hard work, feelings of relief were shared about no longer having to contort the concept to fit funding guidelines.

The WHIM group had spent numerous meeting times, and additional individual outside time, exploring the possibilities of putting such a play together. The development of the idea and the research and writing for funding proposals was the central activity of the group. As one woman related

> I remember when we were all doing the proposal and I just think about how
> many times we got together. How long those meetings were and how many
> people took that stuff home and went back and reworked it and pulled things
> together through their past notes or work that they had done. That was
> quite a combined effort. Then working through the documents, working
> through the proposals, interviewing playwrights. There were a lot of
> volunteer hours that went into that, a lot of people on the committee spent a
> lot of time. I think that we've really come through in different times and put
> in a lot of hours.

During this hectic stage, one of the WHIM members was hired as a short-term contract co-ordinator to oversee this developmental phase of the project. This piece was known as the Community Outreach/Networking and Issue/Theme Identification phase. The co-ordinator handled the other grant submissions to the Manitoba Arts Council and assorted community foundations. Out of these applications, only one $6,000 grant was received. With this bad news, the group lapsed into a lull. Demanding work schedules and changing life circumstances of several WHIM members also played a factor in this more dormant phase. In May of 1998, WHIM met to refocus the group's efforts. Thinking about the project returned to the original idea of collaborating with the Nellie McClung Theatre Group.

Nellie McClung "is the oldest women's theatre in Canada, formed in the early days of the women's movement by Millie Lamb. ... named in honour of Nellie McClung who fought for voting rights for women in Manitoba " (NMT Brochure). The Nellies, as they are commonly referred to, "use theatre as a platform for social action and education" (NMT Brochure). At the May 20th, 1999 meeting WHIM and the Nellies confirmed their collaboration and efforts are being made to co-ordinate fall 1999 performance dates. The target audience WHIM wants to reach is women health care consumers and caregivers in Manitoba, the board members of the Regional Health Authorities, and other policy makers. Previously, the group wanted to organise a province-wide tour of the play. Currently, because of the limited funds, Winnipeg and maybe one nearby rural location, possibly Boissevain, are being thought about as venues.

My time with WHIM has allowed for the observation of the birth of an idea for a social action project and then the planning, writing of proposals, funding rounds and the near death/then revival stages. These experiences exemplify the many stages women's groups must commonly go through in attempting to develop projects to raise awareness around particular issues of concern for women. I have realised that is certainly not easy,

and now am becoming surprised that so many events and lobbying efforts are 'pulled off' in the women's community.

There exists a range of opinions among the WHIM members about their current project. The women voiced their opinions in response to the following question; What is your opinion of the current project to develop a play for popular education about the effects of health care reform?

It's an excellent idea because it is a vehicle for getting community people involved and getting grass roots. If we can do it in the way that we envisioned, going to these rural areas, and having women in on the discussion that will follow the play.

I started out by saying that I felt it was a bit frustrating that WHIM didn't really seem to be accomplishing anything [on producing the play], but it could just be that it has been a slow process. I didn't specifically state that I really hope that something will come of this. It is my fervent wish that there will be a real product at the end of this, a real accomplishment. I just don't know what it's going to look like. I think that we're headed in the right direction after how many years now?

Maybe it was a blessing we didn't get the funding, because now we don't have to abide by rules. We can spend that $6,000 how we want. We can collaborate with Nellie McClung and they sound keen. I may be underestimating. I hope I am.

It does seem like a big task and the enthusiasm seems to cycle. People do realise this is really big, but to their credit they're still plugging away at it.

It's a good idea. I really liked the idea totally outside of the fact that WHIM had initially been involved with something similar years before, because it really wasn't similar. It was quite a bit different. It was a national project. It was well funded and they had big money to do this thing. But really, I'm fond of the approach. I like the idea of being involved in it because I haven't been before, although I don't think I have any more time to put into it than anybody else.

I do feel it has a lot of potential but, I mean, I would just like to see somebody pick it up and take it and run with it. What I'd like my role to be is to maybe come to a few meetings where I give some ideas and then sort of see it all happen. So, I'm not sure how it's going to happen. There are some positive things with Nellie McClung. But I think we have to get back to the table with them.

It still has a role and a place. There have been some activities that have

happened that have provided more of a public context and framework for this to be successful. Health reform was talked about in the media, alterations and changes and food became very topical. Then the Nellie McClung group have been doing stuff in the area of health now, whereas before they weren't really doing it much. They've been increasing their repertoire as a result of some of the material we've given them. Informally people are getting more exposure to these ideas. It may not be formally under the auspices of our project, but it's happening. The Women and Health Reform Working Group that we participated in, last year and the year before, finally built some momentum where they had a provincial forum in March that had an amazing turnout. They managed to rally and notify communities when they were doing the health needs assessments and having public forums. All of this has been working towards a common goal and we've been one piece of it all. We still have a part to play and our work has contributed in lots of informal ways. If only in that we've shared our findings with other people and groups.

It's gone off the rails. Now, I haven't been to the last few meetings, so I could be wrong, but again nobody has really taken the bull by the horns to steer this thing. The discussion started around health reform because of worry about how health reform is just putting health care back on the backs of women. When you got into health reform you weren't asking women how they were being burdened by this and what the real implications of it was for their lives. I don't know the play is going to tell anybody what they don't know. It's turned into a very convoluted process. What I'm saying is, we've been working on this for two years now and we still don't have our play done, right? And we don't have it funded. We had to have funding if we were going to do this project. That was a very conscious decision and that's good, but if we're going to look at that, I think we should have thrown in the towel about 18 months ago when we didn't get that first funding. There are other ways to do this process without the vehicle of the play. The play is a good vehicle, it works, we know that. But if you can't get the money then think up the other way of doing it, because in the meantime health reform has come and gone.

Using the play still feels right to me. We need creative ways. Plays and novels and things are really the right way for that. We've got to be creative, without over dramatising what's happening, and really get at some of the deeper issues.

It's not something that grabs me. It didn't in the beginning and it still doesn't. I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because I'm not sure that health reform is something that jeopardises women's health. Maybe I'm naive or just optimistic, but it's not really clear to me. I can't in my heart of hearts say, "health reform jeopardises women's health," the way that "doctors prescribing tranquillisers to women jeopardises their mental and physical health" from the last play. I have no doubt about that but on the bad impact of health reform on women, I'm not convinced.

It's a topic that is really, really challenging for a play. There's discussion of bringing it down to the personal level. For me, working in health care for a

long time, what bothers me is you can always take anecdotes. It's really hard to generalise from anecdotes and personal experiences to make recommendations regarding structural change, or the impact of structural change. People really have to leap. If I have a difficult time with my current health condition, or that of my kids or partner, and the system responds in such a way, how do I know if it would have responded worse or better five years ago before some of these changes? I struggle a little bit with that. It gets people talking about what isn't working about the current system, but it's a more challenging subject for popular theatre than many others. I'm willing to participate and to learn through the process. I don't have a vision of the end product and have a great deal of confidence, but that's okay, it doesn't mean I can't participate and contribute.

We're not professing to be experts on that [mounting a play]. Certainly one thing that all of us have experienced is a lot of learning as a result. I felt a lot of pride in taking part in this process, because it has been attempting to fill a gap or weave some things together that were happening in other areas. It's been exciting to see at least the visioning behind that and although the momentum has been diminished, there's still movement towards that as an outcome.

It is easy to see that several of the women have been discouraged at some points during the development of this project. One factor behind these differing views is the stage of the project at the point which I interviewed the women. The project has had encouraging high points and depressing low points, which affects the mood of the group.

As of May 1999, a renewed commitment and optimism appears to have emerged, with the script development underway and searches started for possible events and venues to be a part of. Two June meetings have helped to iron out some of the logistics and a further meeting is scheduled already for August. A part-time project co-ordinator, myself, and a facilitator for the after performance discussions, Paula Kierstead, have been hired. The first performance date is Tuesday, October 12th, 1999 at the Convention Centre. Another factor behind the range of opinion is the level of commitment of time and follow-up work each member has made to the play project. All tasks have not been shared equally because all members could not commit fully to the project. Further discussions regarding group dynamics will be presented in Chapters Five and Six.

Regarding this compilation of WHIM's history, one woman commented that she was pleased to finally have it told, and pointed out

> I think it's a women's issue. What we do is run of the mill. Of course, anybody would do it, therefore, it's not seen as, even by ourselves, as something worth recording. That's a real tendency among women.

Chapter Five: Presentation of the Data / Voices of WHIM Women

Out of the eleven interviews, I determined that there were twenty-six themes which emerged. This chapter offers the voices of the women interviewed, an analysis of the themes and relates the findings back to the pertinent literature on the nature of women's political organising in Canada.

Self-Conceptualisations of WHIM

I did not want to impose labels on WHIM, preferring to have the group share their self-conceptualisations with me. Therefore, in our interviews I asked each woman the question; If you were asked to describe WHIM, what adjectives or labels would you use? A few of the women listed off traits, while others offered in-depth responses. The traits mentioned were; supportive, hard working, enthusiastic, dedicated, committed, friendly, inclusive, empowering, concerned and caring. The question proved to generate an interesting array of self-conceptualizations of WHIM by the group members.

> I would say feminist health activists, organisers, networking. It's a support thing.

> It's a small group of women who are very concerned and active in women's health issues. They're trying to give the women back the power of their bodies, to look at health issues from a woman's perspective, and to make other people aware of that perspective. We're trying to educate other women in health related issues.

> I would use the word 'feminist'. I would use 'grass roots'. At times the direction, the overall sense of purpose, seems to shift and not be as clear. This has been an advantage that people can come in and feel that they can influence and contribute. It's hard to sum up in just a few sentences 'what is WHIM all about?' Welcoming, respectful. It's easier to describe it in those adjectives than to say what it is.

> It's a group that is fairly diverse in a number of different ways. We're women who are of different ages, come from different interest backgrounds, and work backgrounds. Laid back. I don't see this as being a particularly dynamic group or having individuals who are particularly strong personalities to carry everything. We're a pretty evenly tempered bunch, I guess.

I would say vivacious. There's a lot of energy and passion and vision. I think there's a lot of hope. Some frustration and angst too, about what's happening, but it's always done from such a positive perspective, looking at what's possible. It's not just coming together, as a lot of groups are, and talking about how horrible things are. It's actually looking at 'What is it we could be doing together? Who could we be connecting with?' Vivacious and dynamic.

I would give us a label of a group of women quite political in our commitment to caring about women's health. And really valuing this more informal process where you have a small network, and you try and do some creative things over time, and you also value coming together as a group. That it sort of supplements or nourishes, in a way, the other things we might do through work that are a bit more formal. Somehow this has been a group that has been able to maintain friendships and I think it fed a need for a more personal kind of contact. I see it as, in terms of what it has accomplished, waxing and waning. Having really active periods and really energetic periods and difficult periods, but committed periods and then periods of just kind of drifting along. I think now we are somewhere in between. Someone needs to call a meeting now. There are projects in embryo but it's been a group that I can rely on, too, for some support and nourishment.

The responses show that WHIM is a number of things to the women involved. Together, they have described an activist network aimed towards health education for women, that is feminist, grass roots, diverse, simultaneously laid back and vivacious, personal, informal, and highly political. From my exposure to the group, I would say that all of these things ring true. Basically, the character of WHIM shifts and changes over time and all of these opinions are like snapshots in a larger photo series. Depending on which members have made it to the meetings and what phase of a project the group is in, WHIM will look and seem quite different. Some meetings are more laid back, personal, friendly, and supportive. Other meetings have been intense, full of hard work, less personal and very dynamic. The interaction is respectful, but very honest. This is a group that does not censor counter opinions to spare feelings. It is all laid out in the open. This openness works to ensure everyone enters into the debates.

I have found WHIM to be a very interesting group of women, who bring a wide

variety of expertise and experiences to the table. For me, it has been a great learning experience to be part of the group. As someone not from Winnipeg, I was briefed on how things run in the city, which agencies are pro-feminist and who support women in the community, what the major issues have been, stories of past activism and countless odds and ends of trivia about the women's community here. Because the women often know each other through several overlapping circles, there is a lot of information sharing and networking that happens through this group.

To answer my own question, I would describe WHIM as an informal network of activists who operate most of the time at a local level, using feminist ideals. As the literature describes (Kome, 1983; Vickers, 1987; Holmes and Riggs, 1984), feminist groups are known to operate with a concern for the process of collaboration, as well as the products of their collaboration. This appears to hold true for the WHIM group, who operate using a feminist process that is characterised by check-ins, group discussion, consensus-based decision making and concern for allowing all voices to be heard. The value placed on group action (Amethyst, 1995; CRIAW, 1987; Vickers, 1988) by feminist groups is evident in WHIM. This was expressed during the focus group and in several of the individual interviews.

Definitions of Feminism

Despite being a large, widespread movement in our country, feminism is difficult to define (Molgat, 1993; Morrow, 1997). To explore the extent to which a shared definition of feminism existed among the women of WHIM I posed the question; What does feminism mean to you and is WHIM a feminist health group? The women responded

> Feminism is to me a way of working, a methodology for analyzing things that takes a women's centred approach. It is, of course, a system of values and principles, but also tries to take women into account in how we look at the world. It's more complex than just achieving equality. It's trying to right wrongs and deal with violence. It's about a system and understanding how

it's structured against women. I haven't really cared for labels. I mean, I don't sort of walk around and say, "I'm a feminist this..." It's always been much broader for me, but I've chosen to work with women, for women, in that sort of sector.

Labels are limiting. They imply a certain role.
And a narrower view of the world than it really does involve- How does capitalism work? How are we structured? Why is there poverty? And sort of where do women fit in that scheme?

With tongue in cheek, I'm going to say it means empowering women. It means working for equality of women with men. It means social justice. It means political action. I always have to remember that when I'm counselling with one woman, that is limited. That's like band-aid work. It's necessary, but it's still band-aid work and I always have to keep in mind the broader picture. That is part of the radical piece, which is part of what feminism really is in itself. Of course, that's not what it means to everybody either.

By the time you get to be in your later twenties or thirties, it's no longer a threat. It's not a problem. It's just something that you learn to accept and maybe that's what feminism is, when you get older it's more the things that you accept. I don't know. Because I don't talk to anybody about it really, I mean, I don't talk to older people about it and I don't necessarily talk to younger people. It's just not something that comes up. It's like religion - who cares?

It's kind of what we were speaking in the [focus] group about. It's about social change. It's about moving, not static, and it really is about social justice. The whole idea of equity for women and dealing with oppression at every level. It's not just gender specific. It really crosses the issues around racism, homophobia, ageism, disableism, and the environment. It's a critical analysis.

Feminism has two meanings- my own personal meaning and what I think it means more generally. To me, it's a sense of opportunity and respect for women that is not often available, or not often enough available. It's about caring for each other and supporting each other to be all that we might want to be. My personal definition is very apolitical in a sense. I worked in feminist agencies and agencies that are anything but, and very similar kinds of damage are done to people in both. I certainly don't see it as a seal of approval on any kind of agency and it may or may not mean that I fit in. I hate the rigidity that often seems to be attached to the word and the intolerance. In my own world that's the thing that I'm most seeking is acceptance of differences, and tolerance for differences, and welcoming, although that's hard for me to do as much as everybody else.

It's more than just a political perspective or analysis that sort of takes into account the state of women, women's history, women's status and looks at it through a woman positive lens. It's a way of interacting where you value

every person's contribution and you try and include it. To me, it's very much about inclusion and being human. It's not just the political piece. It's not just the analysis. It's also a way of being.

I don't know I've ever really called myself a feminist, because I don't know whether I've really had that opportunity to espouse that philosophy. I would have to say, well, "how could you not be?" How can you not be aware of what's really going on and say that you're not in favour of at least some kind of equality? And it's not just economic equality, but a lot of it is tied up in economics and power and those kinds of issues. It's just respect as far as I'm concerned.

As a whole group, the women produced a long list of traits that describe and define feminism. Those were; women-centred, a critical analysis, gender equality, political action, social change, social justice, redistribution of power, a way of dealing with oppressions, empowerment, respect and caring for women, and a way of being in relation to the world. All of the WHIM women have an awareness of feminism and are connected to the larger sociopolitical movement in varying degrees. However, as these comments demonstrate, there has not been one definition of feminism articulated by WHIM to guide their work. Feminist thinking and support for feminist work appears to have been assumed and has gone unquestioned and undebated. This lack of a clear group definition does not seem to have hampered the work of the group in any way, and may just point to how difficult feminism is to describe as a movement. Some of the women in WHIM do not accept or use the label of feminist, which may be a product of the negative images and connotations to the term present in popular culture. The reasons behind accepting or rejecting a label are, of course, more complex than that and we need to question the usefulness of labelling in general.

WHIM as a Feminist Health Group

Concerning the question about whether WHIM could be classified as a feminist health group, every woman interviewed replied "yes". Some of the reasoning behind their classification follows

I don't know whether the other women would give you the same kind of explanations about whether they are or are not feminists, or would call themselves feminist, but I think that in my definition of feminism the possibility of the work that WHIM does is feminist. WHIM is committed to looking at issues of women's health, as opposed to health generally. That in itself makes it feminist to a certain extent. And also because WHIM is concerned about dealing with these issues in terms of there being some aspect of empowerment. What they really want to do is to educate women to speak for themselves, and those are definitely feminist goals.

They would definitely be a feminist health group. It's about changing current social norms and ideas about women's roles and places in that society, so it's about change and it's about equality and it's about moving forward and it's not about the status quo. That's what the group certainly is dedicated to, moving forward, challenging notions and previously held ideas.

It's feminist in the sense that the majority of people who are in it are feminist within their personal philosophy.

It's feminist because of sharing the power of decision-making, coming together with a critique, with a critical analysis to the health care system, with a gender analysis. What's nice is I couldn't tell you what the ideology is. People are who we are and it's small enough that you can talk about stuff and you can build a social support. If we were a lot bigger I don't know if we could talk about the social part of it the same way, the social support.

One of the women who has been in a number of groups over the years had this to say about

the group being feminist,

> Yes, more so than any of the other health groups and women's groups that I belong to actually.
> **Really?**
> Yes, we take into account the personal in ourselves when we're there. We give ourselves permission to be human and whole. We look at how other things are impacting and affecting us. We never let the fact that we are women ever be excluded from any process. We're always very conscious of what that means. We always encourage dialogue, and that's not something done in all groups. We work more from the collective perspective. It's not as hierarchical as some of the other groups are, even in terms of having informal power.
> **There is some informal power within the group though.**
> Yes, but it's not as rigid or closed as with some other groups. A lot of it is based on either who has been there and who happens to know the most, but they share that information. Or who has the most time or access to particular resources, which again is done for the group's benefit as opposed to an individual benefit.

This recognition of WHIM as a feminist group, is a separate issue from whether every woman in WHIM would self-identify as feminist. Women can participate in feminist work and have varying degrees of identification with, and commitment to, feminism. The familiarity with the concepts of feminism allow the group to share a code of conduct in a sense. There is an expectation of how a feminist group will operate (CRIAW, 1987; Vickers, 1988; Holmes and Riggs, 1984; Christiansen-Ruffman, 1995). This leads to the question of whether WHIM operates by these norms and expectations, so I queried; Does WHIM have a feminist process?

Feminist Process

> That's for everybody to judge and decide. Most of the time it tries to be, tries to give everybody a voice, tries to work collectively within the realities. If you're writing a grant proposal then whoever will take the tasks on has some responsibility to get it done, but also some trust and confidence from the group that they will take it forward. I think we've tried to work respectfully of everybody's voices and needs and I think that's saying something.

> I feel more at home [with a feminist process] because it's more reflective of how I feel comfortable working. There is a shared understanding and vision. I don't have to pull my hair out saying, "Don't you get this?" I don't feel I'm constantly up against a wall trying to deal with things that should be givens in my mind.

> Yes. It's never been anything that I've seen anything written down about, but it's always been a process that was kind of understood. How we interact, put it together, organise things, even plan out what we want to organise, but it's much more of a feeling and a way of being. I never even thought to take an inventory ever, if everyone here would define themselves to be feminist. It's a given and it's personal at the same time, but yet the work is still political.

> Bringing ourselves and our personal experiences to the work that we're doing, I think is part of what makes it a feminist process. We wear all out hats simultaneously, so what happened in the morning before you got to where you were going impacts you. It's important as to how present you are at the meeting. You're a whole package deal.

> WHIM is a good example [of an all-women group], because often times we'll start out with just doing sharing. This is an opportunity for people to say whatever they want to say, "Did you have a good summer?" or "What are your plans for Christmas?" or whatever it is and it's around the table kind of

thing. Everyone speaks and everyone listens when the other person is
speaking. It's just not a typical kind of thing. I've been involved with groups
at a national high powered structural level and there's no place for personal
life and personalities. It's all very dignified. Which is fine, it's good for
getting things done maybe.

But it doesn't make you feel a part of something though?

When we meet with WHIM, I don't feel that anyone is feeling lost and in the
shadows. We're a small group, certainly might be more the case if we were a
larger group that some people may fade off into the shadows. There are
people who speak more than others or speak longer, particularly depending
on whatever we happen to talk about. Still, in general, if you've got
something to say it can be said. I don't think that anyone would feel really
uncomfortable, not that I've ever noticed. I can think of some women who are
a little more hesitant or maybe it's just the way they speak, but they don't
seem to be particularly uncomfortable.

The women in WHIM backed up the literature by relating that feminist process is

extremely important. The process behind making the decisions is as important as the

decision itself. The groups' process should be healthy for all who participate, open and

respectful. The importance of these elements of feminist process should be noted as a

reason behind the longevity of the group. The women involved value the style of

interaction and this is important in the retention of certain members. Certain other

members who are more outcome oriented may tire of the attention to process. Still, it

would appear that all group members, in varying degrees, place a value on the features of

feminist process. This process on which so much value is placed is felt to be facilitated by

an all women setting.

All Women Dynamics

Gender is an element that underlies all social interaction. Women and men interact

differently in gender specific groups as opposed to mixed gender groups. This led me to

wonder what features were different in a women-only group and whether the women in

WHIM felt it was important that their group has only women members. The literature on

the nature of women's political organising informs me that women-only group structuring

acts as a facilitator for women's participation (CRIAW, 1987; Amethyst, 1995). The

literature also informs me that women-only groups are thought to employ a consensus-based decision making model more frequently than mixed or men's groups do (Holmes and Riggs, 1984a; CRIAW, 1987). This feature is thought to encourage women's entry into a group and their subsequent participation, because it suggests to them that their voices can and will be heard. This openness of communication is a feature that WHIM members reported valuing also, both in the focus group discussion and individual interviews.

Other aspects of communication, which women expect and appreciate in women-only groups, are clear explanation of points raised and a willingness to share information. As a result of this consciousness on the importance of hearing from everyone, there is less separation between leaders and followers in a group. This feeds into the feminist aim of equalising skills and knowledge within the group as much as possible (Holmes and Riggs, 1984). The energy generated through group discussion and action has also been cited as a motivating factor for women to join and remain in women's groups (CRIAW, 1987). A women-only group is freed from the typical division of labour by sex that characterises most mixed gender groups, where men make the decisions and women provide support services. To discern whether these features of women-only organising sustained their involvement, I posed the questions; Do the dynamics in an all women group differ from those in a mixed gender group? What is the "culture" of an all-woman group, in your opinion?

> What separates most women's groups from mixed gender groups, and WHIM in particular, is that we ask the questions about participation and diversity and inclusion and appropriateness and expertise and making sure that we don't speak for other people and take their voices away. I mean, the very nature of the work and the mentality is so different in a lot of ways.

> There's patience and listening. Men, I hate to make sweeping generalisations, just don't listen as well or however you want to describe that. So, I really noticed that in meetings.

> The dynamics of a women's group, especially a feminist one, is more co-operative. People listen to one another. It's not fighting to get your time. They have a little bit more respect in making sure that everybody gets their

voices in there and equality, whereas with a mixed group somehow the men always seem to be taking over. Their voices are louder and whatever they say seems to be coming across in a more authoritative way and that can intimidate women. After you hear a man talk like that then you don't feel like it, because he might just jump on your opinion and try to cut you down. In women's groups I don't find that so much. People will be more supportive and try to be understanding and take what you say and add on to that, instead of trying to diminish it.

Well, it's not always easy, but it's a lot easier [in women-only groups] and there's the joking and camaraderie. It's just a little more basic and gender specific and comfortable. Again, it depends who is there. There is more of an attention that we learn to process and to everybody speaking. That doesn't always come out in a mixed group. All the things that we tend to find that are valuable about the women's movement really do come out in this [women's organising]. I'm not in a lot of groups that have men in them. Some, at meetings but not a lot.
Do you approach them differently or those meetings differently?
I guess you're more watchful and a little more formal.

Men will sort of push for that decision. It's like, "Come on, let's wrap this up. Let's get to that decision. I want to hear the decision."

I've always had the feeling that there's more credence paid to the things that men say, even though they may not make statements that are very intelligent and certainly may be far less informed than what women may say. But they do tend to have a presence when they speak that women don't. Men are larger, they're physically more evident, have lower voices, lower range and generally speak louder. It has been my experience that when there have been men and women talking, men will interrupt women and keep talking. Now if a women tries to interrupt men she virtually gets talked over. It's just much, much more difficult for women to have their say in a mixed gender group.

We've studied this a lot, and women tend to let men talk and lead in a mixed group. With a women's group you have a different dynamic. Some of the women will come forth and be the leaders. Some of them lead in a very male style, but if you get a mixed group it's definitely a different dynamic. Gender is critical.

I've gone out of my way for a long time to not work with mixed gender groups. I did some work with a mixed gender profeminist organisation, but still mainly women-only groups. More recently I've been working with this social activist group, and it's been mixed and it's so different. You have to be spelling things out all the time. Even things like child care, other people's responsibilities, looking at access issues, looking at inclusion and looking at diversity.

Women's only groups don't mean feminist groups. I've worked with women's

only groups and they weren't, by any stretch of the imagination, feminist in nature. They have been cross-cultural, diverse, had different sexuality's represented but they were by no means feminist in their practice. They weren't inclusive and respectful. They weren't non-judgmental and women positive. Sometimes they contained even misogynous elements and quite a hierarchy of power. Some were quite exclusive and in some cases they were very unhealthy and violent. There was abuse that was happening with them and racism and all sorts of things. So, I can't paint a really wonderful picture of a women's only group, but I have seen some feminist groups in practice and I would say WHIM is one of them. Overall, I would say there's an effort to practice, in an authentic way, what we preach.

It's much more open and warm. It's easier to talk about anything. Generally, there are different dynamics, somewhat different dynamics, but I also enjoy them. I think it's really fun to have the mixed gender. Too much time spent in women-only groups is not healthy for me as a person, because we need to challenge ourselves and open ourselves to hear about differences, and the gender difference is one. I think women, and I know I do, have a sense of superiority to men. That's my sort of confession, superior but in a sort of disempowered kind of way. I think women do feel, in terms of being in tune with their feelings and in tune with others, (and maybe it's through the act of motherhood that many women come to that) that we do feel fuller as people. That sense can lead to certain smugness and a blindness to other people's potential, the other gender's potential.

WHIM members illustrated here how crucial it is for women to come together in a women's only space. This echoes those earlier beliefs that women create a specifically female design for political living (CRIAW, 1987; Christiansen-Ruffman, 1995). WHIM confirmed that the dynamics in an all women group do differ from their experiences in mixed gender groups. WHIM members identified that women's groups ask more questions about who should get to participate and diversity, and consciously attempt to not silence others. WHIM members showed that they value tremendously the listening and the assurance of 'air time' for their views. They identified that some men tend to dominate discussion in mixed gender interactions. One woman spoke about how gender differences can be thought of as just another challenge to overcome in understanding the potential of all people. Mixed gender dynamics are far more challenging, as the responses illuminated. Therefore, women-only groups offer an easier route for women to take in order to operate

politically in their work to improve the lives of women. WHIM, as a group, is able to better

support members and facilitate continued participation by maintaining women only

dynamics. Although, not all women-only groups operate using feminist ideals and process,

as one woman highlighted. Some women-only groups can be just as daunting and

challenging to women as mixed gender groups. Being women only does help to facilitate

women's involvement, but feminists groups go farther and attempt to provide more support

and encouragement for women.

Comparisons of WHIM to Other Women's Groups

I wanted to explore how WHIM was similar to, or different from, other women's

groups to find additional points of comparison for my analysis. I hoped to gain more insight

about how common it was for feminist groups to operate in the way WHIM does. It was

interesting to discover that the women did not know of other groups like WHIM. I found

this surprising because they are such an informed and connected group of women and I

expected that there would be other closely similar groups. When asked if there were other

similar groups and how WHIM compared, they replied

> At different times. There was this sister group, the Women's Health
> Interaction in Ottawa. It's a different group, but for awhile we were
> exchanging minutes. They were doing really detailed minutes, would send
> us theirs and I would track it for awhile. But it had a different configuration
> of women. It had a different balance because Women's Health Clinic here
> was sort of the anchor. It had a different flavour to it, different problems
> came up and I think they did try more actively to recruit women from diverse
> backgrounds and sometimes that worked. I can't really judge their process,
> but I'm not sure there was a group just like ours.

> There's so many different types of groups; self-help groups or single issue
> groups or disease-based groups and they all have sort of a whole range of
> issues and ways they are brought together. Maybe this one is a little more
> amorphous, as kind of a network, with some projects that it has taken on
> over the years.

> I can't compare WHIM with any other women's health groups because it's so
> different. It's differently based and different in the way we operate. We do
> very well considering there are a few people who are given some staff time to

work with WHIM. And the amount of staff time is minimal - 2 hours a month or something.

In my experience, one way that they compare is that WHIM seems to have a lot more consensus than a lot of other groups. We are like-minded women, which makes working together easier. It helps in terms of being productive and WHIM has been around a long time, so they must be doing something right.

I guess, maybe, it needs some stability for the same group of women to be still in place. I think Manitoba, or being outside the centre helps. When you live in Ottawa or Toronto it's different, and those are important things to look at in terms of cohesiveness and how we do hold together better. It's a vast generalisation, but groups break apart more easily over various kinds of political issues there, and possibly elsewhere. There's a sense of maybe competing for certain kinds of resources or members. I don't know exactly what it is, but I think we have better patience here and a little more will to work together. So, not to paint it so glowingly, but I think there has been something unique about it here.

One woman mentioned that certain members receive staff time to be a part of the group. This is true for members who were on staff at two of the community-based health care centres in Winnipeg. This has been a sign of support for their participation from their respective agencies. Location was pointed to as a way of comparing WHIM's longevity to other women's groups. It was asserted that being peripheral to more major centres helped group cohesiveness. Support for this assertion comes from the mention of competition for resources and members in Toronto as a negative feature of the anti-violence against women activism there, by Marina Morrow (1997). It is an interesting point to consider that WHIM being based in Winnipeg, as opposed to a larger centre, has been a factor helping the group to stay together for fifteen years.

WHIM's lack of knowledge regarding similar groups lends support to the assertion that there is a lack of comparative material on types and styles of informal women's groups (Maroney and Luxton, 1987; Egan, 1987; and Rankin, 1996). Because I can only make loose comparisons between WHIM and other feminist groups, this research cannot be used to generalise about the workings of feminist groups in Winnipeg or Canada-wide.

Women's Political Culture

Researchers (CRIAW, 1987; Vickers, 1988; Rankin, 1996) have described how women's activities at the community level are defined as non-political, allowing for the popular belief that women are not very politically active. In fact, women are heavily involved in community initiatives and also in organisations with provincial and national scope (CRIAW, 1987; Vickers, 1988; Christiansen-Ruffman, 1995; Kome, 1983). Women have less time, fewer resources, and fewer support systems to organise politically, in part because of the sexual division of labour and gender role socialisation characteristic of our society, yet they manage. Women operate within a fundamentally different political culture and women's groups have several unique elements (CRIAW, 1987; Kome, 1983; Christiansen-Ruffman, 1995).

Flexibility and Fluidity of Membership

One of these unique elements is a flexible membership structure. As the CRIAW study showed, time was the biggest barrier to women's political participation except in groups flexible enough to take their life circumstances into account and which are based on the premise that "you do what you can, when you can" (1987: 8). In order to achieve this flexibility, it is necessary to have a fluid membership system which allows women to flow in and out of the groups as their time allows. These characteristics of flexibility and fluidity of membership present in many feminist groups facilitate women's political participation. As the women in WHIM commented

> Since I've been there, people have been in and out and that's the way I think
> it's going to be now, because a lot of people are doing part-time work. You
> don't have so much control over your time. People say, "If you have a task for
> me I'll do that, but I don't want to be on the board to come every week. If
> you've got this thing for three months I'm going to be putting my time into
> that."

> There may be a few people who aren't active anymore, but who came to some
> of those planning sessions. I'm also saying I don't think any of us broke apart

where the people got angry and left. I look back at WHIM over the years, there have been a few women who did drop away and they may have felt uncomfortable at various times. It's hard to judge. You're looking at us at a certain point in time and it might have a different look to you in 1984 or whenever, there were different dynamics at different times and people had different stressors in their lives. I wouldn't underestimate that. Women may have felt that this just wasn't the group for them, or we were too cliquish, the originals were kind of controlling it, and it wasn't as welcoming as it could be. I don't discount that. It could happen at different points and might have not been the perception the rest of us wanted to generate, but there it is. You can't retain everyone, but we tried at times to examine that and say, "Are we recruiting broadly enough or are we welcoming women from diverse backgrounds?"

I've always felt much more of a fringe member of the group and at times I wasn't sure that I should even say I was a member, if I was attending so infrequently. In fact, there was a period when I said "I'm just not going to be able to continue coming." And it was, "Well, that's fine, that's great that you're being clear for yourself what your priorities are and anytime you want to come back..." It was very much an open door at that point. I would still hear about it and think, "Well, maybe I could come," but I think there was probably a year, maybe two or three, when I didn't attend at all. That was the point when I would think, "Okay, I was a past member of the group." Then three years later I came to one and thought, "Well, maybe I am sort of a member." I never really had a clearly defined sense of am I in or am I out, and it didn't seem necessary. It was very open and flexible.

This style of membership requires both active and latent members, which is true in WHIM's case. Even during my short time with the group, I have witnessed different people taking on more central roles and others drifting out of the group for a while, and returning later. Perhaps, those who are less active are recharging to become more active in the future and this is actually an effective way of sustaining the group's energies. Or maybe the sustenance for the group comes from the energy of new women as they join. The reasons behind women requiring this fluidity are complex and individual, so what is more important to note is that the women are usually motivated to return.

Group Size

Although new energy may contribute to the group, the question of group size also matters. Many women mentioned that they value the small size and intimacy of the group.

How big would be too big? How many new women would the members of WHIM even want to recruit? How would that affect their group process? As one woman mentioned during the focus group, and the other women supplied agreement,

> WHIM is small enough so we can work stuff out. That's a huge thing, you know, being connected with other groups over the years. You get to a bigger number and you can have all the goodwill you want but then there's another dynamic.
> **So, big isn't always better?**
> It means that you have to think of another way of inclusion, because bigger means there's more possibilities for ego then. It's now about how does everyone have a place at the table for different reasons. It can be a lot less intimidating in a smaller setting. It's interesting because my sense is we always stayed to a critical mass too. It's almost like we time our coming in and going out. We always end up being between 8 and 10. Just enough that there's not just a few people going, "Oh, my God, who are we?" and not so big that the opening round takes an hour.
> **It's a good size then?**
> It feels like the right size.

This feeling that WHIM should remain small is one reason why WHIM, as a group, does not seem to actively recruit new members.

Recruitment

Though WHIM doesn't actively recruit in a purposeful way, an understanding exists that women are welcome to join at any time. Members are encouraged to pass along news about the group through their networks. WHIM members had this to say in regards to recruitment

> Over the years many people have tried to spread the word. But I don't think we ever were all that actively recruiting.

> It is a small group, but if we have a particular project and want to recruit women to it, we have the ties in the community and maybe can do that more. When we talked about the proposal for the play, again, we sort of struggled with how would we involve women's voices. It does keep coming up, but in terms of the core group, I'm not sure we've recruited, or had the time or energy to really recruit, with a kind of strategy in mind.

> It would be great if we could bring new people into the fold. Could we have made more use of opportunities to actually get more women involved? I don't know how easy it would be to organise a group that was larger. I don't know

if it's necessary for the group to be larger per se. I don't see that as a requirement, but if there was energy and like-minded women out there who are interested in this, the group certainly wouldn't be diminished by having them included. That might be able to breathe life into WHIM in such a way that certain individuals weren't burdened with the administrative and organising roles.

At some level, that whole thing needs new blood. It needs new players. It needs new ideas. Because you tend to redo and redo and redo what's worked in the past. I think that some of the things that we want to do don't work anymore and that's part of what you're looking at with WHIM.

I mentioned that there isn't as active external recruiting. It's more how we come in contact through our own networks - colleagues, friends and through our own circles. Individuals we think would be interested in this kind of work and would be interested in contributing.

For a volunteer group, whose members are already short on time, recruitment does not make it to the top of the priority list. Combine this with the fact that women can't self present to WHIM, because like all informal women's groups WHIM is largely unknown and invisible, I am left marvelling at how WHIM has managed to incorporate the more recent members at all. As mentioned during the focus group, women have had the knack of appearing just as the group needed them.

It seems to me that we have a way of pulling in the people, or the qualities, or the skills in people that we need at any particular time. That always amazes me. We're in flux. We never have the same membership for that long in a row. Yet it's not because people aren't committed that they don't come, it's life situations. Still, somehow people get pulled in and meet the needs of whatever project we're doing.

Conceptions of the Political

Despite the mislabelling of women's activism as non-political by the public and traditional political scientists (Vicker, 1988; Rankin, 1996), the women in WHIM understand the political nature of their work. This political nature was mentioned earlier in the comments about WHIM being a specifically feminist health group. One of the women further clarified the political nature during the following exchange

When we're talking about feminism equalling political action, what do you define as political?
Anything that I do to change some aspect of society.
Going to a WHIM meeting, is that political?
Not going to a WHIM meeting, no, but to work on the play that we're working on is political.
So, the WHIM meetings are in a process to get to the project which is political?
Yes.
A lot of people seem to think of political as party politics- the Liberals, New Democrats...
Well, and so it might be but it isn't limited to them. It's lobbying. It's advocating, no matter who you lobby with or with whom you're advocating, for change. So, it might be a political group and it might be a community group.

No, it's not big "P" politics and it's not electoral politics, but it is political in the sense of doing some kind of advocacy work and sometimes just supporting each other to talk about what we're doing.

This self-awareness about being a political group echoes <u>Pandora's</u> realisation, mentioned in the profile complied by CRIAW (1987). Pandora clearly saw that publishing a women's newspaper was a political act, and being woman-positive and lesbian-positive were political positions. While much of society may view most women as non-political, the women themselves identify their political positioning. The personal is still political, in that sense.

Diversity and WHIM

The ideology of sisterhood, that women could easily form connections on the basis of shared gender oppression, subscribed to at the beginning of the second wave of the feminist movement has been challenged by women of colour, poor women and lesbians (Amethyst, 1995; Molgat, 1993 and Morrow, 1997). Feminist groups are responding to the shift to identity politics and the call to ensure diverse representations and perspectives in activist efforts (Corman, 1997; Molgat, 1993; Amethyst, 1995). I explored this issue with WHIM through probing; There has been a call for feminists to be more inclusive of women of different sexual orientations, ethnic backgrounds, classes, abilities, educational levels and

ages. Describe the aim of diversity in relation to the WHIM group. The women replied

I know WHIM tried to get as many people from varied groups, although I think there is still need. It [WHIM] is open, but then some way you've got to meet the women. It's very difficult for these immigrants and visual minority women to join this group because they don't like the word 'feminist'. They think feminists and lesbians are radical women and they kind of shy away from that. Even when they are in those groups many feel that it doesn't speak to them. Somebody like myself, I feel comfortable with people. Although I am a person of colour there, I don't feel that conspicuous. I just feel blended in anyway because of the ideas that I have with those WHIM women. I don't know. I think maybe a little bit more outreach and I don't think necessarily because I'm black that I bring people in. It might be effective for a white person to try to approach the person of colour to invite them into the organisation. Because I felt that way when I got in because of XXXXXX, she always made an extra effort to make me feel welcome that first little while and maybe that would be a way for people to reach out.

The one that we don't do [include] very well are women who don't have the pennies, women who live in the inner city who are impoverished. Look around the table, we're a bunch of middle class women as far as I can think, but we do have lesbian women, we do include women of colour, we try to include Aboriginal women. We do have a diverse age range from 24 to 68. And abilities, too.

It doesn't seem to me that diversity is a problem. Maybe in terms of economic status there's not a lot of diversity. They all work full-time and make a seemingly decent wage, but then that's the people that can afford to devote the time.

Not a lot of young people, but it's the same group of women who have been together for a long time and they're just getting older.

Where we don't differ too much is in our vision about what we think women's health should be and how we think our health care system should look. We're a group of like-minded individuals. That's why we've come together. We do share common visions. We're not identical by any stretch of the imagination. We're individuals. I don't know that it's necessary to have that diversity there. I think we try and be inclusive within the group of people's ideas. I don't feel that there's any tokenism or anything going on. **Maybe it's unrealistic to expect such a small group to have adequate representation of all the different constituencies.** I don't know if that's what WHIM is trying to do. In some way people have come to WHIM, and left and come back, or stayed in touch and there's been this ebb and flow again to participation based on what needs it meets in terms of their lives. It's a voluntary association, not everyone feels the same way about volunteerism, not everyone has time. If they're going to prioritise ways to volunteer, a lot of times ethnic organisations get priorised, gay and lesbian organisations get priorised. Again, it's about political agenda. You

can't do everything. People become associated depending on where they're at in their lives, where their job is at, what kind of work they're doing or what's happening politically in the environment around them. That's when there's more coalition building happening and people are going to go back to other groups or different communities and do work in that area. There needs to be that fluidity, that give and take. I don't think you can hold people accountable to stay included just because we need to be diverse. I don't know if that makes sense.

If we're missing some information, if we're missing some insight, if we don't have the expertise, if there are limits in who we are, we openly acknowledge that. I do feel that much. I don't always feel that it [diversity] is present. I think that there's a culture of WHIM that is more or less mainstream, white, heterosexual, heterosexist (even though there is some diversity), able-bodied (even though there is some diversity under the surface) and those individuals represent themselves.

The way the group meets does not make it equally accessible to all people. The group has tried to be open, welcoming, inclusive and to some extent they've been able to do that. But there are some real limitations and the diversity may come more from how you link with other kinds of women's groups, as opposed to thinking that everybody should come and join WHIM. It's not going to happen. I think we need to look at diversity in terms of our support for and partnering with other kinds of women's groups that may not think of themselves as feminists or call themselves feminists, but in the end we can work together towards some common goals.

There are rich black women, rich native women, rich white women, rich Asian women and there are very poor of all of the above. So, for us as a group of middle class who don't call ourselves rich, but we've got cash flow, to get a group of diverse women we go and we get the rich black woman, rich native woman, rich Asian woman. Rich in the same sense that they've got enough affluence that they can dress right. They've got enough free cash money that they can participate at our level of expectation and so I don't think we're solving the problem. It's just as crazy when you talk to some of these wonderful Aboriginal leaders, the women leaders. If they're in the North End, they don't have much in common with the woman on the reserve with her wood stove and carrying her water. So there's a phoniness to me in this discussion around diversity. I heartily believe we have to understand it. I must know the reality, that their lives are different from mine. But, I can't understand their life, in the same way that people can't understand mine. You bring your own personal values and life experiences and so I'm black and so I'm white or so on. The same way looking at your contemporaries at the university, and what do they have in common with you? What do they have that's not but the very fact that they are at university. The commonality is they've got access to money in varying degrees. They are an elite class group. You can't discuss things with them and expect an answer for the Aboriginal population, if you're talking to an Aboriginal woman in the university setting, because that's not the real world for the great majority of Aboriginal women.

These responses confirm that issues of diversity are a current, important challenge for feminist organising. The women are all aware of the necessity of including diverse perspectives and can recognise that many are lacking in the composition of their group. They raise the interesting question of whether diverse representation must be present within WHIM or whether networking and coalition building with ethnospecific organisations or minority groups is a better, more respectful approach. For small informal groups, like WHIM, the challenge of diversity may be impossible to meet and may only result in tokenism. Collaborations with other existing groups would appear to be a more respectful process of addressing the needs of all the diversities of women.

Barriers to Women's Involvement

It has already been asserted that barriers to women's political participation exist (Kome, 1983; CRIAW, 1987; Rankin, 1996). The barrier of time, and how WHIM accommodates limited time through flexibility around levels of participation and fluid membership, was discussed in an earlier section. I explored what barriers WHIM members believed were operating to prevent women from taking political action in the women's movement.

> Time, money, children, and responsibility. A lot of women are working out of the home. A lot have a couple of jobs. They've got kids. There's a lot of single mums. It's just looking after yourself, you know.

> Something like WHIM, every time we go and we might say, "Oh, you can have dinner for $7.00." A poor woman might not be able to. She might not say anything, but she doesn't come back because she doesn't want to feel bad. You know, little things like that can be barriers for people.

> What I find a barrier for young people in a lot of this work is that they're not patient and don't get the process. They want results quick and they get really bored with going to two or three meetings and nothing has actually happened yet. Like, "They haven't opened up this youth centre yet? What is wrong with you people?" I completely respect that, but the reality is this stuff can take years. You could talk for years and it may not even happen, or it might. You have to like process to be involved in committee stuff, so some

people, it's their personalities too. They want results and they'll just forget talking about it, they'll just go out and do it. Well, yes, you can do it that way but it's not the same then. It kind of misses something. That's the problem, I mean, people that don't have the patience for process, or don't see the value in process, or don't have the time for process.

Awareness about what's going on where. There are some networks and circles, if women are involved they find out things. It takes a very proactive person to figure out how do I go about becoming involved? Who would I begin to contact? What are the kinds of questions I would begin to ask of different organisations to find out if this exists? It's being out there, being visible, being motivated and being very active. Not everyone knows how to do that. You do require a certain skill level to just do that, so people are excluded in that sense.

Even that phrase 'the women's movement' is a barrier. Education is a barrier. We operate at a level that assumes a certain level of education, comfort in more of an academic world, and literacy. The comfort to speak in a group. The ability to come to a meeting and not drag kids along. Financial. For women to work in a structured way for change means they're not working to survive and to cope as best they can at the personal level. It means taking from that personal time to give to a larger group time, and for most women if they do it at all within their immediate community that's amazing. When I moan about time and challenges I am very aware that I do it from a tremendously pampered affluent kind of world. I also do it tongue in cheek because, yes, my life is busy, but I don't struggle with basic survival issues at all. I'm very, very fortunate in that sense.
There's always food in the kitchen.
Absolutely, and a roof over my head and I am not alone. I have a strong support network of people in my life, so I am rich. Because of that I feel like I have an obligation to do some extra, because I don't spend 23 hours a day for just how to survive.

I was asked to do a workshop one time entitled, "Can One Be a Feminist and Still Be Married?" Now, it sounds kind of obvious to you and me, but to those women it was not. And because their husbands had bought into traditional patriarchal way of looking at things, you know, "How could I be a feminist?" But they had the wrong notions about what feminism meant too. That's a barrier.

The whole patriarchal society is a major barrier. I can hear a husband say, "You go to that, no, I will not allow it." Women have constraints. When I had pre-school kids my husband worked morning, afternoon, and evening almost seven days a week. Who was going to look after the kids while I went to a women's meeting? Which I wouldn't have, I mean, there was nobody. You could only get baby-sitters so much and so often. There's all kinds of subtle ways in which society dictates where a woman should be and it's not in the

women's movement. It's at home pregnant in the kitchen, barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen. That's a gross exaggeration, of course.

The responses point out how; socialised gender roles, the current social structures, lack of appreciation for process, lack of awareness of groups to get involved with, mistaken ideas about feminism, lack of education, confidence, time, money, and child care can impose barriers on women's political participation. A related barrier is the perceived lack of commitment to feminism by younger women, which could potentially affect the longevity and influence of the women's movement, one of the women noted

> The feminist ideals are just more ingrained. It seems to me, young women don't have to go to marches and stand and scream that they want equal rights. They feel like they have them. Well, "Of course, I'm not going to stay home and do the cleaning, while he goes out to work and makes money. What a crazy idea!" It's not a radical notion. It's just normal. You think you have the right to have an abortion, well, try to get one, just try. It's that whole continuum of access. How accessible are they really? All of the inequalities are just not as obvious to them.

Empowerment

As Vickers (1988) explained, women's focus on the process used to mobilise, as well as the product, allows for a component of empowerment for each woman as an additional by-product of group action. Information sharing and shared consciousness raising offer opportunities for individual growth (Amethyst, 1995; Holmes and Riggs, 1984). I wanted to know if the women involved with WHIM felt empowered in any way through their involvement. The term empowerment is currently overused and has many definitions, therefore I asked each woman to define what empowerment meant for her, rather than offer my definition. Here is a sampling of their responses

> [Empowerment is] helping people to see their own strengths and providing them with the knowledge and the tools to make decisions for themselves, about themselves and their families and people for whom they are responsible.

> For me to empower you would be to give you something you needed to feel that you had power and control over the situation. Did WHIM empower me?

Yes, I guess so. Through the consultation process, just seeing and being with all those women from all across Canada. Being perceived as someone who had information and wisdom and just being involved in all that. Yes, quite empowering.

Yes, WHIM empowers me. You get to be heard, you have a voice. Through the linkage with WHIM, I got to facilitate a workshop. That's an empowering thing too, to have that confidence that you would be able to do it. That's empowering me and giving me a greater sense of confidence. Having seen the whole plan of strategy [for the consultation] laid out and accomplished, you learn and you grow from that and it's good for me.

I have difficulty with the word 'empowerment', because it seems like there's something external that's doing it. I think 'synergy' is more how we help each other do that as opposed to something external. We create an environment within which we can do that for ourselves, so it means to be healthy, supportive, open, accepting and non-judgmental. That's what WHIM gives me, that environment where I can be me, feel that confidence, not be worn down and not feel like someone is doing something to me. Through my own actions, my own doing in that context I feel competent and validated. I don't know if empowerment would be the word I would necessarily use, it's been so misused. It's complex.

WHIM does [empower me]. It supports me to reach for those things that I may feel are just beyond my grasp. It broadens my world and that awareness is power.

Empowerment is a word that gets bandied around and partly I think it's intended to mean that this process gives you power. It gives you some control over your life or your situation. And the second part of that, does WHIM do this? No.

I'm not sure it empowers me so much as it's a place where I have learned something. It's a place where I feel some rich, personal satisfaction, can test out some ideas and often learn some new ways of thinking about things. I don't know if it actually helps me act in some different ways that I might not have before or totally new directions. But again, if these plays develop that is a side, not that I would act, but it's a side of me that thinks about some new methods and ways of framing issues. For me, that's empowering.

Well, yes of course [WHIM empowers]. I guess it does. I hadn't really thought of that, but it certainly enhances my perspectives about women's health. It certainly reinforces my overall feelings about how things work, or don't work, and is that empowering to a certain extent.

Empowerment is both at an individual and collective level. It really is about taking action, feeling that you have the authority to take action. You can't do it for someone. It needs to come from within, so it's really connected then to the environment and social structure. Yes, I would say WHIM does this,

sure, because of providing the environment for the opportunity to feel like I can take action.

A long list of characteristics emerged that help to define what empowerment means for the women of WHIM. These are; strength, knowledge, tools for decision-making, power, control, voice, confidence, learning, growth, support, non-judgemental acceptance, validation, broader awareness, learning, positive reinforcement, and the belief you are capable of taking action. Many expressed discomfort with the word, but only one woman out of the eleven interviewed did not feel "empowered" through her involvement. In feminist circles there is a high value placed on individual learning and "empowerment" (Schreader, 1990), whatever each woman may take that to mean. This benefit of group involvement, though elusive to measure, should not be overlooked as a facilitator for women's participation and ongoing feminist commitment.

Radical

Like empowerment, radical is a term that is often mentioned in relation to feminism but is rarely defined. I was curious to see whether the women I interviewed would view their efforts with WHIM as radical. A variety of opinion exists

> I would define radical as really different from what's going on. To me, now maybe I live in a small world, but feminism is not a radical notion. It's pretty normal kind of stuff by pretty normal kind of people. So, I guess I would say 'no'.

> In terms of the definition of radical, which is getting at the root of the problem, then WHIM is radical. It's not a bra-burning kind of group, that kind of radicalism, but they're trying to get to the root of women's problems. The root is, because of lack of power and women not being recognised so much as independent agents, we are not given the same equal rights as the male of the species.

> No, I don't think that we have been. At least what I have seen in my tenure has certainly not been radical. We have tried to do very mainstream things. We are trying hard to get money using very mainstream approaches. Even the suggestion to approach the one anonymous donor who actually gave us money, in this community, it's really darn mainstream. Would we have other approaches that would be more radical? Perhaps. Could we have thought of

them? I don't know.

I think it [WHIM] tries to be. I see 'radical' in its true definition, of getting to the root of things. Trying to pose some hard questions people will consider and begin to think about things in new ways. Maybe provide some alternative ways of going about solutions and shake up a more comfortable framework a little bit. We've tried to do that at times. We're radical in the sense that we would debate things amongst ourselves. We might not all have the same view on things, but we would try and air those differences, not take an easy way out necessarily, a way out that would just satisfy the majority and I don't mean even within the group. We have to bend if we're writing a funding proposal. You try and tailor it so you'll get the money, but I don't think we're willing to compromise on our principles or what we wanted to do. I think people were pissed off when we didn't get the money, or they [Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence] didn't understand our proposal, but we can live with how we presented ourselves.

I wouldn't say we're radical out there in the streets. I think we're kind of a quieter radical, both in our analysis and in some of the things we'd like to try and do.

It's not as active as other groups that I've been involved with in its organising. I wouldn't say it's that radical, but I think that it has a core philosophy and mentality that is a vision that's shared by enough of its members that it's radical in that way. It [WHIM] still maintains more or less traditional means to achieving its goals, although we try to be as creative as possible. The only agenda we have is to do what it takes to try and get the job done and not all groups are willing to look at alternative methods of doing things. It's how we're looking at the world, and people would call that radical just because it's so different from the kind of lens most people walk around wearing.

No. I don't like the word 'radical'. I don't think my work is radical in any sphere of my life. To me, radical is someone who is prepared to go to extreme lengths and be prepared to make people very uncomfortable or to hurt people to get a point across. There is a place for people [within WHIM] who want to make their contribution at a more radical level. Again, I think it's pretty open. A lot of the people try to work from within and make the changes that they can from within. They accept some of the realities or the current challenges and limitations and frustrations. Not that they just accept them and say, "Well, that's the way it's always going to be," but they are aware of them and try and effect change on the level that they can. So, generally as a group, I don't think of it as a radical group but, there is room for individuals who want to push a bit more.

Clearly, self-definition by even a small women's group can get confusing. Every

woman present at the table will have a different perspective on the work of the

group. I am still left wondering whether the adjective radical could be applied to WHIM and their work. The group opinion was split right down the middle, as the range of response illustrated. I tend to think WHIM, compared to other women's groups, is likely more radical than many but not as radical as some.

Group Leadership

As the CRIAW researchers (1987) discovered, individuals flow in and out of a women's group's core as interest and time wax and wane. Groups change when new priorities and goals are set, and when new participants join or regular members leave. These connections between individual women and separate women's groups remain as a latent network to be tapped into when new needs or issues arise (CRIAW, 1987; Vickers, 1988). Group membership, and thus group leadership, is loose and shifting in nature. This begs the question of who maintains the group during periods of change or inactivity? Who emerges as a driving force behind group cohesion and activity? While formal, recognisable leaders are rare in women's groups, informal leaders do exist. Even within collectively organised groups, certain individuals take the lead at various times (Holmes and Riggs, 1984).

I asked each woman to describe her own role with the group, but neglected to ask a specific question on who each woman felt the leaders were. Still, despite my error, information came to light about group leadership. This allowed me to adjust my interview guide for the later interviews. This also cued me to cover this issue with Allison, the woman who was named as the one who carried out the leadership role. (Note: Allison is a pseudonym.) The responses here are unfortunately limited, as leadership was not discussed with every woman, still they provide some insight.

> Part of my guilt [over not being as active as others in the group] is sometimes thinking, I haven't ever taken a leadership role. I'm always looking to the same few people to continue on and part of me thinks that's not really fair.

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At some point it's somebody else's turn. My turn has to come up sometime.

Well, for me, it's very, very much Allison. She is the one person who really stands out in that category [of leader] all the time. Certainly there are others who I'm aware of, and again I've not been involved to see some of the dynamics and the leadership. I know there are other strong players, but over the many, many years of my involvement it always seems to come back to her as the mainspring.

One woman discussed leadership in terms of an 'inner circle', of which she did not feel a part. As she put it

I don't feel part of the inner circle of this group.
Who is the inner circle though?
Not me. I don't know if anybody would say they were the inner circle and maybe that's what is the matter with the group. I mean, you meet once a month, or once every six weeks, and this is your only contact. Then we all go off and do our own things. Sometimes things happen and sometimes don't. When I say I'm an outsider, [I mean] I never know what the process was of these things happening. I don't maybe need to, but it means that I don't feel that I know what's going on.
Are you talking about if you miss a meeting then you don't know what's happened, or even if you're at a meeting you don't know?
Even if you're at the meeting sometimes, this decision has been made, that decision has been made. Now, partly it connects to the theatre process. There's a group on that committee who have done popular theatre and a group who have not. I am in the have not group. I've heard enough bandied around about it that I think I understand. I don't know if there are other people who feel like I do either, but I would suspect that there are people who don't really know, have never attended, don't appreciate the benefits of that whole popular theatre concept. That's what I'm speaking of. When they make decisions about things, and so and so says we've got to do such and such, I think they're making it based on sound information. It's based on their good judgement from their own experience to know that this is right. But as an outsider of that whole side of things, I don't know how to make a judgement or what questions to ask to move the process along.
Do you feel there are formal leaders or informal leaders within the group?
Well, your formal leader is Allison by default. I don't think that Allison wants to be the formal leader. I think she feels she's too overextended to take it on and I don't think people will let her give it up.

As the women indicated, there are leadership roles within the group. This is an

acknowledgement that, while the group attempts to work collectively as much as possible,

it is not a collective. Some people only attend meetings and contribute to the discussions,

while others take on the tasks between the meetings, albeit in disproportionate amounts. There is not an equal division of group labour, as in the collective ideal (Holmes and Riggs, 1984). One woman expressed feeling alienated from the decision-making process behind WHIM's current theatre project. It was not transparent for her who was making the decisions and how they were arrived at. I assert this is related to the fact that only certain women agree to take on tasks outside of the meeting times. These women are left to accomplish these tasks more or less as they see fit. The times between meetings where group input could be sought out are often lengthy. To a degree, the women who felt they couldn't take on tasks are stuck with the type and quality of work their WHIM colleagues, who did expend time, produce. It is the kind of situation where members can't complain if they are not willing to take it on themselves and do better. However, there is a quality group standard that the women do work for and the education and skills among the groups members are impressive. Still, it does mean that the consensus-based decision making model is not employed for the smaller, logistical types of decisions. Although this does mean that things do get done faster and meetings are shorter, it is a departure from the ideals of feminist process.

Concerning the identification of a group leader, it was always Allison who was named. So, I discussed this with Allison during her individual interview.

Allison's View of Her Informal Leadership

> I guess over the years I've sometimes felt burdened by it and I've sometimes felt like, okay, this is all right to take it on. There's no doubt that, because of where I have worked, I've had some of that anchoring infrastructure that meant I have taken the leadership role. Sometimes I've worried about it more than others. Even to the point of thinking, "Oh, this will destroy the group process," but I think overall we've weathered those things. It would be interesting to see what comes out of your thesis around did other people feel that maybe it was too dependant on me personally, or on me and occasionally Tanya [A pseudonym.]. But on the other hand, I think it [WHIM] did need that base to keep it going.

During the focus group, a WHIM member praised Allison for her work on behalf of
the group.

> But to be really quite real about it Allison, there's no doubt that any group
> still needs some basic, solid, foundation people who always remember to say,
> "Let's call a meeting." And you have played one of those ongoing roles.

> **Allison:** And Tanya I would say, touching base has been key, like the two of
> us.

> The both of you have. And other people have probably helped with that over
> time too. We all play our thing. I just don't want to overlook the fact that
> any group needs foundation people, and you two have always been there
> doing that - initiating and being there for a staff person. If you want to know
> what's going on you phone them [Allison and Tanya] and they drag you back
> in somehow, just by being excited about what they're doing. I just need to
> make sure that we don't overlook the modest comment. You do play an
> important role, and so does Tanya.

The following quotation offers Tanya's view, who said

> I have to say I sure took my lead from Allison. Things slowed down [after the
> consultation], there was no initiative to keep following it up. Different people
> needed to do different things in their lives. It's safe to say I take my cue from
> Allison. If Allison's not taking it on, I'm not going to either. It's too much.
> **Do you think she sees herself as the facilitator or leader?**
> Not leader, but the organisational facilitator. Making it happen. I'm always
> curious about how long would we go before someone would call a meeting, if
> Allison wasn't there. Particularly if it wasn't grounded now with the support
> we have from [the administration staff person from the Canadian Women's
> Health Network] to make it happen.
> **Do you think Allison gets tired of that role? Would she want
> someone to step in?**
> That's a good question. I'm not sure. My sense is that Allison gets a lot from
> a support level. There aren't very many places you can come together as we
> do, very ad hoc, and instantly feel you have recognition and support as a
> person, no matter what your stresses are.

During our individual interview, Allison commented on the focus group discussion.
Here is her reaction.

> I think at the group interview people sounded honest about what they were
> saying and that they weren't really hiding some deep animosity. I don't
> sense that. I think my role has varied and maybe a lot of it is examining how
> I felt. Sometimes I just felt, "Oh, I wish someone else would take this on."
> But in the end we called meetings and things got pulled together and people
> do come and people do volunteer to take on things, or the ones that can.

Though my role has been key, you know, I don't think it would have
happened if I had been a normal volunteer.
I'm always feeling busy and I don't have that carry through very readily
unless I have someone to help. Even just mailing out the minutes. I'm not
sure it would have happened as readily without that infrastructure. I would
have continued to be part of the group, but someone else would have had to
pick that up.
Have you tried to give away the role?
At different times. Occasionally we've had some discussion on who would
chair meetings and how it would rotate and so on. Occasionally someone
would come in to do a little bit of work, but in the end it tended to fall that
way. In past years when we had staff people, like through summer grants or
Status of Women moneys, that was fine. Then we had a staff person who
would work with the committee and would do that [organising]. When we
didn't it was harder. So, I think my role has been sort of quite key to keeping
it functioning.
So, do you feel that role goes recognised or unrecognised?
Oh, I've never felt unappreciated. No, never that.

Tanya and other WHIM members suggested that Allison receives support from the

group and this encourages her to maintain her leadership role. Support was mentioned as

a factor behind women's participation in the women's movement by several authors (Kome,

1983; CRIAW, 1987; Holmes and Riggs, 1984a; Amethyst, 1995), and WHIM members

validated its importance at the focus group and during several of the individual interviews.

In addition to Allison, other women also expressed how WHIM serves as a support network

for them. The personal connection is important to the women in WHIM, as one of the

women illustrated

> When Allison had this health scare and I remember everybody concerned and
> hugging her, you know, this is the kind of thing that the group also provides.

I showed Allison the sections of interview transcript I wished to use in these last two

sections, as they make her directly identifiable to the other women in WHIM despite the

pseudonym. She agreed that these could and should be included. Allison reiterated that

the leadership roles she, and occasionally Tanya, have taken on is tied strongly to their

being staff at the Women's Health Clinic. They can take some work time to make calls and

have budgets for occasional bits of photocopying. Allison asserted that the agency

connection is crucial. She feels it would have been too hard to sustain WHIM without that base. I also showed Tanya this section and she agreed it should be included. Tanya mentioned that the agency connection helped her to participate more, as well.

I agree with Allison's assessment, but also believe that her and Tanya's personalities played a role in their stepping forward to take on extra tasks and leadership roles. Although they are staff at a supportive agency, this doesn't mean that they were required to be more than a regular group member. It may have been easier for them to participate because of that infrastructure, but they could have still refused extra responsibility. I would attribute them both with giving personalities and that type of work ethic, drive or commitment that makes them participate at a higher level.

Time and Setting Limits

To gauge the amount of time women in WHIM spent on activist efforts, I asked them to estimate the time WHIM took in a month and how much time all their volunteer work took in total, if they undertook more. Before asking this question, I had not fully realised that women don't keep track of time spent in this way. The 'clock in and clock out' mentality around time does not apply to volunteer work. For many of the women, their activism is an extension of what they do in their paid work and so the two get rolled together. Still, several of the women attempted an estimate and these estimates ranged from five to twenty hours per week. The women qualified that there were lull and peak weeks and it is not a constant commitment of that amount.

Needing to set priorities and define boundaries around levels of participation seems to a universal experience of women within WHIM, and likely the women's movement as a whole. As previously illustrated, women are left short on the resource of spare time in our current social structure (Kome, 1983; CRIAW, 1987; Vickers, 1988; Amethyst, 1995;

Christiansen-Ruffman, 1995). Mixing participation in the women's movement in with all of

the existing responsibilities is challenging as the WHIM women explain

> It's a weird gender thing. It's like being activist, but then being socialised [into women's roles]. How do you actually do that and have good boundaries? Part of it is figuring out that you really can't do much if you're not there for yourself. Now, that totally contradicts the selflessness of what we are socialised as women. That's a common, constant struggle. I feel like I'm getting better at it. It's hard though. You meet a lot of resistance, from WHIM and from family. Feminism has rarely addressed it, that superwoman shit.

> We work collectively as much as we can. That way we're all sharing what we need to do and allowing for ebbs and flows, because as women there will be times when we take on more and we take on less. You always hear about the burned out activist. What have we done then? Is that the trail we leave and then disappear.

> I feel you just do it. I don't think it's because I'm not valuing [volunteer work], I guess I don't departmentalise it that much. It's mixed with my paid work. It's who my friends are, who's my chosen family. I'm one of the those very few privileged women who is able to do the political work for pay. So it all gets mushed up. When I wasn't doing political work or activism work for pay then it was clear cut. You do this other job and then you do this other stuff.

> It's a very fluid negotiation [of time], which actually troubles me. WHIM hasn't ever required this, but it's a sense, if you're going to make a commitment people are counting on you. You need to take that as seriously as any other work. That's more often tied to direct service delivery. Still, that's one of the reasons I feel guilt, because I'm not living up to any kind of commitment. That's why I've said at different times, "Okay, I'm just going to be out because I can't be consistent." And I've always been told, "You don't have to be consistent. It's fine just to come in when you can and contribute." So, that's always a struggle. It gets easier as my kids get older and it gets harder when other things interfere. If I haven't been there for awhile it's hard to remember the valuable things that WHIM gives me. Then I go and think, "Yes, this was great," and I want to get back there again soon. You're always constantly trying to rebalance and running around all the time, taking a little piece from one and putting it on another. It's ongoing.

> It has taken me awhile to give myself permission to spend time doing leisure. For a long time my work was my politics and my passion. My activism was my life. It's just what I did in all areas- who I socialised with, who I acquainted myself with, the activities I did for leisure, who I went to listen to for a talk. It's just so integrated. When I think about most women, and some men, who are activists, there is a fusion that happens. You try and integrate everyone into it, otherwise you can't maintain it. You go crazy. Things do

end up falling to the wayside and you end up having to make those horrible choices about what's more important, this or that. You end up choosing friends and partners who share similar visions. I haven't found many successful relationships and family lives that have flourished if one individual has been an activist and the other one hasn't at all. That's why people choose to be with people who support what is important to them. If we don't do what feeds our soul, we don't become who people are drawn to anyway.

I say 'no'. Figuring out what to say 'no' to is hard sometimes, but I'm getting better at it. I let anything go that I possibly can. I say 'no', unless I'm really getting something out of it.

I just reduce my time for sleeping. No, time is a big factor because all the organisations need time and sometimes it's very difficult. My work here is very exacting too. Many evenings I have to work, so it's really a struggle and can lead to a lot of stress. My first priority is work, because this is where I get my money from. I have to try to fit the other [commitments] with any spare time, and give time to my children. Now that they are older, I can be more out of the house.

Do I actually have a strategy? Well, I don't and one of the reasons is the nature of the work that I do. Work for right now has to come first. I also try really hard to structure my weeks so I can get an aerobic class in a couple of times. Four times would be ideal. As far as family stuff, my kids are pretty well on their own. It's only when family things come up. I always know that's really what comes first.

I'm able to say that for a meeting, "I can't do this" or "I can do this", so I set my own boundaries there. It's more balancing what I need for me and I'm pretty good with WHIM at saying what I can and cannot do. It doesn't take too much negotiation on the whole. I draw the line at Sunday meetings. My one concession to Sunday to doing something for myself. It's just my day.

Well, there's a real limitation in the time that I feel I have for volunteering. I volunteer within my community. I would really like to volunteer in a direct service way, because that's missing in my working life and my personal life. I wouldn't choose to do it in a women's group. I might choose around HIV, or literacy, or something that wouldn't be specific just to women. But my support- it's important for me to have some women only focus in my life. I think WHIM, in part, gives me that, but that's not the sole focus of my life at all.

It has to be really high priority for me to spend time. There's not a lot of time in the day. I work full-time, single parent, have a relationship, like to see my elderly mother as much as I can and still want to do volunteer work.

These responses bring up several issues which factor into use of time for women's activism; effects of gender role socialisation, issue of self-care, nature of collective work, common feelings of guilt over lack of consistent commitment, priorities of children and family, requirement of flexibility from group over fluctuating time commitments, need of support from partner and family, work demands, personal lives and the need to be getting a "return" for their efforts. While wanting to contribute to the work of their group, these women still recognised that their individual needs must be met, as well. The many sets of needs and demands in a woman's life must be balanced . All of the factors mentioned by WHIM women impact on their level of commitment to WHIM and the women's health movement. It's amazing that feminism, as a movement, is so widespread and evident in light of how little time and resources women have to sustain it.

Volunteerism

I wanted to explore opinions held towards the feminist movement as a largely volunteer movement. How have society's and individual women's views on volunteerism impacted on the feminist movement? What does it mean for feminism that women's political work goes so unpaid, in contrast to men's political work? I asked each woman to discuss the role volunteer work with women's groups played in their lives. Their responses demonstrate how the lack of pay, or any material reward system, contributed to the devaluation of their political work by family, friends and society at large. Yet, the value of this volunteerism was reinforced by all the women interviewed. As the women discussed

> There's real obvious limitations [to becoming involved with the women's movement] and one is that unpaid work isn't valued. I was more aware of that when I was a young mum at home. I didn't have a full-time, or even a part-time job, and they sensed you're wasting your time in volunteer. That was a struggle.
> **What do you do?**
> At that time I heard it a lot from my partner who just went, "You said you wanted to be at home with the kids so you're not working. But you're taking off and doing volunteer stuff." Actually, it was a valuable stepping stone to

giving me confidence to feel I could contribute in a more formal structured work environment. Volunteer work in any group, can do that for women at all levels, but it's not recognised.

I think it's pretty important. It's the way of sustaining the social movement. A lot of interesting, radical work is not paid work.

Some of the activities fed my soul. I just needed them to keep grounded and sane. Some volunteering was because if I was going to work in a certain area, then I needed to acquire skills and experiences. A lot of women develop skills informally. This city offers those opportunities, more so than others. We look at volunteerism differently, perhaps because we're so under funded in some areas. We haven't had the luxury of paying everyone, but the work needs to be done and so there's always people there to take it up. This mentality, providing opportunities for people to learn, grow, share and mentor each other, even having formalist trainings based in the communities. There's been a lot of opportunity for me to expand my repertoire of skills, my knowledge. It's really helped me be more effective in all my jobs and all the roles. So, I have spent a substantial amount of time making use of, and contributing to, those opportunities.

I guess it's a capitalist society that unless it makes money somehow it doesn't have value. It's this crazy way that we value work and it has to be profit making, otherwise it has no value. People who feel like they're part of a community, whatever community it is - the kids hockey team or their own neighbourhood- have that self-actualisation of understanding that they're connected to all these other human beings. They see the value. They know how important that is and they get enjoyment out of it, so I guess that's what they get back.

Volunteering, though undervalued, can actually be a way for women to acquire confidence, skills, experiences, knowledge and a connection to other human beings. Again, It comes up that Winnipeg, more so than other locales, may be a particularly good place for women to do this. The undervaluing of unpaid community level work was noted as another barrier to women becoming involved in the women's movement. The lack of reward structures for women's political work also deters involvement. These additional barriers to women's political involvement hamper the potential influence of feminism.

The discussions around lack of time, needing to set limits on participation, and views about volunteerism leads into the issue of burnout. Burnout is the condition where people can no longer cope at their current pace and must take a step back and re-evaluate

their activities. In sociopolitical movements, burnout is felt to be a common occurrence. I

asked the women in WHIM about this issue.

Burnout

Some women reported that they did experience burnout, while others did not feel

that they had. This difference could be explained by differing lengths of time of

involvement, levels of active participation and the amount of other responsibilities in their

lives during the periods of their involvement with WHIM. Their positions on burnout are

No, no. I should say I haven't been burned out yet.

I guess that's how I felt about WHIM in terms of what I was giving, a 2 or 3 hour evening, and what I was getting back. It just didn't match. It was taking more out of me than it was giving back.

Yes. I was fine going to the meetings, but when people started talking about this new project, "I'm not jumping in, I'm not doing it". Other people were going to do it, super, but "I'm not doing it".

I avoid burnout. I've simply stopped attending or volunteering at other groups, if they weren't providing me with what I needed. I found other ways to deal with the same topics or issues. I don't know if I would call that burnout or choice. If something was bogging me down, or making it more difficult for me to do the work I thought was important, then I just found another vehicle to do similar work. I've been exhausted at a few points in my life, there's been a lot of work, but I wouldn't say that I've ever burned out at WHIM or because of WHIM. It can be really burdensome sometimes. It can be really heavy, all of these things when they're happening all at the same time and there are other people's deadlines that we need to try and meet. That's the thing about doing the collaborating and the networking, you're not always autonomous in terms of setting your own time line.

I went through a period in my life of going to a lot of meetings and being a part of women's groups and other things, some work-related and some not. I wouldn't do it now. I put in a lot of energy into what I do. I do a fair amount of what I consider volunteer and extra work related to my [paid] work and I'm not willing to give a lot of volunteer time to other things. I value the volunteer work that people do. I don't readily at this point volunteer for things or get involved in other organisations to do community work. I just feel I give at the office and then I need a certain amount of down time and time with family and time with friends and that's become very precious. As far as actually giving time, if I'm asked to speak somewhere, I will. Some more limited thing, certainly I would be glad to do that.

At various points that [involvement with WHIM] has been more difficult to maintain and I did need to take some time away. It's hard to say, because I've had other things going on in my life that have led to me needing to do that, so I can't contain it to just being WHIM. The nature of this work is very demanding. You don't always have the luxury to say, "No, I can't do this," but I think WHIM has been good in terms of helping each other when we can and supporting each other when we need to take on less responsibilities.

No, burnout has not been a factor right now with WHIM. Just in my life as a whole there have been times when I just thought, "It's not healthy to sustain this kind of pace and to always feel torn to jump from one thing to another."

At different times. I think after the consultation we were burned out. I was really exhausted. It was a really strenuous process and I think it took us two years to kind of regroup. There was certainly burnout.

I can see burnout being a factor with WHIM and it's not just burnout related to the group, but related to all of the other things that we members have to spend our time on. It's a question of priorities and do we feel that this is worthwhile. That may be why people like XXXXX, and some of the others, aren't coming because they're spending their time on things that they feel are more productive. There are so many other people in there [WHIM] who do nothing but come to meetings, that's all they do. They never do anything outside of that meeting once every couple of months. It's just the kind of thing that eventually is going to make me say, "I've had enough." Is that burnout? I guess so.

Because we allow ourselves to react to our own energy ebb and flows, we stay alive. Why I say that is I know many groups that are navel gazing as to why people aren't joining them, or it's upsetting we have the same people doing all the work. There seems to be an unwillingness to accept that things do ebb and flow and instead of beating each other up for it or demanding those people come back and get out here and work, go with where you're at. If we needed to hibernate for two years, we did. Then we got rejuvenated and we were in action again. It wasn't that was wrong community development wise, or was bad group process, or the issues have died, or the commitments died, it was accepting this is how human life goes. Why we've maintained the group is because we've been realistic.

These three sections; Time and Setting Limits, Volunteerism and Burnout, highlight the difficulty for women in participating in the women's movement. There is a certain toll that volunteer political work takes on the often already tenuous balancing act amongst paid work, romantic relationships, children, family, friends and individual hobbies and interests. It appears that it takes a certain type of woman to take this extra piece on, one

who has a heightened social conscience and a personal commitment. Factors have been mentioned previously that encourage this political participation, among these were all women dynamics, power of group sharing and support. Another more obvious enticement, would be formal recognition.

Recognition

I investigated whether WHIM members felt that their efforts were recognised by asking; Do you feel that the contributions women's groups like WHIM make to the community are recognised? Why or why not?

> It's recognised within the women's community, but I don't know about in the larger community. The government may recognise it to some degree too, but I think it's only really recognised in the women's community.

> Outside of the women's community, I don't think the larger world recognises or cares. I don't think they care about non-profit organisations, or the fact that you need a board to have a non-profit. But the people in there see the value.

> People who are involved in this kind of work recognise that this is behind the scenes stuff, it's not always visible. We're not in it for glory, more for outcome. In terms of formal recognition, it's absent. In terms of us being able to recognise our own impact and effect, it's a little bit more clear to us who work in the area and perhaps can see people's attitudes shifting, or at least being made aware of things.

> The women's community has some awareness. There is recognition that the women's community is all about volunteering, for the most part. Yes, I would say there's recognition. I don't think the larger community at all knows anything about WHIM. When there was a newsletter that was distributed there was more of an awareness. Possibly through women's groups nationally there's a bit of awareness, then before the [Canadian Women's Health] Network.

> I think women do a lot of work at a lot of levels that doesn't get acknowledged.
> **Is it because it's women doing it?**
> I think we do it very differently from how men do it and so it doesn't get acknowledged. It's almost not a conscious level thing somehow. If you go to your local community club, who's running the hot dogs?
> **Or who typed the brochure?**
> Yes, and it's hidden work.

There's a fair amount of volunteer recognition in the community and the [Women's Health] Clinic tries to do that with its volunteers. I don't think WHIM receives recognition because we don't go after it. We will get the recognition if we're co-hosting something or we're doing something but...
That's not why people are there?
No, it's not.

I think many organisations count their volunteer hours and try and do some appreciation. But WHIM has not sought that out really.
Formal recognition doesn't seem to be a focus in the women's community. So, is it being selfless or just not needing it?
I think some groups do though, especially if they're trying to vie for more funding. Our group is a little more laid back and we're certainly not competitive with others, but that's not to say that all [women's groups] aren't. We do try and still work with coalitions around things. That's why we were able to do some of our research. We piggy-backed off another group. Nellie McClung Theatre is willing to do it, and they have taken all these ideas and they've circulated some of our findings for free. There's kind of give and take that does happen.

If you're talking about the women's communities, particularly the women's health communities, then more likely, yes, efforts are recognised. Women's groups just go unrecognised in the larger society. It's not valued. Women's work is not as valid. Just a housewife. Just a volunteer. I mean, I've said those two things about myself all my life. I'm just a housewife. I don't do anything.

There is sentiment within WHIM members that women's volunteer work is recognised by the women's community, but not by society at large. This refers back simply to the fact that it is volunteer and also that it is work done by women for women. Women who need and want formal recognition will not be enticed to expend their energies in the women's movement.

Effecting Political Action and Social Change

I wanted to discover what the women believe were effective strategies employed by the group throughout the course of their work, and whether they believe their efforts were successful in effecting political action and social change. As variables, 'political action' and 'social change' are virtually impossible to measure. Humans don't interact in a vacuum and a true cause and effect relationship cannot be verified because so many factors could have

been at play. It is not feasible to say that any one campaign by any social change group caused a shift in values and behaviour of the public at large. As a result of this limitation, evaluations of whether feminist groups are successful or not is very complicated. How do you know whether WHIM has effected political action and social change? How can you isolate everything else which may have interacted in a person's choice to support a campaign for change? Another consideration is that social change may be viewed as progressive or threatening, depending upon each individual's position in society and point of view. It would seem that we may never know, for sure, whether one isolated women's group has had any kind of long-lasting effect or influence. What may be easier to see if the cumulative effect of simultaneous efforts by women all over Canada involved with the feminist movement. I asked each member their opinion as to whether WHIM was effective in inspiring political action and social change, and what their most effective strategies may have been. The reviews were mixed, and they are

> I don't have a strong opinion about that, because that hasn't been, for me, the focus of what the group is about. The work that WHIM did, and is doing, to support the Canadian Women's Health Network [is effective]. Although I don't have, in the last few years, a sense of how that is moving and sustaining itself. It was tremendously exhilarating organising the conference. To me, that was peak.

> In some ways. I don't think we should have elusions, but I think it's [WHIM's work] pushed the agendas along in a few areas. I guess, because it has kept us nurtured a bit, that maybe it's had spin offs into other work that we've done. We learned something from talking to each other or we felt more supported through a group like that. So, I think there's less direct [effects].

> I think WHIM has been effective. The fact that they even were instrumental in getting this network, their role in that, shows some kind of effectiveness. They have lobbying skills and really know how to get to the people who can make some difference. They are a small group of women, but very effective. I would think they are pretty much ahead of other groups.

> I think it [WHIM] makes a contribution. I don't know that we have any kind of standards in place to judge our effectiveness. I could care less frankly. My sense of whether the group is successful is at a much smaller level- are we successful for the members of the group? That's probably very, very short-

sighted, but in this participation I'm not really that concerned about outside assessment of effectiveness or not, which I'm sure funders wouldn't like to hear.

I do when I think about how women's groups do that [attempt change] and how a lot of grass roots organisations do that. We're not a lobby group in the sense of political lobby group where we try to locate a bunch of funds to do a particular activity. We sort of try and set ripples off and see where they go and we don't take ownership of that. We allow people to take what they can from it and do what they need with it and that is the guiding principle behind any of our endeavours. We're not putting forth our agenda so much as providing people with information that will enable them to put forth their own. [Help people] get across their own points in their own ways and maybe either generating, or facilitating the acquisition of, or disseminating information about the availability of resources, or simply being a means for individuals to share information. I see that as more of what our role is. We're not in the limelight in that sense. I don't know, I think it's a good way to do things. It's done in a very healthy pace for everyone involved, more often than not, and it needs to be otherwise we wouldn't keep doing it.

Sure. I mean, who knows, right? It's kind of like community development work. It's slow and I guess if you believe the process matters then absolutely [they have been successful]. I believe the process matters so you may not be seeing a lot of tangible end results, but it depends what you're measuring and what you're looking for. So, that's kind of a hard question to answer.

Yes, as much as they make the most of their time and energy.

I've never seen us do any lobbying as such. Now, the biggest thing that we've done since I've been with them has been the consultation. But I have become a non-believer of that process. Non-believer in the idea that you're really going to accomplish anything. I'm a believer in the sense that it does you a lot of good to get this diverse group of people together, get some of these issues out on the table and to discuss them. Still, I don't think you go to that kind of a meeting and think anything concrete is going to come out of it in the long term. It's a very useful media tool, because you can get a lot of information out to a load of communities by doing that sort of thing. But you go to those meetings, you have those discussions, you have those debates, I mean, what contact have we had with three quarters of them since then? Likely nothing, and people don't know what those people went back to their communities and did. They could have done oodles of things, but there's no way to evaluate that.

It's impossible for any volunteer group nowadays to really accomplish anything, unless they have someone who is paid to actually spend time doing just doing the basic organisational stuff, just the administrative tasks. The group can't meet on an ad hoc basis and actually do very much.

I still think *Side Effects* did [work the best]. That was a play with enough

money which toured across the country with a polish to it that really was able to have broad popular appeal. So, to me, it was a model of how a group like this could work. I would say that [*Side Effects*] was really one of the key things and the effort we put in to organising the consultation was also very important. It contributed to the CWHN happening. It really did and to where it is today.

That consultation was a big one in terms of getting the word out and also this past year we had a few focus groups leading up to planning the play. If this play gets off the ground this will be a good strategy for bringing awareness, advocating for women's health issues and general education.

Yes, networking and helping build structures to sustain networking [have been the most effective strategies]..

Well, certainly, the Health Information Updates and the networking with the consultation. The workshops that we did were all awareness raising.

In response to the query about whether WHIM has been effective in facilitating political action and social change, several women suggested that it did not matter. The importance was placed more on making the effort and not on success versus failure. The more important question was at the immediate level, is WHIM successful for the members of the group? My sense of that is "yes", despite the odd murmuring of discontent. We can assume that if being involved with WHIM was not doing anything for them, they would have left the group by now. Still, the negative points raised through this research should be examined by the group to make participation even more fulfilling for every woman involved. This section on effective political action and social change demonstrates again that even with a small, fairly homogenous group, there will always be a variety of opinion. I can only guess at the possible reasons behind this. Perhaps, this is just a product of different individuals having different value sets. Maybe this hints at a need for WHIM to splinter off into two separate groups. The members who have thus far been unsatisfied with the groups effects could operate under a more ardent mandate for change. As Holmes and Riggs (1984) illuminated, it is not necessarily a bad thing when a group divides. This process actually works to ensure that the remaining members form a cohesive, committed

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and supportive group dedicated to a relatively similar vision and set of goals. Although, if it is a huge task for an already existing group to begin a new project, it is maybe an enormous task for women to start a brand new group.

WHIM believes in their work, whether they can prove direct effectiveness or not. They cited networking, their newsletter, *Side Effects*, and the Canadian Women's Health Network Consultation as their most effective strategies. One woman discussed it in terms of setting off "ripples" and hoping that some people would get some value or aid from it at some time. The most direct easily discernible influence of WHIM's work has been on the development of the CWHN. WHIM was one of the key groups instrumental to that process and now the country has a clearinghouse of information on women's health as well as a structure for networking and potentially for more effective feminist activist mobilisation on future issues of concern. I assert that WHIM is successful in inspiring and sustaining political action and social change, though supporting and nurturing its membership and developing both small and large scale feminist activist initiatives.

The strategies used to attempt to effect change allow for an evaluation of whether WHIM is an equal opportunity, integrationist group or a fundamental role change transformationist group (Burt, 1986; CRIAW, 1987; Brisken, 1992). Although they appear to operate from a very critical position, they do not attempt to create alternative structures to those in place currently. They are not proponents of the system as it is and demand change, but do this through accepted channels, such as public forums. Within a classification of women's health groups, specifically, WHIM falls under the category of a political action organisation which use public information campaigns or mobilisations.

Feelings Towards/About The Group

Early in our interviews, I asked the group members a very open-ended question to see what each member would think to mention. The question; How do you feel about the

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group?, proved to be successful in generating a range of answers that show the variety of feelings towards WHIM and about WHIM.

It's a group with a lot of good ideas. A group with a lot of busy talented people but I think they're almost afraid to start a project, because they just somehow know how much work it's going to be. They tend to sort of think, "Oh, my God."

One of the things I've very much appreciated is that the times when I could participate more fully it was nice for them that I could, but the times that I couldn't and yet still wanted to go I was equally accepted. Any input I did have. I feel very positive about the group, both as a group of people and a group of women who want to better things for women in the area of health in its broadest sense; physical, emotional, spiritual. Health in its totality, which includes well-being.

Positive and guilty and a little frustrated that I'm not clear about am I in or am I out. I'm pretty concrete in saying "Okay, this is a piece of my life, this isn't. I said yes to this. I said no to that. This is what I do with that." And WHIM is not like that. It doesn't fit easily into the rest of my concrete world. It's hard to leave that group. I've thought about it several times, should I be more honest and just leave it because I can't contribute. I just don't have time, or energy, or I'm doing too much else, but I haven't left it yet. I sometimes have said, "Oh, I'll just be kind to myself tonight and not go to the meeting." So, I've missed meetings just because I needed a mental health time, not because I was sick or because I had other commitment but just because I needed it.

I feel very good about being part of that group because I have been long interested in health issues, especially relating to women. WHIM has given me a voice, that you can at least make a little bit of difference.

Respect. I respect everyone's contribution and I respect their dedication.

The group has a lot of potential. We wouldn't be really good if we had a chance to do something, and it required a lot of us pulling together over a very short period of time to just get it done. That wouldn't work, because these women are all working very hard at jobs, many of them have families. We're just like any other kind of volunteer who are stretched to the hilt. We're good at working together with the little bit of knowledge that each of us has and kind of sharing from that, but it takes us a while to get to the point. We're not good at motivating each other to think about things and then actually turning that into action. I haven't seen that yet anyway. One of the things I find distressing is some women don't come on a regular basis. It's good for members that you can leave, come back and you are welcome. Good for group cohesion, but it isn't necessarily good for the actual work. At times I feel a little frustrated. I'm pretty goal oriented. I like to know that there's a purpose for being there. If it's just to sit around and have a good

time, that's fine, as long as I understand that. But I don't think that's really what this group feels it's overall purpose is. They want to set goals too. My reason for wanting to be a member of a group doing the kinds of things I think WHIM might like to be involved in, is I don't have it in my other volunteering. I don't really have the opportunity to come together with a group of women like that, which I find very satisfying. They are women with a lot to offer, because of who they are and what they do. I also don't get to be involved in things that are fairly grounded in the reality of women's health. [WHIM] is practically oriented in what's really going on, not in terms of working at one's health clinic kind of stuff, but that we can take the theoretical stuff and apply it somehow.

The potential of that kind of group, not WHIM itself, but just that kind of group, it's huge. Whether or not the women who are actually involved right now would be able to accomplish those, I don't know. It takes so much energy and so much effort. The kinds of things that were accomplished even during the time of the initial *Side Effects* project, that was just so long ago and things were different.

In some respects it's a social network. A lot of people like to meet half a dozen times a year and catch up socially and professionally. They have a tremendous amount of information among themselves. Again, while that might look like a trivial meeting to have dinner with them, there is a lot of sharing of information and sharing of resources. I'm not implying that this is a gossip thing. It's a real information sharing. You know where people are at, what programs are coming in or going out, and so on. It's a real network. I feel positive about being involved.

Overall, good. I think our capacities go up and down and in that sense it requires acknowledging and strengthening the limitations. It moves with more ease when it's project driven. But getting a project started is a lot of work.

Members feel WHIM has good ideas, talented members, tons of potential, flexibility and acceptance. WHIM serves as a social network for them and is a site of information sharing. WHIM gives an opportunity for voice and the sense that each woman can make a difference, causing it to be a group that is hard to leave. WHIM members are dedicated, despite being otherwise so busy. While WHIM may not be good at mobilising quickly and not produce enough action for some members, it still provides all of them with a women only space that members find satisfying. Both positive and negative feelings are held about

and towards the group, but in an overall sense, WHIM members have a majority of positive feelings.

The flexibility of participation was mentioned by some of the women as a necessary and positive feature, while other women were getting frustrated that there is not a regular attendance. Holmes and Riggs (1984) identified that it can be frustrating for goal-oriented women to handle the value based upon the process of decision-making. This is true for certain members within WHIM. I would still assert, however, that the flexibility has been essential for maintaining the longevity of the group and preventing women from having to "drop out" permanently. The CRIAW (1987) study found that in formally structured groups women feel that they have to drop out if they are constrained by lack of time and energy, because they are letting the group down and their limited participation is not allowed for. This flexibility around levels of participation is, in my opinion, one of the main elements which has kept members involved with WHIM over their fifteen year span.

Favourite Memories

In an attempt to further discern what members of WHIM value about their time with the group, I asked them to tell me what their favourite memory was. The answers illuminate how the group operates and how it has been rewarding for group members.

> My favourite memories are the parties and meeting visitors, like when that lady came from New Zealand or Australia to the group. A nice thing, too, was that consultation where women got together and you really got to know people. It was energising and those are some of the nice memories that I have.

> Well, they would have to be during the consultation. One favourite memory would be after it was all over, like, the absolute last day and being in the hotel hot tub. It was so funny because I didn't have a bathing suit so I think I went in, like, in my bra and panties. If I wasn't with a bunch of feminist women I never would have done that, there's no way. Actually, I had my son with me and he was pretty little. He would have only been four or something and he just had his underwear on. We just thought it was a hoot. Yes, that was my favourite memory, for sure. Completing that and then having fun together.

It's hard to say. It's just such a blur of laughter and successes when we finally got something and celebrating those little victories. But then moving on to other things right away it seemed. We never really lingered. I've only been involved with them for a brief time, when you consider the lifespan of the group, and for that time it's a synergy that happens and we motivate each other. We try and move each other towards achieving what we had planned and hoped for. A number of positive things have happened; we found the playwright, or we got the money, or Nellie McClung decided to work with us. I mean, we've always had some excitement that has come from that. It's been more in terms of how we celebrate our little victories because it's been so personal for a lot of us.

It's just the friendships. The connection with the people, the network part of it.

Yes, and it's the night that *Side Effects* opened at the Warehouse Theatre. We were backstage and the place was jammed. There wasn't a seat out there. We couldn't believe it, we were folding programs and somebody was four years old and he was helping. We felt like we had done it. That was one very exciting moment.

I think it's sitting around the table and sharing, the kind of sharing that is valued most within that group. We've had some good laughs. That kind of togetherness.

Well, I guess my favourite memories are always over food and laughter. It's a funny group.

The memories touched on around group parties, laughter, meeting people, and having fun together show, again, the social network side to the group. There appears to be a genuine fondness among the women for each other. Time together is really valued. The mention of friendships, sense of connection, sharing, and togetherness demonstrate that. *Side Effects* and the CWHN consultation always come up as favourite, exciting times for the group, (although not all members were around fifteen years ago for *Side Effects*). The emphasis on celebrating the little successes and victories along the way is important to note, as the process of working together is more focus than any particular outcome or effect. Personally, I am surprised only one member mentioned the food. The sharing of a meal with casual conversation is often the first half hour or so of an evening meeting time.

These responses offer more reasons behind why women have chosen to remain involved, with more enlightenment coming later in the Why be in WHIM section.

Least Favourite Memories

I provided the women with an opportunity to share bad memories of their time with the group, as well. Several women reported that they did not have any least favourite memories and couldn't offer any response to the question. Many of the bad memories centred around the group contracted to facilitate many of the small groups at the Canadian Women's Health Network consultation. Facilitation had been hired out after the committee decided it would place too many demands on them as organisers to be responsible for it. The Winnipeg-based group experienced with facilitation who were hired did not deliver in the way that the committee had asked and needed them to. The conflict between WHIM, and the additional individuals who made up the Winnipeg Consultation Organising Committee, and the contracted group went through a formal mediation process after the consultation. This experience was cited as the least favourite memory by the majority of women who offered a negative experience.

> There was that process going into mediation with those facilitators. We had some meetings around how we would handle that, and that took energy too, but we did it. I think that was really valuable, and again it wasn't that there was anger amongst us. We were able to decide that several of us would go, engage with them, and try and resolve this so it wouldn't be left unresolved. We went through a formal mediation process. They didn't have any idea how angry we were, or that we didn't think that they had done a good job. It did work through a process that was very valuable. I was really pissed off and angry, but it wasn't any of my WHIM mates. I don't know. I would have to think about it [bad memories] more. There's maybe stuff I haven't thought about for years, but it doesn't jump out.

> For me, when the other women took over the consultation. There was a lot of bitching and complaining about the facilitation, that people just really felt the facilitating group had these very bizarre questions. It was, like, "where does that even come from? What's the agenda?" We didn't feel that was an agenda that we had all developed together. It was a little weird. It was a bit of a shock but the beauty was that all the women just sort of revolted, so that was pretty exciting.

They had a revolution against the facilitator?
Yes, it's like, "Wait a minute, we're spending a lot of our time and energy, we're not just going to sit here quietly and be annoyed by this. We're going to take over and say, "No, that's not how we want to do it and we want to ask these different questions. We want to get right to this other thing."" The facilitators weren't too happy about that, obviously. But you shouldn't be trying to ram your agenda down somebody's throat. It should be a process. They have this cookie mould approach to group facilitation. We take them through this way, don't miss this step and don't miss that step. But you've got to be flexible. That's all it was, "This is how we do group facilitation, we've been doing it for a long time, we're really good at it, and so do it this way. " I don't think they understood what a sophisticated group they had, they didn't need to go through 1, 2 and 3. Maybe another group would need to. But if they're already enlightened, do they have to?

Another woman discussing the same scenario changed her opinion from it being a

least favourite memory to a favourite memory after all, and explained,

No, that was a good memory because it was empowering. It was, "Wow, isn't this great. Women can say "no". We don't like it, let's be creative, do something new."

Aside from the facilitation and mediation experience, other least favourite memories

were these

Oh, I think it [my least favourite part] is because we're all who we are. We're all overwhelmed. We can't take anything on and we go into hiatus, which is fine but sometimes it's unnamed hiatus. But maybe that's the way it is. Do you always have to name everything?

My worst memory of WHIM? Being at a meeting, wanting to be there, but I had to bring my child. I can't remember why, I didn't have a babysitter or whatever, and it was awful because he just needed my attention and was sitting there kicking my leg or something. I can't remember. I was so frustrated. I had to scoop him up and take him away. One of the problems, I suppose, for me with WHIM was that it wasn't the culture of young kids. All these women, their kids were 20 years old, if they had them. They were all grown up and moved out of the house, so I didn't feel like that was supported or understood. I could have been the only one who had a young child. So, it didn't feel like it was okay. In other groups where everybody's got young kids, it's a whole different feel.

I just remember once when I felt really bogged down by a process that wasn't very focused and not having a lot of support sometimes to figure some things out. Left on my own in that case. That was more as a staff person. It's different when you're a staff person, you have different needs than when you're a volunteer committee member. You need more validation. You need

more direction and people to be there and be available more often for input. I would say I didn't always enjoy my staff time, because it was very different. It's not that it was bad work ever. It was more that it was never as energising as the stuff as a volunteer.

The experience with the facilitating group was clearly the most negative experience for the group members over their history. However, the women were not angry or resentful at each other, rather they helped each other through to the conflict resolution stage. Another least favourite memory was a lament that the group was overwhelmed by lack of time to do the work together. Also, WHIM meetings are not child friendly zones and it is difficult for mothers to bring their children. If WHIM ever recruits actively, they will have to adjust for this in order to better accommodate mothers with children.

The final least favourite memory mentioned was the lack of support for a member who was hired as staff by WHIM. This raises an interesting issue about how different it is to be working for pay, as opposed to volunteering. It has been a frequent occurrence for WHIM over their history to pay an honorarium to a member who agrees to serve in the role of project co-ordinator. It is expected that the staffperson will be responsible to a far greater degree that the volunteer workers. So, what if the staffperson felt left out on her own? Or what if the group doesn't feel satisfied with the quality of the work? Many scenarios could come out of this type of arrangement that could affect the future dynamics of the group. Is there room for the members of WHIM to express their concerns openly and honestly with one another? From my observation, it does seem that WHIM members can express their feelings openly to one another, which is to their credit. I would hypothesise that in many other small, informal groups such a potentially conflictual situation could spell disaster for group cohesion.

Funding

The issue of staff versus member responsibilities, brings up the topic of funding.

The literature on women's groups describes that lack of financial resources is a major factor limiting the success of the women's movement, and a source of conflict between and within feminist groups (Burt, 1986; Huang, 1998; Schreader, 1990; Morrow, 1997). This was confirmed by a WHIM member who stated

> I know when the staff person ended up leaving and not being paid, it slowed down how often everyone got together and met. It really affected group cohesion and it's unfortunate that groups like ours don't have operational funding. That would make a difference in terms of the kinds of activities we could take on. We always limit ourselves to what's manageable from a volunteer perspective.

While financial worries limit the scope of the group's activities, the women do not appear to let it paralyse them. They still think 'big', even without having any source of secure funding. As was related during the focus group discussion

> Our first process is to really create with ideas and discussions. What is it we want to do? To build on that, have some fun with it, and then get real strategic about it. One of the strategies is, 'how do we fund it?' But we don't let the lack of resources cut off the view or the potential of what we want. Then we get real smart about using resources we have and where else might we go. I've always found that refreshing because too often conversations get limited by what the bank book says.

> We have spent a fair amount of time looking for money and resources, but I agree with you, we don't start there. In the old days, we had Sec State grants and some summer employment projects. But again, it's always small amounts of money and we try to be as creative as possible with a few thousand dollars.

> It's great [that feminist groups can get government money]. That's the role of democracy, the social safety net. Democracy embraces saying there's room to have these debates when the goal is about making our world a better place. We're the taxpayers. The government is there because of us, so I see it as my share. I am frustrated when you have groups that co-opt their vision as a result of funding, where they can't manoeuvre any more. You find that over time they become more and more rigid and then not relevant in terms of the role that they originally had.

> **But when you're getting your money from a very mainstream source, how do you stay marginal?**

> But if you got that funding and they knew who you were and the kind of work that you were going to be doing, then it's really important to try and not

lose sight of that. To figure out that process internally where you can keep that connection. It becomes too easy to go along with things and make little compromises. With time that can really undermine the group, unfortunately. But you're right, to try and remain creative and true, to keep your principles. I also agree that the money should be coming to us. Groups do a tremendous amount of free consulting to government that's extremely unacknowledged. It's a huge pool of expertise.

I think it's the new way to burn us out.

Yes, but over the years, the expertise and the energy that went into those briefs. We can be cynical about what happened to all those comments, but they sharpened our analysis and were part of our struggles. That's still why we're here, the struggle with the state. We either engage and demand resources, or we deal with no resources, but we learn in the process. It's discouraging because the same brief that we did on the patent legislation, we did a poorer version now on the health protection branch because we had less time. It was like fifteen years ago.

Although I agree that's a real pitfall groups tend to fall into when chasing government funding, to change their focus to fit the funding criteria, I've known groups that have not had any government funding and have been just as concerned about not treading on any government toes. Groups lose sight of the fact that remaining grounded in your goal, purpose and accountability is primarily to their grassroots membership and not to whatever their funding source is.

WHIM members clearly recognise the advantages and disadvantages of accepting government funding. However, since the changes to the funding guidelines of the Secretary of State Women's Program, WHIM could not get government money anymore anyway. For the nature of the WHIM group, this is a drawback. This does not free them up to better challenge the system from an alternative position, because WHIM works within the framework of engaging with the state and striving for change from within. The lack of access to funding sources hampers the group's abilities in a way that may prove more and more debilitating if other supports can not be found.

Current Relationships

Bearing in mind that several members of the group have been meeting together, on and off, for fifteen years I wanted to explore how they viewed their relationships currently.

They described

> I like them and they are colleagues in that setting. I don't think we do anything outside of that. In terms of the networking, they are great bunch of women.

> I consider some of the members my friends and I feel that I have really strong relationships with them, a few key people. Some are more acquaintances, but still it's very cordial, very friendly.

> Some periods over the last ten or so years I've been much more connected. I seldom see the other women in my work or in other activities. When I do get to meetings now I don't have the same continuous history, except with the people who have been involved for a long, long time. There's a few people that I still feel very comfortable with. Others, I'm always feeling if I had have gone to two or three meetings in a row I'd be at a more comfortable level. That impacts on my sense of comfort with the group as a whole and my sense of membership.

> I certainly think it's friendly. I don't meet with them outside of the WHIM meetings other than XXXXXX, whom I have spent more time with both at a work level and personal level.

> It's a nice group to work with. In many ways it was a social network for them and it remains that.

> I wouldn't say I had friendships with them, but I feel like they're friends in the sense that if I needed something I feel free to ask them.

> We've become quite a close knit group. I would say I have different relationships with each of them, but feel that with any of them I could call them up any time. We could debrief on things. I value each of the real relationships there have been.

The descriptions point out that the women have positive feelings about their

relationships with each other, and they know they could comfortably turn to one another if

they felt the need. This echoes the mention of support and connection as reasons for

valuing the group. I wanted to explore in more depth the reasons behind their continued,

and in some cases very long-term, involvement with WHIM.

Why be in WHIM?

Throughout the other sections, several motivating factors for being involved with

WHIM have been mentioned indirectly. During our interviews, I asked each woman to

directly explain the reasons behind her involvement with the group. Many of the responses were identical, so here is a sampling offered in response to the question; What motivates you to remain an active member of WHIM?

Validation for my own beliefs. That's something I get as a result of being in the group. Sharing. A sense of community. There are some others who look at the world the way I do and see the things that are possible. Friendship, definitely, and it's been a way that I've managed to stay in touch and build relationships with people that continue to mean a lot to me. It's been a way of sharing information, so that we can all stay informed in the other work we do. The checking in- a lot of that is networking. We're strategising and networking and it seems so natural for us to just be doing that all the time. I find that rewarding as well.

I probably would say that I question whether I am an active member. I think I'm a fringe member. And what motivates me? My motivation ebbs and flows and it waxes and wanes, but it's curiosity. WHIM introduces a different world to me. I keep having the hope that my personal life will stabilise a bit so it will be easier coming to the actual meeting times. That's actually a big challenge in that it has a negative impact on my personal life and there's a significant cost, which seems silly because it's one evening a month or something. Yet, it's a challenge and I'm sure things will get easier. I hope a few years down the line, if I can keep some connection, that I'll be able to participate in a more wholehearted way.

I stay on WHIM because I don't have the energy to leave. I do like the people. It's a good social network. If something really interesting came up I would likely go do something else. I come from the school of 'you've got to put your money where your mouth is' and if you're not prepared to lead then don't criticise those that think they are. I'm not prepared to go into a leadership role, so I put up with what I get.

Well, what we talked about that [focus group] night. The other women, and it's satisfying overall to be part of it. You have to get something out of it to continue. I do believe that we've had some really valuable things. I'm not prepared to give it up yet. We'll just see where it goes, but it is the other women and the fact we share past history, some common values, goals and can see some creative things.

Well, it's been a learning experience. It's been a connection to those women. It's been the satisfaction of knowing that we're doing something, that I'm doing something active. I'm not just thinking about it or wondering what I can do and it broadens my horizons, for sure. It helps me to know what's going on, because there's such a diverse group of women that there's always learning.

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One of the things that keeps me going is the relationship with the women and the support and the affirmations and just the goodies that you get from being together and knowing them. So, that's what I get personally and I also learn a lot just from being part of the group and the kinds of activities that they are involved in.

The validation, sharing, sense of community, connection to the other women, friendship, shared beliefs, values, goals, and history, networking, learning, and the opportunity to be active are the motivators for remaining involved with WHIM.

The focus group and individual interviews produced a wealth of material, which has been highlighted here. Summary conclusions based on the information WHIM has shared with me appear in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

Limitations of the Study

This research provides a case study, Women's Health Interaction Manitoba, to add to the knowledge about women's groups in Canada. Because this study is limited to one group, it cannot be assumed to speak for the workings of all groups in Winnipeg, in Manitoba, or within the Canadian women's movement as a whole. The study is also limited in the extent to which it is comprehensive about the history of WHIM. Only the women involved within the last three years have been interviewed. There have been other members over the group's fifteen year history whose voices do not appear in this text.

Summary and Conclusions

This research has brought to light many aspects of how WHIM operates. It can be said that WHIM is a women-only activist group that is political and feminist. WHIM is an informal small group with a structure loosely based on the collectivist model. It uses a consensus-based decision making process for the major group decisions. WHIM members attempt to employ a distinctly feminist process, marked by the sharing of responsibility, open communication, sharing of information, inclusiveness and support.

The literature on women's organising pointed to possible classifications of groups within the Canadian women's movement (Burt, 1986; Burt, 1990; Brisken, 1992; CRIAW, 1987). WHIM falls into the category of an integrationist group who engages with the current system and attempts to apply pressure for change from within. Out of the categories for feminist health groups specifically, WHIM is in the category of political action organisations, as opposed to self-help.

Compared to the Women of the North group profiled by CRIAW (1987), WHIM is similar in not having membership fees or government funding, but having flexibility in

terms of fluctuating time commitments of members. The enticements for women to participate, namely the support of the group and the energy and commitment of the other women are similar as well. A difference is that WOTN meet in a member's home and advertise their meetings publicly, in addition to having a different set of issues to focus on.

The MUMS group (CRIAW, 1987) shares with WHIM a strong element of support for their group members. Personal lives are not separated from group life. MUMS is different from WHIM in their practice of actively recruiting new members, operating with a larger group (up to twenty people), and being made up mostly poor women. Like WHIM members, some MUMS also report feeling burnt out at times from their involvement with the group.

WHIM and Pandora (CRIAW, 1987) are similar in their conceptions about the political nature of their work, valuing work in a women-only environment, and attempting to operate using a non-hierarchic, consensus-oriented process. However, major differences exist between their workloads and outcomes. Pandora has to meet non-negotiable production deadlines for their newspaper, while WHIM's efforts swing from intense work to periods of dormancy.

Amethyst (1995) and WHIM share a similar premise that the social and economic context of women's lives affects their health. Amethyst also reports little success at reaching out to rural women, like WHIM. The two groups also compare in placing a value on validating their perspectives through sharing their stories in the group and having hope for their group despite long struggles with structure and process. Amethyst differs greatly because it is a service provider with a large staff and volunteer base.

WHIM shares both similarities and differences with Women of the North, Mothers United for Metro Shelter, Pandora and Amethyst Women's Addictions Service. Women's groups mobilise around so many different issues and in so many different ways, it is hard to

generalise about how women's groups operate in a broad sense. While WHIM operates like certain other groups profiled in the literature on the Canadian women's movement, I conclude that it is a more unique style of group. WHIM stands out from other groups for their longevity, their shifting amorphous structure that adapts to change, their mix of local and national projects, being sheltered by a community-based feminist clinic, and for their perseverance despite lack of funding and limited volunteer time. The women themselves could not think of other groups that operated in just the way that WHIM does.

This research has confirmed how important it is for women to organise in a women-only environment. In general, for a variety of reasons, women do not operate as effectively to their full potential in mixed gender settings. All women dynamics are important facilitators for participation in the women's movement and other political arenas. The women in WHIM expressed how this feature of their group was very valuable and made them become, and remain, involved.

This research supports Rankin's (1996) claim that place is extremely important to the nature of women's organising for change. Winnipeg, being peripheral to more major centres, having a historical context of more socialist democratic politics and a strong labour movement, is more conducive to women's activism than other locations. Winnipeg appears to allow for greater group cohesiveness with less competition for resources and members. Several women stated that there is something about Winnipeg that makes it a particularly good site for feminist activism.

This study confirms the assertions by earlier researchers that a flexible and fluid membership system is required to sustain women's groups. Women's groups have to be flexible and allow for varied levels of participation over time and be fluid to accommodate women shifting in and out of the active core of the group. I discovered that both of these

elements are present in WHIM and were mentioned by the women as necessary preconditions to their involvement.

As expected from reading related literature, I found the issue of making time to remain involved in WHIM a challenge for the women interviewed. All of the members reported that it took effort to carve out time for working with WHIM from the rest of their personal responsibilities. These women, perhaps like all women, have limited free time for volunteer work in the women's movement. This issue of time is related to money. Women need a certain amount of economic comfort and security to afford the transportation costs to get to a meeting, to pay for child care and so forth. Poorer women might not have been able to come together in the way that WHIM members have.

Leadership roles within the group emerged as an important issue out of this research. While WHIM has a collective style mindset, it cannot operate as a true collective because of the restraints in terms of time to meet and the inability of all of its members to commit to participate equally. The workload ends up being distributed unevenly and responsibility is not shared equally by all of the women. Certain women end up playing larger roles within the group. This creates informal leadership over time, which has been true in WHIM's case. The issue of leadership is one worth examination in studies of feminist groups in order to discover how 'feminism in the ideal' can differ greatly from 'feminism in the real'.

WHIM illuminated how important and "empowering" group action can be. The energy that comes from collaborating together is an outcome of their work which is important at the personal level, regardless of whether or not their group efforts facilitated political action and social change. This output of the group is not easily measurable and of no interest to potential funders. This results in the devaluation of the personal validation, confidence-building, empowering and supportive aspects of women's organising. As

motivating factors behind women coming together and organising for change, this unfortunate erasure of the personal from the political has been a deficit in previous studies of women's political involvement. This research has proven how crucial it is to examine women's groups with this value set, to focus on effective group process and success for the women involved at the immediate personal level. A suggestion for future research would be to explore these motivating factors in more depth.

When evaluating WHIM in terms of effective political mobilisation and resultant social change, one must bear in mind that we likely will never know in a direct way what effects the group has had over the years. My evaluation is that WHIM has been successful at the very least through sustaining the political action of its members, and through reaching out to other women with consciousness raising initiatives. I believe their activism has in some way contributed to social change and will continue to in the future.

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           Twenty-Five Years of Women's Activism in English Canada*. Ruth Roach Pierson,
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    1987   *Health Network Update:* Issue #1, June. Winnipeg: WHIM.

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            Proposal). Winnipeg: WHIM.

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APPENDIX 1:   INTERVIEW GUIDE

Review consent form and ethical safeguards. Begin interview with factual questions first and then move into opinion questions.

1. What is your age? Education level? Profession?

2. How long have you been a member of Women's Health Interaction Manitoba?

3. How did you learn about the group and become a member?

4. Are you representing your place of work or an agency/foundation? Or are you an individual member?

5. Did you know any of the other members before you joined? How would you describe your current relationships with the other women?

6. Describe your role with the group?

7. If pressed to describe the group, what adjectives or labels would you use?

8. How do you feel about the group?

9. What does feminism mean to you? Is WHIM a *feminist* health group? Why or why not?

10. What have been the key issues WHIM has mobilized around in your time with the group? What were the main activities?

11. What have been the most effective lobbying, advocacy and awareness-raising strategies?

12. Do you feel WHIM is effective in working towards political action and social change? Compared to accomplishments of other women's health groups you are aware of, how does WHIM measure up in your opinion?

13. Is your work radical?

14. What is your opinion of the current project to develop a play for popular education about the effects of health care reform on Manitoban women?

15. Are you in other women's groups? If so, what is the level of your commitment? Discuss the role volunteer work with women's groups plays in your life. Where does WHIM fit on your priority list?

16. What motivates you to remain an active member of WHIM? What rewards do WHIM members receive for their investments of time and energy?

17. Please offer your definition of the word "empowerment". Does this group "empower" you?

18. An apparently common concern of women within the women's movement is time. How to strike the balance between family, friends, work, leisure time and activism? How do you negotiate your time and establish limits?

19. The common measure of use of time is hours of paid work per week. This value system does not take note of how much people do in daily maintenance of themselves, their families and their homes. Likewise, the same omission is true for the work of activists. Women's volunteer work both within the women's community and larger society is not accounted for. If you were to estimate how much time in a week (or by the month) you spend, what would it be in total? What would it be for WHIM only?

20. Do you feel that the contributions women's groups like WHIM make to the community are recognized? Why or why not?

21. Has burnout been a factor for you with relation to WHIM? Other groups?

22. There has been a call for feminists to be more inclusive of women of different sexual orientations, ethnic backgrounds, classes, abilities, educational levels, and ages. Describe the aim of diversity in relation to the WHIM group?

23. What do you feel are the largest barriers to women getting involved and becoming active in the women's movement?

24. How does the dynamic differ from mixed gender groups you may be in? What is the "culture" of an all-woman group, in your opinion? What are the inner dynamics? What is it like to participate?

25. What are your views on the position of women's groups in relation to the Canadian state?

26. What are your favorite memories of the group over the time you have been with them? Least favorite?

27. This next question is an attempt to be reflexive about any influence I may have had over the group, as a member and then as a researcher. What is your opinion of my participation and attendance at the meetings since late October of 1996? Have I affected the group's dynamic in any way? If so, how?

28. How do you feel about being studied for thesis research in anthropology? Would things have been different if I had been a male studying your group?

29. What do you think of this interview?

30. Do you have anything more you would like to add before we end the interview? Either about WHIM or about this interview?

31. Any questions for me about this project?

Reassure informant that the responses were helpful and appreciated. Thank her for doing the interview. Promise a copy of the thesis if she would like one.

APPENDIX 2:   INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I, _____ , have discussed the terms and themes of this interview (refer to the Interview Request Letter) with Jennifer Duggan, have had a chance to ask any questions about it, and now consent to be interviewed by her.

- I agree to participate in this research carried out by her as part of her master's thesis program in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Manitoba.
- I consent to be interviewed about my experiences, but understand that I have control over the topics of discussion and am under no obligation to answer any unwanted questions.
- I also understand that I may terminate the interview(s) at any time. I may also withdraw from the study at any time without any disadvantage to myself.
- I understand that information I provide, and select verbatim quotes from our interview exchange, may be included in the final thesis document, which will be defended publicly, placed in the university library, and possibly presented at an academic conference and/or published. I consent to this sharing of my information.
- I understand that if I have any questions or concerns I may contact Jennifer Duggan's thesis advisor, Dr. William Koolage.

CHECKLIST: *I have read, understood and agree with the following checked items.*
- I agree to the audiotaping of the interview.   YES ___ NO ___
  I understand that the audio tape will be erased at the conclusion of this thesis research, or become my property if I so choose.

- I understand the limits to anonymity and still consent to an interview. YES ___ NO ___
  I understand that my name and any identifying information will not be used in any reporting of the project. I will be provided with a pseudonym. (Refer to Interview Request Letter for explanation of the limits to anonymity.) Because I have checked NO above, I decline to be interviewed at this time.

Signature: _____   **Date:** _____

My signature below demonstrates that I, Jennifer Duggan, also consent to the terms negotiated for this interview, and am bound by them.

Signature: _____   **Date:** _____

Interviewer: Jennifer Duggan   Advisor: Dr. William Koolage
               12 - 205 Arlington Street   452 University College
               Winnipeg, MB   University of Manitoba
               R3G 1Y6   Winnipeg, MB
               phone: 783-1036 (home)   R3T 2N2
                        474-6694 (office)   phone: 474-9120 (office)

APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Women's Health Interaction Manitoba
Group Interview Questions

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1. What do you see as the role of WHIM within the women's health movement?

2. Is there a definition of feminism shared by WHIM members? If so, what is it?

3. I would describe you as feminist activists. Do you agree? If so, what does it mean to you to be a feminist activist? Are there particular principles guiding your actions as feminist activists? *For example, an attempt to employ a consensus-based decision making model.*

4. Does WHIM organize in resistance to any particular body? Who or what is the opposition that you attempt to influence?

5. If WHIM and other feminist health groups did not exist, what do you think it would be like for women health care consumers in Canada?

6. What are the processes WHIM goes through to organize a lobby effort / event / project on an issue? What are the conditions under which WHIM organizes that affect your level of success?

7. The records indicate that the original organizational structure envisioned for WHIM was to consist of a coordinator plus a core steering committee, along with the regular membership. The steering committee members would be from the different subgroups, such as activities, regional base building, research, publications and others as needed. How has the structure of WHIM changed over time? How would you describe the current structure? What events were behind any changes?

8. How does work become divided and shared by WHIM members? In your opinions are there effective structures in place to facilitate this? How does the level of commitment to sharing of the work load affect the types and number of projects WHIM undertakes?

9. How does WHIM compare / contrast to other feminist groups you may belong to? Is there anything particularly unique or beneficial? Is there anything you think could be improved following the example of other groups?

10. How does the fluid membership affect the group? What happens to the dynamic as former members leave and new women join?

11. Discuss the issue of getting funding for your projects. Who are your potential funders? Has the availability of funding cycled since 1984?

12. The activity levels of WHIM appear to have cycled over time. Can you explain the conditions behind the less active to the very active periods over the group's history? In your opinion, what were the peak years?

13. In 1987, WHIM was described as a volunteer organization of over 100 individuals, and community organizations. Was this the peak of WHIM as a network? What variables have affected the size and scope of the group over its history? What is WHIM's current status as a network?

14. WHIM has persisted from 1984 to now, 14 years, which makes it a long-standing group within the women's community in Winnipeg. Explain the reasons behind the success in longevity for the WHIM group.

15. The original purpose of WHIM was to "inform and educate women in Manitoba, to encourage community action, to assist in developing health support networks as required, and to act as a resource center for information on any / all aspects of health care." Discuss whether you feel WHIM has and is achieving these original goals, or not.

Additional Questions
(if time permits)

16. Discuss the role volunteer work with women's groups plays in your lives?

17. Has burnout been a factor for WHIM members?

18. Please provide your views on the context for feminist organizing in Manitoba and Canada. For example, what is the political climate? What are the prevalent social values?

19. Do you feel that the contributions women's groups like WHIM make to the community are recognized? Why or why not?

20. What do you think are the major women's health issues for women in Winnipeg? In Manitoba? In Canada as a whole?

APPENDIX 4: ETHICS STATEMENT

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS REVIEW
Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba

ETHICS STATEMENT

Investigator: JENNIFER DUGGAN

Masters Thesis Title:
WOMEN'S ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A FEMINIST HEALTH GROUP IN WINNIPEG

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY ETHICS GUIDELINES

Rights of the Individual

This research is being conducted with a group of 12 to 18 adult women, who together comprise the group Women's Health Interaction Manitoba (WHIM). The plans for this thesis research have been previously discussed formally with this group during one of their set meetings. At that time, a motion was made to have the group's consent to participate be reflected in the minutes. Therefore, the minutes represent an informal group consent.

In addition, consent will be negotiated individually after a clear description of the thesis proposal. The consultant will be given an opportunity to ask any questions she may have. The consultant will be asked to read and sign the formal written consent form (see attached). Among other points, the consent form explains that she has the right to refuse to answer any unwanted questions, can call the interview to close at any time and withdraw from the study without any disadvantage to herself.

The interview(s) will be held individually with each group member in private. The interview notes will remain in my possession and will be stored in my home. If consent is given to audiotape the interviews, the tapes will be safeguarded at my home and only listened to by myself and the consultant who is recorded on the tape. The tapes will be erased after the research is completed, or given to the consultants, if they so desire.

I will attempt to describe the WHIM members and the group as a whole, and in an accurate and respectful manner.

Informed Consent

The population under study is an educated one, with all consultants possessing some education after high school. Many have undergraduate degrees, a few have masters degrees and one has a Ph.D. In general terms, they are all capable, literate and possess a high level of comprehension of my research plans. No special measures, such as a translator, are required to ensure that an informed consent has been given.

A clear description of my research, drawn from my approved thesis proposal, will be provided prior to any negotiation of consent. There will be unlimited time for questions to be asked about the nature of the research and the particulars of the consent form.

The consultants will be provided with the address and phone number of my thesis advisor, Dr. William Koolage, in case they may wish to address any questions and concerns to him.

I will not coerce any members of WHIM to be interviewed if they decline my interview request.

To address points of Part 13 of the Department of Anthropology Ethics Guidelines, see attached letter.

Deception

No essential information will be withheld form "subjects" and neither will they be intentionally misled about procedures and purposes of this research project.

Risk and Benefit

There are no foreseeable physical, psychological, humane, proprietary or cultural risks to participating in these interviews, or this thesis research in general. I am not operating any experiment which could put my consultants at risk physically. I will not be probing for any information which could be upsetting psychologically or emotionally for my consultants. If they refuse to elaborate, or seem upset during the interview, the question will be dropped and the interview called to a close, if they wish. At group meetings or events, I will not be attempting to alter the normal interactions of the group.

Privacy

If a consultant wishes to have her identify protected, no identifying information about her physical and mental condition, personal circumstances and private social relationships shared with me will be revealed. (The limits to which I can guarantee anonymity is described in more detail below.) Indeed, the information elicited will be confined to their public participation in the WHIM group and their private thoughts and feelings about this participation. Private, intimate details of their personal lives are not of concern to this thesis research. If they share information which they do not wish to appear in the thesis document, it will remain in my confidence.

Since I am interviewing women who are from my own Canadian culture, we likely share a similar concept of privacy. I will not make public any information which is typically considered private in our society.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

If a consultant requires a guarantee of anonymity, a pseudonym will be provided. Also, a discussion will be held about what characteristics of her personality and personal life would make her identifiable, despite a pseudonym. These characteristics will either not be mentioned in the thesis document, or will be changed. However, there are no guarantees of anonymity. The members of WHIM are in a small group and visible in the women's community. We can work to make it as hard as possible for someone to identify them, but it still may be possible. In addition, each member of the group may be recognizable to the other WHIM member as a result of their years of shared experiences. These limits to anonymity will be thoroughly explained to the women before they begin participating in the research.

If a consultant wishes to have her own name attached to the information she provides, I will honor her request. I anticipate that WHIM members may not be averse to being identified as participants in WHIM. All consultants will have a chance to read over any verbatim quotations attributed to them in the thesis document.

Obviously, the members of WHIM know each other well and have shared many experiences with each other. I cannot, because of this history, guarantee anonymity for a consultant from other members of the group. Every effort will be made to achieve true anonymity but this is a small group setting. The risk of this will be told to each consultant, as previously outlined. I will attempt, to the extent possible in this case, to guard against any indirect or unwitting disclosure of identity of subjects by association or combination of information.

Research on Captive and Dependent Populations

Not applicable.

Research on Children

Not applicable.

Library and Archival Research

Not applicable.

Acquisition and Use of Cultural Properties

Not applicable.

Research on other Cultures, Countries, and Ethnic Groups

While there are WHIM members who are from "ethnic" groups, they are also full Canadian citizens and not at any power disadvantage in relation to me. Not applicable.

NOTE: **Regarding Participant Observation**

I have always been spending time with WHIM in the capacity of a full, participating member. The idea to develop a study about the group came after I was already involved and a member, and this additional role was discussed openly with the group. There has been no secrecy and oral group consent was granted. Because of this history, the ethics review statement has concentrated on the interview portion of the research.

Interview Request Letter

Jennifer Duggan
3216 Assiniboine Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3K 0B1

[Insert date], 1998

Dear [WHIM Member],

This letter represents a formal request for an interview with you about your involvement in Women's Health Interaction Manitoba. I will be attempting to interview all members of WHIM and write about the history of this feminist health group for my Masters thesis research in the Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba.

The purpose of this research is to add to the knowledge about women's community organization in Manitoba and Canada. At present, there are only limited studies of women's groups and their work. The realm of feminist organizing and activism remains "behind the scenes" and the influence of the work hidden. By studying WHIM, I will be providing a case study of a long-standing feminist group. This case study will present the history of WHIM, the work done by the group and a description of what it is like for the women who are involved. The research will be an exploration of the 'culture' of this group. The benefits of this research for WHIM is that the group's work and accomplishments in the women's health movement will be documented. The limits to success will also be documented, which may encourage strategizing about how to overcome such barriers in future work. The history will not be lost, plus this example may prove to be useful for other feminist groups. This thesis research may also provide a cause for reflection and help in forming new directions for WHIM.

The main research questions are: Why does WHIM exist? What is the group's mandate? What do WHIM members do and why are you involved? What is the group structure like? What is your role in women's health activism? What is it like to participate and be involved in WHIM?

Agreeing to participate in my research will involve responding to interview questions, and helping to shape the presentation of WHIM by approving quotations and the information shared for release in this thesis document.

There is a risk involved in participating. If you would like your perceptions and reflections to remain anonymous, there are limits to the extent to which I can guarantee anonymity. I can provide a pseudonym and leave out easily identifiable personal characteristics. This may or may not be enough to prevent the public at large from identifying you. However, in the smaller women's community of Winnipeg and certainly in the WHIM group itself, you may be recognized. Of course, you will have an opportunity to approve your representation. Still, if this lack of a guarantee of complete anonymity concerns you, it may be best not to participate. Conversely, if you feel your involvement in WHIM does not require you to need a guarantee of anonymity, I can attach your real name to your observations. I *can* promise to represent WHIM members as fairly and as accurately as possible to the extent of my knowledge.

Please discuss any questions and concerns with me. You will find attached a brief synopsis of my thesis research proposal for your information. As well, a copy of the consent form is included for your review. You may reach me at the numbers and address on the consent form. I will be in touch with you soon.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Duggan

APPENDIX 5: HISTORICAL MATERIALS
FOR
WOMEN'S HEALTH INTERACTION MANITOBA

The following materials are included to help show how WHIM has operated over time and offer a sense of how the women interrelate with each other.

There will be a public meeting at the Broadway Optimist Community Club, 185 Young Street on Tuesday, November 5th at 7:00 p.m. to discuss strategies to empower women on health issues. The discussion will revolve around issues raised in the play Side Effects, as well as the idea of the development of a local women's health network.

Topics on the agenda will include: how to use theatre for community mobilization; how to influence government; how to influence the pharmaceutical industry/ consumer awareness; how to influence health professionals; how to develop supports in the community (self - help groups, services); networking - what it means for women concerned with health issues. (rural/ urban, national, international)

Please attend this important public meeting Tuesday, November 5th at the Broadway Optimist Community Club, 185 Young St.

If you remember...

side effects
a play about women and pharmaceuticals

and are interested in follow up please attend this important public meeting.

WOMEN'S HEALTH INTERACTION

PRESENTS
AN INFORMATION SESSION
ON
THE GENERIC DRUG ISSUE

OCT 29 1986

7-9P.M.

NORQUAY BUILDING AUDITORIUM

401 YORK AVENUE

AGENDA

SPEAKER: Pros and Cons of Generic Drugs
Question Period
Sharing Information

....................SEE YOU THERE, BRING A FRIEND.....................

WOMEN'S HEALTH INTERACTION MANITOBA
Membership Form

☐ Individual Fee $5.00   ☐ Organization $20

   I/We would like to become a member of Women's Health Interaction

NAME:_____

ORGANIZATION/POSITION (if applicable) _____

ADDRESS_____POSTAL CODE_____

TELEPHONE(WORK) _____ HOME_____

Cheque/Money Order is enclosed for $____, payable to:
     Women's Health Interaction Manitoba, 1031 Portage Ave, Wpg,Mb R3G 0R8

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COMMUNITY MEETING of the WOMEN'S HEALTH NETWORK

SUNDAY MARCH 9

1-4 p.m.

YWCA   Room 211A

477 Webb Place

TOPICS

Introduction - Gerri Akman - New Coordinator of WHIMan
Update on Committee Meetings
Suggested Structure of Network

Speaker -   "Native Women's Health Issues"

Film -   "THE ULTIMATE TEST ANIMAL"
Winnipeg Premiere
Discusses the problems in the research and
assessment of Depo Provera (U.S. produced)

Discussion

Update - Manitoba Coalition on Depo Provera

Update - Dalkon Shield

.... REFRESHMENTS ....

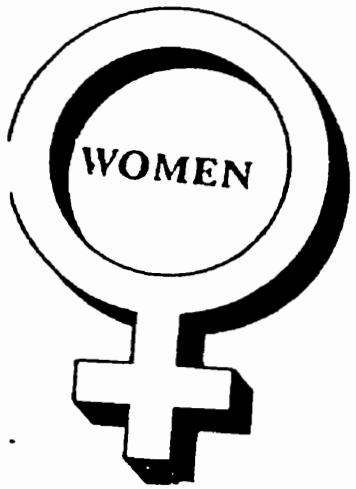Report - Northern Women's Health Conference - Implications for Networking

Discussion - Suggestions as to future strategies

Further information: Please contact Gerri at 124 Nassau
Phone: 4531044 Ex. 32

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WOMEN'S HEALTH INTERACTION MANITOBA

Presents A Panel Discussion on

AND ADDICTIONS

Panelists: Barb Ball (Women's Post Treatment Project)
Veronica Dunn (St. Bonrface Hospital)
Bertha Fontaine (Native Alcoholism Council)
Denise Koss (Alcoholism Foundation Manitoba)
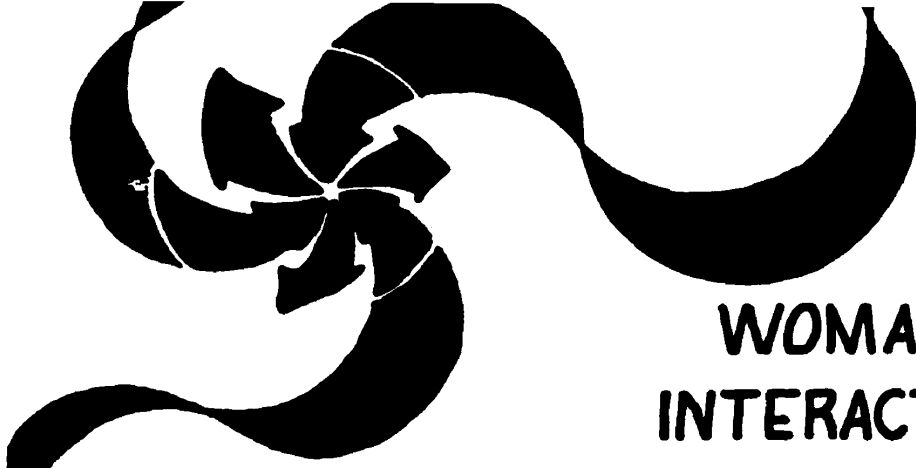
WOMEN

Date: Monday, June 8, 1987

Time: 7:30 P.M.

At: YWCA
447. Webb Place

FREE ADMISSION

Question Period Will Follow

WOMAN'S HEALTH INTERACTION MANITOBA

is holding two FREE workshops

JUNE 7:

BASIC GYNECOLOGY CARE : Are you satisfied ?

This workshop will focus on:
- what needs to be asked in a history,
- breast self exam information,
- and an examination of the tools and techniques of the internal exam.

Ruth Corobow, trained as a Clinical Teaching Associate, U.ofM.

JUNE 14:

WOMEN, ABUSE AND ADDICTIONS: The Links.

A panel discussion . with Barbara Ball, Women's Post Treatment Project and Others

Location: Augustine United Church
           444 River Ave

Workshop entrance is Contemporary Dancers Studio door on Pulford St.

Time: 7:30 - 9:30 P.M.

- Sign interpretation available

  Register by: June 3, Basic Gynecology Care
               June 10, Women, Abuse and Addictions

- Wheelchair accessible

- For more information and signing pre-registration
  Call 786-2106

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WOMEN'S HEALTH INTERACTION MANITOBA

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1998

TIME: 5:30 - 8 PM

PLACE: WOMEN'S HEALTH CLINIC RESOURCE CENTRE
419 GRAHAM AVE - 2ND FLOOR

SUPPER: WILL BE ORDERED - YOU MUST RSVP
BY OCTOBER 20.

AGENDA

1. Nellie McClung Theatre Group will join us to discuss plans for the play on women and health reform. They are keen and have apparently started putting ideas together!

2. Timelines for the play - 1998-99.

3. Individual updates.

4. Jennifer Duggan's thesis on WHIM.

5. Other??

PLEASE RSVP BY OCTOBER 20 IF YOU ARE COMING AND IF SUPPER SHOULD BE ORDERED FOR YOU. (APPROXIMATE COST: $6.00)
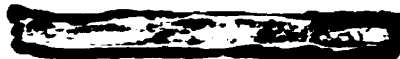
WOMEN'S HEALTH INTERACTION MANITOBA

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: May 30, 1998
TIME: Saturday morning, 9:30 to Noon
PLACE: Women's Health Clinic, 2nd Floor

PROPOSED AGENDA

1. Check-in and introduction of any new members

2. Current status of our proposals for the play

3. Financial report

4. Planning for the next year: options, available resources, upcoming potential grants, etc.
   Are there other things we want to do?

5. CWHN update

6. Other items?

A few words from

Dear Group:
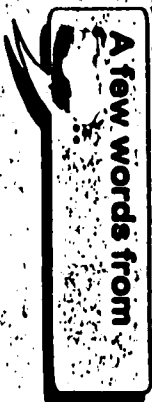
A few of us decided to try the Saturday meeting since it is hard to find an evening. This will probably be the only meeting until the fall and is important re: planning. We have some foundation money, but did not receive the grant from the Prairie Centre of Excellence (letter enclosed). While disappointing, this may free us up to do the play another way.

Try and come to this meeting. PLEASE RSVP ASAP, IF NOT ENOUGH WOMEN ARE AVAILABLE, WE WILL HAVE TO TRY FOR ANOTHER DATE.