Mobilization, Collective Identity and Activism in a Women's Movement Organization in Victoria

by

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ABSTRACT

For the past quarter of a century the women's movement has mobilized an array of resources and brought them under collective control to facilitate social change. The mobilization process, which includes the construction of a collective identity, has revealed conflict at the core of the movement based on two rival frames for understanding oppression.

The politics of identity, a frame which marked the early phase of the women's movement, characterized women as a distinct homogenous group and revealed a systemic asymmetry of power based on gender. The identity frame conceptualized the transformation of women's shared oppression based on an alliance of women everywhere. The emergence of the difference frame in the mid 1980s contested the privileging of gender as the primary category of oppression. The politics of difference drew attention to multiple, interlocking systems of oppression that acknowledge intricate and contradictory power relations and the complexity of organizational strategies.

An understanding of how the mobilization process, which includes the construction of a collective identity, has been shaped by the frames of identity and difference over the past twenty-five years has been examined through nine in-

depth interviews of key activists from the Victoria Status of Women Action Group (SWAG) and historical organization documents.

Aspects of the mobilization process that have been examined include the emergence of SWAG, the financial contradictions it has faced, the development of its cultural resources, and the transformation from a traditional hierarchical organization to a collective approach congruent with feminist principles.

The creation of collective identity has been differentially shaped by the identity and difference frames. The identity frame has guided the creation of an impermeable boundary based on an underlying biological commonality among women. The difference frame has not directed an attempt to define a cross-cultural, transhistoric set of criteria to establish boundaries. Consciousness, as guided by the identity frame, has defined women as a distinct, homogeneous group whose oppression has been enforced through the unidirectional, top-down exertion of power. Self transformation has been accorded priority as a strategy for effecting change. The difference frame has placed an awareness of multiple, interlocking systems of stratification at the centre of consciousness. Cooperative efforts aimed at both personal and structural relations of power are needed for a coalition approach to social change.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past quarter of a century the women's movement has worked for social change. During this period the movement has mobilized an array of resources and brought them under collective control to facilitate political action (Ferree and Hess, 1985; Freeman, 1975). Part of this mobilization process has included the creation of a collective identity. Yet the construction of this vital aspect of movement mobilization has revealed conflict at the core of the contemporary women's movement (Adams, 1989; Alcoff, 1989; hooks 1988; Mohanty, 1992; Nicholson, 1994). Collective identity, along with other aspects of the mobilization process, has been differentially shaped by two innovative and rival approaches for an understanding of gender oppression and the development of political strategies to effect change.

One approach, which has been termed the politics of identity, marked the early phase of the movement and created a politics based on the similarities among women. The politics of identity frame conceptualized women as a distinct, homogeneous group and revealed a systemic asymmetry of power based on gender (Daly, 1978; Morgan, 1984). Accordingly, the transformation of women's shared oppression was contingent upon an alliance of women everywhere. This innovative frame attracted new members to the movement and helped to politicize a range of common conventional activities traditionally excluded from

the sphere of politics.

Despite the explanatory power of the identity frame in some contexts, an alternate frame, called the politics of difference, emerged in the mid 1980s to contest the ideology and the strategies by which the movement had organized for change. The difference frame has been derived in part from the politicization of a variety of other shared collective experiences that could not be understood under the hierarchy of gender oppression (Bourne, 1987; hooks, 1988; Lorde, 1984). The politics of difference has contested the privileging of a universal, homogeneous identity and has drawn attention to multiple systems of stratification, in which gender forms only one axis. The difference frame moved from the fixed and unequivocal categories of oppressor/ oppressed to an acknowledgement of the complex and contradictory power relations that shift with different axes of stratification (Adams, 1989; Spelman, 1988; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990). Accordingly, an understanding of how the mobilization process, which includes the construction of a collective identity, has been shaped by the frames of identity and difference is critical to account for activists' support for and participation in movement activity over the past twenty-five years.

To examine how the mobilization process has been guided by the frames of identity and difference, I selected the Victoria Status of Women Action Group (SWAG) for critical case study. SWAG is the oldest, continuously-operating feminist organization in Victoria, yet it has been virtually absent from the

scholarly literature to date. Many of the movement documents, such as its newsletter, were available from the archival collection at the organization and some documents were found at Provincial Legislative Library. This permitted an examination of how the frames of identity and difference had shaped the organization over the span of a quarter of a century. Finally, many of SWAG's longer-serving key activists remain in Victoria and were willing to share through the interview process examples and insights into how the activists constructed a collective identity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the sociological literature on social movements, the resource mobilization perspective draws attention to the pragmatic acquisition and maintenance of collectively controlled resources. For this perspective, resources are defined broadly to included both material and non-tangible resources such as organizational facilities, finances, legitimacy and political opportunity (Canel, 1992; Freeman, 1983). Mobilization refers to the process of bringing these resources under the collective control of the movement and the use of these assets to pursue social change (McAdam et al., 1988; McCarthy and Zald, 1977). A common criticism of this perspective points out that its instrumental account of collective action focuses on the mobilization of resources with little attention accorded to the ideological elements that guide this process (Cohen, 1985;

Jenkins, 1983).

Initially rooted explicitly in resource mobilization theory, the conceptual framework advanced by Snow et al. (1986) provides a theoretical link between the mobilization of resources and the mobilization of movement participants. The focus of this approach, which has been termed frame analysis, draws attention to the interpretive work that movements engage in to render an innovative and meaningful understanding of common events and conditions that inspire individuals and groups to collectively pursue social change (Snow et al., 1986; Snow and Benford, 1992). Framing is an active process that creates a shared alternate interpretation of unjust political situations which allows for the generation of support for and participation in social movement activity. Yet successful recruitment alone does not translate into sustained social movement participation without the creation of a collective identity.

The creation of a collective identity is a pivotal aspect of the mobilization process (Gamson, 1992). Failure to create a collective identity results in "the disintegration of collective action" (Melucci, 1989:218). Collective identity is necessary to maintain members' commitment and involvement in movement activity over time. The approach developed by Taylor and Whittier (1992) provides a framework to examine how activists create a collective identity. The concepts for collective identity include the establishment of <u>boundaries</u> and the development of <u>consciousness</u>.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Interviews were selected to examine how activists construct collective identity. There has been minimal empirical research and interviews allow for the subjective meanings viewed from the perspective of the movement activists to inform the understanding of how the frames of identity and difference have shaped the creation of a collective identity. The interviews were in-depth, semi-structured and informal. The interview questions were grouped around the concepts of boundaries and consciousness and were constructed to allow for variation in how the participants negotiated a collective identity.

Three criteria were used for the selection of participants. The participants needed to be presently or formerly in a leadership position within SWAG, nominated by two SWAG members, and in view of financial and time constraints, residents of Victoria. The leadership and nomination criteria were adopted to identify key activists as they would know not only the issues and what changes took place, but also how and why, since most of them were intimately involved in the process of collective identity construction.

PRESENTATION OF CHAPTERS

The chapter following this introduction examines the resource mobilization perspective and the incorporation of the ideological focus of frame analysis for a more comprehensive understanding of the mobilization process. This chapter also

examines collective identity as a marginalized yet vital aspect of movement mobilization. This is followed by a detailed theoretical examination of the politics of identity and difference within contemporary feminist literature.

The second chapter describes the epistemological assumptions and methodological considerations that guide the data gathering process. This includes the selection of social movement organization and participants, the interview process, and the procedure for the data analysis.

The third chapter draws on both the interpretive focus of frame analysis and the pragmatic approach of resource mobilization theory to examine some of the varied activities that SWAG has engaged in over the past quarter of a century. It examines how aspects of the mobilization process have been shaped by the frames of identity and difference. This chapter explores the emergence of the organization, the financial contradictions it has faced, the development of its cultural resources, and the transformation from a traditional hierarchical organization to a collective approach congruent with feminist principles.

The fourth chapter examines how the frames of identity and difference have shaped the construction of collective identity within SWAG. It looks at the creation and permeability of boundaries that define and locate movement members from others. The development of consciousness as fostered by the identity and difference frame is explored. It looks at the beliefs and goals of the activists according to their understanding of power relations and the

organizational strategies informed by the identity and difference frames.

The final chapter draws together the previous chapters and presents a summary of the project.

CHAPTER ONE

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Theorists engaged in the examination of social movements are increasingly attending to the processes of mobilizing and sustaining the commitment of movement activists. The second wave of feminist activism, like other social movements, has faced the ongoing challenge of creating support for and participation in social movement activity. Yet notably absent in the field of social movement research is an examination of the long-term mobilization of activists in the women's movement. The contemporary women's movement provides an exceptional opportunity to explore features of the mobilization process for it is a social movement with a conflict at its core.

The conflict is rooted in the movement's framing of women as sharing a common identity to guide the organization and implementation of strategies for social change. This frame, termed the politics of identity, conceptualizes women as a unified, homogeneous group that needs to act collectively as an alliance to transform their shared oppression. Conversely, the politics of difference frame rejects the subordination of difference that is required to make a gendered identity as women visible. The politics of difference frame destabilizes the presumed commonalities that unite all women by offering a direct, conscious critique of the politics of identity, and by contesting the strategies that guide the

movement in its pursuit of change. An understanding of how the frames of identity and difference have shaped the mobilization process is critical to account for activists' support for and participation in movement activity for the past quarter of a century.

The chapter begins with a description of resource mobilization theory which is followed by an examination of recent efforts to incorporate ideological elements, through the concept of collective action frames, into the theoretical framework. The third section looks at the concept of collective identity as a theoretically marginalized yet vital aspect of the mobilization process. The fourth section introduces the frames of identity and difference and how each respectively shapes the pursuit of social change for the contemporary women's movement. The next section provides a theoretical examination of the identity frame. This is followed by an illustration of identity politics within radical feminist theories. The sixth section examines the theoretical development of the politics of difference. The final section looks at two perspectives within postmodernism as extensions derived in part from the difference frame. One approach views the fragmentation as threatening to the very concept of women and to the pursuit of social transformation. Conversely, the other approach explores postmodernism as an opportunity to create a flexible, coalition-based style for organizing social change. The chapter concludes with a summary of the perspective which guides the research project.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY

Until the 1970s, social movement theory was largely an American domain dominated by a collective behaviour approach (Canel, 1992; Scott, 1990). The classical functionalist approach to collective action, as exemplified by Neil Smelser's (1962) Theory of Collective Behaviour, contrasted the rationality of conformity to the social system with the irrationality of non-institutional deviant behaviour. The functionalist perspective, which could not adequately explain the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, has been displaced by the force of criticism condemning the notion that participants in social movements are irrational or deviant individuals. The paradigm shift arose in deliberate opposition to functionalism's emphasis on deprivation and grievances, and the sharp distinction drawn between non-routine and traditional institutionalized action in the collective behaviour studies of the previous decade (Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; McAdam et al., 1988). In turning away from collective behaviour theorists, such as Smelser (1962:8), who states "the beliefs on which collective behaviour is based...are...akin to magical beliefs", the resource mobilization approach refocussed researchers' attention to the task of bringing resources under the collective control of the social movement.

Supplanting the irrationality of the collective behaviour perspective with the rational choice theory of economist Mancur Olson (1965), the resource mobilization approach transformed social movement theory (McCarthy and Zald,

1977). By beginning with the premise that movement participants are rational and well-integrated individuals and groups, resource mobilization theorists take as the principal focus for analysis the strategic and instrumental reasoning of actors who mobilize and manage resources to collectively pursue social change.

For this perspective key factors that effect social change are the availability and creation of resources and the processes of bringing these resources under collective control. Jo Freeman (1983) provides a practical distinction between the material and non-material realm of resources. Material resources include money, organizational facilities, labour, and means of communication. Resources of a non-material or "intangible" nature include people, legitimacy, loyalty, authority, moral commitment, and solidarity (Canel, 1992; Freeman, 1983; Jenkins, 1983; McAdam et al., 1988).

Mobilization is the process by which a group assembles both material and non-material resources and collectively controls them as a means to pursue social action (Canel, 1992; Jenkins, 1983). According to resource mobilization theory, the processes of mobilization are shaped by such things as leadership, organization, political opportunity, and the nature of the political system. Each of these different factors interacts to influence whether the social movement will succeed or fail in its attempt to implement the group's defined goals.

Resource mobilization theory offers a distinctive way of accounting for the "how" of movement formation and collective agency rather than the "why"

(Melucci, 1989). While this perspective has developed innovative theories that are focused on the emergence of a social movement by examining the macromobilization processes, such as changes in the power and opportunity structures (McAdam et al., 1988), it has de-emphasized the importance of ideology and meaning in the mobilization process. In their ground-breaking paper on resource mobilization, John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1973), propose an analysis that focuses exclusively on social movement organizations, stating that attention to movement ideology overestimates the importance of members and potential members to social movements:

> We stress a different approach. Our "resource mobilization" approach emphasizes the resources, beyond membership consciousness and manpower,(sic) that may become available to potential movements. These resources support the growth and vitality of movements and movement organizations. This view does not necessarily deny the existence of grievances. It stresses the structural conditions that facilitate the expression of grievances. (McCarthy and Zald, 1973 in Mueller, 1987:93)

Resource mobilization theory accepts as self-evident that there is injustice, that there is an awareness of it, and that there is dissatisfaction because of it. McCarthy and Zald acknowledge that "there is always enough discontent in any society to supply the grass-roots support for a movement"[1] (McCarthy and Zald, 1977:1215). They maintain that compared with structural considerations the importance of ideology and the interpretation of injustice is "a secondary component in the generation of social movements" (McCarthy and Zald,

1977:1215).

The resource mobilization theory provides an important corrective to the earlier functionalist approach to collective behaviour that accentuated the irrationality and alienation of social movement actors; however, the shift placed the processes by which movement actors interpret and translate grievances and unjust situations into collective action outside the immediate scope of theoretical concern (Canel, 1992; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Snow et al., 1986).

The lack of theoretical attention to both the interpretation of unjust situations and the construction of an oppositional collective identity within the resource mobilization approach has, in part, contributed to a lack of systematic studies of the contemporary women's movement (Ferree and Hess, 1985; Mueller, 1987). There has been minimal documentation specifically of the practices, ideology, organization, and strategies of the contemporary women's movement itself (Adamson et al., 1988; Cunningham et al., 1988; Wine and Ristock, 1991). A classic study of the American women's movement that draws on the resource mobilization approach to examine the formation and early years of movement activism is Jo Freeman's (1975) The Politics of Women's Liberation. Freeman examines the shifting patterns at a macrostructural level within employment, education, and family which helped to set the stage for the emergence of the contemporary women's movement. In addition to the favourable pattern of these structural elements, Freeman points to "cooptable" ideas among a preexisting

communications network that facilitated the participation in the social movement as "the logical thing to do" (Freeman, 1975:68). She explores in detail the two distinct organizational structures that developed early within the American women's movement. Freeman termed one sector 'older' to refer to the more traditional bureaucratic groups and the age of the movement participants and the other sector 'younger' to indicate the emergence of small autonomous groups among younger movement participants (Freeman, 1975:49-50). While Freeman recognizes that "a social movement's primary resource is the commitment of its members" her study, which focuses on the initial development of the contemporary American women's movement, cannot illuminate how members' commitment is sustained over time (Freeman, 1975:101).

Whereas Freeman's analysis concentrated on the emergence of the American women's movement, Myra Marx Ferree and Beth Hess (1985) explore the transformation of the American women's movement and the differences among various feminist groups. In an analysis that reflects on both the formation and the contemporary changes of an expanded American women's movement, Ferree and Hess identify structural changes within employment, education, and political patterns that converged to create an opportunity for the development of the women's movement. In analyzing the transformation of the American women's movement between 1973-83, Ferree and Hess review various social movement organizations' achievements and failures in their pursuit for social

change. However, Jo Freeman points out her review of this book that their analysis provides only a partial understanding of the emergence and transformation of the women's movement because it overlooks the internal dynamics of the movement organizations (Freeman, 1986:65).

While Ferree and Hess have defined social movement success in terms of implementing changes in the traditional sphere of politics, they also draw attention to the importance of mobilizing diverse resources to effect change at both a structural and an individual level. In addition to the concrete resources necessary for collective action, such as specialized skills and material resources, Ferree and Hess maintain that a social movement requires an ideology or "a way of explaining reality that makes sense to potential participants and justifies their involvement" (Ferree and Hess, 1985:26). Their inclusion of elements conventionally deemed outside the theoretical concern of resource mobilization marks an important departure from a classic instrumental account and underscores the difficulty in explaining any social movement that is based on a massive shift in collective consciousness, such as the women's movement.

Similarly, in her study of women in public office before and after the second wave of contemporary feminism, Carol McClurg Mueller (1987) points to the need to expand the resource mobilization framework to address the arbitrary theoretical distinction between resources (means) and outcomes (ends) in identifying success for the women's movement. Mueller states "a shift in

consciousness is one of the defining characteristics of the contemporary women's movement, as indicated in the extensive treatment it receives in *all* the major works that attempt to describe the movement as a totality" (Mueller, 1987:94 emphasis in original)[2]. In short, the women's movement and the ongoing processes of creating and maintaining mobilization are inadequately addressed within the strict instrumental approach of the resource mobilization tradition.

The lack of attention to interpretive issues, such as ideology and collective identity, within the resource mobilization perspective and the focus on strategic-instrumental rationality, resource aquisition, and structural-political processes obscure the breadth and depth of the transformation sought by the women's movement. In theoretical and practical terms, one of the most important and intriguing features of the women's movement is the concern for how to effect change (Adamson et al., 1988). Yet approaches to understanding how to make change have typically been constrained by analyses entrenched in a language of structure and events, rather than agency and strategy (Carroll, 1992). Some theorists, however, are beginning to question the exclusiveness of this focus. In her review of contemporary social movement analysis, Jean Cohen (1985) poses a compelling question:

> Hasn't the critique of the collective behaviour tradition thrown out the baby with bathwater by excluding the analysis of values, norms, ideologies, projects, culture, and identity in other than instrumental terms? (Cohen, 1985:688)

In a comprehensive survey of the contemporary social movement literature, McAdam et al. (1988) acknowledge that the resource mobilization approach has deflected attention away from some of the key aspects of the mobilization process by relegating the interpretation and translation of grievances to a peripheral position. In their assessment, social movement researchers have tended to neglect both "the dynamics of collective action past the emergence of a movement" and "the ongoing accomplishment of collective action" (McAdam et al., 1988:728-729).

Concern for redressing the marginalization of social psychological factors in the analysis of social movements is gaining increased attention by those working within the resource mobilization perspective (Jenkins, 1983; Canel, 1992; Ferree and Miller, 1985). On the rational choice theory of the resource mobilization perspective, Myra Marx Ferree and Frederick Miller (1985) point out that "costs and benefits play a role in generating movement support, but the translation of objective social relationships into subjectively experienced group interests is also critical in building movements" (Ferree and Miller, 1985:39).

A growing appreciation of the importance of socially constructed oppositional practices has led to a shift from the exclusive organizational theory of the resource mobilization perspective to a broader, more inclusive approach that examines the efforts of social movements to create a shared alternative understanding among movement members. In acknowledgement of the previous marginalization of the importance of meaning construction work engaged in by

social movements, William Gamson notes that "many of the major questions animating contemporary work on social movements are intrinsically social psychological" (Gamson, 1992:54).

According to Alberto Melucci (1989), contemporary social movements are engaged in the creation of 'cultural' politics which extends the conception of political action beyond a traditional public political arena. Melucci maintains that visible political action is only one aspect of contemporary social movement mobilization. The activities of contemporary social movements are practised in "the form of networks composed of a multiplicity of groups that are dispersed, fragmented and submerged in everyday life, and which act as cultural laboratories" (Melucci, 1989:60). Put more concretely, a social movement engages in political activity through the creation of a collective identity. In turn, this politicized collective identity may through public actions, such as demonstrations and campaigns, "render power visible" in a resistance to forms of domination interwoven in everyday life (Melucci, 1989:76). The traditional focus of political action, which typically includes the institutionalized political channels, is rejected in favour of non-institutionalized, innovative, norm-breaking, and culturally challenging channels. Accordingly, for many contemporary social movements the "pursuit of an external object or goal is no longer separate from their internal forms" as conceptualized in the resource mobilization approach (Melucci, 1989:74).

While these contemporary critiques by various social movement theorists address different aspects of resource mobilization theory, they share an overarching concern for the marginalization of ideology and the interpretive factors associated with social movement mobilization. In seeking to address these neglected aspects of the resource mobilization approach, a conceptual framework illuminating the processes by which participant mobilization is created has been developed by David Snow and Robert Benford (Snow et al., 1986; Snow and Benford, 1992).

FRAMES AND FRAME ALIGNMENT

Initially rooted explicitly in resource mobilization theory, the conceptual framework advanced by Snow et al., (1986) provides a theoretical link between the mobilization of material resources and the mobilization of movement participants. This approach, termed framing, facilitates an understanding of how movement activists are recruited, which has until recently, been considered peripheral in the resource mobilization perspective. Drawing on Erving Goffman's (1974) work, the term 'frame' refers to an interpretive scheme which allows individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label"[3] events within the context of their life and experiences as well as within the context of the larger world. Framing is an active process of organizing experience and guiding action in a meaningful manner for both an individual and a collective (Snow et al., 1986;

Snow and Benford, 1992). Framing draws attention to a social movement's ability to render a situation meaningful in a manner that inspires individuals and groups to act collectively to create social change.

A social movement needs to articulate a frame or 'worldview' that resonates with events and an individual's experiences in order to bring her/him into the social movement. The process of bridging an individual's and a social movement organization's interpretive orientation is termed frame alignment. Snow et al. (1986) refer to frame alignment as a process where the linkage between an "individual's interests, values, and beliefs and the interpretative orientations of the social movement organization" is established (Snow et al, 1986:464). In other words, it focuses on the politicization of an individual's experiences in a manner that is congruent and complementary with the social movement organization's interpretative frameworks. As a conceptual tool, frame alignment points to the processes through which movement activists weave together new interpretations of events and experiences that are meaningful to individuals so that they are drawn into social movements on the basis of their own experience. Establishing this link is necessary for the mobilization of movement participants; it makes it possible for them to act together to create change.

Collective action frames employed by social movement organizations serve to identify social problems, locate their origins and offer strategies to remedy the problematic situation. Frames focus attention on a condition, happening or

sequence of events that is identified and redefined as "unjust, intolerable, and deserving of corrective action" (Snow and Benford, 1992:137). Concurrent with the collective recognition that an unjust situation warrants corrective action, responsibility needs to be attributed to a perceived source of the injustice, whether it is individuals, collective processes or structures. David Snow and Robert Benford term this process of assigning blame or causality "diagnostic attribution" (Snow and Benford, 1992:137).

Myra Marx Ferree and Frederick Miller (1985) point out that an injustice attributed to a personal idiosyncrasy will not provide the necessary rationale for political movements. A collective approach is needed not only to discuss, but also to attribute responsibility of the injustice to situational factors. Without sharing information and experiences in a group context "people are unlikely to recognize that their private troubles are reflections of public issues rather than personal flaws" (Ferree and Miller, 1985:46).

A second related feature of collective action frames is to articulate alternatives and to assign responsibility for implementing collective action in an attempt to resolve the unjust situation. The process of developing alternative visions about how the problematic situation or aspect of reality may be transformed and how the social movement organization might achieve such a transformation is termed "prognostic attribution" (Snow et al., 1986; Snow and Benford, 1992).

In short, collective action frames are ways of organizing thinking and presenting competing alternate interpretations about unjust political issues. Within this understanding, William Gamson (1992) points out, injustice frames:

> face a field of combat that is already occupied by a competing legitimating frame that is established and quiescent rather than emergent and action-oriented. Would-be challengers face the problem of overcoming a definition of the situation that they themselves may take as part of the natural order.
> (Gamson, 1992:68)

The concept of frames, which was developed based on data derived from multimethod ethnographic studies[4], has relevance to the consciousness-raising technique used in the formative phase of the second wave of contemporary feminism. The consciousness-raising technique may be viewed as an instance of framing and frame alignment. The early consciousness-raising groups allowed women to understand how individual experiences and 'personal' problems were not only relevant to other women, but were also connected to existing social structures. By encouraging women to speak about formerly private issues, such as sexuality and the family, shared characteristics about individual experiences were identified in the framing process. As such, the emergent collective action frame represented a challenge to the existing situation by creating an alternate worldview filtered through gender as a central constituent of identity. Indeed, Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail (1988) credit the consciousness-raising groups with "changing the character and scope of political

life itself" (Adamson et al., 1988:204).

In the framing process, women redefined and enlarged the scope of politics by tying together a range of experientially grounded issues from "sex, privacy, kids and parents to housekeeping hangups"[5] to form the basis of political organizations and strategies for collective action. As Hester Eisenstein states:

> In CR, the point of sharing information about personal life and personal experience was to connect these into something that could transcend the personal. A crucial function of CR was to enable women to connect the personal with the political. Once shared in a small group with other women, individual pain and suffering appeared in a different light. It could be seen that these were not personal, idiosyncratic problems, but ones which fell into a pattern that, with variations, characterized other women's lives as well.
> (Eisenstein, 1983:36)

The politicization of 'personal' experiences and problems served as a bridge to bring women into the social movement on the basis of shared experience. Consciousness-raising succeeded in developing and aligning a frame which refocussed individual problems and personal solutions by linking the spheres of public and private. As Jo Freeman (1975) states:

> [With CR] women learn to see how social structures and attitudes have molded them from birth and limited their opportunities. They ascertain the extent to which women have been denigrated in this society and how they have developed prejudices against themselves and other women. They learn to develop self-esteem and to appreciate the value of group solidarity...
> (Freeman, 1975:118)

The growing awareness of the connection between their personal problems and the socially constructed oppression of women served to mobilize women as active participants in their own movement for social change. Yet successful recruitment alone does not ensure the sustained involvement of members in a social movement.

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

The process of sustaining the commitment of movement activists, as a key aspect of mobilization, is addressed through the concept of collective identity. Collective identity is defined as "the shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity" (Taylor and Whittier, 1992:105). An activist's continued involvement in a social movement is sustained through the development of a collective identity (Diani, 1992; Hunt and Benford, 1994; Friedman and McAdam, 1992; Melucci, 1989; Taylor and Whittier, 1992; van Willigen, 1994). William Gamson points out, "the bridging of personal and collective identity can be viewed strategically, as one part of the mobilization process" (Gamson, 1992:60).

A collective identity imparts movement activists with a sense of "who we are" (Gamson, 1992:57). It consists of the norms and values that activists come to support through their involvement in a social movement organization (Friedman and McAdam, 1992; van Willigen, 1994). On an individual level, a social

movement organization's collective identity becomes a valued aspect of an activist's personal identity, which reinforces her/his continued involvement in the movement (Diani, 1992; Friedman and McAdam, 1992). As Scott Hunt and Robert Benford found in their research on identity and the peace movement, "activists would often claim that their personal identities meshed with the organization's collective identity" (Hunt and Benford, 1994:495).

The creation of a collective identity is pivotal for effecting social change; failure to create a collective identity results in "the disintegration of collective action" (Melucci, 1989:218). Indeed, the construction of new, oppositional forms of collective identity has led "to an unprecedented politicization of previously nonpolitical terrains: sexuality, interpersonal relations, lifestyle, and culture" (Kauffman, 1990:67). While new social movement theorists emphasize that the political organization around new collective identities differentiates contemporary social movements from the more class-based movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Cohen, 1985; Kauffman, 1990; Melucci, 1989), the construction of a collective identity is critical for all forms of collective action (Gamson, 1992; Morris, 1992; Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Weir, 1993). The politics of the new social movements, Laurie Adkin points out "do not compel us to 'bury' class or Marxist theory but they do demand we develop a more inclusive and holistic analysis of the determinants of social change" (Adkin, 1992:77).

Reflecting on the contemporary social movements and the challenges

posed by collective actors, Jean Cohen points out they "strive to create a group identity within a general social identity whose interpretation they contest" (Cohen, 1985:494). Accordingly, social movement members need to "define themselves as part of a broader movement and, at the same time, be perceived as such, by those within the same movement, and by opponents and/or external observers" (Diani, 1992:8). For the women's movement the construction of a collective identity is essential to illuminate the patterns of women's oppression and to engage in the concrete transformation of it. Without a collective identity, the oppression of women becomes a personal idiosyncratic matter where "it is not possible to conceptualize oppression as a systematic, structured, institutionalized process" (Young, 1994:718).

The actual process that movement activists engage in to create a collective identity in a social movement, however, is implicit. While the concept of collective identity has been propelled into the foreground of social movement theory, the conceptual framework for understanding how a social movement develops a collective identity is, as Lorna Weir points out in her assessment of new social movement theory, "in need of elaboration" (Weir, 1993:83). Similarly, William Gamson notes that within social movement theory "the existence of an *established* collective identity is assumed" (Gamson, 1992:58, emphasis in original).

Scott Hunt and Robert Benford (1994) conclude from their research overview that the process of creating a collective identity within social movements

has been assumed to be "rather straightforward and unproblematic" (Hunt and Benford, 1994:491). Hunt and Benford maintain that within social movement research identity has typically been regarded as a static precondition to movement participation, rather than as a product of social interaction. Their research on identity in several peace movement organizations reveals that the alignment of activists' personal and collective identities is shaped by collective action which, in turn, shapes future movement activities. Their analysis of identity construction draws attention to the dialectical relationship between the mobilization of activists into a social movement and the construction of a collective identity.

While Hunt and Benford do not examine the diversity of discourses within the peace and justice movement and the challenges posed for the construction of collective identity in this context, they maintain that a constructionist approach could "shed light on such dynamics" as the development of factions and splinter groups within social movements (Hunt and Benford, 1994:511). Similarly, as Mario Diani points out, the concept of a "collective identity does not imply homogeneity of ideas and orientations within social movement networks" (Diani, 1992:9).

An integral aspect of participating in a social movement includes the passionate discussion of strongly held feelings and experiences and how to translate them into an alternate collective frame or worldview to effectively unite diverse individuals and motivate them to change the status quo. However,

dissention and schisms do erupt within and among social movements about how to effectively frame shared experiences in a meaningful manner. The lack of consensus within and among movement organizations regarding the interpretative work of a social movement has been termed "frame disputes" by Robert Benford (1993).

In Benford's analysis of the nuclear disarmament movement in Austin, Texas he focuses on the dynamics of frame disputes among several social movement organizations. He identifies two organizational contexts within which frame disputes may occur (1993:680). The first context is an intra-social movement organization frame dispute which transpires when two or more movement members may not agree on how to frame a dispute to most effectively serve the group or movement's interests. The second context, in which Benford focuses exclusively for his analysis, is intra-movement disputes. Benford analyzes disputes over framing the nuclear disarmament project that occurred within the peace movement among three organizations. However, Benford's analysis does not examine how challenges to an organization's specific frames are addressed by movement participants. In other words, Benford assumes the personal identities of activists who remain committed to the social movement organization are de facto aligned with the group-specific norms. Given the stated focus of his project, which is an analysis of the dynamics of interorganizational frame disputes, there is little opportunity for an exploration of how the activists of each organization

within the peace movement were able to create a collective identity, which is necessary for collective action.

In seeking to identify this link, Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1992) have proposed a conceptual framework for analyzing the development of a collective identity. They identify three factors central to the process of collective identity formation: boundaries, consciousness, and negotiation. Boundaries demarcate who is inside/outside of the group. This involves an active process through which movement participants promote an increased awareness of the group's commonalities and of the differences between members of the group and others. The second factor, a shared consciousness, arises from participants' recognition of common goals and beliefs. Consciousness is an active process in which members are engaged in the realization and continual affirmation of shared goals (van Willigan, 1994). Similarly, Aldon Morris (1992) maintains that sustained social movement activity necessitates the development of an "oppositional consciousness" which involves an awareness of a struggle between oppressors and oppressed. Negotiation, the third factor in the development of a collective identity, refers to everyday actions taken by activists as a means of resisting and destabilizing dominant definitions and structures. Because this project is principally focused on how the mobilization process, including the construction of a collective identity, has been shaped within the ideological frames of identity and difference, the specific, everyday actions of activists are beyond its

scope. Accordingly, the establishment of boundaries and the development of shared goals and beliefs are featured in the data analysis, whereas the enactment of strategic politics is not included. Turning specifically to the women's movement, the issue of collective identity has underscored a contradiction at the core of the contemporary movement.

POLITICS OF IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

For contemporary feminism, the concept of collective identity highlights a dilemma at the centre of the women's movement. On the one hand, the category of woman provides an opportunity to confirm personal experiences, to identify social structures and processes that shape gender oppression, and to point to alternatives that may be achieved through unified collective action. On the other hand, the category of woman is problematic as efforts to identify a set of attributes common to a group called women undermine notions of equality within feminism by suppressing difference. By questioning the category of woman as an automatic basis of unity, many feminists are rejecting the subordination of different systems of stratification, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and ability among others, to the project of making gender visible.

In their discussion of the challenges posed by the emergence of diverse contemporary social movements, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (1991) distinguish between a politics of identity and a politics of difference. Adopting

Best and Kellner's distinction, a politics of identity is an "attempt to mobilize a politics based on the construction of political and cultural identities through political struggle and commitment" (Best and Kellner, 1991:205). Within the context of this study, a politics of identity refers to the attempt to conceptualize women as a distinct, unified, coherent group by privileging gender as the primary category of oppression. This innovative frame has guided the strategic political action pursued in the early phase of the contemporary women's movement to effect social change. In contrast, an alternate frame, termed the politics of difference, has emerged in part from a questioning of the very ideas and strategies by which the women's movement had previously organized for change. The difference frame refers to "building new political groupings with categories neglected in the previous modern politics such as race, sexual preference, and ethnicity" (Best and Kellner, 1991:205). Thus a politics of difference not only casts doubt on the project of conceptualizing women as a unity but, ultimately, questions the validity of the category 'woman' itself (Nicholson, 1994).

Animating many of the contemporary discussions about the women's movement is the tension between a politics of identity and a politics of difference. While Best and Kellner (1991:206) state "there is no logical incompatibility" between the two frames, conflict over the issue of identity is found at the core of the contemporary women's movement (Adams, 1989; Alcoff, 1989; Bourne, 1987; Bordo, 1990; De Seve, 1992; hooks, 1988; Mohanty, 1992; Spelman, 1988; Young,

1994). Although as Mario Diani points out, "collective identity is always the precarious and temporary outcome of a 'bargaining' process between actors who embody quite different and heterogenous beliefs", there has been little attention accorded to the actual process of collective identity construction within the contemporary women's movement (Diani, 1992:18). Indeed, how has the mobilization process, including the construction of collective identity, been shaped by the frames of identity and difference within SWAG over the past quarter of a century?

In considering how feminist activists who are broadly interested in similar issues, yet from varying experiences, backgrounds and perspectives, create a collective identity as a vital aspect of the mobilization process, it is necessary to examine in greater detail the theoretical aspects of identity and difference politics. The following sections explore how the politics of identity and difference have each been framed within the contemporary feminist literature.

POLITICS OF IDENTITY

A politics of identity highlights the similarities among women and accentuates their difference from men. A politics of identity is predicated on a revaluation of the shared experiences traditionally embodied by women that have been denigrated in a masculinist culture which extols violence and individualism.

Beginning in the mid to late 1970s, the framing of feminism shifted from

what Iris Young (1985:173) terms humanist feminism or "a revolt against femininity" to a gynocentric perspective that emphasizes the similarities among women and their differences from men (Cocks, 1984; Douglas, 1990; Echols, 1989; Eisenstein, 1983; Taylor and Rupp, 1993; Young, 1985). The development of this identity-oriented frame, which appeals for unity among women in order to effect social change, is best exemplified in the work of radical feminists. Although radical feminism varies considerably on the origins of women's oppression[6], the basic tenets of radical feminism can be summarized as follows: Radical feminism views women's oppression as the oldest form of exploitation, underlying all others including race and class. It is the oppression first learned by human beings and the first in which they participate. Gender oppression is the most widespread oppression, found in almost all societies; it classifies nearly all human beings into an oppressor/oppressed status.

In stressing the similarities of women's experiences, radical feminism constructs a frame in which identity politics is central. The naming of women as a specific and distinct group with a set of shared attributes and a common identity lies at the heart of this frame. However, by conceptualizing women as a single homogeneous group, the frame rests on biological foundationalism. Linda Nicholson (1994) defines biological foundationalism in relation to the female/male distinction as "express[ing] itself in the claim that distinctions of nature, at some basic level, manifest themselves in or ground sex identity, a cross-culturally

common set of criteria for distinguishing women and men" (Nicholson, 1994:82). Biological foundationalism includes views that incorporate an element of biological commonality, which is represented in the material given of the body, while retaining aspects of social constructionism. Women's unity, as framed by radical feminism, is regarded as a pre-given essential identity, grounded in the (female) body. This view allows feminists to make cross-cultural and transhistorical generalizations about women and women's experiences relating to a particular female anatomy.

Biological foundationalism represents a continuum of positions, ranging from feminist theorists and others who explicitly employ a biological approach in their analysis of women's oppression, to those who identify themselves as social constructionists yet appeal to the body for cross-cultural transhistoric generalizations. Nicholson (1994) notes that the continuum is marked at one end by a defense of the existing sexual/social structures through biological determinist arguments as found in sociobiology[7]. At the other end of the continuum, the grounding of any perceived distinction between 'women' and 'men' transculturally is open and cannot be determined by biology. By presenting biological foundationalism as a continuum, rather than as a mutually exclusive opposition between biology and social constructionism, the use of biology to ground and support differences between women and men in feminist and non-feminist theoretical positions can be more readily discerned.

In short, those drawing on the body to ground cross-cultural claims about female/male distinctions are more closely positioned to the biological border of the continuum. Differences among women are resolved by referring to variations in social and cultural processes that define, regulate, and reinforce the oppression of women. As such, the very instant the influence of the biological is being subverted, it is also being invoked. Those positions closely associated with the biological end of the continuum maintain that despite wide-ranging cross-cultural differences, women constitute a distinct, homogenous group 'underneath it all' (Daly, 1979; Morgan, 1984).

Identity politics, as conceived by radical feminism, is predicated on a dualistic framework of gender in which women have a cross-cultural transhistoric coherence distinct from men[8]. The unity of women as a group is formed in part by appealing to shared experiences embodied in traditionally female activities (e.g., pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation, and lactation) and values such as nurturance, empathy, supportiveness and non-competitiveness (Cocks, 1984; Douglas, 1990; Grosz and Klein, 1990; Taylor and Rupp, 1993). This frame assumes the stability of a binary opposition between women and men. As Alice Echols states, radical feminists "are more likely to discuss gender differences as though they reflect deep truths about the intractability of maleness and femaleness" (Echols, 1983:440).

Masculinity or, in some cases male biology, is cited as the cause of

women's oppression. Andrea Dworkin (1979) conceptualizes a male regime of power which consists of seven elements:

> The power of men is first a metaphysical assertion of self. It expresses intrinsic authority...Second, power is physical strength used over and against others...third, power is the capacity to terrorize, to use self and strength to inculcate fear...fourth, men have power of naming...fifth, men have power of owning...sixth, the power of money is distinctly male power...seventh, men have the power of sex.
> (Dworkin, 1979:13-24)

In this power paradigm, which emphasizes domination and victimization, women are always viewed in a fixed opposition to men. Women are seen as a coherent unified group in all contexts, regardless of distinctions such as class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, mental and physical ability, and age. As conceptualized in this frame, the oppression of women is enforced by all men in a hierarchical, unidirectional, 'top-down' manner over all women at all times. Although biological foundationalism is found in other feminist theories[9], the works of radical feminists are "a rich source of strong forms" of it and epitomize identity politics within contemporary feminism (Nicholson, 1994:93).

ILLUSTRATING IDENTITY POLITICS IN RADICAL FEMINISM

The next section focuses on two authors, Mary Daly and Robin Morgan, who occupy different positions within the biological foundationalist continuum, yet adopt similar strategies in conceptualizing women as a group. Moreover, Mary

Daly and Robin Morgan have had a strong influence as both writers and activists in the women's movement[10]. As with any attempt to condense a complex theoretical position, nuances among positions may be obscured. These two authors, however, help to illustrate the prevailing tendency of identity politics within this frame.

Mary Daly's Gyn/Ecology (1979) is a striking fusion of poetry, humour, politics, history, spirituality and philosophy. The book, which Mary Daly describes as a restatement of the radical feminist position, encourages women to embark on a journey of "discovery and creation of a world other than patriarchy" (Daly, 1979:2). Daly reclaims the power of naming for women by creating new words and uncovering the original meaning of others blurred by a history of patriarchy.

Daly criticizes biological determinism as the basis for constructing an identity as women. Daly (1978) initially appears to reject a strategy of reversal, stating:

> It should arouse suspicion that Karen Horney's 'womb envy' theory (with which she countered Freud's proposition of 'penis envy') has been eagerly adopted by some liberal males. The problem with such a theory is that the implied criticism stops short of being a genuine feminist analysis... Thus it is a pitfall simply to reverse 'penis envy into womb envy', for such theories trick women into fixating upon womb, female genitalia, and breasts as our ultimately most valuable endowments.
> (Daly, 1978:60)

Despite her critique of the limitations intrinsic to discourse reversal, Daly does not escape grounding women's identity in biology. She draws on biological

characteristics to situate women and men in a dualistic framework that reverses and revalues those experiences traditionally embodied by women (Alcoff, 1989; Echols, 1983; Eisenstein, 1983).

Daly characterizes women's existence within patriarchy as a state of "robotitude" which "stresses the reduction of life in the state of servitude to mechanical motion" (Daly, 1978:53). Women's state of servitude, according to Daly, stems from men's parasitism of female life-loving energy: "Since female energy is essentially biophilic, the female spirit/body is the primary target in this perpetual war of aggression against life" (Daly, 1978:355). Because all men have an inner barrenness or emptiness, they seek to dominate and control women and their life-affirming, life-creating energy upon which they are dependent.

Rather than view women as active agents in this state of robotitude, Daly links together women and nature as the victims of men, "women and our kind--the earth, the sea, the sky--are real but unacknowledged objects of attack, victimized as The Enemy of patriarchy--of all its wars, of all its professions" (Daly, 1978:28). In situations where women are participants in the perpetuation of patriarchal practices, their agency is erased so they are never anything but innocent victims:

> The apparently active role of the women, themselves mutilated, is in fact a passive, instrumental role.
> It hides the real castrators of women. Mentally castrated, these women participate in the destruction of their own kind--of womankind--and in the destruction of strength

> and bonding among women.
> (Daly, 1978:163-164)

Daly uses the term 'sparking' to denote a transformation in the nature of patriarchal power in which women's servitude is displaced by female bonding. Women's agency is achieved by "breaking the casts into which we have been molded and breaking away from the cast/caste condemned to act out the roles prescribed by masculinist myth" (Daly, 1978:55). Women's transcendence of their otherness to men is accompanied by a flourishing of love, creativity and nurturance in an environment free from domination. Women, Hester Eisenstein points out, are characterized as "wholly good and men [are] wholly evil" in this binary framework (Eisenstein, 1983:111).

Daly maintains that an identity as women transcends patriarchally constructed differences that only serve to divide women for the benefit of men.

> Women who accept false inclusion among the fathers and sons are easily polarized against other women on the basis of ethnic, national, class, religious and other **male-defined differences**, applauding the defeat of the 'enemy' women (Daly, 1978:365, emphasis added).

The dualistic framework, as exemplified by Daly's work, emphasizes the stability, durability, and primacy of female-male difference. As Linda Alcoff points out, "the only difference that can change a person's ontological placement on Daly's dichotomous map, is sex difference" (Alcoff, 1989:299).

Like Mary Daly, Robin Morgan emphasizes unity and similarity among

women. Robin Morgan's (1984) appeal to women as a universal group is stated in the title of her text Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology. The anthology, which took 12 years in development and another 5 years in production, includes documentation of women's struggles written by women from 70 countries around the world. Despite the sheer enormity of the project and Morgan's intent to "further the dialogue between and solidarity of women everywhere" (Morgan, 1984:8), she produces an understanding of women as an ahistorical, unified, homogeneous group. By positioning women outside of contemporary world history and constructing a binary framework for female/male distinctions, Morgan restricts women's status to victim or truth-teller.

Morgan provides a detailed critique of biological materialism as the basis of unity among women, suggesting there is nothing mystical nor biologically deterministic about women having a common identity. It is rather, Morgan maintains, a shared world view and a common condition that constitute women as a group. Robin Morgan (1984) states:

> The historical, cross-cultural opposition women express to war and our healthy scepticism of certain technological advances (by which most men seem overly impressed at first and disillusioned at last) are only two instances of shared attitudes among women which seem basic to a common world view.
> (Morgan, 1984:4)

Morgan assumes that across various cultures and throughout history the body

serves as an unchanging site to ground the claim of women's common identity:

> Nor is there anything mystical or biologically deterministic about this commonality. It is the result of a common condition which, despite variations in degree, is experienced by all human beings who are born female. (Morgan, 1984:4)

Although Morgan acknowledges that women's lives vary among cultures, ages, races, nationalities, sexual orientations, and other distinctions, her articulation of a common condition and world view for a universal sisterhood implicitly rests on biological foundationalism (Nicholson, 1994). She points to the suffering inflicted by a universal "patriarchal mentality" and the "epidemic of rape, sexual harassment, forced prostitution, and sexual traffick in women, with transacted marriage, institutionalized family structures, and the denial of individual women's own sexual expression" as common conditions for women (Morgan, 1984:1-8). The designation of 'woman' as a unified coherent group that shares in a common condition assumes all women are equally oppressed and powerless.

In Morgan's analysis, women are bound together as a social collective by their common opposition to war, their shared goal of improvement for humanity and their universal oppression experienced primarily and in the first instance as women. However Morgan's presumption of universal sisterhood, Chandra Talpade Mohanty observes, is contingent upon "the erasure of the history and effects of contemporary imperialism" (Mohanty, 1992:78). Morgan concurs with

Daly's view that women are situated outside of history. This denial of agency treats women as victims "caught up in political webs not of our making which we are powerless to unravel" (Morgan, 1984:25). And it is women, trapped in a masculinist culture that extols violence, who become "the innocent victims in ongoing religious wars between those communities, as mourning mothers, widows, refugees, civilian causalities, and raped 'possessions' of a rival group of men" (Morgan, 1984:29). Despite Morgan's desire to conceptualize women as a group without drawing on the body to ground and support this identity, she conflates the experiences of some women with the experiences of all women. The characterization of women as powerless victims, and the depiction of men as fundamentally and irrevocably oppressive, grounds women's identity in a binary framework where gender overrides all other distinctions.

Despite their vast differences in style and their critiques of biological foundationalism, Robin Morgan and Mary Daly both make recourse to the female body as the basis for conceptualizing women as a group. They both invert and revalue the devalued features of women within patriarchal dualisms. Both maintain that women everywhere need to act collectively in a unified movement to effect social change.

Yet the experience of being a woman can create an illusory unity as Chandra Talpade Mohanty states, since "it is not the experience of being a woman, but the meanings attached to gender, race, class and age at different

historical moments that is of strategic importance" (Mohanty, 1992:86). It is the attention to differences among women that the second frame, the politics of difference, places at its centre.

POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE

The politics of difference does not attempt to define an identity as 'woman' by pointing to a set of experiences or attributes that a group has in common which, in turn, forms the basis for an identity as women. Unlike the politics of identity, this frame does not assume a universal sisterhood predicated on women's shared opposition to patriarchy, an opposition which arises from women's experiences as its victims. Instead, a politics of difference focuses its critique on the assumed similarities among women, casting doubt on the validity of the category 'woman' itself (Nicholson, 1994).

This frame asserts the differences among women and points to the specificity and particularity of experiences of oppression by different groups. A politics of difference calls attention to new political groupings that have been previously subsumed under the universalizing tendency of identity politics. Specifically, a politics of difference stresses multiple differences and site specific explanations (Best and Kellner, 1991). The experiences of oppression, as conceptualized in identity politics, are consciously challenged within this frame as insufficiently homogeneous to form the experiential basis for a progressive social

movement. A politics of difference does not privilege the identity 'woman' above other factors, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, physical and mental ability and location, but rather attempts to open up possibilities for the creation of new and complex conceptions of identity and the assertion of agency. The development of this frame, emphasizing plurality, poses a challenge to identity politics as a unified movement of protest by questioning and, ultimately, preventing "the substitution of a new unitary discourse for the old one" (De Seve, 1992:129).

In order to better understand the emergence of the difference frame it is instructive to situate it as historically connected to the identity frame. That is, the development of the difference frame arises in part from a questioning of the ideas and strategies by which the contemporary women's movement has organized for change. Yet to understand how this change came about, it is necessary to re-examine the prevailing ideology of the women's movement in the early 1970s and analyze the effects of the identity frame for achieving widespread social movement support among women and guiding organizational strategies.

In the formation period of the contemporary women's movement during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the consciousness-raising groups and larger organizations were instrumental in mobilizing new members. It was an exciting and dynamic period of social protest that was conducive to the development and rapid transmission of feminist ideas within various sectors of the New Left and

through different segments of society (Adamson et al., 1988; Echols, 1989; Freeman, 1975; Kauffman 1990). From the beginning, however, the framing of women as a distinct, unified, coherent group to illuminate particular patterns of gender oppression overrode or masked differences. While feminists were constructing a politics based on the similarities among women, doubts about the assertion of a common identity 'as women' were being raised among those who did not see their experiences incorporated into the core of the emerging feminist politics. Although it is not possible to integrate all the elements that constitute the potential of feminist discourses and practices, Jacinthe Michaud maintains, "what is integrated and what remains peripheral becomes a major political issue" (Michaud, 1992:203).

For women marginalized within the movement, the influence of identity politics underscores the point of view of privileged women. As bell hooks (1988) points out, a generalized conception of gender and women's oppression reflects and reinforces the perspective of those making the characterization:

> Contemporary feminist thinkers...suggest that differentiation of status between females and males globally is an indication that patriarchal domination of the planet is the root of the problem...Ideologically, thinking in this direction enables Western women, especially privileged white women, to suggest that racism and class exploitation are merely the offspring of the parent system: patriarchy.
> (hooks, 1988:19-20)

After more than a decade of political activist practice feminists and other social movement activists have started to reappraise this early period and query some of the principles and organizational strategies that their groups employed. For instance, a perceptible shift in the meaning of the phrase "the personal is political" can be seen from when it first emerged and gained widespread currency in the late 1960s and 1970s to present. The concept, like the closely related strategy of consciousness-raising, originally helped to reconceptualize the accepted traditional political terrain by calling for a reintegration and transformation of the public and private spheres. The consciousness-raising technique, along with the slogan the personal is political, enlarged the scope of politics by identifying and connecting individual experiential realities to existing social structures thereby mobilizing women into their own social movement. However the consciousness raising technique, which was instrumental in mobilizing potential movement members, was implemented in small groups and tended to draw women largely from the same social circle (Adamson et al., 1988; Freeman, 1975; Pierson, 1993). As a result, women who were typically white, middle-class and heterosexual framed their shared personal experiences as universal--missing or overlooking the situations of women who led very different lives and had very different experiences.

One of the earliest statements challenging the framing of identity politics in the women's movement is the "The Combahee River Collective Statement"

originally published in 1977. The Collective draws attention to the interconnecting oppressions of class, race, and sex and the implicit assumption that the experiences of white, middle class, heterosexual women are representative of all women's experiences:

> We...often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that here is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual...We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives.
> (Combahee River Collective, 1977/81:213)

In effect, the Collective levels a two-pronged critique: not only does the Collective oppose the position taken by some blacks that sexual oppression either does not exist or is a product of racism, but they also reject those who maintain that racism in the women's movement does not exist or is a product of sexism.

From the early days of the contemporary women's movement there were feminists who expressed concern about the developing identity frame and the differences among women that remained largely unaddressed in a movement organizing around gender inequity. These concerns were generally submerged within the movement by the primacy of the identity frame until the late 1970s and early 1980s when confrontations over the universality of an identity as woman arose. Questions about the relationship of feminism with other forms of critical

and oppositional struggle particularly around the politics of race and sexuality began to emerge more frequently, and increasingly challenged the binary modes of thinking that regarded gender oppression as the primary oppression (Alcoff, 1989; Bourne, 1987; hooks, 1988; Mohanty, 1992; Spelman, 1988). Fuelled by those who refused to subordinate a range of experiences, such as race and sexuality, the identity frame became increasingly untenable for many movement members. As Audre Lorde phrases it, "Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface. Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as Black women" (Lorde, 1984:60).

In a position similar to that expressed by the Combahee Collective, although a decade later, Elizabeth Spelman (1988) maintains that efforts to isolate gender identity reinforce a hierarchy of experience. Gender oppression cannot be examined in a 'pure' form without also referring to classism, racism, ageism and heterosexism, as each of these interacts and has consequences for how sexism is experienced. As Spelman states:

> No woman is subject to any form of oppression simply because she is a woman; which forms of oppression she is subject to depend on what 'kind' of woman she is. In a world in which a woman might be subject to racism, classism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, if she is not so subject it is because of her race, class, religion, sexual orientation. So it can never be the case that the treatment of a woman has only to do with her gender and nothing to do with her class or race. That she is subject only to sexism tells us a lot about her race and class identity... (Spelman, 1988:52-53)

The idea that the personal is political also implied its converse--that the political is personal. It was not enough to work towards reorganizing or restructuring the social system as a whole by signing petitions, lobbying legislators, or participating in marches and rallies, one needed to transform oneself. In this sense, the individual became an important site for political activity; and this marks a departure from politics as it had conventionally been practised (Adams, 1989; Breines, 1989; Gitlin, 1993; Kauffman, 1990; Melucci, 1989). As the decade progressed, however, the politicization of self and daily life was often prescriptively recast to imply how women should live their lives legitimately as feminist activists. For instance, if male domination was the cause not only of women's oppression but also of capitalism, racism, sexual exploitation, war and environmental degradation, then the creation of a society apart becomes the only logical course of action (Daly, 1978; Dworkin, 1979; Morgan, 1984). If "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980) was the root of patriarchal control, then the participation in heterosexual relationships only served to divide and further oppress women.

On closer inspection, however, the various views on practising legitimate feminist politics represented lifestyles most suited to those who advocated them. The promotion of such lifestyle politics revealed an overwhelming disregard for social, economic and political differences among women. For example, lesbian separatism is not only economically difficult,

> it leaves out far too much and far too many people, particularly Black men, women and children. We have a great deal of criticism and loathing for what men have been socialized to be in this society: what they support, how they act, and how they oppress. But we do not have the misguided notion that it is their maleness, per se--i.e., their biological maleness--that makes them what they are. As Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic. We must also question whether Lesbian separatism is an adequate and progressive political analysis and strategy, even for those who practice it, since it so completely denies any but the sexual sources of women's oppression, negating the facts of class and race.
> (Combahee River Collective, 1977/81:214)

As the statement from the Collective indicates, separatism as an organizing principle is problematic when it is stretched to encompass a lesbian separatist lifestyle. Furthermore, the Collective maintains that a separatist strategy involves the abandonment of political coalitions with men in the community. In contrast to those more closely aligned to the biological end of the continuum in biological foundationalism (e.g., Mary Daly and Robin Morgan), the Collective rejects the immutability of biological explanations of gender differences, and refers to them as "particularly dangerous". Viewed in this light, concerns about lifestyle politics in which only certain actions, attitudes and relationships are regarded as acceptable establishes an internal hierarchy which seems to contravene a movement premised on egalitarian values and the elimination of hierarchical power relations.

The conflation of the personal with the political, long in the making, has

been nearly total and has made questions of lifestyle central. More than ever, how one lives one's life, not one's commitment to political struggle, has become a salient factor in identifying legitimate political practice (Adams, 1989; Gitlin, 1993; Kauffman, 1990). Increasingly personalized, the reconstructed realm of politicized terrain has not gone uncontested. Reflecting on the shift in political activist practice and the current emphasis on personalizing politics within the women's movement, Jenny Bourne asserts:

> Identity Politics is all the rage. Exploitation is out (it is intrinsically determinist). Oppression is in (it is intrinsically personal). What is to be done has been replaced by who am I. Political culture has ceded to cultural politics. The material world has passed into the metaphysical.
> (Bourne, 1987:1)

Bourne maintains that the emphasis within feminist practice to personalize politics fosters a division that "has created a stunted, inward-looking and self-righteous 'politics' which sets its face against the politics out there in the real world" (Bourne, 1987:18).

Others (Adams, 1989; Cocks, 1984; Echols, 1989; Gitlin, 1993; Kauffman, 1990) maintain that affirmation and validation of those characteristics devalued in society have superseded strategic mobilization to effect social, political and economic change. Efforts by women to rid themselves of internalized oppression as a precursor to collective action have become disconnected from efforts to engage in structural change. The call for the development of inner personal or

spiritual strength in partnership with a challenge to the inequities in the social, political and economic system has been transformed into a narrow appeal for women to change their perspective through the project of self discovery. In short, the empowerment of women through an individualistic internal revolution has become perceived as political change.

In a retrospective analysis of the identity politics embraced by radical feminists in the 1970s, Joan Cocks (1984) is critical of the strategic political limitations she now sees inherent in a discourse of reversal. Cocks points to "a curious collusion" in which "a rebellious feminism takes up its assigned position at the negative pole" (Cocks, 1984:34). The "collusion" transpires when feminists uncritically embrace those previously denigrated qualities and revalue them, leaving unchallenged the underlying assumptions and structures that support the polarization. Cocks notes that identity politics ends up reconfiguring a binary framework that mirrors hegemonic concepts:

> What both feminists and phallocentrists see as hegemony based on masculine precepts of domination, performance, hierarchy, abstraction and rationality, finds its antipode in a women's community proclaiming itself as **naturally** nurturant, receptive, cooperative, intimate and exalting in the emotions.
> (Cocks, 1984:33)

Identity politics appeal to self-transformation as feminist political practice reveals a crisis in strategy by promoting "an introspective, fragmented antipolitics of lifestyle" (Kauffman, 1990:78). At its extreme, identity politics echoes a market

place approach to political change which "seems to be defined much more by conformity to certain implicit codes of self-fashioning than it is by what one does to change existing structures of domination, exploitation and exclusion" (Kauffman, 1990:78).

Identity-based politics implicitly assume "that a political strategy and, indeed, often political 'correctness' flow directly from identity" (Briskin, 1990:105). Yet in practice, as Briskin notes, identity as the basis for political unity "can conceal political differences...and, at the same time, overemphasize differences" (Briskin, 1990:105). A shared identity does not ensure a commitment to the same principles or goals. Mary Louise Adams (1989) challenges the reduction of the political to the personal and the resultant excessive fragmentation that threatens the viability of the contemporary women's movement. Adams states that "the point of consolidating and expressing a group identity is not merely to construct a political refuge" such as the celebration of feminist counter-culture (Adams, 1989:25), but rather to create coalition-based organizing that recognizes interlocking and multiple systems of oppression. Adams states:

> As long as points are awarded in proportion to the weight of women's oppressions, identity-based organizing will predominate and experience will continue to be manipulated as the lone tailor of feminist politics.
> (Adams, 1989:31)

As Adams points out, part of creating and exerting an identity within a coalitional approach is to recognize that power is not wielded unidirectionally in a

hierarchical manner at all times; power is exerted along many different axis of stratification, including gender. While such an understanding may complicate strategies to effect change by disrupting binary thinking, coalition-based organizing can operate "to agitate for the structural changes that might lead to liberation" rather than focusing solely on internal group or organizational oppression (Adams, 1989:26).

While Iris Young maintains it is "necessary and desirable for members of those groups to adhere with one another and celebrate a common culture, heritage and experience" she cautions that "too strong a desire for unity can lead to repressing the differences within the group or forcing some out" (Young, 1992:312). Yet the differences among women "are not just 'identities' but systems of power as deeply embedded as class that cannot be understood in isolation from one another" (Briskin, 1990:105).

A homogeneous gendered identity is challenged by recognizing the differentiations and contradictions in the experiences of women through the categories of race, class, sexual orientation and a host of other factors. However, as feminists question the universalizing assumptions of a politics of identity which depicts women as a single, coherent group, Susan Bordo (1990) asks "why...are we so ready to deconstruct what have historically been the most ubiquitous elements of the gender axis, while so willing to defer to the authority and integrity of race and class axes as fundamentally *grounding*?" (Bordo, 1990:146, emphasis in

original). Although Bordo supports questioning generalizations about gender that exclude and obscure, she maintains that efforts by contemporary feminists to challenge the conceptualization of women as a distinct category often presume that the categories of race and class have a stability or coherence that gender lacks. Bordo states that "too relentless a focus on historical heterogeneity...can obscure the transhistorical hierarchical patterns of white, male privilege that have informed the creation of the Western intellectual tradition" (Bordo, 1990:149).

POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE AND POSTMODERNISM

Within the process of the political differentiation, postmodernism has emerged to further unsettle the category of woman by destabilizing essentialist constructs of identity. Postmodernism extends the critique of identity politics not only by challenging essentialism and universalism but also by disrupting all social constructs including 'woman', 'oppression', 'race' and 'class' among others as totalizing fictions. In terms of gender identity, the deconstruction of the category 'woman' illustrates that "we are constructs...our experience of our very subjectivity is a construct mediated by and/or grounded on a social discourse beyond (way beyond) individual control" (Alcoff, 1989:306). As such, individual motivations, intentions, and empowerment are impeded by an account which, of strategic importance, denies any room for manoeuvre by the individual or group to challenge, create, and affirm an identity within a social discourse (Alcoff, 1989;

Deveaux, 1994).

Within the perspective termed postmodernism there are substantial variations, and theoretical relationships with feminism are viewed as both potentially threatening and enhancing. Pauline Rosenau (1992) distinguishes between two broad, general and overlapping orientations within postmodernism to help facilitate an understanding of the contradictions in this approach: she terms one sceptical[11] postmodernism and the other affirmative. Rosenau identifies affirmative postmodernism as sharing the sceptics' critique of modernism yet being "either open to positive political action (struggle and resistance) or content with the recognition of visionary, celebratory personal non-dogmatic projects that...include a whole spectrum of postmodern social movements" (Rosenau, 1992:15-16). While affirmative postmodernism subscribes to a belief in social change, sceptical postmodernism rejects any attempt at social change as involving support for a meta-narrative of progress--a distinctly modernist project (Rosenau, 1992:15-16).

As critiques of feminist scholarship further reveal white, heterosexual, middle-class assumptions in feminist scholarship, the conception of theory is changing to address the increasing interest among feminists in modes of theorizing that do not reproduce an implicit politics of domination. To address the growing concern for theorizing to be attentive to historically specific institutional categories, such as reproduction and mothering, Nancy Fraser and

Linda Nicholson (1990) point out that a non-universalist approach, achieved by combining aspects of postmodernism and feminism, replaces unitary notions of woman and feminine gender identity. Rather than the abolition of the subject, as recommended in sceptical postmodernism, Fraser and Nicholson propose to affirm and revitalize the subject by opening new possibilities to fashion identity and the potential for agency.

Fraser and Nicholson call for the displacement of ahistorical essentialist notions of gender identity with "plural and complexly constructed conceptions of social identity, treating gender as one strand among others, [and] attending also to class, race, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation", thereby creating a strategic shift for contemporary feminist political practice (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990:35). Moreover, the development of a plural conception of identity, in which gender forms only one axis among many different systems of stratification, permits feminists to develop alliances and coalitions rather than to organize around a single, universally shared interest or essential identity. Defined in this manner, this approach recognizes that differences and even conflict may emerge in contemporary feminist political practice against complex and interconnected systems of oppressions, as "no single solution...can be adequate for all" (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990:35).

While recognizing that the postmodern critique of identity may initially appear politically ineffective for those denied subjectivity within modernist

politics, bell hooks (1990) states that postmodernism "with its decentred subject can be the space where ties are severed or can provide the occasion for new and varied forms of bonding" (hooks, 1990:31). A decentred subjectivity permits an acknowledgement of shifting collective experiences of racism in relation to different axes of power and powerlessness through class mobility, both upwards and downwards, and challenges the binary framework of essentialism that creates the fixed categories of assimilationist or white-identified and nationalist or black-identified. Viewed in this light, postmodernism "allows us to affirm multiple black identities, varied black experience" (hooks, 1990:28). Hooks points out that postmodernism's critique of essentialist notions of identity "means that we can and must rearticulate our basis for collective bonding" (hooks, 1990:29). In a strategy similar to the alliances and coalitions proposed by Fraser and Nicholson, hooks maintains that postmodernism can foster new and diverse types of bonding which acknowledge that privilege and oppression are not definitive or absolute categories, but rather shift in relation to different axes of power and powerlessness. Hooks states:

> Radical postmodernism calls attention to those shared sensibilities which cross the boundaries of class, gender, race, etc., that could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy--ties that would promote recognition of common commitments, and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition.
> (hooks, 1990:27)

Despite the appearance of aspects of postmodernism as "natural ally of

feminism" (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990:5) by creating an opportunity for the emergence of a plurality of differences unrestricted by any predetermined identity, others are questioning the advantages of de-centering a subjectivity that has not yet even been accorded to women (Marshall, 1992). Critics of the postmodernist elaboration of difference in which fragmentation, heterogeneity, and pluralism challenge modernist conceptualizations of subjectivity argue that the deconstruction of the category of 'woman' is accompanied by a depoliticization of feminism and feminist politics. Specifically, without some conception of women as a social collective, Iris Young points out "feminist politics evaporates" (Young, 1994:719).

Nancy Hartsock, sceptical of the advantages of postmodern theorizing for those who seek not only an understanding of how power relations work but also strategies to transform them, queries the timing of contemporary criticisms of gender-based theories of identity. She asks:

> Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic?
> (Hartsock, 1990:163)

Hartsock maintains that the women's movement, along with other progressive social movements, has two fundamental theoretical intellectual tasks--one of critique and the other of construction. However, as presently conceptualized

within postmodernism, Hartsock maintains a politics of difference does not permit social movements to succeed in the latter task of constructing new subjectivities that can "build an account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can transform the margins as well as the centre" (Hartsock 1990:171). Where the politics of identity approach attempts to unify forces through the mobilization of a group called 'women', efforts to posit any collectivity with a stable or coherent core are rejected within postmodernism as a totalizing move (Deveaux, 1994; Hartsock, 1990; Rosenau, 1992). As Linda Alcoff points out "an effective feminism (following Foucault and Derrida) could only be a wholly negative feminism, deconstructing everything and refusing to construct anything" (Alcoff, 1989:308).

Yet, if gender is only a social construct the ability and even the need to conceptualize women for feminist politics becomes problematic. The postmodern emphasis on the 'free play' of subjectivities has the (unintended) effect of rendering differences among women invisible[12]. As noted by Jane Flax (1987), along with other feminist scholars (Alcoff, 1989; Bordo, 1990; Hartsock, 1990; Marshall, 1992), "the subject under fire from postmodernism may be a more specifically masculine self than postmodern theorists have been willing to admit" (Flax, 1987 quoted in Di Stefano, 1990:75). A denial of a 'group called women' within postmodernism reinforces liberal individualism which maintains that human particularities, such as the broad categories of race, gender and sexuality, are

irrelevant because 'underneath it all' we are all just human beings. The approach available, within the postmodern plurality of subjectivities and liberal individualism's rejection of ascriptive categories, "is to think of and treat people as individuals, variable and unique" (Young, 1994:718). As such, it reinforces the conceptual and material oppression of women found in Enlightenment humanism which it claims to undo (Hartsock, 1990; Marshall, 1992; Young, 1994).

For postmodernism the categories of gender, race and oppression are social constructs, and accordingly, they are unable to ground notions of the systemic, structured nature of power beyond how individuals experience and exercise power. Although feminists engage in the postmodern project of dismantling claims of universality, feminism's rootedness in concrete political struggles against the subordination of women makes it very difficult to accept the notion that women simply do not exist. For some (Bordo, 1992; Hartsock, 1990; Marshall, 1992), the destabilization of subjectivity and concrete beliefs or master narratives signals a danger that directly threatens a commitment to an agenda of progressive social change. In this light, postmodernism can be viewed as underestimating the full political and social significance of the categories female and male. Without exploring various coalitional strategies with feminism and its focus on the "oppression of women in its endless variety and monotonous similarity", postmodernism alone appears to be politically ineffective (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990:35). In short, without naming or conceptualizing women as a

distinct albeit diverse social collective or group the specificity of the women's movement as a political movement ceases to exist.

SUMMARY

Analysis of contemporary social movements generate considerable debate by theorists engaged in an exploration of how movements effect social change. Sociologists working within the resource mobilization tradition describe how resource acquisition and maintenance, such as organizational facilities, political opportunities and financial support, are critical for creating and sustaining a social movement. Other sociological theorists maintain the strict instrumental focus of the resource mobilization perspective neglects the struggles by social movements to redefine and reinterpret ideological elements with an orientation to identity and cultural politics. While insights from the analytic model of resource mobilization, supplemented by the interpretive focus of framing, provide a conceptual framework for a more comprehensive analysis of the processes of mobilization, the creation of a collective identity by a social movement remains in need of theoretical and empirical elaboration. This vital aspect of movement mobilization, which establishes boundaries and develops common goals and beliefs, not only attracts and retains the on-going support and commitment of movement members, but also shapes the subsequent activities of a movement.

Yet the construction of a collective identity within the contemporary

women's movement reveals a conflict at its core. Some feminist theorists, on the one hand, propose a collective identity based on an approach termed politics of identity. In the politics of identity, as the literature suggests, women compose a distinct, coherent group seeking a unified approach to the transformation of society. On the other hand, other feminist theorists point to a multiplicity of differences that cannot be captured within the totalizing concept of a gendered identity as women. The literature on the politics of difference draws attention to the multiple systems of stratification, in which gender forms only one axis, and the complication of organizational strategies to guide political action. Furthermore postmodernism has emerged, as some feminist theorists suggest, to cast doubt on the very concept of women through its critique of essentialism, universalism, and the displacement of a unified or 'core' subjectivity. Given that feminist politics takes not only the delineation of women's oppression as a goal but also the concrete transformation of society, an understanding of how these two frames are negotiated in actual practice by contemporary feminist activists is vital for a fuller understanding of the mobilization process, including the construction of a collective identity.

The next chapter describes the epistemological assumptions and methodological considerations that guide this exploratory investigation into how the frames of identity and difference have shaped the mobilization of resources, the creation and maintenance of a social movement organization, the

establishment of boundaries, and the development of shared goals and beliefs by the feminist activists from the Victoria Status of Women's Action Group over the past quarter of a century.

NOTES

1. Turner and Killian (1972) quoted in John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald. 1977. "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory" American Journal of Sociology, 82(6).

2. Carol McClurg Mueller (1987) refers to the following works about the contemporary women's movement for her assessment of the emphasis given to the shift in consciousness: Carden, 1974; Cassell, 1977; Deckard, 1975; Evans, 1979; Hole and Levine, 1971.

3. Erving Goffman (1974) quoted in David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation". American Sociological Review, 51 (August).

4. Snow et al., (1986) refer to the following studies to illustrate the concept of frames and frame alignment processes: the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist movement (Snow, 1979, 1986), the Hare Krishna (Rochford, 1985), the peace movement (1984) as well as several studies investigating urban neighbourhood movements (no date). The concepts have been refined, extended and applied to studies examining peace and justice (Hunt and Benford, 1994), cross-movement unity (Carroll and Ratner, 1994) and the breast cancer movement (van Willigen, 1994)

5. "Consciousness Raising--What It Is and What It Isn't" Frederiction, N.B., [1975] 1993, Pierson et al., (eds), Canadian Women's Issues Volume I: Strong Voices, Toronto, James Lorimer and Company.

6. For a detailed breakdown of the varieties of radical feminism and the origins of women's oppression as theorized by individuals and feminist groups during the early years of the contemporary American women's movement, see Echols (1989) and Douglas (1990).

7. Sociobiology argues for the primacy of biology in determining human behaviour. Sociobiology maintains that the male/female distinction is rooted in biology and, as such, forms the basis for supporting the existing traditional relations of society. For a critique of sociobiology from a feminist perspective, see R. A. Sydie (1987).

8. Implicit in this binary framework, men constitute a coherent unity.

9. Biological foundationalism is also found in the works of feminists not typically characterized as radical feminist. Nicholson (1994) places the works of Nancy Chodorow (1978), Carol Gilligan (1983), Gayle Rubin (1975) Janice Raymond (1979, 1986) as well as the work of French feminist Luce Irigary along the continuum of biological foundationalism.

10. Robin Morgan edited one of the earliest contemporary American women's movement anthologies Sisterhood is Powerful (1970). For an account of influential feminist groups and individuals, including Robin Morgan, in the formative years of feminism on the East Coast, see Alice Echols, (1989), Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975. Mary Daly's influence is explicitly acknowledged by Marilyn Frye (1983), Dale Spender (1980), and Adrienne Rich (1980) among others. Daly is often cited as a proponent of cultural/radical feminism, see for example, Cocks, 1984; Douglas, 1990; Echols, 1983; Eisenstein, 1983; Taylor and Rupp, 1993; Young, 1985. Audre Lorde (1984) has written an open letter to Mary Daly concerning Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism and her appropriation of Indian, Chinese and African women's experiences in a gender analysis that is isolated from an analysis of race, class and colonialism. Lorde states that Daly's assumption that "all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy" (Lorde, 1984:67).

11. Pauline Rosenau defines sceptical postmodernism as "offering a pessimistic, negative, gloomy assessment, argu[ing] that the postmodern age is one of fragmentation, disintegration, malaise, meaninglessness, a vagueness or even absence of moral parameters and societal chaos". It is a postmodernism that "speaks of the immediacy of death, the demise of the subject, the end of the author, the impossibility of truth, and the abrogation of the Order of Representation". Because the future contains "overpopulation, genocide, atomic destruction, the apocalypse, environmental devastation, the explosion of the sun and the end of the solar system in 4.5 billion years, the death of the universe through entropy" there is "no social or political 'project' worthy of commitment" (Rosenau, 1992:15).

12. Postmodernism also makes differences among men invisible.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter describes the epistemological assumptions and methodological considerations that guide the research project. The chapter is divided broadly into two major segments. The conceptual underpinning of the research project is discussed in the first half of the chapter. It begins with an overview of some of the challenges presented by a feminist epistemology followed by a more direct discussion of qualitative methodology and social movement analysis. I locate my position as the researcher in the third section. The fourth section presents the reasons for selecting the Victoria Status of Women Action Group and its members for the project.

The second half of the chapter describes how these values and philosophical position helped shape the data gathering process. The fifth section discusses the selection of the research participants. The next section describes the interview process. This is followed by an examination of ethics concerning identity disclosure and feminist politics. The eighth section explains the data analysis. The final section provides a descriptive profile of the participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of the methodological framework.

TOWARD A FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

Feminist criticism of the social organization of knowledge poses a

fundamental challenge to the epistemology--or theory of knowledge--of nearly all academic disciplines, including sociology (Christiansen-Ruffman, 1989; Eichler, 1985; Fonow and Cook, 1991; Harding, 1987; Miles and Finn, 1989; Millman and Kanter, 1976; Stacey and Thorne, 1985; Vickers, 1989). Traditional discourses have been "passed off as 'human' knowledge" despite the systematic exclusion of women's experiences, concerns, and values (Spender, 1981:1). Dorothy Smith maintains "what men were doing has been relevant to men, was written by men about men for men" (1975/87:18). The androcentric bias underlying the conduct of traditional inquiry has made women objects of study and limited the content, parameters and agendas of social science (Klein, 1983; Mies, 1983). Yet to understand these criticisms of the social production of knowledge, it is necessary to examine the epistemological basis and the historical context which privileged the knowledge claims made by some while suppressing the claims of others.

As feminist activists were connecting individual experiential realities to the existing social structures and mobilizing women into their own social movement during the 1970s, feminist scholars and researchers began to examine how women were excluded from the various disciplines as active participants in the production of knowledge. Feminist scholars pointed to language, ways of thinking, values, theories and assumptions that contributed to the production and transmission of knowledge that maintained male standards and norms (Millman and Kanter, 1976; Smith, 1975/87). As a strategy to contest their exclusion from the male-centred

approach to social science research, feminist researchers began to draw upon those realities arising from their own concrete experience of oppression as women. In seeking to develop a meaningful alternate framework, women were regarded as a distinct, homogenous group. Barbara Du Bois (1983) maintained that by beginning with personal experiences feminists would create new and oppositional forms of knowledge which would shatter the conventional androcentric modes of inquiry. She states:

> The language and theories we have to work with still lack the very concepts by which the experience and reality of women's lives can be named, described and understood. Our work needs to generate words, concepts that refer to, spring from, are firmly grounded in the actual experiencing of women. And this asks for methods of inquiry that open up our seeing and our thinking, our conceptual frameworks, to new perceptions that actually derive from women's experiences.
> (Du Bois, 1981:110)

Feminist researchers, like the activists in the social movement, supported the aim to transform the existing relations of power. In acknowledgement of this transformative aim, feminist researchers drew sharp distinctions between the goals and methods of mainstream and feminist research[1]. Marcia Westkott (1979) maintained that the production of a "doleful catalogue of the facts of patriarchy" was not enough as it leaves unchallenged the underlying assumptions, structures, and social processes that support and perpetuate male standards and norms (Westkott, 1979:428). Accordingly, a sociology for women which was in the

interest of women, rather than only about women, was viewed as a vital part of the emancipatory processes of feminist praxis (Du Bois, 1983; Fonow and Cook, 1986; Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Mies, 1983; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987).

Feminist scholars recognized that the delineation of women's oppression needed to operate in partnership with an epistemology which supported the emancipatory aim of feminism. With this understanding in mind, feminists began to examine the various overt and implicit ways in which women were marginalized in social science research. Feminists pointed to the fixed and absolute polarization of the categories objective/ subjective that operated to obscure subjectivity in the construction of knowledge claims, including those by men and women[2]. The recognition of the false polarization between the categories of objective/ subjective has prompted Adrienne Rich (1979) to state that "in a patriarchal society, objectivity is the name we give to male subjectivity" (Rich quoted in Spender, 1981:5).

While traditional social research separated the knower from the object of study, many feminist researchers refuted that a separation is possible or even desirable (Acker et al., 1991; Eichler, 1988; Smith, 1987). They maintained that the illusion of this separation and its implied objectivity obscures the relationship between knower and known. In her critique of traditional social research, Dorothy Smith (1987) maintained that the emphasis on objectivity and the assumed separation of the object and subject are socially and historically

constructed norms. They are based in an ideology that has attempted to conceal the social relations of the knower and known through procedures that appear impersonal, dispassionate, and neutral. Once women are included as subjects who reflect back on and affect the researcher, the sharp definitive separation drawn between subject and object breaks down. Dorothy Smith (1987) explains this process:

> So long as "men," "he," and "his" appeared as the general and impersonal terms locating the subject of sociological assertions, the problem remained invisible. [Once women replaced the male pronoun] the appearance of impersonality was gone. The knower turns out after all not to be "abstract knower" perching on an Archimedean point but a member of a definite social category occupying definite positions in the society.
> (Smith, 1987:74)

The theories, concepts and methods in social science are neither abstract nor neutral; they reflect the interests of the ruling apparatus. Dorothy Smith prefers the term ruling apparatus, rather than a conventional concept like power, to draw attention to "the institutions organizing and regulating society with their gendered subtext and their basis in a gender division of labour" (Smith, 1987:3).

The feminist critique of traditional social science[3] has taken what was considered to be abstract universal human knowledge and recast it, revealing epistemological objectivity as an illusion. The feminist critique of objectivity , however, did not merely validate subjectivity as a defense of women. It has altered, in part, the process of knowledge creation. Margrit Eichler (1985)

explains how the process operated.

> Women and men have a different perspective on society stemming from their different positions within that society and which will continue to be crucially significant for as long as a sex structure continues to be crucially important to a society. Women, therefore, have their own perspective, which is of at least equal value to--and arguably of more value than--the corresponding male perspective on the same issue. This is so because those in an inferior position tend to have keener insight into society's workings than those in a superior position. (Eichler, 1985:630)

The feminist critique of research methodology has been intertwined with a broader questioning of the applicability of the natural science model of positivism to social sciences as a whole[4]. Knowledge based on a positivistic epistemology has been presented as objective, universal and unbiased with respect to gender because values are not seen to enter the research process. This, in turn, has led to the view that science does not advocate any specific form of social action (Eichler, 1985; Stacey and Thorne, 1985; Sydie, 1987).

As feminists scrutinized the processes of knowledge creation, critical attention was also directed towards social science methodology. Feminist researchers began to question whether methodologies, like theories, reflected the world of the particular knower. As the scope of the feminist critique expanded, Sandra Harding (1987) proposed a set of distinctions to help clarify the issues and debates around the terms method, methodology, and epistemology. An epistemology is a theory of knowledge which answers the following questions:

who can be a knower; how does knowledge become legitimate; what kinds of things can be known. A methodology is a theory and analysis of how research is conducted. It includes the "broad principles about how to conduct research and how theory is applied" (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991:92). Research methods are the particular techniques of gathering data, such as interviews or surveys.

Traditional methods of investigation, such as interviewing, which have had a long and respected place in social science research were no longer assumed to be exempt from the androcentric bias of conventional scholarly inquiry. Of the variety of qualitative methods available, feminist social science researchers have selected interviewing as "the principal means...to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives" (Graham, 1984:112). Despite the long history and popularity of interviewing among feminist and non-feminist researchers, feminists exposed a number of biases in the technique that have been (re)produced in mainstream social science research.

Ann Oakley (1981) has shown in a review of the social science textbooks from the 1950s, 1960s, and even the 1970s, the recommendations to ensure 'objectivity' during the interview process created and enforced a hierarchical power relation between the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer is supposed to gain information in a specialized one-way form of conversation during which the interviewer is not to offer her/his own views or provide information, even when asked by the participant. These requests should be

deferred by shifting the emphasis back to the respondent. The recommended techniques, Oakley notes, included comments such as, "right now your opinions are more important than mine", "if you really want to know what I think, I'll be honest and tell you in a moment, after we've finished the interview" or by a head shaking gesture which indicates "that's a hard one" and to proceed with the interview. The interviewer is to learn how to humanely elicit information in which "a balance must be struck between the warmth required to generate 'rapport' and the detachment necessary to see the interviewee as an object under surveillance" (Oakley, 1981:33).

Oakley refutes the assertion that a researcher should adopt an exploitative attitude to interviewees. The recommendations place the interviewer in a contradictory position of being friendly but not too friendly, of being detached but not too detached. The unstated ultimate goal of the interview is one of manipulation where the interviewee is objectified as a "data-producing machine" (Oakley, 1981:37). In contrast to the traditional interview techniques, Oakley proposes a non-hierarchical interview where information is exchanged and the researcher shares her/his own experience for a more egalitarian research relationship.

While the research technique of interviewing has been criticized for its strategies to sustain an assumed objectivity, some feminists maintain that the use of certain research methods perpetuates the invisibility of women so that "we

literally cannot see women through traditional science and theory" (Du Bois, 1983:110). Some have criticized quantitative methods for having mirrored the values of masculinity such as "objectivity, detachment, and hierarchy" (Oakley, 1981:38). The quantitative methodological approach, cornerstone to the development of the traditional scientific model, has been criticized by others for having failed to take gender into account as a theoretical category, rather than as a quantifiable variable. This exclusion some feminists maintain (Eichler, 1985; Stacey and Thorne, 1985), has led to the marginalization of feminist perspectives within the social sciences. Feminist researchers have also pointed out that quantitative methods have influenced the selection of research topics so that only those questions that can be answered by this particular method are asked (Daniels, 1976; Vickers, 1989).

Although qualitative methods may be preferable for making visible women's experiences by developing contextualized questions and concepts, there has been a false assumption that quantitative methods are excluded by default from the methodological toolkit of feminist research. In the debate of whether science and particular techniques of inquiry are inherently gendered, there has been a misleading assumption that certain research methods can be used in a non-sexist manner[5] (Eichler, 1988; Harding, 1987; Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991). Judith Stacey (1988) cautions feminist researchers against presuming that qualitative methods, such as ethnography, are inherently more compatible with

feminist principles and goals. Stacey refutes the view that the appropriate choice of method is unequivocally a qualitative research technique. She maintains that imposed limitations on the selection of research methods constrains, rather than facilitates, the researcher's aim and ability to delineate unequal power relations. Stacey concludes:

> There also can and should be feminist research that is rigorously self-aware and therefore humble about the partiality of its...vision and its capacity to represent self and other.
> (Stacey, 1988:26)

Rather than debate the suitability of particular research methods to make visible and transform women's subordinate status, some feminists have proposed that all methods are appropriate, depending on the context and aim of the study (Eichler, 1985; Harding, 1987; Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991; Stacey, 1988). An inclusive approach to feminist methodology recognizes the variety of contributions social science researchers "can make to feminist studies without divesting ourselves of other, potentially very powerful, tools" (Eichler, 1985:623). In her review of recent feminist criticisms of social science analyses, Sandra Harding (1987) states:

> Feminist researchers use just about any and all of the methods, in this concrete sense of the term, that traditional androcentric researchers have used. Of course, precisely how they carry out these methods of evidence gathering is often strikingly different.
> (Harding, 1987:2)

Feminist researchers have reconceptualized the terrain for scholarly inquiry which has opened new areas of study previously regarded as beyond the scope of what could be studied as appropriate subject matter. They have drawn upon experiences arising from the exclusion of women which has provided an indispensable means to recognize and critique research that reflects and reinforces the perspective of those making the claim. They have also drawn attention to the overt and subtle techniques which obscure the social relations of the knower and the known through procedures that support and maintain objectivity. Taken together, the feminist criticisms of traditional social science research methods and methodologies have opened out onto a broader terrain that has politicized all knowledge claims.

While feminist researchers have made and continue to make important contributions for women in social science research, the framework that has guided the inquiry reproduces a dichotomized view which privileges the relationship between a universal, distinct, homogeneous group called women and knowledge claims. The politicization of all knowledge claims destabilizes attempts to present the category woman as a distinct, unified group that has better insight and access to knowledge and truth (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Rosenau, 1992). The connections among knowledge claims and the subordination of those experiences shaped by multiple systems of stratification have only recently been contested. Accordingly, this project seeks to further this exploration by examining how the

experiences of oppression have been shaped by the identity and difference frame for the mobilization of feminist activists.

SELECTION OF A RESEARCH METHOD

As discussed in the previous section, feminist critiques of social science contend that the knower must be recognized as gendered and socially located; all knowledge claims, including feminist knowledge, are informed by researcher values and interests; and all knowledge is affected by power relations--whether they are constructed from the vantage point of the dominant or the subordinate.

The choice of a particular research method is not merely a technical issue which can be separated from specific historical, cultural, ideological and other contexts which frame the research process. Turning specifically to this research project, the selection of qualitative methods was based on the issue under investigation, namely, how has the mobilization process, including the construction of collective identity, been shaped by the frames of identity and difference within SWAG over the past quarter of a century?

Quantitative studies examining collective action have employed a narrow definition of political action that focuses on visible events. Quantitative approaches privilege observable events of social movements (e.g., rallies, demonstrations, marches) without contextualizing the analysis of these visible actions which are "the product of diverse relationships and goals of an underlying

structure of action" (Melucci, 1989:44). By considering collective events as discrete units of analysis, quantitative approaches cannot address collective action as a process rather than as a fact.

A more appropriate approach is a qualitative study of social movements; it permits an understanding of the framework within which social movement activists construct meanings and collective identities that challenge existing power relations. A qualitative approach allows the deeper subjective meanings that have been unnoticed or unrecorded to form the basis for understanding how social movement activists construct a collective identity as a vital aspect of the mobilization process. The use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews enables movement activists' views and meanings to be expressed in a manner congruent with the exploratory and descriptive nature of this study. Since there is minimal research about how activists construct a collective identity, "[q]ualitative methods are...particularly appropriate for exploring subjective experiences at the collective level about which little is known" (Eichler, 1988:43).

Although qualitative data analysis involves a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data, a qualitative approach also allows for the necessary flexibility of being attentive to unexpected data and contrasting experiences (Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Kirby and McKenna, 1989). Most importantly, as a feminist variant of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss' "grounded theory approach" (1967), qualitative analysis such as that discussed by

Kirby and McKenna (1989) enables the development of theory based on movement activists' experiences. It also allows for the recognition of the linkage between the subjective and objective in conducting research. As Sandra Harding (1987) observes:

> The best feminist analysis...insists that the inquirer her/ himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research. (Harding, 1987:9)

With this in mind, this study attended to the subjective elements of the research process by employing a more egalitarian approach characterized by reciprocity, honesty, and reflexivity. A variety of preventive steps were taken throughout the study, which are detailed in the rest of this chapter, to anticipate and minimize potential power differences and to avoid viewing participants as mere objects of knowledge.

MY POSITION IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The critique of the social sciences presented in the preceding pages obliges me to situate myself in the research process. I take as my starting point the notion that a disembodied, distant, omniscient observer, outside and above but all-knowing (a god's eye account) is neither possible nor desirable. I share the view with others that women have been on the margins of social science.

Anne Innis Dagg and Patricia J. Thompson (1988) have compiled the

following figures from Statistics Canada (1986) which show the percentage of full-time university teachers who are women by rank and field for 1984-85 (excluding Quebec): In the Social Sciences and related, only 4.8% are Full Professors; 13.4% are Associate Professors; 25.4% are Assistant Professors; and 39.7% are Lecturers. Women are concentrated in the bottom ranks with the lowest salaries and the least amount of security[6]. Turning exclusively to sociology, another study indicates a similar pattern. The study, conducted by Neil Guppy (1989), examined the rank distributions by sex for sociologists in Canada for 1985-87 and found that women are clustered in the lower ranks compared to their male counterparts[7]. Of all the female instructors in sociology, 15.3% are Full professors; 41.2% are Associate; 37.6% are Assistant; and 5.9% are Lecturers.

Data amassed, in part, for the examination of the status of women by academic rank and the reception of feminist scholarship reveals an inconsistent pattern of progress. The data, collected in a four-phase study conducted by The Canadian Women's Studies Project[8], indicates that sociology has been comparatively more receptive of feminist scholarship than anthropology (Eichler, 1992:85-101)[9]. Women's participation in annual meetings of the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association has steadily increased from 11% at its creation in 1965 to 42% in 1989 (the last year for which data was available). Despite these accomplishments, publications by women in the official refereed journal of the Association reflect a participation rate of only 20% between 1985-

87. Taken together these measures indicate that, despite some inroads, many women researchers remain on the periphery of academia, navigating tension-filled positions as both insiders and outsiders. In Marcia Westkott's (1979) words:

> The feminist debate arises because some of the insiders, who are women, are also outsiders. When women realize that we are simultaneously immersed in and estranged from both our own particular discipline and the Western intellectual tradition generally, a personal tension develops that informs the critical dialogue. This tension, rooted in the contradiction of women's belonging and not belonging, provides the basis for knowing deeply and personally that which we criticize.
> (Marcia Westkott, 1979:422)

In addition to knowing this contradiction, I share the view that the goal of feminist research is not only to be critical but also emancipatory--that knowledge is a means of developing and informing, in a dialectical relationship, feminist praxis.

Over the past quarter of a century, concepts such as equality, power and gender have propelled feminist activists along many different avenues in pursuit of a more equitable society. Feminism, in its many variations, has strived to become an influential movement to change the social, economic and political facets of women's lives and their environment. Although this may be a satisfactory justification to study the movement, my decision to examine the women's movement was not made for this reason alone. Quite simply, I wanted to study the women's movement because I believe in the importance of organizing

to transform the existing relations of power to create a society that fosters equity in its relations.

My interest in this specific research topic emerged from my academic and political activities which have increasingly coalesced around the women's movement and efforts to link theory and practice in the pursuit of social change. My participation as a collective member with the UVic Women's Centre, as a Researcher for the Equity Office at UVic, and as a student representative on Presidential committees such as Equal Rights and Opportunities, Campus Security, and Environmental Programs and Research have brought me in touch with a variety of people who are committed to social change and represented a broad spectrum of ideological perspectives and strategies.

In addition to these activities, I have chosen to strive for a balance between academic work and community involvement. I have participated in events such as the BC and Yukon Women's Centres Association annual conference, cultural events, International Women's Day marches, and Take Back the Night demonstrations organized by SWAG prior to undertaking this project. During the research phase of the project I continued to attend community meetings, marches, demonstrations, rallies and conferences presented by SWAG although I am not a member. Through these experiences I have learned that I share with others the desire of wanting to know how to effect change. Translating this into a theoretical perspective, I am interested in how women with diverse

backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives come to identify with "a group called women" (Cassell, 1977) in a social movement that challenges not only traditional frameworks of analysis but also the social, economic and political structures of society.

SELECTION OF A FEMINIST ORGANIZATION

I selected Victoria Status of Women Action Group (SWAG) for analysis because most literature on the contemporary women's movement examines either the national movement or specific issues of the women's movement. Furthermore, the research which contributes towards an understanding of Canadian women's experiences has left British Columbian women on the periphery of scholarly inquiry (Creese and Strong-Boag, 1992; Wine and Ristock, 1991). Existing knowledge of the women's movement is skewed towards central Canada and relatively little is known about other regions in the country.

While I chose SWAG for analysis precisely because it was separated geographically from the women's movement in central Canada, positive factors were also considered. SWAG has operated continuously since its formation in 1971 despite an era of increasing political conservatism and fiscal restraint: it is now the oldest feminist organization in Victoria[10]. The ability of the organization to define multiple issues and build support attests to its strength and success where, in a country as vast as Canada, mere survival of a social movement is one

measure of success (Findlay et al., 1988). It is also a distinctive organization on the national landscape of the Canadian women's movement. SWAG's creation in 1971 predates the formation of Canada's national feminist organization, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), in 1972. Second, unlike NAC (see, for example, Greaves, 1991; Vickers, 1991), SWAG has been virtually ignored by the scholarly literature to date[11]. Third, many of the movement documents, including some from its formation in 1971, were available from the archival collection at the organization and other documents were located at the Provincial Legislative Library. Finally, many of SWAG's longer-serving key activists remain in Victoria and, in the course of this study, generously shared rich examples and insights as to how social movement activists construct a collective identity.

SELECTION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

An important research decision was to limit the interviews in this study to key activists, that is, those women most heavily involved in SWAG. There are various ways and levels of conceptualizing political activity at the grassroots level such as marching for International Women's Day and Take Back the Night, wearing a button or a t-shirt with a feminist slogan, adding one's name to a petition, and making a financial contribution.

While these are all indicators of levels of activity higher than those who

are uninvolved, for the purpose of this study, distinct criteria were adopted for the selection of key activists. Specifically, three criteria were used for the selection of those to be interviewed: first, a key activist had to have held or be currently holding an executive or leadership position[12] within SWAG; second, she had to have been nominated as a key activist by at least two SWAG activists[13]; and third, in view of financial and time constraints, she had to be located within the Capital Regional District of Victoria.

The combined selection criteria of leadership and nominations were adopted to demarcate those activists who could be called upon for support on a single issue or activity from those who are deeply involved in the movement. Rather than a continuum of activity that shifts in small increments away from the fully involved to the marginally involved, research indicates that there is a clear and definitive division between those identified as activists and rank and file members (Breines, 1989; Echols, 1989; Ferree and Hess, 1995; Freeman, 1975; Luker, 1984).

Moreover, there are important advantages to a purposive sample of ethnographic informants[14]. In a review of the rationale and procedures for selecting informants, Jeffrey Johnson (1990) has shown that there is a relationship among activity in a network, accuracy and reliability. Informants who are most active in the network are those who are also more accurate and reliable in their reporting of behaviour. Reliability, Johnson maintains, is strengthened when

participants "report events that are usual, frequent, or patterned" (Johnson, 1990:36). Therefore, a key activist would know not only the issues and what changes took place, but also how and why, since most of them were intimately involved in the development of innovative, alternate interpretations of unjust situations and strategic political action to effect change.

The names of former key activists who held executive or leadership positions were obtained from past issues of SWAG's newsletter, The Times-Feminist[15]. As well, I approached former SWAG Coordinator Debby Yaffe and explained the nature of the research project and the selection criteria for participants. Drawing on her social network, Debby Yaffe contacted, on my behalf, several of the former activists of SWAG, as identified from The Times-Feminist, and provided them with my telephone number. Many of those given my telephone number reached me and expressed a strong interest in participating in the study. I began with these participants and, at the conclusion of the interview, each was asked to provide the names of two other activists who are presently or were previously involved with SWAG as well as a way to contact them, if possible.

This snowball sampling technique, where the researcher "identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich" (Miles and Huberman, 1994:28), became crucial for identifying and locating former activists, as several had changed their last names during and after their involvement with SWAG[16]. Although the initial contact with Debby Yaffe

underscored the importance of informants who are fortuitously discovered (Johnson, 1990), all of the participants included in this project satisfied the selection criteria. All the participants held or have held key leadership or executive positions with SWAG and were nominated by at least two other members. The interviews were all conducted within the Capital Regional District of Victoria.

Reading the past issues of SWAG's newsletter from the first one published in 1972 to the most recent in 1995 allowed me to establish an historical baseline prior to the interviews which was particularly useful. The examination of organizational literature provided the foundation to develop an historical narrative of SWAG detailing the challenges of creating and sustaining a social movement organization from its formation in 1971 to present activities in 1995 and how the frames of identity and difference have shaped the movement over the past quarter of a century. The background knowledge also helped in the development of some of questions for the interview guide as well as permitted me to become familiar with events, issues, and people. My familiarity with the background of SWAG and specific issues allowed me to be a "knowledgeable stranger" (Reinharz, 1992) during the interview and to develop a relationship that otherwise may not have been possible without my prior research and personal experience in the women's movement.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

A letter of introduction was sent to each participant that outlined the usefulness of the study, the process of data collection, why her participation was important, my commitment to maintaining confidentiality, and the option for identity disclosure. All nine women contacted about the project agreed to take part in it.

The interviews were held at locations mutually agreeable to the participants and myself. They took place at my house, their houses, as well as their places of employment[17]. An important objective was to put each participant at ease while being interviewed. Each interview began with a discussion of the written consent form which is required for university-based research, but was also essential for clarity, prevention of misunderstandings, and simple courtesy (Locke et al., 1987). The form restated the usefulness of the study, the importance of the participant's contribution, and the option to withdraw at any time from the interview process. Both the participant and I signed the form prior to the commencement of the interview to indicate our mutual agreement. Following this, I began to tape record the conversation.

To create a comfortable atmosphere that would enable the participant to relax and talk about herself and her involvement in SWAG, the initial question tapped information that was well-known to her. It was an open-ended question that asked the participant to describe when and how she first became involved in

the women's movement. Following this, I proceeded with open-ended, semi-structured interview questions about how activists construct a collective identity (see Appendix A).

To achieve a sense of how the participants established boundaries, I asked a number of non-directive questions that were placed throughout the interview guide. To examine whether participants invoked an essential or social constructionist understanding of identity, the questions included: the identification of potential allies and opponents, the comparison of women and men in terms of similarities and differences, and the identification of values, if any, that women share and why. To gain an understanding of consciousness, the second factor for the analysis of collective identity, a number of questions were posed. For the activists' beliefs and political strategies, some of the questions asked how they viewed working for change to benefit all women because the category is so very broad and includes so many diverse experiences, and how they believed organizing around one's own oppression creates useful political strategies. For the activists' sense of political arenas in which to pursue social change, the questions tapped their understanding of power and critical issues facing the contemporary women's movement. Finally, the interview concluded with a series of demographic questions addressing age, occupation, education, sexual orientation, marital status, number of children, ethnicity and spiritual/religious affiliation of the participant.

The length of the interview for each participant ranged from one and one-half hours to two hours. While many of the interviews became social occasions, involving food and general conversation, all the interviews were conducted with a conscious rejection of the hierarchical and objectifying stance of traditional social research. This was done to help "break the androcentric bias of knowledge" because "a discourse that speaks for women...has as its subtext, the politics of the women's movement" (Smith, 1984:10).

While this concern undergirded the entire research project, from topic selection and methodology to analysis, specifically for the interview process it involved approaching participants as experts rather than objects to be studied with an indifferent and alienated attitude. I answered the participants' inquiries about myself, my experiences, and the research project honestly and to the best of my ability, as well as shared my thoughts on the contemporary women's movement. The interactive approach permitted me to gather rich narratives about how collective identities are created which otherwise may not have been possible and allowed for a fuller collaboration during the research process.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim into a computer software program to facilitate data analysis. They included my comments as well as frequently repeated phrases such as 'you know' as an indicator of the interaction between the interviewee and myself and to maintain the authenticity of the participants' voices (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Reinharz, 1992).

IDENTITY DISCLOSURE, FEMINIST POLITICS AND ETHICS

Frequently, women's efforts in creating social change are hidden, excluded or denied recognition as a worthwhile contribution. I wanted to avoid perpetuating the exploitation of women as research objects, yet was concerned about potential ethical problems relating to anonymity and establishing a relationship of mutual trust (Acker et al., 1991; Finch, 1984; Fonow and Cook, 1986; Oakley, 1981; Stacey, 1988). As a strategy to resolve the dilemma, each interviewee was offered three choices regarding the degree of anonymity to be provided for her participation in this research project. Each participant was provided with a copy of the interview along with three options for being formally acknowledged for her involvement in shaping the women's movement in Victoria.

The first option was full disclosure. It involved the identification of any quotes that may have been used in the project with the participant's name. It also included a recognition of the participant's contribution to the women's movement and to this study in the Acknowledgements section of the project.

Partial disclosure was the second option offered to each participant. This included attributing any quotes used in the project to a fictitious name and pseudonyms for the names of people close to the interviewee. However, the participants who selected this option received recognition in the Acknowledgments section.

The final option was to remain completely anonymous. As in the partial

disclosure option, any quotes used in the project were attributed to a fictitious name as well as the use of pseudonyms for the names of people close to the participant mentioned in any quoted material. The participants' contributions in this study remain anonymous and they are not included in the Acknowledgements section.

After the interviewing process was completed, each participant was presented with a written transcript of the interview along with a letter which explained the choices of identity disclosure and an addressed, stamped envelope. The follow up provided an opportunity for the participants to make enquiries about the project and permitted me to share the preliminary analysis as well as to reiterate my appreciation for their participation in this research project. Each participant was strongly encouraged to read the transcribed interview carefully before she made the choice about her level of identity disclosure.

I have respected the decisions of all participants. In some places pseudonyms have been used to disguise the identity of six participants. Elsewhere, as requested, the excerpts match the names of three participants. I have distinguished the use of the full identity disclosure option from the other choices by including the participant's full name for the first excerpt of the interview data.

DATA ANALYSIS

The initial phase of the data analysis went on simultaneously with the interviewing process. A few questions were refined and reworded to clarify the intent. For example, the question "what do you like about the women's community in Victoria" was rephrased from the negative "what don't you like about it" to a more neutral "what would you like to improve about it". The rephrased question provided a better opportunity for the participants to share their ideas and suggestions for improvement as well as concerns about the women's movement in Victoria.

The second phase of the data analysis required making sense of the vast amount of data collected from the interviews. Specifically, I followed the analytic procedures outlined by Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter (1988) in their analysis of in-depth interviews examining racial discourses among white New Zealanders. This comparative discourse analysis technique does not attempt to categorize or classify participants, but rather, it examines how a socially constructed concept like 'race' is discursively negotiated by participants.

The first step in the analytic procedure involved attentive, repeated readings of the interview material. The second step, conducted concurrently with the repeated readings, involved a search for regularities in the interview data which I termed the identity frame and the difference frame. These regularities, called interpretative repertoires, are the "building blocks speakers use for

constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena" (Wetherell and Potter, 1988:172). This approach acknowledges that participants may draw on varying interpretative repertoires. As Wetherell and Potter point out in their analysis of racial discourses, participants employ "different, often inconsistent resources, as they seem appropriate" (Wetherell and Potter, 1988:176). Similarly, William Carroll and Bob Ratner (1994) found that activists from diverse social movements, namely environmentalist, labour, feminist, Aboriginal, gay and lesbian, anti-poverty and peace, invoke multiple frames in their accounts of power and injustice. Carroll and Ratner state they made "no assumptions that respondents are monological or cognitively consistent in framing their accounts" (Carroll and Ratner, 1994:10). In accordance with these insights, I assumed during the coding and the analysis of the interview material that participants could draw on more than one interpretative repertoire not only throughout the interview, but also in a single response to a given question.

I began to code the interview material, in a preliminary manner, as I searched for regular patterns in the interview data while using the sensitizing categories of boundaries and consciousness along with the emergent frames of identity and difference. Since this project is exploratory, an open-coding procedure allowed me to uncover patterns while still retaining a certain amount of openness and flexibility for contrasting or unexpected experiences to emerge from the data (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

Satisfied with the data analysis process, I am reminded by Dorothy Smith (1990) that as the final author in linking the specific experiences of the participants to the larger social structure, I "must take full responsibility and not impose this version of social reality as the only possible one" (Smith, 1990:25). Rather than viewing this project as a definitive account of the Victoria Status of Women's Action Group, it should be regarded as an invitation for others to expand, explore and challenge the interpretation presented here.

PRESENTATION OF INTERVIEW MATERIAL

Because the research project was conducted with the recognition that the movement members are active participants in shaping and creating meanings, a principal aim of the analysis was to incorporate and place activists' reflections at the centre of the data analysis. For example, the identity and difference frames which are central to the analysis emerged from the exploratory interviews. It also meant presenting the analysis in the participants' own words wherever possible. Accordingly, I have drawn excerpts from the interview material to illustrate how the frames of identity and difference have shaped the mobilization process, including the creation of a collective identity. The presentation of the interview material in this manner is not to identify some social movement activists as having a 'bad' or 'poor' analysis and others as possessing a 'good' or 'correct' analysis, but rather to draw attention to the frames of identity and difference and how they

have guided the construction of collective identity within SWAG over the past quarter of a century.

DESCRIPTIVE PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS:

A total of 9 women were interviewed for this study whose involvement spanned from SWAG's formation in 1971 to present activity in 1995. The participants vary in age from 46 to 62 with a mean age of 53.6. The participants are highly educated: 6 have Master of Arts degrees; 2 have Bachelor of Arts degrees; and 1 has other post-secondary education. They are employed as professionals or semi-professionals, small business owners, and artists. Their present occupations include nurse, coordinator of a women's centre, artist, employment counsellor, mayor, counsellor, university lecturer, clerical support staffperson, and equity coordinator.

All of the participants have children, with a mean of 2.4 children per participant. Three of the participants identified themselves as lesbian and six as heterosexual. As to their current marital status, two were living with a same sex partner and two were married or living with a male partner. Three of the participants were divorced and two were separated. None of the participants identified herself as particularly religious; however, four who identified themselves as spiritual tended to support female-centred goddess spirituality. Ethnic/racial identity was more difficult to categorize as participants frequently described

multiple ethnic/racial backgrounds. For this study, those who reported Anglo-Saxon or Celtic origins (e.g., British, English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh or some combination thereof) were placed in one group. Seven of the nine participants fit an Anglo-Saxon or Celtic description. One participant stated she was Jewish and one participant reported an Anglo-Saxon and Aboriginal background.

SUMMARY

Feminist researchers have disrupted the epistemological basis of traditional social science with their criticism of the overt and subtle techniques which obscure the social relations of the knower and the known through various procedures that maintain the assumed objectivity of scientific inquiry. They have taken what has been considered to be abstract, universal knowledge and revealed epistemological objectivity as an illusion. Feminist researchers have reconceptualized and expanded the terrain for scholarly inquiry by drawing upon experiences based in the exclusion of women from the process of knowledge creation. Taken together, the feminist criticisms of traditional social research methods and methodologies have opened out on to a broader terrain that has politicized all knowledge claims. Accordingly, this project does not presume that a distinct homogenous group called women has unparalleled access to truth and knowledge. Rather it examines how the relationship between knowledge claims and the subordination of those experiences shaped by multiple systems of stratification has been created,

sustained, and more recently, contested.

A qualitative approach for this project was selected for several reasons. There is very little empirical research on how movement activists construct a collective identity. Accordingly, an open-ended interview allows the subjective meanings viewed from the perspective of the movement activists to inform the understanding of how the frames of identity and difference, which emerged from the exploratory interviews, have shaped the construction of collective identity. It also allows for the flexibility to be attentive to unexpected or contrasting information during the data gathering process

The interviews were in-depth, semi-structured and informal. The interview questions were grouped around the concepts of boundaries and consciousness and were constructed to allow for variation in how the participants constructed collective identity. The interviews were conducted with a conscious rejection of traditional interview techniques that create and enforce a hierarchical relationship between the participant and the researcher. Some of the steps taken to anticipate and minimize potential power differences included approaching the participants as experts, providing of a transcript of the interview, and offering the participants a choice on identity disclosure.

The selection of SWAG for this project was governed by several considerations. SWAG is a distinctive movement organization as it has a long, uninterrupted history of activism, yet it has been virtually absent from the

scholarly literature to date. Many of the movement documents, including some from its formation in 1971, were available from the archival collection at the organization and others were located at the Provincial Legislative Library. This allowed for an historical approach examining how the frames of identity and difference have shaped the mobilization process. Finally, many of the SWAG's longer-serving key activists remain in Victoria and were willing to share examples and insights into how activists constructed a collective identity.

Nine interviews were conducted with SWAG activists. Three criteria were used for the selection of those to be interviewed. They included: presently or formerly held a leadership position, nomination by two other SWAG activists, and located in Victoria. These criteria were adopted to identify key activists from the general movement members as key activists would know not only the issues and what changes took place, but also how and why, since most of them were intimately involved in the development of innovative, alternate interpretations of unjust situations and strategic political action. The interviews were transcribed verbatim into a computer program to facilitate the data analysis. The data analysis followed the steps outlined by Wetherell and Potter (1988). The comparative technique was helpful for examining how the collective identity constructed by activists was shaped by the frames of identity and difference.

Before proceeding to an examination of the interview data, the next chapter explores how SWAG has drawn upon a variety of strategies and tactics to

mobilize collectively controlled resources to effect social change over the past twenty-five years. This account examines how the frames of identity and difference have shaped the creation and transformation of the organization from a traditional hierarchical model to a collective approach congruent with feminist principles, the financial contradictions it has faced, and the development of its cultural resources. The exploration of these aspects of the mobilization process is followed by an examination of how the frames of identity and difference have guided the construction of collective identity.

NOTES

1. Shulamit Reinharz (1983) provides several tables which detail the contrasts between mainstream and feminist approaches to research.

2. Researchers in other traditions of sociology (e.g., symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology) also criticize the emphasis on objectivity and the assumption that the subject and object can readily be separated. For an overview of these, see George Ritzer, 1992.

3. This discussion is limited to the social sciences. For a feminist critique of the physical sciences, see Evelyn Fox Keller (1985) Reflections on Gender and Society.

4. Positivism is the idea that a single scientific method is applicable to all fields of study, and the physical sciences provide the standard of certainty and exactness for all disciplines. Positivists also believe that knowledge is inherently neutral and they can keep human values out of their work. Because research is seen to be 'value free' science does not appear to be advocating any specific form of social action. For a critique of Durkheim, Weber, Marx and Freud, see R. A. Sydie (1987) Natural Women, Cultural Men: A Feminist Perspective on Sociological Theory.

5. Margrit Eichler (1988:45) states that methods are used in a sexist manner if (1) questions are asked of one sex about the other and the responses are subsequently utilized as if they represented the reality for the other sex; (2) questions are asked that do not reflect the theoretically possible spectrum of female-male behaviours, attitudes, capacities, traits, characteristics, etc.; (3) the sex of the participants in the research process is not properly taken into account; (4) any sexually identified objects or persons (whether through verbal, visual, or any other means) are not properly controlled for; (5) research instruments are validated on one sex only but used by both; and (6) data collected on both sexes are manipulated in such a manner that they cannot be analyzed (or the researcher(s) fail(s) to analyze them although it is possible to do so) by sex.

6. The same pattern also emerges for the percentage of full-time university teachers who are women by rank and field for 1984-85 (excluding Quebec) in the

following fields: Education, Fine and Applied Arts, Humanities and related, Agricultural and Biological Sciences, Health Professions and Occupations, and Mathematics and Physical Sciences. See Anne Innis Dagg and Patricia J. Thompson (1988) for the specific figures of each field and a detailed discussion.

7. Quoted in Eichler, 1992:82, Table 8. The rank distributions by sex for sociologists in Canada for 1985-87 show that 31.3% of Full professors are men; 48.7% are Associate; 18.7% are Assistant; and 1.3% are Lecturers.

8. The project consisted of four phases of data collection: phase 1 involved collecting data through registrars' offices on women's/feminist studies offerings at all Canadian universities in 1987; phase 2 involved identifying and administering a questionnaire to all professors who had ever taught a credit course on women's/feminist studies at a Canadian university in 1988; phase 3 involved qualitative follow-up interviews with one hundred of the women randomly selected from the study population and all of the men who could be reached (for a total of 187 interviews) in 1989; and phase 4 involved in-depth interviews with 30 thinkers across the world whose work had been identified as particularly useful by the total study population (1989-91). The information presented here draws on phases 2 and 3 of the data collection.

9. See Somer Brodribb and Michele Pujol (1991) "The Canadian Women's Studies Project: Inside Looking In," Resources for Feminist Research Vol. 20, No. 3/4 (Fall/Winter) for a critique of this project as it appeared in Atlantis (Fall 1990) Vol. 16, No. 1. See Margrit Eichler (1992) "On Charming Princes and Reviews: Response to Brodribb and Pujol's Review Essay "The Canadian Women's Studies Project: Inside Looking In?" and Rhonda L. Lenton (1992) "Feminism or Feminisms? A Reply to Brodribb and Pujol" for responses.

10. Other long-term feminist groups and organizations in Victoria include: Everywoman's Books, a feminist non-profit collectively run bookstore which has operated uninterrupted since 1975; Transition House, a battered women's shelter which has been in service since the early 1970's; and The Sexual Assault Centre, which opened its doors in 1982 after the demise of Victoria's Rape Relief in the late 1970's.

11. Josephine Payne-O'Connor (1986) Sharing Power: Women in Politics, Vancouver Island Profiles provides an overview of women on Vancouver Island who are active as lobbyists, mayors, community leaders, band counsellors, chiefs, political reporters, and members of the provincial legislature. Although Payne-O'Connor was a member of SWAG and the proceeds from this political skills

handbook "will go to support the work of the Victoria Status of Women Action Group in encouraging women to participate fully in political life", she does not include the organization nor its (then) current members in her profile of women who are creating and leading community action groups. She interviews two former members of SWAG, Pam Blackstone and Mimi Rogers, about their experiences in Women Against Pornography and working as a political correspondent within the Provincial Legislative Press Gallery, respectively.

12. Until 1981, SWAG position titles reflected a hierarchical structure: Executive positions included president, vice-president (programmes), vice-president (media and projects), secretary and treasurer. To better reflect a collective structure, the traditional titles were replaced in 1981 with coordinator, programs, media, conference, correspondence, recording secretary, treasurer, and membership.

13. Nominations were accepted from both current and former SWAG members.

14. Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (1994) describe a range of sampling strategies that may be designed in advance of the data collection or may evolve during the study. For an overview of the types of sampling and their purpose, see the Typology of Sampling Strategies in Qualitative Inquiry, Miles and Huberman, 1994:28.

15. In 1976 the Victoria Women's Centre newsletter Lysistrata and Victoria Status of Women Action Group newsletter News merged to "save both woman power and finances" (Status of Women Action Group - News, March 15, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 1). The Times-Feminist is the current name of SWAG's newsletter. It was adopted in June 1990 after submissions for a new name were requested from readers (Vol. 17, No. 1).

16. Some activists changed their name to better reflect a feminist identity, other names changed in relation to their marital status, and other names changed for unspecified reasons.

17. Reflecting on the location of the interviews, interviewing women in their homes or mine was preferable since it generally produced more social, relaxed and thorough interview. Seven of the nine interviews were conducted either at the participants' home or my own.

CHAPTER THREE

CREATING AND SUSTAINING THE VICTORIA STATUS OF WOMEN ACTION GROUP: 1971 TO 1995

Social movements need to bring an array of resources under collective control to effect social change. Yet a classic instrumental account focuses on the mobilization of resources with little attention accorded to the ideological elements that guide this process. With this restriction of resource mobilization theory in mind, this chapter also draws on the interpretive approach of framing to examine some of the challenges of creating and sustaining a social movement organization. Specifically, it addresses the emergence of SWAG, the mobilization of material and non-material resources, the development of its organizational structure and how the frames of identity and difference have shaped these processes.

Within the resource mobilization tradition that has predominated in the United States, social movement literature has tended to focus exclusively on the structural factors that facilitate the recruitment process of individuals during the emergence of a social movement. Too much emphasis on the structural factors has contributed to a "misguided and overly mechanistic analysis" (Snow et al., 1986:468) that has neglected the challenge of sustaining members' involvement beyond the initial mobilization (Hunt and Benford, 1992; Morris and Mueller,

1992; Snow and Benford, 1992). In view of this limitation, frame analysis calls attention to the on-going interpretive work that movements have engaged in to render an innovative and meaningful understanding of common events and conditions among movement members. Framing creates a shared alternate interpretation of unjust political issues which allows for the generation of support for and participation in social movement activity (Snow et al., 1986).

With this theoretical understanding in mind, the contemporary women's movement can be viewed as having created an innovative interpretation which presented the category woman as a universally subordinated group with a shared commitment to the same principles and goals to end that oppression. This frame, termed the politics of identity, marked the early phase of the contemporary women's movement and has shaped both the strategic action and efforts to mobilize resources by SWAG. Despite the initial explanatory power of the identity frame in some contexts, an alternate frame--called the politics of difference--emerged in the mid 1980s to question the very ideas and strategies by which SWAG had previously organized for change. The politics of difference has contested the privileging of a universal, homogeneous identity and has drawn attention to many different systems of stratification, in which gender forms only one axis. Accordingly, an understanding of the mobilization process includes an examination not only of the challenges faced by SWAG for resource acquisition and maintenance, but also how the frames of identity and difference have guided

its pursuit of social change.

By attending to both the interpretive work of framing and the pragmatic mobilization of resources, this chapter examines some of the varied activities SWAG has engaged in over the span of twenty-five years to construct and refine collective action frames that not only resonate experientially with its members to "retain their cognitive and ideological loyalties" (McAdam et al., 1988:725), but also to mobilize a wide variety of resources crucial for effecting social change. The first section examines the roots of SWAG's existence and how the movement activists drew upon shared personal experiences to construct the identity frame that has guided SWAG's early efforts to implement change. The second section explores the mobilization of financial resources and the some of the contradictions SWAG has confronted as a state-funded social movement organization in pursuit of social change. The third section looks at the development of cultural resources--conferences, rallies and newsletters--and how the identity frame and difference frame have each shaped these vital components of movement mobilization for SWAG. The fourth section examines the challenge presented by the development and maintenance of a social movement organization that balances efficiency with egalitarian social relations. This section traces the major changes in the structural organization of SWAG as it has moved from a traditional hierarchical model towards a collective approach that embodies feminist principles in its everyday practice. A summary of the chapter is provided

in the final section.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE VICTORIA STATUS OF WOMEN

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) is widely recognized as a pivotal event in the establishment and organization the contemporary Canadian women's movement[1] (Adamson et al., 1988; Cohen, 1993; Findlay, 1987; Morris, 1980; Wine and Ristock, 1991). The striking of a Royal Commission and grassroots organizing helped to create a climate of expectation for change (Adamson et al., 1988). The release of the Report in 1970 was accompanied by the mobilization of women across Canada who viewed the 167 recommendations "as a benchmark to assess what progress women have made" (CACSW, 1979). It was in this climate that the Victoria Status of Women Action Group was created in 1971.

While traces of feminist activity can be found in Victoria prior to 1971, it was not until after the release of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women Report that a fully articulate and autonomous movement for contemporary women's liberation became established. The Victoria Status of Women Action Group was formed directly out of a conference organized to investigate the inadequate response of the Federal government to implement the 167 recommendations of the 1970 RCSW Report. The conference, which was held at the University of Victoria in 1971 on November 12-13, featured keynote speakers

Rosemary Brown[2] and Pauline Jewett[3]. It mobilized diverse local women's political, academic and religious groups which included: the Women's Caucus of the University of Victoria, the University of Victoria Women's Club, the Voice of Women, a Jewish Women's group, a Unitarian Women's group, a Catholic Women's group, and a Liberal Women's group.

Out of the conference, an ad hoc group was formed. At the first meeting following its founding, eighty women met to establish an elected board of directors and to draft a constitution (The Times, December 3, 1971). In their initial organizing stage the ad hoc members formed five action groups to address areas to research for specific actions to facilitate the implementation of the RCSW Report's recommendations. These groups included: (1) daycare, (2) education, (3) equal employment and pay, (4) women's public life, and (5) the family. As important components of their political activist practice, the ad hoc group also established a speakers' bureau to educate the public and an ombudsman[4] to work on legal issues.

By the spring of 1972 the group had conducted a survey of the retail trade, focusing on large chain department stores, small speciality stores and grocery stores. They produced a report that indicated women were concentrated in part-time positions with low wages (Status of Women in Retail Sales Report, 1972). In response to these statistical findings, and supported by the recommendations of the RCSW Report, the group insisted upon an increase in the minimum wage and

proceeded to lobby the Provincial Minister of Labour.

The Political Life Group conducted a survey of SWAG members at a general meeting in May, 1972 and found, of the 25 members who responded, eleven had previously worked on political campaigns (T-F, 1972, Vol. 1, No. 1). The results of this survey support other studies that indicate that many of the early activists in the contemporary women's movement brought with them valuable organizational skills gained from their participation in political parties and Left organizations (Adamson et al., 1988; Douglas, 1992; Echols, 1989; Ferree and Hess, 1985; Freeman, 1975).

The combined organizational skills of the early activists facilitated the presentation of SWAG's first conference one year after its formation. On November 4-5, 1972, keynote speakers Judy LaMarsh, Grace McInnis, Shirley Stocker (CBC), and Grace Hartman (CUPE National President) called for the transformation of the existing unequal power relations between women and men in order to achieve political, economic, and social change. The goals of the conference were to "bring together as many groups and individuals interested in women's rights, as possible; to encourage the formation of the Status of Women Action Groups in other centres on the Island, and to plan co-operative action in the struggle to equalize the Status of Women in this province and across the country" (T-F, 1972, Vol. 1, No. 1). The broadly articulated framing of the conference attracted 300-350 people and was co-sponsored by the Victoria

District Labour Council and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

The Victoria Status of Women Action Group concentrated its energy on mobilizing women through a variety of strategies in addition to its first conference. Within a short period of time activists had booked the display case at the Victoria Public Library to "spread the word on SWAG and the Women's Movement" and had organized a series of noon hour lectures co-sponsored by SWAG and the YM/YWCA on the recommendations of the RCSW Report (T-F, 1972, Vol. 1, No. 1). While the immediate goals for SWAG included educating more people about the RCSW Report and its implications as well as lobbying British Columbia's Provincial Minister of Labour about the discrimination against women in British Columbia's labour code[5], an innovative frame was emerging that redefined particular events and experiences as unjust. That is, the politicization of a gendered identity was under way. Women were beginning to view themselves as an alliance of opponents to the status quo. Activists introduced a new way of identifying and framing common experiences, on the basis of gender, to create a shared alternate worldview to unite diverse individuals into a group with a common interest in changing the status quo.

Early SWAG activists drew on their personal experiences and queried the requisite public disclosure of marital status through titles like 'Miss' and 'Mrs'. They challenged the existing patriarchal assumption that all women are identified by their relationship to a male. A brief survey of public institutions, namely a

bank, store, hospital, telephone company and city hall, revealed their resistance to use the term 'Ms'. The survey results indicated that it was "against directory rules" at the telephone company or it would be considered "a mistake" at the hospital (T-F, 1972, Vol. 1, No. 1). The depiction of female sexuality was also challenged by the early activists. An advertising campaign by a spa company that portrayed women as commodities with advertising slogans such as, "how does your man feel about your figure--does he have cause for complaint?" and "he deserves a lovelier you--his happiness can't wait" drew activists' attention to the mass media and its role in reproducing and legitimizing norms about female sexuality. As a tactic to protest the sexual exploitation of women in its advertising campaign, SWAG members were encouraged to telephone the spa company and threaten to cancel their membership (T-F, 1972, Vol. 1, No. 1).

From its beginning, SWAG framed the condition of women as unjust and set out with the practical purpose of ending it. The first issue of SWAG's newsletter is of particular interest because it reflects the creation of the identity frame and its importance as the foundation for mapping out the strategy for effecting change to be pursued through SWAG. Asserting the universality of a shared identity as women, the newsletter marks the discovery and weaving together of new interpretations of common events and shared experiences through the category of gender. It frames women's subordinate status as a uniform experience; women, as an undifferentiated group, were recognized as being absent

from traditional positions of power with a strong emphasis on employment and partisan politics. The first issue of SWAG's newsletter brought innovative critical attention to the asymmetric organization of power based on gender. While the first issue constructed a frame based on the primacy of female-male difference with gender as a central constituent of identity, the emergent frame also marked a clear break with the conventional view of politics by insisting upon the political character of economic, familial and sexual practices. By recasting specific events and experiences to reveal their gendered nature, SWAG was able to draw in more movement members. Despite its initial success in attracting new members by creating an emergent frame that resonated with their everyday personal experiences, SWAG soon discovered that the organization and implementation of collective action also requires financial resources.

MOBILIZATION OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The women's movement in Canada has been characterized as 'contradictory' because it has been largely state funded[6] (Findlay, 1987; Wine and Ristock, 1991; Adamson et al., 1988). Similarly, the contradictions of being state-funded have shaped the activities of SWAG as it has attempted to not only attract movement activists but also to sustain their commitment beyond the initial mobilization.

McAdam et al. (1988) identify two options available to social movement

organizations for securing financial resources to sustain the movement. The first option is to obtain resources from the grassroots members. However, as most social movement constituents typically have access to only limited financial resources, the social movement organization will be engaged "in a near continuous round of resource-generating just to survive" (McAdam et al., 1988:725). The second option, which poses another set of difficulties, is to establish resource links with a group outside of the social movement constituency.

SWAG has combined both of these strategies for securing funds, although the emphasis has shifted over the past two decades to strengthening its financial links with the state. Despite this transition, reliance on state funding has been controversial not only for SWAG but also for the Canadian women's movement. The contradictions for feminist organizations while being funded by the state have been documented primarily in feminist service organizations like battered women's shelters[7]. While SWAG does not provide direct service, such as counselling, it faces a similar challenge of establishing a feminist organization that does not reinscribe the very structures and processes that it has set out to change.

In the early phase of SWAG, financial resources were generated by a range of activities. The financial statement for 1974 indicates that SWAG generated limited funding from the levy of membership fees, the solicitation of donations from movement members, the proceeds of a book sale and a bazaar, and the profits of the previous year's conference. In 1975, a short term grant

from the state covered the expenses for producing the newsletter, creating a videotape, and purchasing educational material (T-F, 1975, Vol. 2, No. 3).

The International Year of the Woman (IYW) in 1975 initially created a sense of opportunity among activists that organized efforts to implement political and economic change would lead to equality for women in society. Despite the optimism at the commencement of the year-long commemoration, very little improvement was marked in the status of women in Canada (Findlay, 1987). Mimi Robertson, the President of SWAG during this period, criticized the lack of progress by the state for the implementation of the RCSW recommendations: "On the Federal scene, IYW fizzled like a dud firecracker within four months--and all of us were left with the feeling that, once again, women had been betrayed" (T-F, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 1). In light of the lack of concrete gains in the male dominated power structure, Robertson proposed that the organization needed to renew its demands. By 1976 the early framing of SWAG had been extended from the implementation of the recommendations in the RCSW Report to include a broader agenda, namely: family law reform, 24 hour daycare, training programs for women in the labour market, non-sexist learning materials in schools, mass-screening mammography equipment and programs for early detection of breast cancer, funding for Women's Centres, Transition Houses, Rape Crisis Centres, and Status of Women Offices (T-F, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 1).

Within this expansion of issues, women continued to be framed as a

homogeneous group, distinctly different from men. Although violence against women was not initially recognized as an issue in the Royal Commission Report, SWAG identified the violence against women as political and called for the creation of transition houses and rape crisis centres. While the politicization of issues by SWAG had grown and diversified during this period, it also served to strengthen the identity frame. That is, all women were characterized as members of a homogeneous group that was uniformly oppressed. Distinctions, such as class, race and sexuality, were subsumed under the primary oppression of gender. In stressing the universality of an identity as women not only were vast differences among women implicitly erased, but also their agency or complicity to oppress other women.

As the decade progressed, SWAG continued to pursue state funding, although it was later debated by movement members[8], in order to provide the necessary financial resources to maintain the organization. While researchers have noted the benefits of direct and indirect state support for the mobilization of movements (Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy and Zald, 1977) acceptance of state financial resources has posed a recurrent and unresolved dilemma for SWAG, and more broadly, the women's movement in Canada. Several events in the 1980's clearly marked the incongruity of being tied to the state funding process. Each of the following examples addresses a different facet of the contradictions faced by SWAG for having established a financial resource base beyond its

movement constituency.

The first example illustrates the state's explicit influence in an attempt to shape the agenda of SWAG through the placement of restrictions on issues deemed inappropriate for financial support. In 1987, based on a report from The Standing Committee on Secretary of State[9], the Federal government's funding agency restricted the terms of reference for granting funds to proposals. One year prior to the imposition of funding restrictions, a review of the Women's Program of the Department of Secretary of State was launched in December 1986 due, in part, to the persistent lobbying efforts by the conservative group Realistic, Equal, and Active for Life (R.E.A.L.) Women. Arguing that no single national group represented all Canadian women's views on equality, R.E.A.L. Women challenged not only the concept of equality for women but also the need to provide federal funds to work towards it. This anti-feminist group championed a return to traditional conservative middle-class family ethics, values and lifestyles, stating "it should be recognized that men and women are equal but different" (Fairness in Funding Report, 1987). Seeking a compromise between the polarized women's groups, the Committee imposed restrictions which denied funding to proposals that included issues of sexual orientation and reproductive choice[10]. This conservative agenda advanced by Secretary of State placed social movement organizations in an awkward position where they "could do those things, but...couldn't tell [Secretary of State] about it" (Rhonda, 1994).

Three years prior to the restrictions imposed by the state in 1987, SWAG had organized a workshop entitled 'Lesbianism, Feminism, and Lesbophobia' in February 1984. Within six months of the workshop SWAG had drafted and adopted policy statements on sexuality and lesbianism which affirmed women's individual rights to choose their own sexual lifestyle and recognized the social, economic, and legal oppression of lesbians (T-F, 1984, Vol. 11, No. 4). SWAG's policy statements affirmed sexual orientation both in terms of personal choice and women's equality. Recalling that the identity frame is an attempt to mobilize a politics based on the conceptualization of women as a distinct and homogeneous group, the framing of sexual orientation can be viewed as a destabilization of this identity. By recasting the universalizing assumption of identity politics which frames women as a single coherent group, the politicization of sexuality signifies the framing of difference. Human sexuality was characterized as "male-defined" with an "emphasis on penetration and ejaculation" (T-F, 1984, Vol. 11, No. 4). Women's sexuality was described as "directly tied to the service roles assigned women". As a strategy to challenge the "phallocentrism of normative heterosexuality", women were encouraged to explore and to assert their sexual needs. The policy states that SWAG:

> encourages each woman to explore and define her own sexuality; [SWAG] affirms the rights of a woman to choose her own sexual lifestyle be it bisexual, celibate, heterosexual or lesbian; [SWAG] supports the rights of consenting adults to choose their own forms

> of sexual activity.
> (T-F, 1984, Vol. 11, No. 4)

By acknowledging the variety of women's sexual desires (i.e. bisexual, heterosexual or lesbian) the policy unsettled the identity frame's assumption that there is a uniformity to female desire. It also recognized that some women may be subject to different forms of oppression, in this instance, as a result of their sexual orientation. In short, it was a disruption of the identity frame's assertion of a universal female experience and a recognition of another system of oppression. Snow and Benford (1992) state that "efforts to extend the ideational scope may encounter resistance from its progenitors and guardians, as well as external supporters" (1992:145). On this point, SWAG's efforts to frame sexual orientation as a politics of difference encountered resistance from the external financial supporters. Despite an increasingly conservative political environment, SWAG refused to modify its agenda to accommodate the state.

In defiance of the state imposed restrictions, SWAG organized its first event to acknowledge lesbians in Victoria for their expertise and commitment to the movement in the fall of 1988 (T-F, 1988, Vol. 15, No. 2). Women gathered at the Crystal Gardens for the Gala Appreciation for Lesbians Supper on October 15, 1988 to "celebrate the achievements of lesbians throughout the ages, across the country and in our own community" (T-F, 1988, Vol. 15, No. 2). This event was extremely successful and it celebrated its fourth anniversary in 1992. The

following year, in May 1993, the first LesbiAntics festival, which was organized by an ad hoc committee through SWAG, was held as "part of a community-building process [to] celebrate lesbian diversity and affirm our lives and culture, past and present" (LesbiAntics pamphlet, 1994). More than 450 women attended the "Out On Stage" variety show, dance, and "Dykes Thru the Ages" fashion show and tea. All of these events drew press attention, increased awareness of women's political activism, and created an emotional response which contributed to an effective mobilization process. Even though these tactics endangered SWAG's state funding, it was critical for SWAG to contest the state's restrictive agenda. If SWAG had failed to act in a manner consistent with its framing, it would have risked rendering "its framing efforts vulnerable to dismissal" (Snow and Benford, 1992:147). While the events created a sense of community which helped to retain member's sense of loyalty and commitment to SWAG, they also fostered the politics of difference. That is, the framing of difference through the politicization of sexuality contested the universalizing assumptions of the identity frame and the subordination of distinctions and contradictions of experiences to create a homogeneous gendered identity as women. The framing of difference acknowledges, rather than suppresses, that privilege and oppression are not confined exclusively in a binary framework. Accordingly, the difference frame moves beyond an understanding of power relations as presented in the identity frame to a more complex analysis of interlocking systems of oppression.

SWAG also challenged the state's restriction on issues of reproductive choice by responding to the Provincial government's attempt to withhold Medical Service Plan (MSP) funds for abortions through a highly visible campaign which included tactics such as the 'Stand Up For Choice' Rally held on June 20, 1987 at the Provincial Legislature (T-F, 1987, Vol. 14, No. 3). The demonstration connected feminism's struggle for reproductive choice provincially to Canadian nationalism. Colours were symbolically used to create a sense of belonging to the movement as participants were encouraged to wear red and white--"the official rally colours" (T-F, 1987, Vol. 14, No. 3). This demonstration, which was successful in signifying strength among movement activists, was only one in a series of highly visible tactics in a long campaign conducted both in the public and political arenas across Canada to ensure women's reproductive rights[11]. While SWAG had endorsed reproductive choice nine years earlier in 1978[12], it was vital to elicit support for abortion rights as part of an overall consistent movement action for women's rights. Reflecting on the reproductive choice campaign and the ability of the women's movement to frame issues independent of state influence, SWAG coordinator Debby (Gregory) Yaffe stated in 1988, "SWAG would have forfeited our position within the community. People flocked to us in that time of crisis, and had we said 'Sorry, we can't work on this issue', we would have lost all credibility we've built up over the years" (T-F, 1988, Vol. 15, No. 3).

Viewed within a resource mobilization framework, the increasingly

conservative agenda of the Social Credit provincial government during this period was positive in a paradoxical sense for SWAG. The attack on abortion funding not only increased the public's awareness of the issue, but it was also instrumental in drawing more activists to the movement as SWAG experienced an increase in both its financial donations and membership rolls (T-F, 1988, Vol. 15, No. 3). Even though many of the new supporters were only paper members, they represented financial support and potential recruits to action against the state. While SWAG challenged the restriction on reproductive choice without any immediate negative financial repercussions from the state, Rhonda (1994) acknowledges "that the grant application...did informally shape things. People would get so busy fulfilling the terms of the grant application they didn't really have time to deal with the concerns of women in the community".

The most recent sweeping attempt to control the Canadian women's movement through restriction of its financial resources is perhaps the most widely known. In 1990 the Progressive Conservative Federal Government, led by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, proposed to cut core funding which would force the closure of more than 80 Women's Centres and shelters for battered women across Canada. The federal budget cuts left SWAG "gasping for air" as 15 of British Columbia's 33 women's centres were targeted for closure by the summer of 1990 (T-F, 1990, Vol. 16, No. 5). National women's organizations marked for funding cuts included: The National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC),

the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW), the Women's Research Centre, Healthsharing, and the Canadian Women's Studies Journal.

Between 1990 and 1991, SWAG, along with many of the Women's Centres in BC and across Canada, had been operating with an uncertain future and the economic strains created anxiety within the movement. The projected closure of Transition Houses and Women's Centres became an important mobilizing issue throughout British Columbia and Canada. The changes within the political and economic environment placed the movement in a defensive position as it attempted to restore the previous level of federal financial support. Reflecting on the fiscal crisis faced by the movement during the previous year and the strategic action taken to counter it, SWAG Coordinator Marianne Alto observed that:

> We witnessed something that has rarely been seen in the modern women's movement--the coming together of incredibly diverse women, who stood shoulder to shoulder chanting, occupying, writing, marching, speaking out, demanding the right to financial support for the essential work accomplished by women's centres country wide. (T-F, 1991, Vol. 17, No. 4)

Fortunately, a temporary reprieve was granted that extended funding for the Transition Houses and Women's Centres in British Columbia for one year. Although other issues were addressed during this period, the threatened elimination of funding and the predicted demise of important services provided by the women's movement became a focal point for political activity.

While SWAG eventually received state funding from the provincial rather than the federal level, it has since attempted to mobilize financial resources through innovative alternate methods, such as municipal grants[13], expanded membership categories[14], wage subsidy programs for co-op students from the University of Victoria, and fundraising from its constituents through dances and special events, donations at marches, direct-mail requests, and t-shirt sales. As a non-profit organization, SWAG has continued to pursue charitable tax status from Revenue Canada since the early 1980s. The applications, however, have repeatedly been denied because SWAG's work is viewed as 'too political'[15]. Despite the diversified resource base, for the fiscal year ending March 1993, slightly more than 88 percent of SWAG's total funding came from government grants[16] (Statement of Revenue and Expenditures, 1993).

These examples illustrate, in varying ways, the difficulty of maintaining and advancing feminist theories and strategies that contest existing power structures and practices while being funded by the state. Although attention was briefly redirected to pursue a diversified resource base to help offset the instability created by the 1990-91 fiscal crisis, there is no indication that SWAG, at least in recent years, has altered its actions to accommodate the state. SWAG continues to work for social change to improve the economic, social and political status of women, despite looming resource cuts during these fiscally conservative times.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

A major challenge to any social movement is the transition from a small group of core of activists to a larger, more diverse movement. Since social movements generally emerge from the actions of small homogeneous groups of people (Ferree and Hess, 1985; Freeman, 1975; Luker, 1984; Weir, 1993), a major task for the movement is to expand its constituency base to generate increased support for and participation in the movement. In a comprehensive review of social movement literature, McAdam et al. (1988) conclude "the factor that has been shown to bear the strongest relationship to activism is prior contact with another movement participant" (McAdam et al., 1988:707). However, to create a broad-based movement to effect social change, attempts must be made to attract new members that extend beyond interpersonal ties. SWAG has engaged in three key strategies--conferences, rallies and newsletters--to expand the number of social movement members, to keep them committed to the ideology of the women's movement, and to foster a sense of community among movement members.

Conferences

The annual fall conference organized by SWAG has been an effective mobilization strategy. Beginning in 1972, the conferences served to draw in a range of movement participants who were not directly involved in the core organization. By 1978 the conferences had become a community tradition in

Victoria and generated limited financial resources for SWAG[17]. Oliver and Marwell (1992:264) state, "organizations tend to ritualize their fund-raising events"; however, this restrictive, instrumental interpretation fails to view the annual conference as an opportunity to attract new movement supporters and to promote a shared alternate worldview that could guide collective political action in a meaningful manner. For instance, in a detailed Report produced in 1978 following the Focus Women conference it was noted that "registration was *again* largely from the community rather than SWAG membership" (Conference Report, 1978:6 emphasis added). In addition to having drawn a large segment of its support from the unaffiliated members of the community, the 1978 conference attracted twenty-five new members for SWAG (Conference Report, 1978:6).

Similar participation results were achieved at the conference held in 1980, Celebrating Sisterhood. SWAG reported that of the nearly 300 participants who attended, approximately 25% (or 75 women) responded to the feedback forms. For 67% of the respondents (or 50 of the 75 women who responded) it was their first SWAG conference, and the same number, 67%, indicated that they were not presently members of SWAG (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 8). While the figures attested to the effectiveness of this particular mobilization strategy to attract new members that extended beyond the interpersonal ties of the movement's constituency, the conferences were also instrumental for framing a shared identity among women.

In the late 1970s SWAG identified four key objectives for its annual fall conference:

> (1) that feminists otherwise busy outside of SWAG during the year will be refreshed and stimulated.
>
> (2) that women outside the movement will feel welcome and learn something of feminist objectives.
>
> (3) that those attending will learn the current social, political, and economic status of women.
>
> (4) that those attending will have the opportunity for sharing and interacting with other women. (Conference Committee Report, 1978)

The conferences were held at the University of Victoria, despite concerns expressed by some movement members that the location was "elitist" and limited the accessibility of a more diverse constituency (Conference Committee Report, 1978). As Avis Rasmussen recalled:

> The conferences could attract women who weren't maybe able to contribute all their time or whatever, but they would come. Although we did have it at UVic, so sometimes we used to talk about that, and say why are we having it here because it does kind of represent a place that some women didn't feel comfortable coming to.

Rather than relocating the annual conferences, financial constraints precluded the use of an alternate site. They continued to be held at UVic because "we didn't have lots of flowing money" and the space could be arranged without a fee through the UVic Women's Action Group (Rasmussen, 1994).

The conferences were successful in sustaining members' commitment to the social movement which is "equally crucial" to the recruitment process (Benford and Hunt, 1992:40). They were organized around a variety of themes to draw attention to the movements' efforts to politicize common situations and shared personal experiences. The conferences included: Affirmative Action (1974), All Women Work (1976), Focus Women (1978), Political Skills (1979), Celebrating Sisterhood (1980), Women and Employment (1981), Celebrating Sisterhood--SWAG's 10th Anniversary (1982), Women and the Changing Family (1983), Charter of Rights and Women's Equality (1984), and Take Hold of the Future (1985).

The identity politics which guided SWAG's political activist practice during the 1970s and 1980s similarly shaped the organization and presentation of the conferences. By drawing upon common characteristics in the economic, political and familial arenas, the conferences succeeded in framing women as a distinct, unified group that needed to act collectively to transform their shared systemic subordination. For instance, the 1978 conference titled "Focus Women" had been shaped by identity politics in the events and incidents it had framed in its workshops as "unjust, intolerable, and deserving of corrective action" (Snow and Benford, 1992:137). Workshops were presented to provide participants with a shared alternate interpretation around specific issues which framed women as a universally oppressed group in an attempt to mobilize new activists and maintain

the support of committed movement members. Some of the workshops offered at the 1978 conference addressed "sexism in school, sexual harassment, rape as aggression towards women, the anger within, female medical problems, what is sexuality, participating in politics, and images of women in the visual arts" (T-F, 1978, Vol. 5, No. 8).

Conferences that fostered political activist practice based on an alliance of women everywhere with themes like sisterhood, presented in 1980 and again in 1982, also helped to reinforce the identity frame. The 1980 Conference Report summarized its theme as the "celebration of being a woman as an individual and as part of a larger group who care for and support each other" (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 2). The conference examined "problems and barriers we still face [and] indicated ways and means to overcome these" (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 2). The twelve workshops offered at the Conference framed women as a distinct, homogeneous group "that brought us in touch with our roots" (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 2) to illuminate particular patterns of gender oppression[18]. The workshops confirmed the need for and existence of a distinct homogeneous group called women, and the strategies discussed and developed at the conferences to guide political action to end gender oppression operated within a binary framework of power relations that classified men and women into an oppressor/oppressed status. The privileging of gender as the primary category of oppression at the conferences shaped the pursuit of strategic action by submerging other systems of

stratification.

Despite the previous success of the conferences for attracting new movement members, by the mid 1980's this particular mobilization technique failed to strike a responsive chord between SWAG and the broader feminist community. Ten years after it had began, the annual fall conference was discontinued because of the heavy demand on activists' time and energy in staging the event and the dwindling number of conference participants (T-F, 1986, Vol. 13, No. 1). Although SWAG no longer sponsors an annual fall conference, it has continued to organize conferences at various times throughout the year to serve as a linkage among the social movement organization and individual women and groups in the community. One of SWAG's more recent co-sponsored conferences, which was held in 1993 at the University of Victoria, addressed stalking. In January 1994, SWAG coordinated a conference on Reproductive Technology at UVic which was also well attended.

Rallies

SWAG continuously adjusts and readjusts its mobilization techniques based on movement participants' responses or lack of them. Although SWAG has focused on the legislative arena to effect change, it has continued to engage in a variety of other tactics to achieve its goals. One strategy that has been utilized throughout SWAG's history to draw attention to the movement's framing efforts and to attract potential movement members are rallies. Marches and other highly

visible public demonstrations (e.g., rallies in front of the Provincial Legislature) serve three important tasks for any social movement. First, the event draws the public's attention to the unjust situation that the movement is organized around. Second, it helps to attract potential movement members. Third, it reaffirms movement members' collectively negotiated interpretation of reality which helps to sustain loyalty and commitment (Benford, 1993; Hunt and Benford, 1994; Snow et al., 1986). An example that illustrates this mobilization strategy is the development of the annual Take Back The Night rally.

SWAG introduced the first march held in Victoria on the broadly framed issue of violence against women in 1983. Although the attendance varied from 60 to 200 participants between 1983 and 1988, by 1989 the march attracted well over 600 women[19] (T-F, 1990, Vol. 17, No. 1). In 1993, the march took place for the first time without police escorts or a permit from Victoria City Hall. This symbolic tactical decision drew attention to women's right to be in public space without protection or permission. To facilitate the security and management of the march, approximately 100 women were recruited to be marshals. These trained safety women blocked off street traffic and directed the route as nearly 800 women and children marched past the male-only Union Club (T-F, 1993, Vol. 18, No. 5). More than 500 participants attended the 1994 Take Back the Night march (T-F, 1994, Vol. 19, No. 5). The march, organized for a second consecutive year by an ad hoc committee of women's groups and individuals

rather than exclusively by SWAG, took place again without a permit. In an attempt to draw a more diverse movement constituency, event organizers moved the rally from its traditional Friday night to Thursday night. This change made the event accessible for Jewish women, as the Jewish Sabbath begins Friday evening.

In the decade since SWAG organized its first Take Back the Night rally, the challenge of representing a movement constituency with diverse and, occasionally, conflicting needs and experiences has become increasingly apparent. Questions about how racism, heterosexism, and classism fit into feminism have coalesced to shake the previously stable identity frame and have complicated the analysis for the organization and implementation of strategic political action to effect change. But the identification of difference needs to operate in partnership with a search for common ground or else the specificity of women's oppression evaporates (Adams, 1989; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Nicholson, 1994; Young, 1994). In other words, the elaboration of difference in which fragmentation, heterogeneity and pluralism are not complemented by an investigation of the interconnections among multiple systems of oppressions offers little to guide the movement in its pursuit of social change.

Yet in this instance, the acknowledgement of differences among women has not been accompanied by an understanding of how violence against women is distinguished by race, sexual orientation, and mental and physical ability among

other distinctions. Rather than understanding the differences, working on violence against women has helped to promote an image, once again, that there is an underlying commonality among diverse groups of women. Like the identity politics articulated by Robin Morgan and Mary Daly in the 1970s, the framing of violence against women is defined broadly as to transcend distinctions among women on the basis of race, class, geographic location, ability, sexual orientation, and even ideology (1994, SWAG Press Release) while referring to the female body as an unchanging site to support the claim of a universal identity. The definition of violence, provided by the Take Back The Night (1994) Press Release, encompasses the depiction of women in the mass media, verbal abuse and physical conflict. Its very diffuseness permits an understanding of violence as a "part of every woman's life" in which "no woman can escape entirely" (1994, SWAG Press Release).

While each rally has made and continues to make an important contribution to the awareness concerning violence against women, the identity frame guiding the campaign reproduces a highly dichotomized view of gender which presents women as endangered, violable, and fearful. By making recourse to the female body and its potential to be violated as the basis for conceptualizing women as a group (Daly, 1978; Dworkin, 1979; Morgan, 1984), it is assumed that women are a homogenized unity which is equally powerless and uniformly vulnerable. Despite its explanatory power in some contexts, the identity frame

implicitly denies an opportunity to examine women's agency, will and capacity for violence (e.g., child abuse) for a comprehensive understanding of abuse. Like the strategy utilized by Daly (1978) and Morgan (1984) more than a decade ago, women and men are classified into the binary framework of victim/dominator. The identity frame also overlooks how other systems of stratification, such as race, influence how violence is addressed (hooks 1988; Lorde, 1984; Mohanty, 1992). Accordingly, it reproduces and operates within a victim paradigm that erases vast differences, such as culture, history, location as well as a host of other factors including race, class, sexuality, in favour of a male/female binary as an exclusive explanation for violence and the experience of oppression.

Newsletters

While events such as conferences and demonstrations are crucial for building a sense of loyalty and community among activists, maintaining an alternate account that legitimates the actions of a social movement requires continuous negotiation over meaning for "what is at stake is nothing less than the popular perception of reality" (McAdam et al., 1988:722). Yet maintaining a shared alternative interpretation of reality or frame requires a mechanism to connect members to the social movement on a continual basis. To help accomplish this critical task, SWAG publishes a bi-monthly[20] newsletter, The Times-Feminist[21]. It is an active component of SWAG's outreach to members in the community that links together activists and groups beyond the core members

of the organization. The newsletter provides feminist analysis of current issues which helps to align individuals' and SWAG's interpretive orientations. The newsletter also provides a forum for members to reaffirm or contest the movement's framing strategy through article submissions, book reviews, poetry and cartoons. The Times-Feminist provides a calendar which announces local, provincial and national events thereby helping to foster a sense of movement community and to mobilize mass support for highly visible events like demonstrations and rallies.

In a 1976 issue, the newsletter described three crucial tasks it serves for the movement in response to the question 'why women's newsletters':

> 1) To help women recognize the 'odd one out' feelings they often have in this masculine and alien culture, and make them aware that many other women share those feelings.
>
> 2) To insure that at least one publication will regard women's issues as matters of importance, instead of ignoring, underplaying, or distorting them as peripheral, faintly amusing trivia.
>
> 3) To provide solid information with regard to women's issues which is not being provided to the public by other means.
> (T-F, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 2)

When SWAG initially developed the newsletter it faced the task of having to educate the public of the need for change in women's status in the social system. In seeking to develop a meaningful alternate interpretation to overcome the

perceived "natural order" of an unjust situation (Gamson, 1992), women were portrayed as a distinct, homogeneous group that lived in opposition to a "masculine and alien culture" (T-F, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 2). It was an innovative framing and it accentuated their differences from men to help make visible the systemic asymmetry of power based on gender. Consistent with the identity frame that guided SWAG's early efforts to implement social change, the stated goals of the newsletter were conditioned by a binary framework of power relations. It focused on the similarities among women in an attempt to create an alliance of women everywhere. Women's lives, the 1976 issue of the newsletter stated, had been "ignor[ed], underplay[ed], or distort[ed] as peripheral, faintly amusing trivia" within the mass media and the publication of SWAG's newsletter would help to correct this misrepresentation (T-F, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 2). Despite the insightful recognition of the trivialization and distortion of women's lives and experiences within the mass media, the goals of the newsletter covertly denied an opportunity to examine other systems of oppression and how they interacted with gender. The goals of the newsletter were framed to persuade women that gender united them more than anything (i.e., racism or sexual orientation) could divide them.

While the newsletter has made specific events and experiences meaningful to movement members by framing them in an innovative manner congruent with SWAG's interpretive orientation, it has also provided a forum for members to debate, expand and clarify the movement's framing strategy. From the beginning,

the politics of identity has helped to reconceptualize the conventional political terrain and to guide SWAG in its pursuit for social transformation. Yet the experiences of oppression as conceptualized by the identity frame had submerged other systems of stratification by privileging gender as the primary category of oppression.

In the 1980s, however, the newsletter began to register efforts to destabilize the identity frame by interpreting and reporting events and perspectives that contested and moved beyond the female/male binary. One of the earliest attempts within SWAG to destabilize the framing of women as a distinct, homogeneous group occurred through the politicization of sexuality. In an attempt to "build new political groupings with categories neglected in the previous modern politics" (Best and Kellner, 1991:205) SWAG activists who did not see their specific experiences integrated into the core frame that guided the movement in its pursuit for change began to raise doubts about the assertion of a distinct, coherent, unified group. Rhonda recalled that "lesbians were doing a lot of the work but they were being marginalized and made invisible". The invisibility of lesbians was maintained because "the newspaper didn't reflect it, the events didn't reflect it, what was being offered didn't reflect it. It just reflected a very heterosexual image". Accordingly, members drew attention to a range of shared characteristics about individual experiences that were connected to the existing social structure of heterosexuality. The politicization of sexual orientation, which

created a new political grouping, was accompanied by efforts to recognize and understand other systems of oppression and search for connections among them.

With the unsettling of the identity frame, there has been an increased focus of how gender oppression is intertwined with other systems of oppression such as racism, heterosexism and classism, among others. For those who had a commitment to priority of gender oppression, these issues were more muted until the latter part of the 1980s and 1990s. By 1990 however, the Editorial Policy of The Times-Feminist acknowledged multiple differences:

> We will not print anything which, in the opinion of the editors, is racist, classist, homophobic, sexist, ageist, antisemetic (sic), ablebodyist, or in any other way degrades or demeans a person or a class of persons. (T-F, 1990 Vol. 17, No. 1)

Whereas the goals of the newsletter in 1976 foster identity politics based on a single universal collectivity called 'women', the 1990 Editorial policy marks an increased sensitivity and awareness to difference. That is, a homogeneous gendered identity based on the suppression of experiences of persons unlike white, middle-class, heterosexual women has been unsettled.

In concrete terms for SWAG, this has translated into unlearning racism workshops that began in October 1988 (T-F, 1988, Vol. 15, No. 3) and unlearning homophobia workshops (T-F, 1991, Vol. 17, No. 6). In 1990 the newsletter profiled an 'Unlearning Racism' workshop sponsored by SWAG that contested the dualistic framework of identity politics and examined some of the ways

systemic and internalized racism operated (T-F, 1990, Vol. 17, No. 1). In another article, attention was drawn to gender oppression as only one system of oppression that could not be isolated and examined, as it is intimately connected to the structures of racism and heterosexism. In recognition of the subordination of difference, the article stated that "feminists are complicit in silencing many of the voices of women in Canada...We must learn to relate across differences by listening to different voices on their own terms" (T-F, 1990, Vol. 16, No. 5). A sample of some of the articles which have focused on multiple oppressions include women with disabilities (T-F, 1994, Vol. 19, No. 2), legal status of lesbians (T-F, 1991, Vol. 18, No. 5), and poverty (T-F, 1991, Vol. 17, No. 4). There has also been an exploration of the global dimensions of the women's movement with attention to international issues, such as Chilean resistance and Third World feminism (T-F, 1989, Vol. 15, No. 5), the conflict in El Salvador (T-F, 1990, Vol. 16, No. 4), and a two-part series on gender and development in Nigeria (T-F, 1990, Vol. 17, No. 8 and 1991, Vol. 17, No. 9).

Viewed in this light, the cultural resources have performed critical roles for SWAG that have expanded the constituency base of the movement, fostered a sense of community among the movement members, and supported an innovative alternate frame. The development of SWAG's cultural resources has been shaped by the identity frame which has helped to create a meaningful interpretation to allow for the generation of support for and participation in movement activity.

From the beginning, the conferences, the Take Back the Night rally, and the newsletter have been guided by a politics based on the similarities among women. However, during the latter part of the 1980s and the early 1990s, the newsletter has registered efforts to contest the identity frame. Derived in part from experiences that could not be submerged under a hierarchy based on gender, the difference frame has pointed to multiple, interlocking systems of stratification that have disrupted a binary framework of power relations. All three cultural resources have contributed to the success of the movement in varying ways which has allowed SWAG to become the longest, continuously-operating feminist organization in Victoria.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE:

The feminist activists that originally created SWAG initially organized around their own life experiences and developed an organizational structure with which they were familiar to efficiently achieve goals. Yet the late 1970s and early 1980s marked a shift in the internal organizational structure and processes of SWAG from a hierarchical model to a continuously evolving consensus-based approach congruent with emerging feminist principles. The transition also marked a shift from exclusively evaluating collective action by its impact on the conventional political system to a greater concern with how the organization embodied feminist principles.

Until the late 1970s SWAG was organized as a traditional hierarchical structure. SWAG had an Executive comprised of a President, Vice-President of Programs, Vice-President of Media and Projects, Secretary, and Treasurer[22]. In the early phase of SWAG the meetings were formal and followed an agenda set by the President. The meetings were conducted using a modified parliamentary procedure and votes were cast, by a show of hands, to make decisions. The Executive members were elected at an Annual General Meeting using formal voting procedures. While this organizational structure was efficient for the implementation of specific goals, it did not adequately balance organizational proficiency with the needs and interests of many movement members.

Four years after its creation, SWAG was experiencing tensions and contradictions concerning its goals and organizing strategy. At a general meeting held in January 1975 called "Where is SWAG Going and How Is It Going to Get There", forty-five movement members met to discuss SWAG and its political agenda. On the question of organizational structure, members expressed concern that the Executive "carried too much weight and power" (T-F, 1975, Vol. 2, No. 2). Solutions proposed by members at the general meeting to redistribute power and move towards participatory democracy included: (1) encouraging all members to actively participate in at least one project; and (2) making previously closed Executive meetings accessible to any interested SWAG member (T-F, 1975, Vol. 2, No. 2).

Conversely, the need to create a concrete centralized organizational structure to channel political activity and to establish responsibility lines for the implementation of goals was clearly stated by the members. It was noted that "SWAG can never have the political presence and clout without an office and paid staff" (T-F, 1975, Vol. 2, No. 2). After debating political direction and organizational strategies, members voted to endorse strengthening the women's movement and to create legitimacy through the establishment of a centralized social movement organization. Over the ensuing months, SWAG members worked to promote a strong, centralized organizational base. By February 1976, a $5100 grant was obtained from the Provincial Coordinator of the Status of Women which permitted SWAG to open a temporary office in downtown Victoria and hire, on a short term basis, its first paid staffperson. Alice Ages, who was hired on February 16, 1976, began to organize the office and to establish its first filing system. In addition to the call for more "womanpower" to assist with the operation of the office, a request for plants, sofa cushions, more shelves and a coffee warmer was made to SWAG members (T-F, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 1). The request, however, was accompanied with a reassertion that creating an efficient office was a strategic manoeuvre to effect social change, not retreat from it. The 1976 issue of the newsletter underscored the idea that the office was neither a refuge from male supremacy nor an oasis from the rigor of political struggle. It stated:

> Listing those items [see above] is perhaps dangerously misleading. It makes it sound as though we're establishing a cozy lounge or 'ladies' club-room. Not so. This is an OFFICE, with a startling amount of work to do...please don't entertain the notion that it's a nice place to drink tea and chat.
> (T-F, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 1)

While the downtown office location only lasted for about one year due to a lack of steady operational funds,[23] it established an organizational pattern for SWAG that provided an efficient model for accomplishing its immediate goals. The members of SWAG were very active in writing briefs, presenting workshops, and organizing letter writing campaigns as strategies for effecting change.

The activists interviewed for this project who were involved at the beginning of the contemporary women's movement did not believe during their early phase of activism that long range planning would be necessary. They began their activism thinking that the subordination of women was an oversight which persisted through the maintenance of traditional norms and values in the social, economic, and political spheres and would be corrected by bringing the matter to the attention of the public. Shirley Avril (1994) articulated a general sentiment, which was expressed by other participants, concerning the irrelevance of long range planning during the early phase of feminist organizing: "It was so clear that women weren't equal and had been discriminated against that we thought that if we just told everyone they would see it as clearly as we did. And, of course, would want to end it".

There was a high level of energy and excitement as SWAG members came together to create change during the early 1970s. Judith described the momentum of the early phase in the movement stating, "we all wanted to change the world". Activists were energized by the belief that anything could happen and they anticipated that it would happen tomorrow or at least soon afterward. Echoing a similar experience, Rhonda (1994) pointed out that they were generally unaware of the magnitude of the task that lay ahead.

> I think we were so totally unrealistic, we thought we could change everything in about, at the outset--five years--preferably about two months...[But] we didn't have any idea how much woman hating we were going to uncover, just the casual woman hating that is built into the fabric of everyday life.

The early activists had the expectation of immediate social change and organized in a manner to facilitate SWAG's objectives; accordingly, less attention was given to long range planning. The agenda was largely reactive to the federal, provincial, and local governments as well as the interests expressed by members. However, the executive members (and later the coordinating committee) were able to meet once a year at a retreat either on Vancouver Island or the Lower Mainland to set priorities and agendas for the upcoming year. The goal-setting and proactive processes were crucial not only for framing a shared vision of equality for women, but also for accomplishing goals and evaluating strategies.

By the mid 1970s the feminist agenda had grown and diversified beyond

the scope of any single social movement organization. Along with the expanding awareness of feminist issues came the realization that efforts to effect major social change would require a long term approach. The issues were viewed as more complex, more deeply entrenched, and more difficult to achieve than they had seemed in the earlier period of organizing. SWAG needed to revamp its internal structure to address the changing needs of movement members, to explore alternatives that did not replicate the structures of traditional hierarchical organizations, and to engage in long range planning. As Nancy Adamson et al. (1988) point out in their analysis of Canadian feminist organizational process:

> Organizational structures and process do not exist for themselves. They have a purpose: to facilitate the political effectiveness of the organization. It is in the context of a particular group's political analysis and strategy that its structure and process must be evaluated. (Adamson et al., 1988:253)

Beginning in the late 1970s, SWAG responded to the challenge of creating organizational structures and processes to facilitate its political effectiveness. Over several years at various retreats an organizational review was undertaken and modifications were developed, implemented, and adjusted to create an organizational structure that could simultaneously be effective, adapt to changing situations, and embody feminist principles.

Motivated by members who rejected both the hierarchical structures of society and SWAG's internal structure (T-F, 1979 Vol. 6, No. 7), the organization

experimented with a rotating chair for one year in 1980[24]. Although the rotating chair facilitated a more egalitarian approach among the members by sharing knowledge and skills, the lack of continuity cited by those chairing prompted the development of an internal organizational model that was consistent with feminist principles as well as specific short term and long range goals (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 2). Subsequently, the Executive Committee was replaced in 1981 with a Coordinating Committee and positions were relabelled accordingly to fit a collective model[25].

In 1981 the former and (then) current executive members met at a retreat to discuss the future direction of SWAG and possible solutions to internal organizational difficulties. The members discussed SWAG's objectives, strategies, and tactics. Specifically, concerns were expressed about the emphasis on writing and presenting briefs, lobbying various governmental departments and agencies, and letter writing campaigns as tactics for creating change (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 3). As activists had discovered during their ten years of activism, focusing on the traditional political arena is a social movement strategy that may or may not lead to a preferred outcome. But as a resource mobilization tactic, political engagement itself does not necessarily translate to greater levels of movement mobilization (Benford, 1993; Snow et al., 1986). As one interviewee succinctly phrased it, "very few women join the movement to write legal briefs". SWAG members acknowledged that they were failing to mobilize the most important

resource in any social movement--activists. The core committees which had operated throughout the 1970s were no longer attracting many members. The committee structure was assessed as placing unrealistic demands on women who were already balancing a multitude of competing interests, such as "raising families, working outside the home, participating in monthly meetings" (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 3).

Pragmatic and ideological considerations governed the organizational restructuring process. The committee structure was modified and 'contact persons' were established to address "specific concerns as they arise or as members are interested in pursuing certain areas" (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 3). The streamlined committee structure alleviated some of the heavy demands on members' time by reducing the number of meetings and enabled members to focus on specific issues of interest. The revision was done to both reflect the experiences of members working within SWAG and to abolish the hierarchical bureaucratic structure which was viewed as "outdated" and "giving the impression of 'in' and 'out' groups" (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 3).

Since a social movement depends largely on its members as its most important resource (Canel, 1992; Freeman, 1983), it was crucial to restructure the monthly general meetings to make them more attractive to a larger number of participants and to frame issues in a meaningful manner to draw more potential movement supporters. In an attempt to regain the commitment of fading

supporters and mobilize new potential activists, the organization reintroduced the presentation of an informal discussion each month "on an issue of concern for the women's movement". To help foster a sense of commitment among movement participants, the informal discussions were followed by a "social time to allow women to get to know each other" (T-F, 1982, Vol. 9, No. 7). The business meetings were held separately, although interested members were also encouraged to attend.

During this period there was a growing interest among some movement members to examine pornography and its links to women's oppression. In the spring of 1982 SWAG's discussion, inspired by the recent release of the film Not a Love Story directed by Bonnie Klein, centred on pornography (T-F, 1982, Vol. 9, No. 3). The next meeting examined sex role stereotyping in the media. The following general meeting addressed pornography and censorship. The meetings continued to frame women as a distinct, homogeneous group by drawing on the body to ground and support the unity of women. By identifying male violence towards woman expressed through pornography as the foundation of women's oppression (Dworkin, 1979), the identity frame was strengthened. That is, the concentration on male violence and the objectification of women reproduced a binary framework of power that confined women's status to victim.

Along with the increased recognition that a long term approach to effect change was needed because the issues were more complex and more deeply

rooted, SWAG members acknowledged that a permanent, centralized location was an essential component of its political strategy. The desire for a centralized social movement organization resurfaced in 1982, nearly five years after the demise of the original office. As stated by Lois Vickery in 1982, "over the last couple of years we have reached a turning point in our organization. It is unrealistic to expect that this work will continue without an office and at least a part-time coordinator/office manager...If we are to make any changes, we must prepare for a long-term battle" (T-F, 1982, Vol. 9, No. 1).

Upon further discussion by movement members, SWAG expanded its original vision from a part-time coordinator in an office to a Women's Resource Centre, that would "provide access to feminist information and research, and offer support and referral for women in crisis or needing support and provide a place for women to make social contact with one another" (T-F, 1982, Vol. 9, No. 2). Although these functions were being provided in a limited manner via member's homes[26], the activists decided once again to "centralize [SWAG to create] high community visibility". Members hoped that the recentralization of SWAG would "enable us to more effectively fulfil our (wo)mandate" and would be instrumental in attracting new activists (T-F, 1982, Vol. 9, No. 2). To facilitate the fulfilment of its expanded mandate, SWAG requested funds from its movement constituency and secured a small operating grant from the state. By early September, 1982 SWAG had hired a part time coordinator and re-opened its office doors to the

public[27]. Nearly three years later, SWAG moved into its own office situated in a more accessible downtown building. The media publicity about the centralized public location of SWAG contributed to a considerable increase in both the number of drop-in visitors and new movement members (T-F, 1985, Vol. 12, No. 2).

SWAG's transition towards embodying feminist principles has not been without its challenges. Like other feminist organizations that have shifted from hierarchical to consensus based approaches, such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, there have been difficulties concerning an appropriate way to incorporate feminist principles in an efficient organizational context (Greaves, 1991; Vickers, 1991). One example that illustrates this difficulty occurred when SWAG received an increase in its operating funds and members disagreed about how to most effectively utilize the funds.

In June 1985, the Secretary of State supported a grant application made by SWAG to provide a salary for a half-time Program Coordinator to organize and maintain a series of public programs aimed at attracting potential movement members. The creation of this position was in addition to the existing half-time Office Coordinator. After a discussion concerning the advantages and limitations of having two part-time positions or one full-time position, the majority of the Coordinating Committee chose to have one woman fill both positions. Upon hearing the Coordinating Committee's decision, Josephine (Adams) Payne-

O'Connor, a longtime activist who had just been selected the previous month to be SWAG's new Coordinator, resigned from her position in protest and withdrew her membership from SWAG stating:

> I [feel] very strongly in these times of high unemployment and consequent poverty among Victoria's qualified women, SWAG should employ a second half-time person. After serious reflection, I am still unable to reconcile the committee's decision with my own political priorities: that the most serious issue facing us as women is violence, and that poverty is an insidious form of violence.
> (T-F, 1985, Vol. 12, No. 3)

While this example stands out because of its visibility in the newsletter, it draws attention to the difficulty of practising consensus-based decision making. Operating by consensus requires a large time commitment on behalf of the members as well as a thorough understanding of the principles of the process (Freeman, 1975; Pierson, 1975/93). One of the latent effects of this particular fracture over the process of deciding how to expend resources has been to strengthen SWAG's commitment to consensus-based decision making. In an attempt to ensure that intense dissension among the coordinating committee members regarding SWAG's specific objectives and strategies is not repeated, workshops on consensus decision making were instituted (T-F, 1988, Vol. 15, No. 3).

Organizational disputes are important movement events because they require movement members to confront and debate meaningful issues (Benford,

1993). Rather than maintaining unity by denying the existence of controversial matters, disagreements over the framing of issues necessitates that participants articulate a position which may or may not be congruent with the existing frame. While framing disputes can dissipate vast amounts of energy, they also underscore the need for a framing strategy that most effectively serves the group's interests and is meaningful and complementary with member's individual experiences (Benford, 1993; Snow et al., 1986). For instance, the issues of reproductive choice and sexual orientation were initially interpreted by some SWAG members as representing a controversial or 'radical' agenda. Despite the reluctance of some members to oppose government restrictions SWAG elected to take on these issues, even at the risk of losing financial and potential membership support. The outcome of these issues established SWAG as an organization that would be involved in a range of issues and would not hesitate taking a public stance on potentially controversial matters.

As a tactic to address the competing demands on the time of movement participants and to allow more opportunities for movement members to develop organizational skills and experience, the concept of an office collective was introduced in 1988 (T-F, 1988, Vol. 15, No. 1). Consisting of volunteers, the Office Collective members contribute a specified number of hours each week to facilitate the daily operation of SWAG. They are the 'front-line' activists who field telephone questions, respond to women who drop in, and perform a variety

of daily tasks that keep SWAG operating smoothly. They function semi-autonomously and make routine decisions collectively. Since 1990, attempts have been made to integrate the Office Collective with the Coordinating Committee to minimize hierarchical relationships and to facilitate a strong collective organizational structure. As a strategy to combine egalitarian social relationships and participatory democracy, the Coordinating Committee has been expanded to include the members of the Office Collective for decisions regarding critical policy issues. As of 1995, the Coordinating Committee, operating on a consensus approach, consisted of the chair, past chair, treasurer, secretary, newsletter coordinators, members at large, office collective members and coordinator.

It has been an on-going process to establish a model for the organization of SWAG that integrates feminist principles with the bureaucratic efficiencies of a hierarchical model while recognizing that "no one structure can meet the variety of political agendas found in the women's movement" (Adamson et al., 1988:256). One of the key insights that distinguishes feminist organizations and political practice is the blurring of instrumental/expressive goals (Adamson et al., 1988; Echols, 1989; Freeman, 1975; Ferree and Hess, 1985; Douglas, 1992). The focus shifts from examining how successful the organization has been at implementing its goals by judging its impact on the conventional political system to examining the ways in which the organization has incorporated feminist principles in its everyday practice.

Similarly, Wini Breines (1989) uses the term "prefigurative politics" to summarize the goals of the New Left movement of the 1960s. Breines defines prefigurative politics as "creating and sustaining within the live[d] practice of the movement relationships and political forms that 'prefigured' and embodied the desired society" (Breines, 1989:6). Breines maintains that the goal of the New Left to create counter-institutions which would foreshadow or 'prefigure' the desired society would not only fulfil needs unmet by the current system, but could, by dramatizing the inadequacy of the system, politicize those not being served by the system. In this respect, the organizational development of SWAG underscores the difficulties of reconciling prefigurative and strategic politics. SWAG has sought to create political processes that maximize individual participation and equalize or, at least, minimize hierarchical power relations. SWAG has struggled to develop an alternate, innovative model to traditional hierarchical decision-making that is balanced by organizational efficacy and efficiency. As such, the creation and development of SWAG's organizational structure reflects efforts to embody feminist principles of limited hierarchies, shared knowledge, and multifaceted strategies for effecting social change.

SUMMARY

Over the past quarter of a century, SWAG has utilized a variety of strategies and tactics to mobilize collectively controlled resources to effect social

change. This chapter has examined the early organizing stage of SWAG, the contradictions it has faced for the establishment of financial ties with the state, and the development of its cultural resources. The final section explored the creation and transformation of the social movement organization from a traditional hierarchical model to a collective approach that has embodied the feminist principle of egalitarianism in its everyday practice. These aspects of the mobilization process, however, have been shaped by interpretative work that SWAG has engaged in during the past twenty-five years to render innovative political interpretations of various situations.

The efforts by SWAG to politicize a range of common activities and experiences excluded from traditional conceptions of "the political" have served as a bridge to bring new members to the movement and to guide collective action. The early activists created a politics based on the similarities among women and revealed a systemic asymmetry of power based on gender. This innovative approach, which has been termed the politics of identity, conceptualized women as a distinct, unified, homogeneous group and shaped the conferences, rallies, and newspapers produced by SWAG. However, as time passed and diverse experiences were politicized, the binary framework of the identity frame became increasingly untenable for many movement members.

During the mid 1980s and early 1990s differences among women, which had previously been suppressed in the identity frame, emerged to indicate that a

homogeneous gendered identity as women failed to adequately address the specificity and particularity of many experiences of oppression. The newsletter, instrumental for maintaining an alternate account to legitimate collective action, called into question the subordination of other systems of oppression, such as sexual orientation, race and class. The politics of difference, as this inventive alternate frame has been termed, moved beyond the fixed and absolute categories of oppressor/ oppressed to a framing of multiple, interlocking systems of oppression that acknowledged complex and contradictory power relations.

While this chapter has examined how SWAG has created and modified its organizational structure to reconcile efficiency with minimal hierarchy, and constructed and refined its framing to facilitate collective action, it has bypassed how the frames of identity and difference have guided the construction a collective identity that has maintained members' commitment and involvement over the past twenty-five years. One of the key insights of frame analysis is that the mobilization of resources is not enough; social movements need to construct a collective identity to sustain the members' support for and participation in social movement activity (Gamson, 1992; Melucci, 1989; Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Weir, 1993). The next chapter examines, in greater detail, how the frames of identity and difference are negotiated in actual practice by SWAG activists in the construction of collective identity.

NOTES

1. For a detailed examination of how the Commission was formed, see Cerise Morris, 1980, "Determination and Thoroughness: The Movement for a Royal Commission on the Status of Women". Atlantis, 5(2).

2. In 1971 Rosemary Brown was the Ombudswoman, Status of Women Council (1970-72). She was elected to the British Columbia Legislature as a member of the New Democratic Party in 1972 and re-elected in 1975 and 1979.

3. Pauline Jewett was a professor of Political Science in 1971 and was appointed President of Simon Fraser University in 1974-78. She was the first woman to head a major co-educational university in Canada.

4. The term ombudsman has been retained to reflect the designation specified by SWAG in 1971.

5. This issue was propelled forward by the Ombudsman service regarding the discrimination against a female police officer in Saanich who was denied a promotion on the basis of her gender (T-F, 1972, Vol. 1, No. 1).

6. For a discussion of movement-state links and the effects of trying to integrate women's issues into the policy making process at a national level, see Sue Findlay, 1987, "Facing the State: The Politics of the Women's Movement Reconsidered". In Heather Jon Maroney and Meg Luxton (eds), Feminism and Political Economy: Women's Work, Women's Struggles, Methuen: Toronto.

7. For a discussion of the challenge between feminist social service collectives and the mainstream social service system for effecting social change, see Janice L. Ristock, 1991, "Feminist Collectives: The Struggles and Contradictions in our Quest for a 'Uniquely Feminist Structure'". In Jeri Dawn Wine and Janice L. Ristock (eds), Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada, Toronto: James Lorimer and Company. For an examination of the struggle during the 1980s to maintain the state-funded Transition House in Vancouver, see Leslie Kenny and Warren Magnusson, 1993, "In Transition: The Women's House Saving Action". The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, 30(3).

8. For an example of the printed debate around SWAG's decision to accept state funding, see The Times-Feminist December 1982 (Vol. 9, No. 10) and January 1983 (Vol. 10, No. 1) for discussions against state funding. See The Times-Feminist February 1983 (Vol. 10, No. 2), for a reply in support of the acceptance of state funding.

9. I use the title 'Secretary of State' to refer to the Federal branch of government that funds women's organizations throughout this chapter even though the Federal Department of the Secretary of State has recently changed its title to 'The Disabled Persons Participation Program, Social Development and Education Branch, Human Resources Development Canada'. I have chosen to retain the Secretary of State designation as it has widespread currency among social movement activists and others not deeply familiar with the recent changes to the Federal program.

10. See the "Fairness in Funding" Report (1987) produced by the Secretary of State for a detailed review of the process for determining program criteria.

11. For an account of the Canadian prochoice campaign and its challenge to the regulatory power of criminal law, see Lorna Weir, 1994, "Left Popular Politics in Canadian Feminist Abortion Organizing, 1982-1991". Feminist Studies 20(2).

12. Prior to the development of SWAG's position on abortion in 1978, all previous executive decisions had regarded abortion as a matter of personal choice stating that abortion "must be an individual not a collective decision" (T-F, 1978, Vol. 5, No. 4).

13. The municipal grants were received from the District of Saanich ($2,105) and the Township of Esquimalt ($409). These were the first municipal grants received by SWAG (T-F, 1991, Vol. 17, No. 6).

14. SWAG has developed several categories for its membership as an aspect of diversifying and increasing its financial support. By 1994, SWAG offered seven tiered categories for membership, each reflecting a different membership fee. The categories are: (1) Regular member $24, (2) Regular member, low income $12, (3) Regular member plus sponsorship of low income member $36, (4) Sustaining member $50, (5) Male friend of SWAG $36, (6) Corporate, non-profit $24, (7) Corporate, profit $100. All memberships include a one year subscription to SWAG's bimonthly newsletter, The Times-Feminist.

15. Although Victoria Status of Women Action Group has repeatedly been

denied charitable tax status by Revenue Canada, the Vancouver Status of Women has been granted this status (T-F, 1988, Vol. 15, No. 3). As of December 1994, SWAG has still not been granted charitable tax status.

16. This figure of 88.3% of SWAG's total funding from the state for the fiscal year ending 1993 is up from the 1992 figure of 72.8%. The apparent increased reliance on state funding came from a substantially larger provincial grant in 1993 of $52,500 (nearly four times the 1992 amount of $12,500). It is also important to note that SWAG was in a deficit position at the conclusion of the 1992 fiscal year (i.e., there was a deficiency of revenue over expenditures) (Statement of Revenue and Expenditures, 1993).

17. Documents indicate that the conferences generated very limited financial resources. For instance, in the 1973 the profit from the conference was $73.00; in 1978 the conference attendance was greatly reduced due to a postal strike and SWAG broke even financially; in 1979 proceeds from the conference totalled $158.15.

18. The Conference was organized around twelve workshops: 'Women as Parents' a discussion of issues around birth and motherhood; 'The Fairy Tale Princess' an exploration of feminine ideals in the lives of young girls; 'Mother and the Older Child' a discussion of the responsibilities for older children; 'Women and Sanity' a critique of traditional coping strategies and feminist alternatives; 'Rituals for a Woman's Life' a demonstration of Native rituals in dance and song for women; 'Daughters of the Earth' an exploration of wicca; 'Saving Earth' an examination of women's crucial role in saving Mother Earth; 'Poverty and Power' an examination of poverty as violence against women; 'Women Against Violence' a discussion of surviving violence; 'Creating Work from Home' strategies for building economic independence; 'Building Unions for Women' strategies for building power at work; and 'Feminist Party of Canada' ways to build women's own political party (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 2).

19. While the relationship between SWAG and the mass media (e.g., newspapers, radio and television) is beyond the scope of this project, it is insightful to note that the largest turnout of 600 women and children for the Take Back the Night march in SWAG's history failed to be covered in the mainstream press (T-F, 1990, Vol. 17, No. 1). For an analysis of mainstream media and attempts by women's groups to incorporate a feminist perspective of male violence against women, see Sharon Stone, 1993, "Getting the Message Out: Feminists, the Press and Violence against Women". The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 30:3.

20. The newsletter, which had been published every month, began a bi-monthly production schedule in April 1983 due to an increase in postal rates and limited movement resources (T-F, 1983, Vol. 10, No. 4).

21. In 1975, the newsletter circulation was 600 (T-F, 1975, Vol. 2, No. 5). By 1976, 750 received the newsletter (T-F, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 3). In May 1979, there were 105 members who received the newsletter. Through a recruitment campaign which mailed membership renewal appeals along with the newsletter to 117 members whose subscription had lapsed, 20 responded. By January 1980, the newsletter circulation was 196 paid members (T-F, 1980, Vol. 7, No. 2).

22. The Executive titles remained fairly constant in this period although there was some variation. For example in 1976 the Executive consisted of a President, Vice President of Programs, Vice President Projects, Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, and Membership (T-F, 1976, Vol. 3, No. 1).

23. The records are unclear as to precisely when the office ceased to be located at 8-671 Fort Street. The temporary operational funding was provided for approximately one year through the Provincial Coordinator of the Status of Women for the International Year of the Woman.

24. Members served as chair for a one month period.

25. The position titles changed from President, Vice President (2), Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary to Co-ordinator, Programs, Media, Conference, Correspondence, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, and Membership. Collectively, they became known as the Coordinating Committee (T-F, 1981, Vol. 8, No. 2).

26. The office was located for a period of time at Shirley Avril's home during the late 1970s.

27. In 1982 SWAG moved to 1045 Linden and shared an office with the (then) new Sexual Assault Centre and Canadian Abortion Rights Action League (CARAL). In 1985 SWAG moved into its own office at the Centennial Building on 620 View Street. As of December 1, 1994, SWAG relocated to 506 Fort Street.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONSTRUCTING COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Research on social movements has tended to focus exclusively on the instrumental aspects of the mobilization process with little attention given to the challenge of sustaining movement members' support and commitment over time. As the literature on social movements suggests, successful recruitment alone does not translate into sustained social movement participation without the creation of a collective identity. Accordingly, an understanding of collective identity as an aspect of the mobilization process is critical to account for SWAG members' support for and participation in movement activity over the past twenty-five years.

Within the contemporary women's movement, the politics of identity has conceptualized women as a distinct, homogenous group. This frame has created an innovative and meaningful interpretation of unjust situations that has guided SWAG in its pursuit for social change. Despite the influence of identity politics, another inventive, alternate frame derived from the politicization of a variety of of other shared, collective experiences has emerged to contest the strategies by which the movement has organized for change. In its starkest form this frame, termed the politics of difference, has called into question the very existence of a group called women as a basis of unity for strategic political action.

This chapter uses the interview data to examine how the frames of identity

and difference have shaped the construction of collective identity within SWAG. Although collective identity has been discussed by movement theorists, very little empirical research has investigated how social movements actually engage in its construction. The approach advanced by Taylor and Whittier (1992) provides a framework to examine collective identity as a vital aspect of the mobilization process necessary to sustain members' commitment and involvement to effect social change. The concepts for the collective identity framework explored in this chapter include the establishment of boundaries that define and locate movement members, and the development of consciousness which imparts a sense of shared beliefs and goals among activists.

The first section examines how the frames of identity and difference have shaped boundaries based on biological foundationalism and how values and political allies have been determined by it. The second section explores consciousness and how the frames of identity and difference have guided the development of the beliefs and political strategies of the activists. The third section also looks at consciousness but examines how the identity and difference frame have defined the political arenas for the organization and implementation of strategic political action to effect change. A summary is provided in the final section.

BOUNDARIES

This section examines how the SWAG activists locate themselves as part of a movement, and at the same time, are recognized as such by opponents and those within the movement. The identity frame shapes the activists' view of women's unity as grounded and supported by the body. Based on this similarity, activists maintain that women share values, which in turn, allows them to be allies. The difference frame refutes biological explanations and values based on similar physical experiences. Allies are selected according to their political beliefs, rather than by their shared status as oppressed.

Identity Frame

The identity frame informs an understanding about female/male distinctions by regarding the female body as an unchanging site to ground and support claims about similarities among women. Avis Rasmussen[1] draws attention to the specific elements that unite all women. In addition to the physical act of bearing children, Avis notes other biologically based differences that are shared among women include:

> If they're breastfeeding, that is definitely a female area, I don't know a man who has ever done that. So consequently, there is that whole area of child bearing and the hormonal balance and the ovulation which does make women different.

Judith calls for the revaluation of the negative features traditionally associated with women, such as reproduction. She maintains that women's shared

maternalism transcends all distinctions among women, including ideological differences.

> I really think Mother Nature adapted women for centuries to be mothers. Put a bunch of feminists in a room, put a bunch of R.E.A.L. women in a room, put in a bunch of communist women from the 1940s...and sooner or later they would talk about food and men wouldn't. They would talk about food, they would talk about textiles, the nuts and bolts of living, they would talk about housework.

Judith adopts a unified view of all women by making cross-cultural and transhistorical generalizations about women's experiences relating to the possession of a particular anatomy. The cornerstone for the unity of women as a group rests on shared reproductive experiences that have existed "for centuries".

Alice Albert situates women and men in a stable, dualistic framework and refers to fundamental differences between women and men, viewing the latter as inferior beings.

> I just think they are a total other race--not very sophisticated for the most part. They are not very educated, I mean about people in general. I just don't have a high regard for men.

Carolyn acknowledges the difficulty of separating biological and social influences on human behavior. She states that "there are probably some socialized behaviors [because] men and women do behave differently". However, she also refers to innate differences that form and reinforce male dominance and female subordination. Women are capable of physical violence, Carolyn notes,

but it is "partly our size" which keeps women vulnerable.

> I actually think that probably deep down there are some genetic differences or innate differences between men and women...I think women face some issues, like safety in the community, that men never even think about. And that affects your approach to things, your activities and how you organize your life.

Carolyn revalorizes qualities traditionally associated with women by using women's nurturing role as mothers to define, as a general characteristic of all women, a non-violent, caring approach to the world. The gentle and nurturing values that women share affect how they work for social change. As Carolyn explains:

> I think that we often view the world in a much less competitive way and a much healthier way. We are not necessarily always striving to out-do someone, we are trying to find a cooperative solution.

Similarly, Vivian acknowledges women's need for social connections stating, "women value their associations, their friends, their families and relationships". Alice accentuates women's differences from men with respect to values and states that women are naturally more caring:

> Women are nurturers, I don't see men as being nurturing. Women are humanistic, I don't see men as being very humanistic. Women really care, have more social skills and provide a much saner environment within which to live.

Alice regards women's biological traits as beneficial and men's as potentially harmful. The portrayal of women as a distinct, homogeneous group that

"provides a much saner environment" helps to make visible the systemic asymmetry of power based on gender.

Judith maintains that women have a cross-cultural coherence that is distinct from men. Judith states that "women have values [that] are important". She refers to a feminine principle within women that supports the stability of a binary framework and notes, "we don't want to raise women so they are the same as little boys, they'd turn into female-men". Judith states:

> We need in our whole culture more celebration of the feminine. I think actually [in] the early women's movement we were so bent on getting a sense of personal power that we overrode the feminine in ourselves to a large extent, instead of celebrating it.

Judith refers to the early childhood socialization of women which helps in the preparation for the stress of motherhood.

> I think there are fundamental psychological differences between men and women...I think women's acculturation in early childhood adapts us to handle the incredible stress of nurturing young children and men don't have it. [He says] "shut that kid up", "throw that kid against the wall", or "here kid, I'll smack you if you don't shut up". Yes, there are real differences between men and women.

Alice maintains that women have to mobilize other women in unified opposition in order to effect change. She defines allies as:

> Primarily other women...I've been saying this for years and I still do it, mind you, but I'm so tired of educating men in every way, as an ally, as a political partner.

Alice does not see any other groups as allies or potential allies. She reaffirms an

assumed commonality among women 'as women'.

> No, I just want to say women. And women can be everywhere because they are in finance, they are in government, [and] they are in politics. They are everywhere in everything.

Avis refers to specific categories of women, such as "business and professional women, university women" and feminist organizations like "NAC [The National Action Committee on the Status of Women] and LEAF [Legal Education and Action Fund]" as allies to help create concrete social change. Like Avis, Vivian identifies specific areas in which women have been promoting change, such as unions, partisan politics, and the church as potential allies:

> Unions, although I have known union women who have had their struggles within the unions. I see now that the church has feminist women that are very strong and making changes. And definitely there are feminist women in politics that are are making big changes.

As the participants point out, the differences between women and men are so deep, they have contributed to two distinctly different and polarized groups: women and men. The participants represent a continuum of positions ranging from those who explicity employ a biological approach in their analysis of women's oppression to others who incorporate an element of biological commonality along with aspects of social constructionism. Despite the variation in positions stated by the participants, they are closely aligned to the biological end of the continuum within biological foundationalism. All the participants who use the identity frame regard women's unity as a pre-given that is grounded in the

female body. This allows the participants to maintain that women compose a distinct, homogeneous group regardless of social and cultural distinctions. It also allows the participants to impart shared values on the basis of similar physical experiences. Women are viewed by the participants as nurturing, gentle, and appreciative of social connections whereas men are regarded as aggressive, competitive and forceful. Accordingly, the strategy informed by the identity frame calls for an alliance of women everywhere to effect change.

Difference Frame

Phyllis rejects the immutability of biological explanations as the basis for constructing unity among women. She notes that by making recourse to the body, gender is presented in a highly dichotomized framework that presumes a homogeneity which she refutes:

> I definitely do not believe that women are born peace-makers, that women are born connected to nature and all this. I do believe that we are strongly socialized in that direction. I think the fact that we produce children, I don't think affects every single woman in the world. I think there are some women who would definitely choose not do that. So to say that children are a common interest I don't think is appropriate.

In contrast to those more closely aligned with the biological end of the continuum in biological foundationalism, Phyllis disagrees that a biological experience, such as childbirth, provides the basis for unity among women. She maintains that by appealing to shared experiences embodied in traditionally female activities for the unity of women presumes a universality that transcends cross-cultural differences.

Rather than drawing on the body to support a shared universal identity, Phyllis refers to the social construction of women's oppression through the concept of gender.

> I think that we're connected on many issues, but we're not all connected [in the same way] except by the fact that we have been oppressed because of our gender.

Shirley Avril is disinclined to ascribe any essential or biological characteristics that are shared by all women. Although she points to some similarity based on childbirth and childrearing, she also acknowledges exceptions which prevent the designation of universal experiences that unite women. In response to whether she believes there are any basic values that women share, Shirley states:

> No I don't. There is some indication because of the experience biologically of giving birth and nurturing children, we might develop something that is similar to those women who have done that, but many haven't. Many give birth and don't nurture, so I'm very reluctant to say, for example, [there is] a woman's way of knowing.

Similarly, Elaine queries the merit of a biological approach to understanding the oppression of women. She questions whether the constructed character of gender can be definitively separated from biology as they are experienced together:

> That is interesting because the values that we traditionally espouse [about women], like compassion and empathy, are we really born with them or are they conditioned into us? Maybe it is a combination of the two. I really don't know.

While Elaine expresses a desire to believe that women are more caring, she cites examples that contest this wish and rhetorically asks, "what happened there?" Having pointed out exceptions of women who do not share similar values on the basis of biology Elaine concludes, "if you are looking at how we're conditioned and the end result, then yes, sure".

Rhonda is also sceptical that values shared by virtue of a particular female anatomy unite women. She maintains that defining a cross-culturally common set of criteria for distinguishing women and men is not possible because "we only know what we've been brought [up] to know and how society is structured". Rhonda explains her view on whether women share values:

> No, well, yes, but in a contingent way. I mean if people are socialized in a certain way, they are going to share values. But I don't believe that women are naturally nurturing or naturally anything, or that you can even make sensible statements about that. We don't know.

Rhonda maintains that gender differences are social constructs developed and maintained through a variety of strategies that operate at both the interpersonal and structural level, and they contribute to sustaining women's subordinate status.

Elaine envisions a coalitional approach among progressive social movements for the organization and implementation of strategic political action to effect change. Elaine defines allies for the women's movement as "any organization that was working on any type of social change that wasn't included under establishment" which includes:

> Any community group who was struggling along with issues around safety, poverty, the Voice of Women, Black people, Native Indian people.

While Elaine also views a potential alliance between the women's movement and unions as a strategy to effect change, she notes that the articulation of an innovative and meaningful understanding of an unjust situation needs to be conveyed cooperatively by many different groups, not just the women's movement.

> Everybody all together, it is the only way, all the groups. There has to be a lot more education. I think people have to recognize that. Actually the unions can do a lot of work in that area too [because] that is where you have adult people grouped together who you can educate and put ideas in their minds...So rather than laying that completely on the women's movement, I think the unions would be able to deal with that.

Whereas Elaine refers to specific political groupings, such as First Nations and persons of colour, that have been previously subsumed under the universalizing tendency of identity politics as potential allies, Rhonda prefers to define allies according to specific situations. While she points out "potentially all men are opponents of the women's movement, potentially certain groups of women are, potentially the whole world is an opponent" that is a framework she prefers not use. Rather than determining allies within a binary framework of oppressor/ oppressed, Rhonda finds that allies are most effectively chosen on a situational basis:

> I think just depends what we are talking about, who, where, when, and why. I guess things just seem a lot more specific to me than they used to. Certainly there are plenty of les-

> bians I feel that are anti-Semitic and I am not comfortable. Or lesbians who are not feminists or anti-feminists [and] I feel totally alienated from them. But on other grounds I would be right there with them, so we have all these overlapping grounds for working.

Similarly, Phyllis stresses the importance of being allies to each other within the movement "so there is a very broad and loud voice heard" in both the public and political arenas. Phyllis views "this work to work together" as being one of the most important tasks facing the contemporary women's movement. She regards the linkages that need to be created in a search for common ground among the various groups as critical for preventing an excessive and potentially threatening fragmentation within the movement:

> I think some of the work that needs to be done is building bridges between the different communities [such as, women with disabilities and lesbians]. I think that there needs to be a lot of work done in this area actually.

A coalitional approach within the movement would permit each segment to work on specific issues of interest, yet maintain a broad-based perspective that could guide the movement in its pursuit of social change. Phyllis notes that:

> Even if they don't all come together as one big group, that they are there for each other so that when the troops need to be called out that they are there and they respond so there is a strong voice.

Phyllis also refers to the need to develop alliances with groups that have conventionally been outside the boundary of the women's movement, such as men. In contrast to those more closely aligned with the biological end of the

continuum in biological foundationalism, Phyllis rejects the immutability of biological explanations of gender differences. She names patriarchy as the "enemy" and maintains that "it is an incredible waste or loss of potential supporting energy if we don't use them [men] or let them work with us on our terms". In addition to the development of situation-specific alliances with men, Phyllis notes that there are other potential alliances that could be created for the women's movement:

> I think when we get into the situation where we refuse to work with men in any way that we're losing track of the analysis, that it is patriarchy that we are trying to change and that what we're not looking at is man/bad, woman/good. There are obviously men who have been oppressed by patriarchy, [for example] men of colour, men with disabilities. And certainly they have not experienced the oppression that we, as women, have experienced but I don't think they have come through unscathed either.

As Phyllis observes, the experiences of oppression cannot be confined in a binary framework that restricts the status of man and woman to membership in a single category of bad and good, dominator and dominated, victimizer and victim. Phyllis insists that oppression needs to be understood more broadly and flexibly than as the power relations between men and women.

None of the participants who use a difference frame refer to an underlying commonality among women that is based on the female body as an unchanging site to support the claim of universality. The participants view women and men as social constructs, that there is no essential or biological core of identity other

than life experiences, and that these experiences are shaped within a multi-stratified social structure. Allies cannot be determined according to their membership in a single fixed category. They need to be selected in a context specific situation that takes into consideration their understanding and their position within the shifting axis of power.

CONSCIOUSNESS: GENDER OPPRESSION

This section examines the beliefs of the activists for understanding gender oppression as a systemic, asymmetric organization of power rather than as a personal idiosyncrasy or problem. The identity frame guides activists to regard gender oppression as the primary axis of subordination and fosters the view that women need to act as a coherent, unified group in the pursuit of social change. The difference frame calls for activists to move beyond a binary framework and the fixed categories of power and powerlessness. The difference frame maintains that social change needs to operate in a fluid coalition with diverse political groups.

Identity Frame

Judith does not believe that working for change to benefit all women has been very difficult even though the category 'woman' encompasses so many different women and experiences. Judith states that the women's movement benefits all women:

> We have worked to benefit all women. I truly believe that every woman in North America has at least more soul than she had 15 years ago, more of a sense of personhood. She may feel lost and helpless in that, I mean there is still a huge amount of psychological suffering, but I think there always will be.

Despite the previous capability of the movement to pursue social change to benefit all women, Judith is concerned that there no longer appear to be any clearly defined issues which could mobilize women as a unified group. The binary framework that accentuates women's differences from men and helps to make visible the systemic assymetry of power restricts an exploration of how other systems of stratification interact with gender oppression. For Judith, women's shared status as victims of male domination through spousal violence, incest, and childhood abuse provides a common experience around which women can mobilize. She explains her view:

> It is like the most superficial issues have been dealt with or are being dealt with...spousal violence, the abuse of children, derelict dads, all of those issues have come out of the closet and the deeper levels of them, co-dependent relationships, incest and childhood sexual abuse. I don't know what large issues women can cohere around. Yes, it was easy back then because there were these things that were absolutely blatant abuses that we could all agree on. But all those wonderful easy first causes where we could all agree--things are getting a lot more complex now.

According to Judith, women are bound together as members of a unified, homogeneous group whose oppression is enforced through power exerted in a unidirectional, top-down manner. Women's shared status as victims eclipses all

other distinctions. The homogeneity of women as a group rests on an understanding where difference can only be construed in a fixed binary of female/ male, oppressed/ oppressor, victim/ victimizer. As Judith points out, "things are a lot more complex now" as the "first causes" are being addressed and the constraints of a binary framework for understanding systemic power relations are becoming increasingly apparent to her.

Alice does not believe that the category 'woman' is so broad that it makes difficult to work for change to benefit all women. Alice refers to issues such as child care, health and safety, and abuse as common concerns that traverse class and culture differences among women.

> I think there are some basic concerns that women have that cross cultures, that cross socio-economic groupings, that I think it is easy, or not difficult, for women to work for the rights of other women or for the rights of women, period. I look at child care rights, I look at the rights of women in labour markets, whether from the health and safety aspect as well as to family benefits, look at abuse.

Alice focuses on similarities among women and maintains that an effective strategy to guide political action to transform their shared subordination is contingent upon an alliance of women everywhere.

For movement politics, Vivian maintains that it is important to organize around one's own oppression to create useful political strategies. Vivian describes the process of devising strategic action, stating "you have got to think about your own life and what's happening in your own life and what you are doing about it".

Like Vivian, Alice believes it is important to organize around one's own oppression as a strategy for connecting formerly personal problems to the existing social structure. She states that beginning with shared concrete experiences helps women to understand the connection between personal issues and the systemic oppression of women. Alice explains the process:

> If you look at it from the individual then of course if one talks about "I have been oppressed as a mother or a wife" then that is an issue that is important to me. Then if you think about it in a community perspective, which includes financial issues, job related issues, reproductive technologies, anything to do with women's bodies, health.

The consciousness-raising strategy that Alice describes not only helped to reconceptualize the conventional political terrain, but it was also instrumental for mobilization of new members. As Avis points out, organizing around one's own oppression politicizes immediately relevant personal experiences. In turn, this personal connection helps in the struggle for social change "because the feelings are very strong and you [are] really determined to make a change".

To gain an understanding of how "organizing around your own oppression" operates, Alice explains that ethnic, race and class differences cannot be understood under the primacy of gender oppression:

> I think that is important because they are rallying around something that is specific to them...and they may be dealing with some of the same kind of issues that SWAG deals with, however, it is safe for them to deal with it in their own community because they are all of that community whether it is East Indian or Chinese or what ever.

Because Alice maintains a binary framework in which women comprise a homogenous group, connections among systems of oppression are neither recognized nor developed. Differences among women that reflect systemic oppression, such as race, are resolved by an individualist approach that places difference on the margins of the movement or in a racial or ethnic group. Alice continues:

> I think there is a lot to be gained by women accepting and appreciating individual differences and individual approaches to overcoming barriers or oppression and dealing with issues that affect them.

That the concern for experiences of oppression related to other systems of domination are largely overlooked speaks to the difficulties of a binary framework of power relations.

When empolying an identity frame, participants confirm the need for and existence of a distinct, homogenous group called women to draw attention to a systemic pattern of oppression. They maintain that women are universally oppressed and strategies to guide political activist practice to end the oppression are contingent on the creation an alliance of women everywhere. Gender is privileged as the primary category of oppression and other systems of stratification are subordinated. While both the identity and difference frames guide activists to begin with one's personal experiences, which are shared collectively, the use of the difference frame allows for the identification of

connections to the structural oppression of women.

Difference Frame

In response to the claim that what is most important in movement politics is to organize around one's own specific oppression, Rhonda points out "all the struggles are ultimately linked up...because we are all oppressed by the same forces". Rhonda articulates the challenges facing contemporary feminist organizational strategies by pointing out that women are differentiated along many axis and without a recognition of these differences, an implicit politics of domination can be reproduced. She describes how political activist practice based on an assumed alliance of women can unintentionally make it more difficult to challenge other systems of oppression:

> I don't think you can stop there because if there is privilege in the world and if women are not only united as women, but also truly divided along class lines and neo-colonial lines etc. then we have to look at ways in which if I organize around my situation I might actually be making it materially harder for you organizing around yours.

Rhonda repudiates the belief that all women are equally oppressed and powerless by drawing attention to women's agency in reproducing oppression. However, she acknowledges that it has taken her "a long time to be able to see that in a way that is meaningful". The contradictions among women themselves are obscured when the issue of individual complicity for re/producing oppression is denied. Rhonda maintains that to more fully understand the relations of domination, it is

critical to recognize that "women do actually exercise privilege on our behalf against other women". Otherwise, without a recognition of women's agency, Rhonda states:

> It is too easy to come to these false conclusions that we are all in the same boat when we are not. All women are not actually oppressed in the same way and that some women are in a position of oppressing other women. I always thought yes, some women have privilege over other women, but it is all because of patriarchy, it is all men's fault. I guess I sort of see how it is not just men's fault, that women do actually exercise privilege on our own behalf against other women.

Elaine does not ascribe any essential characteristics to unite women, but rather she refers to a bond created among women by "sharing the experience going about changing things". The bond created by sharing the challenges of effecting change acknowledges interlocking systems of stratification, yet allows for diverse groups to come together in a coalition. Elaine describes the nature of the bond:

> I think there is a common bond amongst women when you realize that you're working for the same thing. It really doesn't matter how it happens, whether you're a battered wife or you've been raped or have suffered in the workplace or just fallen flat on your face because you tried to be super-woman. I think there is a recognition that society is not set up for us and the common bond is just sharing the experience going about changing things.

Elaine rejects an assumed similarity among women, stating that "part of the problem we have had in uniting women, to get some impetus to make changes [is] because our lives are so totally different". Despite the multiplicity of different

systems of oppression, Elaine believes that as women develop a greater sense of personal autonomy, connections can be created. While the connections may be variable, transitory, and occasionally contradictory, they still need to be created to help guide the movement in its pursuit of social change. For instance, Elaine refers to class distinctions and states "women married to poor men [have] a different set of problems" compared to those who are not. Although "they can still get...beaten", Elaine notes the experiential reality of that situation is shaped by class difference, such as whether they seek medical attention and press criminal charges. It is on the basis of shared experiences, that may be similar but not the same, that connections among systems of oppression can be developed.

The identification of difference needs to work hand in hand with a search for commonality. Elaine notes that organizing around a single issue not only prevents an understanding of the interconnections among the experiences of oppression within multiple systems of domination, but could also inadvertently strengthen other systems. As she describes it:

> I think the women involved in it might lose out in some way by not tying into everything that is going on with women, it wouldn't give them the broader pespective. And I think that would be unfortunate because you could have somebody who has worked for a number of years in a specific area and still add to the oppression of women in other areas.

Similarily, Shirley expresses a sensitivity to the differences among women in their experiences of oppression. While she acknowledges that organizing

around one's own oppression is "the most personally fulfilling" and that "our emotion and commitment will be more intense" Shirley goes on to point out the importance of being aware of other areas of oppression, stating that "it is not enough for me to be an activist for white, middle-class, professional women". Such an approach underscores the point of view of privileged women and prevents an understanding among diverse experiences of oppression by obscuring systemic power differences along axis other than gender. Shirley describes a process for creating a more inclusive approach to social change that builds an awareness of potential connections among multiple oppressions:

> I think it is also important that we are at least conversant with other areas of oppression...That I need to say, that as a woman, I have many things in common with other women who are very different from me. And it is important that I educate myself about those other oppressions, to be supportive of them, but first to ensure that I'm not part of the oppression. And then being conversant with the oppression, being willing to be supportive of, work towards equality for all. It is also important to acknowledge that while we may support others whose oppression we do not share completely, we don't speak for them. That a large part of the support is listening and doing what I'm told will be supportive, not what I think will be supportive.

Shirley stresses the need to be aware of how other oppressions are interconnected with gender oppression. During the late 1970's and early 1980's Shirley discovered that identity as a basis for political unity can conceal political differences. She explains how a search for common ground goes beyond a shared identity:

> When I started going to more dances or meeting people socially who had been in relationships for ten years, or older lesbians, I was talking introductory baseline feminism 101 and they had never heard it before. But I suddenly realized that understanding women's issues, having a feminist analysis had absolutely nothing to do with sexual orientation.

Rhonda also rejects identity based politics, noting that a shared identity does ensure a commitment to the same principles or goals. She maintains that failure to recognize that the category of woman is so broad contributes to the difficulty for making changes to benefit all women. Rhonda states:

> If you don't recognize all the differences, that is what makes it hard to work for changes that benefit all women...You think you are encompassing all women in your program but you are actually only encompassing a few. The more you realize how different women are, the more effectively you can actually work for change that will benefit all women because you will actually take more women's points of view into consideration.

With the elaboration of difference and the pluralization of political groupings, Rhonda states that "all the issues and aspects of life that feminists have traditionally worked with are all still valid to work on, we just have to think about them a bit differently, in a more global context".

The use of the difference frame leads activists to point to multiple systems of stratification that influence the experience of oppression in many diverse forms. They maintain that the privileging of gender obscures other systemic oppressions. They reject the exclusive reliance on a binary framework of power relations as limiting the development of political strategies to effect social change. They

maintain that bonds based on common experience need to be created for a more inclusive approach to social change which incorporates an awareness of multiple systems of domination. The connections are neither static nor fixed, but rather they are flexible links that shift in relation to different axes of power and powerlessness.

CONSCIOUSNESS: POWER AND SOCIAL CHANGE

This section examines how the activists view power and potential avenues for the pursuit of social change. The identity frame shapes which political arenas participants regard as critical for implementing change with an orientation towards personal empowerment and alternate institutions. While the difference frame guides activist practice in both the public and personal arenas, complex and shifting power relations complicate the development of political strategies.

Identity Frame

Carolyn sees women as being confined to the periphery of the decision-making process and expresses scepticism about efforts to successfully implement change at the state level. She "sense[s] a long way to go and [is] not absolutely convinced any more that we can ever or that we should even bother competing totally with rules that are basically set up and structures that are set up for and by men". While Carolyn acknowledges that the status of women has improved in terms of the numbers of women in the House of Commons and at the local

government level, she remarks:

> I don't think we can win that way in the sense that we can become equal partners because there are some realities that women have to face that men don't have to face. I would hope that we could create structures that accommodate some of the needs of women. Women are going to have to continue to fight for those things because, by and large, men, I don't think, are aware even though we can tell them, they don't live it.

Carolyn maintains that alternative institutions created for women serve not only as centres of resistance, but are also instrumental for "trying to expand the horizons and the support base" of the movement. However, she points to looming fiscal restraints that will act as barriers to prevent or limit strategies for change, such as the construction of alternate institutions. In view of the impending economic constraints, Carolyn proposes that women mobilize as a unified oppositional group as a tactical necessity.

> I am not sure in a world that is increasingly bottom-line oriented, where there is major financial crunches coming, that there is going to be a willingness to explore different ways of doing things because they are often uncertain. Therefore I would say that it is really important for women to work together to try and change the agenda.

In addition to a fiscally conservative environment, Carolyn notes that the understanding of oppression has become more complex, and accordingly, the analysis for the organization and implementation of strategic political action has become more complicated. For Carolyn, the shift from fixed power relations and clear, definitive categories to an acknowledgement of complex and fluid power

relations is affecting the movement's efforts to effect social change. She views the transition towards interrelated categories and power relations as comprising one of the most important issues facing the contemporary movement. The backlash, as Carolyn labels this shift, is:

> less of a willingness to think that women have a just cause. A lot of people think we have come far enough and it should just stay where it is now. I think there was more sympathy when it was easier to show. When you were dealing with things like equal pay rather than pay equity. We have gone into more complex ways of viewing equality. And now that a lot of the really blatant legal discrimination has been removed, it is less black and white. We have moved into more complex and more grey areas and therefore it is less easy to get the message and the concerns out and explain them to people.

As Vivian points out, the "backlash is more organized" which makes it more difficult to implement strategic political action to effect change than it was twenty years ago.

Alice clearly expresses personal transformation as a key arena for feminist political practice. She depicts power being enforced by "the male establishment" in a hierarchical manner. As Alice describes it:

> We, as women, don't have much power and I don't know that I necessarily see that having power is really all that important just because of all the connotations that go with power. You've heard [the expression] "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely". So I see women in power who are really well meaning and just get stymied by their male counter-parts as well as by the bureaucracy up there, so they're not as effective as they might like to

> be themselves. So I see power very much as counter-productive.

Alice is sceptical of efforts to gain power for women within the system in order to achieve structural change. She prefers feminist political practice that emphasizes personal transformation. For Alice, the individual is an important site for political activity. The process begins on an individual level to rid oneself of internalized oppression and the goal is the empowerment of women through an internal revolution. As Alice describes it:

> I like to look at the concept of empowerment and the more people that feel empowered, the more people can effect personal change. It has a magnifying, spiralling effect. It sounds very glorious, very esoteric, but I would much prefer to see change effected as a groundswell, rather than as a power on down way.

Alice maintains that by changing one's perspective, one changes reality. It is only then that women can create social change in the world. In evaluating her activism with SWAG, Alice believes that "a lot of the women's movement and activities have been co-opted...I don't think we have made many gains".

Like Alice, Judith identifies power with personal transformation and an individual's ability to make choices for one's self.

> The kind of power that has always been of enormous importance to me has been autonomy and agency, to not feel pushed around or manipulated or run by other people is just a huge issue for me...I can make choices and live with the consequences. I get to make my own mistakes, I get to make choices for myself. I have never been interested in power over other people and I am suspicious of people who are.

While Judith did not want to dismiss the value of lobbying as a political strategy for making the structural changes that are needed, she stresses the importance of self-transformation.

> I decided that you can't [effect] change standing on the steps of the Legislature, demanding new legislation. [It] is pointless unless we change the attitudes of the women. Writing textbooks on how to change the way children are treated in school is not much good unless you change the way mothers relate to their children from infancy up.

Judith believes that women have internalized their oppression and if they want to change their situation they need to first transform themselves. It is only after personal change has occurred, when women begin to feel psychologically strong and healthy about themselves, that their relationships improve.

> Freedom isn't something you ask for, equality is not a gift that somebody gives you...people get equality when they quit behaving in subservient ways.

Avis echoes the importance of self-transformation as a vital step towards changing structures of domination. She states:

> It is really up to the people who are oppressed to decide they are not going to be oppressed any longer because it matters to them. Nobody else is going to do it for you, really quite frankly, I can't imagine why they would. So that's basically why we women have to do it [our]selves. It's up to us to make the change.

The participants who use the identity frame maintain that one of the key features of feminist activist practice is the shift from the implementation and evaluation of change in the traditional political sphere to the reconceptualization

of political terrain which includes the individual and daily life. When employing either the identity or the difference frame the activists emphasize the importance of self-transformation as strategic political action. However, the use of the identity frame by the participants focuses on personal empowerment which displaces attempts to act collectively and engage in structural change.

Difference Frame

Shirley calls for simultaneous change aimed at both the personal and structural level. Rather than emphasizing personal transformation as legitimate or preferred political activist practice, Shirley connects the development of inner personal strength with participation in the state.

> I think that power needs to be exercised in the personal and the public way. There was a time when it was common to think, and I was inclined to believe [it] myself, personal power was where it was at. As long as you had your own life together, you had a sense of control in your own life, that was enough.

Shirley states that developing "a sense of personal power, of strenth, of confidence" needs to work in conjunction with creating change on a structural level. She explains that tactical strategies like separatism fail to change structural power relations and systems of oppression:

> It is equally important to exercise power in the public arena, to participate in some way in public decision making. Public decision making will always exist, whether or not we partici-pate, it will still continue.

Phyllis no longer regards the traditional terrain of political action, the

state, as a focus for challenging unequal power relations. She believes that her understanding had, until recently, "stopped at the borders" and was not sufficiently global in perspective. Phyllis maintains that the multi-national corporations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are replacing the government as the site for effecting social change because she "[doesn't] think there is power in any government any more". To facilitate an oppositional political strategy for this non-conventional political terrain, Phyllis states that:

> We have to find out who is in there, who is doing it, and how they are doing it. And where the points of possible change are.

While Phyllis no longer regards the state as an important site to pursue social change, Elaine sees the government operating in partnership with the multi-national corporations. Elaine explains her view on power:

> I see power in Canada as being held by multi-nationals, all the large companies who are really manipulating people to buy and consume more. And I see the majority of politicians as working hand-in-hand with them, with little concern for quality of life. I see the power as divested into large organizations that employ mainly white, middle [and] upper class males and that is where the power is and that is what we are struggling against.

Rhonda maintains that power "is in the hands of people it has always been in the hands of". In her understanding of power, the dominant group rules through conventional economic and political channels:

> It seems to me that the people who hold the power are the white middle class straight men. They hold the economic power [and] they hold the traditional centres of political power.

While Rhonda draws a distinction between political and economic power, she does not believe that power relations have changed, rather "what has changed is the rhetoric around it and maybe expectations".

> I don't see very many Native people with much power, some in their own bands, but very much circumscribed by [non-Native people] around them. I don't see too many disabled people with a lot of institutionalized power, even white middle-class privileged women don't really have much power, except economic purchasing power, but not real power.

Shirley maintains that the most important issue facing the contemporary women's movement is not only the recognition of the multitude of differences among women, but also the challenge of creating modes of analysis and strategies that do not reproduce an implicit politics of domination. Shirley states:

> It is a question of finding a way to include women with diverse oppression, who are new to Canada, women of colour, old or new to Canada, recent or long term, women with disabilities, lesbians, single women, married women, all kinds of women. To say that what ever women are doing it is of value, that there is not one way to be a valuable woman. That we can talk about power dynamics between men and women in a way that acknowledges and respects those women for whom that is not the primary issue.

Phyllis states that "there is no way of knowing the possibilities" for assessing the potential of the contemporary women's movement to affect global change. She notes the complexity of the interconnections among the multiple systems of oppression:

> I think there are so many hierarchies, there is the gender hierarchy, there is the colour hierarchy, the continent hier-

> archy, so I think as you begin to ease apart the threads of one hierarchy, you affect the threads that are holding the other hierarchies together. And so this is where I see the strength and power and potential of the women's movement in creating global change. As we begin to do it together, there is no way of knowing the possibilities.

Similarly, Rhonda discusses the challenge of creating a social movement that acknowledges and contests all forms of structural inequality. She views this shift occurring within the women's movement as a necessary redesign from the current approach:

> Part of it is this internal restructuring of the women's movement from being white, middle class kind of movement to... incorporating diversity. Women with privilege who are used to being the centre of things have to learn how not to be in the centre without being completely silenced because our tendency has been to say 'well, if I can't be the defining subject of feminism, then I'm not going to say anything at all and I'm going to fade into the woodwork'.

While Rhonda is supportive of efforts to address differences among women, she is critical of those that leave intact a binary framework that reproduces and confines difference in the margins as 'Other' from a centre composed of white, middle-class, heterosexual women. She states that "we have to learn how to speak, but not in this automatic authoritative voice". Otherwise, the very power dynamic that is to be replaced ends up being reinscribed. Rhonda states:

> What is happening now [with] diversity is white women get to be normal and black women get to be representing diversity or straight women get to be normal and lesbians get to represent diversity. We have to get over that.

Without an attempt to refashion identity and the potential for agency, Rhonda maintains that efforts to shift from an undifferentiated concept of women to recognizing differences among women simply results in "a different way of reconfiguring the same power dynamics".

The participants who use the difference frame maintain that strategies to guide political action need to recognize the multiple, interlocking systems of domination. Accordingly, they refuse the fixed categories of oppressed/ oppressor, victim/ victimizer, and dominated/ dominator which anchor an undifferentiated concept of woman in the margins. The participants point to complex and contradictory power relations that complicate strategies to effect social change both locally and globally. They recognize the challenge of creating modes of analysis and strategies for change that do not reproduce an implicit politics of domination. While the binary framework makes visible gender oppression, they maintain it needs to be supplemented with a more sensitive and complex understanding of power relations to effect change. The participants who use the difference frame unequivocally support cooperative efforts aimed at change within the personal and structural relations of power.

SUMMARY

The creation of a collective identity has been a vital aspect of the mobilization process and has sustained SWAG members' support for and

participation in movement activity over the past quarter of a century. Within SWAG the construction of collective identity has been shaped by the frames of identity and difference. The establishment of boundaries that have defined and located movement members and the development of consciousness which has imparted shared beliefs and goals has been examined.

The identity frame has guided the creation of an impermeable boundary that defines and locates members of the movement. The boundary that has been drawn by activists is fixed by an underlying biological element shared by women. Women compose a distinct unified group based on a commonality that has been expressed through the material given of the body. This impermeable boundary has strictly demarcated women and men into two dichotomous groups. Accordingly, similarities among women have been highlighted and differences have been suppressed. The experiences traditionally embodied by women have been revaluated and constitute the basis for shared values. The values shared by women and their biological commonality oblige women to act collectively to transform their shared oppression.

The fixed boundary defined by the identity frame is in contrast to the fluid boundary shaped by the difference frame. Whereas the female body has been regarded as an unchanging site to establish and support an impermeable boundary, distinctions that have produced and anchored a dichotomized framework are rejected. There has been no attempt to define a cross-cultural,

transhistoric set of criteria for the establishment of a boundary between men and women. There are no shared values related to a particular biological anatomy that ground the claim of a universal identity. Allies for the organization and pursuit of social change are selected on a situational basis.

Consciousness, as guided by the identity frame, has drawn attention to the systematic asymmetry of power based on gender. Women compose a distinct, unified group that has been universally oppressed. Differences among women are submerged as the binary framework for making visible and understanding unequal power relations privileges gender oppression. The arena that is priority for feminist activist practice is self-transformation. It is only after the oppression that women have internalized has been transformed, and they have developed an inner personal strength, that structural change may be pursued.

In contrast to the beliefs and goals shaped by the identity frame, consciousness, as guided by the difference frame, has placed an awareness of multiple systems of stratification at its centre. The shift to an exploration of multiple and interlocking systems of domination, however, has not rendered irrelevant the systemic forms of gender oppression. Rather than accord gender oppression unequivocal priority, it is regarded as one axis among many along which power may be differentially exerted. Power relations are viewed as complex and contradictory. Accordingly, flexible connections are needed to balance the plurality of new political groups and to guide strategies for change

that do not reproduce an implicit politics of domination. The creation of new and diverse links which acknowledge that privilege and oppression are neither definitive nor static categories, but rather shift in relation to different axes of power and powerlessness, is a strategic shift for contemporary feminist political practice.

While collective identity has been differentially shaped by the frames of identity and difference there are some common threads. Collective identity has sustained members' commitment and involvement over the past twenty-five years which has helped SWAG to become the longest, continuously-operating women's movement organization in Victoria. The creation of a collective identity, which has been instrumental in retaining members' support beyond the initial mobilization phase, has allowed activists to identify a systemic pattern of power based on gender and to develop strategies to change that imbalance. Collective identity has allowed feminists to reconceptualize the conventional political terrain to encompass both the individual and everyday actions.

Despite the innovative critical attention to gender oppression and the explanatory power of a binary framework in some contexts, a collective identity for the contemporary movement cannot be static. It needs to operate in what Linda Nicholson (1994) calls a new and different kind of "coalition politics". Rather than viewing coalition politics as something feminists enter into with other activists that have been regarded as external to the conventional boundary of the

women's movement, Nicholson states that "we could think about coalition politics as that which is also internal to [feminist politics]" (Nicholson, 1994:102).

Such an approach to political activitist practice compels the displacement of an ahistorical essentialist understanding of identity with a new way of looking at subjectivity and agency (Deveaux, 1994; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Rosenau, 1992). This new and flexible approach to identity would recognize that individuals can be neither reduced nor confined to membership in one category. It would acknowledge, for instance, that women are affected by more than their gender status (hooks, 1990). Identities, along with allies, would be formulated in a situation specific context in the same manner that coalition politics are created. It would be an open, shifting, and fluid strategic politics informed by a complex interweaving of the identity and difference frames in various contexts for change aimed at both the personal and structural relations of power.

NOTES

1. For a description of some of the activities with which each participant has been involved, see Appendix B.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The early organizing phase of the contemporary women's movement was an exciting and dynamic period characterized by a departure from politics as it had conventionally been practised. Activists drew upon shared collective experiences and connected them to existing social structures in constructing an innovative and alternate interpretation of the supposedly natural order of gender. The identity frame, as this approach has been termed, drew attention to similarities among women and accentuated their differences from men to help make visible a systemic asymmetry of power based on gender. In this binary framework, women were conceptualized as a unified, homogenous group that needed to act collectively as an alliance of women to transform their shared oppression.

While the identity frame brought critical innovative attention to a systemic pattern of oppression in the critical practice of feminism, an alternate frame emerged which indicated that the homogeneous gendered identity "women" failed to adequately address the specificity and particularity of many experiences of oppression. The difference frame, as this rival approach has been termed, drew attention to a range of other shared, collective experiences that had been subordinated within the identity frame. The difference frame emerged in the mid

1980s to question the very ideas and strategies by which the movement had previously organized for change. The use of the difference frame lead to rejecting the fixed and unequivocal categories of oppressor/ oppressed, dominator/ dominated, victimizer/ victim and moved to viewing power relations as complex and contradictory, shifting according to different axes of stratification. Whereas the strategy informed by the identity frame was an alliance of women everywhere acting collectively to transform their shared oppression, the use of the difference frame pointed to flexible, transitory connections that would operate in a form of coalition politics. In this thesis an understanding of how the frames of identity and difference have shaped the mobilization process, including the construction of a collective identity, has been sought from a historical perspective. This has allowed the conflict at the core of the contemporary movement to be placed in context and understood within a framework of power relations rather than as personal clashes.

From its early organizational phase to the mid 1980s, the mobilization process within SWAG was shaped by the identity frame. During this period SWAG drew upon a variety of strategies and tactics to mobilize collectively controlled resources in the pursuit of social change. SWAG engaged in various strategies to generate resource from its members through an assessment of fees for membership, special events and dances. Over the past two decades SWAG has strengthened its financial ties with the state and has faced several

contradictions for the establishment of a resource base beyond the movement constituency. The state has attempted to explicitly influence the political agenda of SWAG through the placement of restrictions on issues deemed inappropriate for financial assistance. Although sexual orientation and reproductive choice were excluded from state financial support, SWAG elected to oppose the financial restrictions. These incidents established SWAG as an organization that would be involved in a range of issues and would not shirk from assuming a public stance on controversial matters. While SWAG generated financial resources and contested state practices, it also had to attract new movement members to expand support for and participation in the movement.

Cultural resources were instrumental for the expansion of the movement base beyond the interpersonal ties of the movement constituency, the generation of sense of community among the movement members, and the promotion of an innovative, alternate frame that resonated with everyday experiences. The conferences, rallies, and newsletters focused on the similarities among women--creating and sustaining support for a binary framework of power relations that privileged gender oppression. While the newsletter had maintained an alternate account that legitimated SWAG's strategic political action, by the mid 1980s the newsletter had begun to reflect efforts to destabilize the identity frame. One of the earliest attempts to unsettle the framing of women as a distinct, homogeneous group occurred through the politicization of sexual orientation. By the 1990s

there was a shift from a binary framework of power relations to an attempt to recognize and understand other systems of oppression and to search for connections among them.

SWAG had originally created a movement organization based on a traditional hierarchical model with elected officers, formal voting procedures and an agenda set by the president. The transition from a bureaucratic organization to a collective approach which embodies feminist principles has been a remarkable accomplishment. SWAG has created political processes which have maximized individual participation and have equalized, or at least, minimized hierarchical power relations. SWAG has experimented, modified, and developed an innovative structure that has balanced organizational efficiency with the feminist principles of limited hierarchies, shared knowledge, and multifaceted strategies for effecting social change.

SWAG has created and modified its organizational structure to reconcile efficiency with minimal hierarchy, acquired and maintained resources, and constructed and refined its framing to facilitate collective action as necessary aspects of the mobilization process; it has also constructed a collective identity that has sustained members' commitment and involvement over the past twenty-five years. The construction of a collective identity, like the other aspects of the mobilization process, has been shaped by the frames of identity and difference.

The establishment of boundaries has operated to define and locate

movement members from others. The identity frame has guided the creation of an impermeable fixed boundary based on an underlying biological commonality among an undifferentiated group called women. This impermeable boundary has strictly demarcated women and men into two polarized groups and has revalued the experiences traditionally embodied by women. The values shared by women and their biological commonality oblige women to act collectively to transform their shared oppression. Whereas the material given of the body has been regarded as an unchanging site for the establishment and maintenance of an impermeable boundary, the difference frame has not directed an attempt to define a cross-cultural, transhistoric set of criteria to locate and define movement members. Accordingly, there have been no values imparted to anyone based on biological elements.

Consciousness, as guided by the identity frame, has drawn attention to women as a distinct, homogeneous group whose oppression has been enforced through power exerted in a unidirectional, top-down manner. Self-transformation has been accorded priority as a strategy for effecting change. It is only after the oppression that women have internalized has been transformed, after they have developed an inner personal strength, that structural change may be pursued. In contrast to the beliefs and goals shaped by the identity frame, the difference frame has placed an awareness of multiple and interlocking systems of stratification at the centre of consciousness. Power relations have shifted from a

fixed and stable binary framework to a recognition of the complex, fluid and contradictory relationship among multiple axis of stratification. Accordingly, flexible connections need to be created among the numerous new political groups which acknowledge that privilege and oppression are neither definitive nor static categories.

This analysis suggests several possible avenues for possible future research. For instance, the frames of identity and difference which emerged through repeated readings of the interview data are broadly constructed and variations are obscured. Future research could refine the frames for a more detailed examination of activists' understanding of power relations and the context in which activists are most likely to invoke each frame, respectively.

A related line of research could extend the selection criteria of research participants to include a purposive sample of key activists and rank-and-file members who are not only long-serving but also those with more recent involvement. Such an approach to future research would allow activists that are identified by others as "information rich" (Miles and Huberman, 1994), but not identified as long-serving core members, to be included. This broadening of the selection criteria may reach participants who could represent a wide spectrum of ideological perspectives and activist strategies. For instance, further research could examine how activists that may be inclined towards a politics of difference might be marginalized within the movement.

Another interesting line of research concerns the implications of the bifurcation of frames for feminist practice. The activists in this study who employed the difference frame have taken the first step toward new ways to think about gender beyond the female/male binary. Future research could examine how the difference frame used by activists to talk and think about gender may be implemented in actual political practice. This could include an empirical examination not only of feminist movement organizations, but also other progressive social movements by mapping out what it might mean for activists working together for social change. In addition to these possibilities, future research could explore the potential cooptation of the difference frame in which "difference" is understood merely as variety, rather than as an analytical framework that enables women to explore and confront the inequalities of the structural relations of power.

Future empirical research could also look at factors that may precipitate changes in the use of the identity and difference frames by activists. This could be explored as a case study of a movement organization to determine whether the frames of identity and difference are co-dependent in sustaining a conflicted, yet tangible, identity for contemporary feminism. A related question could examine whether the essentialist identity frame is starting to fade in the context of postmodern pluralization, perhaps ceding territory to the difference frame or to another emergent frame.

While this research has examined many of the activities that constitute the ongoing accomplishment of collective action within the Victoria Status of Women Action Group, there is a need for further research which describes the contemporary movement characteristics and analyzes the social, political and economic structures and processes which facilitate social change.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Can you describe when and how you first became involved in the women's movement? [probe specific events, people, work experiences, reading material, family and/or friends]

2. What prompted you to become involved with SWAG?

3. Did you define yourself as a feminist in this period? If so, when did you first use that term to describe your views? If not, did you ever begin using that term to describe yourself and when?

4. Was being a feminist difficult then? More difficult than now? Why? Did people react negatively to the term? Who?

5. Looking back, what activities have been most important to you in working for women's rights?

6. As someone with an historical perspective, how do you view the contemporary women's movement? How does it compare to the struggle for women's rights in the 1970s?

7. What do you see as the immediate goals for SWAG, and what do you see as the long-range goals? First, the immediate goals: And the long range goals?

8. Does this agenda of long-range and immediate goals differ from the agenda that existed when you first became involved in SWAG? If so, how has it changed?

9. What unites the members of SWAG? Are there any important areas of disagreement?

10. What makes SWAG different from other groups working on "women's issues"?

11. It has been claimed by some activists that what is most important in movement politics is to organize around one's own specific oppression. What do you think about this idea? Does SWAG use separatism as a strategy? [probe separatism from men or within own sexual, racial, class and ethnic caucuses] Why

or why not? What are some examples? Is separatism a goal for SWAG? Why or why not?

12. Whom do you think SWAG represents? Are there any groups of women who do not participate in SWAG? Why do you think that is?

13. Since it is difficult to address everything, what issues get the most attention in SWAG? How do you decide? Are you satisfied with what issues do get prioritized? Why or why not?

14. As a person active in the women's movement, whom do you see as allies or potential allies? And opponents?

15. It has been claimed by some that the category 'woman' is so broad and encompasses so many different women and experiences that it is very difficult to work for change to benefit all women. What do you think about this point of view? Do you think all women share some basic interests? What are they? Why? If not, what women share these interests? Why?

16. How do you see women and men in comparison to each other? What, if any, are their similarities? and differences?

17. Do you see women as having any special 'female' values? What are these values? Are these qualities shared by all women? If not, what women possess these qualities? Why?

18. Do you think that there are any politically relevant differences among women? If yes, what kinds of difference? Any similarities? What kinds?

19. There are some women who deny being a feminist ("I'm not a feminist but...") yet benefit from the women's movement and others who explicitly stand opposed to the women's movement, such as R.E.A.L. Women (Real, Equal, Active, for Life). Why do you think there are these differences among women?

20. It has been claimed by some feminists that the women's movement represents white, middle class women. Does this apply to SWAG? Why or why not?

21. What does the phrase "the personal is political" mean to you?

22. How would you define the "women's community" in Victoria? What does someone need to do or be to become part of this community? Do you feel like a

member of this community? Why or why not?

23. What do you like most about the women's community? What would you like to change about the women's community to improve it?

24. Part of the women's community in Victoria involves social and cultural activities such as bookstores, coffee shops and newspapers as well as other events such as dances, concerts and artists. How important do you think these are for promoting change? Why?

25. What would you say are the main benefits--of any kind--that you have gotten from your involvement in the women's movement? Have you experienced any drawbacks or disadvantages as a result of your involvement in the women's movement?

26. Would you say that your activism in the women's movement has had an impact on your own identity--on how you view yourself and how others view you? How so? [probe aspects of change]

27. What are your thoughts on the nature of power in Canada today [If participant asks for clarification: "I mean power in the broadest sense of the term--as an aspect of social life". Then repeat question.

28. In what ways does SWAG challenge power as you have just described it? Are there any other strategies that you use?

29. In what ways do you see this power imbalance structured into society? Do you see this as the basis for the subordination of women? Why or why not? What do you think perpetuates this oppression? Why?

30. What would you say are the most important issues facing the women's movement today?

31. Finally, what does being a feminist mean to you?

Demographics

32. How old were you on your last birthday?

33. Where were you born?

34. What is your citizenship?

35. What is your ethnic background?

36. What is your educational background?

0-8 years
9-11 years (some high school)
12 years (high school graduate)
13-15 years (some college/university)
16 years (university graduate)
17 or more, but without post-graduate degree
17 or more and masters degree
17 or more and PhD
other (e.g., vocational training)

37. Do you have any children? How many? Female or Male? How old?

38. Are you...

living with a partner or married
single
widowed
divorced
separated

39. Do you describe yourself as a lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual woman?

40. What is your present occupation?

41. Is the organization where you work a private-sector business, a government organization or a non-profit organization?

42. Are you employed by someone else, are you self-employed, or do you work without pay in a family business or firm?

43. Do you supervise any employees? How many?

[If participant is living with a partner or married, repeat Questions 40, 41, 42, and 43 about partner]

44. Were you raised in any particular religious or spiritual tradition? Would you describe yourself as a religious or spiritual person now?

45. Are you currently a member of any feminist organizations, or do you subscribe to any feminist newsletters or magazines? Which ones? (obtain description if unfamiliar)

46. Besides SWAG, are you presently involved in any other groups or organizations working for social change? [probe name of group, nature of involvement, length of involvement]

47. Thank you for your patience and cooperation! Has our interview been a positive experience for you? Why or why not? Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to tell me about? Do you have any comments or suggestions to improve the interview process?

48. Finally, in order to continue with the interviewing, would you be willing to suggest the names of two women who were also active in SWAG that I could contact for an interview?

Two Persons Active in SWAG: Name	How to Contact
1)	
2)	

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Alice Albert

Alice initially became involved with SWAG while attending the University of Victoria for her Masters degree during the late 1970s. She brought to SWAG experience that she gained from her participation in England as an activist with several feminist groups. As a member of the Coordinating Committee until the early 1980s, Alice was involved in a range of activities which included the organization of SWAG's annual conference and the preservation of SWAG's archival material. As a member of SWAG's Feminist History Group, Alice was instrumental in the creation and presentation of the documentary "50 Years as Persons" in 1980 on the achievement of political rights for women in Victoria. Alice describes being a feminist as "important because it has given me a sense of identity, of where I am and where I am coming from, what my values are, and a method of focusing on what is important".

Avis Rasmussen

Avis had been employed as a teacher while caring for her three young children. She left the paid labour market shortly before the birth of her twin

daughters. While involved with the day to day care of her children, Avis began to volunteer at SWAG. Avis discussed her involvement with the women's movement and coming to identify herself as a feminist as a slow and gradual process that was, at times, very difficult. She initially became involved in SWAG through its Family Law Committee during the mid 1970s and created position papers concerning spousal maintenance and the division of community property. Avis also helped to coordinate the annual fall conference for SWAG and later chaired the Education Committee in the early 1980s. She returned to the University of Victoria to complete her Masters degree in Education and continued as a member of the Coordinating Committee at SWAG until the mid 1980s. Avis notes that her involvement with the women's movement has made her "aspire to carry on working with [her] art". She also acknowledges that "it was a great benefit to realize that change, even though it could take time, was possible".

Carolyn

Carolyn first became involved in the women's movement when she helped to conduct a study in the early 1970s which examined some of the barriers facing women in employment. She later moved to Victoria with her husband and two children in the mid 1970s and immediately became involved with SWAG. As Treasurer, Conference Organizer, and Chair of the Labour Committee from 1978 to 1981 Carolyn has been engaged in a variety of activities until her departure in

the early 1980s. Carolyn notes that being a feminist "is helpful in understanding yourself as a woman, understanding the kinds of things that have created the situation...and why it is that you are dealt with in certain ways".

Elaine

Elaine first became involved with SWAG in the late 1970s. Through her participation in SWAG, Elaine found that she had come "into contact for the first time in [her] life with women who [she] could really relate to". One of the first tasks that Elaine did as a member of SWAG was to write a letter to the local newspaper editor protesting the comments of a prominent highly conservative psychiatrist in Victoria. Elaine also became involved with several organizations including Rape Relief and the NDP Women's Rights Committee. Accounting for her involvement with SWAG, Elaine stated that she "was basically interested in women's issues, so even if [she] had learned about the Voice of Women with their focus on peace, that would not have been [satisfactory]". Elaine noted that she "wanted more information about women, what was going on with women". In support of this commitment, Elaine has served as President, newsletter Editor, conference organizer, author of numerous SWAG policy briefs, and member of the Health committee among other various activities until the mid 1980s.

Judith

Prior to attending the founding conference for SWAG in 1971, Judith had read the recommendations of the RCSW Report and was intrigued. She initially became involved with SWAG stating that "feminism was the most exciting thing that was happening in all our lives" and later participated in the founding of Rape Relief. Judith was involved with the development of the organizational structure of SWAG, including the establishment of the first office in 1976, along with other activities, such as the photographic display "Our Hidden Heritage", which documented the history of women in BC. Soon after the founding of SWAG Judith returned to the University of Victoria to obtain her Masters degree. Judith points out that being involved in the women's movement has given her "validation, confidence, trust, a career, a place in the world, practically everything that matters to me--except my kids".

Phyllis

After having lived abroad for several years, Phyllis relocated to Victoria with her husband and two children. She joined SWAG in the early 1980s as a volunteer and soon became a member of the Board. Over the span of nearly fifteen years since her initial involvement, Phyllis has been immersed in a broad scope of activities which have included Coordinator, liaison for Provincial and Federal Committees on the Status of Women, Treasurer, and member of SWAG's

Personnel Committee. Being a feminist, according to Phyllis, "means being me and claiming all aspects of myself, not feeling that parts of me aren't appropriate or need to be hidden away, that they are either too good or too bad, but just being able to accept that I am what I am".

<u>Rhonda</u>

Rhonda's initial encounter with SWAG during the early 1980s left her feeling "disoriented". She arrived for the Annual General Meeting "looking for the radical feminists in Victoria" and encountered a formal election conducted by Robert's Rules of Order in progress. Unaccustomed to SWAG's organizational process, Rhonda initially became involved with the production of the newsletter. Drawing on political activist experience that she gained while in Europe and at SWAG, Rhonda became a Coordinator during the mid 1980s until 1989. She was the architect of the Office Collective and instrumental for the organization of the first Gala Appreciation in Victoria. She has continued to be a contributor to the newsletter, <u>The Times-Feminist</u>. Rhonda credits the women's movement for having given her "a whole world that [she] can operate out of".

<u>Shirley Avril</u>

Shirley attended the founding conference of SWAG in 1971. It was her introduction to an entire event designed specifically for women and examined

issues of importance to women. As a teacher at the time and an active union member of the BC Teachers Federation, Shirley became involved in SWAG's Education committee to address concerns that the education system was not meeting the needs of female students particularly well. One of the initial tasks conducted by the committee was the comparison of the number of female and male illustrations and characters in school textbooks as a strategy to raise awareness and gain support for a gender balanced curriculum. Shirley continued to be active within SWAG for nearly fifteen years until the mid 1980s. During this time some of Shirley's activities have included newsletter Editor and Production Coordinator, Conference Coordinator, several years as President and later as Coordinator in the early 1980s. She credits the women's movement for providing her with "wonderful friends...and a safe place to learn organizational skills, public speaking skills, analytical thinking and confidence".

Vivian

While Vivian was raising her four children she had been very involved in partisan politics. She described feeling "somewhat limited [with her partisan involvement] and a little bit lonely" when she attended the founding conference of SWAG in 1971. Immediately following the conference, Vivian became extensively involved with developing the architecture of SWAG's organizational structure and its committees. In 1975 she was appointed the Federal Advisory Council on the

Status of Women to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the RCSW Report. For nearly twenty years Vivian has been engaged in some capacity with SWAG on numerous projects and committees, which have included serving as President and Chair of the Family Law Committee until the mid 1970s.

VITA

Surname: Cikaliuk | Given Name: Monique

Place of Birth: Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1991 to 1996
University of Victoria	1988 to 1991
University College of the Cariboo	1985 to 1988

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (Honours)	University of Victoria	1991

Honours and Awards:

University of Victoria Fellowship	1991 to 1993
Sara Spencer Foundation Research Award	1993
President's Scholarship	1991
University of Victoria Faculty Scholarship	1991
Xi Nu Chapter, Beta Sigma Phi Sorority Prize	1991

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