1999

Feminism meets self-care in social change work

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Feminism Meets Self-Care in Social Change Work

by

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Honours Science, University of Waterloo, 1994

THESIS

submitted to the Department of Psychology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree

Wilfrid Laurier University

January, 1999

ABSTRACT

The trauma literature reveals that anti-violence work can negatively affect anti-violence workers. These effects are different from those of doing general counselling, therapy, and research. The effects include disrupted beliefs about the goodness of people, difficulty trusting others, emotional numbness, psychic drain, spiritual disconnectedness, and loss of meaning and purpose in life. I experienced a negative transformation while participating in feminist social change work, specifically feminist anti-violence work. I decided to investigate this transformation and share my insights. I collected the data from within myself through an intuitive, reflective writing process, then compared and contrasted my experience to relevant literature. I discovered that feminism, or some assumptions about feminism, in addition to the aforementioned stresses of anti-violence work, impacted negatively on my well-being. I suspect some of my assumptions about feminism are shared with other anti-violence workers, and believe these assumptions may be impeding the progress of the collective women's movement. I propose that anti-violence workers improve their self-care efforts to reduce the negative impact of their work. I recommend self-care include self-reflection directed toward challenging assumptions and questioning beliefs, values, and practices to improve the effectiveness of self-care and social change efforts. I share contradictions between self-care and feminism that I experienced, and discuss how to reconcile the needs of the self and the collective within feminist social change work. I recommend the assumptions and contradictions I discuss be compared and contrasted to the experiences of other women to enhance our understanding of the impact of self-care and feminism in social change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the feminist community in Kitchener-Waterloo for your warm welcome to my formal entrance into the women's movement, your sincere support throughout my Master's education, and your dedication to improving the living conditions for all women through social change. I appreciate the energy, commitment, and self-sacrifice you, and other feminist women have given to the cause of equality and justice. I gratefully acknowledge the benefits I receive from the social and political changes that resulted from your perseverance.

I wish to thank my thesis committee members, Kim Morouney and Marty Laurence, my external examiner, Juanne Clarke, and my thesis defence chairperson, Cheryl Regehr, for your support and encouragement in the thesis writing and defence processes, respectively. I also wish to thank each of you for choosing a career in academia, despite the patriarchy of the academic system. I appreciate your presence in the field, your commitment to change, and the 'mentoring' you provide female students like myself.

Thank you to my advisor, Richard Walsh-Bowers, for supporting my alternative thesis design, and for the freedom to direct my own thesis experience.

Thank you to my surrogate thesis advisor, Paul Davock, for the gifts of time, energy, and humour throughout the thesis process. I sincerely appreciate our many thesis-related (and non-thesis-related) discussions. I also appreciate your open and honest feedback, your encouragement, and your respect for my learning style and goals.

Special thanks to my family for your love and support, and to my friends for those much needed thesis diversions. Finally, special thanks to Bryan, for listening patiently, editing incisively, and loving me so unconditionally, despite my many moods throughout the thesis process.

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teach a woman self-care and you save her life;
develop teachers of self-care and you lift all society."**

CHAPTER 1: MY SOCIAL LOCATION

I was raised to appreciate the value of community service, living in a small town community, with parents who practised community giving and development. I always had the wish to make a difference in other people's lives. I was not sure as to the means; I simply knew I wanted to make a career out of "making a difference".

I researched violence against women for my undergraduate thesis and empirically tested a date rape education model with undergraduate students. As a result, I left my undergraduate degree with a greater awareness of the impact of violence on my own life, my mother's life, and on women's lives in general. I decided to work on understanding and preventing violence against women as my way of making a difference in the world. At that time, I believed that the violence in women's lives could come to an end within my lifetime, and that equal opportunity for women was a viable goal. I believed that changes in attitudes about women and practices that oppressed women could all be challenged and reformed to fit my vision of equality. I also believed in my own ability to participate in and influence this social change process. I felt confident about myself, strong, determined, and together. I knew what I wanted to accomplish in life, and how I wanted to do it. What I needed was an increased knowledge of theories and practices that I could use to fulfill my larger goal of working towards equality; I needed to see how people effect social change through their daily living. Thus, I came to my master's program with the goal of learning community development and social change strategies that could make a difference in women's lives, especially in relation to the issue of violence.

Quickly, I realised that my master's program alone could not provide the knowledge and experience I was seeking, so I volunteered at a local women's shelter and a sexual assault support

centre. I joined a violence prevention committee in the community and I worked on a community education project to prevent violence against women and children.

I participated in feminist anti-violence work for 3 years before beginning this thesis. When I first started volunteering, I attended volunteer training sessions to learn about shelter and sexual assault work. These training sessions served two purposes: to increase volunteers' awareness of violence and the kinds of situations one might encounter as a volunteer, and to provide volunteers with the skills to carry out the work. I learned about the prevalence of violence and the variety of ways in which women are violated. I heard testimonials of women's lived experiences of severe physical battering, child abuse, controlling and demeaning acts perpetrated against women by loved ones, stranger rape, date rape, and ritual abuse perpetrated by cult members on children (an experience that is much more common in Ontario than the average citizen realizes). I facilitated information groups for women who had experienced violence and saw first-hand how experiences of violence and oppression can take away a woman's hope for a better future. I facilitated educational presentations in the community and realized there was no part of the community untouched by the issue of violence against women. Women young and old, of all races and classes, told horrifying stories of traumatic experiences of violence and oppression and attested to the negative impact such experiences have on their view of themselves and of the world.

In my Master's program, we also discussed at length the magnitude of oppression and its varying effects. Meanwhile; sexism existed within our own department. This sexism displayed itself in various forms, ranging from hiring committees that showed explicit resistance to hiring women faculty, to individual faculty members who did not respect women's ways of learning and

their contributions to the learning experience. At community meetings and in classes, men would talk longer and interrupt women more often than the other way around. Evidence of sexism and women's inequality appeared everywhere.

Gradually, I noticed changes within myself. I clenched my teeth in my sleep, I experienced stiffness and aches and pains, I suffered fatigue, anxiety, and eventually depression. Emotionally, I was drained from listening to women's horrific stories. I relived the trauma of my own past experiences of sexual violence and oppression. I felt cut off from my previously strong sense of spirituality. I questioned the goodness of other people and the possibility of happiness in my own future. I lost my ability to appreciate and connect with nature. I lost hope. My mental stimulation was out of balance. Everything coming in related to oppression. In our classes, we seldom discussed cases of positive change. I focussed on keeping up with course readings, and temporarily stopped reading books and articles of interest to me. I assumed that the faculty knew what the students needed to learn from their own experience of effecting change. I basically gave up my power to educate myself by focussing on course reading instead of reading a variety of literature.

Eventually, I lost my dedication to achieving women's equality. I believed I was of no value to social change efforts. I experienced an emptiness and wondered why and how I changed so much in such a short period of time. I blamed myself, thinking I was just not cut out for violence prevention work and that my dedication to it was a mistake. Then I came to the arbitrary conclusion that it was not my personality per se that led to the transformation in my self and my view of the world, but rather some unknown factors of circumstance. I decided to write about the transformation I experienced to understand why the transformation occurred and to explore

potential strategies for preventing my diminished view of myself and others. After engaging in an arduous reflective writing process and analysing themes in my writing, I decided "Feminism Meets Self-Care in Social Change Work" seemed the most appropriate thesis title. My writing focuses mostly on the personal paradoxes I experienced between feminism and self-care while participating in a setting oriented to social change.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION

There is an aspect of doing anti-violence work within an organized feminist setting that has not been addressed by the research literature. This aspect is the effect of the unstated assumptions or beliefs about feminism that guide the work on the women who do the work. The violence prevention settings in which I participated believe feminism should be used to guide social change work. Feminism as a philosophy supposedly grew out of women's lived experiences. Thus, following feminist principles should enable women to do their work in ways that suit them. My perception is that some women in feminist organizations are operating under definitions or aspects of feminism that were not defined by themselves, but by other women in the field, past or present. I believe as feminist social change workers, we need to examine the behavioural manifestations of our current philosophy of feminism to determine which practices and beliefs help or hinder us in our work. Once we understand what beliefs and practices help us in our work, we can reformulate a theory or philosophy of feminism to guide our future work based on our own lived experiences.

Discussions around beliefs do happen within feminist violence prevention work. These discussions often remain private to each setting, because the women do not have the time to research or write about the issues that emerge from their philosophical discussions. As such, I am choosing to writing about my own experience of working and volunteering in feminist social change settings. I highlight a number of assumptions about feminist social change work that I believe are operating in these settings, and I examine the effect of these assumptions on my ability to do social change. Then, I propose that self-care, or learning to establish and maintain our own healthy self-concepts and lifestyles, be implemented as the first step toward maximizing our

individual ability to contribute to any form of social change.

The literature on vicarious traumatization and secondary traumatic stress, which can be defined as the stress resulting from helping a traumatized person, suggests that the effects of these phenomena can be minimized by implementing a number of self-care strategies. This list of self-care strategies includes setting limits on the amount of time one shares with others, minimizing exposure to additional traumatic material in the media, spending time with loving, trusting, supportive family or friends, engaging in personal learning, growth, or positive social change activities, getting regular sleep and exercise, practising proper nutrition, debriefing about difficult work with a counsellor, and developing and practising one's own form of spirituality (Neumann & Gamble, 1995; Pearlman, 1995; Schauben & Frazier, 1995; Stamm, 1995). I agree that all of these strategies as well as others, like connecting with music and nature, or going for a massage, are important components of our self-care regimes. Sometimes, though, we may need to do more than take care of ourselves. We may need to change our situation, our beliefs, our practices, and our priorities if we are to effectively advance our own healthy development and our social change efforts.

I think there are a few specific, though assumed beliefs present in feminist violence prevention and social change settings that need to be challenged as part of a commitment to better self-care. In reflecting on my own experience of feminism and violence prevention work, I identified seven assumptions that I believe most theories of feminism have failed to expose. These seven assumptions are stated below and discussed and challenged individually in the thesis after the methodology section.

Assumption #1: Women must sacrifice themselves completely to achieving equality in order for social change to occur.

Assumption #2: Identifying with, defining one's self in terms of, or experiencing oppression is necessary to change oppressive systems.

Assumption #3: Identifying with a female archetype shows a higher level of respect for women and is necessary for achieving women's equality.

Assumption #4: Achieving equality for women requires that as feminists, we love all women equally.

Assumption #5: There is only one philosophy of feminism, one common place of understanding for the established feminist social change worker, and such a unified singular version of feminism is necessary for feminist social change to occur.

Assumption #6: Women's equality can be achieved through practising socialist feminism, which we assume to mean we should reject money.

Assumption #7: Consciousness raising that focuses on oppression and its effects is a necessary and effective social change process.

The following paraphrased quote, based on the proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime; develop teachers of fishermen, and you lift all society" (Covey, Merrill, & Merrill, 1994), summarizes the essence and focus of my thesis:

> **"Give a woman care and you save her for a day; teach a woman self-care and you save her life; develop teachers of self-care and you lift all society."**

The remainder of the thesis is organized as follows: a) background information on feminism, feminist social change, violence against women, and the kind of research literature published to date on these topics, b) a literature review of vicarious traumatization, secondary traumatic stress, or more precisely, the effects of anti-violence work on the worker, c) the social context of working and volunteering in the 1990's, d) the methodology I employed to collect data, e) seven assumptions involved with doing feminist violence prevention work that I challenge, f) a discussion of self-care strategies that we can use to undo assumptions and beliefs that are hindering our work, g) my contribution to the literature including future research implications, and h) a reflection on this thesis process, including a summary of what I learned from doing this kind of thesis.

In part e) I share the personal and literature data I collected for this thesis. These data are organized around a series of assumptions about how to be a feminist social change worker in a violence prevention setting. I call them assumptions because they were often unstated rules that I perceived to be in place from watching others do the work, and from listening to other women define their personal philosophy of feminism. I chose each assumption because in examining my own experience of this work, these assumptions affected my ability to perform optimally in the setting. I introduce and discuss the assumptions consecutively, and I present strategies for changing these assumptions and improving our self-care abilities throughout the data and discussion sections of the thesis.

CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Over the last century, women took great strides toward their own liberation from society's roles and expectations of them. Through the first and second waves of feminism and the women's movement, women challenged many of the systems, structures, and practices that contributed to their conditions of oppression. In the first wave of the women's movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women organized around issues such as suffrage, pregnancy rights, education, property rights, and economic independence (Dubois, 1979). In the second wave of the women's movement, from the late 1960's until today, women challenged the image of femininity prescribed for them by society, the sexual division of labour in the home and the workplace, outdated laws like the anti-abortion law, inadequate social services like child care and health care specific to women's needs, and the limits on choices for girls and women within the education system. In addition, women exposed the sexism, heterosexism, racism, and exploitation that contributes to women's oppression (Adamson, Briskin, & McPhail, 1988). They also uncovered and named various other forms of violence against women, including sexual harassment, incest, rape, woman abuse, and battering (MacLeod, 1987).

These efforts of the women's movement inspired many systemic changes that led to improvements in women's freedom and status as human beings. The most significant change came when women won the right to vote federally in Canada in 1918 and provincially between 1916 and 1922, with the exception of Quebec, where women could not vote provincially until 1940 (Cleverdon, 1950). Women's right to equality was inscribed into the new Canadian constitution in 1981 (Kome, 1983). Also in 1981, the Ontario Human Rights Code was amended to include protection against sexual harassment in the workplace (Adamson et al., 1988). In

1986, the Canadian federal government passed a bill promoting affirmative action for women and other people of minority status (Czerny, Swift, & Clarke, 1994). The Supreme Court of Canada ruled in 1988 that restricting women's access to abortion was unconstitutional (Toronto Star, January 29, 1988; pg. 1).

In 1965, there were few women's organizations, bookstores, or women's studies courses in universities (Cohen, 1988). Since then, many women's organizations, bookstores, music events, art galleries, women's centres on university campuses, women's studies courses, shelters for battered women, rape crisis centres, self-defence courses, and women-owned businesses have emerged. Research on women's health care and psychological well-being also increased in recent years (Lambert-Lagace, 1989). One of the most important changes resulting from women's collective efforts is the change in public consciousness about women's issues. Presently, more people are aware of women's inequality and show increased acceptance for women's rights, compared to the 1960's when women's issues were completely ignored and the women's movement ridiculed (Adamson et al., 1988).

Despite the increase in opportunities for women, and the changes in legislation, attitudes, and social consciousness, women still face many challenges. The most prevalent of these challenges is probably violence. Sexual harassment, sexual objectification, rape, incest, discrimination based on gender, race, class, and sexuality, and the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse of women continues today. A 1993 Statistics Canada survey based on telephone interviews to 12,300 Canadian women found that 51% of Canadian women had experienced violence since the age of 16. Twenty-nine per cent of married or previously married women were assaulted by their husbands. Twenty-five percent had been pushed, grabbed, or shoved. Nineteen percent had been

threatened. Fifteen percent had been slapped. Eleven percent had been kicked, bit, or hit. Nine percent had been beaten up. Eight percent had been sexually assaulted. Seven percent had been choked. Six percent had been hit with something. Eighteen percent of the attacks on women by their loved ones were violent enough to cause physical injury[1] (Globe and Mail, November 19, 1993; pg. A4). Other researchers report that approximately one woman in five will be raped in her lifetime (Koss, 1993) and that one in four women is sexually abused as a child (Rowan & Foy, 1993).

Further, there are new stereotypes and myths to which women are expected to conform. For example, women are expected to work outside the home and to manage the household responsibilities, while still providing the primary care for children (Marshall, 1993). The sexual division of labour in the home was challenged in the 1970's. However, the myth of the superwoman emerged instead of concrete changes in the way women and men manage home and child care responsibilities (Wolf, 1993). This myth can be viewed as society's meagre attempt at justifying the woman's double day of labour and does not reflect the kinds of structural changes necessary to create balance in the home. Such changes would have a great impact on men's current participation in the paid workforce. As society is structured around work and economic growth, there is great resistance to changes that might affect this system (Czerny et al., 1994). Any real changes could be avoided because under the myth of the superwoman, women would feel pressured to fulfill the responsibilities of home and child care, in addition to their paid work responsibilities.

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[1] Figures do not add to 100% because of multiple responses.

The statistics on violence against women and the example of the superwoman myth reveal an uncomfortable truth: there is a gap between women's vision of freedom from oppression and the current reality women face. Although much has changed for women over the last century, some of the radical visions of the second wave of feminism, like ending violence against women and challenging images of femininity, remain unfulfilled.

There are a number of reasons for this gap. Firstly, freedom from oppression appeared achievable within a lifetime in the 1960's because of the social context of rapid change predominant at that time. Resistance to feminism arose as a backlash in the 1980's and 1990's. As a result, feminist social change unfolds more slowly today than second wave feminists anticipated. Secondly, women involved with feminist organizations such as shelters and rape crisis centres have carried the burden of promoting equality, challenging gender role stereotypes and gender discrimination, and doing anti-violence work on their own (Koss & Harvey, 1991). Violence and women's oppression were thought to be a woman's issue even though women's oppression affects everyone in a community (Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, 1995). Women's oppression is too broad to be challenged by relatively small groups of dedicated feminist organizations. The lack of participation from other sectors in the community is unquestioningly responsible for part of the gap between women's vision of freedom from violence and oppression and their current reality. The necessity of community-wide participation in interventions is just now entering the consciousness of some communities. The Community Education Committee to Prevent Violence and Oppression Against Women and Children, known as CECPVOWC by the committee's members, is an example of a community coordinated anti-violence effort in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. This committee of legal, health,

education, and violence prevention representatives meets regularly to discuss challenges, visions, social action, and violence prevention strategies for their community. Continued support and participation from the larger community will strengthen the anti-oppression efforts of women's organizations and is necessary to achieve women's equality.

The current political and economic climate also widens the gap between women's vision of freedom and their current reality. Governments that do not support, or identify with the importance of, women's freedom may not fund related programs. When organizations like school boards, municipalities, and universities do not receive money for violence prevention and equity programs, they may not implement them, at least not without intense pressure from their respective communities. The bottom line for many institutions is money. Therefore, when funds are lacking, these institutions sometimes opt out of anti-violence and equity programs if these programs require extra funds.

Further, when governments do get involved with issues like violence against women, they start by assessing the magnitude of the problem to decide whether it deserves their attention and funding. Generally, the same thinking applies within universities and school boards. Thus, initial energy and money is often directed toward documenting the prevalence of violence and oppressive myths or stereotypes. As a result, studies like the 1993 Statistics Canada Survey mentioned earlier, and many others (Abbey, 1987; Koss & Harvey, 1991; Koss, 1993; Rowan & Foy, 1993) have focused on the prevalence of violence against women and on the kinds of myths and stereotypes impeding women's freedom. These studies all suggest that the violence in women's lives is ever-present and that society's gender role prescriptions affect everything in women's lives from dating to the workplace.

Once the prevalence of violence has been re-documented, officials are usually interested in assessing the effects of violence and oppression on its victims. Thus, many researchers examined the effect of violence and oppression on the victims' self-esteem, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health, and psychological well-being (Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993; Thorne-Finch, 1992; Wyatt, Newcomb, & Rierdele, 1993). Nightmares, fearful thoughts, intrusive images, suspicion of other people's motives, concerns about safety, anger, anxiety, depression, low self-confidence and low self-esteem are all documented symptoms of traumatic experiences like violence against women (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Figley, 1985, 1988; van der Kolk, 1987). Unfortunately, funds often run out or governments change just as the prevalence and effects of oppression and violence are assessed. Thus, the cycle of exploratory research is repeated frequently throughout recent history, despite ample evidence to validate government and community involvement in this kind of social change (Statistics Canada, 1993; Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, 1995).

In addition to research identifying the prevalence and effects of violence and myths, researchers in the 1990's began evaluating the impact of violence prevention and treatment programs. With the onset of outcome based funding principles, or funding that hinges on achieving certain specified outcomes, program evaluation research strategies received increased attention in community psychology, social work, and service organizations. Program evaluation is a useful tool for examining the processes and strategies most likely to produce change, healing, or increased awareness about violence. However, program evaluation research tends to focus on which processes create certain outcomes (Posavac & Carey, 1992). Typically, less attention is paid to the impact the people delivering a program have on the program's outcomes or the impact

a program has on those people who deliver it. In violence prevention and treatment settings, the people who deliver the programs are often women. Few studies have been published on the impact of anti-violence work on these women. Where the impact of feminist anti-violence work on the women who do the work is the main theme of the thesis, I will review and summarize the available, related literature in detail in the following section.

CHAPTER 4: THE EFFECTS OF ANTI-VIOLENCE WORK ON THE WORKER

In recent studies, researchers found that people who work with survivors of traumatic experiences may also experience profound psychological effects that can be disruptive and painful. These reactions can be short-term (Blank, 1987; Danieli, 1981; Lindy, 1988), or long-term, even lasting months or years after working with traumatized persons (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Long-term effects include changes in the helpers' beliefs about themselves, their expectations of the future, and their assumptions about other people (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995). In 1990, McCann and Pearlman termed the transformation in a helper's self-concept and beliefs that results from exposure to the traumatic experiences of their clients "vicarious traumatization". This phenomenon is also known as "secondary traumatic stress" and can be simply defined as: "the natural, consequent behaviours and emotions resulting from knowledge about a traumatic event; it is the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (Figley, 1995, pg. 10).

Kassam-Adams (1994) surveyed 100 psychotherapists and noted they displayed symptoms of stress mirroring those of their sexually traumatized clients. Studies on the reactions of rape researchers, emergency workers, and hospital staff concur that the helpers' responses to the trauma parallelled those of the trauma survivors (Alexander et al., 1989; Dyregrov & Mitchell, 1992; Genest, Levine, Ramsden, & Swanson, 1990; Lyon, 1993; Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995; Raphael & Wilson, 1994).

In a 1995 study, Schauben and Frazier assessed the effects of working with sexual violence survivors on female counsellors. Members of a women psychologists' association and a group of sexual violence counsellors who had a higher percentage of sexual trauma survivors in their

caseload reported more disrupted beliefs, particularly about the goodness of other people, more symptoms of traumatic stress, and more self-reported vicarious trauma. They described symptoms like feeling angry at the perpetrators, sadness, fear, helplessness, and powerlessness. They also reported difficulty dealing with client emotions about the abuse, including their fear, anger, neediness, denial, pain, and shame. One counsellor in the Schauben and Frazier (1995) study described that she experienced a "psychic drain" as a result of hearing about so much pain. Other counsellors in the study reported becoming more distrustful of men and society in general, and expressed changes in their beliefs about people's basic innocence and decency. Some counsellors also reported that their feelings of safety in the world had deteriorated, as had their ability to be trusting of others and even themselves. Nightmares, anxiety, hostility, depression, feeling easily annoyed or irritated, having difficulty making decisions, and obsessive-compulsive thoughts and behaviours are other effects that counsellors who had extensive exposure to survivors of sexual trauma reported experiencing (Schauben & Frazier, 1995).

Neumann and Gamble (1995) define vicarious traumatization as a negative transformation in the trauma worker's inner experience that results from exposure to client's trauma material. They report that therapists who work with trauma survivors commonly experience a variety of traumatic symptoms similar to those of the victimized person. These symptoms include headaches, nausea, sleeplessness, intrusive imagery, increased feelings of personal vulnerability, difficulty trusting others, and emotional numbness. They also associate disruptions in the worker's sense of identity, world view, spirituality, ability to tolerate strong feelings, and core beliefs about safety, trust, esteem, control, and intimacy with vicarious traumatization. World views are particularly challenged when workers hear in detail about exploitation, sadism,

abandonment, betrayal, ritualistic abuse, and child abuse. New trauma workers exposed to the graphic material of trauma clients may quickly find themselves becoming more suspicious of others, increasingly worried about personal safety, despairing about the violence and cruelty in our society, and pessimistic about the power of counselling, therapy, and education to make a difference. Workers may also find themselves becoming less empathic and more distanced from their clients, less energetic, and more likely to entertain thoughts of victim blaming. Lastly, new trauma workers are particularly likely to question their choice of profession and may entertain thoughts of leaving the field (Neumann & Gamble, 1995).

Basically, this trauma literature tells us that doing trauma or anti-violence work can affect anti-violence workers negatively and that these effects are different from those of doing general counselling, therapy, and research (Schauben & Frazier, 1995). Simply put, it can be very difficult to hear survivors' stories and empathize with their pain. Helpers experiencing vicarious traumatization may find themselves wondering, "How can people be so cruel?; "Are people not basically good?"; and "Is the world a just place?" (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). These can be very painful shifts, as helpers feel themselves losing their sense of hope, optimism, connection with others, and their ability to make a difference (Rosenbloom et al., 1995). This transformation is especially difficult for helpers whose sense of optimism motivated them to become involved in a helping or social change profession in the first place. Helpers may also find their spiritual beliefs shifting, including their sense of meaning and purpose in life (Rosenbloom, Pratt, & Pearlman, 1995). One's sense of what is meaningful may come into question, and it may become more difficult to maintain a connection with a higher power, nature, God, or a belief in one's future. A helper's sense of identity, her sense of who she is and what she has to offer, may also be impacted

by hearing traumatic material and experiencing others' pain, leading to reduced feelings of personal accomplishment and worthiness (Schauben & Frazier, 1995). Clearly, the nature of social change work, particularly work related to understanding and improving women's conditions, can be harmful to those doing the work.

In sum, extensive research exists on the prevalence of violence and the effects of this violence on its victims. There is also research on various programs that deal with the issue of violence against women to determine their effectiveness at changing attitudes and promoting women's equality (Brunk, 1996; Gould, 1994; Telford & Zanna, 1994; Feltey, Ainslie, & Geib, 1991; Koss & Harvey, 1991; Miller, 1988; Sandberg, Jackson, & Petretic-Jackson, 1987; Brisken & Gary, 1986). Most recently, some researchers documented the effects of working with survivors of violence on those in the profession (Schauben & Frazier, 1995; Kassam-Adams, 1994; Neumann & Gamble, 1995; Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995; McCann & Pearlman, 1990). The impact of some assumptions about feminism on those performing social change and violence prevention work is not discussed in the literature, and is the focus of this thesis.

CHAPTER 5: THE CONTEXT OF WORKING AND VOLUNTEERING IN THE 1990'S

You may have seen the following commercial on television for a courier company that guarantees overnight delivery. The commercial ends with a business man saying something like this: "9 - 5: those are not my hours, and they [the courier company] do not just serve from 9 - 5. I respect anybody who has the same kind of work ethic." The advertisement promotes an efficient delivery service; it also suggests that working long hours is a respectable work ethic.

Working a 50 - 70 hour work week is typically rewarded and praised in many corporations. This practice of giving much of one's energy to work also pervades in social change spheres and is not limited to paid work. Some volunteers work as many hours as their paid counterparts. While women may be accustomed to working around the clock as a result of their responsibilities in the home, I wonder, why does this trend extend to women's work outside the home?

This trend of overworking and being busy has caught fire in all facets of the community (Covey, Merrill, & Merrill, 1994). The peer pressure to work too many hours is ever-present. An example of this peer pressure is when you consider the response of friends and colleagues when you ask "How are you?". The responses are most likely "busy", "stressed", "overworked", or some variation of this complaint.

These responses are so common, we expect to hear nothing else. For example, walk into a community meeting, dinner party, or other gathering of peers, and announce to the group how rested, energetic, healthy, relaxed, happy, and un-busy you are, and observe the reaction of others in the room. Rather than congratulating you for taking good care of yourself, others may criticize you, at least through sarcasm, and may perceive you as lazy, incompetent, doing un-worthwhile work, or lucky. Seemingly, a women's value to society drops if she is not perceived by others to be busy, stressed, and tired. Thus claiming to be busy and stressed, and coping with it, is

acceptable in our society.

I knew on the inside that I was not coping well with the busy-ness and stress, and assumed I was the exception, not the rule. Looking back, I wonder whether other women were also just surviving. If so, then imagine our capacity for effecting change under less stressful circumstances. Evaluating how we do social change work, or at least investigating how we can build the idea and practice of self-care into social change movements, especially the women's and violence prevention movements, might enable women in the field to thrive, not just survive. While initial strides in the direction of self-care may be painful and difficult, we can envision a time when practising self-care ideals within social change (and other) work will become the norm.

A dear friend and personal mentor in violence prevention work mentioned to me once that she felt younger women were not accepting the torch from their foremothers in the women's movement as readily as did her own generation. At the time, we both attributed this trend to the right-wing, conservative backlash against feminism that has been brewing over the last decade or so. There was a sense of sadness in her voice, as though she feared that all the hard work of her generation and of those before her would now be forgotten. A year has passed since we had this conversation, and now I am not so sure that young women are not interested in making change. Young women see these older women dedicating their entire lives to social change, sacrificing self-care in the process. My woman friend was herself guilty of omitting self-care from her social change and life regimes. I was aware that she had often worked twice as many hours in a week as she was being paid to work (this is in addition to her work in her home). I was reluctant to dedicate myself totally to social change work. I felt like I would have to make too many personal sacrifices to do so and I was not even sure I could survive the long hours and selfless lifestyle. But, I saw no other acceptable alternatives to the way social work occurs. The permission to

discuss alternatives, like working less hours or setting personal work limits, felt non-existent. It seemed many women were giving themselves completely away to their work, and just accepting the state of stress, fatigue, and anxiety that goes along with that lifestyle. Apparently, we have assumed that stress, fatigue, anxiety, depression, and eventually burnout, are just part of the work. My proposition is that introducing individual self-care will not only save our selves, but will also bring about a renewed energy in the field of social change, allowing us to make greater strides as a community. Bridging the gap between self and social change may also attract more women to this kind of work introducing additional physical and intellectual resources to the field.

CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY

Traditionally, psychology researchers practised mainly empirical or experimental research methodologies in their quest to understand human behaviour (Ormiston & Sassower, 1989). Experiment-oriented and empirically based methodologies still constitute mainstream research within the field of psychology and in related fields like science and medicine (Ormiston & Sassower, 1989). In 1980, the experimental research method accounted for 71% of studies reported in major social psychology journals. In 1985, this method accounted for 78% of published social psychology studies (Fine & Gordon, 1989).

Feminists criticized mainstream experimental, empirical or quantitative methodologies, arguing that such methodologies lead to particular blindnesses in our understanding of human behaviour (Unger, 1981). Mainstream researchers maintain that quantitative study designs and laboratory experiments are objective and value-neutral tools of inquiry because of their rigorous standards and reliance on statistics to determine the transferability of research results (Oakley, 1985). But researchers themselves choose the topics and issues to study; researchers identify and manipulate the variables within any particular study design; researchers decide how to analyse the data and decide which findings to report. Feminist critics argue that these researchers are human beings, with as much bias and social conditioning as the next person, and are thus no more objective in their view of what is worthy of scientific inquiry (Reinharz, 1992).

Despite rigorously controlled data collection procedures and methodologies, research can be biased through the researcher's choice of topic and research participants. The media frequently portray dramatic discoveries and scientific breakthroughs as emanating from carefully controlled laboratory experiments or other quantitative study designs. The media support bestows prestige and scientific credibility on the results of such laboratory experiments (Reinharz, 1992). In many

cases, what passes for objectivity in this publicly respected approach to research is actually the position of privileged, educated, white males (Hubbard, 1979). That is, because white men served as researchers and research participants, their researched focused on issues of interest to them. The results were assumed to be valid for all people, even though representative population samples were not included in the research process. As with some medical research, psychological research presumed all human beings were like white men, thus no further research was thought to be necessary. The pretense of objectivity served as a cover for patriarchy because neither the researchers nor their audience questioned the validity and transferability of this so-called objectivity (Oakley, 1985).

A more objective scientific approach to psychology research is to have women and men from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, with very different ideologies and interests, participating in the research process. This way, the personal bias each researcher and participant brings could be offset by an opposing bias brought forth by another person (Hubbard, 1979). Where psychology research traditionally did not occur this way, the views, perspectives, experiences and ideologies of women and minorities were under-represented, and hence understudied in the field of psychology. As a result, feminists, and researchers from around the world introduced a variety of research methods to supplement our ability to understand human and psychological functioning (Reinharz, 1992).

Feminist research has been innovative in its choice to study particular groups of women and certain behaviours formerly ignored by social science. For example, impoverished women and behaviours like striving to improve one's community entered the research forum through feminism (Reinharz, 1984). Feminist researchers also used innovative forms of data to learn about topics and people of interest to them. Some of these forms of data include short stories, novels, private

writings like letters to friends and jottings in a notebook, interviews, oral histories, cross-cultural research, case studies, content analyses of textbooks and data, consciousness-raising groups, group diaries, drama, conversation, intuitive and associative writing, photography, and reflective dialogues of unplanned personal experiences (Reinharz, 1992).

Researchers debate over whether these and other feminist and qualitative methods of inquiry are as "reliable" as the traditional quantitative methods of obtaining so-called objective, transferable results. In my opinion, the debate of feminist vs. traditional methodology, or qualitative vs. quantitative data is as moot as the debate over the role of nature vs. nurture in human development. We can always find arguments to support our particular point of view. Rather than choosing one methodology as more sound, more informative, or simply more correct, I believe it is in the best interest of scientific and psychological research to understand human behaviour through a variety of methods of inquiry and forms of data.

Ideally, all researchers would incorporate personal experience, relevant literature, qualitative data collected in interview or conversation format, and more specific data collected via surveys, experiments, or some other quantifiable measure in their study designs. Such a balanced methodology reflects individual experiences and connects people's personal experiences to political systems by uncovering the common or unique conditions in which personal experiences occur. Incorporating a range of methodological tools into a study design maximizes the researcher's opportunity for discovering diverse actions or strategies for change because each research tool encourages different thinking patterns and responses from participants. Thus, I believe diversity of methodology is as important to our learning as diversity of research topic and research participant.

Including a variety of research methodologies into every research activity may not be feasible or necessary, depending on the available resources, or previous related research. Students participating in research projects for educational credit will be limited by factors like money and time, two resources necessary for more intricate research designs. The educational system could expose students to a variety of methods throughout their career. For example, undergraduate students could be introduced to the range of research methods in the classroom, but could be encouraged to undertake thesis projects based on personal experiences. They would learn to compare and contrast their experiences with the literature, and potentially identify some of their own biases through a reflective writing process. These practices would in turn provide undergraduates with basic self-knowledge and analytical and writing skills necessary for all levels of research.

Upon entering an MA program, students could expand their circle of comparison from the literature to small groups of people. The focus here could be on practising qualitative methods, so that budding researchers learn to develop research questions out of their shared and separate experiences with others. Once students reach the PhD level, they would have analysed a problem through their own eyes, compared and contrasted their experience with the literature, and deepened their understanding of an issue by talking and listening to others through qualitative inquiry. Typically, PhD level students receive greater financial resources than MA or undergraduate students and have more time in their program to develop and carry out more intricate research designs. Thus, these students could assess the cause and effect aspects of research, as well as the transferability of findings to the broader population, by adding larger quantitative and experimental designs to the emerging research process. Established professors, who have the greatest access to resources, would need to know the personal experience /

literature based, qualitative, and quantitative research methodologies so they could effectively supervise and carry out academic research.

As an undergraduate psychology student, I learned and practised experimental and quantitative research designs. As a master's student, I became familiar with qualitative research methods. Qualitative methods focus openly on the depth and details of people's experiences. Quantitative methods use standardized measures to assess the reactions of many people to a limited set of questions so the data can be aggregated and analysed statistically. Community psychologists in my program value personal experience, self-reflection, and uncovering one's personal and research biases. However, we did not practice connecting self-reflection or personal experience to research questions and designs in our program. I decided the best way to learn how to use personal experience as a form of research was to try it myself. Thus, I based the first level of my methodological decision for this thesis on my own preferred learning experience, which is to learn how to collect and critically analyse data from within myself.

I envisioned sharing my personal data and my analysis of it with other women to compare and contrast women's experiences of self-care within social change work. I still believe this second step is a valuable addition to the current research. I have focussed my energy on fully analysing and understanding my own experiences of self-care and social change work. Because of the amount of energy and time required to justly complete the personal experience part of this research, I decided conversations with other women needed to be a separate study. Thus, my second methodological decision was based on limited resources. My decision also fit with one of my guiding beliefs about research, which is that our own experience with an issue needs to be fully articulated so we can later assess the impact of our own selves on the research results and the future implications of that research.

Another guiding belief I have about research is that all research that uses participants outside the self must be of direct use to those participants. I did not know what kind of data I would generate or which direction my writing would take me. I was not comfortable involving outside participants until I could discuss with potential participants how to design research that would benefit myself and the participants equally. I was concerned if I moved on to outside research too early, I would neglect my own voice and experience out of my desire to design research that would meet the needs of the participants.

As a feminist, I believe the value of research is that it can provide diverse groups of people the opportunity to study their own interests. Not having had the opportunity to study or communicate my paradoxical experiences of feminism, self-care, and social change work, I decided to study my personal experience of these issues. My hope is that in communicating my experience in depth and detail, and in sharing my analysis of this personal experience, other women will be inspired to engage in a similar self-reflective process. Having stated my methodological beliefs, I will now share my chosen research methodology.

Studying Unplanned Personal Experience as a Methodology

Many feminist researchers draw on personal experience to do their research. Starting with one's own experiences serves many purposes. It defines the research topic and questions, leads the researcher to useful sources of data (from within and outside themselves), and ensures the researcher's voice is not silenced (Reinharz, 1992). Mainstream psychological research typically does not allow the use of the singular voice, and frequently neglects women's interests. Using personal experience as a form of data ensures the experiences and interests of women and other minorities previously neglected from research practices are represented (Reinharz, 1992; Olesen, 1994).

Some feminist researchers start with their own experience, analyse it, and do not collect other data. Others start with their experience, are troubled by it, then collect other data to compare with their experience. Yet others study other people's experience, but in the process realize they have a personal identification with the research, and use this link to deepen the research (Reinharz, 1992). Martha Keniston-Laurence (forthcoming), and Amy Rossiter (1988) are examples of feminist researchers who studied their own unplanned personal experiences and wrote about these experiences formally to share their insights with others. I decided to follow their example and study my own unplanned experience of self-care within feminist social change settings. I had kept notes on my experience and had frequently jotted down thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and reflections after meetings or particularly moving or provocative events. I processed and analysed my reflections on my experience mentally and through discussions with friends, and recorded my insights.

Upon deciding to write my thesis on self-care in feminist social change work, I revisited all my previous notes. As I reviewed the notes, I participated in an intuitive or associative writing exercise, where I assembled and recorded all of my thoughts on my noted comments and experiences. I continued with this associative writing process until I felt I had exhausted all my reflections, perceptions, and feelings related to my experience of self-care in feminist social change work. The main purpose of this extended exercise was to travel through the layers of social conditioning and politically correct thinking to discover my own voice on the subject matter that was beginning to evolve out of my experience. A second purpose was to encourage my thinking to go in whatever direction my intuition suggested. That is, continuously writing without structure or preconceived ideas of where this writing would go liberated me to express myself honestly. There was no need to coerce my thinking in a specified direction to achieve a pre-

determined outcome or to prove a pre-determined point.

As Richardson (1994) explains, this kind of intuitive or associative writing is a valuable method of inquiry. Writing is usually used as a tool to share the information gathered in the research, and does not emerge in the research process in many cases until the end of the research project. Richardson (1994) states, "Writing is also a way of knowing - a method of discovery and analysis" (pg. 516). She also believes, "Writing from our own Selves should strengthen the community of qualitative researchers and the individual voices within it, because we will be more fully present in our work, more honest, more engaged" (pg. 516).

I concur with this assessment of intuitive writing as an effective method of inquiry, and support feminism's belief in using both personal experience as a form of data, and the singular voice as a method of expressing this data. Thus, the data presented in the following section emerged from my personal experience, my reflections, perceptions, thoughts, and analysis of this experience. It includes information, assumptions, and perspectives that may be unique to me. Where possible, I have supported my perceptions and assumptions with outside literature sources in order to deepen my understanding of my experience. The data is a mixture of personal and literature data, but does not include any data collected from other research participants. The purpose of this thesis research is not to assume the transferability of my experience of self-care within feminist social change work. Rather, the purpose is to share my own experience as a way to encourage discussion around the issue of women's self-care within feminist social change work. You might recall I chose seven assumptions that I perceive to be operating in the feminist environments in which I participated. I discuss each of these assumptions individually, including relevant background information, a description of my own experience regarding the assumption, and a preferred scenario or alternative ways of thinking and behaving. Each assumption is

presented and discussed consecutively. The seven assumptions, in order of appearance, are as follows:

Assumption #1: Women must sacrifice themselves completely to achieving equality in order for social change to occur.

Assumption #2: Identifying with, defining one's self in terms of, or experiencing oppression is necessary to change oppressive systems.

Assumption #3: Identifying with a female archetype shows a higher level of respect for women and is necessary for achieving women's equality.

Assumption #4: Achieving equality for women requires that as feminists, we love all women equally.

Assumption #5: There is only one philosophy of feminism, one common place of understanding for the established feminist social change worker, and such a unified singular version of feminism is necessary for feminist social change to occur.

Assumption #6: Women's equality can be achieved through practising socialist feminism, which we assume to mean we should reject money.

Assumption #7: Consciousness raising that focuses on oppression and its effects is a necessary and effective social change process.

CHAPTER 7: THE ASSUMPTIONS I WISH TO CHALLENGE

Assumption #1: Women must sacrifice themselves completely to achieving equality in order for social change to occur.

Traditionally, women have been socialized to be nurturers and care-givers (De Beauvoir, 1952). The woman's role was in the family, taking care of the daily needs of her spouse, children, and extended family members (Czerny et al., 1994). The children and spouse were fed and clothed first, and the woman of the house managed on whatever money and resources remained (Czerny et al., 1994). Women provided love and support to others, generally without asking or expecting anything in return. While women's role as care-givers was prescribed to them by society, women over the centuries and around the world generally accepted this role without questioning its potential impact on their lives (De Beauvoir, 1952). As recent as my own grandmother's youth, women took pride in their household role, and selflessly gave everything they had to their family. Women believed it was their duty and responsibility to do so; giving any less would be selfish and unkind, and thought to be out of character for women at that time.

Part of me acknowledges the nobility in the selfless giving women traditionally practised. Having the ability to bear and the responsibility to raise children are a privilege and an honour. The children are the future of the country, and by raising the children, women have a say in the future. Children need love, support, care, and nourishment to grow up whole, healthy, strong, and wise. To rob children of what they need to grow is to rob ourselves of a better future. Thus, selflessly giving to children is understandable and possibly even essential. In the present day, the role of care-giver is slowly being dispersed into both genders, so that while caring for children is still essential, it is no longer essential that the care be provided solely by women.

Through women's role as care-givers, the practise of giving time, love, energy, and support to others has become almost instinctive or natural. That is, women have become so accustomed to giving freely of themselves that they do not question or possibly even recognize their selfless behaviour (Ban Breathnach, 1995). A friend recently told me she was feeling drained of energy and she could not understand why she felt that way. She checked with her doctor; her physical health was fine. She was exercising regularly, working fewer hours than average at that time and sleeping well. I suggested she keep track of everything she did throughout the day in a notebook for a few days. She shared her list with me after three days. Immediately, I saw where her energy was going. She spent most of her free time with friends, either on the phone, in person, or connecting via e-mail. Apparently, each friend was going through one crisis or another, and they all needed to be listened to and supported.

As women, I think we expect that friendship carries a certain amount of sharing, listening, and supporting one another. We assume selfless giving is essential to maintain our friendships. Ideally, each of our relationships is balanced in terms of this give-and-take between friends. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Because my friend believed that being supportive was just part of her role as a friend, she did not count this time as "work" and did not realize that this "work" was actually very draining. I am sure this experience happens often among women, and very few come to realize the amount of energy they expend in their role as friend.

A certain degree of selflessness might be essential in raising children, but the problem arises when women take their caring or giving nature to the extreme - taking care of their spouse, grown children, extended family, co-workers, bosses, peers, friends, and anyone else who happens to be in their circle of influence, without taking equal time to replenish themselves (Hay, 1997). Frequently, women do not consider caring for themselves until a major life crisis, such as a

"nervous breakdown" or illness, prompts their thinking in that direction. Even then, many women feel guilty and selfish when they take time out of their busy schedules to meet their own needs (Hay, 1997; Lerner-Robbins, 1996). I think putting one's needs and wants first is even more difficult for women doing social change work, particularly in the field of violence prevention. It is difficult not to be selfless with children when you feel the nobility of the cause; in the same way, it is difficult not to be selfless with women and children who are experiencing violence. Abused women and children need help, and helping other people find a life free from violence is an important and worthwhile way to expend one's energy.

It is not only the clients of anti-violence agencies who require time and energy, but co-workers too. Working with victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse is very challenging. Workers may experience post-traumatic stress if they have their own unresolved history of abuse, or may experience secondary traumatic stress through the process of empathising with their clients (Pearlman & Mac Ian, 1995). The organizations in which I participated implemented formal peer support and debriefing networks, because talking about emotional stress with a peer is one way to minimize the impact of that stress on the woman's work (Schauben & Frazier, 1995). While I applaud support networks within the workplace, it also means women must take a turn at being care-giver for their peers. For women whose main responsibility is supporting the agency's clients and the community's victims of violence, supporting co-workers might at times be an added stress.

Anti-violence work can also be demanding on a woman's time. Because violence against women and children is ever-present in our society, there is typically a long list of clientele requiring the services of agencies and organizations that deal with these issues. Despite this need for violence prevention and treatment services, funding for these kinds of services is often limited.

Thus, anti-violence workers are in short supply relative to the demand in the community.

Anti-violence workers also have a long list of responsibilities. Because formal violence prevention/treatment training is lacking, women in this field train themselves through experience. They educate and support each other in their prevention and treatment efforts. They recruit, train, and support new-comers to the field. They research and develop public education methods and educate the public about violence. They evaluate their own effectiveness with clients and the public. They connect with other organizations to share and learn from one another. And they carry out these responsibilities on a shoestring budget, with fewer staff that can reasonably share the load. The situation is severe: How can women feel free to take time for themselves when the circumstances of their environment are so demanding?

Further, if one woman takes time for herself, someone else may have to fill the gap left by her absence. I think women feel both guilty at leaving their peers in such a situation and pressured by their peers to participate equally in the work. In a culture that despises idleness, encourages intense work-schedules, and praises women as care-givers specifically, it is difficult for many women to feel comfortable resting, relaxing, or taking care of themselves (Ban Breathnach, 1995). Given the factors of learned selflessness, guilt, peer pressure, the demands of the work and community, it is not surprising that women in anti-violence work neglect themselves and forget the value and importance of their own self-care.

However, our power as women, caregivers, or feminists lies in our ability to give ourselves the attention we continually give other people (Lerner-Robbins, 1996). When we give ourselves love, support, time, and rest, we feel whole, strong, determined, impassioned, full of life, and powerful. Countless hours of sacrificing ourselves physically and emotionally to others robs us of our time, energy, passion, and hence our power to make a difference (Lerner-Robbins, 1996).

Ironically, it is when we take care of ourselves so that we can be at our very best that the people around us also get our very best.

Covey et al. (1994) assert that self-discovery, self-awareness, and self-change are key components to self-care. I concur. Women need to set aside time, even if only a little everyday, to discover their interests, values, beliefs and goals without the influences of society, family, and media pressures (often working to shape women into what meets their needs). Women can use this self-knowledge to make choices and decisions that are in tune with the goal of self-care.

We have a physical self (the body) that craves and appreciates physical activity. We have a mental self, or 'brain', that craves and appreciates learning. We have emotional selves (our hearts) that crave love and support (in both giving and receiving contexts). We have spiritual selves (our souls) that crave a connection to our passions, and to something greater than ourselves, whether that be religion, nature, or even just a connection to the belief that we can all be great people. Therefore, to really take care of our selves, we need knowledge and self-care goals for each dimension of our self.

Emotional Self-Care

Peer support networks, peer supervision, and training sessions devoted to self-care are practices in place to help meet the emotional needs of anti-violence workers. The benefits to these practices include an opportunity to debrief and dialogue with someone who understands the work and the issues, an opportunity to be validated in one's work process, and an opportunity for mutual learning and growth (Schauben & Frazier, 1995).

In one of the training sessions devoted to self-care , participants were given a blank sheet of paper and asked to write down the things they do in response to stressful events. Afterward, each participant shared their list with the group. Some of the strategies include taking a bath by

candlelight with a favourite selection of music playing in the background, going for a walk (and other forms of exercise, too, for some of the women), cooking a favourite meal or enjoying a favourite snack, sipping a glass of wine, going away for a weekend, staying in for a weekend, getting a little extra sleep, and going for a massage. I do not dispute that all of these activities are relaxing. The effects are valuable, but unfortunately may be short term. However, the women in the anti-violence organizations in which I participated appear to understand the value of emotional well-being and make a conscious effort to practice emotional self-care through peer support and emotional debriefing practices. Thus, I am confident women will make a continued effort to research and practice emotional self-care. We also have physical, spiritual and mental needs, though, and these are areas where I believe women in social change work could make improvements.

Physical Self-Care

Some women in violence prevention have made changes in their physical self-care. These women noticed that getting more and regular exercise increased their energy level and improved their sense of well-being. Thus, they made an effort to build walking or going to a gym into their daily routine. As other women begin to notice the benefits of exercise, they may decide to follow the example and develop their own plan for regular physical activity.

In order for individual women to implement and maintain physical self-care regimes, their respective agencies and organizations will need to implement practices and policies that encourage and praise women's self-care. For example, as members in an organization become interested in their physical health and fitness, the organization might consider seeking discounts at local fitness centres for their employees, permitting flexibility in lunch and working hours so that employees can participate in physical activities just before, during, or after their work day, and

organizing health and fitness information sessions to inform their workers of other health and fitness opportunities.

Some such practices and commitments are in place, and there is room for improvement. Most people know that drinking eight or more glasses of water per day promotes people's physical health by preventing dehydration, fatigue, and by preventing toxicity in certain organs. To encourage women to drink more water, purified water is provided at community meetings and on-site in some women's organizations. Women are more likely to drink water that is clean, cold, and on-hand. Thus, providing water is a simple practice that demonstrates organizational support for women's physical self-care. With increasing media attention on breast cancer, heart, and stroke disease, and the publicized relationship between these diseases and exercise and diet, hopefully more women will begin to take better care of their physical health. Possibly organizations will also put structures in place, like a longer lunch hour, to enable women to make time for physical activity.

Spiritual Self-Care

There seems to be general interest in spirituality, given the surge of books now available on that topic. In feminist organizations, spirituality enters informally into discussions as individual women explore their spirituality and assess the value of spiritual practices and connections. Though some women in social change work have spiritual practices in place, others have neglected their spiritual self. Violence prevention work presents many negative and unhappy images. Thus, having a connection to something greater than everyday problems is necessary to prevent women from losing their hope and faith of better conditions for women as a group (Schauben & Frazier, 1995). Developing spiritual beliefs, experiencing spiritual feelings and connections, and maintaining spiritual practices requires time. And, as I have mentioned, time is

in short supply for violence prevention workers.

In my case, spiritual feelings are most likely to occur when I am in nature and/or in the company of really whole, soulful, happy, and sturdy people. When I visit a sandy beach and marvel at the "organized coincidence" of all that sand piled so conveniently next to all that water, I feel as though Mother Nature put it there just for us to enjoy. When I take time to visit high mountains, I am again amazed by the chaotic order of the world. When I watch children grow, when I watch the leaves change colours with the seasons, even the seasons change with the time of year, the sun rise and set, and the moon come and go, I am aware of forces greater than I can conceive. When I hear the voice of a musician who has found her song and feel the passion of her singing in my own heart and body, I feel connected to people on a level I cannot explain or even understand. Similarly, when I see a person bestow an act of pure kindness on another, I am able to believe in the greatness and miracle of life. When I believe in life's greatness, I am more able to bestow my own share of pure kindness and potential greatness. Taking time to appreciate these miracles also minimizes the impact of daily troubles.

A busy schedule of changing the world and caring for others does not permit one to observe the wonders of the world and experience spiritual feelings. Seeing the effects of the negative side of human behaviour routinely wears down the ability to see and connect with the spiritual side of life. I felt angry, bitter, unfortunate, frustrated, and eventually, hopeless from focussing so intently on abuse and violence. Next, I stopped caring as much about ending violence against women and improving women's living conditions; I was certain the world was a bad place, and things would never change. In an effort to lift my spirits and heal from my perceived failure, I spent more time in nature and listened to my most inspirational female music. I felt more whole, and less affected by the evidence of negative, abusive behaviour that I previously could not

escape. As a result, I realized the value of spiritual experiences, especially within work that can lead to a pessimistic view of the world. Women and organizations could consciously commit to better spiritual self-care by exploring which experiences lead to appreciation for the miracles in life and a sense of belonging to something greater than life's daily routines and challenges. Once individuals and organizations have taken the time to learn what spiritual self-care means to each one, they can work together to ensure spiritual opportunities are not omitted from their personal and work lives. Given the positive impact of spirituality on my own life and ability to do social change work, I believe building spiritual experiences into daily routines, at work or otherwise, will benefit other anti-violence workers and enhance their ability to do social change work.

Mental Self-Care

Another aspect of our selves that I believe women unconsciously neglect is the mental or intellectual self. Like the body, the brain craves stimulation, and left unstimulated or under used, will degenerate. I think there are a few ways women limit their intellectual diet: by participating more passively in formal or institutionalized education, by avoiding critical debates with peers for fear of a potential conflict, and by postponing professional development activities to the bottom of the to-do list because of a perceived lack of time for things like new learning.

As with spiritual experiences, I believe mental stimulation requires time and an understanding of the kind of experience that sharpens our mental acuity. For busy anti-violence workers, taking time to read, take classes, participate in discussions, or engage in any other form of active learning may feel like a luxury activity over which other routine activities take precedence. If a woman engages in intellectual pursuits and feels disappointed by her experience, she may hesitate to engage in future learning or intellectual pursuits. Many women may not have had the opportunity to discover their own learning patterns because formal education generally does not encourage

such exploration. Thus, it may be difficult to find satisfying, mentally stimulating activities without going through a time-consuming trial and error process. Further, formal learning centres are essentially male-focussed because they were created by men for men (Field-Belenky, McVicker-Clinchy, Rule-Goldberger, & Mattuck-Tarule, 1997). Women's needs, interest, and learning styles were not considered in the development of these centres, possibly making it difficult for women to have positive learning experiences in formal educational institutions.

In my own educational experience, I was frequently treated as though I was only an emotional being, with no capacity or interest in problem solving, critical thinking, or other intellectual activities. For example, some science professors suggested I pursue a career in the helping professions, rather than in science, because "women were not geared toward that kind of mental activity." Because of the prevalence of the belief that women are not mentally or intellectually capable, women may have internalized society's beliefs about their mental needs and abilities. As a result, women may not realize when they are lacking in mental stimulation.

Because of time constraints and a lack of formal education opportunities in tune with women's interests and learning styles, many women may not wish to return to school to obtain intellectual stimulation. Because of society's oppression of women's critical thinking, women may fear informal intellectual activities like critical analysis, questioning, and debating within their own field, believing these activities will only result in conflict.

I noticed some women in social change work and in university classes who seemed uncomfortable with or reluctant to express ideas that contradicted those of their superiors and sometimes even their peers. Although I often question ideas, practices, or beliefs, I occasionally do not because I am concerned about the feelings of the person whose ideas I wish to challenge. If I perceive that someone is unprepared emotionally, or unable to participate in a debate without

feeling personally attacked or hurt, I am less comfortable engaging in such a debate, even if the purpose is to heighten awareness and intellectual understanding of an issue.

I think my attention to the feelings of others within supposed intellectual discussions is common among women. Women are trained to be sensitive to others' emotions, even to care for and protect the emotional well-being of others (Hay, 1997). At the same time, we have been trained to leave the critical thinking and debating to men or to those women in charge (Field-Belenky et al.,1997). I am not saying that women do not think; rather I am highlighting the social conditions that discourage women from expressing their thoughts and participating in the process of questioning ideas, practices, and beliefs. Women need practice trusting their own beliefs and their knowledge from experience, and in questioning the ideas of others in relation to their own. When women working toward social change neglect intellectual pursuits and discussions in favour of protecting others' emotions, the effects are damaging to women's collective status. Some issues are not on the table for discussion because there is fear someone's feelings will be hurt. Silencing ourselves to protect the feelings of others minimizes our effectiveness in social change work. Tending to the emotions of others detracts from the intellectual energy we can direct toward examining our ideals, practices, and collective social experiences. Even practices or beliefs that were at one time beneficial may need re-thinking in a new social context.

In summary, women have been conditioned to put their own needs last, and to expend their energy caring for others. With the expanding work week and continued pressure on women to manage the home with myths like that of the superwoman, there is little time left for rest, relaxation, and self-exploration. Exercise, learning, spirituality, and personal and professional development are all sacrificed just to cope with the demands and stress of social change work and life. Women generally do not take care of themselves unless prompted to do so by a crisis, and

given the potential effects of anti-violence work, neglecting to practice balanced self-care could be suicidal for individual women and the collective movement toward equality.

Assumption #2: Identifying with, defining one's self in terms of, and experiencing oppression are necessary to change oppressive systems.

After more than 30 years of struggle by the grass-roots women's movement, the idea of a socially-structured oppression sounds less revolutionary than it did in the 1960's (Adamson et al., 1988). In the 1960's, women connected their personal problems to the political systems that structured their lives by sharing and discussing their experiences. This connection between the personal and the political reduced the isolation of personal experience and activated women politically (Adamson et al., 1988). Women were no longer immobilized by the belief that they had only themselves to blame for their difficulties. Instead, they focused their pain and anger externally toward political action to achieve social change that would benefit women collectively.

This change in perception about oppression was undoubtedly then, and is even now, quite liberating for many women. I met a number of women, who, upon their first visit to a shelter after experiencing violence, were genuinely surprised and relieved to discover the reason the police did not intervene, despite an invitation to do so from the woman, was because they had no policies in place to enable them to be of real help. For example, until recently the local police department operated under the assumption that domestic disputes are a private matter between those people involved. Re-defining wife abuse as an act punishable by law empowered police officers to intervene in future domestic abuse situations. Upon understanding the limitations of the social system, women could release feelings of worthlessness, blame, shame, and even insanity. In the case of domestic violence, becoming aware of the police policy not to intervene in such situations could help a woman see how political structures affect women's collective and personal experiences. Women could then direct their energy toward healing their own life and learning how to change their oppressive conditions, as well the conditions oppressive to all women. Thus,

organizing and understanding women's individual difficulties as symptoms of a society-wide structure of power and powerlessness, wherein women were victimized by the men holding the power of official authority, be it husband or public official, served an important function in mobilizing women to participate in their own liberation.

Further, through the general acceptance of the idea that the "personal is political", women's personal experiences became the authentic guide to understanding and organizing around women's oppression (Adamson et al., 1988). I am grateful that women's personal experiences are now taken more seriously at the political level of society and serve to instruct new directions socially and politically. I believe there is also a negative impact of identifying with or defining ourselves in terms of our personally oppressive experiences, even for the sake of social change.

This emphasis on personal experience occasionally leads to the belief that "one cannot understand or comment on a particular form of oppression unless one has personal experience of it" (Adamson et al., p. 209). As such, the suggestion is that a man cannot understand women's oppression; heterosexuals cannot relate to the discrimination experienced by lesbians and gays; a white person cannot comment on racism; and so on. A hidden assumption implicit in organizing feminism and social change efforts around women's personal experiences of oppression is the more oppressed you are, the more experience, hence the greater authority you have on the subject. As Pratibha Parmer, a black feminist in Britain, says in her interview with author Lynne Segal (1987): "One of the results of only focussing on separate oppressions is retrogressive. Women have got into hierarchies of oppression saying, 'I'm more oppressed than you because I've got more labels and oppressed status'. I think that was totally wrong and negative." (p. 60)

I could not agree more with Parmer's statement. In my experience with both feminist agencies and university classes, I felt not just encouraged, but pressured to disclose any personal

experience of either violence or oppression. For example, during my volunteer training in various violence prevention organizations, I felt if I did not disclose some association with a past oppressive experience, my contribution to the agency might be considered less valuable. Within my course work at the university, the value of my contributions also appeared to be measured against my ability to associate with an oppressed group. Unfortunately, I found there were negative consequences when I defined myself in terms of past oppressive experiences.

Prior to starting my MA in Community Psychology and participating in feminist social change work, I did not define myself as oppressed. My self-concept was very positive. I felt strong and determined to succeed at whatever interested me. I believed there were many possibilities and opportunities out there just waiting for me to claim. I had no complaints about being born a woman, and yet I was aware of the horrible things that do happen to women simply because of their gender. I had experienced some of these horrible things myself. Until I came to my master's program, that is all they were: just horrible things that happened to me. In the Community Psychology program, we seemed to focus on the atrocities of the world and the horrible oppression in our own lives. Since the program lacked discussions around practical efforts to liberate ourselves and others from the stifling weight of oppression, I gradually believed there was little we could do to bring about a better world.

I found the discussions and association with oppression nearly equally prominent in the anti-violence settings in which I participated. Before long, I started to feel "oppressed." I lost my sense of confidence, my determination to succeed, and a positive view of myself. These feelings were replaced with hopelessness, worthlessness, and a lack of trust in the idea of a good future for myself and other women. I participated in so many discussions about oppression that I could no longer see any other facets of life. "Everybody is oppressed," (I heard this statement from so

many people all too willing to share their own unpleasant experiences so as not to be left out of the 'in', but oppressed, crowd), and "the whole world is rotten." Think these thoughts everyday, all day long, and judge for yourself whether the impact is moving or flattening. For some, scrutinizing the world's problems, even without positive stories of change or existence, is moving. For me, it was definitely not.

I do not believe social change agents and educators need to drill the state of oppression into the minds of those interested in participating in the change process. Awareness of reality is important, but so is each person's own healthy state of mind. What positive change or impact can a person possibly make when they possess a negative attitude and self-concept? Not to mention, how enjoyable is a journey in social change when the focus is on problems and challenges rather than on possibilities and successes? I am not arguing against education that builds empathy. Rather, I am proposing education that acknowledges oppression, and focuses more on people's strengths, spirit, and ability to make change occur. I am simply asking educators within agencies and institutions to remember the success stories of social change, the stories that ignite our own human spirit, and to breathe as much life into these stories as they do the heart-breaking painful tales of oppression.

Assumption #3: Identification with a female archetype shows a higher level of respect for women and is necessary for achieving women's equality.

Part of eliminating oppression and violence against women involves women learning to love themselves and other women (Williamson, 1992). Women have learned to devalue and often hate themselves through the process of internalizing society's attitudes toward women. They need to undo these devaluing effects as much as they need the external violence and oppression to end if they are to truly enjoy inner peace and outer freedom (Friedan, 1998). One way women sometimes counterbalance society's negative messages about women is to appreciate the parts of themselves that make them women or "feminine". Within the feminist circles in which I participated, it is acceptable for women to "define and embrace their femininity". That is, women are encouraged to find their feminine side, to express it, and to learn to recognize the value of their feminine qualities. Women in business, academia, and other male-dominated professions are sometimes expected to behave as men do if they wish to be seen and heard, or to advance within their male-led fields. Women are punished other times for this so-called unfeminine behaviour (The Chilly Collective, 1995). I believe these mixed messages from society around what is acceptable feminine behaviour led feminists to the assumption that women must show respect for a woman's female behaviours and a woman's female body type in order to achieve respect for womankind.

"Feminine" Behaviour

While women's internalized sexism and the effects of devaluing our selves are still evident in the feminist circles in which I participated, I felt a greater acceptance of my womanhood from the many women with whom I worked. I felt no pressure to follow male guidelines to do my work; in

fact, there were no male role-models to set the standards in any of my feminist work and volunteer settings. This experience was completely new to me, and quite honestly, a pleasant change. For once, I was free to be a woman, to do my work "as a woman", to live "as a woman", and to relate to others "as a woman". Unfortunately, I did not really know what it means to live, work, and relate to others "as a woman". I understood and accepted the possibility that many of my behaviours might be modelled after the way men work and live. What I did not know was whether some of these behaviours might also be my own. That is, how could I tell which behaviours or practices were simply a reflection of my surroundings and which ones would be my own, were I not part of a culture that places more value on the behaviours men frequently exhibit?

I felt somewhat confused by other feminist women's suggestion that women ought to "embrace their femininity". What exactly does that mean? Are they suggesting there are innate male and female human characteristics? Who defines gender-based characteristics? If so, how do they know which characteristics belong to each gender, where women and men generally display many similar qualities? And further, how do women live out this expectation or ideal of embracing femininity - are women to observe men's behaviour and always do the same task differently? If women are behaving differently from men, are they inherently succeeding in defining or embracing their femininity? I think such a generalization is false and dangerous. We would still be defining ourselves in reference to men; instead of behaving as men are, we would be behaving as men are not. Who is to say which set of these qualities, if either, is definitively masculine or feminine? I do not believe that it even makes sense to divide human qualities into categories of masculine and feminine, even though our social roles are currently defined this way (De Beauvoir, 1952). As we can see now and throughout history, these so-called gender

differences have been used to hierarchically categorize women and men, obviously to the benefit of neither group (Friedan, 1998). Each gender feels the constraints of their prescribed roles. For example, men appointed as breadwinners can feel devalued if they are under- or unemployed, and women appointed as caregivers can feel worthless if they are not caring for the needs of others.

Embracing so called femininity is not itself necessarily a negative strategy of counterbalancing society's and our own inner hatred for women. I think accepting society's definition of femininity serves to further oppress women and encourages them to fit into a certain socially constructed ideal. In my experience, the predominant or visible definition of femininity is one cultivated by a sexist culture that encourages women to be weak, unassertive, kind, gentle, passive, caring, putting others' needs ahead of their own, yet be happy and pleasant. I have also encountered a stereotype of feminine behaviour, which is to be jealous, back-stabbing, gossipy, competitive (other than in competition-driven activities), sulky, and even manipulative.

Given that these two 'definitions of femininity' are the only conscious ideal I had, the initial message I received from the idea of embracing one's femininity was that it is acceptable to show weakness, be passive, kind, gentle, caring of others, even motherly, to the exclusion of other feelings and needs. I also thought I was supposed to be more accepting of the 'negative' feminine characteristics. That is, I thought I should be more tolerant of women's (inappropriate) competitive and jealous behaviours as a step toward learning to "embrace women's femininity".

I did not consciously choose to become more passive and tolerant; in fact, I did not realize at the time that my behaviour changed in this direction. Now that I am reflecting upon what I have learned over the last three years, I can identify specific, yet unstated, turning points in my behaviour and attitude towards myself. I heard the phrase "embrace your femininity". I saw women shrink away from sharing honest thoughts and feelings that they perceived might not be

well received by others, and then share them later in a certain private circle. I unconsciously received the message that if I am to show respect for the work process and other women, I must behave unassertively. I saw women continually give in to the needs of the agency or to the needs of other women, even when they could imagine drastic consequences to themselves. I thought to be accepted by this group, I too needed to put the needs of others ahead of my own. I also heard some women denigrate those women who did not seem to be "embracing their femininity". For example, women who were directive and/or assertive were sometimes labelled "male-women", or "manly women". These assertive "manly women" were accused by some women (indirectly, of course) of being "unfeminist", unconscious of their rejection of their "feminine qualities", and at heart, "woman-haters". Because I involved myself in anti-violence work to eliminate society's antagonistic attitudes against women, the last thing I wanted was to be labelled a "woman-hater" or "unfeminist". I began practising the so-called "feminine behaviours" of the women around me who were not considered anti-woman, subconsciously thinking that was the safest way to resolve my confusion around this concept of "embracing my femininity". Gradually, I felt more and more like the part I was playing; I felt weak and passive, yet caring and selfless. I also put the needs of the agency and my peers ahead of my own. Upon reflection, I realized I must have really misunderstood the concept of "embracing my femininity".

I still do not really understand what it means to "embrace one's femininity" nor how this ideal will help feminists with their work and relationships to each other. I suspect the intention is to help reduce mistrust and hatred among women. What I believe is that ideals of any kind can be misleading and need to be questioned regularly. The process of questioning, dialoguing, learning, and understanding will likely help women find their own identities more directly than any ideals put forth by society, the women's movement, or specific feminist circles. This process of

questioning identities may also enable women to separate themselves from the internalized, socially constructed version of femininity (or masculinity) that defines many of us today.

"Feminine" Physique

As part of embracing one's femininity, accepting one's female body type is also considered an ideal goal in some feminist circles. The "arrived" feminist loves and accepts her female body, regardless of her body's natural or current physique. At first, this seems like a very healthy response to the unrealistic physical ideal constantly presented in the media. And given the pervasiveness of eating disorders, learning to love and accept one's body as nature created it is important - definitely a worthy challenge for all women. Loving and accepting one's body can be an important step in overcoming the focus of attention on women's physical beauty, a socially constructed ideal of beauty that has historically prevented women from loving their own bodies unless they happen to match the ideal body of the times.

The danger is that we can convince ourselves to accept unhealthy bodies, just to show our resistance to the mass culture and our acceptance of the ideal of "embracing one's femininity". Human bodies of all shapes and sizes possess beauty by the miracle of life alone. I think people are even more beautiful when they do not engage in verbal self-mutilation in response to feelings of unhappiness about physical appearance. What I am saying is that it is beautiful when women also see themselves that way, no matter how they look. However, accepting any shape or body, socially beautiful or otherwise, that is not the result of proper exercise and balanced nutrition is not a healthy approach to rejecting society's ideals of women's bodies or embracing one's femininity. And an unhealthy body is not a respected body, even if it is *accepted and loved* by its woman inhabitant.

While accepting varying shapes and sizes that are natural for each of us is a worthy cause, we need to remember that living is an active exercise - the body will continue on functioning (for a while) whether we tend to it or not, but keeping it healthy requires movement and proper nutrition. Using the body to its fullest physical potential is a human quality, and respecting and caring for one's body is not unfeminine. Loving and accepting one's body at its fullest potential, in its most fit state, is also a more definite rejection of the social ideal of physical beauty. By doing so, women are not only rejecting a feminine ideal of physical beauty, women are respecting an ideal of fitness and health that will serve to enhance their overall self-concept and improve their ability to function in stressful environments like social change work.

Assumption #4: Achieving equality for women requires that as feminists, we love all women equally.

Feminism, for me, means achieving equal access to life's opportunities for womankind. I believed that women needed to bond together and assertively demand equal and respectful treatment from their male counterparts. I saw women and men as adversaries, and I thought women needed to be strong and firm in their position if they were to make any advances in their status. I came to understand all men were the not the enemy once I stopped painting them with same sexist paintbrush. I realized men are not really adversaries; they too are the product of social conditioning. I do not excuse any man's hateful behaviour toward women. Rather, I decide on a situational basis whether to tolerate, challenge, or ignore it.

Until recently I also carried many unconscious assumptions about women, again painting all women with the same brush. Firstly, I believed women needed to stick together; united we stand, divided we fall. Secondly, I believed that if I was asking men to respect women as a gender, then I too must respect women as a group. I translated this second assumption into the belief that I must respect all women equally in order to demand women's equality. My third assumption was that to respect all women equally, I believed I should love and treat all women the same. In contrast, I gave myself permission to tolerate, challenge, or ignore any disrespectful behaviour displayed on the part of men. In other words, I had a double standard in place. In my relationships and encounters with women, I felt I had to be nice and kind, what I thought was respectful, no matter how they treated me. I had no criteria for deciding which women to befriend or pass over. Somehow, I convinced myself that to be a feminist, I must **accept** all the women I meet into my life, as a way of showing respect, love, and kindness, building solidarity, and uniting with women to achieve equality.

At first glance, my double standard and attitudes toward women might seem virtuous. However, my beliefs were neither realistic nor respectful, under closer scrutiny. There are women whose ideals, goals, interests, and ways of being are different from, and may even conflict with, mine. It is important to respect other people's rights. But I do not have to like all women the same or maintain friendships with people with whom I have nothing aside from gender in common. There are some men I would not like, so why should I expect to like all women? It is unrealistic to believe that we could, let alone should, like everyone we meet equally. Liking and respecting are not the same; it is reasonable to work toward respecting people's diversity - liking everyone equally is another story.

My double standard toward women was also disrespectful, not just unrealistic. By telling myself I must like all women equally, I eliminated my freedom to choose when to tolerate or challenge disrespectful behaviour. I equated liking with "not challenging". With men, I "challenged" when I thought their friendship was worth the effort. I probably also challenged men when I thought it was safe to do so. By not challenging women, am I unconsciously suggesting they are either not worth the effort or that they cannot be trusted to respond respectfully? Effectively, yes, on both counts. Sparing or protecting the feelings of a woman, avoiding potential conflict by not engaging in a debate, and fearing rather than trusting women's ability to respond rationally are not behaviours indicative of respect. Rather, these are behaviours we might use on a child whom we believe to be too young or underdeveloped to responsibly handle their own challenges and feelings.

This passive and uncritical but essentially disrespectful behaviour toward women that I discovered in myself is also present, I believe, more generally among women. Most women want to be liked. Women sometimes address each other's need to be liked by not questioning,

disagreeing with, or challenging one another, even though our feminism and our work settings may benefit by doing so. For example, I have met women who are so intent on pleasing others they become anxious at the thought of contradicting someone else's ideas and opinions. Undoubtedly, choosing to be silent in the face of adversity is not solely a female experience. Men may also choose not to speak their mind in certain situations. Through this kind of uncritical behaviour, women may miss out on deeper friendships with other women if this behaviour precludes honesty.

In feminist circles, in violence prevention and social change work, and within the women's movement, this 'nice' but disrespectful behaviour has greater consequences. While women worry about sparing the feelings of other women, who are actually strong and mature enough to handle conflict and challenge, they miss opportunities to dialogue honestly and learn from differences of opinion and experience. Gloria Steinem (1994) expressed that she believes it is women's diversity that will unite women in their quest for change. I agree with her, although unity will not happen if women are not even talking openly about their diversity of thought and experience. Simply put, when women talk openly about their beliefs, experiences, and, yes, their differences, too, creative opportunities for learning, growth, and modelling respect for women as a group emerge. When women practice 'nice' behaviour out of fear, distrust, and internalized sexism, they gradually limit open and honest communication, and hence learning and growth among women. Women probably will not achieve equal opportunity without a unified strength and solidarity to challenge the current systems, and strength and solidarity will not occur without respectful, honest and open dialogue within feminist circles. The goal is not liking all women; rather it is respecting and understanding women's unique and collective experiences. This goal is a tall order, but it must be filled if women wish to remain true to the goal of equal rights and access to opportunity.

Assumption #5: There is only one common philosophy of feminism, one common place of understanding, for the established feminist social change worker, and such a unified singular version of feminism is necessary for feminist social change to occur.

Another experience I have witnessed on many occasions is the ideal of a single feminism bonding all women together. Even when women know there is diversity in physical appearance, education, class, age, race, religion, sexuality, and so forth, some women expect other women to have similar beliefs about feminism. The meaning of feminism, even the use of the label "feminist", comes up frequently in discussions in violence prevention settings. Such discussions are usually very intense, and even uncomfortable for some participants. There are women who refuse to accept the label feminist, even when their values are similar to those women who publicly define themselves as feminist. There are women who have consciously cultivated their philosophy of feminism, and others who have not consciously formalized their thoughts on feminism. Some women have developed a set of values rooted in justice and equal opportunity, and others have given little or no thought to the whole question of values.

I identify myself as a feminist, and I have defined my feminism as equal access to life's opportunities. I realize from talking to other self-defined feminists that feminism means different things to different people. Individuals and agencies alike may have their own working definition of feminism, which may or may not overlap. Further, there are a number of stereotypes and media images of feminism in people's awareness. With all of this information and confusion around feminism, two issues have emerged. Firstly, it is difficult to define oneself as a feminist when the word carries so many meanings. There is a risk of being misunderstood or misjudged depending on the meaning one's audience attributes to the word feminist. Secondly, I have

encountered many feminists who have little or no tolerance for a definition of feminism that is vastly (or sometimes even just mildly) different from their own, despite their dedication to ending discrimination and oppression.

On one hand, there exist many definitions and interpretations of feminism. On the other, there is an expectation within some feminist circles of a single, universal definition of feminism, with one way to practice this feminist philosophy, and a common willingness to use the label feminist. That is, there is a myth that there is only one way to practice feminism, one way to show one's desire for equality, or simply, one right definition of feminism. I have often heard women saying of those whose beliefs are different that they "have not arrived yet", reflecting this belief of one common place of arrival or understanding of feminism. Discussions on this issue display the perception that feminism is something "radical" - some women even question whether they are radical enough to identify themselves as feminists. Other women question their peers in the same way, accusing them of not being radical enough to deserve the label feminist. Again, the assumption is there is only one way to be a feminist or one acceptable ideal of feminism.

Undoubtedly, the existence of many definitions of feminism is one reason talking about feminism is so difficult. I think these discussions are difficult for a few other important reasons. The media or mainstream image of feminism is that all feminists are man-hating lesbian women. This stereotype includes the perception that feminist women do not shave, wear make-up, or care about their clothes or physical appearance. The stereotype also casts women as bitches, who only want to have power over or to rule men. I am certain that these stereotypes are very widespread, because every time I participated in discussions of feminism with potential volunteers, I heard the phrase, "I believe in women's rights, but I'm not really a feminist". This statement is usually followed with an apologetic comment like, "I have to admit, I do shave my legs and I like to wear

heels". These statements suggest to me that women believe in standing up for equality, but are concerned if they call themselves feminists, they will face societal judgements that are not consistent with or reflective of their current lifestyle. I think the concern is that they will either have to become something they are not, in order to participate in ending women's (and their own) oppression, or they will be outcast by the organized feminist community and excluded from social change opportunities. Clearly, insisting women conform to an idealized set of feminist standards contributes in its own way to women's oppression. Women are already a product of prescribed gender roles, stereotypes, and images that were defined not by themselves, but by their society. Adding new prescriptions and images through feminism only adds to the challenge of self-definition and eventually self-actualization. Feminism ought to liberate women from social constraints, not create new unrealistic ideals to which women feel they need to conform.

More worrisome than women's reluctance to label themselves feminist because they shave or wear heels, is the discomfort many women express around being labelled a lesbian. Obviously, the belief that feminism equates with lesbianism is a myth; some feminists are lesbians and some are not. Likewise, some lesbian women consider themselves feminist, and some do not. The most common sentiment expressed by women deciding whether to become involved in feminist organizations is that they do not hate men, or want power over men - characteristics often attributed to lesbian women. This common myth that all lesbian women hate men and wish to have power over men is untrue in my experience. Many lesbian women do not hate men, and they do not share the ultimate goal of having power over men's lives. The next commonly expressed sentiment is that women do not want their friends, peers, family, or co-workers to get the impression that because they are feminists, they are also lesbians. In some cases, this thinking likely occurs because women are homophobic themselves. In other cases, I think women are

responding out of fear. They know that homosexuality is generally rejected by our homophobic society, and they have likely seen injustices performed toward people who are, or are believed to be, gay or lesbian. Many women wish to be part of the mainstream for once; it is this very isolation and subordination toward women they wish to end. If labelling themselves feminist carries the risk of inducing even more discrimination and alienation, some women are not likely to embrace that label. If having women identify themselves publicly as feminists is important to ending women's oppression, then women also need to be educated about their own and society's misconceptions about homosexuality. They also need to learn how to deal with the various stereotypes that accompany the word feminist.

How important is it that women define themselves as feminists within social change work to improve the status of women? We know the word carries many definitions, and the ideal of a single feminism for all women is unrealistic. So why do so-called feminist groups spend a portion of their time debating their feminist philosophies? Is it not more important for women to discuss their real-life experiences and challenges, and work together to make changes that affect women's lives more directly? For example, I know that safe, reliable, and affordable child care is important to many women, both social change workers and agency clientele alike. Researching, discussing, and presenting child care alternatives to employers, communities, and government might have very tangible effects on women's lives, and could be a positive stride to women's liberation from oppression (in that having safe and reliable child care permits women to pursue other avenues to learn, grow, and expand their horizons).

Perhaps defining ourselves as feminists was meant to be an act that would bond women together, that would build the "sisterhood". If so, the intentions were great, but with feminism acquiring so many meanings, some of which are just stereotypes, the act of discussing feminism

has itself become a dividing factor among women. Women who do not fit the perceived ideal of feminism, whether it be for cultural, racial, religious, or social reasons, seem reluctant to participate in feminist social change work, even though they share the goal of improving living conditions for all women. At the same time, different groups of women are developing an exclusive definition of feminism that may be in conflict with, and intolerant of, other definitions of feminism. At a time when there is a great backlash against women's advancement, we need to broaden and build our membership within social change circles so that we can continue to creatively dismantle the stereotypes and systems that oppress women. I do not think that we as women can afford to be exclusive in our social change efforts; social change agents have a lot of work to do and need all the energy and input they can get to change the conditions of women's lives.

In the struggle to reject the mainstream patriarchal values and the mainstream stereotypes of feminism, women have entered a paradox. On one hand, women wish to unite against the forces of patriarchy. At the same time, women may worry about losing their individuality and diversity by being painted with one brush by the mainstream culture. It is our assumption that we cannot be united and diverse at the same time, that we cannot be different people working toward the same common goals, perhaps through different means, without experiencing conflict and discomfort in feminist circles.

When women social change agents seek to control or limit diversity, I assume it is out of fear that showing any diversity within the movement indicates that we are divided and susceptible to fall (from the over interpretation of "united we stand, divided we fall"). In my opinion, judging each other, labelling each other as arrived or not conscious yet is the dividing energy in feminism right now. Only when women accept and understand their differences can they rise above them to

acknowledge the great miracle of life. They can then work to reconcile the arbitrary social constructions that currently infringe on people's opportunity to enjoy the full range of possibilities within the human experience.

Assumption #6: Women's equality can be achieved through practising socialist feminism, which we assume to mean we should reject money.

An influential strand of feminism grew out of the male led Marxist-Leninist movement (hereinafter, the "Left") of the 1960's (Wolf, 1993). Groups like Students for a Democratic Society gave birth to groups of radical women who went on to create much of the second wave of feminist culture (Echols, 1989). These young, mostly middle class, white women (and men) strove for collectivism, expressed contempt for capital in any form, accused those interested in economic advancement of "selling out", and embraced self-sacrifice as a way to show their allegiance to the cause, the cause being equality and justice for all (Echols, 1989).

Today, feminism is still largely associated with the political Left and socialist values. Equal rights and opportunities for women, recognition that women are oppressed by virtue of being women, and social change are core aims of feminism. Feminism, though, is not a unified political ideology. There are essentially three currents within feminism: liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism (Adamson, et al., 1988). Liberal feminists see the social and economic system as fundamentally acceptable and argue for equal opportunity. Radical feminists identify the emotional, social, and political differences between women and men, and argue for a non-hierarchical co-operative society organized on the female values of life-giving and nurturance. Radical feminism named the differences between women and men and thus made women's oppression visible. Socialist feminists use a systemic approach to analysing women's oppression, focusing on the intertwining relationship of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Socialist feminists also believe that women and men have commonalities in some areas, and a conflict of interest in others. Concerns around health, safety, and pay levels in the workplace are a common interest; housework responsibilities lie in conflicted interest (Adamson, et al., 1988). I believe

there is a secondary definition of socialist feminism implied within feminist organizations. That is, I think many feminists assume the term socialist feminism means fully accepting the socialist values introduced by the male-led Left in the 1960's. Because of this assumption, some feminist women do not question whether the practical application of these socialist values benefits their social change efforts and ideals.

The Marxist or socialist analysis was helpful for relating issues of gender, race, and class to money, power, and control of resources (Wolf, 1993). The argument was that capitalist practices facilitate the oppression of women and people of minority status, and are the basis for all oppression and violence against women. This argument stemmed from the evidence that those in control of power and money were oppressing women and other minority people and benefitting directly from such oppression. For example, people who are treated as secondary citizens in society would, by lack of choice, work for less pay, thereby creating a competitive job climate. This climate, in turn, instills fear and instability regarding employment and income security within labour forces. Such a fearful atmosphere can lead to a passive, accepting, and obedient work force, that can easily be exploited by employers looking to maximize their profit by minimizing the amount they pay to workers.

The argument that capitalism fuels the oppression of women and minority people is continually used by local violence prevention workers as a basis for understanding both violence against women and broader issues of oppression. This interpretation of the relationship between capitalism and oppression provides a context for the violence in women's lives and the inequality experienced by women and other people of minority status. From here, women and others working for equality can pinpoint systems and regulations that need to be changed to move in the direction of justice. Thus, the analysis of oppression provided by the Left has mobilized people to

work for change and identified specific, tangible political and social practices to challenge (Wolf, 1993).

Feminism's association with socialist/collectivist values also led to contempt for female individualism, women in business, and the personal accumulation of money (Wolf, 1993). Whatever was ill-paid, subversive, or marginal in terms of work and pay was sought out and accepted by feminists as a way of showing their rejection of capitalist values and their support for their cause (Wolf, 1993). The rejection of money was framed as adherence to socialist values, which were believed by many feminists to be the ticket to ending oppression and achieving equality and justice.

So how radical was feminism's rejection of money? Rejection of capitalism is understandable given the way capitalism as a system currently exploits women and other minority people. The male Left's rejection of money in the 1960's was a radical act, because men were supposed to have an intimate relationship with money, even allow it to define and dominate their existence. Women have had centuries of training to consider money impure, undeserved, mysterious, not our worry, and a male-imitative and politically incorrect concern (Steinem, 1994). It seems that many women exploring feminism readily accepted the practice of rejecting money. Perhaps this acceptance was due to the fact that the argument put forth by the male Left simply fit with women's internalized belief that they should have no relationship to money. That is, some women may have adopted men's values about money and capitalism as their own under the guise of feminism, when the sexist belief that women should have no money or a desire to earn it was created by men to exclude women from the perceived opportunities and benefits of capitalism.

Women's rejection of money to show their rejection of current practices in capitalism is an implied standard within feminist circles. Evidence of women's personal rejection of money and

women's rejection of other women striving to achieve money is abundant in the feminist circles in which I participated. I heard many women reject the idea of achieving personal wealth, express guilt over modest salaries that are actually well-deserved, and diminish their own budgetary successes when they finally save enough for a house of their own. I saw women undersell the value of their talents in salary negotiations and in community-based workshops or contracts, and I saw women use money unwisely rather than for their own personal gain. All of these actions are actually considered an act of faith to the principles of (socialist) feminism. As an aside, women do not reject money directed toward their work or their organizations (through grants, donations, etc.), nor do they reject the concept of economic independence for the women they serve. They simply reject money directed toward themselves.

Collectively, feminism does not question this rejection of money, nor does it openly acknowledge the impact of economic power. "Money talks" and in our society money is needed to survive. Dealing with the inequity in the division of wealth in our society by accepting poverty and encouraging others to do the same via judgemental peer pressure may be contributing to the subjugation of feminist women. In effect, this ideology perpetuates existing myths about women and money, such as, women do not understand money, cannot make money, cannot manage money, cannot be trusted with money, and are unfeminine if they associate with or achieve money (Steinem, 1994).

The patriarchal view of money and women can be challenged. Traditional views of women and money are defeated everyday by single mothers who successfully manage their own households on unrealistically low incomes. Why do feminists readily accept the idea that rejecting money is a valid contribution to social change efforts? Violence prevention workers encourage the woman whose partner abuses her to keep her own bank account, and to set aside

her own financial pot for a rainy day. These same workers express guilt about having an inner desire to be financially secure. I think this resistance to acquiring money illustrates women's acceptance of the traditional belief that a woman should not be the breadwinner in the family and should rely on a man (be it father or partner) for financial guidance and support. Rather than serve as a strong statement against the evils of excessive wealth, I think (socialist) feminists' rejection of money serves to deepen the challenges these women already face. Social change work is sufficiently challenging without also worrying about financial sustenance. Further, it is the rich, and not the poor who are listened to in society. By choosing to be poor as a way of showing their non-acceptance for the division of wealth, feminist women may become even more disenfranchised as a group, and thus may have less opportunity for impact as change agents.

The reality is that within the world's current economic system, women need economic power and money to meet their basic (and more advanced) needs. Women's organizations also need money for these same reasons. Women cannot assert power over money nor affect its flow if they do not allow themselves to have a relationship with it personally. That is, if women do not learn to value money and appreciate its power as individuals, then it will not be easy to fully use money to women's collective benefit in social change work, because we will have little or no experience with the uses and potential of money. Women can have money and at the same time reject a system that hierarchically impoverishes them. Women can learn the benefits and abuses of money, and eventually change the role money plays in the construction of the world. When women allow money to continue to be foreign, and even a dirty concept, these women are relinquishing economic power to other people who are only too willing to acquire it.

Corporate North America is aware of the power of money, and corporations frequently use money to influence standards and practices that benefit their interests. It is time for women and

other minority people to fight fire with fire. Women (and other minority people) need to know how to live with and accept money personally, so that they can create justice-driven opportunities for money, rather than allow white men and corporate North America to continue to dominate the flow of resources in today's society.

If women truly believe in the abundance principle that stems from socialist values, then why do women assume that they must give up money, or refuse to accept it, in order to prevent the conditions of poverty experienced by so many? It is not the existence of money or economic power per se that causes poverty. It is the unjust way in which money (and wealth and resources) are distributed that leads to poverty. Therefore, it makes more sense to me that women encourage each other to become more involved in the financial and economic aspects of life. Then, women can exercise their right to speak out on the distribution of money, rather than silently accept the popular notion that an association with money is a sign of an unaware, uncaring, irresponsible, or hypocritical (socialist) feminist.

Rejection of money is symptomatic of the domination of the women's movement by middle class white women. Middle class white women could reject money, because they were provided with economic support from their parents until they married (and at that time, it was assumed women would marry). It was (and is) customary for women to marry within their class (Steinem, 1994). Therefore, middle class, heterosexual women could count on being supported by a husband after they outgrew their parents. Thus, it was relatively easy for these women to preach rejection of money as a way to support women's liberation, and to carry out this belief in practice. Some women, especially women who were not middle class, could not afford to reject personal acquisition of money for the sake of collective social change efforts. Many of the women outside the middle class were (and are) minority women because of society's structured oppression of

these women. Had feminism included poor and minority women from the outset, the principle of sacrificing personal financial gain for the collective might have remained an ideal rather than become a standard, because too many women would not have realistically been able to uphold this standard in their personal lives.

Today, single motherhood is common in Canada (Czerny et al., 1994). Sexism, racism, and homophobia are as rampant as ever, and the working and living conditions for women are still far below the levels experienced by men. Women only earn on average $.70 for every dollar a man earns, and while women are on average more educated, they still fill most of the part-time and lower paying positions in society (Steinem, 1994). These conditions are not going to change until women acquire economic power and learn to use it for their own (true) collective benefit.

Individually, feminist social change agents need money to survive just like other women in the community. Currently, many women live in poverty. Poor health and poverty are correlated in the young and old (Lambert-Lagace, 1989). We have also seen the importance of good self-care in women's ability to continue participating in social change and making a positive difference in the lives of other women. Instead of viewing money as an impure evil, we could reframe our thinking to view money as an avenue to better self-care. Money is not all there is to life, but having it does make some things easier. Managing it well could prevent women from becoming poor as they age and may also enable women to continue with various forms of social change.

Assumption #7: Consciousness raising that focuses on oppression and its effects is a necessary and effective social change process.

The women's liberation movement emerged in Canada in the 1960's and early 1970's, as feminists articulated analyses of women's oppression, proposed strategies for change, and formed organizations (Carey, 1980). "Consciousness raising", a form of organizing unique to the women's movement, emerged early on in this period (Carey, 1980). Groups of 8 - 10 women met regularly over a period of time to discuss any topic of interest to the group's members (Adamson et al., 1988). Women came to these groups because they needed support from other women and they were hungry for ways to make changes in their lives. The purpose was to provide an opportunity for women to voice their hidden problems and give these problems legitimacy in the collective context of women's lives (Jaggar, 1983). That is, "the point of sharing information about personal life and personal experience was to connect these into something that could transcend the personal" (Eisenstein, 1983, p. 35).

Once shared in a small group with other women, individual pain and suffering appeared in a different light (Eisenstein, 1983). Women's problems could then be seen not as personal and private ones, but as problems which fell into a pattern that characterized other women's lives as well. The consciousness raising process emphasized the value of women's own perceptions and abilities, embraced the idea that the knowledge and ability to create change was rooted in each woman's own experience, and permitted women to create their own agendas for change (Adamson et al., 1988). This spirit of consciousness raising is reflected in the following quote from the Redstockings Manifesto (1969):

> "We regard our personal experience, and our feelings about that experience as the basis for an analysis of our common situation. We cannot rely on existing ideologies as they are products of male supremacist culture. We question every generalization and accept none that are not confirmed by our experience." (pg. 274)

Women became aware of the connection between their personal problems and the socially constructed oppression of women through their consciousness raising groups. These groups also mobilized women to become active participants in their struggle for liberation (Adamson et al., 1988). Consciousness raising efforts and the new knowledge that the "personal is political" offered women a personal stake in seeking political change (Carey, 1980). Consciousness raising as a process did not create the issues. Instead, consciousness raising was a vehicle through which women identified issues that were most important in their experience, and linked these issues to larger goals of social change. The consciousness raising process replaced women's previous political apathy with collective energy and dedication to making change through participatory approaches (Adamson et al., 1988). The historical significance of consciousness raising to women's quest for liberation and equality is immensely valuable. Consciousness raising undoubtedly served as a catalyst to greater organizing for change by raising people's awareness of the common challenges experienced by women that were previously hidden and accepted by individuals.

Formal consciousness raising groups are less common today, though the concept and process of consciousness raising still prevails in the anti-violence organizations in which I participated. For example, women who have experienced violence are always encouraged to express their experience in individual and group counselling or educational sessions within these organizations. Volunteers and workers meet to discuss their own experiences of violence and of supporting other women who have experienced violence. These meetings are used to discuss potential personal and social actions, and to plan group activities that serve to educate the public about their knowledge of women's collective experiences.

Consciousness raising can build solidarity among women who have experienced abuse because it is through increased awareness of violence against women that women come to know they are not alone in their experience (Carey, 1980). Realizing that personal experiences of violence are part of a larger political system that serves to control women's lives and bodies can be liberating for many women. This awareness often alleviates women's feelings of blame and personal responsibility for the violence perpetrated against them by others. Further, raising people's awareness of violence against women serves to highlight the prevalence and severity of violence, so that the existence of personal and systemic violence cannot be disputed. Once an accurate scope of the violence in women's lives is accepted by society, appropriate healing and prevention measures can be planned.

While I appreciate the need for consciousness raising efforts, my own experience of consciousness raising was not altogether positive. The act of having my consciousness raised actually diminished my hope for a life free from violence. Focusing so intently on the incidence and severity of violence to the exclusion of positive changes that have resulted from the women's movement led me to believe that viable solutions were not possible.

When I first learned the scope of violence against women through my exposure to statistics on incidence rates, I felt angry. I also felt impassioned to work for change, to find a way to bring this state of affairs for women to an end. Realistically, my knowledge of the issues was still quite limited, as was my knowledge of processes that facilitate change and my own potential contribution to ending violence against women. I had the romantic perception that I could "change the world". I came to my master's program with exactly this intention; I came to learn the methods and strategies that could be used to make societal changes happen.

In our program, we focussed on learning about alternative research methods and on the effects of oppression on society's diverse members. Our course work raised my awareness around broader issues of oppression and offered new ideas and tools for conducting community based research. However, I was not convinced that academic research alone would effect the social change I envisioned.

I engaged in violence prevention work to learn all I could about bringing equality for women into reality. I attended various training sessions and workshops at local shelters and assault support centres, and in the community. The common practice in violence prevention today is to raise the learners' awareness of the incidence and severity of violence to prepare them for the kinds of situations they might face as volunteers or workers. Role playing, knowing what sorts of issues will arise, and discussing them in lower stress settings does enable one to face such real-life situations with more confidence and ease. Unfortunately, this training strategy is also reactive in nature. It assumes violence will happen, and focuses on treating, helping, or healing the person who experienced the violence. I have benefitted from such healing interventions, and I do not dispute their value.

In both the case of the university and the violence prevention work, we focussed on the evidence and effects of oppression, rather than on past successes of change or potential future strategies for change. I desired balance in this discussion; I wanted to hear about successful strategies for change at the systemic, institutional, and personal levels, or at least discuss such possibilities. The omission of these discussions discouraged me.

Meanwhile, I witnessed faculty in my own department challenged by the process of integrating just values into their personal behaviour and their institutional practices. These faculty members make a clear intellectual and spoken commitment to justice and social change, yet struggle to live

up to their own ideals. If those studying the effects of oppression find it difficult to practice the social justice they preach, then what kind of response could I expect from the average citizen, who generally does not have access to knowledge of oppression or the belief that the world can be different from how it is now? I saw clearly the severity of violence against women and at the same time, learned how difficult it is for people to use this information to make personal changes in their behaviour.

Essentially, my consciousness raising experience led to two perceptions: that violence and inequality are more severe than I thought, and that individual and social changes are incredibly difficult to embrace, achieve, and maintain. Interestingly, this situation parallels that of women who do not leave violent situations. They know the severity of violence, and yet find it difficult to change their situation by leaving. The situation and the change seem equally frightening, though at least the violence is familiar. The pain of the situation probably taints and hinders the potential benefit of the change. The change or solution may even be unforeseeable paradoxically because of the severity of the violence. I felt the full weight of oppression when I realized the magnitude of oppression and the challenge of eliminating it. I was not hearing positive stories of change and could not imagine such changes myself.

Eventually, I came to the conclusion that focussing solely on the problem without strategizing, without reviewing past successes, is defeating. Because I was not hearing social change success stories I made the assumption, wrongly I think, that such examples simply do not exist. Typical consciousness raising that focuses on women's horrific experiences of violence has its place in social change work. I believe consciousness raising also needs to include raising awareness of possible (or even past) solutions and proactive strategies for change to be more effective in tapping into people's potential passion for justice.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION

Before I started this thesis, I lived my life as much as possible in a feminist milieu. Many of the decisions I made, people I spent time with, and thoughts I shared had to measure up to and be filtered through an image I cultivated in my mind of what feminism and female empowerment means. I could not utter thoughts of dislike for another woman, or another woman's opinion, because that would mean I was horribly unfeminist, betraying my cause and hence myself in the process. My desire to pursue personal, individual power, my desire to earn a living that could support my needs, my close relationships with people who chose not to use feminism as a personal guiding philosophy, and my desire to move away from my own past oppressive experiences onto practical, realistic, and proactive ways of living all represented contradictions to my developing sense of how to participate with integrity in a feminist revolution. I had no idea how to reconcile these inner contradictions.

I had a deep desire to experience a loving, profound, and meaningful connection with the feminist community. I anticipated and hoped for a sense of belonging among a group of women who could understand my experiences, needs, wants, and choices. I created within myself the fear that if I offered a face, a thought, or an opinion other than what I perceived the feminist community expected, I might lose the opportunity to bond and grow with that community. The thought of sharing some of the questions, contradictions and revelations I experienced instilled feelings of guilt, betrayal, and fear that I might never fit in or be accepted within feminist circles. I thought I might be perceived as betraying feminism, the women's movement, and female empowerment, rather than be seen as someone who deeply values and strives for female empowerment.

Further and related to the assumptions of feminism I have chosen to challenge, I perceived other self-defined feminist women as believing in an all-encompassing, strictly defined, feminist identity. I perceived that to become a feminist, I must live in poverty or at least refuse to accumulate wealth. I perceived I must always critique or challenge other so-called unfeminist beliefs through consciousness-raising. I perceived I must centre my thoughts, feelings and actions around my own and others' experiences of oppression, devote myself primarily to promoting equality for women, possibly even at the expense of my physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual health, and participate only in feminist (or at least socialist) activities, including choosing work or a career that displays an obvious connection to socialist feminist values. I believed if I did not meet these perceived prerequisites, I could not actively live out my desire to strive for a social transformation rooted in feminist values.

I believe feminism means equal access to all of life's opportunities for all of life's participants. I also believe individuals have the right to choose their beliefs, actions, and responses to the actions of others or situations beyond their control. As well, feminism to me is about searching for new experiences, new understandings, new ways of thinking and acting in the world, as opposed to arriving at some pre-determined, common understanding of feminism. Thus, the underlying contradiction I experienced arose from my belief in self-determination and my perception that self-determination had no place in feminist social change. For example, is it acceptable to use consciousness-raising to highlight the horror and pain of oppression if the people participating in the consciousness-raising activity have chosen not to focus their energy on horror and pain, but on successful, positive, historical accounts of social change? Is it reasonable to judge another person's belief of how much money they need to survive? Is it realistic to assume all women define themselves by their gender first and foremost? Is it respectful to label

another woman "not arrived yet" if she chooses to prioritize racial oppression over gender oppression, if she chooses to raise a family and work inside the home rather than outside the home, perform her social change efforts through the act of raising children rather than participating in community oriented social change, or if she chooses to seek a fit body, wishes to be treated like a lady, or have power over money? Judging women (and men) as unevolved, unfeminist, or hopelessly duped by the patriarchy can quickly and silently negate their sense of self, their experience, and hence their voice and wisdom. Yet this very act of giving voice to women's experience is one of the key elements of feminism as I perceive it. Feminists set out to dismantle the systems that limit women's freedom and, in my opinion, have in the process created new systems, stereotypes, and assumptions to which women might feel they need to conform if they wish to participate in feminist social change.

With feminism, we seek first to eliminate injustices in society. The approach is to change the attitudes and behaviours of those who behave unjustly toward others. When feminism fails to change unjust beliefs of society, we seem to seek changes within our own feminist circle. I think the unconscious belief is that the differences among us have weakened our collective action strategy. We assume that we can control the behaviours of others by changing our own. We might be wise to discuss instead how to change our individual and collective responses to the various forms of oppression we experience. As Covey (1989) reports: "The fountain of content must spring up in the mind, and he who hath so little knowledge of human nature as to seek happiness by changing anything but his own disposition, will waste his life in fruitless efforts and multiply the grief he proposes to remove" (pg. 93).

We do not have the power to change others. We only have the power to change ourselves and possibly to influence others. By focussing on changing the world, feminism has had slow

success. In frustration, feminist social change agents may have inadvertently begun trying to change each other, blaming diversity in feminist beliefs for the slow progress of feminist social change. Clearly, trying to change one another will not bring feminists closer to the goal of liberating people from oppression. Thus, it may be a good time in history to focus some of the energy directed at changing the world inward for the purpose of self-awareness, self-determination, and self-care. I believe individual self-care efforts will benefit the collective effort toward social change, because the whole gathers its energy from the various parts.

Women have a choice as to how they respond to the sexism and oppression in our society and at the same time can continue to strive for change through education. I am not saying public education cannot effect changes in our society. I believe it can. There will always be some people who will hold on to discriminating views and will encourage others to do the same. Rather than criticizing within our movement when we do not succeed in changing the behaviours and values of others, we could develop a planned response to those individuals who demean women. The only things we have direct control over in life are our thoughts, values, feelings, and behaviours. We have only indirect control over other people's behaviour - we can seek to educate but cannot assume our desired outcome. Lastly, there are some situations over which we have no control, such as our past, our birthplace, birth parents, family of origin, or our entrance into history. I would have the greatest success in changing my self, and the least success in changing circumstances over which I have no control, and possibly some success influencing others.

Feminism, to me , is about influencing the behaviour of others, encouraging others to behave respectfully, without discrimination and prejudice. I also believe that to be most effective at influencing others, I must operate from my own self-awareness and from a position of complete

self-respect. The lesson for me is that while I believe feminism is the manifestation of fairminded intentions of women striving for equality, feminism as much as the system it opposes has the potential to create limitations in people if we choose to let it. Preventing the growth of a limiting feminism requires individual efforts toward self-awareness, and an awareness of values or beliefs that might encourage justice versus those that might impede it. Using justice-oriented values to inform our self-determination process, and openly re-evaluating our values and behaviours to assess their current impact on our ability to live respectfully and effect appropriate, meaningful, and positive change may also lead to a more diverse, yet inclusive, philosophy of feminism.

Being able to engage in such self-reflection and personal growth requires time and energy, as well as a healthy self-image. This point brings us back to the issue of self-care. We must take care of ourselves physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually to effectively assess the validity of our behaviours, feelings, thoughts, and values. When we are taking good care of ourselves, I believe it is easier to be more accepting of others, and thus easier to have open and honest dialogues. Open dialogues are our best resource for learning and understanding human behaviour, and thus can lay the groundwork for discovering new ways of surviving oppression while striving for change. These thoughts for me illustrate the grand paradox of feminist social change work: though there is currently little room for the self in the collective movement, each individual self needs to be healthy and balanced in order for the collective movement to make gains in women's freedom. The whole depends on the strength of the parts for success, but the whole also oppresses the same parts by imposing limiting definitions of arrival and acceptable ways of thinking and behaving within feminist circles. As women burn out from lack of self-care and blindness to the potential restrictions of a perceived liberating philosophy of feminism, the collective will disintegrate and our daughters will be forced to re-invent the wheel.

In sum, the prevalence and effects of oppression and violence were well documented in previous literature. Many researchers and activists examined the effectiveness of various anti-oppression and violence prevention programs. Most recently, some researchers identified the negative impact of violence prevention work on the workers. In addition, these researchers identified self-care strategies that women in violence prevention could use to cope with the stress of the work. Initially, I also thought that practising better physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental self-care was the solution to the situation. But, this solution is basically a first order change strategy. That is, implementing better self-care to adapt to the feminist system of social change assumes that the system's premises are acceptable. I was not convinced that the current feminist social change practices are ideal, so the assumptions I challenged related to how we do feminist social change, instead of how we can adapt to current feminist social change practices. Basically, I include challenging assumptions and questioning systems, beliefs, values, and practices in my philosophy of self-care. This broader conceptualization of self-care, and my analysis of assumptions and practices that I believe impede our ability to take care of ourselves and effect feminist social change are my unique contributions to the existing literature on self-care in feminist social change work.

CHAPTER 9: POSSIBLE FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Formal Research

I have used myself as both researcher and research participant in this thesis to explore my relationship to feminist social change work and self-care. I presented assumptions that I perceive to exist generally among feminist social change work. I shared my experience of contradiction between my perceptions of feminism and self-care, and my own needs and desires. I centred my thesis research within myself. As such, it is impossible for me to say with certainty whether my contradictory experiences are unique to me or are shared with others in the field of feminist social change work, or among women more generally.

One possible future direction is to investigate the presence of these assumptions and contradictions within feminist social change agents and other women desiring to use feminism as a guiding philosophy for their life and work. The design of this investigation would parallel the ideal research design I described earlier in the methodology section. That is, the researcher and participants could begin the research process with personal reflection and intuitive writing exercises to identify their own experiences and perceptions regarding feminism and self-care. Group interviews, wherein participants discuss, debate, and deconstruct the assumptions I have presented, along with their own assumptions or perceptions regarding feminism, self-care, and social change work could complement the intuitive writing phase of the research process. Ideally, participants would speak from experience, sharing any paradoxes or lack thereof between their philosophy and practice of both feminist social change work and self-care. Participants would also debate current self-care and social change practices, and examine areas for self-development and collective growth. The discussions could take place longitudinally, to capture the learning that takes place within the group and the dynamic thinking required to continually expand

knowledge in new directions.

Recording the discussions via audio or videotape, transcribing the interview debates, and collectively reviewing the transcripts would permit continuous learning about feminist social change work and self-care. The purpose of such a research design is to ground future social change in practical definitions of feminism that do not exclude the self in the collective change process. This research design could be integrated into any feminist group, and carried out internally for their own learning and growth (and such analytical dialogues are often part of feminist work in the community, though attention to self-care might be a new addition to these discussions). Academics wishing to bridge the gap between themselves and community researchers could offer their service to carry out the data collection, data assimilation, and presentation of data back to the group. Ideally, an academic researcher would hear and capture all points of view shared by research participants. The academic researcher could also facilitate debate of these various viewpoints so the group could learn, understand, and grow in awareness. Further, an academic researcher could bridge the gap between groups of change agents who might not otherwise have contact with one another. The discussion/debate interviews could take place in a variety of settings. The researcher could share developments in feminist and self-care philosophies to each group for further analysis, develop large-scale quantitative measures to examine feminist and self-care issues across a broader population of women, and share insights with a larger audience through publication and education.

Informal Research and Education

Because research funding is in shorter supply nowadays, such an involved research project may be difficult to manage. However, individual educators and social change agents can create their own informal discussion and learning forums. By sharing experiences, especially those that

leave us feeling confused about our values and our needs, we can initiate small-scale discussions in our classrooms and agencies relating to feminist social change work and self-care. I described the essence of my thesis with the statement: **"Give a woman care and you save her for a day; teach a woman self-care and you save her life; develop teachers of self-care and you lift all society."** Many feminist social change agents encourage other women to take care of themselves. Feminist social change agents need to practice self-care, too, so they can understand what is really involved in caring for oneself. Teaching self-care and developing teachers of self-care will be most productive if these teachings are preceded and informed by individual awareness of self-care and discussions/debates around the challenges of self-care, especially as it relates to feminist social change work.

It is ourselves over which we have the greatest influence, thus self-awareness, self-determination, and self-care are all attainable. As we work toward these goals, we are likely to increase our ability to influence others by our example. It will become easier to be more accepting of others when we feel cared for, and less tempting to attack those who are different from us and who might otherwise arouse our feelings of inferiority. Committing to our own self-care, and openly discussing experiences or paradoxes of self-care within feminist social change are important steps toward ensuring the collective social change movement continues to move in a beneficial direction.

CHAPTER 10: MY REFLECTIONS ON THE THESIS PROCESS

At one point during the process of writing my thesis I broke from the rhythm to assert my views on thesis writing and academia. Because this interlude occurred while I was immersed in the thesis, I believe it captures my more honest thoughts and emotions regarding my graduate education. Therefore, I will share the journal-type entry with you verbatim, to provide a summary of what I learned about myself from doing a reflective, self-focussed thesis.

I do not like the traditional academic expectations surrounding a master's thesis. I feel angry that my education is organized to fulfill someone else's expectations and ideas of what they think education should be or what they think education is. Few academics and educators asked me what education means to me, what I like about learning, how I like to learn, or even how I learn best. Because I was so rarely asked these questions, I find it difficult to articulate my understanding of and appreciation for learning as a process. I know in my heart what education means to me, when education has been meaningful and helped me to grow. But I cannot express these sentiments in words. I am not practised in dialoguing about learning, because I was so rarely asked about my learning ideals.

What I can tell you is that I do not like how I feel when I sit down to write. I feel alone and isolated in my venture. I feel neglected rather than understood, welcomed, and supported by my higher education institution. I feel forced to try to fulfill criteria that do not serve me or my educational vision and goals. I am paying in tuition for a service over which I feel I have no power. The thesis experience is hardly carried out with my needs and interests in mind, despite the fact that I am the consumer of my education. If this experience were truly meant to serve me and my needs, then I would be free to define it for myself, 'it' being both the process and the product of the experience.

Were it my choice, I would unleash my passion for learning and growth through dialogue and discussion, blending verbal exchanges with a balance of reading and reflection on real-life experiences. I learn from reading, listening, and critically analysing the experiences of others. I learn from participating verbally in life, in real-life activities and in discussions about those activities. My thinking is expanded most when I participate in small group discussions. I like telling and hearing stories, and am most engaged in learning when discussions of real-life stories lead to new a understanding of human behaviour. I do not learn with as much passion or pleasure working in solitude, reading, writing, and referring my thoughts concisely to published works of academics and scholars who write from an objective, rather than a more overtly personal perspective. For many, writing is an active learning process and proves to be very insightful. Writing does not tap into my passion for learning as much as discussions and active dialogues do. Writing is a process I engage in because I know I must. Like taking out the garbage, it must be done. I hold my breath, dive into the stink, and try very hard to convince myself that life will be better, my knowledge and mind will be expanded, and the learning will come once the task of writing is done. Conversely, I feel the joy, the power, the passion, the pleasure of learning when I am learning through conversation, through discussion and analysis of real-life, everyday experiences and challenges. In fact, the discussions I had with friends, peers in social change work, and educators during the thesis process are the real source of my thesis learning. Writing in solitude taught me that I like learning co-operatively, and that writing is not my preferred mode of expression.

Other key learnings from doing a reflective, self-focussed thesis did emerge as well, despite my dread for the writing process. I found more value in my own self-worth simply by deconstructing some of the ideas about feminism that I acquired previously. Because I was

measuring myself against standards that I did not create, I frequently felt as though I could not measure up, and thus could not become an integral participant in feminist social change work. Even though I have not yet created new standards for myself, I somehow felt liberated and less oppressed once I learned feminism is a socially constructed reality that need not remain static.

My vision now is to see the transformation I experienced translated into the community and education so that other women struggling to find a place within feminism can do so without sacrificing their selves in the process. I also hope other women feel the power that comes when assumptions, perceptions, and oppressive myths are lifted. My belief is this transformative process can be facilitated easiest within educational forums like universities. The universities' focus is on learning and there is plenty of opportunity for discussing theory and practice, as well as real-life experience. Ideally, I would have preferred my graduate education focus more on examining our perceptions and assumptions about social change, and examples of successful social change from history or the community. Instead, I believe we focussed more on the vastness of the pain and oppression in the world, and wasted a lot of energy discussing things which we cannot change, like the attitudes and beliefs of others whose value system is different form our own. Changes in attitudes do happen, but not by sitting around complaining about how unconscious or un-arrived others are in their thinking, nor by judging or excluding diversity of thought from discussions.

Much of my learning in my master's degree came when I defined my own learning goals and created my own preferred thesis process. Prior to my thesis, and even during the writing process, I felt as though I was mainly satisfying someone else's ideals of education for the sake of achieving a master's degree. I did not come into the program with the simple intention of getting a master's degree to enhance my future employability. Rather, I came to learn and understand

more about myself and my potential contribution to achieving equality for womankind in particular. I incurred many feelings of isolation and anger along the way, wishing that I did not have to educate myself on the things that I came knowing nothing about and wanting to know everything about. In the end, I received exactly the education I hoped for, but only because I chose the readings for my thesis, and engaged in my own process of self-reflection and inner learning outside of the program. If only my process were more common in graduate programs, perhaps it would have felt less risky, less isolating, and hence less painful. Further, I suspect there are other people who also prefer conversation to solitary writing as a forum for learning, and I would have appreciated the opportunity to participate in a thesis process considerate of my learning style, along with other people who share my learning style. Perhaps this will be a future addition to graduate training.

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