

**THE RECORD KEEPING PRACTICES OF WOMEN'S  
ORGANIZATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THREE ORGANIZATIONS IN  
VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Examination of the context of record creation, maintenance, and use is a valuable tool which allows the archivist to build a body of knowledge regarding archival records and their creators. Such knowledge enables the archivist to make informed decisions in all realms of archival practice. This discussion focuses upon the women's organization, undertaking a case study of three organizations in Vancouver, British Columbia in order to provide information about their record keeping practices.

The case study employs open-ended focus interviews, observation, and document analysis, where provided. Participants are selected based upon their involvement in the creation, maintenance, and use of records in their respective organizations. They are asked to provide information as to the administrative history of the organization and to describe the processes by which they receive, create, use, organize, maintain, and destroy records. Participants are also asked to characterize their organization and its record keeping practices as they relate to the concept of a women's organization.

A framework for analysis is established, which allows for further characterization of each women's organization. This framework addresses the voluntary nature of most women's organizations, as well as their unique processes and forms. Three models are presented which allow for further characterization of the history, structure, and practices of each organization. The distinctive internal processes, forms, and record keeping practices of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Western Businesswomen's Association, and the West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund are presented. The thesis concludes by providing

recommendations regarding further explorations of record creation, maintenance, and use and their value for the archival profession.

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## INTRODUCTION

The end of the twentieth century marks the close of an era of tremendous change in societal structures and practices that reflect a move towards gender equality. While it can be argued that society has not yet achieved such equality, it is evident that women have taken on new and unique societal roles. In other words, we find women active in roles that were previously unexplored by females, and this change is undoubtedly reflected in society as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

As societal change is reflected in the records that a society creates, the new and varied roles of women should also be evident in these byproducts of activity. The difficulty arises in establishing a means by which this change can be examined. Does one look at the records themselves, or at the records creators? Generally the question must be asked, how best to go about examining the impact of the changing role of women upon the process of records creation, maintenance, and use?<sup>2</sup> This thesis will examine current record keeping practices of female records creators as they exist within the context of the women's organization.

It can be argued that women have always been active in the process of record keeping. Both publicly and privately, women have generated recorded information as a natural byproduct of their own actions. *Privately*, women have generated a variety of recorded information in the context of their day-to-day lives. Diaries and correspondence are two examples of the types of records

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<sup>1</sup> Societal advancements on the part of women will vary from one society to another throughout the world. While an examination of various societies would reveal varying degrees of advancement, and such an examination would be worthwhile, for the purposes of this thesis, only Canadian society will be examined.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, the creation, maintenance, and use of records shall act as the definition of record keeping.



that have been generated by women in the realm of the private, though Eva Moseley notes that these types of records tend to be more commonplace in the lives of middle and upper-class women.<sup>3</sup>

While women have not been active *publicly* to the degree that we find them at the end of this century, their presence and action can be discerned throughout history in a variety of public contexts. Moseley answers her own question, "Where have women been active and important? Primarily in the private world of the family; more recently in those public institutions that have assumed family functions."<sup>4</sup> However, it is not the purpose or goal of this thesis to explore the *historical* role of women in society, nor to assess its impact. Suffice it to say that women have created and/or been reflected in the content of records in both private and public contexts.

While an examination of the role of gender in the creation, maintenance, and use of public records in a modern context would no doubt prove insightful, the method and means by which such an examination could be carried out is difficult to establish. How can the impact of gender on the record keeping process be isolated? Is the examination of gender as an isolated variable even possible, and should it be studied as such? Indeed, gender is only one factor that influences individual perspective. The role of ethnicity, socio-economic status, and education, as well as other factors, might also be examined. While gender is not necessarily a factor which can be easily isolated in any context, public or private, it is perhaps more effectively examined through a defined

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<sup>3</sup> Eva Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" *American Archivist* 43 (Spring 1980): 184.

<sup>4</sup> Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" 181. Rosabeth Moss Kanter notes that organizational literature has underexamined the contributions and structural situations of women in maintenance and support functions such as office work, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Women and the Structure of Organizations: Explorations in Theory and Behavior," in *Another Voice: Feminist Perspectives on Social Life and Social Science*, ed. Marcia Millman and Rosabeth Moss Kanter (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1975), 45.

category, such as organizations which address the unique needs, issues, and perspectives of women. Clearly, gender is not the only factor affecting the perspectives and practices of women's organizations. However, the definable boundaries of such organizations are much more conducive to direct investigation.

The reasons for conducting an exploration of the record keeping practices of women's organizations are many. Most importantly, women's organizations have never been fully investigated in the context of records creation. Further, exploring their record keeping activities provides a body of knowledge that does not exist in the archival field at present. Other investigations of records creators have been conducted,<sup>5</sup> but these have not pertained to *women* as records creators. An investigation of the record keeping practices of women's organizations will provide archivists with an information resource which can be consulted in order to increase their knowledge of records that may find their way into archival institutions. Such knowledge is important in that it will assist archivists in making well-informed acquisition and appraisal decisions.

It is also important to note that this type of exploration links archival studies with other fields such as women's studies, sociology, and political science. Such a linking can only strengthen perspective and understanding within the archival field. Indeed, as Michael Lutzker argues, other disciplines

offer constructs that can deepen our understanding of how institutions function. It remains for us to scrutinize the literature and apply the insights of these disciplines in order to understand more fully the inner dynamics of the institutions or agencies that create records and the various purposes of records creation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Master of Archival Studies theses have been written examining records creators such as voluntary, ethnic, and environmental non-governmental organizations, to name a few.

Perhaps it is best to state the objective of this examination by defining what it is not. It is not the goal of this discussion to come to a definitive conclusion about the unique nature of women as records creators or keepers, neither in a general sense nor in the specific context of women's organizations. The goal of this examination is simply to provide an understanding of what women's organizations are doing at present in the context of record keeping, as they are a dynamic, diverse, and rapidly expanding type of organization which can provide the archival community with useful contextual information.

This examination of the record keeping practices of women's organizations will be conducted in the context of a qualitative case study of three such organizations based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Prior to addressing the perspectives and practices of the three organizations, a thorough discussion of the need for such an examination will be set out. This discussion will address the need for an examination at the creation stage, as well as the role of such an examination in providing a resource for the archival community. A framework for the examination of women's organizations will be established and a methodology for the case study will be presented as a basis for the discussion of the results. The results of interviews with members of each organization and observations of record keeping practices will be presented and discussed. Finally, the conclusion of this thesis will provide a summary and recommendations for further research.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael A. Lutzker, "Max Weber and the Analysis of Modern Bureaucratic Organization: Notes Toward a Theory of Appraisal," *American Archivist* 45 (1982): 119-120.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Establishing a Framework for the Exploration of Record Keeping in Women's Organizations

#### The Archivist In Context

Archivists bear a responsibility to act as unbiased guardians of recorded information. This responsibility is enhanced by a generalized knowledge of the processes of records creation, maintenance, and use within the larger continuum of the record itself. Archivists respect the provenance and original order of the inactive records that make their way into archival institutions. They purport these guiding principles to those who use the material in archival custody. Generally, archivists act as informed keepers of recorded information.

But while the archival profession is knowledgeable as to the principles of archival theory and practice, and as part of this knowledge archivists possess the ability to examine the context of records creation in order to better serve the record, it is debatable as to whether they regularly, consistently, and effectively investigate context. Assumptions are made based upon an educated perspective, but archivists may not look to the *records creator* for a more thorough understanding of activities and record keeping practices. This discussion attempts to contribute to such an understanding by providing information about a specific body of records creators, namely the women's organization.

The need for direct investigation of the record keeping practices of women's organizations is supported by the argument that archivists allow personal judgements to cloud their ability to make informed decisions.

However, in the context of appraisal and acquisition, it is debatable as to whether subjective bias can even be avoided. Roy Schaeffer ponders this issue, stating that

. . . . appraisal assumes the application of all of the hazardous elements of nonscientific social and personal evaluation, the application of relative value judgements to the retention of records. It immediately raises questions of what values and whose values, and how they are applied. Are they to be the values of the records creator, the user, or the archivist? Are they to be the values of contemporary society or the society which creates the records? How are we to ensure that posterity receives a documentary legacy that permits an accurate assessment of the development of our society in all of its dimensions?<sup>7</sup>

It would be simplistic and naive to argue that as a profession and as individual archivists we could possibly achieve complete objectivity. However, through a process of acknowledging our *subjectivity*, informing ourselves as to context, and *striving* to be objective in an informed fashion, it is possible to make acquisition and appraisal decisions that more accurately reflect the society of which we are a part. In the context of appraisal, Terry Eastwood has argued that

[w]hen archivists perform, or better yet take part in, appraisal of documentary memory, they are ineluctably contemporary actors in various realms of their own society. They themselves become a device of public memory but not its creator or interpreter. It takes the special subtlety of a special kind of objectivity to fulfill that task well.<sup>8</sup>

Eastwood again addresses the notion of objectivity:

To argue from evidence towards making any given projection of value is solely what constitutes the archivist's objectivity. To claim to pursue objectivity does not mean to be certain. Certainty

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<sup>7</sup> Roy C. Schaeffer, "Transcendent Concepts: Power, Appraisal, and the Archivist as 'Social Outcast,'" *American Archivist* 55 (1992): 610.

<sup>8</sup> Terry Eastwood, "Towards a Social Theory of Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, ed. Barbara Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 85.

is for polemicists and ideologists . . . . So long as we simply assert value without substantiating our assertions with evidence, we are vulnerable to accusations that we arrogate to ourselves the right to express our own necessarily biased interests and call them society's values.<sup>9</sup>

Eastwood acknowledges the archivist's place within society, as a subjective individual who is a part of a larger social perspective, striving to be objective in an informed manner. His statements regarding the role of the archivist and the search for objectivity challenge the archival profession to be both self-reflective and proactive. Such a challenge lends itself to a direct examination of the practices of the records creator, which will in turn strengthen the decision making process.<sup>10</sup> The current discussion of the record keeping practices of women's organizations attempts to meet that challenge, under the guise that ". . . many an appraising archivist, like many a social or family historian, needs an extra reminder that women are as much a part of history as men are."<sup>11</sup>

### **Investigating the Records Creator**

A number of archivists have taken up the challenge set out by Eastwood by carrying out direct examinations of particular classes of records creators. Such studies provide the archival profession with valuable information about the individuals and bodies producing the materials that eventually find their way into archival institutions. Susan Hart, Jian Xiang Liu, Lisbeth Pitblado, and

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<sup>9</sup> Terry Eastwood, "How Goes It With Appraisal?," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993): 119.

<sup>10</sup> Danielle Laberge argues that it is impossible to establish a complex understanding of the workings of a given society without examining information regarding the social groups that make up that society, Danielle Laberge, "Information, Knowledge, and Rights: The Preservation of Archives as a Political and Social Issue," *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88): 46.

<sup>11</sup> Moseley refers to the works of M.R. Beard when making this statement, Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" 185-186.

Victoria Blinkhorn are archivists who have endeavoured to explore the world of records creation within voluntary, ethnic, and environmental non-government organizations, as well as the community of visual artists. These archivists have encouraged the profession to look to the creator in order to strengthen theories, methodologies, and practices. Hart, in her Master of Archival Studies thesis, *Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Organizations*, calls on archivists to "conduct research in order to reach a clearer understanding of records creators, and based on this, to develop better approaches to acquisition."<sup>12</sup> Hart writes, "The archivist must . . . seek a thorough understanding of the period and area of society from which she or he is supposed to acquire archival records."<sup>13</sup> Xiang Liu's Master of Archival Studies thesis on the potential for acquisition of ethnic archives argues that "[a]rchivists will be able to develop more feasible acquisition strategy with knowledge from the investigation of the creators or owners situation."<sup>14</sup>

Blinkhorn's examination of visual artists as records creators points to the need for an examination of records creators within the context of the larger community, challenging archivists to establish a complex perspective that incorporates the larger social dynamic. Blinkhorn states that

[t]he archivist needs to know whether an organization is significant to the community whose records the repository is mandated to preserve. This significance may be measured by examining the pervasiveness of the organization, taking into consideration the ways in which it influences and functions for society, and the extent to which it reflects society.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Susan Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1989), 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>14</sup> Jian Xiang Liu, "The Potential for Acquisition of Ethnic Archives: A Case Study of Five Chinese Organizations in Vancouver, British Columbia" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1993), 104.

Examination of the records creator within the larger social context allows the archivist to make informed appraisal decisions at all stages of the process. These decisions incorporate knowledge of

- (1) the society in which the records to be appraised were generated,
- (2) the life, activities, ideas, spirit, and any other element that may shed light on the personality and work of the person who created the records, and
- (3) the activities which generated the records and the types of records these activities produce.<sup>15</sup>

This educated archivist is then able to make decisions that benefit the records creator, the community, and the records themselves.

Archivists have looked to the records creator, but they have also conducted other explorations which point to the need for an examination of the creation of records generated by and pertaining to women. Diane Beattie and Gabrielle Earnshaw have explored such records in the context of their use and acquisition. Beattie, in her Master of Archival Studies thesis, *The Informational Needs of Historians Researching Women: An Archival User Study*, examines the needs of historians in the field of women's history in order to provide archivists with information about attitudes towards and the use of archival materials by such researchers. Earnshaw's work on the women's archives movement, *Preserving Records Bearing on the Experience of Women in North America: The Women's Archives Movement and its Significance for Appraisal*

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<sup>15</sup> Victoria Blinkhorn, "The Records of Visual Artists: Appraising for Acquisition and Selection" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1988), 110, as cited in Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 2.

<sup>16</sup> Blinkhorn, "The Records of Visual Artists," 43-44, as cited in Lisbeth Joy Pitblado, "Developing an Acquisition Strategy for the Records of Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1993), 26-27.



for Acquisition, explores attempts to compensate for the lack of material in archival institutions that reflects the experiences of women. Earnshaw argues,

The women's archives movement suggests that appraisal for acquisition in traditional archives has discriminated against records created by women. Although archival theory and methodology of appraisal for acquisition are not inherently biased, in practice acquisition of private records takes place in a haphazard manner according to the value system of the ruling political ideology. Because of structural and societal discrimination women have not been part of this ruling elite and interest in the preservation of their records has been minimal.<sup>17</sup>

What is compelling about Earnshaw's argument is that it points to a lack of discussion of records generated by and about women within the archival community. Earnshaw notes that out of 37 issues of *Archivaria* (1975-1994), aside from Veronica Strong-Boag's article, "Raising Clio's Consciousness: Women's History and Archives in Canada," and book and exhibition reviews, "the subject of women and archival preservation has been the topic of only two other articles."<sup>18</sup> She also points out that in 57 issues of the *American Archivist* (1938-1994), only four discussions have addressed records pertaining to women's experiences. Earnshaw's discussion is a recent one and as such, these figures continue to lend support to further discussion within the archival field in order to establish a better understanding of women as records creators. This thesis will attempt to provide such a discussion in the context of the women's organization.

Earnshaw's work supports the argument that women themselves have altered context by moving into more diverse areas of society. Such alteration should be reflected in the archival record. She notes that

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<sup>17</sup> Gabrielle Earnshaw, "Preserving Records Bearing on the Experience of Women in North America: The Women's Archives Movement and its significance for Appraisal for Acquisition" (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1994), ii-iii.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3.

the increase in number of women who hold positions in organizations of all kinds has increased substantially in the past decade. As this happens, traditional archives will automatically catch documentary evidence of women's activities in their net . . . .<sup>19</sup>

The increasing presence of women in a wider variety of organizations, as well as public focus on the role of individual women, both professionally and personally, has meant that archives may have begun to acquire more records created by and about women, whether or not archivists are conscious of this change.

Earnshaw provides a challenge which is more specifically relevant to the current discussion than Eastwood's call for evidence. She states that

acquisition policies should be based on a thorough understanding of women and women's organizations as records creators in order to acquire records. Archivists must become familiar with the kinds of records women and women's organizations create to understand the documentary residue of their actions and transactions.<sup>20</sup>

This challenge provides the basis for an examination of the record keeping practices of women's organizations. Such an examination will provide evidence and information for the archival community which does not exist at present.

### **Archival Literature: Delving into the notion of "Women's Materials"**

As alluded to by Earnshaw, the archival profession has been the audience for discussions that pertain to women as the creators and subjects of recorded information. Such discussions are pertinent to an examination of record keeping in women's organizations, as they lay out the criticisms that have been directed at the archival community in the past. They also form the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 99.

basis for an understanding of what archivists may have overlooked, providing challenges for the gathering of information within the context of the current discussion.

In the late seventies and early eighties, a number of journal articles presented the concept of "the new women's history" to the archival community. This concept was defined at the time as, "that of all women and their activities, achievements, and relationships, especially those not traditionally the concern of historians."<sup>21</sup> This history sought to examine the non-public activities of both elite and non-elite women, in contrast to traditional women's history, which took as its focus prominent white women.<sup>22</sup> The new women's history arose alongside a "new social history," which, as Veronica Strong-Boag puts it, was an "ally in the reconstruction" of Canadian historical scholarship, exploring the past "from the bottom up."<sup>23</sup> Both perspectives offered a new approach to the exploration of past experience, through investigation and interpretation.

The new women's history movement offered a number of challenges to the archival community. Historians such as Strong-Boag and Moseley challenged archivists to examine so-called "women's materials" from a number of perspectives, including acquisition and access. These historians charged archivists with failing to provide society with an archival record that mirrored the historical experiences of women.

Neglect of women has not only meant little or no space given to them in historical writings, but it has also meant little or no space given to women's papers in manuscript repositories and little or no

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<sup>21</sup> Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" 180.

<sup>22</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The New Woman and the New History," *Feminist Studies* 3, nos. 1/2 (1976): 186 (paper given at the 1975 SAA meeting), as cited in Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" 180.

<sup>23</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag, "Raising Clio's Consciousness: Women's History and Archives in Canada," *Archivaria* 6 (Summer 1978): 70.

effort to acquire these materials. Women themselves have often considered their papers trivia and treated them accordingly. Many papers have been lost forever, while others exist only as spotty or scattered bits and pieces.<sup>24</sup>

Joanna Schneider Zangrando called on the archival community to contribute to the process of altering social attitudes towards women, pointing to the power of the archivist in determining what materials make their way into archives through acquisition and the accessibility of such material based on what she terms retrieval schemes.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of acquisition, the new women's history pushed archivists to re-examine private sources of acquisition to ensure that they were acquiring more than just the records of powerful and established individuals and organizations which, for the most part, tended at that time to be male or male-dominated. These authors asked the archival community if it was not ignoring the contributions of individual women and organizations that acted on behalf of women's concerns. One element of this challenge asked archivists to make individual women and organizations aware of the possibility of donating their materials to an archives.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of access, the new women's history challenged archivists to explore the ways in which they were describing archival material, and if indeed they weren't "burying" the experiences of women within descriptions that reflected the lives and activities of men. Strong-Boag notes that finding aids often "hide" women behind married names or under initials, instead of

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<sup>24</sup> Eva Moseley, "Women in Archives: Documenting the History of Women in America," *American Archivist* 36 (1973): 215.

<sup>25</sup> Joanna Schneider Zangrando, "Women in Archives: An Historian's View on the Liberation of Clio," *American Archivist* 36 (April 1973): 207, 210.

<sup>26</sup> Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" 184-185.

indicating full first and maiden names.<sup>27</sup> The new women's history also pointed to the need for clearer access points in terms of public records, as much can be learned about the experiences of women of all classes and occupational categories<sup>28</sup> from an examination of such commonplace records as census material and case files.<sup>29</sup> Generally, the new women's history asked the archival community to provide pointers towards materials that may provide researchers with a clearer view of the historical experiences of women.

However, what the proponents of the new women's history were asking of archivists went above and beyond the normal tasks of the archival profession. While archivists needed to inform themselves as to the experiences of women in order to fairly acquire materials and provide adequate access, what was being asked of them was to treat the study of women's history differently than the profession does other fields of study. Strong-Boag tells archivists that "existing holdings should be reappraised for their value for women's history and additions must be made to present collections."<sup>30</sup> While more defined and concise access points may lead researchers to information that was previously "buried" within inadequate description and informed archival acquisition may lead to a more balanced archival record, Strong-Boag's request amounts to the special treatment of materials pertaining to the experiences of women. It is the job of the archivist to make well informed decisions about the acquisition of private materials and to create well written and linked descriptions, but it is not

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<sup>27</sup> Strong-Boag, "Raising Clio's Consciousness," 74. Also discussed in Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" 183.

<sup>28</sup> Moseley provides an extensive discussion of possible sources of information on the lives of working-class women such as domestic servants, as well as farm women, Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" 181-184.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>30</sup> Strong-Boag, "Raising Clio's Consciousness," 74.

the role of the archivist to treat any one particular community with favouritism. Ironically, it would be this favouritism that would distort the archival record.

Moseley calls on the archivist to "try to find and acquire at least some of the kinds of records that will document [women's] history directly. This requires a change in collecting policy and appraisal criteria."<sup>31</sup> Once again, the challenge presented by the new women's history may have been pushing archivists to act in a partial fashion. While it is true that acquisition policies and practices should be examined in order to assess whether or not institutions and individual archivists are adequately acquiring private materials pertaining to the experiences of women, asking archivists to actively "collect" such materials would amount to the special treatment that historians such as Moseley and Strong-Boag are criticizing.

Efforts have been made within the archival community to respond to the challenges of the new women's history movement. A number of guides to women's materials have been generated, both by institutions, regions, and provinces.<sup>32</sup> Archival description has also changed in that archivists have made efforts towards providing clearer descriptions which point researchers to records that provided information about the historical experiences of women. The Canadian Rules for Archival Description (RAD) has played a significant role

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<sup>31</sup> Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History,'" 184.

<sup>32</sup> Examples of such guides include Margaret Fulford, ed., *The Canadian Women's Movement, 1960-1990: A Guide to Archival Resources* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1992), Joanna Dean and David Fraser, *Women's Archives Guide: Manuscript Sources for the History of Women* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1991), Marilyn Hindmarch and Heather Reilly, *Some Sources for Women's History in the Public Archives of Canada* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1974), Jean Dryden, *Some Sources for Women's History at the Provincial Archives of Alberta* (Edmonton: Alberta Culture, Historical Resources Division, 1980), Linda Louise Hale, *Selected Bibliography of Manuscripts and Pamphlets Pertaining to Women Held by Archives, Libraries, Museums and Associations in British Columbia* (Toronto: OISE Press, 1978), and Vera Fast and Mary Kinnear, *Planting the Garden: An Annotated Archival Bibliography of the History of Women in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1987).

in such descriptions in that it has increased access points by ensuring that multiple levels of description can be created and that these descriptions provide clearer and more concise information about records.

In discussing the influence of the new women's history, it is important to note that it arose within a larger social dynamic that included second wave feminism.<sup>33</sup> While archivists were contemplating the challenges of the new women's history, they were also exposed to the numerous social and political arguments put forward by second wave feminists as well as the wider political and social debates that ensued. It is possible that this larger social context has had some impact upon archivists, making them more aware of the need to provide access to archival materials within their institutions that shed light on the experiences of women. The larger social, gender-focused debate may have also had an impact on the acquisition of so-called women's materials. As archivists have become aware of possible biases in practice, this self-reflection may have had some impact on their choices and perspectives. Hopefully this self-reflection has resulted in a more equitable and unbiased acquisition of archival materials in general.

Still speaking within the larger social context, while historians such as Strong-Boag and Moseley were calling for change within the archival community, women themselves were changing. It is not the intent of this discussion to provide an extensive history of the changing role of women in the last half of the twentieth century, but it should be noted, as it was at the beginning of this discussion, that society has experienced a tremendous degree

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<sup>33</sup> The first wave of the women's movement had begun in the mid 1800s, striving to attain legal, political, and sexual equality, but ultimately not achieving this goal and facing a backlash between 1930 and 1960, Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 96. Contemporary or second wave feminism of the late 1970s is defined in its attempts to destroy the sex/gender system in order to achieve a state of equality at "every level of existence," Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) as cited in Tong, *Feminist Thought*, 98.

of change in terms of how it views gender. More and more women have entered the public domain, taking on non-traditional roles and thus altering the face of the workforce.<sup>34</sup> As a result, more and more women have become involved in the creation of public records as *authors* and *addressees*, rather than simply as writers in a secretarial capacity. As the move of women into the public sphere has become commonplace, more women can be found in positions of power within public and private institutions, as was suggested by Earnshaw. This movement has doubtlessly altered the definition of *elite* that was presented by the women's history movement. Consequently, the face of private records creation has also changed, as more women make a name for themselves as individuals within various levels of society. So while the issues that were raised by Strong-Boag and Moseley have not necessarily been addressed in their entirety or adequately, society itself has changed the context of the discussion. It is this new context that requires examination. This thesis will attempt such an examination through a focus on the record keeping practices of women's organizations.

### **Framework for Analysis: Defining the Women's Organization**

Exploring the record keeping practices of women's organizations must involve a discussion of the organizational context within which these organizations exist. Providing such a context necessitates the creation of a framework for discussion. This framework must lay out definitions and concepts with which case organizations can be viewed. The first and most logical definition that is required is that of the women's organization.

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<sup>34</sup> Moseley points out that nineteenth century industrialization and medical discoveries allowed women to emerge more generally from the home and take on roles traditionally occupied by men, Moseley, "Documenting the History of Women in America," 216.



However, it is extremely difficult to define the *women's organization* as a concept. While it is most obvious that such an organization focuses in some way, shape, or form on women and issues specific to the female sex and gender, the difficulty lies in determining the parameters of this focus. Such parameters must be broad enough to encompass the multitudes of perspective that are represented in women's organizations. As such, they should not preclude the unique characteristics of any one individual organization.

Generally, social definitions are often utilized without a clear delineation as to their elements. Moreover, such definitions are rarely tested against the *membership* of a social group in order to establish the accuracy and pervasiveness of the definition as it reflects perspective and practice. It would seem that there is value in reexamining societal definitions in order to provide a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of the divisions within. A discussion of the characteristics of a women's organization will attempt to provide parameters for this specific social group.

The women's organization can be addressed in the context of a social movement which itself often lacks definition. The women's movement, and the organizations that work within it, possess a variety of complex and contradictory perspectives which are more often than not oversimplified or reified.<sup>35</sup> In a 1976 dialogue between Anne F. Scott and William H. Chafe, Chafe differentiates between group behaviour in the context of women acting self-consciously as a collective whole and women functioning similarly as individuals, regardless of a sense of collective identity.<sup>36</sup> Chafe's differentiation

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen Jay Gould defines reification as "our tendency to convert abstract concepts into entities," Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, 2d ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 56.

<sup>36</sup> Anne F. Scott and William H. Chafe, "What We Wish We Knew About Women: A Dialogue," in *Clio Was a Woman: Studies in the History of American Women*, ed. Mabel E. Deutrich and Virginia C. Purdy (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980), 6.

is important in the context of this notion of reification, as society often delegitimizes the perspectives of a social group if it fails to speak with one voice. However, a social group such as the women's movement is made up of a multiplicity of voices and is strengthened by such diversity. Generally, the recognition and validation of categories of feminist experience has fueled the creation of theory within the women's movement, challenging the notion of *woman* as an overriding, unitary category of experience.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, the construct of feminism is one which is often addressed without a clear delineation of its meaning.

Feminists do not agree among themselves on one all-inclusive and universally acceptable definition of the term *feminism*. Depending on a number of factors, *feminism* can mean different things and have a variety of functions . . . . Feminism may be a perspective, a world view, a political theory, a spiritual focus, or a kind of activism.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to note that there are clear divisions within feminist thought representing liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, and post-modern perspectives.<sup>39</sup> Any discussion of the women's movement and more specifically, any definition of a women's organization must be broad enough to incorporate all of these categories.

Providing a clear and concise, yet all-encompassing, definition of a women's organization necessitates the discussion of whether or not a women's organization must adhere to some component of feminism. A women's organization that is feminist in nature possesses a belief in the achievement of gender equality. This statement is often contradicted by common perception of

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<sup>37</sup> Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 171.

<sup>38</sup> Sheila Ruth, *Issues in Feminism: An Introduction to Women's Studies* (Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1990), 3.

<sup>39</sup> Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 1.

feminist practice as that which necessitates the dominance of the female sex and/or gender. Such misperception is further reinforced by organizations that do not define themselves as feminist, yet whose practices may still be considered within the context of feminism. Organizations such as Realistic, Equal and Active for Life (REAL) Women argue that the feminist community "has disenfranchised and devalued women with families who choose to remain in the home."<sup>40</sup> The perspectives of organizations such as REAL Women may embody a rejection of feminism, yet it may be argued that their practices inevitably work to better the experiences and lives of women. As such, these organizations may not place themselves within the feminist context, but may still be addressed within this framework. Susan Phillips argues for a relaxed or "liberalized" interpretation of feminism that allows for the creation of a collective identity which can incorporate organizations such as REAL Women, as well as other more traditional organizations like the Catholic Women's League.<sup>41</sup> So it would seem that a women's organization is innately working towards some form of gender equality, which may be defined uniquely in a given context and worked towards within specific means.

The basis of a women's organization is a collectively defined system of social relations that carries out specific activities and procedurally replaces its members. This basis is reflected within two definitions of the term *organization*. The Oxford Dictionary defines an organization as "organizing or being organized; organized body or system or society."<sup>42</sup> The University of British

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<sup>40</sup> Susan D. Phillips, "Meaning and Structure in Social Movements: Mapping the Network of National Canadian Women's Organizations," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* XXIV, no. 4 (December 1991): 764.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 766.

Columbia School of Library, Archival and Information Studies *Select List of Archival Terminology* defines an organization as

1. A system of interrelated social relations,
2. A social system that has an unequivocal collective identity, and exact roster of members, a program of activity, and procedures for replacing members.<sup>43</sup>

As women's organizations often fall into the category of voluntary organizations, Hart's discussion of such organizations provides further context for the creation of a framework in which to examine individual women's organizations. In her 1989 MAS thesis, *Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations*, Hart defines this type of association as a "formal, democratic, non-profit organization of members who freely choose to work together towards a shared purpose, independently of other organizations."<sup>44</sup> Most voluntary associations are "limited by age, gender, location, profession, religion, class or some other factor."<sup>45</sup> While all of these factors may apply within the context of a women's organization, the predominant limitation that applies to this discussion is that of gender.

Hart addresses the life cycle of an organization. This life cycle can be applied generally to the life of a women's organization as it contains none of Hart's organizational limitations. Hart notes that an organization arises "in response to a perceived need which can be satisfied through collective effort."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> J.B. Sykes, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 7th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982): 719.

<sup>43</sup> "Select List of Archival Terminology " (School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of British Columbia, n.d., photocopy), 13.

<sup>44</sup> Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 16. In creating this definition, Hart utilizes the definition of an organization employed by Theodore Caplow, *Principles of Organization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 1, as cited in Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 14. Caplow's definition echoes the definition employed by the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies.

<sup>45</sup> Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 18.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

It goes on to give itself a title and structure, publicizing its purpose so as to recruit members.<sup>47</sup> As an organization grows, membership swells and administrative structure becomes more complex, both of which are accompanied by a growth in records creation. There is an "increase in formalization, types, and volume [of records] at each stage."<sup>48</sup> With the growth and maturation of an organization, meetings are regularized, there are more nominal members, the executive works longer hours, reports to membership pass from oral to written, the means of joining becomes more formal, and income and property increases.<sup>49</sup> Hart states that many voluntary organizations have a short life span, while others establish secondary organizations or relationships with other organizations, the latter two developments signifying stability. An organization also derives long-term stability by securing membership on a permanent basis.

Hart breaks down the notion of the voluntary association into eight overlapping types. These types can be utilized to define and describe the women's organizations which will be examined in this thesis and as such are part of the larger framework utilized in this discussion. Both voluntary and women's organizations may function as:

- (1) political action associations . . . . aimed at achieving political power and/or using political means to modify some aspect(s) of society;
- (2) professional or occupational associations of persons educated

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<sup>47</sup> Hart notes that this process may involve the modeling of another organization. In setting out the life cycle of an organization, Hart makes use of the work of F. Stuart Chapin and John E. Tsouderos, "Formalization Observed in Ten Voluntary Associations: Concepts, Morphology, Process," *Pacific Sociology Review* 13 (1970): 308-309, as cited in Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 23.

<sup>48</sup> Here Hart is referring to Chapin and Tsouderos' five stages of growth of an organization, as cited in Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 23.

<sup>49</sup> Chapin and Tsouderos, "Formalization Observed in Ten Voluntary Associations," as cited in Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 23.

- for or working in the same profession, meeting for purposes of information exchange, networking, and achieving common goals;
- (3) research associations engaged in scholarly research in a certain subject area . . . . ;
  - (4) economic associations including cooperatives, business associations, . . . . intended to improve the financial resources and working conditions of their members;
  - (5) religious associations . . . . aimed at promoting religious dogmas and values;
  - (6) service associations committed to improving the lives of disadvantaged groups and persons, particularly through education, medical assistance, and charity;
  - (7) self-help associations which work towards the improvement of the members' lives . . . . ; [and]
  - (8) social associations which are concerned with entertainment and social interaction on the basis of shared activities . . . . or shared personal traits . . . .<sup>50</sup>

Such categorization is based on the central function expressed in an organization's constitution.<sup>51</sup>

While women's organizations *may* be examined as voluntary organizations, and as such Hart's analysis provides a definitional basis for such an examination, the activities and structures of women's organizations require a more specific analysis. The characteristics of democratic control, formal structure, and organizational independence may be addressed in a unique light when applied to a women's organization. These organizations have arisen in a unique context, deriving structure and meaning out of a critique of organizational systems that have not addressed women's needs, abilities, concerns, or voices.

Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail provide the basis for a detailed examination of women's organizations in their work, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada*,

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<sup>50</sup> Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 25-26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

and as such add another more directly applicable layer to the framework for the analysis of specific organizations. The authors place the women's organization within the context of the Canadian women's movement.<sup>52</sup> They note that this movement has established itself over the course of the last twenty years, through a "process of rejecting the traditional, experimenting with new forms and structures, and creating feminist alternatives."<sup>53</sup> The beginnings of this process arose out of the experiences of women who felt powerless in traditional forms of organization and in response, began experimenting with new forms and processes. The new models that began to emerge reflected attempts to both empower members and provide a means by which goals could be attained. Feminist alternatives took the form of study groups, consciousness raising groups, women's caucuses, women's organizations, women's centres, services, and businesses.<sup>54</sup> The three authors note that "[w]hat holds a movement together is more ideological in nature than what is necessary to sustain an organization."<sup>55</sup> The ideology of the *women's* movement, in this case, is a commitment to women's liberation, inclusive of such beliefs as the *personal is political* and *sisterhood*.<sup>56</sup> This commitment to women's liberation can be found within the forms and processes of individual organizations.

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<sup>52</sup> Phillips discusses social movements, such as the women's movement, as differentiated but interconnected networks of organizations that sponsor meaning, acting upon both state and civil society. Phillips, "Meaning and Structure in Social Movements," 756-757.

<sup>53</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 229. Phillips contrasts the Canadian women's movement with Britain and Western Europe, citing the strength and diversity of nationally based Canadian women's organizations. Phillips, "Meaning and Structure in Social Movements," 761.

<sup>54</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 229.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>56</sup> Sisterhood can be defined as the belief that the women's movement is open to all women regardless of their politics, Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 240.

Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail echo previous definitions of organization in pointing to elements such as structure, membership, politics, norms, and goals.<sup>57</sup> However, the models of organization that have arisen in the context of the women's movement are quite unique, and as such provide the basis for the analysis of individual women's organizations. The first of these models, *institutionalized feminism*, arose out of organizations that were based in traditional processes and hierarchical organizational structures.<sup>58</sup> This feminist organizational model attempts to change the system from within, modifying traditional structures and processes to meet specific membership needs.<sup>59</sup> However, departing from the traditional, there is an emphasis on a deeper involvement on the part of the membership in terms of knowledge, awareness, and participation.

*Grass-roots feminism*, the second and most dominant model of feminist organization, did not arise out of any particular organizational form. Rather, its membership came from other social movements such as student and civil-rights experiences. The critique of traditional organizations employed by grass-roots feminism originally stemmed from a belief in democratic centralism - theoretically all group members participate in the making and carrying out of decisions.<sup>60</sup> Generally, the formation of this second model was a reaction by women who had participated in left-wing social movements and organizations, and were attempting to establish something more effective for women. What

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<sup>57</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 230.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 231. An earlier wave of women organization's such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the National Council of Women (NCW) are exemplary of this belief in traditional process and structure, stemming from an ideology defined as *maternal feminism*, as discussed in Phillips, "Meaning and Structure in Social Movements," 762.

<sup>59</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 233.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 231-232.



has become known as the *feminist alternative* is defined through three principles: "a rejection of the notions of hierarchy and leadership, an emphasis on personal experience, and a belief in the importance of process."<sup>61</sup>

Many Canadian women's organizations have adopted the grass-roots feminist model, modifying it based upon organizational analysis, goals, and strategies in order to create a unique structure and process which most directly addresses the needs of their membership.<sup>62</sup> In their early manifestations, grass-roots feminist organizations focused on the importance of personal experience, as was often embodied in small consciousness-raising groups. While these first applications of the feminist process varied from one organization to another, all incorporated the following elements: "collective organization, no leadership, rotation of administrative tasks, agreement by consensus, and an emphasis on personal experience."<sup>63</sup> While the predominant grass-roots experience is relevant to an examination of specific women's organizations, the institutionalized feminist model may also prove applicable and therefore neither model can be discounted.

Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail point to two predominant issues of feminist organizing which are relevant in the context of a framework of analysis for individual organizations - internal process and form. Stemming from the belief that there is no *one* feminist model of internal process, a women's organization must determine what unique processes would best further its goals. While early grass-roots feminist organizations completely rejected the processes that were characteristic of traditional models of organization, many women's organizations have come to modify their strict application of the grass-

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 236.

roots model, incorporating any structured or hierarchical elements that facilitate core beliefs.

Originally, the grass-roots model had rejected notions of leadership, defined membership and recruitment, and centralized decision-making. Notions of hierarchy and difference had also been rejected, with a new emphasis placed upon a belief in sisterhood and consensus. Gradually, as women's organizations began to realize that leadership had simply become covert, membership recruitment suffered from a lack of criteria, and members possessed diverse and conflicting beliefs and perspectives which made criteria necessary and consensus difficult, they began to modify their original definitions of internal process to include formalized leadership, membership criteria, and participatory democracy.<sup>64</sup> Such modifications can be considered in the light of Hart's discussion of the growth of a voluntary organization. Organizational stability in the context of the new grass-roots model required critical examinations of internal process and resulted in necessary changes within individual organizations.

The second predominant issue of feminist organizing is that of form. Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail note that an organization must determine the overall form or structure "most appropriate to the group's particular feminist agenda."<sup>65</sup> Inclusive in this determination is an identification of the type of issues addressed by the group, its size, and the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the organization. These characteristics have implications for the longevity of a women's organization.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 237-244.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>66</sup> Debra C. Minkoff, "The Organization of Survival: Women's and Racial-Ethnic Voluntarist and Activist Organizations, 1955-1985," *Social Forces* 71, no. 4 (June 1993): 905.

The first element of form or structure identified by Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail is that of organizational type. The first of these types is the *umbrella* or coalition organization. This type of organization is predominantly comprised of other member organizations, rarely attracting or maintaining individuals as members. The National Action Committee on the Status of Women is an example of an umbrella organization, uniting over 500 organizations within its membership.<sup>67</sup>

The positive aspect of this way of organizing is that it focuses on what large numbers of organizations and individuals within the movement can agree on, and is thus able to validate the differences among groups while concentrating on their shared viewpoints.<sup>68</sup>

*Multi-issue* organizations, the second type of organization identified by the three authors, are individual groups that address a wide range of issues from within a common political analysis.<sup>69</sup> Women's centres are an example of this form of organization as they present a common front of support services regarding multiple issues such as domestic violence, rape, single parenthood, and poverty. The strength of this type of organization is its ability to examine individual issues and present them in the context of a larger feminist perspective.

Finally, *single issue* organizations focus upon one issue, uniting many different political analyses in a common strategy. This type of feminist organization is most common as it channels a diverse membership toward the accomplishment of one task, such as the legalization of midwifery. The strength of single issue organizations is their ability to unite a broad range of members

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<sup>67</sup> In 1988 there were 554 member bodies, Anne Molgat, "An Action That Will Not Be Allowed To Subside: NAC's First Twenty Years" (National Action Committee on the Status of Women, Information Brief, 1993), 1.

<sup>68</sup> Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change*, 245.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

possessing varied knowledge and skills which often allows the organization to successfully address the issue at hand.

A second component of feminist organizational form is size. The size of a women's organization is dependent upon its political agenda and strategy and may change over time and vary from group to group, not necessarily equating itself with effectiveness.<sup>70</sup> Each individual organization must determine the desired membership size required to carry out its objectives. However, the membership of most organizations is small and is usually associated with structure. Umbrella and single-issue organizations tend to be large as they either represent a large number of people or only need to focus on one issue. Organizations focused on multiple issues tend to be smaller in size, as they require a membership that is united by a common political analysis.<sup>71</sup>

The third and final element of feminist organizational form pertains to the heterogeneity and/or homogeneity of an organization's membership. Within this element, both characteristics may apply to an individual organization. Early feminist organizations saw themselves as homogeneous within the context of the larger women's movement. Yet the experiences of these original organizations revealed a diversity of perspectives, objectives, and methods. In some cases, these experiences also revealed a failure on the part of women's organizations to acknowledge diversity in terms of race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail point to the role of feminism in the comprehension and exposure of the power relations that have been built into organizational structures and processes, inclusive of those which define themselves as feminist.<sup>72</sup> In its attempts to identify and address *gender*

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 249.

inequality, feminism may also offer tools which are useful in acknowledging and understanding *various* forms of inequality.

The complexity of internal process and form that may be found within a women's organization is evidenced within what Heidi Gottfried and Penny Weiss deem the *compound feminist organization*. While this compound organization could be addressed as a fourth type of organization within the framework set out earlier, it is important to note that Adamson, Briskin, and MacPhail point to type of organization in the context of *issue*. What Gottfried and Weiss address acknowledges the dynamic nature of grass-roots feminism in the context of the larger notions of internal process and form. Indeed, the compound feminist organization may even take into account the institutionalized feminist organizational model in that it acknowledges the modifications that institutionalized feminist organizing has made to the traditional organizational model. The compound feminist organization brings together multiple feminist frameworks, a variety of tactics, and flexibility, increasing the potential success of an organization by crossing over or combining organizational and theoretical elements and characteristics.<sup>73</sup> Generally, it reflects variations in form, structure, and feminist belief.

Both the grass-roots and compound feminist organizational models are based in an understanding of early attempts at feminist organizing which approached process and structure theoretically. Practical application and self-examination allowed for the creation of a complex relationship between theory and practice in the creation of organizations which have made use of the most relevant elements of organizational theory, both within and outside of the feminist perspective. Gottfried and Weiss point to the "innate relationship

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<sup>73</sup> Heidi Gottfried and Penny Weiss, "A Compound Feminist Organization: Purdue University's Council on the Status of Women," *Women & Politics* 14, no.2 (1994): 34.

between (organizational) theory and practice."<sup>74</sup> Such an approach was further enhanced within early women's organizations by the diverse perspectives of individual women who were looking to create a unique organizational context.

The discussion of the women's organization within the context of the *compound feminist organization* further emphasizes the difficulty of creating clean theoretical categories of feminist organization which may be utilized in the discussion of individual organizations. Women's organizations continue to change both internally and categorically, in their attempts to establish frameworks and practices that allow for the efficient and effective address of the diverse issues that affect women's lives. Examination of the practices and perspectives of individual organizations in the context of a boundary such as the compound feminist organization allows for the exposure of unique organizational elements which may not fit into any existing categories.<sup>75</sup> The inclusion of both institutionalized and grass-roots models of organizing further enhance such an examination.

The works of Hart, Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, and Gottfried and Weiss provide the framework for a complex analysis of individual women's organizations. These authors have addressed the ideological, procedural, and structural components of what, as cumulatively defined throughout the course of this discussion, can be deemed women's organizations. The women's organization works towards equality through unique means. It is primarily defined within the context of the voluntary organization in that women's organizations are predominantly formal, democratic, and non-profit, with a

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 41.

defined membership that gathers freely and works towards the attainment of a goal through independent means. However, the women's organization requires more unique identification in that it has arisen within a unique social context.

While women's organizations can be discussed in terms of type, size, and self awareness, they are specifically characterized by the unique structural and functional nature of each *individual* organization. Individual women's organizations have taken those qualities of more traditional organizations which they deem useful and incorporated them within the unique context of a variety of issues which pertain directly to the lives of women. While providing a succinct and encompassing definition is difficult, the women's organization incorporates those varying elements of internal process and structure which best facilitate the attainments of its core values, focusing on a unique interpretation of the attainment of equality for women, predominantly, but not exclusively through feminist means and beliefs.

The current discussion attempts to apply a complex understanding of the women's organization to individual organizations. Such an examination will reveal the unique beliefs and practices of three different women's organizations in Vancouver, British Columbia. In an attempt to provide the archival community with a complex understanding of this type of organization that will be relevant to archival practice, the discussion will also address the record keeping practices of these organizations. It is this record keeping context which will add a unique component to both an understanding of women's organizations *and* records creators. Records of organizations are "the forms that externalize social consciousness in social practices, objectify reasoning, knowledge, memory,

decision-making, judgement, [and] evaluation."<sup>76</sup> Knowledge of the record keeping practices of women's organizations is meant to provide the informed archivist with a tool that will enable him or her to acquire an archival record that presents an accurate reflection of society.

The argument has been made that archives are not acquiring the records of women's organizations because this type of organization does not generally maintain adequate record keeping systems. Darlene Roth argues that the records of women's voluntary associations are often lost in the transition between the homes of individual members, with members possessing little knowledge of the content and historical relevance of these records.<sup>77</sup> A direct examination of the record keeping practices of women's organizations will reveal the record keeping reality of these organizations, providing archivists with an insight which will challenge and direct their perspectives and practices.

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<sup>76</sup> Dorothy E. Smith, "Textually Mediated Social Organization," *International Social Science Journal* 36 (1984): 60, as cited in Catherine F. Schryer, "Records as Genre," *Written Communication* 10, no. 2 (April 1993): 205.

<sup>77</sup> Darlene Roth, "Pandora's New Box: A Look at the Records of Women's Voluntary Associations," *Georgia Archive* 7(1979): 38.



## CHAPTER TWO

### A Methodology for the Case Study of Three Women's Organizations

The record keeping practices of three selected women's organizations are approached in the context of a specific research method, a qualitative case study employing open-ended focus interviews and observation. This method allows for the examination of the history and practices of the three case organizations in a flexible manner, with the subjects of the interviews providing unique perspectives regarding their respective organizations.

An examination of the record keeping practices of women's organizations is by nature basic research. Basic research is defined by the investigation of a phenomenon "in order to get at the nature of reality with regard to that phenomenon."<sup>78</sup> The phenomenon addressed in this investigation is the women's organization, more specifically the record keeping practices of such organizations. This investigation attempts to address the nature of these practices by allowing representatives of three organizations to provide their own unique contextual descriptions of the history and activities of their respective organizations. As such, this investigation may provide the basis for a more thorough understanding of women's organizations as record keepers in that it both establishes an understanding of three specific organizations and sets out a framework for the examination of other women's organizations.

The selection of a basic research approach for the examination of women's organizations is supported by the lack of information that exists about this type of organization. Given that gender is an often forgotten factor, exploring its role often necessitates basic examination for informational

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2d ed. (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990), 152.

purposes. Carol Tavis, in her book *The Mismeasure of Woman*, explores gender similarities and differences, exploding a number of common assumptions that are gender related. Tavis validates the notion of basic research:

Throughout this book, I will be examining the stories behind the headlines and popular theories of sex differences, travelling the trail of the universal male, showing how the belief in male normalcy and female deficiency guides scientific inquiry, shapes its results, and determines which findings make the news and which findings we live by . . . . My goal is not to analyze, yet alone solve, all the problems that women and men face in their complex lives. But by bringing hidden assumptions into the light, I hope to show how our ways of thinking about women and men lead to certain predictable results for all of us . . . .<sup>79</sup>

Tavis' statement about her own investigation supports the current investigation of gender and record keeping in the context of women's organizations. It allows for the provision of information pertaining to a body of records creators of which little is known.

### **Qualitative Research**

The research method utilized in this study is qualitative, employing interview and observation. A qualitative method is conducive to the examination of the activities, perspectives, and record keeping practices of organizations, as this method is "noncontrolling, holistic and case oriented, about processes, open and flexible, diverse in methods, humanistic, inductive, and scientific."<sup>80</sup> Such characteristics are particularly relevant to an investigation of the unique activities, perspectives, and practices of three

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<sup>79</sup> Carol Tavis, *The Mismeasure of Woman* (Toronto: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 24-25.

<sup>80</sup> Raya Fidel, "Qualitative Methods in Information Retrieval Research," *Library and Information Science Research*, 15 (Summer 1993): 219.

women's organizations, as it attempts to reveal complex information about each individual organization. The narrative results of this investigation will faithfully convey the qualitative nature of the data by providing a broad description of each organization.<sup>81</sup>

A number of methodological issues arise in the context of qualitative research. Issues of reliability and validity are paramount as the flexible nature of qualitative research does not necessarily accommodate the constancy of application, condition, result, and generalization. However, both reliability and validity may benefit from the use of a flexible process in that it allows the researcher to correct mistakes by identifying inconsistencies and redirecting the line of inquiry.<sup>82</sup>

Reliability, or "the extent to which repeated employment of the same research instrument, under conditions taken to be constant, produces the same result,"<sup>83</sup> has been deemed inapplicable to qualitative research, given its flexible and dynamic nature.<sup>84</sup> This study is characteristic of such flexibility, allowing for the inclusion of individualized questions as guided by the responses of the individuals interviewed. Such flexibility of delivery was important given the need to obtain specific information that may not have been apparent at the time of the determination of interview questions. However, this investigation attempts to maintain a certain level of consistency from one

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<sup>81</sup> Brett Sutton, "The Rationale for Qualitative Research: A Review of Principles and Theoretical Foundations," *Library Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (1993): 425.

<sup>82</sup> Kathryn M. Borman, Margaret D. Le Compte, and Judith Prelissle Goetz, "Ethnographic and Qualitative Research Design and Why it Doesn't Work," *American Behavioral Scientist* 30, no. 1 (September/October 1986): 52.

<sup>83</sup> Raya Fidel, "The Case Study Method: A Case Study," *Library and Information Science Research* 6 (1984): 276.

<sup>84</sup> Fidel, "Qualitative Methods in Information Retrieval Research," 231.

interview to another, utilizing the same instruments, standardized questions, and observation guidelines for each of the three organizations.

Issues of validity, or "the degree to which the researcher has investigated what he sets out to investigate,"<sup>85</sup> can be minimized through a three-way process of interview, observation, and document examination. Raya Fidel defines this three-way process as methodological triangulation, or the use of more than one technique of data collection, which allows the researcher to overcome deficiencies in each method.<sup>86</sup> This study employs the written notation of observations, both during and after each tape recorded interview, in order to provide additional contextual information. When they were provided by the organizations, documents were also examined.

During the conduct of the interview with two members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, technical difficulties with the tape recorder resulted in the absence of a tape recorded interview. In order to minimize the impact that this difficulty may have had on the validity of the results, notations were made immediately after the interview was completed. These written notes were then forwarded to the interviewees for verification, with allowances for the inclusion of any further *clarification* deemed relevant by the interviewee.

While such a variation in the recording of the interview may decrease the overall validity of this discussion, every effort was made to ensure that the information received during the interview process was accurate according to the interview participants. A pilot interview had been conducted prior to the case

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<sup>85</sup> Fidel, "The Case Study Method," 276.

<sup>86</sup> Fidel, "Qualitative Methods in Information Retrieval Research," 227. Robert Grover and Jack Glazier also discuss this three-way process, identifying it as a cross-check system, Robert Grover and Jack Glazier, "Implications for Application of Qualitative Methods to Library and Information Science Research," *Library and Information Science Research* 7 (1985): 255.

study and no technical difficulties had been detected at that time. As well, three prior interviews had not revealed any technical problems. The experience of technical difficulties in the interview recording process proved challenging in terms of the accurate and consistent recording of results and may have affected the overall validity of the results and study. However, the alternative approach taken in response, reflective of the triangulation method, proved effective in terms of retaining the informational nature of the responses provided during the interview.

One of the goals of research, whether qualitative or quantitative, is the ability to generalize the results of a specific investigation to the larger population and as such, generate theory about the larger group. The ability to generalize about the larger population of women's organizations is a difficult process, given the diverse nature of this organizational community. As such, this investigation simply attempts to lend insight into a particular group of records creators that has not been examined within an archival context. Robert Stake notes that the "insistence on the ultimacy of theory building appears to be diminishing in qualitative social science."<sup>87</sup> Such is the case with this investigation.

### **Case Studies**

The case study is a specific approach to data collection and analysis, defined by an interest in individual cases or objects as opposed to methods of inquiry.<sup>88</sup> Qualitative methodology can be strengthened through the case study,

<sup>87</sup> Robert E. Stake, "Case Studies," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1990), 238.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 236.

as it allows the subject of the research to provide specific perspectives and meanings.<sup>89</sup> This case study attempted to allow the individuals speaking on behalf of the three organizations to provide their individual perspectives, as reflective of their respective organization and practices. The strength of the case-based approach is its ability to reveal a contemporary phenomenon in its practical context.<sup>90</sup> The contemporary phenomenon of interest is the women's organization, and specifically, their record keeping practices.

Case studies can be utilized for three purposes: exploration, description, and explanation, and can employ single-case or multiple-case design. This particular case study is both explorative and descriptive in that addresses the activities and practices of organizations which were previously unexplored in an archival context. It employs multiple-case design by discussing the practices of three organizations.

Both multiple and single case designs use a process of selection that focuses on extreme or exemplary, as opposed to representative, cases.<sup>91</sup> No attempts were made to select cases which were representative of women's organizations. Given the varied nature of this type of organization, a representative sample would be difficult to obtain. As Stake argues, the case study approach provides an opportunity to learn, overriding the importance of a highly representative sample.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 239-240.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Yin, "The Case Study as a Serious Research Strategy," *Knowledge, Creation, Diffusion, Utilization* 3, no.1 (September 1981): 98.

<sup>91</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1980), 101, as cited in Yin, "The Case Study as a Serious Research Strategy," 101.

<sup>92</sup> Stake, "Case Studies," 243-245.

## **Interview and Observation**

The case study carried out in this investigation employed open-ended focus interviews and observation. Focus interviews utilize a specific set of questions presented over a short period of time and may be open-ended in that they elicit opinion and insight as well as fact, allowing the researcher to play a role in defining the context and initiating topics.<sup>93</sup> The questions utilized in this discussion were established prior to the interviewing process (Appendix A) and utilized directly during the interviews. It is argued that such standardization allows for a systematic interview with reduced judgement on the part of the interviewer.<sup>94</sup> However, this interview attempted to obtain unique and complex information and as such acknowledged the unique context of each organization. As a result, if additional questions were required for clarification or a question needed to be reworded in order to provide further understanding for the individuals involved, this process of alteration was carried out. Such flexibility served to provide further insights into the organizations under investigation.

Observation protocols were established within the context of this case study that allowed for notations regarding the record keeping processes of the organizations to be made both during the interview and afterward. Such observational notes took into account the physical nature of records maintenance within each organization. Observation is defined as the noting of behaviours and environmental conditions in either a formal or casual collection

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<sup>93</sup> Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1984), 83, and Marion Paris, *Library School Closings: Four Case Studies* (New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1988), 23-24. Also discussed in Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2d ed., 278.

<sup>94</sup> Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 2d ed., 285.

process.<sup>95</sup> Information obtained through this process of observation can be useful in terms of understanding the context of the activities and practices of the organizations.

### **Description of the Case Study**

Three women's organizations in Vancouver, British Columbia were selected to participate in this investigation. These organizations included the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, British Columbia Branch, The Western Businesswomen's Association, and the West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund. Organizations within the city of Vancouver were chosen as it was decided that they would be the most accessible. Sampling was not employed in the selection of the involved organizations as it was not deemed to be relevant to this particular investigation. As stated above, what is of importance is the opportunity to learn from direct evidence of the experiences of these organizations.

It was also decided that organizations with privacy concerns regarding access to personal information, such as transition houses and rape relief centres, would not be approached to participate in this study. Such organizations have unique concerns surrounding the creation, maintenance, and use of records containing personal information and therefore warrant a specific examination of their own. The avoidance of organizations with privacy concerns reduces the complexity of the present investigation and allows for a more detailed study of basic record keeping practices within women's organizations.

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<sup>95</sup> Yin, *Case Study Research*, 85.



The organizations were initially contacted by mail. Introductory letters were sent to the presidents of all three organizations, as well as to the individual or individuals primarily responsible for the maintenance of records within each organization. In the case of the West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, the Legal Director was also contacted as it was thought that she would be active in the creation of records and therefore able to provide insight into the creation process. Individuals were also asked to forward the letter to a more appropriate candidate if they did not feel qualified to participate in the study.

The consent form (Appendix B) that was sent to potential participants provided a description of the study and allowed for the recipient to agree to or decline participation in the study, as well as to permit the disclosure of their personal identity, as it was felt that this disclosure would allow for the presentation of more detailed information about each of the organizations. Duplicate consent forms were included with the introductory letter, allowing for the retention of one copy of the form by consenting individuals. Sample interview questions and observation summaries were also included (Appendices C and D), in order to provide the individuals with some understanding as to the process involved.

Six individuals representing the three organizations agreed to participate in the case study and interview appointments were made by telephone. Consent forms were either returned by mail or at the point of the interview. The interviews were carried out between May 29, 1996 and September 21, 1996, taking into account the numerous demands on the schedules of the involved individuals. The length of the interviews varied from thirty to ninety minutes, reflecting the flexible nature of the open-ended interview process. Interviews were recorded on cassette tapes and observations were made immediately

after each interview. In all instances, individuals provided publications or copies of documents, and these supplemented the information provided by the interviews and observation notes. Written notes were made from each taped interview, inclusive of the direct comments of individuals. The combination of interview tapes and notations, observational notes, and the examination of documents contributed to the discussion of the three organizations which will now be presented.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Record Keeping in Three Vancouver, British Columbia Women's Organizations**

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Western Businesswomen's Association, and the West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund are three organizations that have established distinctive record keeping practices. Each organization can be examined with the framework established in Chapter One. This framework employs an understanding of the women's organization through the use of three feminist models: institutionalized, grass-roots, and compound feminist organizing. In order to apply the framework to the three organizations, specific information must be provided about each organization. Information is derived from the interview and observation process utilized in this investigation and will be presented as such.

Within the discussion of each individual organization, information will be divided between the organization's administrative history and background and its records creation and keeping practices. The discussion of the administrative history and background will incorporate the framework for analysis. The record keeping practices implemented by each organization are reflected in the unique and interwoven processes of records creation, maintenance, and use, and as such will be discussed as they were presented within the interview process. A final discussion will compare the specific record keeping practices employed by the three organizations.

## **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom - British Columbia Branch**

### **Administrative History and Background**

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, British Columbia Branch (WILPF-BC) was established in 1917, under its original name, WILPF, Vancouver Branch.<sup>96</sup> WILPF-BC is a branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, International (WILPF International), which is based in Geneva, Switzerland. This international parent organization has its roots in an anti-war gathering of more than a thousand women in The Hague, the Netherlands in April of 1915, at which point the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace was formed.<sup>97</sup> This Committee became the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1919. At the time of the interview, WILPF International maintained branches in forty-two countries. Delegates from these various countries meet every three years to elect international officers and formulate policies and programs.

WILPF-BC functions within the context of its membership in a larger parent body. As such, WILPF-BC can be seen as a member of an *umbrella organization*, WILPF International. While individual members such as WILPF-BC may establish independent activities for a given year that vary from other

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<sup>96</sup> Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice In British Columbia: Helena Gutteridge the Unknown Reformer* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 245. The organization took on its new name in 1991, with the approval of the Secretary-General of its parent body, Carolyn Kline and Joyce Lydiard, interview by author, interview notes, 21 September 1996, and Carolyn Kline, letter to author clarifying interview notes, 17 October 1996.

<sup>97</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, British Columbia Branch, Membership Pamphlet (Vancouver British Columbia, n.d.), 1, and Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice In British Columbia*, 244.

WILPF members, WILPF International is able to unite its branches within the context of larger international objectives, utilizing the diversity of its membership. WILPF International's size, as reflected within its international representation, is also indicative of an umbrella organization.

The community served by WILPF-BC is that of all women, internationally, nationally, and locally.<sup>98</sup> WILPF-BC's primary purposes and objectives are similar to those of its international parent. The League works to educate, inform, and empower women through campaigns to promote disarmament and human rights and missions into areas of conflict. The aims and principles of WILPF International include the gathering of

women of different political and philosophical views who are united in the determination to study, make known and help abolish the political, social, economic and psychological causes of war.<sup>99</sup>

The League's primary objectives include

to prevent war by ongoing mediation and negotiated settlement of conflicts;  
to strengthen the UN and its Specialized Agencies;  
to abolish violence and injustices against women; and  
to nurture our environment.<sup>100</sup>

The objectives, aims, principles, and historical roots of WILPF International reflect a consciousness of both the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the organization's membership. Carolyn Kline, President of WILPF-BC at the time that the interview was conducted, noted that the roots of the organization are embedded within the women's suffrage movement, a political philosophy which unites WILPF members. Membership diversity is

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<sup>98</sup> Kline and Lydiard, interview by author, interview notes, 21 September 1996, and Joyce Lydiard, letter to author clarifying interview notes, 26 October 1996.

<sup>99</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, British Columbia Branch, Membership Pamphlet, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 3.

acknowledged within the aims and principles of WILPF International, which identify members as women of different political and philosophical views.

WILPF-BC carries out a number of activities which complement those of its international parent. Joyce Lydiard, Corresponding Secretary at the time that the interview was conducted, indicated that members determine the focus of action on a yearly basis, within the context of the WILPF-BC mandate. For example, four members of WILPF-BC attended the United Nations fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and within this context the organization focused on addressing the root causes of "poverty, violence, environmental degradation and other issues/concerns as listed in the UN Platform for Action."<sup>101</sup> Throughout the year, WILPF-BC organizes public lectures, study groups, leafleting vigils, and commemorative programs on Mother's Day and Hiroshima Day.<sup>102</sup> It also provides financial aid to women from developing countries for local initiatives and WILPF conference attendance and generally encourages women to work toward peace, freedom, and justice. More generally, WILPF-BC participates in projects that are coordinated at national and international levels.

In the 1930s, the Vancouver Branch of WILPF was one of six Canadian branches, alongside Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, and Edmonton.<sup>103</sup> One of the organization's objectives during this time period was social transformation.<sup>104</sup> The Vancouver Branch disbanded during WWII and reorganized again in 1947. During the post-war period, the organization actively addressed housing shortages and the relocation of Japanese

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<sup>101</sup> Lydiard, letter to author clarifying interview notes.

<sup>102</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, British Columbia Branch, Membership Pamphlet, 3.

<sup>103</sup> Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice In British Columbia*, 249.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

Canadians who had been interned in 1942, as well as presenting opposition to the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.<sup>105</sup> Membership in the Vancouver Branch of WILPF dwindled in the 1950s. Then President, Jean Cole, noted at the time that "the mere mention of peace, co-operation and understanding in world terms, tends to either send people scurrying for shelter or bring out the tyrants and hypocrites who shout 'Communists' or 'eccentrics.'

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WILPF-BC maintains a loosely hierarchical structure typical of many volunteer organizations. The organization has a president, vice-president, and treasurer. Two secretarial positions are maintained, corresponding and recording. Committees include Programme, Social Action, Environment, Publicity, Networking, and Membership. The chairs of each committee sit for a two year term<sup>107</sup> and are filled or replaced through a Nominating Committee, whose chair is appointed by the president. However, most positions are filled by acclamation. Individuals are also assigned responsibility for the telephone tree, newsletter, mediation, and mailing.<sup>108</sup> Of particular note is the unique position of historian/resident poet.

Kline indicated that WILPF-BC has undergone a number of changes in the last decade. The addition of the quarterly newsletter, *Peace Lines*, and an increase in the number of active officers and committee chairs has taken place since the late 1980s. As well, two types of meetings are now held by WILPF-BC, a programmed meeting inclusive of a speaker and a business and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 251-52.

<sup>106</sup> *Vancouver Sun*, August 16, 1955, 4, as cited in Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice In British Columbia*, 257.

<sup>107</sup> This two year term was initiated in 1993, Kline, letter to author clarifying interview notes.

<sup>108</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, British Columbia Branch, "Officers and Committee Chairs," *Peace Lines*, 6, no. 1 ( March 1996): 2.

discussion meeting. Since the early 1990s, the organization has also held unstructured weekly meetings. Prior to 1988 there were no standing committees, one monthly meeting, and there had not been a newsletter for some time. At the time of the interview with Kline and Lydiard, WILPF-BC was planning a weekly study group on human rights and the United Nations, in order to develop a group of individuals who would be able to speak on this subject at community organizations and schools.

WILPF-BC maintains relationships with a variety of local and national organizations, including Voice of Women, the Raging Grannies, the Canadian Peace Alliance, End the Arms Race, the United Nations Association, Women's March Against Poverty, and the Canada-Cuba Friendship Committee.<sup>109</sup> Internationally, WILPF has consultative status as a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) with the United Nations and six of its specialized agencies, putting forward proposals and suggestions based on information from and the activities of its members.

The framework for analysis established within this discussion provides a further understanding of WILPF-BC. WILPF-BC members gather freely in order to work towards a shared purpose, the elimination of the varied causes of war, and as such the organization can be considered a non-profit, voluntary association. WILPF-BC maintains a degree of autonomy from its parent body, WILPF International, formulating independent activities such as leafleting vigils and study groups. Such semi-autonomous behaviour, coupled with WILPF International's *formal* recognition as an NGO, further characterize the organization as voluntary. The factor which *limits* both WILPF-BC and its parent

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<sup>109</sup> Kline and Lydiard, interview by author.



body is a gendered focus, both in terms of membership and objectives. Finally, as is characteristic of a stable non-profit organization, WILPF-BC and its parent body have both a lengthy history and secured, extensive membership.

WILPF-BC can be examined more specifically as a *political action* non-profit association. Hart defines this type of association as one which utilizes political means to modify some aspect of society.<sup>110</sup> WILPF-BC works on three levels, internationally, nationally, and locally, to eliminate the causes of war in all of their manifestations. It does so through regular contact with various forms of government, maintaining a direct relationship with the United Nations through its consultative position as an NGO.

WILPF-BC functions as a women's organization in that it addresses *gender issues* internationally, nationally, and locally.<sup>111</sup> Kline indicated that the members of WILPF-BC may possess varying definitions of a women's organization. Such variation is consistent with the complexity of such a definition, as discussed earlier. Kline presented two elements of such a women's organization, within the context of WILPF-BC, that she felt could be agreed upon by all members. First, membership in WILPF is predominantly female.<sup>112</sup> Second, the issues addressed by WILPF are issues which are of concern to women, such as social, political, and economic justice; the rights of children; gender, racial, religious, and political equality; nonviolence; mediation for conflict resolution; international disarmament; and an equal voice for women in political and economic decisions internationally, nationally, and locally. Kline stated that WILPF-BC addresses the concerns of women on a broad level,

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<sup>110</sup> Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 25-26.

<sup>111</sup> Lydiard, letter to author clarifying interview notes.

<sup>112</sup> Some WILPF branches have male members, but WILPF-BC is limited to female membership. WILPF-BC does allow men to attend meetings which present a topic of interest, Kline, letter to author clarifying interview notes.

playing a role in women's lives by presenting them with information as to how international, national, and local issues affect their daily lives. Kline's description of WILPF-BC within the context of a women's organization reflects a further understanding of the heterogeneity of the organization; members are women with diverse points of view.

The feminist models addressed within the framework for analysis shed further light on both WILPF-BC and its parent body, WILPF International. WILPF's historical development allies it with more traditional women's organizations such as the YWCA and the National Council of Women of Canada and as such is reflective of an institutionalized feminist approach. The level of knowledge, awareness, and participation of members are also indicative of this institutionalized framework.

However, WILPF-BC departs from an institutionalized approach in the context of its mandated activities. Such activities often put the organization at odds with formal social and governmental systems that perpetuate the political, social, and economic causes of conflict, as identified by WILPF. While the age and history of both WILPF bodies place them outside of the grass-roots framework, it is evident that the philosophies and practices of grass-roots feminism have impacted upon the organization. WILPF-BC's distinctive application of process, including two secretarial positions, committee and non-committee based positions, and changes in the number and dynamic of meetings held by the organization are examples of a more grass-roots approach. It is the influence of diverse perspectives and practices upon the processes and form of the organization over a prolonged period of time that characterizes WILPF-BC as a women's organization.

## Record Creation and Keeping

WILPF-BC is a small branch of a larger international organization and consequently does not need to maintain an office.<sup>113</sup> As a result, documentation that is directed to the organization is received through a rented mailbox, or via electronic mail or fax. The predominant responsibility for the receipt of documentation lies with the corresponding secretary, who destroys irrelevant documents, dates relevant material, retains what she is competent to deal with, and passes the remainder on to the president or relevant committee chairs. Documents may also be retained and passed on to the relevant individual at a meeting.

As is the case with most small, voluntary organizations, WILPF-BC officers predominantly generate correspondence, minutes, and pamphlets. Most correspondence is generated by the president and the corresponding secretary. At the time that the interview was conducted, both individuals were generating documents electronically. Minutes of meetings are generated, copied, and circulated by the recording secretary. Financial reports are generated, copied, and circulated by the treasurer. Other examples of documents that are generated by WILPF-BC are a "history lesson" pertaining to WILPF's early years that is presented at the beginning of each meeting, the WILPF-BC annual report which is also submitted to WILPF International, documentation concerning branch responsibilities, and historical pamphlets which are generated and distributed by the BC branch.<sup>114</sup>

When asked to identify the vital records of the organization, Kline and Lydiard pointed to the minutes of WILPF-BC meetings and the organization's

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<sup>113</sup> WILPF-BC meetings are held at the Unitarian Church of Vancouver.

<sup>114</sup> Kline, letter to author clarifying interview notes.

membership lists. However, both women also acknowledged the importance of correspondence, annual reports, brochures, and monthly financial statements in terms of providing contextual information about the interests and activities of the organization.

Control over WILPF-BC records is dispersed throughout the organization, with each officer maintaining her own records and individual filing system. Kline and Lydiard indicated that such decentralized filing results in the duplication of material between officers. When asked whether they were satisfied with the process by which they filed their records, both women indicated that, "there is always room for improvement."<sup>115</sup> Kline stated that WILPF-BC records may be duplicated amongst members to a greater degree than found in other organizations. One of the reasons for this duplication is the involvement of WILPF-BC members in a variety of peace organizations. WILPF-BC members also maintain a high level of personal interest in specific issues and update their individual filing systems as such. The duplication to which Kline refers is most likely published reference material and not the administrative or operational records of the organization.

Both Kline and Lydiard discussed their individual filing systems. These systems are reflective of the personal record keeping practices which are often considered typical of smaller non-profit organizations. The filing system maintained by Kline is predominantly paper based. Any record she generates electronically is also copied in paper form and both versions are retained. Kline's records are predominantly maintained by year, with minutes, correspondence, and financial reports retained in corresponding yearly binders. She also maintains reference files by category within a filing cabinet.

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<sup>115</sup> Kline and Lydiard, interview by author.

Lydiard primarily retains records in electronic form. All incoming and outgoing electronic mail and electronically generated correspondence is retained as such. Lydiard indicated that this form of retention could be problematic in that the next corresponding secretary may not be computer literate or possess compatible software. She identified technology obsolescence as problematic in this regard.

A unique means of control that is implemented by WILPF-BC is their "In/Out" list of correspondence. This list is generated by the corresponding secretary, and divides correspondence received and generated by the organization into that which is received internationally, nationally, and regionally. It notes the date of the document and the name of the member who received or generated the document. It also assigns a number to the document and describes it, inclusive of the type of document, who it was from or sent to, and the location of the sender or recipient.<sup>116</sup> If a piece of correspondence is deemed important to the organization, a black dot<sup>117</sup> is placed beside its entry and it is discussed at the next meeting. The president maintains a separate "In/Out" list, which details the correspondence that she generates and receives.<sup>118</sup> This list is then submitted to the corresponding secretary prior to the next meeting and attached to the general list. The "In/Out" list is duplicated and circulated to members during WILPF-BC meetings.

WILPF-BC retains all of its records for an indefinite period of time. Inactive records are eventually donated to the University of British Columbia

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<sup>116</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, British Columbia Branch, "In/Out" Correspondence List (March 2 - April 27 1996, photocopy).

<sup>117</sup> Lydiard preferred the term *black dot*, as opposed to *bullet*, which can be construed as a militaristic term, Lydiard, letter to author clarifying interview notes.

<sup>118</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, British Columbia Branch, President's Correspondence List (February 17 - April 6 1996, photocopy).

Archives and Special Collections.<sup>119</sup> Two such donations have already been made. Kline and Lydiard foresaw a role for WILPF-BC's archival records in providing female researchers with information about the organization's activities. They also stated that these archival records would provide information about the involvement and priorities of British Columbia women during a specific period of time.

When asked about their record keeping practices as they pertain to WILPF-BC's gendered focus, Lydiard's response pointed to the organization's mandated functions. She indicated that the types of files generated by the organization provide information about sources of negative impact upon the lives of women. Lydiard noted that the focus at the time of the interview was on the root causes of issues and concerns listed in the United Nation's Platform for Action, including local manifestations of militarism, nuclear power and weapons, and human rights abuses. WILPF-BC files also reflect the organization's focus on local and national issues pertaining to the marginalization of women, such as budget cuts to education and health care and proposed changes to Unemployment Insurance and the Canadian Pension Plan.<sup>120</sup> Lydiard's response does not identify any record keeping practices that are unique to WILPF-BC in the context of its gendered focus. Rather, it can be argued that the decentralized methods of record keeping employed by WILPF-BC are reflective of the branch's size and voluntary nature. Such practices are also indicative of the primary administrative and operational responsibilities that lie with WILPF International.

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<sup>119</sup> Kline and Lydiard, interview by author.

<sup>120</sup> Lydiard, letter to author clarifying interview notes.

## **Western Businesswomen's Association**

### **Administrative History and Background**

The Western Businessswomen's Association (WBA) was established in 1978. The impetus for its establishment was the need for Vancouver business women to have a place to gather, provide support for, and mentor one another.<sup>121</sup> It arose out of a meeting of twelve hundred women at the University of British Columbia (UBC), out of which organizations such as the WBA, the West Coast Women's Network and the Women Business Owners Association were formed. The WBA was founded when Audrey Patterson, who attended the UBC meeting, placed an advertisement in the newspaper asking to meet with like-minded business women. The gathering that followed brought together a large number of women who eventually established themselves as an organization. The constitution has not changed substantially since the inception of the WBA.

The primary purpose and objective of the WBA is to provide women with a social and business atmosphere in which they can seek advice, meet other women, and promote their own businesses, regardless of their current work status.<sup>122</sup> "Encouraging and stimulating cooperation and fellowship between businesswomen who are exchanging business knowledge and ideas, the objective of the Western Businesswomen's Association is to act as a support

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<sup>121</sup> Bernice Davidson and Teena Keizer, interview by author, tape recording, Vancouver, British Columbia, 4 June 1996.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

network for successful businesswomen."<sup>123</sup> The WBA offers a "soft networking," non-confrontational alternative to co-gendered marketing associations.<sup>124</sup>

The WBA's focus on a primary objective defines the organization as *single-issue*. While members come from a common perspective in that they are united as participants in the dynamic of the private context of business, no political or business philosophy is required of the membership. Rather, members of differing perspectives and beliefs are united in the organizational function of a support network.

WBA membership may be considered quite small when compared more generally to other organizations. However, in contrast to similar women's business organizations, WBA membership is actually quite large, fluctuating at approximately 150 members each year. The Women Business Owners and the Westcoast Women's Network maintain approximately thirty and forty-five members respectively.<sup>125</sup> The size of the WBA membership further supports its classification as a single-issue organization.

The community served by the WBA is the downtown Vancouver business community. Members must be business women in a supervisory or senior management position, own their own business, or work within a profession.<sup>126</sup> The organization also operates a Whistler Chapter, which was established in 1993, reflecting the approximately 66 percent of Whistler businesses that are owned by women.<sup>127</sup> The focus on the provision of a supportive network of

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<sup>123</sup> Western Businesswomen's Association, "A successful year in pursuit of the WBA's objectives," *Shared Success* (Spring and Summer 1996): 1.

<sup>124</sup> Lois Brassart, interview by author, tape recording, Vancouver, British Columbia, 18 September 1996.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*



members who are united by similar work experiences reflects the homogeneity of the WBA.

Lois Brassart, the WBA's president at the time of the interview, indicated that members experience a life cycle in the organization. Focus groups and surveys carried out by the WBA have indicated that applicants for membership must possess a certain level of confidence in order to make the move to become a member and interact with the existing membership, who may often appear intimidating as a result of their positions in business or a profession. Brassart indicated that the WBA provides businesswomen with the affirmation that results from the sharing of experiences in male dominated industries. Once members move on to senior management positions, they often leave the WBA, perhaps joining an industry-based association. Members may also move in and out of the organization dependent upon their roles as parents or the demands of a new work experience. A member may outgrow the association entirely after moving through various offices, culminating in the position of president.

The main activities of the organization facilitate interaction between Vancouver businesswomen. Programmes and special events include monthly dinner meetings held between September and June, which include a guest speaker; a trade show in June, which allows members to promote their businesses; and events such as a golf tournament, summer retreat, and an art gallery outing. The WBA also participates in a Youth Leadership Program with the YWCA. This mentorship program pairs WBA members with female high school students for two hours a month, for four months, inclusive of two social events and two work-related experiences.<sup>128</sup> Four of the participants are

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

awarded scholarships of two hundred and fifty dollars each for pursuits in post-secondary education, which are generated with the proceeds from WBA raffles. The WBA also contributes to the Simon Fraser University/WBA Endowment Bursary and is involved with the Women Entrepreneur of the Year Award and the YWCA Women of Distinction Award.

The structure of the WBA, a non-profit society, has remained relatively stable throughout the years. The Board of Directors is composed of a president, two vice-presidents who are each responsible for the overseeing of one half of the directors, a secretary, and treasurer. In 1995, the organization experimented with a co-presidency, as two women felt that they were both too busy to take on the task themselves.

A number of directorships are maintained by the WBA, each of which is held for two years. The Public Relations, Membership, Newsletter, and Program Directors are responsible for advertising and the promotion of meetings, the quality and inclusion of new membership, the organization's quarterly newsletter, and the promotion of the organization, respectively.<sup>129</sup> The Development Director is in charge of the mentorship program and community outreach, and is the WBA's government liaison. The WBA also maintains a Hospitality Director. Replacement of Board members is carried out by a Nominating Committee, which is usually made up of the past president. The membership may vote on nominations, but replacement is done predominantly through acclamation. Members of the Board usually move up through various directorships, into the vice-president positions, eventually becoming president.

The WBA maintains informal relationships with a variety of organizations, such as the previously mentioned Women Business Owners and the Westcoast

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<sup>129</sup> Western Businesswomen's Association, Job Descriptions (Vancouver, British Columbia, n.d., photocopy), 1-16.

Women's Network. These two organizations have always been considered sister organizations by the WBA, and their members are given the member rate when attending WBA dinners.<sup>130</sup> All three organizations publicize each other's meetings and collaborate on events and fund-raising activities such as trade shows, forums, and *Celebrate Now*, which has raised money for breast cancer research.<sup>131</sup> The WBA also maintains relationships with organizations such as the Canadian Club, the CanAsian Businesswomen's Network, Women in Construction, and Women in Finance. The organization is flexible and open to participation in any activity presented by another organization.

Applying the framework for analysis utilized within this discussion, the WBA is both a formal and democratic non-profit association. Its members work towards a shared purpose, providing a network of support for local business women, and do so independent of other organizations. Membership and focus is *limited* by both gender and a defined grouping of professions. While the WBA does not have a long history, it is a well established organization with a substantial membership compared to organizations with a similar focus. As such, it has achieved a certain level of stability.

Hart's discussion of non-profit organizations characterizes them more specifically in terms of function. The WBA is a professional or occupational association, which is comprised of individuals "educated or working in the same profession, meeting for purposes of information exchange, and achieving common goals."<sup>132</sup> The WBA's objective, to act as a support network for successful businesswomen, falls within this definition.

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<sup>130</sup> Davidson and Keizer, interview by author.

<sup>131</sup> Brassart, interview by author.

<sup>132</sup> Hart, "Archival Acquisition of the Records of Voluntary Associations," 25-26.

When asked to define the WBA as a *women's* organization, the responses of participants were consistent with the above definition of a occupational association. Davidson indicated that the organization was socially oriented. Brassart stated that the membership of the WBA would generally not identify itself as feminist, but would profess a belief in gender equality. She reaffirmed earlier comments regarding the atmosphere of affirmation that exists within the WBA. The social atmosphere established by the WBA provides some degree of compensation for business women who are often excluded from the informal social activities of their male counterparts.<sup>133</sup> It is a "soft-networking," non-confrontational approach which is reflective of the practices of early grass-roots feminists.

Elements of the WBA's internal process and form are also consistent with the framework discussion of the compound feminist organization. The organization employs a loosely hierarchical structure indicative of its non-profit status. This structure is fluid in that it may be modified to meet the needs and abilities of the membership at any given time. The implementation of a co-presidency is an example of such fluidity. The variations in feminist perspective that were noted by Brassart are also consistent with the dynamic nature of the compound feminist organization.

### **Record Creation and Keeping**

The WBA is also an organization that does not maintain a physical office. However, it does utilize the services of a support organization, Support Services Unlimited. During her interview, Brassart stated that organizations

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<sup>133</sup> Brassart, interview by author.

such as the WBA need such a support service. Bernice Davidson, President of Support Services Unlimited, indicated that the relationship between the WBA and Support Services Unlimited was first established by the WBA.<sup>134</sup> Davidson was approached by an outgoing WBA president, whose own business staff had been providing services for the organization. The incoming president was unable to utilize her own staff in this way, and the previous president felt that the outside service was necessary.

The office administrator for the WBA, an employee of the support service, is responsible for the receipt of the organization's mail. He or she opens and dates it, separates anything that requires immediate action, and places the remainder in a file which will go to the monthly Board meeting. Brassart indicated that the Board may destroy as much as ninety percent of this documentation. If the quantity of documentation within this file becomes considerable prior to the Board meeting, the file is sent to the secretary who divides the documents and forward them to the applicable director, destroying "junk mail" or documentation deemed irrelevant to the organization.<sup>135</sup> Financial documentation and membership applications are separated by the office administrator and forwarded to the applicable director. A resource table maintained at meetings in order to promote the business activities of individual members also allows the Board to present the membership with any information that it feels would be of benefit.

All members of the Board of Directors receive and maintain documentation relevant to their position. This documentation is passed on to new Board members at the beginning of their term. Each director may maintain some documentation on other portfolios, but their predominant body of records

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<sup>134</sup> Davidson and Keizer, interview by author.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

pertains to their directorate or complementary portfolios.<sup>136</sup> Each director is expected to submit a formal report which details the objectives of the directorate for that year, how they were achieved, how things may have been done differently, and what work was carried on from the previous director. When a president wants to eliminate inactive documentation, it is passed on to the support service.<sup>137</sup> However, this maintenance process has never been carried out by Board directors.

The office administrator is responsible for the creation of a number of WBA documents. She generates the minutes and annual reports of the WBA, as well as monthly lists of financial documents. This list is forwarded to the treasurer, who produces the financial statements, copies of which are retained by the support service. Support service staff identified the membership database as the organization's vital record.

Control over WBA records is maintained through a centralized filing system that is administered by Support Services Unlimited. WBA records are organized by year and activity. The current year is retained actively, while the previous year is retained on a semi-active basis. Once records have passed this semi-active retention, the office administrator weeds out and destroys material such as correspondence and membership applications, retaining newsletters and minutes inactively. Correspondence that is relevant to the organization is often published in the newsletter and is retained inactively in this context.

Davidson noted that inactive records were utilized during the 15th anniversary of WBA and may be utilized again for upcoming anniversaries. She stated that such documentation is useful whenever the history of an

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<sup>136</sup> Brassart, interview by author.

<sup>137</sup> Davidson and Keizer, interview by author.

organization is investigated. Davidson also noted that the inactive records of another organization for which they provide support services have been donated to the City of Vancouver Archives. Donation of WBA records to an archival repository has never occurred. However, Davidson stated that if inactive WBA records began to accumulate, the support service would recommend such donation.

The Office Administrator indicated satisfaction with the WBA filing system. The provision of the support service means that records are regularly filed and maintained. If directors find that they are missing specific documentation, the support service is able to provide them with copies. Brassart indicated that the record keeping system was altered quite drastically in 1994, in order to make the process more formal, efficient, and accountable.<sup>138</sup> The regular listing of financial documents was included in this new process, and was reflective of the then treasurer's predominant occupation as a CGA. Brassart indicated that the new system is extremely efficient, taking into account the impact of individual personalities on the process.

When asked about their record keeping practices as they pertain to the gendered focus of the WBA, the support service president and office administrator expressed the belief that the WBA maintains closer supervision over its record keeping activities than do predominantly male organizations that also utilize Support Services Unlimited. The WBA contacts the support service on a regular basis, demanding high standards for the services which it receives. Davidson indicated that other predominantly female fund-raising organizations have often needed a number of years in order to establish a trusting relationship with the support service and grant it more autonomy in the keeping

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<sup>138</sup> Brassart, interview by author.

of association records, which Davidson indicated makes their job easier. She stated that perhaps women are more "hands on," whereas men may solicit the services of a secretary in the context of their profession and thus, find it easier to let go of the record keeping process as it pertains to an organization of which they are a member. Brassart echoed Davidson in her belief that the WBA is highly organized and detail-oriented. She stated that "when women do something, they do it well," whereas men may have a tendency to pass work on to a secretary.

The opinions of the interviewees are reflective of the mandate of the WBA. The organization provides a supportive and affirming social environment for business women. The need for such an organization arises out of the prejudices and difficulties that women may encounter in male-dominated industries. Within the context of their professions, many business women *may* have to overcompensate for perceived inabilities or their isolated status as female in a predominantly male environment by working harder, longer, or more efficiently. The belief that professional women are more "hands on," as expressed by the interviewees, is most likely reflective of the practices of some business women who remain more involved with the process of records creation, maintenance, and use than their male counterparts. While this may not be the case for all business women, the opinions expressed by the interviewees are most likely based upon an examined practice.

Consequently, WBA officers may carry over professional practices to their work with the organization. While it can be argued that the WBA is, in effect, "passing their records on to a secretary" by utilizing the support service for record keeping purposes, the level of involvement that is maintained by WBA officers continues after the records are physically transferred to Support Services Unlimited. The comparison with other male-dominated organizations



provided by Davidson points to a noted difference in practice. This degree of involvement is also evident in Brassart's discussion of the increased efficiency of the new filing system. The record keeping practices of the WBA most obviously reflect the activities of the organization. The point that can be taken from the comments of the interviewees is that the efficiency of the WBA record keeping system is not only reflective of the use of a support service. This efficiency is also the result of highly involved WBA officers who embody in their record keeping practices their beliefs regarding the success of women in the business world.

### **West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund**

#### **Administrative History and Background**

The West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (West Coast LEAF) is the British Columbia branch of a national organization, the Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF). While West Coast LEAF does not have a formal predecessor, many of its original members were part of an informal group of women that came together to lobby government to include a section pertaining to equality for women in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 15 of the Charter addresses gender equality and reads:

15. (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

(2) Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental

or physical disability.<sup>139</sup>

The first members of LEAF and West Coast LEAF, both of which were formally founded in 1985, were predominantly lawyers who felt that there was value in establishing legal precedent to ensure that the Charter was used as a tool to create equality for women.<sup>140</sup> The establishment of West Coast LEAF reflected a desire on the part of its original members to establish a sister organization that would more specifically address the needs of West Coast women. A member of West Coast LEAF's Board of Directors is the British Columbia representative on the LEAF National Board of Directors<sup>141</sup> and West Coast LEAF makes a yearly financial contribution to the national organization.

After 1985, LEAF established branches in other parts of the country. However, none of the branches other than West Coast LEAF maintain a staffed office. They are predominantly active in raising funds to support the national organization.<sup>142</sup> As litigation strategy is predominantly national in nature, based in Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and test litigation is most often carried out at the Supreme Court of Canada, the relationship of the other branches to the national office is quite natural. This dynamic also applies to West Coast LEAF in that while it conducts its research in British Columbia, the actual litigation is most often nationally based.

The community served by West Coast LEAF is all the women of Canada.<sup>143</sup> While West Coast LEAF sets objectives such as education that are

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<sup>139</sup> Gerald L. Gall, *The Canadian Legal System*, 3d ed (Toronto: Carswell, 1990), 72.

<sup>140</sup> Bonnie Theemes, interview by author, tape recording, Vancouver, British Columbia, 29 May 1996.

<sup>141</sup> West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, Board Orientation Manual (Vancouver, British Columbia, February 1996, photocopy), 1.

<sup>142</sup> Theemes, interview by author.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

*practically* limited to British Columbia, they still exist within the larger focus of the nation as a whole. This community can be broadened to include all Canadians, as the organization was established because of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms which addresses gender equality and therefore implicates all citizens.<sup>144</sup> Within this context, the primary objective of West Coast LEAF is the attainment of equal rights for all women. Its formal mandate is "to argue test cases before the Canadian courts, human rights commissions and government agencies on behalf of women; and to provide public education on the issue of sex equality."<sup>145</sup>

The concern for equal rights for all women could, arguably, define West Coast LEAF as a single issue organization. However, this focus on equal rights is more accurately reflective of the shared principles and beliefs of West Coast LEAF members. Such common principles guide the organization and its members in their efforts to address the numerous issues that fall within the context of sexual equality or its denial. As such, West Coast LEAF can be identified as a *multi-issue* organization. The multiple issues addressed by the organization are done through test cases and education.

The purpose and activities of West Coast LEAF are set out formally in the context of a constitution and bylaws, which have only been amended once. The organization is a non-profit society, and as such is incorporated under the Societies Act of British Columbia. West Coast LEAF is also a registered charity under the Income Tax Act of Canada.<sup>146</sup> The organization has a formal mission statement that arose out of strategic and organizational planning.<sup>147</sup> At the time

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, "Leaflet," *Leaflet* 9, no. 2 (1996): 4.

<sup>146</sup> West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, Board Orientation Manual, 1.

<sup>147</sup> Theemes, interview by author.

of the interview with Bonnie Theemes, West Coast LEAF's Executive Director, the organization was in the process of developing mission or vision statements around each of its programs.

Three main activities are carried out by West Coast LEAF. The first of these consists of background investigation and research to determine issues of importance for B.C. women.<sup>148</sup> Such investigation may also be the result of a specific legal problem that has been experienced by a Canadian woman or women.<sup>149</sup> Regardless of origin, research and investigation may lead to a case proposal which requires approval from the national office based on its concurrence with national litigation objectives and existing precedents. If approval is attained, West Coast LEAF will then act as an intervener for a specific case. This intervention may occur at the British Columbia Supreme Court, British Columbia Court of Appeal, or the Supreme Court of Canada.

The second activity of West Coast LEAF is that of education. The organization educates generally as to its mandated use of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to meet the objective of women's equality. Theemes stated that this process of educating about equality under the law brings about a general awareness of the issues and problems relating to gender equality and the ways in which women can be empowered to act.

Law reform work is the third activity carried out by West Coast LEAF. This reform activity involves the preparation and submission of papers to commissions, government ministries and departments, and generally to anyone who is making decisions that may affect legislation.<sup>150</sup> These submissions are

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Sherene Razack, *Canadian Feminism and the Law: The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund and Pursuit of Equality* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1991), 53.

<sup>150</sup> Theemes, interview by author.

intended to help shape new legislation or modify existing legislation in the context of any issues it may pose for women.

The original founders of LEAF modelled the structure of the organization upon American litigation funds, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).<sup>151</sup> LEAF attempted to replicate the NAACP's capacity for expert litigation in a particular field of law in order to have an impact on case law. At its inception, LEAF's founders developed criteria for case selection, and established an organizational structure that facilitated the strategy of seeking out, researching, and assisting nationally important cases through the court process.<sup>152</sup> LEAF followed Karen O'Connor's recommendations pertaining to *American* women's organizations<sup>153</sup> that include a strong national headquarters, skilled volunteers, the establishment of local affiliates, and the value of both publicity and education. In order to achieve its goals, LEAF established a structure that consists of a board of directors that is comprised of a national chair and vice-chair; a national legal committee; finance, fundraising, and public education and research chairs; and local affiliates on the prairies, in the Yukon, and on both coasts.<sup>154</sup>

The structure of West Coast LEAF is modelled after its national counterpart. West Coast LEAF is run by an eighteen-member board of directors, including a president, vice-president, treasurer, and internal steering committee. The Board meets every six weeks to "set policy, determine the future direction of the Association and to oversee the ongoing work of the staff

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<sup>151</sup> Razack, *Canadian Feminism and the Law*, 52.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>153</sup> Karen O'Connor, *Women's Organizations' Use of the Courts* (Mass.: Lexington Books, 1980), 3-28, as cited in Razack, *Canadian Feminism and the Law*, 52.

<sup>154</sup> Razack, *Canadian Feminism and the Law*, 53.

and committees."<sup>155</sup> Board members sit for two year terms and are elected by the membership at the annual general meeting. West Coast LEAF maintains approximately five to six active committees whose chairs are all members of the Board. These committees include Education, Non-government Liaison, Legal and Nominating. Theemes states that the organization attempts to come to consensus-based decisions, while still allowing for some level of leadership. As such, a vote may be taken by the Board or a decision may simply evolve consensually.

The Steering Committee is responsible for the facilitation of board work through a process of providing leadership and streamlining information pertaining to issues being considered by the Board.<sup>156</sup> It also addresses routine administrative matters. However, the independent decision-making ability of the Steering Committee has changed over time. Originally, this committee had the ability to make some decisions independent of overall board approval. Though the Board could alter a decision where it felt it was necessary, the Steering Committee was able to maintain this independence in decision making. As time passed, the Board decided to retain more control and asked that the Steering Committee provide all of the background information necessary to make a decision, which was the final prerogative of the Board. However, this level of control on the part of the Board of Directors was found to be extremely time consuming and has resulted in a return to the original practice of allowing the Steering Committee to make more of the daily decisions.

The Steering Committee is comprised of the chairs of the Legal and Fund-raising committees, as well as the president, vice-president, and treasurer

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<sup>155</sup> West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, Board Orientation Manual, 1.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 1.

of the organization. The executive director of the organization sits as an ex-officio member and "[t]wo other board members attend each meeting rotating attendance throughout the board."<sup>157</sup> The structure of the Steering Committee changes from time to time in terms of committee representation, depending upon current priorities and long-term plans. In the early years of the organization, when organizational procedure and structure were being established, the Administration and Personnel Committee chair was a member of the Steering Committee, as decisions pertaining to administration were more crucial at that point in time. Now the Administration and Personnel Committee chair is no longer a member of the Steering Committee. Instead she interacts directly with the executive director. This structure has some flexibility, as any committee chair may attend a Steering Committee meeting if a topic of discussion is relevant to that committee.

All other committees are typically made up of ten to twenty people. Theemes states that ideally the organization would like to see committee membership at fifteen to twenty individuals, but sometimes finds committees reduced to five or six people, which poses problems in terms of accomplishing tasks. Each committee is chaired by a member of the board of directors, while committee members come from both the board and general membership.<sup>158</sup> Eighty to one hundred volunteers participate in committee work at any one given time. West Coast LEAF maintains approximately 700 members.<sup>159</sup>

The Legal Committee of West Coast LEAF works in conjunction with the Legal Committee of the National association, and as such is responsible for

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 5.

implementing national litigation strategy in British Columbia.<sup>160</sup> This committee is coordinated by the legal director, who is responsible for the screening of all inquiries made to West Coast LEAF. The Legal Committee evaluates referred cases and actively seeks out potential cases, as discussed above. It also investigates potential community contacts, newsletter articles, and speaking engagements.<sup>161</sup>

The West Coast LEAF Legal Committee presents referrals to LEAF's national legal committee on two levels. First, it refers cases for approval based upon a compliance with LEAF's litigation strategy, as the national committee ultimately coordinates litigation. Second, West Coast LEAF's Legal Committee makes recommendations to the national Legal Committee regarding counsel and assistance with research in an individual case. Lawyers work on a pro bono basis in most instances. Volunteers are most often lawyers, law students, and community workers. During both the selection of a case and the preparation of submissions, the Legal Committee actively consults with other women's organizations, in order to profit from their experience or expertise in a given area.

In 1992, the Legal Committee of West Coast LEAF was joined with the Law and Government Liaison Committee, to prepare submissions to governments and task forces. The Law and Government Liaison Committee is primarily responsible for making submissions to commissions, legislative committees, politicians, and government officials regarding "issues affecting the legal rights of women in the federal, provincial and municipal spheres of government."<sup>162</sup> This liaison committee also monitors and analyzes

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 3.



developments in legislation and case law that pertain to the interests and rights of women.

Five other committees function with West Coast LEAF. The Fundraising Committee obtains both public and private sector funding for the western arm of LEAF, which is primarily directed towards administrative costs, litigation, and public education.<sup>163</sup> The Public Relations committee develops and coordinates communications strategy for West Coast LEAF.<sup>164</sup> This committee is mandated to prepare press releases and organize media conferences and briefs pertaining to cases. It also oversees the publication of the organization's newsletter, *Leaflet*, and trains Board members and volunteers who may act as media spokespersons for West Coast LEAF. The Public Education Committee is responsible for educating the public as to the mandate and activities of West Coast LEAF, which includes organizing speakers, preparing publicly disseminated material, and maintaining contacts with community groups.<sup>165</sup> West Coast LEAF also maintains a nominating committee and administration and personnel committee. The Nominating Committee implements the national diversification policy, to ensure "the representation and participation of women of diverse racial, cultural and aboriginal backgrounds and women with disabilities."<sup>166</sup>

While membership in West Coast LEAF is not restricted to women, no men have been active members of the Board. Theemes states that the organization has not evolved to a point where it is can make decisions about the needs of women with men as members of the Board. However, men do

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 3.

participate in committee work and may also be a part of a working group for an intervention, but would not represent the case at the court level. Theemes stated that if an individual male was the necessary expert on a particular issue, then they may represent the case, but generally West Coast LEAF is able to more passionately present the needs of women through a predominantly female voice.

Theemes noted that West Coast LEAF is reflective of many modern organizations and businesses in that it is attempting to be more representative of its community in terms of cultural balance and the incorporation of minority perspectives. She stated that the organization has a particular interest in the legal equality issues of women who suffer from more than one disadvantage. As such, West Coast LEAF would like to maintain a board that is representative of the organization's ideals and philosophy.<sup>167</sup> Theemes states that this balance is one that the organization has not yet attained. Such attempts at diverse representation reflect a consciousness on the part of West Coast LEAF of the heterogeneity of its membership and of women more generally. However, West Coast LEAF's national counterpart has been accused of *failing* to present a heterogeneous perspective, a charge which is no doubt reflected in the membership and activities of West Coast LEAF.

Since its inception, LEAF has struggled to maintain a balance between two defining characteristics, "as a women's organization and as one involved primarily in legal activities that require large sums of money."<sup>168</sup> The contradiction that lies between these two features is based in LEAF's inevitable participation in a legal system that requires specialized and hierarchical work practices. Such practices do not necessarily allow for consultation with various

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<sup>167</sup> Theemes, interview by author.

<sup>168</sup> Razack, *Canadian Feminism and the Law*, 53.

women's organizations and communities in order to facilitate the proper representation of the diverse interests and perspectives of women.<sup>169</sup> What Razack defines as *legal narrowing* is further emphasized in members of a legal team that more often than not share "the same class and race origins and, as legal professionals, have all been schooled in the assumptions and practices of liberal legalism."<sup>170</sup> This homogeneity is reflective of the group of women who founded LEAF.

The imbalance between the feminist and legal perspectives that exist within LEAF is further emphasized in the need for large sums of money to support the litigation process. The attainment of such funds often requires an organizational image that focuses on the legal skills of its members, as opposed to their membership in the feminist community, inevitably distancing LEAF from the communities of women that it is trying to represent.<sup>171</sup> LEAF members are conscious of the criticisms of the organization's homogeneous membership and activities, but argue that this homogeneity was a necessary component in establishing a firm footing for the organization within the legal community.<sup>172</sup> Theemes' comments regarding the heterogeneity of West Coast LEAF's membership are reflective of what the organization now feels it is able to focus on, given the degree to which it has entrenched itself as a *legal* advocate for gender equality.

West Coast LEAF's attempts at striking a balance between legal and feminist perspectives and practices are evident within the formal and informal relationships that the organization maintains with both women's and legal

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 55.

organizations. Theemes states that West Coast LEAF tries to maintain as many relationships as possible with other women's groups in order to ensure that they are achieving a balanced perspective of the issues that are important to Canadian women.<sup>173</sup> These relationships allow West Coast LEAF to work towards the setting of precedents that reflect the values and desires of Canadian women. In the context of specific case work, West Coast LEAF often works in formal coalitions with other groups in order to combine the legal expertise and specific knowledge relevant to an individual case. The body acting as intervener would be the formalized coalition. These relationships may also include fund-raising activities or conferences. Approximately one third of the organization's core funding is provided by the Law Foundation of British Columbia and as such maintains an integral relationship with West Coast LEAF.<sup>174</sup>

West Coast LEAF formally identifies itself as a non-profit organization and as such can be placed within the framework that was established in Chapter One. In the context of Hart's discussion of non-profit organizations, West Coast LEAF is embodied within a membership that chooses to work towards the purposeful attainment of equality for women. Gender is a limiting factor in terms of Board membership and organizational focus. While West Coast LEAF has a substantial membership, it is a young organization and is consequently experiencing the growing pains that are evident within the life cycle of any organization. Such difficulties are reflected in the striking of a balance between gender-focused and legal perspectives, as discussed above.

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<sup>173</sup> Theemes, interview by author.

<sup>174</sup> The rest of the organization's funding is derived from donations, fund-raising letters, gaming activities, and occasional government funding for specific projects, Theemes, interview by author.

The political nature of West Coast LEAF's precedent setting work clearly defines the organization as a *political action* non-profit organization, that utilizes political means to modify some aspect of society, in this case the inequalities that exist between men and women.

When asked how she would characterize West Coast LEAF, Theemes stated that the organization was a women's legal organization that was both feminist and pro-choice in its ideology. Within the context of this definition, she identified the membership of West Coast LEAF as professional women who are committed to a cause. This characterization can be examined in the context of the feminist approaches that are a part of the framework for this discussion.

West Coast LEAF functions within the confines of the legal system by attempting to create change from within. It maintains a hierarchical structure that complements its interaction with the legal system. Both of these characteristics link West Coast LEAF with the institutionalized model of feminist organizing discussed by Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail. However, West Coast LEAF lacks the established history of institutionalized feminist organizations such as the YWCA. Its efforts towards consensus decision-making and flexible structure, seen within ongoing changes to committees, reflect the influence of more grass-roots practices and perspectives. While West Coast LEAF functions within the confines of the traditional structure required by its participation in the legal system, the boundaries of this system are stretched by West Coast LEAF and its national sister organization in their efforts to establish formalized gender equality, further exemplifying grass-roots processes. Both LEAF and West Coast LEAF are complex organizations that reflect the dynamic nature of a women's organization. Models such as institutionalized and grass-roots feminist organizing are useful in terms of understanding the processes and forms of these two organizations. However,

the application of these models to dynamic organizations such as West Coast LEAF does not allow for rigid categorization within one given model.

### **Record Creation and Keeping**

In contrast to WILPF-BC and the WBA, West Coast LEAF does maintain physical office space. As a result, all mail received by the organization arrives at this office. The administrative assistant is responsible for the initial receipt of documents, dating and forwarding mail to the appropriate member of the organization. If there is no obvious direction for a particular document, it is forwarded to the executive director, who decides as to its relevance to the organization and eventual retention or destruction.

West Coast LEAF receives large quantities of documentation pertaining to other organizations, as well as governmental and community activities. If this documentation is deemed to have relevance to the work of West Coast LEAF, it is then retained as reference material in the organization's library. Documentation that pertains to activities in which West Coast LEAF may wish to participate, such as conferences, meetings, or opportunities for submissions to commissions may also be retained by the organization within their filing system.

West Coast LEAF generates and maintains an extensive database that contains information about each individual who has had contact with the organization through an educational or fund-raising activity, or as a mentor or Board member. The organization also generates records that pertain to specific projects, fund-raising, legal cases, and program work. Files pertaining to legal activities would include specialized documentation such as legal facts,

decisions, and arguments, as well as background notes.<sup>175</sup> Files are also maintained for each committee, including documentation pertaining to the planning and conduct of activities.

West Coast LEAF produces an annual report and annual financial statements as required by law. Quarterly reports are submitted to the Law Foundation, and have been since the Foundation began funding West Coast LEAF in 1986-1987. Copies of all applications to various funding agencies are retained, along with the final report that is submitted at the end of the funding term. West Coast LEAF also generates a number of manuals which pertain to board orientation, the speakers bureau, and volunteers. The organization also generates a quarterly newsletter, *Leaflet*. As is typical of any non-profit organization, minutes of Board meetings and various committee meetings are generated and maintained by West Coast LEAF.

At the time of the interview with Theemes, West Coast LEAF did not utilize electronic mail. Documents were transported utilizing fax machines and courier services. Electronic documents are also copied and retained in paper form. Theemes felt this was typical of most modern records creators, stating that though there may have been an intention to generate less paper with the advent of the computer, duplication of individual documents is proving otherwise.

Theemes identified the database and the working files for current litigation as a vital records. She stated that the majority of the organization's legal records are public documents in the context of the specific court cases for which they were presented and consequently would not be considered vital.

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<sup>175</sup> A portion of this documentation will be public if West Coast LEAF has acted formally in any way, Theemes, interview by author.

Record keeping requirements have been altered regularly since the inception of West Coast LEAF.<sup>176</sup> As activities such as fund-raising were established, records creation and maintenance requirements also arose. Since approximately 1992, record keeping has become more complex, reflecting the increasingly complex nature of the organization. Theemes expressed a need for the creation of a more efficient and effective record keeping system, stating that the current record keeping practices disperse documents pertaining to a given activity throughout the system.

West Coast LEAF maintains a centralized filing system that primarily reflects administrative activities such as finance and personnel, as well as board activities and development. In addition to this central system, the legal director physically maintains all documentation pertaining to legal work, inclusive of any specific case files. The executive director maintains all documentation pertaining to fund-raising, as she coordinates this activity.

Individuals who maintain organizational records outside of the office also create separate filing systems. This has posed a problem as individuals leave the organization, and West Coast LEAF is left to decipher the system and relevance of the records within. Reference material is often weeded and destroyed before the remaining documentation can be integrated into existing filing systems. Theemes stated that such individualized filing systems continue to pose a problem as long as project workers are employed by the organization. She stated that this problem is further exacerbated by the fact that filing tends to be of a very low priority, regardless of its importance to the organization. Theemes pointed to the issues of functioning as a non-profit, legal organization,

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<sup>176</sup> Theemes, interview by author.



with too much work and too few people, strict deadlines, and current priorities, with an inability to address on-going issues.

West Coast LEAF's Executive Director indicated that she was not satisfied with the organization's current record keeping practices. She stated that she has a vision of a simple and effective system for maintaining the records of the organization, with obvious divisions and simple identification such as colour coded files. As indicated above, time restrictions prevent the full implementation of such a system, though Theemes does attempt efforts in this regard when she is able. She stated that recent expansions in the organization have made the need for and attainment of an efficient filing system more evident.

As West Coast LEAF is still a relatively young organization, it is only just beginning to deal with long-term records retention and disposal. Theemes identified minutes of Board and committee meetings as inactive records which document the history and activities of the organization. These minutes will be retained on a long-term basis.

Theemes stated that she has weeded through files on a number of occasions, retaining inactive records that may either have practical value in the context of future projects or historical value in terms of documenting the activities of the organization.<sup>177</sup> However, physical limitations in terms of proper storage have prevented West Coast LEAF from maintaining a system of active, semi-active, and inactive records that is practical for the organization. Boxed and labelled files have been considered archival. Theemes stated that this separation was premature, as she often returns to these boxes to retrieve documentation that is still needed. New filing cabinets had been purchased just prior to the interview and truly inactive files were going to be properly

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

separated. Theemes indicated that inactive storage would ideally be maintained off site. However, it is quite likely that inactive records will remain on site, as the quantity of such records is not yet an issue.

Theemes stated that much of the documentation from the first three or four years of the organization has most likely been retained by individuals who were involved with the organization at that time. No donations have been made to an archival institution, and this option has never been considered, primarily due to the age of the organization and the on-going use of its records. Given the legal focus of West Coast LEAF, many inactive records dating from the organization's inception are still utilized, in order to monitor the focus and evolution of the organization.

Theemes did not feel that the record keeping practices of West Coast LEAF were unique in the context of the organization's gendered focus. She stated that she has worked in a number of volunteer organizations that are similar in structure and operation to West Coast LEAF, whether they were a government appointed body, a political party, or a non-profit charitable organization. She stated that the structure of the organization defines the way in which it maintains its records. The activities and structures of West Coast LEAF in the context of its Board, committees, and fund-raising reflect those of any organization. The divisions of West Coast LEAF reflect the divisions of any other non-profit charitable organization. Theemes stated that this structure is first and foremost a volunteer board comprised of committees that functions as a non-profit charitable organization. This interaction between function and structure defines the organization's record keeping activities. Theemes' perspectives reaffirm predominant archival approaches to record keeping and will be considered in the discussion that now follows.

### **Discussion: What Three Women's Organizations Reveal About Record Keeping**

The individual discussions of the record keeping practices of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Western Businesswomen's Association, and the West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund provide an in-depth understanding of the process of records creation, maintenance, and use which occurs within each organization. While this information is extremely useful on its own, it is important to address it within a discussion of such practices as they apply to the concept of the women's organization. Each organization addresses its mandate through individualized processes and forms, *inclusive* of record keeping. Each interviewee provided an understanding of how their record keeping practices reflected their organization in the context of a *women's* organization. These responses require further discussion.

As addressed at the beginning of this discussion, gender is a characteristic that functions alongside other characteristics such as ethnicity and socio-economic status. Any such characteristics will influence the perspectives of a given organization and hence its activities. In the case of the three organizations under examination within this discussion, the role of gender is evident within *mandated function and activities*. Each organization focuses on gender issues in some way, whether it be the role that peace and disarmament can play in the lives of women, the experiences of women who work in male-dominated industries, or overall gender equality. Each organization situates its perspective on gender issues within a unique light, calling into play the diverse perspectives of its membership.

The goal of this thesis has been to provide an in-depth understanding of the record keeping practices of a dynamic body of records creators, the women's organization. As such, the record keeping practices of three organizations have been presented in light of the respective organizations' functions, activities, structure, and historical development. This administrative context has revealed the adaptive internal processes of each organization, reaffirming Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail's contention that the internal processes of a women's organization inevitably reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of feminist organizing.

The issues of form and process identified by Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail are evident within each organization addressed by this case study. Issues of organizational focus, size, and the dynamic nature of membership were evident within the information provided by interviewees. Both WILPF-BC and West Coast LEAF function as political action non-profit organizations, while the WBA functions as a professional or occupational association. In terms of organizational focus, WILPF-BC is a member of an umbrella organization, the WBA has a single issue focus, and West Coast LEAF unites its members under one dominant philosophy in order to address a multitude of issues.

All three organizations exhibited a certain level of consciousness of the homogeneity and heterogeneity of their membership. WILPF-BC, the WBA, and West Coast LEAF provided information which reflected a clear understanding of the characteristics that unite their members in the accomplishment of certain goals. However, the individuals who represented WILPF-BC and West Coast LEAF in this case study also portrayed a consciousness of the *diversity* of their membership. This heterogeneity is evident within the aims and principles established by WILPF International. The problems of accommodating such

heterogeneity were most evident within West Coast LEAF's struggle to maintain a balance within its existence as a women's *legal* organization.

The unique internal processes of the three case organizations were consistent with the contentions of Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail. Each organization functions within some level of hierarchy which is reflective of their non-profit status, institutionalized feminist organizing, and the growth of grass-roots organizational processes. All three organizations exhibit practices which reveal attempts to mold distinctive processes that effectively address their mandates as women's organizations. West Coast LEAF practices consensus decision-making. The WBA is willing to modify its structure to accommodate the unique demands and abilities of individual members by establishing a co-presidency. WILPF-BC maintains positions outside of the formal committee structure. All three organizations have modified their internal processes over time. As such, these three organizations exemplify the dynamic interaction of institutionalized, grass-roots, and complex feminist organizing. They illustrate the complex nature of the women's organization as a fluid construct that defies compartmentalization.

As records keepers, the three organizations that participated in this case study maintain systems that support and reflect their various activities. WILPF-BC practices decentralized record keeping, with records retention occurring in the homes of WILPF-BC officers, as is typical of many small volunteer organizations. Such dispersed control is not problematic for the organization, as it creates and receives a limited number of documents in a given year. Control over more common documentation such as correspondence is maintained through the use of "In and Out" lists that allow the organization to monitor the generation and receipt of correspondence and the dissemination of

its content to the membership. The records generated, received, and maintained by WILPF-BC are also reflective of the branch status of the organization. While WILPF-BC may generate and maintain documentation that is unique to its specific activities, the primary administrative and operational records of the organization are maintained by WILPF International.

The WBA maintains a voluntary structure similar to that of WILPF-BC, but its record keeping practices differ greatly. The use of a support service allows the WBA to maintain centralized control of its records. While directors retain active documentation and reference material that is pertinent to their position, the primary administrative and operational records of the association are retained by Support Services Unlimited. The WBA office administrator, an employee of the support service, generates the majority of the organization's records, including minutes of meetings, reports, and financial documentation. This individual is also responsible for the maintenance of the organization's membership database. The WBA generates, receives, and maintains records which facilitate its substantive activities, including meetings, fund-raising, joint programs with other organizations, and scholarships. As WBA activities are more formal and routine than those of WILPF-BC, it generates a greater number of records. Sole administrative responsibility for the organization also lies with the WBA and consequently the organization also maintains more administrative records. The WBA record keeping system was revamped in 1994, allowing for more efficient and effective control over the organization's records.

While West Coast LEAF generates the greatest quantity of records, its record keeping practices are not necessarily as structured as those of WILPF-BC and the WBA. West Coast LEAF is predominantly a women's *legal* organization and consequently generates, receives, and maintains a large quantity of records to support the varied administrative and operational activities

of the organization. The record keeping system maintained by the organization is decentralized, with separate systems originating alongside the positions of office administrator, legal director, and executive director. These systems facilitate activities which are predominantly administrative, legal, or fund-raising oriented. Separate systems are also established by individuals who are employed under short-term contracts with the organization. Records creation is consistent with this decentralized system. West Coast LEAF has altered its record keeping system as new activities arise, an occurrence which has become more frequent since 1992. However, the system is no longer meeting the complex record keeping needs of organization. Records that reflect and support one activity are often scattered throughout the various decentralized systems.

The three organizations possess records retention and disposition practices that differ greatly from one another. WILPF-BC destroys the largest number of records upon receipt, eliminating records which are not pertinent to the activities of the organization. However, it does not destroy any of its inactive records. Individual filing systems such as that of the then president, may distinguish records by year, thus rendering them active, semi-active, and inactive based on how current they are in relation to the given year. Inactive records are only united and retained as such when an archival donation is made by the organization. Such donation had only occurred twice prior to the interview.

The WBA, on the other hand, routinely destroys records which are no longer of relevance to the activities of the organization. As does WILPF-BC, the WBA destroys a large quantity of material that is not pertinent to the activities of the organization when such material is received. Records are maintained in three distinctive states, reflecting active, semi-active, and inactive use. Records

are active and semi-active respectively for the first two years after creation. After this two year period has passed, records are weeded. Newsletters and minutes are the predominant types of records that are retained inactively. No donations have been made to an archival institution, and as such, inactive records have been retained indefinitely by the support service. As the organization is relatively young and the quantity of inactive records is still small, storage of such records has not posed any problems for either the support service or the WBA.

West Coast LEAF has encountered ongoing problems with records retention and disposition based on the long-term semi-active use of the majority of the organization's records. As such, no donations of inactive records have been made to an archival institution. While attempts have been made to separate records based on active and inactive use, at the time that the interview was conducted West Coast LEAF had not been successful in establishing a clear system of active, semi-active, and inactive records. Physical storage limitations, the on-going requirements of legal work, and the need to monitor the organization's focus and evolution have all played a role in the record keeping problems experienced by West Coast LEAF.

All three organizations acknowledged the role of their respective records in providing information about their activities. All WILPF-BC records were seen as important in terms of providing information about the activities of the organization and of BC women in general. This overall sense of importance may be reflective of the donations that WILPF-BC has already made to an archival institution. The records of the WBA have been used as a source of information regarding the history of the organization, during various anniversaries. The records of West Coast LEAF were identified as possessing long-term "practical" and "historical" value, reflecting the on-going use of



records by the organization for both active, operational and inactive, archival use.

WILPF-BC, the WBA, and West Coast LEAF generate, receive, and maintain records which reflect and facilitate their individual activities. These records are retained according to unique classification systems that are either simple and effective, in the case of WILPF-BC, or more complex and in need of more efficient classification, as is the case with West Coast LEAF. The WBA exhibits the most efficient and effective record keeping practices, incorporating regular destruction of inactive materials that hold no long-term value to the organization and the retention of active, semi-active, and inactive records by a support service within a redefined classification system. The record keeping practices of these three organizations reflect the organizational demands of each group, as well as individual processes, structures, and memberships that characterize WILPF-BC, the WBA, and West Coast LEAF as women's organizations.

However, while the record keeping practices of women's organizations may incorporate the unique procedural and structural practices of feminist organizing, they may also be influenced by gender itself. The organizations that participated in this case study reaffirmed the theoretical perspective that record keeping practices are directly related to the structure and activities of a given organization. The responses of two of the organizations confirmed this perspective. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, in defining its record keeping practices within the context of a women's organization, made reference to the focus and activities of the organization. The response of the West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund's Executive Director made more *direct* reference to the role of organizational structure in the creation, maintenance, and use of records.

The responses of the interviewees who represented the WBA, however, presented a unique understanding of the role of gender in the record keeping practices of this organization. The president of the support service utilized by the WBA and the organization's office administrator both differentiated the record keeping practices of the WBA from other predominantly male organizations who employ Support Services Unlimited. The WBA maintains a higher degree of supervision over the keeping of its records, which was confirmed by the WBA's President, Brassart. Davidson, President of the support service, indicated that other predominantly female organizations have also maintained a strong degree of involvement in the record keeping process, while male dominated organizations are more comfortable with the process of directing work to the support service.

Brassart eluded to the demands that women place upon themselves in the context of accomplishment. Such comments may be reflective of the greater degree of competency that is required of female professionals that function within predominantly male administered work environments. This competency may be something that both the environments and individual women require in order to succeed within a given profession or occupation. These attitudes and practices may have influenced the practices of WBA members outside of the workplace, within their chosen professional organization.

The unique perspective presented by WBA interviewees sheds light on one specific context in which gender may affect the record keeping practices of an organization. This context, however, exists within the larger structural and process based environment of the women's organization. In turn, it is impacted by the larger dynamic society in which women's organizations function.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has addressed gender and record keeping in the context of the women's organization. It has established a framework for the analysis of such organizations which was then applied to three individual women's organizations. The results of the case study provide the archival community with specific knowledge of the women's organization as a body of records creators.

Such an investigation has been important in terms of reminding the archival profession of its responsibility to act in an informed and knowledgeable manner when it appraises and acquires records. This discussion has not attempted to explore the acquisition and appraisal of records generated by and about women. Rather this examination has attempted to look at what underlies the practice of archives in order to challenge the profession with the provision of new and dynamic information. While archivists are both educated and experienced, they must continue to challenge and inform themselves.

An understanding of women's organizations as record keepers requires an archival profession which is conscious of its own biases. This consciousness includes an understanding of the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity. Such an understanding places the archivist within a larger social perspective, conscious of his or her own subjectivity, striving towards a more well-informed, objective knowledge through which to make decisions. It does not require an archivist that strives to be omniscient. Rather, an understanding of women's organizations asks the archivist to acknowledge their individual limitations.

The women's organization is a dynamic entity that is difficult to confine within an all-encompassing definition. For the purposes of this discussion, the

women's organization has been defined as a predominantly voluntary organization that employs unique forms and processes to work towards the attainment of an individualized interpretation of gender equality. This definition incorporates a specific understanding of the non-profit, voluntary association that functions within eight unique contexts. The framework for analysis that lies within the definition of a women's organization reflects the interplay between three perspectives or "models" of feminist organizing. Institutionalized, grass-roots, and compound feminist organizing address the diverse forms and processes of women's organizations.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Vancouver Branch, is an organization that functions within an umbrella structure to facilitate the gathering of a diverse community of women focused upon the elimination of the various causes of war. WILPF-BC is a political action non-profit organization that works towards gender equality within a larger political context. While the history of WILPF-BC allies it with the components of institutionalized feminist organizing, its activities and flexible processes reflect the influences of later grass-roots feminist perspectives.

The Western Businesswomen's Association is a single-issue professional association that provides Vancouver business women with an environment in which to socialize, exchange information, and promote business activities. The model that best accommodates the context of this organization is that of compound feminist organizing. This model incorporates the non-profit structure of the WBA, its unique processes, and the diversity of the business women that are embodied within the organization's membership.

The West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund works towards the attainment of gender equality in the context of multiple issues. West Coast LEAF maintains a difficult balance as a women's organization that

establishes legal precedents for gender equality, further defining the organization as a political action non-profit. While West Coast LEAF embodies the traditional structural and process-based characteristics of institutionalized feminist organizing, working within the legal system to bring about change, its unique methods and perspectives also ally it with the grass-roots approach to the attainment of gender equality.

This discussion has also revealed the distinctive record keeping contexts of the three individual women's organizations. WILPF-BC maintains a simple, decentralized record keeping system that reflects the individual record keeping practices of WILPF-BC members. All WILPF-BC records are retained inactively. The WBA maintains a centralized and highly controlled record keeping system. It utilizes a support system that retains core inactive records, newsletters and minutes, providing access to these inactive records on a long-term basis. West Coast LEAF is the organization that generates the largest quantity of records of the three organizations that participated in this case study. Records creation and use in this organization are reflective of the complex nature of legal work. This complexity, combined with issues of physical storage and on-going use have resulted in a system which does not efficiently and effectively meet the needs of the organization.

The results of the interviews with members and staff of the WBA offered an insight into the role that gender plays in the record keeping practices of this organization. The WBA was seen as more involved in the record keeping process than similar predominantly male organizations. While this insight is specific to the unique organizational and record keeping context of the WBA, it reflects a dynamic that may be present in other women's organizations. Such an assumption, however, would require further investigation.

The case study of the record keeping practices of three women's organizations in Vancouver, British Columbia has provided the archival community with a resource upon which a variety of further investigations may be based. Most obviously, this investigation provides the archival community with information about a body of records creators. It is hoped that such information will allow archivists to make acquisition and appraisal decisions that are based on a more thorough understanding of record keeping in the context of this type of organization. Such an understanding should inevitably be based in the continued exploration of the records creator, inclusive of, but not limited to the women's organization. Specifically, this discussion of women's organizations directly challenges the archival community to actively investigate records creation within the defined mandates of each archival institution. A more thorough understanding of individual records creators supports an informed decision making process in the context of acquisition.

More generally, this case study of the women's organization supports further investigation of other bodies of records creators which have not been examined by the archival community. The discussion of non-profit, ethnic, and non-governmental organizations influenced this particular investigation. Explorations of record keeping within municipalities and churches have also been conducted. However, there are other specific contexts of records creation, maintenance, and use which require further investigation.

The framework for analysis established within this discussion may also be implemented in the further examination of women's organizations. While the discussion of WILPF-BC, the WBA, and West Coast LEAF provide detailed information about each of these records creators, there are numerous other women's organizations that would provide information that was not revealed by

this particular investigation. Such investigations should be encouraged, as they are an invaluable resource for the archival community.

Stepping back from the specific context of the women's organization, this discussion has served as a reminder to the archival profession to remain open to new sources of information. While the formation of individual opinions is a necessary component of investigation and discussion, such investigation and discussion should allow the archivist to weigh diverse and varied perspectives. Organizations such as the three explored in this discussion should be allowed to represent themselves as sources of information. Such direct examination only serves to increase the level of accuracy of the information that is attained. As such, the archival community should conduct informal investigations of the context of records creation within organizations on a regular basis, allowing individual archivists to maintain a current and in-depth understanding of the records creator and their practices.

Regarding organizational form as discussed by Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, archivists must not discount or overlook the homogeneity and heterogeneity of organizations. Organizations are complex entities, influenced by numerous and interconnected factors, none of which should be dismissed, as they play a role in the structure of an organization and its record keeping practices. In general, the archival profession must challenge itself to remain open to the dynamic context of all records creation, conscious of its own biases, basing its judgments upon thorough examination and exploration.

In the conclusion of her discussion of the women's archives movement, Earnshaw states that

[t]he mandate of archivists is to ensure the preservation of a

collective memory that represents all spheres of society. To misrepresent the contribution of more than half the Canadian and American populations through inadequate acquisition or descriptive practices is a falsification of the society archivists are meant to serve. Without the equal representation of women's contribution to Canadian or American society, the collective memory is ill-served, and ultimately and most importantly, archives become a distortion of reality which only serves to inhibit understanding of how society changes.<sup>178</sup>

This thesis has attempted to address this potential inequality by providing a resource of information regarding the creation, maintenance, and use of records by women's organizations, one small component of the larger dynamic of records that reflect the experiences and activities of women. It has allowed three organizations to reveal unique contextual information which will allow the archival community to move towards a more adequate and informed treatment of the archival record.

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<sup>178</sup> Earnshaw, "The Women's Archives Movement," 105.



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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Questions**

**RECORD - ANY DOCUMENT(S) MADE OR RECEIVED IN THE  
COURSE OF A PRACTICAL ACTIVITY.**

#### **Administrative History and Background**

**Perhaps we could start off by discussing the history of your organization.**

**Could you tell me about the establishment of your organization, including when and how it was established and why?**

- impetus
- community your organization serves
- primary purpose or objective
- main activities
- purpose and activities set out in a formal statement
- predecessor(s)
  - when established
  - their purpose or objective (if differs from your own)
- relationships with other organizations
  - formal and informal

**Could you discuss your organization's structure (the officers, committees, divisions, etc.), as well as any major changes in this structure that have occurred over time.**

- reasons for any changes
- structure of each unit
- purpose and activities of each unit
- WHAT DOES ----- DO?
- process by which each position is filled or replaced
- organizational chart

**How would you define yourself in the context of a "women's organization?"**

- do you see yourself as a women's organization?
- how would you define "women's organization"?

### **Record Creation and Keeping**

**Perhaps the next area we could discuss is the process by which you create and maintain the records of your organization, in other words, what you do with your records.**

**Records accumulate naturally in the process of day to day activity. However, maintaining records (personally or within an organization) is a difficult process. Even larger organizations have difficulty with this process.**

**One of the most basic elements of records maintenance is the receipt of mail. What happens to a letter when it is received in your office?**

- how received
- by whom
- what happens after receipt
- filed? how? process?

**Within your office, what types of records are created?**

- reports? correspondence? minutes?
- some more typical than others?
- how created?
- by whom?
- what happens after creation?
- filed? sent out? process?

**Which records would you consider to be vital, the ones that you can't do without?**

**How long do you keep records?**

- varies with type?

**Do you ever get rid of records?**

- how?
- which ones?
- security concerns?

**Do you have a place where you put old records? Do you see a role for these records?**

- Evidence?
- Memory?
- Users?
- transferred any to an archival institution?

**Tell me about how you file records.**

- consider this a "system"?

**SYSTEM - METHOD OF CONTROL**

- central control vs dispersed control?
- physical separation of frequently used records from those that are rarely or no longer used?
- use of process for the retrieval of records?
- primary form of records? other forms?
- place of records which are created electronically within the system as a whole?

**Are you satisfied with the process by which you file your records?**

•problems encountered?

**Given the broader focus of your organization, serving the needs of women, do you feel that any of your record keeping practices are distinctive within this focus?**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Consent Form**

#### **Title of Project**

The Record Keeping Practices of Women's Organizations: A Case Study of Three Organizations in Vancouver, B.C.

#### **Student Investigator**

Jana Buhlmann  
School of Library, Archival and Information Studies,  
UBC, 1956 Main Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z1  
phone: \*\*\*-\*\*\*\* (home)

The research is for a master's thesis.

#### **Faculty Advisor**

Prof. Terence Eastwood  
School of Library, Archival and Information Studies, UBC  
phone: \*\*\*-\*\*\*\*

#### **Description of the Project**

The purpose of this project is to examine the record creation and keeping practices of women's organizations in order to provide a more extensive understanding of the record creation process of materials related to the experience of women. A case study of women's organizations will be carried out in order to determine any record creation and keeping practices unique to women's organizations.

#### **Methods**

This project will utilize the case study method, employing interviews and observation. Informants from three Vancouver women's organizations will be interviewed. Post-interview observations about record keeping practices will be noted in writing by the investigator. Tape recorded interviews and written observations will provide the main source of data to be analyzed. A common

set of questions will guide each interview. Specific guidelines will direct the process of written observations. Qualitative analysis of the data will be performed.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality of the data will be maintained through the following guarantees:

- (1) only the investigator and the faculty advisor will have access to the recorded interviews
- (2) report of findings will only reveal the personal identity of informants who have provided written consent for such identification
- (3) tapes and transcripts will be retained by the investigator upon completion of this project with no plans for further use. Informants who do not provide written consent to reveal their personal identity will have their identity anonymized in tapes and transcripts.

### **Time**

The interview will take approximately one hour.

### **Inquiries**

The investigator and the faculty advisor will answer any inquiries concerning procedures for the interview. This project is conducted under the auspices of the University of British Columbia.

### **Consent**

If you agree to these conditions, please sign the statement given below and return this form using the envelope provided by April 17, 1996. There will be no consequences if you do not sign the form or if you decide not to participate in the project. If you do sign, it will indicate that you consent to participate in the study by answering an interview, but you may withdraw from your commitment at any time. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will have no adverse consequences for you.

**Statement of consent**

I have received a copy of the consent form, and I will \_\_\_\_\_  
/ will not \_\_\_\_\_ participate in the research project.

I give consent \_\_\_\_\_ / do not give consent \_\_\_\_\_ to have my  
personal identity utilized.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number : home \_\_\_\_\_

work \_\_\_\_\_



## **APPENDIX C**

### **Sample Questions**

What community does your organization serve?

What is the mandate of the organization?

What are the primary functions of the organization?

When was the organization established? What was the impetus for the establishment?

Does record keeping play a vital role in the activity of your organization? If yes, what do you believe that role to be?

Do you utilize a records classification system?

If yes, did you establish it yourself or did you bring in someone from outside the organization to create it?

If yes, does the system meet your administrative and operational needs?

If yes, have you encountered difficulty in maintaining the system?

If no, do you feel that the organization would benefit from such system?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Observations Summary**

Upon completion of each interview, the investigator will make note of the physical description and environment of the organization's office and its records in order to confirm matters discussed in the interview. This written observation will include:

- a description of the office itself in terms of layout
- a physical description of the records, including storage, volume, and media
- additional notes about the categories of the records