Feminist Supervision: Oxymoron or Redefinition of Power

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Anna Maria P. Spilker

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Department of Social Work and Family Studies
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver
Canada

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Abstract

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Many feminists working for feminist agencies that are hierarchically structured struggle with the issue of how to create an equitable workplace where power differentials between workers are minimized. Feminism in its very essence is about a redistribution of power. In their relationships with their supervisors, however, these workers often find themselves in a subordinate role.

Much has been written about how feminist principles can be applied to the supervision process. No studies have been done, however, on how a hierarchical structure affects the supervisory relationship. This qualitative research looks at women's experience of such relationships within a hierarchical context. For this purpose I interviewed six women who identified themselves as feminists and who were employed by hierarchically structured agencies that saw themselves as subscribing to a feminist ideology. I also include my own experience in this area, since it is pertinent to the study and is one of the reasons I became interested in this issue. My
findings suggest that these workers' experiences varied greatly. What stood out most strongly was their desire for meaningful and effective relationships.

Three main themes were developed from these interviews, each of which divided into a number of sub-themes. The main themes this study uncovered were (1) The varied ways these women experienced their supervisory relationships; (2) How they experienced the role of the supervisory relationship within the context of a hierarchical structure; and (3) What their experience revealed about what is needed to make such relationships function in more meaningful and constructive ways.

This study attempts to begin a conversation about how supervisory relationships affect us as workers. I feel that this information is important to the field of Social Work, for how we are supervised impacts our effectiveness with our clients. Listening to the ones that have less power, I believe, makes a good beginning place.
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"It really has been a learning process for me working here, because it is a women's organization, and it is supposed to support all women, including me!" Mary
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Organizational Inequities in Social Work:

While social work on the one hand is committed to working with individuals, and their right to self-determination and self-fulfillment, on the other hand it desires to advocate for societal change and a more equitable distribution of resources. Even though these two are not at cross-purposes, a split has occurred between direct and indirect service, and between clinical practitioners and those who work to create social change, especially those who create policy (Morell, 1987, p. 146). As well, most front line practice has generally been performed by women, and policy development is mostly male dominated. Men have also been credited with the development of most recognized theoretical frameworks within the field of social work. It is only more recently that women's contributions have become more recognized, and feminist theory in particular has gained recognition (Van Den Bergh, 1995). This gender split has led to both political and economic inequities within the profession, and within agencies these inequities have been perpetuated in the relationship between management and workers (Morell, 1987).
Traditional organizational settings tend to be bureaucratic, and hierarchical, which leads to inflexibility. This according to Morell (1987) contributes to a "routinization of domination" (p. 152). Human service workers in these settings will experience a dissonance that leads to feelings of "isolation, alienation, devaluation, and powerlessness" (Finn, 1990, p. 55). Workers become trapped between the "needs of their clients and the administrative barriers" (p. 57) they face in their day to day work.

Feminists’ Response to Organizational Inequities within Social Work:

Feminists have responded by working to eliminate or minimize hierarchical structures through the incorporation of feminist philosophy in their work setting. It is difficult to define terms such as hierarchy and feminist philosophy in absolutes. In the context of this paper a hierarchy is identified as an organizational structure in which there is a power dynamic between those in authority and workers, and where this power dynamic is supported by the structure of the agency. In terms of a supervisory relationship a hierarchy also implies that one person, the supervisor, fills the role of the expert and the worker is the information or knowledge seeker (Chan, 1996). Feminist philosophy,
on the other hand, is concerned with the equalization or minimization of power structures. It exposes women's oppression and demands change.

Within the feminist movement women have long debated about ways to create organizational structures that empower all women. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail (1988) explain how two prevalent models came into existence in the 1960s and 70s. The first, institutionalized feminism, "retained many of the structures and processes of traditional organizations, but [women] modified them to meet [their] own needs" (p. 233). The second, grass-roots feminism "rejected traditional organizational forms altogether and set out to build a new alternative" (p. 233). The latter has come to be known as the collective model, this model is process oriented and is built around consensus decision making.

The collective model has often been criticized, because it is perceived as a system that makes the change and decision making process an arduous one. It can indeed take a long time to reach consensus, and at times the process can reach an impasse. It must be recognized, however, that this model seriously aims at equalizing power differentials between workers, and is clearly quite workable in smaller organizations (Riger, 1994). For the purposes of this research, however, I concentrated on the more traditional organizational structure. As it was the
difficulty of combining a hierarchical structure with a feminist philosophy that I was interested in exploring.

Those feminists who worked within the traditional hierarchical model attempted to change its structure to reflect the needs and goals of women (Adamson et al., 1988). These changes on the whole did not affect the structures of these organizations, but rather dealt with the process used within the structures. An emphasis was put on teaching women the rules of order, ensuring they were aware of the decisions and activities of the Board of Directors and executive staff, as well as to include as many women as possible in the overall process (Adamson et al.). Feminists continue to work within these altered hierarchical structures, which by their very nature are incongruent with feminist ideology.

Feminist Ideology

Van Den Bergh (1995) identifies a number of important standpoints that most clearly describe feminist ideology. One of these is that in feminist theory and practice the personal is political. Here a direct connection is made between the individual's personal experience and the sociopolitical construct of the society they live in. Though feminism is mainly concerned with the oppression of women in
our society, it also seeks to dismantle "all permanent power hierarchies in which one category of humans dominates or controls another" (Morell, 1987, p. 148).

Feminism recognizes that the oppression of any one group diminishes us all, and separates us from ourselves as well as others. Feminism concerns itself with issues of interdependence, and looks to both process and context to understand the connectedness between "the person and her sociopolitical world" (Finn, 1990, p. 58).

Feminism actively resists hierarchical organizational models of power. These are seen mainly as instruments "of domination that [mystify] power through the politically neutral discourse of 'efficiency, rules, roles and procedures'" (Morell, 1987, p. 149). Feminism seeks to subvert depersonalization through active resistance (Morell, 1987). It does so by emphasizing empowerment and participatory decision-making, and is based on mutual support, and equity (Finn, 1990).

Van Den Bergh (1995) also articulates the feminist standpoints of "(1) knowing, (2) connecting, (3) caring, and (4) diversity" (p. xxxiii). She sees these as postmodern standpoints which show "an awareness of the multiplicity of women's experiences and hence the diversity of their ways of knowing" (p. xxxiii). She also
sees these standpoints as indicative of our concern with relatedness and connectedness on both interpersonal and community levels.

Finn (1990) states that congruency between feminist values and work place values is essential to help workers cope with feelings of isolation and devaluation as experienced by their clients. Working in an environment that doesn't support one's values creates tension within the worker. Workers become separated from themselves, and this in turn has implications for their work.

Outline

The purpose of my exploratory and descriptive research study was to examine feminist workers experience of supervision within hierarchically structured feminist agencies. My goal was to hear these women describe, in their own words, how these relationships affect them and their work. My exploration of the literature is outlined in Chapter II, where I look at some conceptual frameworks of supervision; feminist theories of supervision, as well as how power is constructed within these relationships. I also explore ways of reconceptualizing power as outlined in the literature.

Chapter III describes the methodology used for this research study. The rationale for using a qualitative method and individual interviews is outlined.
description of methods of recruitment, the outline of the actual interviews, and
the process of data analysis and verification are included, as is information on
how feminist principles informed the process.

Chapter IV presents the findings of this research study. The themes
and sub-themes that emerged from women's descriptions of their experiences of
hierarchically structured supervisory relationships within feminist agencies are
outlined and supported with direct quotes.

Chapter V links the results from this research study to the larger body
of literature. Here a strong feminist analysis brings workers' voices, previously
unsolicited, into the discourse about supervision. While Chapter VI looks at how
these results can be used to educate supervisors and staff within a broad range
of agencies, and a theoretical framework outlining a feminist supervision model is
presented.
History of Supervision in Social Work

Supervision within social work practice developed in the late 1800s within the context of welfare agencies and institutions that were run by public boards and commissions (Kadushin, 1992). It was used as a way to manage the delivery of services to clients by volunteers. "The agent [supervisor] ... gave continuity to the work, and acted as a channel of communication" (p. 3). The agent was mostly seen as the administrator of welfare services. In the late 1920s accountability was seen as an important aspect of supervision. The other areas seen as vital to supervision were education and support. The heavy emphasis on education within social work supervision was a result of the strong influences of psychiatry. "The emphasis is on training and growth of the clinician and the supervision is clinically oriented" (p. 13). In the early 1970s there was again a growing concern with accountability and this lead to a greater emphasis on the administrative aspects of supervision. Kadushin notes that since 1975 there has been a "marked increase in the number of books devoted to social work supervision" (p. 14). These include three editions of his own text.
In the late 70s consultation rather than supervision was the preferred terminology. Within social work the desire to practice in as egalitarian a way as possible made the traditional model of supervision less popular. Supervision was seen as associated with "the agency and its bureaucracy" (Kadushin, 1992, p. 17). Yet, supervision within social work has endured, especially within public institutions. In 1993 Shulman published his book called *Interactional Supervision*, as the title suggests, a model of supervision as an interactive process is developed in this text. In the next section which describes some of the concepts of supervision in social work I will look first at Kadushin's model of supervision, this will be followed by a description of some other models of supervision that are more in line with Shulman's interactional style.

**Concepts of Supervision in Social Work**

As noted above much has been written about the supervision process, and here I want to briefly cover some of the major concepts in the literature. Kadushin (1992) sees supervision as having three major functions, these are administration, education and support. "All are necessary if the ultimate objective of supervision is to be achieved" (p. 20). Administration has as its "primary
goal ... to insure adherence to policy and procedure” (p. 20). Education has as its primary goal "to dispel ignorance and upgrade skill” (p. 20), and the primary goal for supportive supervision is "worker morale and job satisfaction” (p. 20).

Kadushin feels quite strongly that this last objective needs to be present in the supervision of social workers. He sees the supervisor as having one foot in the front-line work and one foot in management which makes the supervisory position "clearly a middle-management position” (p. 21), and that this "position of the supervisor in the hierarchy ... further helps to define supervision” (p.21). Though this text offers much of interest to supervisors, it tends to be somewhat rigid in many of its concepts. His discussion of the power concepts within the supervisory structure is one clear example of this. Kadushin talks about the use of reward and coercive power. He states that "authority is a right that legitamizes the use of power” (p.84), and that "the supervisor has the ability to control punishment”(p. 86). Kadushin realizes that there is a "general discomfort” (p. 86) within social work to using these forms of power. He warns that “as a consequence of the reluctant ... utilization of supervisory power, external sources of control [will be] developed” (p. 134) This kind of thinking is clearly linked to a patriarchal hierarchical framework, and is in contradiction to many of social work’s basic values of empowerment and autonomy.
A form of supervision more in keeping with a social work philosophy is expressed in *The Social Work Supervisor* (Browne and Bourne, 1996). Browne and Bourne offer their own definition of supervision, which they see as an interactional process.

Supervision is the primary means by which an agency-designated supervisor enables staff, individually and collectively; and ensures standards of practice. The aim is to enable the supervisee(s) to carry out their work, as stated in their job specification, as effectively as possible. Regular arranged meetings between supervisor and supervisee(s) form the core of the process by which the supervisory task is carried out. The supervisee is an active participant in this interactional process. (p. 9)

Here supervision is seen as "both an event and a process" (p. 11). Different aspects of the supervision process are discussed in detail, these include burn-out, stress, and trauma. Browne and Bourne feel that the "space allocated for supervision ... is a very precious resource to be protected ... and that this protection is more likely to occur when the function is clearly [defined]" (p.11).

They also indicate that there is evidence which shows "that issues of race and gender and other oppressions are of profound importance in supervision" (p.14).

The issue of power is explored in an examination of power over, and it is pointed
out that empowerment can be an important tool when working within unequal relationships. Most of their discussion of the actual supervisory relationship, however, is devoted to the "difficulties and tangles that can occur" (p. 81) within the relationship.

Tamara Kaiser (1997) in her book *Supervisory Relationships: Exploring the Human Element* approaches this from a slightly different angle. She talks about how "most texts talk about the 'how to's' of supervision without really attending to the human element, which both underlies and adds excitement and challenge to the task" (p. v). She offers a conceptual model of supervision which has as its premise that "relationship interacts with all aspects of supervision, including the context in which it occurs" (p. 11, see Appendix A, for a diagram of this model). Kaiser does not shy away from the issues of power and authority. She states that maybe a more important question to ask is "not where on the continua of hierarchy/egalitarianism or dependency/autonomy one falls, but rather how the issue of power is addressed" (p. 17). Kaiser raises the issue of unequal relationships and that it is "an important part of the supervisory process ... to continually address this theme" (p. 18). She believes that both the supervisor and the supervisee have power, and that although "supervisors are in a
more powerful position than are supervisees, supervisees also have power to enhance or sabotage the supervisory process” (p. 48).

While this is a limited examination of the literature on Social Work supervision, there is clear evidence of social work’s struggle with issues of power within supervisory relationships. How we deal with the issue of power has a tremendous impact on how we construct our relationships in supervision. Given Tamara Kaiser’s (1997) conceptual model of supervision where relationship affects all of the supervision process, this is an important aspect to pay attention to. The next two sections will look at how feminist social work has dealt with the issue of power within supervisory relationships.

Feminist Theories of Supervision

Feminist theory argues that it is important for workers and supervisors to “eliminate false dichotomies [and] artificial separations” (Chernesky, 1995, p.73). It encourages workers to challenge the emphasis on productivity and concentrate instead on working relationships in an effort to understand better the impact of their work (Finn, 1990). Feminist theory encourages workers to resist oppressive conditions (Morell, 1987) in a way that begins to facilitate a shift in paradigms. A shift that will take into account the needs of the client and
the worker, as well as agency function (Hipp & Munson, 1995). Gloria Steinem (as quoted in Adamson et al. 1988) insists that the end never justifies the means, but rather that the means and the end are intrinsically linked. In feminism the process itself is as important as the final outcome/product.

Finn (1990) sees a feminist supervisory approach as being supportive of growth. Whereas organizational expectations often label workers' vulnerabilities as weakness, feminist supervision is able to acknowledge personal strengths as well as vulnerabilities in a way that promotes learning. In a feminist model of supervision, one based on mutuality, power is redefined as "power by affiliation", explained by Eisler (1987) to mean a way "of advancing one's own development without at the same time having to limit the development of others" (p. 193).

Feminist supervisors, according to Chernesky (1995), have a leadership style "that is derived from women's unique qualities that incorporate feminist principles" (p.73). They create "nonhierarchal and collaborative organizational structures in which power is redefined and process is valued" (p. 75). These supervisors are also committed "to improving women's lives through fundamental change and empowerment" (p.75). Beth Humphries (1999) argues that within social work we need to speak out against inequality if we are committed to work that involves a struggle for social justice. This includes confronting all "social
structures ... that do not support the needs and rights of women" (Barnsley, 1995, p. 6).

Van Den Bergh (1995) argues that social work would do well to ascribe to a partnership model. She feels that this would be in keeping with its most cardinal values. Hipp and Munson (1995) present a partnership model of feminist supervision/consultation. They see such a model functioning at four different levels: "societal, agency, supervisory and client" (p. 27; see Appendix B for a diagram of this model). According to Hipp and Munson this model fosters "supervisory relationships in which the relationship is based on joining and sharing to meet client and professional needs" (p. 33). They see a partnership model allowing "for deeper explorations of our work with others ... [and] caring and life-enhancing activities ... at the core" (p.35).

Redefining Power

The literature on feminist models challenge us to examine how we create structures that support women to work in ways that make it possible for them to incorporate feminist principles in their work. Feminist literature clearly points out that on the whole one cannot expect dominator models to promote equal treatment (Hipp & Munson, 1995; Zunz, 1991). Hierarchical structures that fit
the category of the dominator model can, therefore, not be used to create an equitable workplace. In a hierarchy those that are higher up in an organization have, by definition, power over their subordinates (Chernesky, 1986). Within the feminist movement women have long debated about ways to create organizational structures that empower women. It would seem, then, that in a hierarchical feminist structure the pivotal issue to address is the issue of power.

Noddings (1984) talks about unequal meetings resulting from one person’s need for help or instruction, and the other person’s ability to meet those needs. She explains how the supervisor as “one-caring needs to see from both her own perspective and that of the [worker] in order to ... meet the needs of the [worker]” (p. 67). The worker is “freed by the [supervisor’s] engrossment in [her] and [her] projects to pursue those projects without considering their significance for the personal development of the [supervisor]” (p.67). The supervisor sees the worker, “the cared-for as [she] is and as [she] might be - as [she] envisions [her] best self - in order to confirm [her]” (p. 67). She believes that it is “not only the authorization to help or instruct that makes unequal meetings ... inevitable, it is also the nature of the cared-for’s situation” (p. 66). She goes on to say that mutual inclusion can at times cause equal meetings to occur, but that generally they are unequal of necessity. Kaiser (1997) adds to this that
clearly the nature of the cared-for's response affects the relationship. It is much easier to give to those who give back by taking what is offered, using it fully, and sharing their internal processes and accomplishments. However, the one-caring cannot demand this sort of responsiveness; to do so would be to treat the cared-for as an object, existing for the gratification of the one-caring's own needs. (p.18)

To insist, then, that supervisor and supervisee must be equally powerful, is unrealistic. Van Den Bergh and Cooper (1995) talk about reconceptualizing power. They see power as a "central concern within feminist analysis" (p. 77). They discuss how power within a patriarchal model is seen as a finite commodity. "Through control of power, patriarchal models breed subordination by promoting dependency and not providing persons with the ability to have full control over their lives" (p. 77). In patriarchy we are seen through the social role we fill, and the value this role has in society. Feminists have sought to change this notion of power. They view power as infinite,

A widely distributed energy of influence, strength, effectiveness, and responsibility. Power is viewed as facilitative: empowerment to action occurs rather than domination. Empowerment, or claiming personal power, is a political act because it allows people control over their
own lives and the ability to make decisions for themselves. (p. 77)

This does not mean that differences of power are eliminated. What it does mean is that power is defined differently, and that one type of power is not more legitimate than another. Van Den Bergh and Cooper (1995) put it this way:

To redefine power does not mean to deny the reality of differentials that exist between persons in knowledge, influence, skills, resources or responsibility ..... Types of power, such as knowledge power, or skill power, must be recognized and acknowledged .... From time to time, certain individuals might be more expert ... and their opinion could weigh more heavily than that of others. (p.77-78, my emphasis)

Responsibility in this way is clearly related to the issue of accountability. Kaiser (1997) sees accountability as "the process of taking responsibility for one's behavior and for the impact of that behavior on self and others" (p. 14). The supervisor in a traditional setting uses her judgment and skill to determine whether the worker "is doing competent work and ... is staying within the parameters of the ethical code of the profession" (p. 15). Butler and Wintram (1991), however, believe that accountability can be a process that workers, clients and supervisors are all part of. "The evaluation process means that we are
accountable ... co-workers need to evaluate themselves and each other and get feedback from [clients] about their work" (p. 177). They feel that "the ability to praise or criticize our co-worker without fear of rejection can give us the impetus to test out improvements in our practice..." (p. 178). Evaluation is seen as an integral part of the work and can be carried out in a variety of ways, not just one way. It need not be relegated to only the supervisor, nor should it be seen as a postscript or retrospective of the work done.

How we as feminists put all this into practice is important. Kaiser (1997) gives some guidelines for minimizing the hierarchical nature of relationships:

- Giving shared responsibility to both supervisee and supervisor for contracting and for evaluation.
- The use of clear, understandable language as well as respectful encouragement of the supervisee's questions and ideas.
- Avoiding behaviors that will emphasize hierarchy, such as being directive rather than suggesting possible actions. (p. 27-28)

Workers and supervisors' personal and interactive styles are seen as significant factors to take into account if we are to create more meaningful relationships according to Butler and Wintram (1991). Van Den Bergh and Cooper (1995) state that "structures can be created ... that give persons
more equal access to issues, resources, and information" (p.78) and that "disclosing certain data can provide the conditions by which individuals can make choices - and that is part of the process of empowering" (p.78).

These are all part of what needs to happen if we are to change how hierarchical feminist structures function. Some will say that as long as they are hierarchical nothing can change. Yet, clearly, even in a collective structure we will have differentials in power. Through feminist praxis (practice linked to theory) we can begin to create new realities. Bricker-Jenkins and Hooyman (1986) talk about relationship as "a political as well as a social construction" (p.17), where we "are each personally responsible for our contribution to the shaping of reality and thus personally responsible to each other" (p. 17). In this way we "are liberated only through our own actions - our participation in an unfolding collective process" (p. 17).

Summary

Feminist supervision as explored in the literature outlined above clearly diverges from traditional supervision in several areas, the most important area being the definition and use of power. Feminists argue that it isn't so much about power being "bad", but rather about how power is used in the supervisory
relationship. Facilitative power allows for workers to take control over, and responsibility for, their own work. Whereas traditional supervision promotes the idea of an expert on whom the worker relies and depends for skill and knowledge superior to her own, feminist supervision promotes interdependence. It values relationships in all its complex forms, and it promotes responsibility to oneself and to others.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Feminist practice within the field of social work is becoming more and more recognized, and methods of feminist research are actively taught in most schools of social work. Yet, the issue of supervision within feminist practice has received little attention, both in curriculum content and as the subject of research studies. I could find no direct studies that look at how feminist workers cope when confronted with hierarchical models of supervision within their workplace. Hipp and Munson (1995) mention one study of 237 psychotherapists, done in 1984 by Steinhelber, Patterson, Cliffe and LeGoullon, which found that "clients reported significantly greater improvement when the supervisor and supervisee theoretical orientations were congruent" (p. 32). As well, Zunz's 1991 study demonstrated that a hierarchical structure does not promote equality even when such a setting endeavors to equalize the distribution of power.

Zunz's study raises some serious questions about how feminist workers experience their relationship with their supervisor when this is constructed within the hierarchical structures of their agencies, even when these agencies
have a feminist orientation. Theoretical writing on this subject appears to be limited to specialized feminist writings and not much is available on the subject within mainstream social work literature. I have also been unable to find any empirical research on this subject. Clearly there is a need for an empirical exploration of the effects unequal relations have on feminist workers. This research study begins to uncover some of the issues involved through hearing and examining the experiences of seven feminist workers, including myself, of such supervisory relationships.

Personal Relevance of the Research

Over the last five years I have been employed by a feminist agency that has a clear hierarchical structure. We have a Board of Directors, an Executive Director, several Program Managers, Counsellors, Women Support Workers, and Support Staff. The agency has a policy and mission statement which reflects a feminist philosophy. The executive director identifies as a feminist as does almost all of the other staff. The Executive Director is my immediate supervisor. At this time I do not supervise any staff, although I have in the past. Within the agency we have struggled with issues of supervision, and I
believe that my experience is pertinent to this study. I also fit the criteria for participation in this study as outlined below. For these reasons I have included my own voice in the data.

Participants

Participants in this study needed to self-identify as feminists, and work for hierarchically structured agencies that identified as having a feminist philosophy. Women were recruited for this study through a snowball method. After discussing my research project and criteria for participation with a colleague to receive feedback on the relevance of this research to workers' lived experience, she felt that there were a number of women who might be interested in participating in this study. She discussed my project with two women from different agencies, who in turn approached others. In this way the word spread and four women telephoned me to volunteer, all four were accepted. Through my Masters of Social Work program at the University of British Columbia two other women volunteered for this research project, and were suitable for this study. All in all six women participated. Three of the women resided in the Vancouver area, two were from Nanaimo, and one woman lived and worked in Victoria.
Throughout this study women will be referred to by fictitious names. These names were mostly of their own choosing, and were assigned to each participant to make it possible to attribute comments to the actual person without exposing their true identity, as well as for ease of presentation.

The education and experience levels of the participants varied. Audrey has an MSW degree from the University of British Columbia, and has 2 years of experience working in a hierarchical agency that adheres to a feminist philosophy. Jane has a BA and a BSW, both from the University of British Columbia; she has 13 years of experience working in such an agency. Peg has no post-secondary education, but has 10 years of experience working for a hierarchically structured Women's Center. Mary has a BA in Criminology from the University of Victoria, and has 2 years of experience in a feminist agency. Ann has a BSW from a university in one of the Western provinces and is an MSW candidate at the University of British Columbia; she has 3 years of work experience with an agency that considers itself feminist. Karen is an MSW candidate with the University of British Columbia as well, and has a BSW from the University of Victoria; she has 3 years of work experience in two different agencies. I have a BSW from the University from Victoria and am an MSW candidate at the University of British Columbia. For the past five years I have
been employed by a feminist agency which works exclusively with women. All the participants, except one, receive regularly scheduled supervision within their agencies. One woman receives supervision only sporadically, as well as when needed around difficult work related situations.

Two of the participants did not have a formal social work education or work designation. These women, however, performed tasks that were similar to those women who did have this training and designation. Their agencies identified as providing social services, and the women's varied training and experience made them suitable participants for this study.

These six women, as well as myself, were employed by agencies that are hierarchically structured. In all, seven different agencies were represented. Five of the agencies have a board of directors, an executive director, several program managers, front-line staff and support staff. One of the agencies has recently moved towards a more egalitarian structure; however, some parts of the hierarchical model remain. This agency still has a board of directors; the flattened structure now has only two wage levels, with one level for a number of program coordinators and another for all other staff. The sixth agency is a small women's centre that has a board of directors, a paid program coordinator and two staff. The board in this case tries to run as much as possible as a collective,
however, this does not carry over into their relationship to staff. From listening
to women's accounts of how their agencies function it became clear that two of
the agencies mentioned struggled a great deal with issues of hierarchy and power
within their organization, whereas the hierarchical structure was clearly more
entrenched in the other five agencies. All of the agencies see themselves as
having a feminist orientation, and this is reflected in their mission statements
and policies. One agency also had a separate "Statement of Philosophy" which
clearly supports "a feminist philosophy that celebrates diversity and promotes
political, economic, social and cultural equality and addresses issues of power and
control" (Agency #1, Policy Manual, 1998, with permission).

All of the participants, including myself, identified themselves as strong
feminists. Although this does not mean that all these women held the same
values and beliefs, there was strong agreement about feminist theory and
practice values. These were that they (1) see the personal as political; (2) work
to minimize power differentials in their work with clients; (3) use consciousness-
raising strategies in their work; (4) see women's experience within the larger
societal context; (5) use of autonomy and self-determination as tools of
empowerment. These five standpoints were identified by all participants.
Purpose

When I first started out on this research project my aim was to discover how women workers made meaning of their relationship with their supervisor within hierarchical structures. I have worked and volunteered for a number of non-profit agencies. These agencies often go through difficult times due to power struggles within the agency and/or board. A few years ago I witnessed two feminist agencies go through such struggles. Both agencies managed to come through these struggles, but not unscathed. These experiences made me reflect on how we as feminists work together to dismantle oppression. Most of the questions that came to mind are beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that my analysis took me back to examining more closely our personal/professional relationships within these organizations, and how power differentials affect them. It is from this place that my final research question originated.

How do feminist workers experience their relationship with their supervisor when this is constructed within a hierarchical structure?
Women responded not only by telling me their experiences of these relationships, but also by elaborating on how they struggled to make these relationships more meaningful. The participants identified areas that they saw as important to the development of meaningful and reciprocal relationships. I have honoured their openness and willingness to share their experiences and knowledge by taking my lead from them. This paper, therefore, has become about more than just my research question. I believe this is very much in keeping with feminist research, which tries as much as possible to make research a participatory process (Riger, 1992).

The importance of hearing women's voices and to listening carefully to the meaning of their words and stories is the essence of feminist research. Reinharz (1992) talks about how researchers can liberate women's language by "seizing the power to name and to wrench words from their semantic fields" (p. 218). Sandra Harding (1997) states that we need to study women "from the perspective of their own experiences so that women can understand themselves and the world" (p. 164). My purpose then, was not only to answer my research question, but to honour women's process at the same time.
Method

Since the purpose of this study was to examine feminist women's experiences of supervisory relationships within hierarchically structured agencies that have a feminist orientation, a qualitative research style was seen as most consistent with the purpose of this research, for this study is both exploratory and descriptive. It is intended to promote a better understanding of the workers' actual experiences of the phenomenon, the supervisory relationship.

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human [issue]. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (Creswell, 1998, p. 15, my emphasis)

Maxwell (1996) states that qualitative research is especially suited to "understanding the particular context within which participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions" (p. 17).

This method is also most congruent with a feminist perspective. Sally Mason (1997) states that only a qualitative analysis is able to capture the complexities of women's experiences in context, as well as in their own words (as excerpted from Lather, 1988). Stephanie Riger (1992) points out that both
context and setting are important considerations if the research process is to reflect feminist values. This method seems particularly appropriate to the phenomenon being examined: feminist workers' experience of supervisory relationships within a hierarchically imposed structure. For this method is sensitive to "the ways in which women create meaning and experience life [in this case supervision] from their particular position in the social hierarchy" (Riger, 1992, p. 734).

According to Maria Mies (1983) research has largely served the interest of the dominant elite. Kirby and McKenna (1989) state that too often the experts who do research have been well trained in patterns of thinking which not only conflict with their understanding, but explain and justify a world many are actually interested in changing. (p. 17)

They feel that for too long oppressed groups have been "excluded from participating in, describing and analyzing our own understanding of reality" (p. 16).

Stanley and Wise (1983) state that we need

To reclaim, name and re-name our experience and thus our knowledge of this social world we live in and daily help to construct, because only
by doing so will it become truly ours, ours to use and do with as we will.

(p. 205)

I believe qualitative research is conducive to creating knowledge, which is "rooted in and representative of [mine and others'] experience" (Kirby & McKenna, p. 16).

Adrienne Rich (1979) in her important work On Lies, Secrets and Silence tells us that for too long women have been made to feel "insane when cleaving to the truth of our experience" (p. 190). She goes on to say that "our future depends on ... describing our reality as candidly and fully as we can to each other" (p. 190).

I feel that qualitative research methods can expose the reality of women's supervisory experiences. Through this research we can begin to look more closely at how these power structures can be understood, as well as named and re-named. By doing so we begin to take responsibility for our part in these relationships, and begin to create the reality we desire.

Data Collection

Individual interviews were chosen as the data collection method. Reinharz (1992) points out that feminist researchers find that interviewing allows access to "people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words" (p.19), and "maximizes discovery and description" (p. 18). I chose an unstructured open-
ended interview style to allow participants the freedom to comment on their experience as widely as possible. "Open-ended interview research explores people's views of reality" (p.18), and "allows the researchers to make full use of differences among people" (p.19).

Unstructured interviews are based on a clear plan that you keep constantly in mind, but are also characterized by a minimum of control over the informant's responses. (Bernard, 1994, p. 209).

The aim is to get "people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms, and at their own pace" (p.209). Using individual interviews over, for instance, a focus group, allowed women more time to express themselves without having to take others' time allotment into considerations. I chose individual interviews, also, because I wanted to interview women in a setting of their choice, so they could be as comfortable as possible. The other consideration was that women were recruited from two areas of British Columbia that are quite a distance apart, these were the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. It would have been difficult for these women to come together in one place.

The interviews with the women were audiotaped. My own interview was conducted by another student in the University of British Columbia School of Social Work MSW program and audiotaped as well. I started by asking this
student to go over the questions with me and to feel free to participate in the
discussion with me, as she had also worked for a similar agency in the past. It was
my intention that the interview with myself would be of similar quality as the
interviews I conducted with the other participants. Yet, I realize that it is not
quite the same, as I developed the questions from my own experience and reading.
It is for this reason that I have left my own voice recognizable, so that the
reader may decide for herself if my comments are indeed congruent with the
intent of the study.

The question asked of all participants was: How would you describe your
relationship with your supervisor in the context of your work? A second question
if needed was: What does the supervisory process you engage in look like? Other
probes were: Is the supervision you receive meeting your needs? Is feminist
theory discussed at all? Can you give me examples of how the supervision process
does/doesn't work for you? Have you ever expressed concerns about the
supervision process with your supervisor? How does your experience of
supervision impact on client services? I also asked women What other
experiences of supervision have you had? and What recommendations would you
like to make to improve the supervision process and relationship? Most of the
probes were rarely needed as women brought up these issues during their discussion of the first two or three questions.

All interviews, including my own, were transcribed and analysed by myself. I transcribed each interview within five days of having done the interview. Immediately following this the resulting data was coded "linking different segments or instances in the data" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 27). This process involved examining the transcripts for segments that contained a single meaning, and linking them to other segments that contained the same or similar meanings. These linked segments of data were instrumental in identifying key themes and ideas. Using these themes I both interpreted and described the interviews using a hermeneutical process, within the context of both my own feminist perspective and my experience of supervision. Hermeneutics refers to a method of interpretation which looks for "the intended and the expressed meaning" (Kvale, 1996, p. 47) within text. For my purposes this meant looking for meaning in separate segments of the data, and then linking these back to the actual texts of the conversations. In this way my interpretation was always informed by the text, and I remained aware of how my interpretations were changing the text/ure of these interviews. This helped me stay as true as possible to women's words and intended meanings.
Validity

To ensure that the interpretations and descriptions captured the true intent of the participants, all the participants were asked to read their own interview transcript, as well as the resulting interpretations and descriptions of their interview. Two of the women did not respond in detail due to busy personal schedules. Four of the women also reviewed the way the interviews had been coded. If I was unclear about anything I asked women to clarify that particular point or area. This reflects what Kvale (1996) calls the analysis proper “developing the meanings of the interview [and] bringing subjects' own understanding into [the process]” (p. 190).

The next step was to discuss my findings and interpretations with others in the field in order to receive feedback and to test its validity. I felt it was important to get input from others, both inside and outside of my own field of experience, since I was not only doing the study, but also a participant in the study. Three colleagues, feminists in similar positions as myself, were very interested, as was my therapist support group, consisting of 4 workers from different hierarchical, non-feminist agencies. Though these women are employed by non-feminist agencies, the women themselves do identify as feminists. Data was presented to them, with all identifying material removed, and we discussed...
the findings to see if my interpretations made sense to them in view of the data. They also used their own experience and understanding of the phenomenon to examine the gathered data, and to look for inconsistencies. Maxwell (1996) states that

soliciting feedback from others is an extremely useful strategy for identifying validity threats, our own biases and assumptions, and flaws in our logic or methods ... to get such feedback from a variety of people, both those familiar with the phenomena or settings ... and those who are strangers to the situation. (p. 94)

Finally I feel that the data presented in this paper is very "rich", and not only provides a full picture of the research subject in a way that supports my inferences, but also makes it difficult for mistaken conclusions to be drawn (Maxwell). This, I believe, strengthens the validity of my data.

The method and design for this qualitative research study received the approval of the Behavioural Sciences Screening Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects at the University of British Columbia in February 2000. The approval was received when this project was first designed in Dr. O'Connor's qualitative research class. No separate certificate of approval was made available to me (See Appendix C).
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Hearing Women's Voices: Feminist Workers' Experiences of Supervision

Introduction

In their interviews women talked freely about their relationships with their supervisors. They discussed how they experienced their relationships, they looked at their own roles as well as the roles of their supervisors within these relationships, and they talked about the contexts in which these relationships took place. These conversations also revealed what the participants believed was needed for these relationships to develop in more meaningful and constructive ways. After carefully listening to and examining the stories I became aware that women's stories were varied as well as rich in detail. Women's ability to access supervision, for example, was one area that varied greatly among the participants.

When I need it I seek it out, it's not a scheduled thing... Jane

We meet every two weeks ... for about an hour ... it's very traditional.

Ann
Here I grab a cup of coffee, [my supervisor] grabs a cup of coffee and we talk. Mary

We hired an outside consultant ... we meet every two weeks ... she also does part of the evaluation process. Audrey

Yet, from within the many variations, one strong message emerged: these women not only want to make sense of their relationships with their supervisors, these relationships also matter to them.

There is something that is missing ... which I have struggled with all the time ... I don't know her well enough but it's hard to get to know her, and I don't mean a friend ... but I like more of a holistic thing. Ann

The relationship, well there are a few components to it ... certainly working with her is wonderful, it is very positive ... there is a personal as well as a professional aspect, and it seems to work really well. Mary

I looked at her very much as a mentor ... she sort of mattered to me as a person. Karen
Themes and sub-themes

After listening closely to these women and analysing their responses I became aware of the following three themes:

(1) The varied ways these women experienced their supervisory relationships;
(2) How they experienced the role of the supervisory relationship within the context of a hierarchical, feminist structure;
(3) What their experience revealed about what is needed to make such relationships function in more meaningful and constructive ways.

From within these themes there also emerged a number of sub-themes as outlined in table 1.

As I listened to women's voices I was struck again by the large variations in their experience and by their strong desire to have what Kaiser (1987) defines as "shared meaning" or "a mutual understanding and agreement" (p.18) within the relationship. Broome (1991) describes shared meaning as "an ongoing process of discussing, adjusting, and correcting perceptions" (p. 242) which brings us to a level of mutual understanding within the relationship. Women also had their own words for what would constitute a meaningful relationship. They used "holistic" (Ann); personal in a "professional sort of way" (Mary); "having a common understanding about things" (Karen).
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Table 1.
Exploration of themes and sub-themes

1. The varied ways these women experience their supervisory relationships.

How these women experienced their relationships with their supervisors is extremely varied in this small sample of workers. One of the women was not sure if she really even had a "relationship" with her supervisor. She felt that the supervisor was mostly not available to her, and that any communication happened mainly around administrative issues. The experience of this woman was that there was too much distance between herself and her supervisor.

*I don't know if I have ever had a relationship with her. I've never gotten any direction or feedback, or anything really.* Peg

Another woman identified that the parameters in her relationship were not at all clear. In this case it appeared that there were boundary issues that were never discussed, and this complicated the relationship in a major way.

*I was emotionally involved in some way, she mattered to me as a person, so I think that complicated things, and we never talked about that, and the way we would be in this relationship.* Karen

Ann identified that she experienced the relationship as both very hierarchical and traditional. She experienced her supervisor as distant and cold.

Ann stated that this often made her feel less than her supervisor.
I feel very much like the student learning to do clinical work, and it
doesn't feel very good.

In Audrey's case there was also a certain distance, however, she did not see this
as a negative, but rather identified it as a professional distance based on respect
and trust.

I see her as a really good resource, she keeps a very professional
distance, we stay in the work only. I really respect her skill.

It is important to note that this is the one relationship where the agency brought
in an outside supervisor who worked exclusively with the clinical staff. She
functioned in both a consultative and evaluative role for the workers. Yet, this
worker felt also that

Our relationship is still developing, ..., that process is begun. Audrey

For the two other women and myself the relationships were seen as involving
less distance. My own experience was that there was a balance between the
professional and personal involvement in our relationship. Both of us were able to
be present as complete individuals, and there was a certain amount of mutuality.
Yet, both of us knew that she, as the supervisor, had the final say in any decision
making process if there was an issue where we could not reach an agreement.
Jane, on the other hand, had worked with her supervisor for 13 years, and they had a comfort level with each other that felt very good.

When I need [supervision] I seek it out, it's comfortable and we work well together.

Mary had only worked for six months with her supervisor, yet she felt that their relationship was one of trust and mutuality. She also felt that the relationship encouraged both her professional and personal growth. Mary was very emphatic about the fact that she didn't feel the hierarchy in this relationship.

It feels more equal; it feels like I have a voice, it feels great.

Sub-Themes

From within this variation of experience of the supervisory relationship came a number of sub-themes. These sub-themes detail what women saw as valuable and important for the supervisory relationship. Though women clearly attached the same values to certain attributes of the relationship, they each experienced these in different ways, both positive and negative.

(a) Workers experience of being (in)visible within the relationship.
Peg felt that her supervisor was mostly unavailable, and was not aware of what she actually did, or who she was. She found this difficult and frustrating.

*I need to be seen in the work: otherwise burnout isn't far away.*

Ann experienced what is possible in a supervisory relationship when her supervisor went on a sabbatical. The "fill-in" supervisor provided her with much needed validation.

*I felt really supported and seen by her, it validated who I am I guess.*

Mary, on the other hand, felt that she was completely supported by and visible to her supervisor.

*I have a voice, I am heard, she's there for me.*

She felt that this in turn made her more present to the needs of the women coming in for services. Karen put a slightly different emphasis on the need to be visible at work as a whole person,

*If you are asking us to work five days a week, seven hours a day, how can we not bring ourselves ... to our workplace; it is the most time we spent anywhere in our week.*
Workers' experience of their supervisors' (in)visibility within the relationship.

The women talked about the importance of being able to really see their supervisor. They indicated that they would like to get past the professional distance created by some of the supervisors. Ann talked about how her regular supervisor presents a kind of aloofness, something is missing, she's not totally there.

and she felt she could not go back to that after her studies.

I just can't do it; we'll need to talk this one out.

My personal experience of my supervisor had been that she was able to bring both her professional as well as her personal self to the relationship.

For instance, we may be totally immersed in client issues in the morning, and over lunch we can be seen talking about some personal stuff. That for me feels congruent with the work we do, it models a certain openness.

Audrey on the other hand was content with the fact that her supervisor remained in the work only. It is important again to point out that this was an outside supervisor, and that Audrey did have closer relationships with other coordinators.
coordinators within the agency. She really felt that she needed this clinical
supervisor specifically for her skills around the clinical work. She did also mention
that this woman was able to

validate the skills I have, and she is gentle and caring, really there.

For Jane the relationship felt very solid.

We’ve gone through a lot over 13 years, both professionally, but also
personally, and we have been really there for each other, that’s why
we can be at this comfortable place in the work with each other.

(c) Workers’ experience of shared meaning and shared practice values within
the relationship.

The women felt very strongly about the importance of shared practice
values, and that these needed to be based in feminist theory. They felt that it
was important to name what that meant for each of them, and that there needed
to be an acceptance of difference. Women saw this as an important element to
building shared meaning and understanding within the relationship. Karen’s
experience especially highlighted what happened when there was no shared
understanding between the worker and her supervisor.
When I first started there she was still hanging on to this idea of a collective, even though it was a hierarchy, the supervisor still encouraged that family atmosphere, and yet there was also this management issue, and she treated someone else really badly, so then I felt ... I had a fear that she could turn on me. There was no common understanding about what we valued and how we worked.

Peg talked about how she saw things developing within her agency when a new person had come on board. She felt that this was an opportunity to begin the process of building shared meaning and understanding.

I believe that within this organization we can cultivate an atmosphere where people are safe to put out where they are at, that there is no judgment and that we are able to hear one another. We don't have to agree, hell, I don't want to agree with everyone, I learn more when it's safe to disagree. It is good to say this is how I see the world and this is my experience ... and I come to it through my experience, and what about you ... so that we have an understanding of what that means.

When there is no common understanding of and respect for each other's values and attitudes conflict often results. As feminists we see unity among
women, or sisterhood, as important, forgetting that, as Riger (1994) points out, sisters can be extremely competitive and that conflict is more the norm than not. Feminists also often disagree about issues. In my interviews with the women, conflict did come up. Karen experienced an extreme form of this in her agency between a colleague and their supervisor.

So there was a lot of tension then between her and my supervisor, and that affected how I felt towards my supervisor too, because she was very hostile towards this worker.

There seemed to be some reluctance to talk about conflict and how this was experienced. Mostly it was just talked about as a certain amount of tension that was felt at work.

There is a lot of suspicion, a certain tension; I think we really need to build the trust. Audrey

Personally I stated that I found it difficult to bring conflict out in the open for as a strong feminist I feel that I have already cut myself off from the mainstream, it is difficult to risk losing the community that I feel so strongly connected too.

(d) Workers' experience of the level of mutuality within the relationship.
Women felt strongly that if there was to be any depth to the relationship then there needed to be some emphasis on mutuality and participation, a sort of give and take, within the relationship. Women like Jane who had a lot of experience expressed it this way

*I am a very independent worker, and having now done this work for 13 years I tend to be able to be a very strong participant in this supervision process, not like when I first started and I needed more direction.*

While Mary, who was fairly new to the work put it like this

*I have a lot to learn from her, that’s for sure, but you know I’m not some blank slate, I have opinions and ideas, and feedback to give, and you know, she’s open to that, and she’ll try and make changes, and she shares a lot of herself and her skill. I feel I have input and a say.*

Women talked about how mutuality promoted “a depth of understanding between [worker and supervisor]” (Jane), and “an atmosphere ... where it is safe to put out where you both are at” (Peg) within the relationships. Without this element of mutuality present the women felt that the relationship was flat, and they also found it more difficult to approach their supervisor as someone to help them deal with stressful work situations.
I mean I get to the point where I'm stressed out and I have to phone the agency down the road for some consultation, that doesn't feel very good. Peg

Clearly women's experiences of supervision were very varied, even within this small sample of workers. Yet within this variation there was a clear thread of what these women considered to be essential elements of the supervisory relationship if it was to have any meaningful purpose in their work. The next section looks at how a hierarchical context affects these experiences.

2. **How these women experienced the role of the supervisory relationship within the context of a hierarchical, feminist structure.**

Women talked a great deal about the role of the supervisory relationship as it was perceived within the agency, and how that affected them. Jane talked about how her supervisor's role was to facilitate staff evaluations:

*I do a self-evaluation, and I ask peers to fill out an evaluation, she then gives me feedback about those, and we discuss how that all fits together. We also talk about educational goals, workshops etc. It's very respectful, and I participate fully.*
Karen's experience was very different, she was an independent and autonomous worker, and all of a sudden the supervisory role at her agency shifted.

My supervisor was saying you need to let me know when you are going, I mean if I left half an hour early one day it meant I worked half an hour late last night or the night before, it really bothered me.

Within my own agency supervision filled a number of roles, but for me the role of the supervisory relationship is to be a support to me in the work I do, it's difficult work and I need to know that there is someone I can rely on to give me some honest feedback without being judgmental, someone I can speak my truth with, that's a big piece.

For Audrey it was also important to have someone there who was aware of what she did.

That's how we contracted it with her, someone who knows what we are doing, who will make sure we're accountable, who challenges us, but who also can let us be vulnerable and be with us in that.
Sub-Themes

Within this theme there were again a number of issues, or sub-themes, that emerged. There was a discussion of:

(a) How the role of the supervisory relationship is defined, considering its hierarchical nature, and the philosophical (feminist) framework within which it has to function.

Women felt that there was a need to define the role of the supervisory relationship given the hierarchical nature of such a relationship, and the fact that in their cases this was constructed in the context of a feminist philosophy. They felt that these two were very much in opposition to each other.

To me supervision implies that there is a difference in authority and power and you're going to somebody who you need direction from,

feminism is about flattening that out, having a two way process.

Jane

The women talked about how important it was to talk about what would happen in supervision, how it was structured and how participatory it would be.

They saw themselves mostly as active participants in the supervision process; however, it appeared that in the majority of the cases it was more a trial and
error process to discover where the boundaries were around that, as indicated by
the following three comments.

There was no opportunity to put ideas forward, it wasn't an
environment where I felt listened to, I sure found that out! Peg

Oh, she's responsive, and she tries to be fair in different ways, but
she will just never initiate these conversations. Ann

We talk about things, that works really well, we've talked about the
power issues, and we each can bring things up, sort of as we go along.

Mary

Karen talked about how important it was to make sure there was an agency
structure that supported the role of the supervisory relationship within the
structure.

I think that policy is very important, especially within feminist
agencies where people come in with very different ideas about what
feminism is and what they want their workplace to be, and what
supervision will look like, and knowing that it was developed with
staff input, that that was the way it was approached. So someone
new cannot just come in and change it all on you.
How the supervisory relationship affects the workers' professional development and growth.

The women in my study talked about how their professional development and growth were influenced by the way they were supervised. It would appear that the more mutual a relationship was the more women felt they were expanding in their professional lives.

*I'm learning as much as I can from her, and not only the positive things, but her mistakes as well, it's all a learning process, I feel I've been offered an excellent opportunity to grow here, and not have a lot of pressures around performance.* Mary

*I also learn things from her, she has particular strengths ... around how she deals with volunteers, and she more finely organizes things, but it is limited.* Peg

For others the supervisor's role was also about challenging the worker to try some new ways of being in the work, ways that might be unfamiliar, but that would get the worker to stretch her skills.

*She's encouraging me to be part of a reflective team, that is very challenging and also very exciting, I've never done anything like that.* Audrey
These women all identified a desire to learn, stretch and grow in their work, and
they looked to their supervisor to provide a piece of this. They also wanted their
supervisor to promote their learning, both by challenging them in their work, and
by encouraging them to seek out other educational sources.

(c) How the supervisory relationship affects the work with clients.

All the women related that the supervisory relationships significantly
affected their work with their clients. This happened both with positive as well as
negative supervisory experiences.

*It does impact in the way that I learn from hearing myself and*
*getting her feedback, the more you do that the more you improve*
*your work with your clients, it helps in listening for the underlying*
*issues.* Jane

*What was happening in the relationship sure affected how I worked,*
*it just affected my level of confidence in my work because I didn't*
*feel that I had a solid place to come from like I didn't feel solid*
*about my supervisor.* Karen

Women felt safer and more supported in the work when they received
regularly scheduled times with their supervisor.
I don't feel like I'm just left there on my own, so if I get triggered there is a place for me to go that is regular and it is very clear what it is for, and that is good for my work with my clients. Audrey

They also related how the supervisors orientation to the process affected their work.

When I work with someone like K. it brings it all together for me, me and the client, and how I am as a social worker in the session, I feel really supported in my thoughts and approaches, I don't have that with my regular supervisor. Ann

It becomes clear from the above experiences of the women in my study that these women felt that the supervisory relationship influenced their work in a number of significant ways. Their experiences show that it is important for these women how their supervisory relationships are constructed. The next section of this chapter looks at what would make these relationships function in a more open and holistic way.

3. What these women's experiences reveal about what is needed to make supervisory relationships function in more meaningful and constructive ways.
From within these interviews there emerged a clear picture (see figure 1) of what these women felt was needed for the supervisory relationships to become more meaningful for all involved. Their interviews revealed some exciting possibilities. Even though all of them felt that hierarchy and feminism are opposites, the majority felt that it was possible to have a feminist orientation both in the supervisory relationship as well as in their relationships with their clients. My own view was one example of this.

I think it is possible to bring feminism into structures where there is a power differential. We do this all the time with our clients. A woman comes in and she tells me all about herself, I don’t tell her about my life struggles, that in itself creates an imbalance. And I think it is good for us to struggle with that, I think that is mirrored in how we struggle in supervision with inequality.

Karen on the other hand felt that the supervisory role as well as the process needed to be re-examined.

I'm not sure if the supervisory thing works, the word even, I don't know if that structure even works because so much can be the way a
Feminist Practice Values and Theory

SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

Naming Power

Validation, Support and Trust

Valuing and Desiring Process

What We Value:
Feminist workers' view of the supervision process

Figure 1.
particular supervisor does it, so it makes me nervous to think about
speaking about a structure when someone can step into that and turn
it into something that I don't intend...

Even though there were some different views, from within the women's
experiences emerged four sub-themes when looking at what was needed for these
relationships to develop in a more holistic and meaningful way.

Sub-Themes

These themes emerged consistently in all of the interviews. It became
clear from listening to the women's stories of their supervision experiences that
all four of these were seen as essential to the development of relationships that
would be both effective and meaningful to the workers.

(a) Valuing and desiring process

The women each discussed at length how important it was how the
supervision took place, and how much they either desired a working process, or
how much they valued having that in place. Women felt that it was important to
discuss with their supervisor how the supervisory process would take place, and
what components were important to them. Ann talked about the lack of process in
her relationship with her supervisor and how the lack of that affected her.
She doesn't bring stuff up, she's open to me bringing it, but she's not pro-active, it's not a joint process. I can't go back and work with her like that, and I will not feel that this is my problem, I mean to go back and say 'we need to talk about this'.

Peg's experience was very similar to Ann's

There is no room for it [supervision process], that's right, and it is a source of frustration for me, because I think ideally we should be able to organize it so that we have space at least once a week. You know to debrief and those kinds of things, to have a process to deal with issues.

Women who felt that they had a good process shared how they had gotten there. Jane talked about how great that process is now and how comfortable.

This had taken a lot of work and effort to come to, however.

Yes, there is room for process, but that took time, we had to figure out a structure first, time, place, what would we bring, how would that look, who would be responsible for what, what about power etc.

Now when I don't need so much supervision it's there when I need it, but not thirteen years ago.
For myself, I stated that I needed both structure and process for the supervision process to be both meaningful and useful.

*Paying attention to the process takes time, yet without it you don't get to the deeper issues that need to be looked at in the work, and so you have to schedule that time. Luckily we are given space for that, and of course it's not enough to do it all, but it is something.*

Women identified that for the supervision process to be effective both parties needed to take responsibility for the work that happened there. They talked of the importance to have mutuality and reciprocity in the relationship if the process was to reach some deep places, both around work with clients, as well as in identifying the effects of this work on themselves. It was felt that without this component burnout was more likely to occur:

*Process takes time, and it felt quite positive to me, but then it was decided that the process took too much time ... like, we are here for the clients not for ourselves. So that shut things down. We had no say in that, it just happened. So I didn't feel I had a solid place to come from, so it was hard to go out there and do my work. It affected me enormously. Karen*
I have found that there is a real need for partnership, there is a
real need for a joint process ... make it as reciprocal as possible ...
supervision and evaluation both. You need to be seen in the work and
you need to have it reflected back to you, I need that. Peg

(b) Validation, support and trust.

To build meaningful relationships with one another in the workplace
requires both respect and safety (Kaiser, 1997). The women identified that for
safety to be present in the relationship in a way that promoted openness with one
another took time. Trust, they felt, was built through their experiences of the
relationship over time.

We both started at the same time, almost two years ago now ... our
relationship is still developing ... we had to get through that, like is it
okay to speak up and when and what will the reaction be, is it
safe...that's definitely begun. Audrey

At the beginning I went, okay, how am I going to say this ... my heart
would be pounding, thinking what is going to happen ... but as time
progressed that has become easier ... the biggest thing I have found
over time is that we can talk about anything, it’s safe ... I can trust
her 100%. Mary

Accountability was seen by some as at times getting in the way of the
relationship between worker and supervisor, if not performed using a respectful
and mutual process.

So when accountability came up, around this is my supervisor and she
has to tell me if I’m doing something, it hit really hard, because
there was no ... it sort of stood outside the relationship almost
because it felt more like this person was there to help me, be
supportive of me, believe in me, help me achieve my goals and then
when there was something she needed to call me on, it didn’t fit as
easily into the relationship. Karen

However, most of the women felt that evaluation was an important part of the
supervision process, when done respectfully and with the worker’s full input.

I need to be evaluated and to get feedback in a respectful way so
that I can make some changes, and shift and grow, I’m not getting
that...my last evaluation was done in a very disrespectful way, they
didn’t talk to anyone that I felt could tell them about my work. Peg
Kaiser (1997) states that the ability to speak the truth about oneself and one's work are necessary for the process of accountability, and is related directly to the level of trust within the relationship. Trust was definitely identified by these women as an important component if a relationship was to be effective in any way, without that the relationships tended to remain superficial.

I asked in clinical consult about how much do I need to trust my supervisor for the relationship to work in any kind of way, I'm getting confused, and how deep can we go with almost no trust. Karen

All the women mentioned the need for a trusting relationship and all talked of the need for support and validation.

It feels like I have a voice. It's really supporting; it is meeting a lot of my needs. I know she trusts me 100%. It feels fantastic. I get absolute support. Mary

No, I don't get that support; I need to get validated, to be seen in the work. We're talking about it, I can see that it will be there, it takes time with a new person, you have to build that trust. Peg

I just do a whole lot better in that encouraging, supporting way, it's how I am, it validates who I am I guess. Ann
Again the women mentioned that none of this could happen in isolation, they felt it required a mutual process and a sense that the supervisor and the worker were in the work together, not separate.

(c) Naming power differentials.

The women saw naming who had the power and how it was used as an important step towards a more equitable relationship. They felt that if it wasn’t named, and no boundaries were placed on power, then it essentially prevented the relationship from becoming mutually beneficial.

You know I want it to be a partnership. We need to name the power, and the differences. Because there is a difference. We’re beginning that. Peg

So common understanding, this is the power you have, and this is the power you may not have in this pseudo-hierarchy that we got, and just so that it is clear. It is not that power is bad or that it wasn’t okay that the coordinator had more power, but we just wanted to know who had it, and how much, and when, and where it was ending, and to develop something with staff input I think is important. Karen
All throughout the interviews the women made reference to how power was defined in the relationships with their supervisors. Audrey saw it positively

*She does draw on everyone's experience; it's not just her as the expert.*

While Ann experienced it negatively

*It's too hierarchical for me ... it feels very traditional, and I feel less than. It's not comfortable for me. Ann*

It became clear that power issues were seen as very important both within their relationships and their agencies, as it was often perceived as being in conflict with feminist values. Some of the women even commented about not being sure if supervision was a term that still had relevance in their work, they were more interested in exploring what the alternatives might be.

*To me the word supervision implies that there is a difference in authority and power, so it's right there in the word, how do you keep that out of the relationship, it's hard. Jane*

*I'm not even sure if the supervisory thing works, the word even. It makes me nervous to think about such a structure where someone can just step into that and turn it into something that wasn't intended originally. Karen*
(d) Agency context that reflects feminist practice values and theory.

As mentioned earlier these women felt very strongly about the importance of shared practice values, and how these needed to be based in feminist theory. They were also very clear about the importance of the context in which the relationship happened. Values and theory, they argued, needed to be included in the agency philosophy and policy as well. At Audrey’s place of work the agency was in the process of minimizing the hierarchical structure in an effort to be more congruent with feminist values.

*We are very much a feminist agency, and we are going through some changes right now to make the whole agency less hierarchical. Like we have gone to only two wage levels. There are still issues to be resolved. We have hired some consultants to come in... these are process people, how do we deal with conflict, how do we build trust.*

*We need to come to a shared understanding.*

Karen felt that it was most important to have a process in place where agency and worker philosophies and values are openly discussed so that it is possible to have an understanding of the differences that are always going to be present.

*It's important to be clear on things: people come in with different ideas about what feminism is and what they want their workplace to*
be. You need to have a process, to come to some understanding and agreement around practice. It needs to be in policy too, so you know there is a process. So it doesn't change each time you have a new supervisor. Congruency and continuity I guess. Karen

Women talked a great deal about the differences that arose between workers and supervisors, as well as the agency context.

Feminist values around what we do, that comes up all the time, after all this is a Women's Centre! But, yes, I know what you mean. We talk a lot about difference and how that affects the women that come in. You know even the way we dress, we talk about it. Mary

We don't talk about what that means. What that means as individuals and what that means in the context of the organization. We don't talk about the differences. There is no opportunity. We need to, it's important, it affects our work. Peg

Participants talked also about the need for agencies to be pro-active in questioning the status quo. Women did not strongly criticize the hierarchical structure of their agencies, many actually felt it was a good way to deal with the bureaucratic issues; however, they did see a need for agencies to look at minimizing the effects of that as much as possible.
In essence what we want is for things to be as flattened out as possible. Peg

Yes, I don’t want to be responsible for the budget and those kinds of things, but at the same time I want to know what is happening with that, so I can be a more responsible worker in this structure. Jane

Karen felt that there was a need for agencies to look at how we separate the personal from the professional, and that there was a need for some middle ground in that.

It would be 'hey you can't get your personal needs met in the workplace', you know it is hard work we do and your needs are going to come up, and if we ignore them our clients aren't going to get the service they deserve. It's this patriarchal division of the personal and the professional, feminist agencies need to look at that.

Summary

The women who participated in my study were all strong feminists, who had clear insight into what they needed from their supervisory relationships, yet they were also flexible and open. Most important to them was the possibility to build a meaningful and open relationship with their supervisor, one built on trust,
mutuality, and common understanding of what it means to work as a feminist in a society that hangs on to hierarchical values and structures. Their desire was to create an alternative, an alternative that can take what is useful in such a structure and change what doesn't work. They saw their agencies as places where such alternatives can be created. Women felt that the supervisory relationship was one place to start that conversation, but that mostly it needed to involve everyone in the agency.

_We need as feminist to name what we see, and to challenge constantly the status quo. We need to be able to imagine a different way, and for that we need to work in a structure that can support that vision. It's too much for one relationship to sustain..._ Jane

They also felt that supervision might take different forms from the traditional supervisor-supervisee model, even within a hierarchical structure. A couple of the women had worked for agencies where there was a buddy system and/or a peer supervision process.

_I think the peer stuff kept me more accountable than anything else,_

_I had such respect for the women I worked with, they were so skilled. The coordinator would then coordinate our evaluations, it worked quite well._ Karen
My own experience working for a feminist agency that continues to be very hierarchical was congruent with the experiences of the other women. For me there was very much a struggle between not really wanting to be involved in the day to day running of the agency, and yet wanting to be informed and have a chance to be heard. I believe, like Riger (1994) that a certain amount of structure can facilitate the accomplishment of certain goals and can insure accountability and fairness. I also agree with Martin (1990) that it may not be so much about the hierarchical arrangement as it is about "how power is actually used, and for what purposes" (p.196).
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Grounding Feminist Workers' Experience

Creating Meaningful Relationships

The primary purpose of my study was to find out how feminist workers experienced their relationships with their supervisors within hierarchically structured agencies that had a stated feminist philosophy. The unstructured interview style left it open to the women to take this question in any direction they chose. What they chose was to talk about how they experienced their relationships, how they worked within the context of their agencies, and how they felt these relationships could be different. They were especially concerned with how to make these relationships equitable and meaningful. Two of the women already had this type of relationship, two others and myself felt that they and their supervisors were working towards this or had reached a place of comfort with what they had, and for two more the experience of supervision had been quite a difficult one.

Though women's experiences of supervision were very different from one another, there was significant agreement around how women would like to see
these relationships function. It became clear, looking at the data, that women felt they needed to have a strong sense of *shared meaning* within the supervisory relationship. Kaiser (1997) describes shared meaning as a mutual understanding and agreement created within the context of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, which is essential if the relationship is "to operate effectively..." (p.89). This research suggests that workers wanted to be seen, and have their supervisors be visible, as people in their supervisory relationships. They also wanted to be able to speak truth there. This requires that workers and supervisors have both understanding and respect for each other's practice values, and have a certain amount of mutuality within the relationship.

How we as feminists defined our relationships was an important aspect of this research. The women in this study had clear visions of how they felt these relationships needed to function. These interviews showed that women were very interested in connectedness. Gilligan (1982) says that women's vision and experience of relationships "provides a non-hierarchical vision of human connection" (p. 62). Not only did these women want to feel connected in these relationships; they wanted these connections to be meaningful. This is in keeping with much of the feminist literature that acknowledges women's desire for
meaningful relationships in all areas of their lives (Gilligan, 1982, Levine, 1984, Van Den Bergh, 1995).

**Defining the Supervisory Relationship**

How women see the role of the relationship, then, becomes important to the function of the supervision. The women in this study identified three areas that they saw as important to this. They wanted the supervisory role clearly defined, they wanted it to support their professional development and growth, and they were very aware of how the supervisory relationship affects their client work. Much of the literature on supervision asserts a need for education of workers to promote professional growth and development (Kadushin, 1992, Shulman, 1993, Munson, 1993, Kaiser, 1997). While Kaiser (1997) and Broome (1991) assert that clients are best served if supervisors and workers have a shared understanding of approaches to working with clients.

Workers' assertion that an agreement around philosophy and theory, and a clear understanding of the role of supervision within the agency is important, especially if these are constructed within a hierarchical structure, fits clearly with the feminist standpoint of eliminating false dichotomies (Van Den Bergh, 1995). It is almost impossible for feminists to have one philosophy for client
work, for example, and have that philosophy totally ignored in another area, for
instance around fundraising or the governing of the agency. At the same time,
however, it is often difficult to construct supervisory relationships within
hierarchical structures that incorporate feminist values, which in their very
essence are about equalization, or minimization, of the power base. For us to work
in a hierarchical structure as feminists is, then, a contradiction in terms. Clearly
it is difficult for feminists to fit into a structure that imposes power
differentials between women. Yet, women continue to attempt to integrate their
values and politics into these structures. One feminist worker told me that she
felt it was a good sign that we struggled with issues of power and difference.
"Feminism can never be static", she explained, "for as women become more and
more aware and political it changes us as well as feminism, it is hard, but not bad"
(personal communication February 18th, 2000). Maybe that is so, however, at
times these struggles lead to pain and anger, and that is neither good nor
necessary. Women have been oppressed for a long time, to act outside of that
oppression is very difficult. Feminists' anger at, and mistrust of hierarchical
structures comes from our experiences of oppression in the patriarchy. To ignore
the impact of this would be a mistake (Saulnier, 1996).
Women in this study did discuss conflict and how it affected them. Mostly they talked about how conflict seemed to result from a difference in values and beliefs. It is my sense from listening to these women that conflict is something they had difficulty exploring. It seemed to both scare and confuse them. Riger (1994) talks about how conflict "threatens the sense of community that motivates many women to join feminist organizations" (p. 291). Yet, unresolved interpersonal conflicts can get in the way of organizational functioning, and if kept under wraps for too long may surface when least expected (Riger, 1994). Some of the women in my study had experienced severe conflict in their agencies, and were hurt and confused by what happened. It is difficult for those of us who desire political and also emotional solidarity to acknowledge those differences that bring us conflict and pain. Yet, Jean Baker Miller (1986) believes that we should not shy away from conflict, but rather base our actions on the way women have often dealt with conflict in their relationships and families in the past, by fostering development and rejecting domination and subordination. Miller believes that proper use of conflict resolution techniques allows for opposing parties to speak their differences and find a common understanding.
(Re)Naming Power

It is my belief that we are often afraid of claiming our power, because we do not want to appear to resemble the patriarchal model where there is an expert who has power over those who are less knowledgeable. A hierarchical model reminds us of the oppressive experiences of the past. Yet, to have no structure can be just as destructive, as power struggles and hidden agendas can wreak havoc (Shields, 1994). Therefore, I think these women were correct in naming the importance of exposing and renaming power differences. This is another feminist standpoint (Van Den Bergh, 1995). We can begin this by at least naming power as a difference between us, not as something to use against one another. To do this women clearly saw the need for a process that allowed for discussion to take place about the meaning of power, and how it can and cannot be used. Process is an important feminist tool; the women felt that process makes it possible for us to come to a shared understanding, even if we do not agree, thereby eliminating feelings of alienation and anger.

This is especially important when issues come up around accountability. Peterson (1984), when discussing accountability in supervision, talks about the need for the supervisor to be able to help the clinician see the consequences of her work. Practitioners are often deeply affected by their clients. Peterson feels
that this leaves them open to losing their objectivity, and that because of this they could end up working in a way that is not in the best interest of the client.

Kaiser (1997) states that all one's relationships "contribute to the development of personal identity...[involving] understanding both one's own interests and those of the other" (p. 14). Supervision, as mentioned earlier, involves speaking one's truth to the other. For this to be possible a process needs to be in place that allows for safety and trust. The women who participated in my study expressed exactly this issue when they related what they felt was needed to make supervisory relationships more meaningful and effective.

Finn (1990) argues that feminist agencies need to promote interdependence and mutual support. She states that burnout occurs when providers of human services experience the isolation, alienation, devaluation, and powerlessness felt by their clients and ... this experience is a natural outgrowth of work environments in which feminist values are discounted. (p. 55)

She goes on to state that "a feminist approach ... emphasizes empowerment, [and] participatory decision making" (p. 57). This was affirmed by the participants in this study. They felt a very strong need for feminist values to be included in the supervisory process. Similarly, Chan's 1996 study revealed that agencies often
struggle with issues of how to provide empowerment and support for staff. This is a complex and challenging issue, but one that Chan's participants felt could be dealt with through a formal management training program.

Riger's (1994) description of the stages of growth in feminist organizations explains how, as an organization grows, there are increased pressures for a more formal structure. This was acknowledged by the workers in this study: I think "[the agency] outgrew the collective structure" (Karen). Mary also wondered about this very issue, "this is really only a three woman place, and if we had twenty women, I don't know what that would mean for the structure here". Riger goes on to say that the organizational structure may also depend on the purpose of the agency.

A feminist group whose primary aim is to foster growth and development of its members might most effectively remain small and egalitarian, and one that aspires to provide a service for others might function best with some hierarchical features. (p. 284)

However, she points out that most feminist organizations "agree that hierarchy should be minimal and broad participation should prevail" (p. 289). This clearly fits with what the women in my study were saying regarding minimizing the hierarchy and encouraging mutuality within the agency, but especially in the supervisory
relationship. Riger points out that different forms can exist together within the same organization, so that if the agency is unable, or unwilling, to reduce the hierarchy, the supervisory relationship could still aim for a more participatory process if both parties are willing. This study identified the desire by feminist workers to raise this issue as an expectation of their working relationships.

Adrienne Chan (1996) interviewed women who were coordinators, managers or administrators of 28 women-serving agencies throughout British Columbia. From my experience with the British Columbia Association of Specialized Victim Services and Counselling Programs, I know that a considerable number of these agencies are hierarchically structured. Chan’s participants identified three key elements dealing with attitudes and values. These were:

- **humanistic**: consideration and concern for the individual as a whole including social, emotional, mental, and physical well being.

Learning, sharing, and growth are important aspects of the humanistic approach.

- **empowering**: dedicated to equalizing power and to facilitating the development of power and esteem of individuals...

- **inclusive**: consideration and consultation within the organization regarding structure... (p. 7)
Chan states that these themes are consistent with the feminist values of
"participation, fairness, equity, and equalization of power" (p. 7). It would appear then that administrators were in favor of many of the same values and attitudes as were expressed by the workers in my study. They are interested in examining the governing structures of their agencies and equalizing power differentials. This, I believe, is due to feminists continued examination of the use of power in our society.

Whereas "early feminists equated power with exploitation and domination" (Martin, 1990, p. 195) more recently power has become viewed as having a possibility for positive as well as negative influences on organizational structures. Martin's research would indicate that "how power is actually used, and for what purposes, may be more important than its hierarchical or collectivist arrangement" (p. 196). Even within this small sample of agencies represented in my study, it would appear that Martin was correct when she stated that "the structures of many feminist organizations are impure mixtures of bureaucracy and democracy rather than a single type" (p. 195). It becomes clear then that an organization's image of itself will affect how its workers are seen in relation to issues of power, and participation in governance. The women in my study expressed the need for agencies to reflect more holistically the feminist values
that "focus on the primacy of interpersonal relationships; [and the] empowerment and personal development of members" (p. 192). They argued that the relationships between workers on all levels of the hierarchy needed to reflect these values.

**Summary**

This study contributes to much of what has been written about working in feminist agencies. The women in this study clearly recognized the importance of working towards establishing a workplace where there is a shared meaning not just around the client work, but in regards to the total work environment. They desired a workplace where there is an adherence to feminist values. The fact that they worked in hierarchical structures is secondary to this. Though they realized that these structures create inequalities, these workers also realized that even within collective structures power struggles can and do happen. These workers were more concerned with the need to maintain a political feminist vision which is concerned with exposing all forms of oppression wherever this occurs. It was their commitment to this vision which made it so important for them to have their relationships at work as congruent as possible with their political values and beliefs.
Nan Van Den Bergh (1995), in her discussion about postmodern feminist standpoint theory referred to at the beginning of this paper, succinctly states what it is these workers value most. She translates the standpoints of "(1) knowing, (2) connecting, (3) caring, and (4) diversity" (p. xxxiii) as "hear us ... and know us for who we are, in our differences and similarities ... we value connection and caring" (xxxiii). Carol Gilligan (1982) writes that "women's sense of integrity appears to be entwined with an ethic of care, so that to see themselves ... is to see themselves in relationship of connection..."(p. 171), and that once the activity of caring for others is freed from "the wish for approval ... [then] the ethic of responsibility can become a self-chosen anchor of personal integrity and strength" (p. 171). Once we begin to act from a place of internal power, rather than because we feel we should, women can become more aware of the political nature of their actions. As feminist workers this is exactly where women find themselves in their relationships in the workplace. They act from a place of integrity and strength. They know how these relationships might look, and are willing to take their share of the responsibility in bringing that about. However, they realize that they can not do this on their own; they need each other, workers, supervisors and administrators.
Feminism is more than just a theoretical framework, or a philosophy, though it is those things as well. Women in this study saw it as a value, an active principle, which grounds their work and affects their lives on many different levels. They saw feminism as a process of questioning rather than as a dogma or a set of prescribed rules that needed to be followed (Ellis, 1998). More than anything they wanted to see these principles active in their workplaces.
The results of this research would suggest that it is important for feminist workers to have a supervisory relationship that promotes mutuality and process. Though the sample used for this research was quite small, I feel that many of the women's experiences and conceptualizations were clearly reflected in the available feminist literature. It is for this reason that I feel I am justified in making some assertions related to the results of this study. One assertion that I believe can be made is that university social work management and supervision courses, especially at the Master's level, need to have a component on feminist methods and theories of supervision. Students need to be aware of the differences between traditional, partnership, and feminist models of supervision (see table 2). Many of these students will at some point in their careers become supervisors, and for them to be aware of different models of supervision will help both them and their supervisees.

The contribution of this study is significant in that it exposed a strong desire for a feminist orientation in the supervisory relationship, yet this was
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Adapted from Hipp and Munson's (1995) chart (see Appendix B). The additional column describing a feminist model has been developed and added using information from the research and literature presented in this paper.

Table 2.
Theoretical Frameworks for Supervision Models
poorly articulated and operationalized by most of the supervisors of this sample of workers. Chan (1996) in her needs analysis of management training concluded that there is a clear lack of training programs available for coordinators and managers of women-serving agencies. She states that

Training plays an important role in skill development in order to manage growth, set priorities, and prepare for the future of the organization. Training also provides a foundation for coordinators/managers to support each other and their staff... (p. 1)

Hipp and Munson (1995) also express a need for the partnership model, based on a feminist perspective, to be part of the curriculum in social work education, and wonder "how we foster a partnership model across the curriculum in social work education?". Chan outlines much of what is needed to manage women-serving agencies. Her research found, however, that the review of literature and existing programs "did not provide any substantial information or designs incorporating both concepts [of feminism and management]" (p. 14). Chan did outline six management themes that are congruent with feminist values.

Chan's 1996 findings regarding management requirements were seen by the Women's Sector Management Development Project as "lacking important information regarding the full range of competencies now required of senior
managers in the field” (Cowderoy, 2000, p. 2). The intent of the project “was to confirm and clarify the professional development needs of senior managers in the non-profit women-serving sector” (p. 1). The report concluded that

No program in B.C. or anywhere else in Canada has been designed specifically to develop senior managers in women-serving non-profit organizations. (p. 35)

And that

The number of existing managers of women’s organizations in B.C. are likely insufficient to sustain delivery of an ongoing management development program specifically for this population… (p. 35)

The project is instead looking at a partnership with a Lower Mainland university to adapt their non-profit management training program to include courses specifically for senior managers in the women’s sector.

Women-serving agencies are clearly looking at what the needs of senior managers are within this sector, and the report mentions integrating feminist ideology and women-centred policies and practices into the training. However, this study shows that more consideration needs to be given to the supervisory relationship and it’s affect on workers, clients, supervisors, and agencies as a whole. It also needs to incorporate the views of feminist workers in the area of
supervision, and not only those of senior management if they want to create a workable partnership model that is based in a feminist ideology.

This research studied only a small sample of workers and more research may be needed to establish the full needs of workers and supervisors. It is my hope, however, that this will not become a reason for not acting in the best interest of all workers within women serving agencies at this point in time.

Opportunities for Further Research and Action

It is my hope that others will feel inspired to go deeper into this fascinating subject, and look more closely at how feminist workers and their supervisors can work together to create a working climate that is congruent with their ideological frameworks. Development and function of a truly feminist model is one area that needs to be more fully explored through both research and practice. Both Chan's work and the feminist framework developed in table 2 are important starting places.

Martin in her 1990 article suggests that if feminists “want control over, and a say in, what feminists have created organizationally” (p. 202) then they need to claim this topic for themselves. Martin expresses a need for more research to identify the effects feminist organizations have both on its own
members and society as a whole. She also encourages feminist researchers to look at "the variety of forms that feminist organizations take ... [and] see how they differ from and resemble one another [as well as] nonfeminist organizations" (p. 202). It is my vision that this type of research will promote inclusivity and diversity at all levels of organizations. This in turn, I believe, will have a direct impact on how we work together within these agencies, and change the very foundations of our relationships with one another. The need for more clarity, however, should not stop us from developing training programs in supervision and management which reflect a feminist vision. Neither should such educational programs just be confined to training programs for managers of women-serving agencies.


**Figure 1** Conceptual model of clinical supervision
## Appendix B

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Hipp and Munson (1995) p. 28